

Preaching the Gospel

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

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Article 5 on How To Prepare A Sermon—

HOW TO WRITE A SERMON – COMPLETING THE OUTLINE

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In the previous article I came up with a basic three-point outline for my sermon on turning the other cheek. I organized my notes around that outline. Now it is time to finish writing the sermon.

I will begin with my first point, “People were misapplying the Old Testament law, verse 38.” I read over all my notes that have a 1 next to them and consider how to divide this point into subtopics. I finally decide on the following break-down:

- I. People were misapplying the Old Testament law, verse 38.
 - A. That law applied to the courts.
 - B. Our courts today need to apply that same principle.
 - C. It is human nature to want to apply “an eye for an eye” in our personal lives.

Now I go back through all my notes that have a 1 next to them and decide which of the subcategories they belong to. One of my notes may have been “Leviticus 24:19-20”. That obviously belongs under A, so I add an A after the 1. My marginal note now says “1A”. I continue until all of my 1s have been given an A, B, or C. Here again, I may not be sure about a category, so I might put “1A or B” beside one of them. There may be some notes that do not fit this outline at all. The best thing to do is to put an X to the left of those. I have more than enough notes for this sermon. I do not need notes that do not fit. They will just detract from the flow of my sermon.

Now I have all of my notes for major point 1 organized into A, B, or C. It is time to start writing the sub-points under A. I look at all the notes I have labeled 1A and decide which one should go first. I type that in, possibly rewording it as I go. This is also a time for thinking. As I type, I am mentally preaching my sermon. I will often add extra points that were not in my notes. Some of my notes will be rewritten and others will be dropped. My goal is to have a sermon where each point belongs where it is and one point flows easily into the next. As I use a note I put a check mark to the left of that note in the margin. If I decide to reject a point, I put an X next to it. That way I know that I only have to look at notes that have neither an X nor a check mark next to them. (In a later article I will show how to do this more easily in Microsoft Word.) Here is what I came up with for point A:

- A. That law applied to the courts.
1. Leviticus 24:19-20 This appears in a list of punishments for various crimes.
 2. No one could argue with the fairness of that law. Even a five-year-old child understands that it is fair for the penalty to fit the crime.

That last point 2 provides the perfect lead-in for point B: “Our courts today need to apply that same principle.”

When we created our list of main points I suggested that three was a good number. That rule does not apply for these sub-points. In section A I have two sub-points. In section B I might have 10. I just write as many as I think I need to make the point.

I apply the same method I used for point A to write points B and C, then go on to major point II. The entire outline usually takes me a couple hours. It would be faster if I used the notes exactly as I wrote them down, but my sermon will preach better if I think about the wording as I type in my points. I also end up adding a number of points that were not in my notes, mostly because I can see that I will have a gap in my sermon if I don't.

The introduction and conclusion are special cases. If you like to divide those sections into main points, then number the notes that refer to “intro” or “concl” accordingly. I usually just write a paragraph or two for each of those sections, so I can just go through the notes for each and write the introduction and conclusion. I usually write the introduction first and the conclusion last, but you can do it in whatever order is most natural for you.

In my next article I will discuss the importance of discarding points that do not fit.

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QUOTES

Preaching the Gospel Magazine is provoking some wonderful responses. Below are some of them.

When my daughter was younger she would ask me what I was going to preach about almost every Sunday. It got me thinking of how I'd explain in a sentence or minute what I was going to spend 30 to 45 minutes telling older folks. Occasionally, I'd just announce, “Jeanne asked me... and here's the answer”... then start the sermon.

Steve Willis—email 16 Nov 2005

I read in a sermon Preparation book some years ago: “In gathering your material in advance, waiting, adding thoughts, etc., it has time, like a good cup of tea, to **‘steep.’**”

Peter McPherson—email 16 Nov 2005

True Story: Elmer Moore was holding a meeting at Crescent Park church in Odessa TX (we were preaching at Westridge, Odessa, at that time). He preached one evening from 1 Corinthians 4, “Three Judgments”. Apparently, his approach filled me with excessive zeal, so I met him afterward and said, “I'd sure like to have a copy of your outline.” He replied, “You like that, huh? Well, OK...it's all yours.” And he removed a piece of an envelope from his shirt

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pocket on which he had scribbled "1 Corinthians 4:1-4." Beneath it was the citation, "2 Corinthians 5:10."

Important lesson learned. I've used that outline several times, since.

Royce Bell—email 16 Nov 2005

Hi uncle Paul,
Just to let you know that how much I appreciated this one. Especially the section on "Planning and preaching". Thank you for this good work you are doing.

Alan Fox—17 Nov 2005

We are really enjoying your lessons on preaching. Paddy plans to use them with three of the men in the congregation starting in January.

Sandi (Kendall-Ball)--16 Dec 2005

USE SIMPLE WORDS

1 Corinthians 14:9--So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. (NASB)

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. (KJV)

Paul here condemned the practice of the tongue speakers in the church at Corinth. Some were speaking in languages which were not understood by the people and there was no interpreter to make the message plain. Paul told that speaker to "keep silent in the church" (v. 28). This is a message to us, too. If we do not use speech that is clear and words easy to be understood, we need to "keep silent in the church."

Every job has a special vocabulary. When I am around computer programmers I hear a whole language I can't understand! My doctor loses me once in a while when he mentions a condition, treatment or disease. Even teen-agers have a lingo which shuts us oldsters out.

Preachers have the job of preaching so that people will understand. That is not always easy. I study books about important Bible subjects. In those books there are words like teleological, ontological, theological, and eschatology. Most of the time I can understand those words as they are used in the books, and usually they help. They are technical and therefore have a specific meaning.

But when I am preaching, I must NOT use those words. They are not "words easy to be understood."

Furthermore, the preacher must consider his audience. In South Africa I must be very careful about using illustrations and stories which are too American. Instead of illustrating, those stories often confuse because cultures are so different. I get excellent taped sermons from Mark Roberts, but many of his references and illustrations are so current and American that they are useless for use in South Africa. (In fact, they are so based on current American news that even I

sometimes have trouble understanding the connections.) But his illustrations are just right for his Texas audience. He is using words and situations that they know very well.

A problem with many sermons is that the preacher uses the same words of the books he has studied, without being careful to be sure that those words are easily understood by his audience. You should study, then you should digest the material until you can explain it in your own words, not the words of the author. In your notes, be sure you use your own words, words which are easy to understand.

Preach to be understood!

EYE CONTACT

The preacher must “make contact” with his audience. One important tool in doing this is “eye contact.” This means, **LOOK AT PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE—IN THEIR EYES!**

I know a young preacher who never looks at his audience. He looks at his notes, out the window or at the ceiling. This distances him from his audience and makes his sermon much less effective than if he were earnestly looking his hearers in the eye. I cannot imagine that when Jesus was preaching that He was doing so with downcast eyes!

At first you may find this difficult to do. Persist. And don’t look at the same persons all the time. Let your eyes rest briefly on one, then on another, making sure that your eyes include all in the audience. Even in a large audience, you should use your eyes to include everyone.

The only exception to this is the blind preacher. Since the hearers know he cannot see, he is able to keep attention well even though he cannot have eye contact. But for the rest of us—**USE YOUR EYES!**

**And He said unto them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” . . .
And they went out and preached everywhere.” – Mark 16:15, 20.**

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