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IMPROVING APPLICATION IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING  
AT RACINE BIBLE CHURCH, RACINE, WISCONSIN

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

IMPROVING APPLICATION IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING  
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## PREFACE

The Savior is alive. His Word is true. His power is perfect. My sermons are not. I preach an infallible, inerrant, ever-vibrant word. There is no problem on that end. But the speaker is another matter altogether. My imperfections and limitations are ever before me. Praise be to God that his Spirit binds up broken vessels, even going so far as to call them his co-laborers.

I am thankful to the faithful men of God who taught me hermeneutics and homiletics at The Master's Seminary eighteen years ago. More recently, I have reason to thank the faculty and staff of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for their instruction and guidance. My teachers have faithfully handed the trust to me. I pray that I will be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, that I may entrust it to others who will teach others also.

Most fundamental gratitude is due to my parents, who made innumerable sacrifices, generously and joyously, at every stage of my education. I wish to be direct about one matter regarding my father, without meaning any disrespect to the seminary. Better, by far, than all the instruction I received in seminary is the legacy of having a father who has spoken the words of Proverbs 4:1-9 to me all the days of my life.

The friendship, love, encouragement, and joy I receive from my wife, Amy, sustains me. The Lord has given her an abundant measure of faith, hope and love. The joy of her life seems to be sharing it with me. I am blessed.

Finally, to the dear people of Racine Bible Church. They accepted me, eleven years ago, as a 29-year-old senior pastor. They have been patient with me. They put up

with my preaching. They supported my studies. Above all else, they pray for me. In this I know their love, not only for me, but for our Savior. To Him be the glory.

Spencer DeBurgh

Racine, Wisconsin

December 2011

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to improve application in my own preaching while teaching lay leaders how to recognize, evaluate, and appreciate proper application in expository preaching at Racine Bible Church, Wisconsin.

#### **Goals**

This project intended to accomplish four goals that served as the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to improve application in my expository preaching. Application is a function of proper hermeneutics; therefore, this improvement first necessitates accuracy in hermeneutics. From this starting point, I expect to develop more skill in moving from exegesis to exposition and then to proper application in expository preaching.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum that teaches lay leaders to recognize exposition that properly interprets and applies the Word of God. Training lay leaders to recognize and evaluate application improved my own accuracy in the area of application in exposition.

The third goal was to teach this curriculum to a select group of Racine Bible Church members in eight consecutive Sunday evening meetings. Additionally, upon completion of the course, selected lay leaders were asked to evaluate the application in my expository preaching for six weeks, utilizing the criteria learned in the class.

The fourth goal was that these participants would gain knowledge of principles for sound interpretation and application in expository preaching. Many of the class

participants were teachers in the ministry of Racine Bible Church and put these lessons into practice immediately in their own ministry of the Word. Not all class members were teachers, but all class members gained knowledge of the ministry of the Word.

Recognition of exposition as exegetically sound came through basic exposure to the rudiments of the hermeneutical task. Appreciation of application in exposition came through teaching on the application process with focused attention given to common mistakes made in application. The participants subsequently had an increased ability to be discerning regarding the ministry of the Word.

### **Context**

Racine Bible's history dates to 1912 when a group of nineteen men began meeting for a weekly Bible study. The first major developmental step occurred in 1927 when this group built the Union Tabernacle on Center Street in Racine. A. H. Stewart, called as the first pastor in 1931, served for ten years. In these initial years, the Union Tabernacle was known throughout the city and surrounding areas as the primary preaching place in Racine. The era's popular radio teachers regularly took the train up from Chicago, or down from Milwaukee, to preach in Racine at the Union Tabernacle. H. A. Ironside, A. C. Gaebelein, Donald Barnhouse, William Newell, and Lewis S. Chafer are some of the expositors who preached here in those days.

Significant changes occurred in 1949. Fundamental principles in ecclesial organizational structure were agreed upon and the name was changed to Racine Bible Church. A most pivotal year occurred in 1959 when Philip Wisenhunt was called as senior pastor. Pastor Wisenhunt would serve for eighteen years. These formative years are viewed as some of the finest in the church's history. Through solid expositional preaching and creative local outreach the church grew in spiritual depth and numeric breadth.

The church's growth has continued to be tied to the effectiveness of her pulpit. Pastor Harold Longenecker preached for six years from 1987 to 1993. His style could be characterized as classic exposition, exhibiting careful interpretation and relevant

application. The pastor who followed Longenecker, Roy Herbster, was not as strong in the pulpit. While exhibiting a heart for God and much giftedness for ministry, the pulpit ministry was not as strong as it needed to be. The conclusion of Racine Bible's leadership board was to make a change. The board decided to look for a new pastor who would be stronger in the pulpit. John Feinberg filled the pulpit in the interim while the board searched for Racine Bible's next pastor. It is no exaggeration to say that the highest priority in the search process was for a strong expository preacher. I was called to the church as senior pastor in 2001.

From this brief history it is evident that faithful expository preaching has been a high value at Racine Bible for three-quarters of a century. Numerous of the esteemed authors cited in this very project have preached at Racine Bible Church. Haddon Robinson preached at the fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1977. More recently, Grant Osborne taught evening Bible classes, and John Feinberg filled the pulpit as an interim preaching pastor from 1999 through 2001.

The years from 2001 through 2006 can be characterized as filled with change, growth, and forward momentum. In 2004 the church held groundbreaking ceremonies for a new \$4.1 million facility. The first worship services in the new facility, which seats 500 for worship, were held in the spring of 2005. The new location is one quarter mile from Interstate 94 on the Highway 20 exit. This ease of access brings many new households from Racine, Kenosha, and surrounding communities within a twenty-minute driving distance. The population of Racine and Kenosha Counties exceeded 350,000 in the year 2005. With the addition of surrounding cities in southern Milwaukee County this number climbs to almost 500,000.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>University of Wisconsin-Madison, "Population Projections from Applied Population Laboratory" [on-line]; accessed 25 February 2008; available from <http://www.wisstat.wisc.edu/>; Internet.

A transition to two services marks another recent change. February of 2008 marked the beginning of a two-service model. Two identical services are offered (the first at 9:00 and the second at 10:45). This change enabled more persons to access the expository ministry offered on Sunday mornings at Racine Bible Church.

Meticulous attendance records for Sunday morning worship, Sunday school hour, and Sunday evening worship services have been kept from 1959 to the present. One can begin summarizing these numbers with the average Sunday morning attendance of 242 for the year 1959. Steady growth from that point peaked in 1976 and 1977 at 669 and 668. This trajectory accords precisely with the tenure of Philip Wisenhunt as senior pastor.

From that point the numbers tell a tale of slow decline. A cluster of reasons, both internal to the church and external to the community, contribute to this shrinkage.

How do these numbers reflect on the pulpit and exposition? One interesting fact is that the decline nearly stops between 1987 and 1993. Attendance during these years, with Pastor Longenecker in the pulpit, held at a steady average of 420. His reputable, respectable exposition provided direction and leadership for the church's health and growth. Upon Longenecker's retirement, the average attendance continued on its slow decline. In the seven years between 1993 and 2000, average attendance declined to reach a low of 320 in the year 2000.

Since the year 2000, attendance has taken an upward turn. Beginning with a climb from 349 in 2001 to 398 in 2003. This increase continues to the present. The most recent Sunday morning worship attendance numbers are as follows: 398 in 2003, 456 in 2004, 528 in 2005 and 574 in 2006. What factors contribute to this steady growth?

Construction of a new facility and attendant momentum surrounding the move are undeniable factors. This move attracted community awareness, giving church members added enthusiasm toward inviting acquaintances. A second contributing factor was increased staff positions. Racine Bible has retained a senior pastor, associate pastor, youth minister and music director for several decades. In addition to these four standard

positions, two new positions have been added. Pastor of spiritual development (Christian education) was added in 2006 and pastor of discipleship and evangelism in 2008. Surely these new positions, as well as renewed effectiveness in the previous positions, contribute to the numeric growth of the congregation. A third and final factor in the growth was the marked emphasis on expository preaching. In newcomer's welcome luncheons and membership classes the question is always asked, "What drew you to Racine Bible Church?" The answer which always tops the responses is, "the strong preaching."

Doctrinally, Racine Bible Church has a long affiliation with the Independent Fundamental Churches of America. Her doctrine through the years has been fundamental and dispensational. Members are exposed to a detailed doctrinal statement in required six-week membership classes. However, it is apparent that not all attendees, or members, are sufficiently grounded in doctrinal discernment. This lack is described below in the rationale section.

The ethos and character of Racine Bible Church can fairly be characterized as loving and generous. Long-time members and new members alike are quick to share stories of loving support received from their church family. Such true Christian love is of inestimable import to the growth of the church (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-12). An element as important as love will often be defined inaccurately and subsequently misunderstood. At Racine Bible, as at many evangelical churches in the Midwest, this misunderstanding takes shape as a lack of discernment. It appears as an overly generous stance toward Christian preaching that is less than true exposition. Comments such as "It would be unloving to criticize," or "It would not display Christian love to disagree" are heard when preaching is critiqued. This project sought to instruct church members in the importance of accuracy in expository preaching while elevating their appreciation of such accuracy in preaching.

The goal of this project was to improve my own expository preaching by training key lay leaders in understanding expository preaching, with a specific view to

accuracy in application. This new knowledge helped to guard the church's health into the future by enabling accountability from the pew to the pulpit. It was an additional hope that the church would be strengthened by these members receiving this training.

### **Rationale**

The common problem addressed by this ministry project was the lack of discernment regarding preaching. Evidence of this lack appears in many church members who are uncritically accepting of preaching which falls short of sound doctrine and true exposition. Such preaching is accepted for its popular appeal or emotive content, but fails to demonstrate accuracy in exposition. Congregants are motivated toward life change when they hear a sermon or teaching that resonates with a felt-need in their lives. But it is rare to find a member who can ascertain if the teaching or preaching is accurately applying the Word of God through sound expository principles of application.

Almost weekly I am approached by a church member with questions (in the form of a photocopied article, a recorded sermon, or an emailed link) about such preaching. Some members want to promote such preaching: "This really blessed me!" Others are hesitant to endorse such preaching: "I don't think it is right, but I cannot say why."

The current programs or ministries that deal with this problem are the pulpit, Sunday school hour, and Sunday evening teaching. A concerted effort is made to ensure that these ministry events model sound exposition. Additionally, this problem is addressed through numerous individual conversations explaining the differences in variant teaching and moving members toward greater discernment. These methods are deemed inadequate. This problem requires more specifically focused attention. This project addressed the problem through systematic teaching, group interaction, specifically directed assignments, and classroom demonstration and critique.

Addressing this problem is critical for the church's continued health as well as safeguarding her future. Expository preaching holds such a central place in the life and ministry of the church that every church member ought to be enabled to recognize and

appreciate excellence and accuracy in it (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 2:2; 4:13; Titus 2:1, 15).

As this problem was remedied, participants took one more step toward spiritual maturity. The will of God is for each of his children to grow up (Eph 4:13). Such growth was evidenced in spiritual stability that resists false and inaccurate preaching (Eph 4:14). Church members were safeguarded from application which is illegitimate hermeneutically. Commensurately, the participants were enabled to recognize sound application in expository preaching. Additionally, the biblical virtue of discernment was elevated to have supreme value throughout the book of Proverbs. This project afforded directed development of this valuable virtue.

This problem also must be addressed from the perspective of the pulpit. A burden for people's needs and zeal to see their lives change ought to burn in the heart of every pastor. However, such earnest desires bring with them their own dangers. Specifically, in the preaching ministry, the pastor will be tempted to make application where it is not warranted by the text nor legitimated by accurate interpretation. Righteous desires to see good in the lives of one's people may lead to illegitimate or forced application of Scripture. House and Garland aptly summarize this struggle:

Many times exhortations on the basis of related principles taught elsewhere in Scripture will suggest themselves. But good application reinserts the very principle led out of its ancient context into the contemporary context without distorting its meaning. Put another way, good applications are those which the author would have made if he were writing today.<sup>2</sup>

Preparing and executing this project served as a rebuke and reminder to the expositor over against all too common missteps in the area of application.

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<sup>2</sup>H. Wayne House and David G. Garland, *God's Message, Your Sermon* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 89.

## Definitions and Limitations

In this project, the following definition of expository preaching from Sidney Greidanus, which he attributes to Merrill Unger, was used:

Expository preaching is handling the text in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers.<sup>3</sup>

House and Garland helpfully define the applicatory goal of expository preaching. This definition highlights the necessity for accuracy in application: “The goal of expository preaching of a text, or topically related texts, is bringing the listener as close as possible to the meaning of the original text, in its context, in order to apply its unchanging truth to the listener’s context.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the working definition of application was taken from Willhite: “I reserve the term application for the concrete beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors for which the sermon calls.”<sup>5</sup>

The limitations on this project was as follows: The length of the project consisted of fifteen weeks; due to the limited duration of the project, long-term results were not measurable.

The number of participants was approximately 40 in the seminar, with a sub-set of 8 in-depth evaluators. The class convened for eight consecutive Sunday evenings for a period of ninety minutes. This class duration and size are standard procedure for the Sunday evening education ministry at Racine Bible Church. “Firm Foundations” is the name given to our Sunday evening education program.

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<sup>3</sup>Merrill Unger, quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 11.

<sup>4</sup>House and Garland, *God’s Message*, 50.

<sup>5</sup>Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 17.

Before the seminar began, I administered a pre-project examination to all participants gauging their ability to recognize and evaluate legitimate application in expository preaching. I conducted the seminar over an eight-week period. At the conclusion of the seminar, all of the participants were re-examined to measure any change in their ability to recognize and evaluate legitimate application in expository preaching.

While the class was open to all who wished to attend, I targeted 8 individuals who were invited for more in-depth involvement. This sub-set of 8 participants was commissioned to evaluate my preaching over a six-week period immediately following the class. These 8 were chosen as a cross-section of demographics and education levels. A final week was used to conduct in-depth interviews with these participants, evaluating the value and legitimacy of application in my own preaching. Limiting the number to 8 enabled the interviews to be more detailed.

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal of this project was improvement of application in my own expository preaching. Application is a function of proper hermeneutics; therefore, this improvement necessitates accuracy in hermeneutics. Development and delivery of the curriculum crystallized matters of interpretation and application in my own mind, improving my work in the study.

Evaluating this work as it was presented in the sermon also took place. After completion of a seminar, 8 selected lay leaders were asked to evaluate my preaching for six weeks, utilizing the criteria learned in the class. I convened meetings with these 8 evaluators weekly, on Sunday evenings during the evaluation process. These meetings provided me immediate opportunities to improve application week to week in the process. This meeting also provided the evaluators with a forum for comparison and clarification so that their evaluative abilities could improve. At the conclusion of the six weeks, I conducted final interviews with each one individually. Both of these processes,

teaching the seminar and meeting with selected seminar participants for evaluation, sharpened my skills and moved me toward greater accuracy in application in preaching.

The second goal of this project was to develop a curriculum that teaches lay leaders to recognize exposition, which properly interprets and applies the Word of God. This curriculum briefly covered the importance of preaching in the local church. The primary lessons presented a basic understanding of accuracy in interpretation and the process of application. This teaching was presented to lay persons (not preachers) in a way that enabled them to become more discerning listeners.

The third goal was to teach this curriculum to a select group of Racine Bible Church members in eight consecutive Sunday evening meetings. The current church structure provided for equipping classes that last for eight weeks and meet on Sunday nights. Utilizing this readily accessible format ensured maximum participation. I invited all of Racine Bible Church's current teachers (Sunday school, small groups, and Bible studies) and many participated. Sunday evening was the best time to get these busily ministering people together since evening classes were already on the church calendar. Class instruction consisted of distribution of a detailed syllabus, presentation of a carefully prepared lecture, and targeted examples of correct and incorrect application in preaching. These examples were presented through live demonstration or audio recording.

The fourth goal was that these participants would gain knowledge of both expository preaching and principles of sound application from sound interpretation. Participants' overall knowledge was measured before the class began and again upon its completion through a written test. In addition, their ability to discern proper and improper application was tested before and after. Presentation of the basic principles of interpretation and application through the syllabus and lecture was examined as well. Three assignments were given over the eight-week course. In these homework assignments, the class participants demonstrated their immediate grasp of the principles covered in class.

## **Summary of Chapters**

Chapter 1 includes an introduction to Racine Bible Church. The church's history and experience with expository preaching is correlated to attendance patterns. The more recent ministry context is reviewed. Several recent changes in staffing and facilities is summarized. The common problems this project seeks to address are related. These problems include the lack of discernment regarding legitimate application in expository preaching. The reasons for addressing these problems for the good of the church are revealed.

Chapter 2 provides biblical and theological direction for evaluating and appreciating application in expository preaching. This study provides the biblical basis for encouraging church members to evaluate and appreciate proper expository preaching. The biblical study of accuracy in interpretation covers Nehemiah 8:1-12 and 2 Timothy 2:14-16. In addition, the chapter includes a biblical study showing the need for and mechanics of discernment in listening to expository preaching. The Berean listeners found in Acts 17:10-11 are exhibited as an example for modern listeners. The other principal text in this half of the chapter relating to discernment and spiritual maturity is Ephesians 4:13-16.

Chapter 3 presents principles of hermeneutics and application. The bridge between authorial intent and present application is presented. Principles of accuracy in application is outlined. Hermeneutical theory relative to meaning and significance is traced through to interpretation and application. The chapter provides a precise explanation as to how the application of a passage arises from careful interpretation and subsequently yields a legitimate current application.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology utilized in the project. Project procedure is narrated in detail. Teaching materials from the seminar are summarized. The pre and post-project knowledge evaluation surveys which gauge knowledge of expository preaching are presented. The instruments measuring discernment in evaluation of application in preaching are also presented.

Chapter 5 focuses on analysis and evaluation. The pre and post-project knowledge evaluation surveys that gauge knowledge of expository preaching are evaluated for knowledge increase. The instruments measuring discernment in evaluation of application in preaching are also evaluated for measurement of increased abilities. Each of the project's goals receives analysis. In addition, I evaluate my own development through teaching the seminar and receiving the in-depth evaluations from eight seminar participants.

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DIRECTION  
FOR IMPROVING APPLICATION IN  
EXPOSITORY PREACHING

**Introduction**

Three things dominate the view from behind the pulpit: an open Bible, a stack of sermon notes, and a congregation of needy souls. The preacher's charge, given in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, is to preach the Word (2 Tim 4:1-2). The sermon notes represent the work done with that open Bible in order to prepare for this task. This charge from 2 Timothy is further defined with a triad of verbs: reprove, rebuke, and exhort. These represent the actions the preacher is seeking to make toward that third element in the picture, the congregation. The Word preached from that open Bible must be a Word applied via rebuke and exhortation. The preached Word both confronts wrong attitudes and actions and exhorts toward proper actions. The preacher who fulfills this charge will follow through with a deep commitment to applying the truths of the Word into the lives of his listeners. Those sermon notes represent his efforts at making the message from that open Bible clear and pointedly relevant toward the congregation of hungry souls.

**Definitions**

In this project, I used the following definition of expository preaching from Sidney Greidanus, which he attributes to Merrill Unger:

Expository preaching is handling the text in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the

light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers.<sup>1</sup>

Exposition might best be distinguished not as much by the form of the message as by the process by which the message is crafted and communicated. The expository preacher does not use the text so much as the Spirit of God uses the preacher to present the text to an audience today. Expository preaching is the communication of the Biblical message, found through faithful exegesis, which the Holy Spirit applies to the life of the preacher and, through him, to his hearers.

The definition of application in this project was taken from Willhite: “I reserve the term application for the concrete beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors for which the sermon calls.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Preaching and Application**

The inclusion of application in the definition of expository preaching is crucial. Preaching might touch the emotions and even motivate change without being exposition. Many forms of rhetoric or communication can do so. Exposition targets the heart and mind with the very Word of God as the operative force. Expository preaching contemporizes the proposition of a biblical text in order to inform minds and influence hearts. Applied explanation is what true preaching is all about. Expository preaching consists in the explanation and application of a passage of Scripture. Without explanation it is not expository; without application it is not preaching.

Application is a critical component for the preacher’s interpretation primarily, and also for his presentation to the hearers in teaching. For the preacher’s part, the exegetical process and the hermeneutical circle have not been closed or completed until

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill Unger, quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 11.

<sup>2</sup>Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 17.

the exegete comes to terms with his own and his intended audience's response to the text.<sup>3</sup>

Preaching true to its aim presents information for the purpose of transformation. Accuracy in interpretation is necessary but not sufficient. That information must be brought over to the lives of the listeners so that it might be applied. Exegesis is not an end in itself. Its purposes are never fully realized until it begins to take into account the problems of transferring what has been learned from the text over to the lives of those in the church. Application takes the truths of Scripture and relates them into the lives of listeners. This transference may be accomplished through providing specific exhortations and concrete examples related to daily living.

House and Garland helpfully define the applicatory goal of expository preaching. This definition highlights the necessity for accuracy in application. "The goal of expository preaching of a text, or topically related texts, is bringing the listener as close as possible to the meaning of the original text, in its context, in order to apply its unchanging truth to the listener's context."<sup>4</sup>

Bryan Chapell's work is filled with strong statements about the necessity of application:

Expository preaching does not merely obligate preachers to explain what the Bible says; it obligates them to explain what the Bible means in the lives of people today. Application is as necessary for sound exposition as is explication. In fact, the real meaning of a text remains hidden until we discern how its truths affect our lives.<sup>5</sup>

Application fulfills the obligations of exposition. Application is the present, personal consequence of scriptural truth. Without application, a preacher has no reason to preach, because truth without actual or potential application fulfills no redemptive

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<sup>3</sup>Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 149-50.

<sup>4</sup>H. Wayne House and David G. Garland, *God's Message, Your Sermon* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 50.

<sup>5</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 84.

purpose. This means that at its heart preaching is not merely the proclamation of truth but truth applied.<sup>6</sup>

The picture of preaching is not complete with the open Bible and prepared sermon notes. The gathered congregation represents the important elements of application. Listeners have a God-given obligation to respond by applying expository preaching in their own lives. One of Jesus' own sermons concludes with an appeal to "everyone who hears these words of mine and acts upon them" (Matt 7:24). The Lord Jesus defined his family, his closest beloved associates, in terms of those who were constantly applying the Scripture in their lives: "But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it'" (Luke 8:21).

Listeners who do not follow through with application are at risk of being self-deluded. They may become forgetful hearers who miss out on God's blessing. These warnings of malediction fall upon the one who "is a hearer of the word and not a doer" (Jas 1:23). James exhorts the listeners to "prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jas 1:22).

### **Accuracy in Preaching and Application**

While the warning to the listeners is against self-delusion and for application, a subsequent warning is given to the teachers in the following context. The warning to the listeners is superseded in gravity by the subsequent warning given to the preachers (Jas 3:1). It is the preachers who are warned not only against self-delusion, but of strict judgment. The absolute requirement for these teachers is accuracy.

The three items that dominate the view from the pulpit each demand accuracy. The Bible demands accurate exegesis. The sermon notes represent, ideally, the work of a man of God who has accurately handled the Word of God. The gathered people of the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 210.

congregation are not obligated to follow the preacher's opinions but rather to hear and do the Word of God.

Greidanus's comments on this issue are incisive:

By whose authority do preachers preach? Whose word do they bring? If contemporary preachers preach with authority the congregation can no longer dismiss their sermons as merely personal opinions but must respond to them as authoritative messages. Accordingly, if preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must proclaim the message of the inspired Scriptures, for the Scriptures alone are the word of God written; the Scriptures alone have divine authority.<sup>7</sup>

Though such accuracy is clearly required, far too often it is lacking. Modern preachers may miss this calling in at least two different ways. They may bring inaccurate, superficial work from the Word of God or simply substitute their own ideas for the Word altogether. Carson emphasizes the importance of accuracy and its appalling absence:

We are dealing with God's thoughts: we are obligated to take the greatest pains to understand them truly and to explain them clearly. It is all the more shocking, therefore, to find in the evangelical pulpit, where the Scriptures are officially revered, frequent, and inexcusable sloppiness in handling them.<sup>8</sup>

### **Nehemiah 8**

The events in Nehemiah pertain directly to exposition accuracy in interpretation and application. These events commenced in the year 446 BC, the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah chronicles the third return to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, along with these very walls, were destroyed because Judah was unfaithful to the covenant, ignoring and disobeying the Word of God.

Nehemiah 8:1 mentions Ezra for the first time in the book. He is identified as Ezra the scribe and then, in the next verse, as Ezra the priest. Significantly the book he is asked to bring is also carefully introduced with a surplus of titles "the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel." The reading, understanding, and applying

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<sup>7</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 12.

<sup>8</sup>D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 15-16.

of that Word dominates this entire passage. Nehemiah 8:18 is representative “from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God.” When the people confessed their sin, it was that they had “not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments” and that they had “cast your law behind their back” (9:26). This experience of understanding the Law of God and confessing a failure to rightly apply and obey it determines the course of the book.

It is evident in the narrative arc that all of Ezra and Nehemiah lead up to chapters 7 through 13 of Nehemiah. The community reorders its life through reading, hearing, understanding, and applying the Word of God. The narrative culminates with a renewal of covenant obligation in which they enter into a curse and an oath “to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God and his rules and his statutes” (10:29). The covenant renewal was a spiritual awakening evidenced by receiving the Word of God with a zeal to hear it and walk in it. This covenant renewal is also found in Exodus 34, Joshua 24, and 2 Kings 18 and 22.

Bryan Chapell provides a brief treatment of Nehemiah 8 as a paradigm for expository preaching that culminates in application. He identifies three necessary components for faithful exposition:

The exposition of the Word involved three elements: presentation of the Word (it was read), explanation of the Word (making it clear and giving its meaning), and exhortations based on the Word (the priests causes the people to understand in such a way that they could use the information that was imparted). Presentation of the Word itself, explanation of its content, and exhortation to apply its truths composed the pattern of proclamation.<sup>9</sup>

The pattern of accurately understanding and properly applying the Word of the Lord is repeated from person to person throughout chapters 7 and 8. Ezra’s personal commitment (7:10) is duplicated in the lives of the thirteen Levites (8:8) and, through them, also in the lives of heads of the households (8:13). Each of these men learns to read,

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<sup>9</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 87.

interpret, teach, and apply the Word.

Accuracy in interpretation is highlighted in Nehemiah 8:7. The exact nature of what the Levites did at this point depends on the meaning assigned to the Hebrew word *meporas*, from a verbal stem *prs* meaning divide, separate, or specify (passive participle agreeing with *hasseper*, the book). The adverb in verse 8 describing how they read is well translated “distinctly.” This process implies care for the exact pronunciation and phrasing, so as to make the details of the reading in both its original and contemporary sense readily comprehensible to the gathered congregation.<sup>10</sup>

Apparently what occurred in the narrative was a two-step process. Myers argues, “Ezra read from the Hebrew while the Levites gave what he read in Aramaic and so assisted in making the law intelligible to the people.”<sup>11</sup> This dual process was necessary in order to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between the last seventy years in Babylonia with their cultural heritage as found in Scripture.

Breneman observes, “Although the message and content of Scripture does not change, it does need fresh application in every situation.”<sup>12</sup> Breneman strikes the balanced conviction that Ezra and the Levites sought to bring from the Word: “The biblical text needs to be applied by each generation and in each situation without falling into legalism or accepting a syncretism in which one loses the Scripture’s authority and distinctive message.”<sup>13</sup> This painstaking process of interpretation and translation produces understanding. “All the people who understand” is repeated twice in Nehemiah 8:2-3. The narrative showcases how Ezra and the Levites helped them or caused them to understand

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<sup>10</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 288.

<sup>11</sup>Jacob Martin Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 14 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 154.

<sup>12</sup>Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 226.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 228.

through extended reading and diligent teaching.

The people's understanding response is conviction and weeping (8:9, 9:1, 33) followed by covenant commitment in chapter 10. While the actions of the people dominate the narrative, the crucial factor is determining how these actions were generated, that is, what brought about this tremendous change? It was the reading, teaching, explaining, and applying of the Word of God by faithful expositors. This defines the expositor's job description and portrays his intended result.

An examination of Nehemiah 7 through 10 reveals that application is further highlighted through the patterned structure of the narrative. Throntveit breaks the narrative into three scenes (7:73b-8:12; 8:13-18; 9:1-10:39), each of which displays an identical sequence. Each scene moves from time reference to assembly, to encounter with the Law, to application, and finally to response. The encounter with the Law consists of teaching and interpretation of the Word, which leads to understanding (8:2, 3, 7, 8, 12; 10:28). This understanding ultimately results in living "according to the ordinance" (8:18; 9:13, 29, 10:29). The progression that governs all three scenes is as follows: encounter with the Law, application, and response.<sup>14</sup> Thus the patterned narrative structure through all four chapters is built to highlight teaching, understanding through right interpretation, and careful, God-honoring application. Accurate application is the ultimate issue toward which all the assembling, reading, teaching, and clarifying leads. "The instructional activity of the Levites coupled with the text's progression and the pronounced emphasis on 'understanding' (vv. 2, 3, 7, 8, 12) points to the response of the people as the main interest of the passage."<sup>15</sup> The third scene (9:1-10:39) provides the climax to this section of Ezra-Nehemiah, which celebrates the completion of the walls.

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<sup>14</sup>Mark Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1992), 95-96.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

The people's confession in chapter 9 is about how they and their fathers had failed to keep the Law of God. Their new resolution has to do with remembering and following the commandments. These commandments became clear to them all through the instructional labors of the Levites. The right reception and application of the Word in chapter 10 was dependent upon its right explanation and interpretation in chapters 8 and 9. Throntveit summarizes how this triad of scenes highlights the interpretation and application of the Word:

In each of the three scenes, after the law has been publicly read, the intention of the original stipulation is made the basis for present application and response. The ability of scripture to speak to later situations is thus emphasized with a consequent growth in the authority of scripture, properly interpreted and applied, for the community.<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis on interpretation, explanation, and application of Scripture dominates the narrative and climaxes in chapter 10. The application of God's Word climaxes the action in the narrative arc for all three scenes. The role of the expositor in causing the people to understand leads to accurate application. This faithful ministry in turn brings the blessings of obedience into the lives of God's people.

## **2 Timothy 2:15**

Accuracy in expository preaching receives a similar, though much briefer, treatment in 2 Timothy. The hard work to which the preacher is called in 2 Timothy 2:15 resumes the triad of metaphors presented in verses 3 through 6. Hard work is elucidated there with the single-minded focus of a soldier, the disciplined competition of the athlete and the ceaseless labor of the farmer. Timothy is called to hard work. This work consists in accurately handling the word of truth. The Apostolic admonition in verse 15 leaves every expositor with at least three fundamental factors to consider. God calls the preacher to work. The God who calls men to the work will eventually evaluate them for that work. This work consists in a rightly handling God's Word of truth.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 110.

Second Timothy 2:14 begins the second major division of the book, The second division, 2:14-4:8, deals with the problem in Ephesus by challenging Timothy to teach properly, in direct contrast to the irreverent babblers of 2:14-26. Though false teachers make up a major theme in this section, the negative and positive injunctions to Timothy disclose what a God pleasing teacher will do in the church.

The entire section of 2:14-26 consists of commands for Timothy to teach the congregation and to avoid those involved in disputes about words. Towner writes that these commands

. . . may be divided into two sequences, each constructed of three imperatives in a negative/positive/negative pattern. Paul is using the failings of his opponents to instruct his protégé, ‘They are doing this, but you should be doing that.’ The intention of the contrast (‘they do this . . . but you should . . .’) is to emphasize the superior character of the life and action that Timothy is to embrace.<sup>17</sup>

The antithesis guides the commands about teaching.

The positive command in verse 15 resounds between two negative examples in 14 and 16. The contrast amplifies the force of the command in verse 15. Timothy’s use of the Word of truth is to have the opposite effect of the three negative results given in the preceding and following verses “does no good, ruins the hearers, lead people into more and more ungodliness.” Rightly handling the Word of truth will produce results that, correspondingly, do good, build up the hearers, and lead people into more and more godliness.

Verse 14 contains two *epi* prepositional phrases describing the results of false teaching. When the subject of true teaching comes up in verse 15, it is with a view primarily to the results in the life of the teacher—he will be approved by God; and secondarily to the results in the life of the hearers—they will receive the Word of truth rightly divided. This issue of results continues through to verse 16 where improper

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<sup>17</sup>Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, The IVP New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 516.

teaching leads people into more and more ungodliness. Set between these two statements of negative result, verse 15 provides for proper results. The encouragement for the modern expositor is evident.

### **Rightly Dividing**

Central to the verse is the verb *orthotomein*. The participle *orthotomounta* is unattested in this construction elsewhere. It is a compound derived from *ortho*, translated “rightly” or “correctly” and the verb *tomein* translated “divide” or “cut.”<sup>18</sup> The meaning of this compound verb can be filled in with several possible word pictures. Luke Timothy Johnson summarizes this term:

Interpreters find a variety of possible sources for the derivation of the term *orthotomeo* . . . driving a straight furrow . . . a plow cutting a straight furrow, a road engineer’s building a straight road, or a mason’s squaring and cutting a stone to fit its proper place.<sup>19</sup>

Johnson further suggests that medical imagery is in play here. The verb cutting straight would be used of surgery. For further proof of the imagery working in this context he points out that it is a gangrene that is being opposed by this right cutting.<sup>20</sup>

The meaning of the term can be further traced through its usage in the Septuagint. Two usages of note are found in Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5. There it appears to mean “to cut a path in a straight direction, by clearing difficult land to make a road.”<sup>21</sup> In the context of the meaningless disputes mentioned to Timothy in verses 14 and 16 the meaning may be to guide the Word of truth along a straight path to do its God-intended work without being turned aside by false teaching or useless babble.

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<sup>18</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 384.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 215.

<sup>20</sup>Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 324.

<sup>21</sup>I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 748.

Each of these metaphors helps the expositor to visualize or imagine what it is he labors toward in the study. His labor with the language tools, contextual attention, commentary evaluation, and research is all for a purpose. He seeks to uncover the historical meaning so that it can be presented straight to the present hearers. He is building a straight road of application.

Oden's comment aptly sums up the matter:

Rightly dividing the word of truth means rightly working out the Scripture, so that the word can be preached without distortion, that the apostolic witness can be received, remembered, transmitted accurately, cutting a straight path through all ambiguities in order to get the message of truth through to the hearer.<sup>22</sup>

The purpose for which the Word is handled rightly is so that it can get to the hearers for their profit and growth.

### **Accuracy and Application**

As mentioned above, the command in verse 15 comes between negative examples in 14 and 16. The teaching in verse 14 is “useless” or “does no good.” This expresses the common concept that “practical usefulness was the traditional test of any teaching's quality.”<sup>23</sup> Towner cites Philo and Plato on this common concept of testing a teaching's application. Timothy's counter-goal in verse 15 is that the Word of truth rightly handled will in fact be most useful to the hearers. This is made more explicit in 3:16 with the near synonym *ophelimos*. It is the hard work of accuracy that will ensure Timothy's teaching is most useful to accomplish God's purposes.

Accuracy in application is so important that it functions as “the specific activity that in this context is to be the criterion of approval before God as an unashamed worker.”<sup>24</sup> The actual result for which God is searching, the specific measurement God is

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 67.

<sup>23</sup>Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 519.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 521.

taking is this: does the workman accurately handle the Word of truth so that it profits the hearers? The approved workman will teach the Word of God accurately and correctly in such a way that his treatment of the word of truth is useful for God's purposes in the life of the church.

Again, Oden's comment provides a summation of the matter. At issue here is "how to apply the received tradition to particular circumstances, to apply the address of Scripture in a timely way and in a way that can be appropriated by its hearers without distorting the apostolic tradition!"<sup>25</sup> The hard work is carried forward with this balance in view. The workman wishes to present the word of truth in all of its historic truth in order to meet the pressing present and contemporary situation. This requires careful study of historical context, detailed mining out of original authorial meaning, and present sensitivity to the will of God in the contemporary circumstance. Accuracy in interpretation and application is paramount.

The requirements here can be summed up in a three-fold manner. First, his supreme ambition must be to obtain God's approval. Second, he is to be a workman carrying out his labor in such a way that he would have no cause to be ashamed when his work undergoes inspection. Third, this workman is being held accountable to accuracy in delivering the Word of truth as a teacher of that Word.<sup>26</sup> These three requirements deserve and demand the attention of every expositor. Those who listen to exposition may judge that exposition based upon these three criteria.

### **Acts 17**

The activity of the Bereans recounted in Acts 17 provides a paradigm for congregational discernment in listening to expository preaching. This narrative account

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<sup>25</sup>Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 67.

<sup>26</sup>Lea and Griffin, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*, 215.

in the middle of Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) finds Paul and Silas in Berea after fleeing southwest from Thessalonica (17:10). The detractors who had run them out of Thessalonica quickly sent a deputation to Berea to force Paul's departure from that city as well (17:13).

During his brief stay, Paul taught the Berean Jews in the synagogue. The content of his teaching is not listed in the Berean narrative but may be assumed from the statement of his customary teaching in verses 2 and 3 of the same chapter. He reasoned from the Scriptures, explaining that the same Jesus who suffered and rose again is the Christ. Therefore, when verse 11 says that the Bereans "examined the Scriptures," the things that the Bereans needed to examine would have included Christ's suffering, resurrection, and kingdom of salvation. Their searching was prompted because this teaching about Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ presented a reading of Scripture, which was novel to these Jewish hearers. Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures was particularly original compared to all they had been taught in that same synagogue. If they were going to accept it they needed to put it to the test first.

The effort the Bereans showed toward discernment wins them the characterization of "noble" or "noble-minded" in Luke's description. The term *eugenēs*, originally meant "of noble birth" or "well born" but it came naturally to be applied to noble behavior.<sup>27</sup> Bock further explains the meaning of this word:

The word came to have a more general connotation of being open, tolerant, generous, having the qualities that go with good breeding. Nowhere is this more evident than in their willingness to take Paul's scriptural exposition seriously. They did not accept his word uncritically but did their own examination of the Scriptures to see if they really did point to the death and resurrection of the Messiah as Paul claimed.<sup>28</sup>

For church members listening to expository preaching today this means a

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<sup>27</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 816.

<sup>28</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 363.

freedom from prejudice to believe the teacher simply because “he is my pastor.” Such sentiments can border on gullibility and open the door to manipulation. Church members should take what a beloved pastor or teacher says back to the touchstone of Scripture. If the pastor is Christ’s true under-shepherd this is what he would want his listeners to do.

The process by which the Bereans examined or tested the teaching is described by the word *anakrinein*. “This verb is nowhere else in the NT used of the study of Scripture; it suggests rather the legal examination of witnesses (or of an accused person).”<sup>29</sup> It is used with that definition (legal examination of an accused person) by Luke further on in the Acts narrative (24:8 and 28:18). The usage of this verb emphasizes the careful, fact-finding, fact-checking, written record scouring nature of their study. The parallels to modern expository listeners are straightforward. After listening to a sermon filled with data and application that arises from interpretation, the listener should examine his or her own copy of the Scriptures to ascertain if this teaching does indeed accurately convey what is found therein.

The Bereans model a process that deserves duplication by all who hear expository preaching. Greidanus cites two passages in which the similar examining action takes place in a section subtitled “The Bible as Criterion for Preaching:”

The Bible also functions as the criterion for preaching. Paul reminds the Corinthians that even the word of New Testament prophets is not simply to be accepted but should first be weighed (1 Cor 14:29). In 1 Thess. 5:20-21 he encourages the congregation, ‘Do not despise prophesying, but test everything.’ Someone may claim to speak the word of God, but that claim does not necessarily make it so. Hence the hearers will have to test the word that is spoken to see if it is indeed worthy of acceptance as the word of God.<sup>30</sup>

When Greidanus elaborates on the criterion and nature of the testing, he summarizes precisely what the Bereans did in the Acts 17 passage without actually citing that passage:

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<sup>29</sup>Barrett, *A Commentary on Acts*, 818.

<sup>30</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 14.

Testing, of course, must be done with a certain standard, a criterion. But what standard shall we use for testing sermons? The standard surely cannot be personal likes and dislikes. The only standard we have today is the canon, the Bible. Sermons, therefore, must be tested against the Scriptures.<sup>31</sup>

Bryan Chapell likewise commends the practice as continually necessary:

Any trained public speaker can select a theme and gather together a bundle of stories that will emotionally touch an audience—but this is not preaching. Only the Holy Spirit working by and with the Word of God in the hearts of men and women can effect the spiritual changes that are the mark of true preaching.”<sup>32</sup>

If those who listen want these true spiritual changes they must do more than simply react to the emotion or stories in the sermon. Rather, they must follow the Bereans in judging preaching to ensure that it is biblical and therefore powerful.

### **Ephesians 4:12-15**

The noble mindedness of the Bereans in Acts 17 is paralleled by Paul’s description of his goal for all believers in Ephesians 4. Accuracy in interpretation and clarity in application are for the purpose of growth to maturity.

This paragraph presents one of the New Testament’s most profound descriptions of spiritual maturity in the church. Maturity is clearly in view throughout the chapter. Paul uses the term ‘building up’ in a return to the architectural figure introduced in chapter 2 (2:21-22). Here in verse 12 what is built up is nothing less than the living body of Christ. This ideal of full Christian maturity is characterized in 4:14 from its negative aspect; in 4:15 from the positive. In advancing toward maturity the believers are to grow past the stage of children, who are unstable and easily tossed about, and into the stature of adulthood with commensurate stability.<sup>33</sup>

The two participles in verse 14, “being tossed” and “carried about,” describe

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 139-40.

<sup>33</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 201.

the ones who are childish. They lack the stability that comes from discernment. As the congregants grow in discernment it is just such stability and resistance that they acquire. Bruce comments on the way this passage moves toward discernment: “Maturity brings with it the capacity to evaluate various forms of teaching, to accept what is true and reject what is false.”<sup>34</sup> Listeners who cannot discern accurate teaching are in constant danger of being carried about by inaccurate teaching. Advancement out of this stage is defined as maturity, which is one of the primary growth goals for Christ’s body in Ephesians and all of the epistles.

Bruce concisely sums up the meaning behind the term “infants”:

The NT writers use the term ‘infants’ to denote spiritual immaturity—an immaturity which is culpable when sufficient time has passed for those so described to have grown out of infancy. Infants are defenseless, unable to protect themselves; in the spiritual life they are an easy prey for false teachers and others who would like to lead them astray from the true path.<sup>35</sup>

Participation in the church fellowship and exposure to accurate expository preaching will help believers advance into maturity. The term *nepios* connotes not only physical age but childish understanding, that is, foolishness, inexperience, or lack of insight. In the present context it has reference to a child’s gullibility, lack of understanding, or lack of perception. Paul proposes that teaching gifts are necessary so that believers do not remain as children in their perception.<sup>36</sup>

John Stott gives a warmly applicable statement about the comparison to children:

Of course we are to resemble children in their humility and innocence, but not in their ignorance or instability. Unstable children are like little boats in a stormy sea, entirely at the mercy of wind and waves. They never seem to know their own mind or come to settled convictions. Instead, their opinions tend to be those of the last preacher they

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<sup>34</sup>F. F. Bruce *The Epistle to the Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 351.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 560-61.

heard or the last book they read, and they fall an easy prey to each new theological fad.<sup>37</sup>

It is growth toward maturity, manifested in increased discernment in listening to preaching, that will protect believers from being such easy prey. Moving believers along in precisely this growth process is a primary reason Jesus provides gifted expository preachers to his church. Christ giving these gifts, after taking captivity captive in his ascension, is the pinnacle point of chapter 4. This serves as a culmination to the teaching on the composition of the church that makes up chapters 2 through 4.

How does this growth toward maturity progress? This question can be answered from the context. Members of the church exercise character qualities of love toward each other (4:1-3) while gratefully receiving the grace-produced fruit of gifted ministers (4:7-12). It is this reception that is the subject of the training course involved in this project. When receiving teaching from a gifted pastor teacher, the discerning listener will apply only that which arises from accurate interpretation for legitimate application. Without this discernment, listeners would never advance past the state of tossed-about children.

### **Conclusions**

Nehemiah's narrative reveals a pattern, which shows that expository preaching must arise from careful interpretation. The reason such teaching is presented to God's people is for the expressed purpose of applying God's Word to their present life circumstances in careful and accurate obedience.

The exhortation to Timothy proves that expository preaching requires accuracy of interpretation. So central is this requirement that God Himself will judge the expositor's work on precisely this point.

The Acts and Ephesians passages relate these truths from the receivers' side. God honoring listening will refuse to accept a teaching merely because of its novelty or the

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<sup>37</sup>John Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 170.

teacher's charisma. Rather, the teaching will be examined in light of the Scriptures and then received if it accords with the Word of God. This process enables growth toward maturity. Immaturity is a lack of just such discernment and a subsequent susceptibility to popular teaching that is not an accurate application of God's Word. When expository preachers fulfill the charge found in Timothy and their listeners follow the pattern of the Bereans, God is glorified by both the accuracy and application of his Word in his church.

CHAPTER 3  
PRINCIPLES OF HERMENEUTICS AND APPLICATION  
FOR IMPROVING APPLICATION IN  
EXPOSITORY PREACHING

**The Importance of Application**

Why preach? It is not an exaggeration to claim that application of Scripture is the entire point of pastoral ministry. The pastor conducts himself and carries out his ministry in line with the application of relevant scriptural passages. His study of the Word yields application in his own life. He labors in study and presentation to make the Word's application clear for his people. After the preaching event he continues, in prayer, asking the living God to bring peoples' lives in line with God's will in Scripture. Day by day, the application of Scripture to all the relationships and circumstances of peoples' lives is the pastor's primary concern.

What is the purpose of expository preaching? Application fulfills the obligations of exposition. "Application is the present, personal consequence of scriptural truth. Without application, a preacher has no reason to preach, because truth without actual or potential application fulfills no redemptive purpose."<sup>1</sup> The purpose of expository preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth appropriate response to the God whose message is being delivered. The response will consist of faith, obedience, hope, worship, and other spiritual acts and attitudes.<sup>2</sup>

What is the point of preaching if application is left out? God's Word always

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<sup>1</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 210.

<sup>2</sup>J. I. Packer, "Why Preach?" in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 9.

demands a human response. As Scripture testifies, when a congregation merely hears the Word, even with a profound level of understanding, and yet fails to “do it,” the whole event is a deceptive enterprise (Jas 1:22). The preacher’s responsibility is to demonstrate, with crystal clarity, the relevance of every portion of God’s Word for the doing. God’s Word itself is seeking this response from its hearers. The preacher is opening, reading, and teaching the Word for this very purpose.<sup>3</sup>

Application is an essential component of Chapell’s fine definition of expository preaching:

An expository sermon may be defined as a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.<sup>4</sup>

Preaching is life-centered in its focus. It is also true that preaching is God-centered in its viewpoint and Christ-centered in its substance. But preaching must collide with real life in order to fulfill its God given purpose. Preaching is the communication of eternal truth about God in order to bring it to bear upon people from the present moment into their future. Preaching must bear in on present existence. If it does not then it may be communication about truth, but it is not biblical preaching.<sup>5</sup> The living God speaks his living Word that lives might be transformed. Preaching must do more than merely impart information. It is necessary that preaching actually provide “the means to transformation ordained by a sovereign God that will affect lives and destinies of eternal souls committed to a preacher’s spiritual care.”<sup>6</sup>

For the preacher’s part, the exegetical process has not been completed until the

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<sup>3</sup>Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nashville: Nelson, 2002), 19-20.

<sup>4</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 31.

<sup>5</sup>Packer, “Why Preach,” 10.

<sup>6</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 25.

exegete comes to understand the proper response to the text. His goal in presenting his sermon is to bring his listeners into life changing contact with the text in order to apply its truth in their own settings.

### **Definitions**

The definition of application in this project is taken from Willhite: “I reserve the term application for the concrete beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors for which the sermon calls.”<sup>7</sup> Application in biblical exposition is the process of communicating the present day relevance of a biblical text, specifying how that relevance may be translated into action, and urging the hearers to make that transference. Where do these demands for change in attitude and action come from? What right does the preacher have to make such demands? What obligates the hearers to heed them? The answer to these questions is found in understanding hermeneutics, meaning, and significance in order to ascertain the true source of authority.

Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word meaning “to interpret.” Traditionally it has meant “that science which delineates principles or methods for interpreting an individual author’s meaning.”<sup>8</sup> Literal hermeneutics assumes the single meaning of Scripture which was fixed by the writer’s use of words in their original contexts.

The terms “meaning” and “significance” are used by numerous hermeneutical authors. These terms were popularized by E. D. Hirsch. Meaning is single and is determined by the will of the author as expressed in the text he wrote to a specific audience. Significance is manifold and can arise from the meaning of the text to be displayed through

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<sup>7</sup>Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 17.

<sup>8</sup>Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 21.

principles that apply to multiple audiences. Meaning relates directly to interpretation. Significance relates directly to application. The author's intended meaning is a single core that is unvarying. The significance is multiform and includes the implications of a text for individual readers. Significance includes applications of the original meaning, which vary depending on diverse contemporary circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Grant Osborne's comments about significance shows how it is tied to application:

Significance has been defined as the relationship of meaning to someone or something else, any person, any situation, or any predicament. The meaning of the text, as has been argued, is one, constant and unchanging. It can be discovered by appropriate hermeneutical procedures. The significance of the text, on the other hand, is manifold and constantly changing. It is manifold because the persons, situations, and predicaments to which the text can be related are manifold. It is constantly changing because the persons, situations, and predicaments to which the text can be related are never the same.<sup>10</sup>

Though significance is multiform and changing it is still bound by strict guidelines. Scripture's unchanging and authoritative meaning is not subject to personal perspective or opinion. Meaning must not become subject to what a pastor (well intentioned or not) wants to do in the lives of his listeners. A passage's application is manifold within the parameters of, and as governed by, the interpretation rightly arrived at through the work of exegesis.<sup>11</sup>

These defining concepts lead to two fundamental truths for proper application in expository preaching. The first is that the biblical text has a single meaning determined by the will of the author as expressed in the text with a view to the original hearers. This meaning can be determined and extrapolated from the text by utilizing hermeneutics. The second truth is that the biblical text has a manifold significance that is squarely based

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 22-26.

<sup>10</sup>Hendrik Krabbendam, "Hermeneutics and Preaching," in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 229-30.

<sup>11</sup>Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives*, 207.

upon the meaning of the text and can be formulated by means of principles arising from it with a view to any subsequent audience.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Bridge**

The important issue of accurate application in expository preaching can be understood using the bridge metaphor. Basic bridge construction involves building over a river by constructing supporting anchors on both banks. The bridge of proper application is similarly built with two anchors. Application in preaching must be anchored in both authorial intent and contemporary relevance. Expository preaching requires a supporting anchor in the past and the present. Just as a bridge must be firmly anchored on both sides in order to present a trustworthy walkway, so expository preaching combines accurate hermeneutics with present relevance. The bridge is successfully built when these components are in place. Authorial intent for original listeners forms the anchor in the past. Principled exhortation for contemporary listeners forms the anchor in the present. These two anchors represent meaning and significance.

The two banks preachers build upon are the original setting and the contemporary setting. The walkway is the clearly communicated sermon filled with exhortations about attitudes and actions. These attitudes and actions are relevant for the listeners today but clearly arise from the historic text.

To put the issue succinctly: since the message was first addressed to an ancient church, it requires explication; since that message needs to be addressed to a contemporary church, it requires application. The problem preachers face is how to integrate explication and application so that the whole sermon comes across as relevant communication.<sup>13</sup>

In preaching, God's truth crosses a bridge in order to enter the life of the present

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<sup>12</sup>Krabbendam, "Hermeneutics and Preaching," 213.

<sup>13</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 183.

day listener. The bridge must be built spanning the two sides. The bottom line, therefore, is that the meaning of the text and its significance are transmitted. Preaching as communication of truth encompasses not only exposition, but also application.

### **Bridge Construction and Inspection**

Bridges may fail for a number of reasons. If a bridge fails while travelers are upon it, tragedy ensues. Proper anchoring prevents bridge failure. The integrity of the anchors, on both sides of the chasm, helps to ensure that a bridge remains strong and provides a safe passageway. Expository preaching, done carefully and correctly, provides a trustworthy path for the message and thrust of the text to enter the hearts and lives of listeners. What provides for trustworthy anchors in expository preaching?

The first anchor is interpretation that is accurate to original authorial intent. The second anchor is application, based on that original authorial meaning, and communicated clearly with contemporary significance.

### **First Anchor**

Grant Osborne identifies this first anchor as nothing less than the essential for true authority in preaching:

The only means for true authority in preaching and daily Christian living is to utilize hermeneutics to wed our application as closely as possible to our interpretation and to make certain that our interpretation coheres with the thrust of the text.<sup>14</sup>

**Disciplined listening.** This first anchor requires discipline on the preacher's part. He must listen to his text in order to anchor his eventual application in sound interpretation. It is this discipline in interpretation that over-eagerness toward application may endanger. Greidanus warns of this danger: "Eager to discover relevance, the minister never takes time to hear what the text really says. Application dominates interpretation.

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<sup>14</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 26.

This is folly, for how can one apply what one has not yet heard or understood?”<sup>15</sup>

The preacher knows that he will be stepping into the pulpit in order to declare an authoritative word to the assembled congregation. Yet there is an ever-present danger that the authority will be merely human and not divine. Preachers are especially prone to this danger. After all, because of their proximity to the congregation and people’s needs, they usually know what they feel needs to be said to the people. Also, because of their education, training, and experience, they have a good idea of what the text will say before they exegete it. Hence the danger is very real that the authority in the sermon may not actually arise from the Word of God itself. The purpose of the preacher may override the purpose of the text and in effect silence the text.<sup>16</sup> If the preacher turns to application too early in the process, he risks allowing the audience to influence his exegesis. He risks allowing significance to determine meaning.<sup>17</sup> This over-eagerness reverses the order so that significance determines meaning in a way that empties meaning of its actual authority. How to move to application without sacrificing authority is the question.

Listening to the text on its own terms allows the author’s message to come through clearly. Meaning arises from the text itself rather than from the preacher’s personal intention for the text.

**Discover meaning through hermeneutics.** While the end goal is contemporary application, the process must begin with historic meaning. Grant Osborne locates the first step in determining meaning with a view toward eventually transferring that meaning in the sermon:

First, one should study the original situation behind the message of the text. In other

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<sup>15</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 107.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Timothy S. Warren, “A Paradigm for Preaching,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 469.

words, how was the biblical author contextualizing or applying biblical truths to the situation behind the text? This is discovered by applying background material to the problems addressed in the passage.<sup>18</sup>

Concentration on this background and the original message is a key safeguard toward establishing valid application. In order to determine responsible application for today, therefore, certain key questions beg to be answered. What issues did the author seek to address? What questions did he seek to answer? What is the specific message he proclaimed?<sup>19</sup>

In his classic text on biblical preaching Haddon Robinson reminds us that “basic to perceptive application is accurate exegesis.”<sup>20</sup> Accurate exegesis is only possible through the painstaking process of studying and observing the text. What was the author trying to convey? What was his subject? What did he say about his subject? Why did he say these things to this particular audience? Listening to the text, and observing all of its contents carefully, positions the preacher to discover the theological purpose present in the text.

**Discern theological purpose.** Careful observation reveals the message and meaning of the text. When the preacher takes this message into consideration, he can analyze it in order to determine the underlying theological principle present in the text. Rather than using a text to present his own theological considerations, the preacher is accurately presenting the theological message of the text of Scripture.

Properly chosen preaching portions address a situation in life with a deeper truth. A preacher must identify the eternal truth that the biblical author applies to the situation present in the text. Osborne calls this the “deep structural principle” behind the message. This is the larger theological truth the author utilizes to address his readers at their point

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<sup>18</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 440.

<sup>19</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 167.

<sup>20</sup>Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 90.

of need.<sup>21</sup> This truth may be about God, man, sin, or salvation. Disciplined listening remains important at this stage of sermon preparation. This truth must arise from the text of Scripture itself. Biblical authority is compromised if one launches into further theological explanation and application outside of the text. The preacher must continue to query the passage itself to uncover the author's theological purpose. Is there an explicit theological statement made in the text? Did the author or narrator provide editorial comments or other interpretive statements?<sup>22</sup>

There is a theological truth in the text that is meant to accomplish a purpose. The text is seeking to accomplish something in the lives of its original hearers. It may answer a question or provide comfort and encouragement. It may correct, teach, warn, or threaten. It may motivate to obedience, praise, or otherwise seek to transform perspective. The preacher must be able to identify that goal.<sup>23</sup>

**Determine what to share for teaching purposes.** The study and observation necessary for this first anchor yields a large amount of exegetical data. How does the preacher make an intelligent and helpful decision about what data to share with his audience? This important question is answered by considering what will establish biblical authority in application. Genuine authority is established through sharing enough of the hermeneutical process in the course of the sermon to show the listeners that the preacher is presenting the true meaning of Scripture. Many preachers, in a desire for relevance, are tempted to skip this step. Greidanus gives a helpful word to alleviate hesitation about providing this hermeneutical data in the sermon:

Nevertheless, preachers need not be apologetic about providing their congregations with some of the results of their exegetical study. The presence of explication in the

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<sup>21</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 443.

<sup>22</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 92.

<sup>23</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 173.

sermon does not automatically lead to a dualistic sermon of which only the second half is relevant, for explication forms the foundation for application. As the basis for application, explication of how a passage was originally understood is not at all irrelevant; on the contrary, explication provides the reasons for the particular application. As such, explication provides the congregation with the tools to test the message.<sup>24</sup>

At times the preacher or listener may grow impatient. Explanations of historical detail, lists of names in genealogies, grammatical specificity concerning verb tenses, and other ancient details appear for all practical purposes to be irrelevant. But God chose to reveal himself and his will in a book that requires reading line by line. While listeners may, inaudibly, complain, “Skip all this ancient stuff and get to the point.” It is the ancient stuff (the exegetical detail accurately rendered) that ensures that the point itself bears God’s authority. It forms a trustworthy anchor, in which the authority for the sermon is truly established. Getting to the point of application in the sermon requires moving with and through the details of the text. This is the only way to prove publicly that the authority for the application point is truly God’s authority.

## **Second Anchor**

The second anchor, contemporary relevance, accords with the purpose of preaching. The purpose of the sermon is to promote God-glorifying life change in the listeners. Application is an essential, even definitive, component in expository preaching. The second anchor for the bridge is contemporary significance in the sermon. Where the first anchor is indispensable for accuracy and authority, this second anchor is equally necessary for focus and purpose. Without this second anchor the exercise is pointless. With it securely in place the goal of preaching can be accomplished.

This second anchor must be genuinely connected with the first anchor to preserve and prove proper authority in preaching. The contemporary application point or points must maintain genuine continuity with the meaning of the preaching passage.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 183.

**Contemporary application must maintain continuity with meaning.**

Uncovering the theological truth in the passage positions the preacher to present an exposition that is both biblically accurate and life oriented. This produces preaching that is helpful to man while remaining God centered. Greidanus explains how continuity is found in theocentricity:

The continuity between the message for the first hearers and that for the church today will be readily apparent when we consider that it is the same God who upholds the world now as well as then. In other words, once we have caught the theocentric focus of the text—what it reveals about God’s acts, God’s promises, God’s will—we have caught hold of the continuity that allows for meaningful application today in spite of discontinuity, for the triune God is constant, steadfast, faithful, the same today as he was in the distant past.<sup>25</sup>

Two key questions can be used to gauge the biblical accuracy of application.

What was the text intended to change in the attitudes and actions of its original recipients?

Is the principle, which is being advocated in the sermon, clearly derived from the principle present in the text?

This concern for continuity ensures that the application is accurate to the biblical meaning. Once the preacher has uncovered the God-given meaning of the text, he then seeks to discern parallels between the original situation addressed in the text and the contemporary experiences of his listeners. One key question serves well to evaluate the parallels. The preacher should ask, “If the biblical writer were exhorting my congregation on this subject, what aspects of church life would he address?”<sup>26</sup>

**Contemporary application must maintain connection with life today.** The preacher, at this point, must be conversant with both the meaning of the text and the significance it has in the lives of his listeners. It takes time and care to identify contemporary situations, problems, or questions that are truly comparable to those faced

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>26</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 441.

by the original audience. Situations are seldom identical to those faced by the original audience, so the preacher must seek to ascertain if contemporary situations are actually analogous. If they are, then application is accurate and the bridge is reliable. The key is discovering a genuine analogy among contemporary hearers so that the text is understood as God's ordained response to the listeners' questions and needs.<sup>27</sup> The preacher seeks to discover a genuine analogy, a common connection point, between then and now. The work here is to uncover a parallel situation in the modern context. If this connection is genuine then it enables contemporary hearers to hear the text and sermon as an authentic response to their current needs. The sermon's application provides an answer to their question, a hope in their sorrow, an encouragement for their discouragement, a remedy for their sin, an inducement toward their obedience.

Application answers the question of the passage's present pertinence. To make proper application the preacher must ask and answer rigorous questions. Since these principles are true, what effect should they have today? What ideas, feelings, attitudes, or actions should this affect? What changes does this require? What will life look like if these truths are ignored? What will life look like if these truths are remembered? How might life be improved by these principles? What problems might be eliminated or alleviated?

The preacher helps ensure that application effectively meets needs by further considering potential objections and misunderstandings. How can he be sure that the people will understand the application of the text? What objections might believers or unbelievers have to these truths? What obstacles keep people from believing these principles or living in these ways? What common assumptions contradict these truths? Which cultural considerations are contradicted by these truths?

Application should be specific enough to show that it is immediately practical.

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<sup>27</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 173.

Osborne warns,

It does little good to say, 'Pray more.' The congregation already knows that. Center not just on the what but on the why and the how. Be concrete, telling the overworked doctor and busy professional how prayer can help them in their daily struggles.<sup>28</sup>

Application must show awareness of the realities and challenges listeners face and offer practical help for overcoming those challenges.

**Contemporary application may go much deeper than behavior.** While application must be oriented toward practical living it need not be located in visible actions. Many times it may be the beginning or cessation of a behavior that all can see. But it may just as often be an attitude or inner-reality that is not as visible. Application may be content-oriented, relating to what the hearers should believe or value, or it may be conduct-oriented, relating to what they should do or obey. Often these two orientations in application are intermingled simply because people will often do only what they value. Beliefs guide behaviors. Affections drive actions.

The ultimate goal of application may not be to tell people how they should act. It may be to transform their thinking, to alter their view of the world, trials, obedience, and opportunities. The application may be to dig down into a deeper understanding of the love and grace of God. Application may be that the doctrinal content provokes worship, awe, and praise.

Bryan Chapell makes the point that this applicational depth can gauge the maturity of a preacher:

Application may be attitudinal as well as behavioral. In fact, the frequent mark of immaturity among preachers is too much emphasis on behavior. Mature preachers do not ignore behavior, but they carefully build an attitudinal foundation for whatever actions they say God requires.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 444.

<sup>29</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 210.

## Two Anchors Built in Proper Order

A simply stated, yet highly significant, issue is the order in which these anchors are built. The preacher prepares and preaches with his audience in mind. Yet how can he do so without allowing that audience to improperly influence the exegetical process? How does he guard the truth of the message? The answer lies in order of operations. The preacher must distinguish and sequence the separate but related steps of sermon preparation.

The first anchor must be proper interpretation. By anchoring first at the point of authorial intent from the text and then moving toward spanning a bridge to homiletical purpose, biblical accuracy can be better ensured. These two essential components or processes must be identified and ordered.<sup>30</sup> In Timothy Warren's article the order of these steps is explained through the concept of mathematical bracketing:

Hermeneutical bracketing brackets, not in order to eliminate, but merely to place out of the question for the time being. Attention is narrowed to the essential problem at hand, disregarding, or ignoring the superfluous or misleading. Order of operations is another mathematical term that applies here. This temporary suspension purposes to grasp the meaning of the original text untainted by the influence of either a more fully developed theology or any contemporary cultural significance.<sup>31</sup>

Expository preaching requires a bridge constructed with these two anchors. Faithful preaching will accomplish both precise accuracy in the study and powerful relevance in the pulpit. Meaning and significance must both be understood and transferred. This occurs when these two bridge anchors are carefully constructed in their proper order.

Focusing on these two anchors provides a working model for moving from study to sermon while keeping purpose in view. Chapell's summative comment concludes by establishing how these two steps enable accurate exegesis and relevant expository preaching:

Exegesis and explanation are bottomless pits of commentary possibilities if a preacher has no clear purpose in mind. Application gives exposition a target on which to

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<sup>30</sup>Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," 469.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.,475.

focus. Preachers select explanatory arguments and facts from the infinite possibilities on the basis of how readily they will support the application.<sup>32</sup>

### **Bridge Construction in Scripture**

This process of bridge building is also called contemporization or contextualization. Ramesh Richard goes so far as to state that “contemporization is the main task of the expository preacher. He takes what was written centuries ago and contemporizes it for present-day audiences.”<sup>33</sup> Since this process ensures that the authority of the sermon actually derives from God’s Word and that the sermon truly deals with the lives of modern listeners, it is as important as Richard states.

If this process is so important, then one might expect to find it on display in the Word of God itself. Scripture does not disappoint. The Word of God fulfills this expectation. The writers of the New Testament themselves did contemporization throughout their writing, teaching, and preaching. The Apostle Paul is explicit about the process in 1 Corinthians 10:11. The author to the Hebrews models it in every chapter of his epistle. It is even on display throughout the pages of the Old Testament. Many times the Psalmist brought contemporary application to his exposition of the Exodus narrative or similar historical events (Pss 66, 78, 105, 136). The Psalmist was contemporizing, for the audience present in his day, the significance and relevance of previous revelation. So the psalmists, prophets, and apostles themselves show that the recorded events of Scripture can and should serve as applicational templates for subsequent hearers. Bringing an application over the centuries from then to now is nothing innovative.

While all Scripture is profitable for the believer’s thorough equipping for good works (2 Tim 3:17), every truth it teaches must be derived from something said to

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<sup>32</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 212.

<sup>33</sup>Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 19.

someone else in different circumstances (1 Cor 10:11).<sup>34</sup> The letters of the New Testament were addressed to specific assemblies filled with individuals who struggle with particular problems. Those problems and questions prompted the epistles to be written.

God's Word is timely. The authors of Scripture spoke to specific situations, problems, and questions. Yet that very timely help also created problems. Contemporary situations are not always apparently similar to those faced by the people in the Bible. Because modern readers share a common humanity with the people of the Bible, a universal and timeless dimension can be found in the problems they faced and the answers given in the text. Exposition of the Scripture today needs to speak effectively to the problems and concerns of particular people just as the New Testament initially did. In order to do this authoritatively, the transfer must be made along an accurate bridge. Preachers today must build similar bridges to the ones built by the authors of Scripture itself.

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<sup>34</sup>H. Wayne House and David G. Garland, *God's Message, Your Sermon* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 18.

CHAPTER 4  
PROJECT METHODOLOGY FOR IMPROVING  
APPLICATION IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING

**Introductory Matters**

A major goal in this project is the development of a curriculum that teaches lay leaders how to recognize and evaluate exposition that properly interprets and applies the Word of God. This chapter narrates the presentation of that curriculum in the execution of this phase of the project. Materials handed out to participants are footnoted and included in appendices. The substance of each week's teaching material is included in this chapter.

All of Racine Bible Church's teachers were invited to this training course. Racine Bible has a regularly scheduled training and equipping ministry on Sunday nights. This ministry is named "Firm Foundations" and convenes in blocks of eight week classes. The material was taught in eight weeks because this format was already present and afforded maximum participation for Racine Bible Church's members.

**Sessions 1 and 2**

Each class participant received and completed an agreement to participate<sup>1</sup> along with a general questionnaire collecting demographic data about age, education, and church attendance.<sup>2</sup>

In the first class meeting participants completed a knowledge evaluation survey.<sup>3</sup> This survey gauged their current knowledge of expository preaching. At the

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<sup>1</sup>Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup>Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup>Appendix 3.

conclusion of the seminar the same evaluation survey was administered to measure their increase in knowledge.

Participants also participated in an exercise to identify and recognize proper or improper interpretation and application in preaching. Four samples of application in preaching were presented to the class<sup>4</sup> and members completed an evaluation for each sample.<sup>5</sup> At the conclusion of the seminar a similar identification was administered with four additional samples (two repeated and two new) in order to measure their increase in discernment.<sup>6</sup> Each set of four samples included two samples of accurate exegesis leading to accurate application and two of inaccurate exegesis leading to inaccurate application.

### **The Importance of Preaching in the Church**

Over the course of the first two class meetings, fundamental definitions of preaching and related concepts were discussed. This instruction began with consideration of the primacy of preaching and concluded with summary questions about expository preaching. Preaching is absolutely necessary. The good news of the gospel must be preached. The people gathered together and transformed by that gospel must continue to be built up by the preaching of God's Word. Thus, preaching is God's chosen means of calling sinners to repentance and calling the repentant redeemed to Christlikeness. The perennial imperative given to the pastor of the church at Ephesus belongs to every pastor: "Preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2).

The Bible is the seed that brings the new to life in conversion (1 Pet 1:23-25), it is the sword the Spirit uses to do battle with sin (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12), it is the one and

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<sup>4</sup>Appendix 4.

<sup>5</sup>Appendix 5.

<sup>6</sup>Appendix 6.

only charge that the faithful minister must deliver in order to fulfill his ministry and be innocent of bloodguilt (Acts 20:24-27).

But does what goes by the name “preaching” in most churches actually fulfill this divine imperative? What did the Apostle, inspired by the Spirit of God, mean by the imperative “preach the Word”?

Preaching should be an explanation, application, demonstration, indeed, a re-presentation of the Word. Expository preaching is not preaching that merely mentions the Bible. Rather expository preaching is preaching that is driven by Scripture. It is not preaching that begins with a biblical text but then is mostly filled with the preacher’s own ideas. It is a declaration of God’s Word.

### **Definition**

In this training course, the following definition of expository preaching from Sidney Greidanus is used, which he attributes to Merrill Unger:

Expository preaching is handling the text in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers.<sup>7</sup>

### **Meaning and Authorial Intent**

In expository preaching the intent of the biblical author is the intent of the sermon’s preacher. The meaning of the text is the substance of the sermon. This type of preaching is committed to a careful transfer of meaning. The meaning of the author of Scripture is the meaning conveyed by the author of the sermon.

Expository preaching is Bible-centered preaching. What drives the development and delivery of the sermon is the substance of the Scripture. The text is handled and transferred in such a way that its meaning is the substance of the sermon. The Word of

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<sup>7</sup>Merrill Unger, quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 11.

God is the message. This means that the Bible is the source of the message, the substance of the message, and the structure for the message.<sup>8</sup> Effective expository preaching keeps the Bible in the driver's seat. The content of the message must come from the Scripture and the application must unfold from the meaning of the text itself.

Is preaching the word of man or the Word of God? Is it possible that preaching, done with an open Bible, is not preaching the Word? Some preachers merely incorporate Bible verses into their message, but the message is theirs. The Bible serves to support the preacher's opinions and agendas. Expository preachers actually preach Bible verses. The faithful expositor truly derives his message from the Bible. Fabarez highlights this point:

The preacher does not use the Bible to preach his own message; instead, it is the Bible that uses the preachers to preach its message. Because the Bible's message is God's message, when we preach expositively we engage ourselves in the incredible task of giving human utterance to God's message.<sup>9</sup>

## **Interpretation**

Exposition might best be distinguished not as much by the form of the message as by the process in which the message is crafted and communicated. The expository preacher does not use the text so much as the Spirit of God uses the preacher to present the text to an audience today. Expository preaching is the communication of the Biblical message, found through faithful exegesis, which the Holy Spirit applies to the life of the preacher and, through him, to his hearers.

Since expository preaching communicates the biblical message, it will always be inescapably bound to the serious work of interpretation, also known as exegesis, in order to discover that message. If the preacher is to explain the text, he must first study the text and devote the necessary hours of study and research necessary to understand the text. The

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<sup>8</sup>Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 15.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

pastor must invest the largest portion of his energy and intellectual engagement (not to mention his time) to this task of “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). There are no shortcuts to genuine exposition.

### **Authority**

God is the source of truth; he has spoken in the written Word, man’s only sure authority. Preaching must clearly reflect commitment to divine authority. All true preaching must be biblically-based, biblically-sourced. And listeners must have some certainty that the message is biblically testable (Acts 17:11). “When we have extracted . . . from the text instead of imposing . . . on it, we may speak with more confidence that the word we share . . . has an authority which is not our own, but is borrowed from the text.”<sup>10</sup>

The authority of the preacher is derived from the Word that is preached. The authority is bound up in the message itself, which must be the Word of God. Yet the messenger’s authority is dependent upon faithfulness to God’s word, as is seen in the execution of false prophets (Deut 18:20), in the rebuke of an apostle who acted contrary to God’s truth (Gal 2:14), and in the requirement of church leaders to hold to the truth (Titus 1:9). The issue of authority is inescapable. Either the preacher or the text will be the operant authority.<sup>11</sup> Expository preaching is that methodology that guards the proper authority of Scripture.

### **Exposition and Imposition**

A helpful way to understand a definition is by considering its opposite. The opposite of exposition is imposition. Imposition is to impose on the text a meaning that

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<sup>10</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 155.

<sup>11</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “A Theology of Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 15.

is not there. The opposite of exegesis is eisegesis. Eisegesis is to lead a meaning into the text that is not present in the text itself.

The need for discernment here is real. Preaching that is filled with good, true, and helpful ideas from the Bible is not necessarily expository preaching. Preaching that presents true and orthodox Christian doctrine is not necessarily exposition.

David Jackman represents the danger, in the mental process of the preacher, with this warning:

The danger is that certain words or ideas in the text will trigger ideas in the preacher's memory bank that are then downloaded and uncritically included in the sermon. So we end up preaching our framework rather than the biblical text, unless the Bible text is questioning our framework every time we are preparing. It is not that framework preaching is wrong if the framework is itself biblically orthodox. What is said will probably be true, but the preaching will soon become reductionist and predictable. It becomes impository of the preacher's word upon the text, which has to dance to the preacher's tune.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of this course is to assist listeners in identifying such imposition for what it is. Listen for the preaching of the Word, for genuine exposition. Be wary of truth that is true but that does not arise from exposition but rather imposition. Listen for sound interpretation forming application that arises clearly from interpretation.

### **Helpful Pictures**

The preacher preaches the Word when the Word speaks its message clearly and accurately through the preacher. To exposit is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it for everyone to see. The expositor pries open what is closed, unlocks what is locked up, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted, or unfolds what is tightly packed.

In expository preaching the text is not an introduction to a talk, which conveys what the preacher thinks. The text is not a peg on which the preacher hangs everything

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<sup>12</sup>David Jackman, "The Hermeneutical Distinctives of Expository Preaching," in *Preach the Word Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 14.

that he wants to say about a subject. The text is not a trampoline that the preacher bounces off of in order to share whatever it is he wants to share.

In expository preaching the text is the master that controls what is said. In expository preaching the preacher does not use the text as much as the Spirit uses the preacher to speak the text.

### **Sound Systems**

Most pastors and church members can remember frustrating experiences with church sound systems. At Racine Bible Church one Sunday morning our sound engineer informed me that the wireless microphone transponder was picking up the Spanish radio station. That is certainly not what the people gathered early on Sunday morning to hear. The expository preacher is to be a sound system faithfully reproducing the voice of God speaking in the Scripture. He must not muffle or distort the voice of God. He must carefully avoid substituting his personal transmission for the Word of God. In expository preaching the preacher is God's sound system. Everyone wants the system to amplify accurately in order to convey what the speaker (in this case, God himself) is saying.

### **Stewards and Seed Throwers**

John Stott offers a colorful summary of the New Testament imagery for preaching, helpfully unpacking what the metaphors convey:

If the metaphor of the steward teaches anything it is that the preacher does not supply his own message; he is supplied with it. The steward was not expected to feed the household out of his own pocket, the preacher is not to provide his own message by his own ingenuity. Many New Testament metaphors indicate the same truth, that the preacher's task is to proclaim a message which has been given to him. The preacher is a sower and the seed is the Word of God (Lk. 8:11). He is a herald, and he is told what good news he is to proclaim. He takes part in the building of an edifice, and both the foundation and the materials have been provided (1 Cor. 3:10-15).<sup>13</sup>

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23. <sup>13</sup>John R.W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961),

These images convey a clear concept. It is God who supplies the messenger with the message.

### **Concluding Key Questions**

Since one of the goals for this course is discernment in evaluating expository preaching, class members were encouraged to consider a few key questions to help identify and categorize the preaching they heard. No one wants to be deceived when listening to preaching. If one is listening to preaching in order to hear the Word of God, how can one be sure that the sermon is, actually, the Word of God? Making this determination is critically important. It need not be overly complicated or difficult. These questions may prove helpful in making such a determination.

If the original author of the text heard the sermon, would he recognize it as explaining his meaning? Can listeners test the message by the text of Scripture itself? What drives the message? Is it merely the preacher's preferences and impressions? Or does the text itself exercise the controlling influence? Do listeners leave able to explain the passage of Scripture to someone else? If listeners took the time to study the same text, do they feel that they could or would come up with a similar sermon?

### **Sessions 3 and 4**

The third and fourth weeks of the training course were devoted to understanding basic interpretation and forming a biblical concept of preaching. Before presenting and unpacking the process of the bridge in the core sessions of the course, we took time to present a basic biblical understanding of the concepts the bridge would utilize later in the course. The core concepts clustered around accuracy in interpretation and a definition of preaching in which application is grounded in accurate interpretation.

## Discussion on Bible Interpretation

The homework assignment after the first two lectures was for the class to read a chapter written by Wayne Grudem on Bible interpretation.<sup>14</sup> The class devoted extensive time to discussing this reading assignment. Members received the following discussion questions and used them to interact with the reading and one another.

One common danger one faces is that the deeper one goes into Bible interpretation the less confident one becomes, because one starts to learn how much more there is to learn. What is said about the clarity of Scripture in response to this issue on page 55 of Grudem's book? Point 1 (pp. 55-56) is, spend your earliest and best time reading the text of the Bible itself. Would they say that this is already their practice? How does it help them? What are effective ways they have found to read the Scripture repeatedly and carefully?

Point 2 (p. 57) is, the interpretation of Scripture is not a magical or mysterious process, because Scripture was written in the ordinary language of the day. This point clarifies and simplifies the interpreter's search. One searches for a God-given, understanding of the meaning of words and phrases in the passage.

Point 3 (pp. 57-60) is that every interpreter has only four sources of information about the text. These four sources of information are as follows. The first source of information is the meaning of individual words and sentences. Words can have a range of meanings (that is why dictionaries will list several meanings for a word). Context helps one decide among the possible meanings of a word, but context does not give a word an entirely different meaning than it had everywhere else. The second source is the place of a statement in its context. What is the purpose of a verse or statement? Is it to support a previous statement? Is it stating something with which the author is going to disagree?

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<sup>14</sup>Wayne Grudem, "Right and Wrong Interpretation of the Bible: Some Suggestions for Pastors and Bible Teachers," in *Preach the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 54-75.

The third source of information is the overall teaching of Scripture. One verse influences the interpreter's understanding of the whole, and the interpreter's understanding of the whole influences his understanding of one verse, so there is a back-and-forth thought process as one seeks to get it all right. The fourth and final source is some information about the historical and cultural background. Good commentaries and reference books on history, geography, and culture are helpful. However, while this material is often helpful it is seldom necessary.

What is their response to comments in the third section, on pages 58-59 of Grudem's book, about the overall teaching of Scripture? How important do they think historical and cultural background (pp. 59-60) is in the interpretive process?

Point 4 is the admonition to look for reasons rather than mere opinions to give support to an interpretation. Do they usually hear Bible teachers doing this? Why or why not? How can they become less persuaded by opinions and more aware of reasons?

Point 5 is that there is only one meaning for each text (though there are many applications). Can they restate what is said about the intent of the original authors of Scripture on page 62? Can they restate what is said about multiple applications on page 62?

Points 6 and 7 are about noticing literary type and narrator perspective in the text. Point 6 is to notice the kind of literature in which the verse is found. What are the types of literature in the Bible? Why is it important to be aware of literary genre? Point 7 is to notice whether the text approves or disapproves or merely reports a person's actions. Do they agree or disagree with the interpretation and assessment of Rahab's conduct on page 63? Why or why not?

Point 8 is the warning to be careful not to generalize specific statements in order to apply them to fundamentally different situations. The author gives two examples from Matthew 16 and 23. Do they agree with his use of these examples? Why or why not? Can they think of more examples?

Point 9 makes the encouraging point that it is possible to do a short or long study of any passage. Do what you can with the time you have, and do not be discouraged about all that you cannot do. How do they deal with discouragement during teaching preparation? What do they do when their time to prepare is severely limited?

Point 10 is an important admonition on prayer. Pray regularly for the Holy Spirit's help in the whole process of interpreting the Bible. The author shares about the Holy Spirit enabling him to see information clearly in answer to prayer on page 65 of Grudem's book. Have they had similar experiences? What does prayer during teaching preparation look and sound like in their experience?

In the concluding section on the big picture of the whole of Scripture numerous interpretive guidelines are offered. Pages 66 and 67 emphasize asking what the original author and readers would have understood a passage to mean. What do they notice about the allegorical examples given in this section? Why is this practice illegitimate?

Pages 67 and 68 focus on application. Interpreters are encouraged to ask, what application did the original author want the readers to make to their lives? How might this step safeguard interpreters from wrong applications?

Next Grudem presents a detailed example of how the big picture centers on Jesus Christ. The text of 1 Samuel 16 and 17 is interpreted carefully for what it says, or foreshadows, about Christ. Is this persuasive? Is the author imposing something on the text or being faithful to the text? Why or why not?

Pages 71 through 73 compact a great amount of theology into a brief space. Do you have any questions about that timeline? The main point of this section is that one must remember where each passage fits in that timeline in order to accurately interpret and apply various passages. How does this timeline help interpreters to be accurate in other application?

The chapter concludes with an emphasis on the development of themes throughout the Bible. The case is made for a richer understanding of the wise men bringing

gifts as a theological theme. Is this case persuasive? How might this help in interpreting and applying the Bible? How might these themes be discovered and appreciated in study?

### **Accuracy in Interpretation and Application Established in Nehemiah 8**

During this course, it is important to remember a most fundamental fact about the principles students learn about preaching, discernment, interpretation, and application. The most important thing that can be said about these principles is that they arise directly from the Word of God. Their truth and importance is not decided upon by the course instructor but established in the biblical text itself. Class members saw this in two places, one from the Old Testament and one from the New.

The events in Nehemiah pertain directly to accuracy in interpretation and application in expository preaching. These events commenced in the year 446 BC, the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah chronicles the return to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, along with these very walls, had been destroyed because Judah had been unfaithful to the covenant, ignoring and disobeying the Word of God. These events frame the story with the fundamental fact that understanding and obeying the Word of God drives this narrative from start to finish.

Ezra 8:1 mentions Ezra for the first time in the book. Significantly the book he is asked to bring is carefully introduced with a surplus of titles “the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.” The reading, understanding, and applying of that Word dominates this entire passage. Nehemiah 8:18 is representative “from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God.”

It is evident in the narrative arc that all of Ezra and Nehemiah lead up to chapters 7 through 13 of Nehemiah. The community reorders its life through reading, hearing, understanding, and applying the Word of God. When the people confessed their sin, it was that they had “not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments” and that they had “cast your law behind their back” (9:26). This experience of understanding the Law of

God and confessing a failure to rightly apply and obey it determines the course of the book.

Bryan Chapell provides a brief treatment of Nehemiah 8 as a paradigm for expository preaching that culminates in application. He identifies three necessary components for faithful exposition:

The exposition of the Word involved three elements: presentation of the Word (it was read), explanation of the Word (making it clear and giving its meaning), and exhortations based on the Word (the priests causes the people to understand in such a way that they could use the information that was imparted). Presentation of the Word itself, explanation of its content, and exhortation to apply its truths composed the pattern of proclamation.<sup>15</sup>

Accuracy in interpretation is highlighted in Nehemiah 8:7. The exact nature of what the Levites did at this point depends on the meaning assigned to the Hebrew word *meporas*. The adverb in verse 8 describing how they read is well translated “distinctly.” This process implies care for the exact pronunciation and phrasing, so as to make the details of the reading in both its original and contemporary sense readily comprehensible to the gathered congregation.

Apparently what occurred in the narrative was a two-step process. Ezra read from the Hebrew while the Levites personally shared what he read with the people in Aramaic so that the law became intelligible to the people. This dual process was necessary in order to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between the last seventy years in Babylonia with their cultural heritage as found in Scripture.

This painstaking process of interpretation and translation produced understanding. “All the people who understand” is repeated twice in Nehemiah 8:2-3. The narrative showcases how Ezra and the Levites helped them or caused them to understand through extended reading and diligent teaching.

The people’s understanding response is conviction and weeping (8:9; 9:1, 33) followed by covenant commitment in chapter 10. While the actions of the people dominate

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<sup>15</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 86.

the narrative, the crucial factor is determining how these actions were generated, that is, what brought about this tremendous change? It was the reading, teaching, explaining, and applying of the Word of God by faithful expositors. This type of application defines the expositor's job description and portrays his intended result.

### **Accuracy in Interpretation and Application Established in 2 Timothy 2**

While the example from the Old Testament came from a narrative text, this one from the New Testament comes from an epistolary text. What Ezra and the Levites were doing in the previous story is exactly what an apostolic legate, Timothy, is commanded to do in this epistle.

Timothy's job is presented through word pictures. The hard work to which the preacher is called in 2 Timothy 2:15 resumes the triad of metaphors presented in verses 3 through 6. Hard work is elucidated in that section with the single-minded focus of a soldier, the disciplined competition of the athlete and the ceaseless labor of the farmer. Timothy is called to hard work. This work consists in accurately handling the word of truth.

Central to the verse is the verb *orthotomein*. It is a compound derived from *ortho*, translated "rightly" or "correctly" and the verb *tomein* translated "divide" or "cut." The meaning of this compound verb can be filled in with several possible word pictures. Three such pictures are: a farmer driving a straight furrow in a field, a road engineer building a straight road, or a mason cutting a stone to fit its proper place. The meaning of the term can be further traced through its usage in the Septuagint. Two usages of note are found in Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5. There it appears to mean "to cut a path in a straight direction, by clearing difficult land to make a road."<sup>16</sup> In the context of the meaningless disputes mentioned to Timothy in verses 14 and 16 the meaning may be to guide the Word

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<sup>16</sup>I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 748.

of truth along a straight path to do its God intended work without being turned aside by false teaching or useless babble.

Each of these metaphors helps the expositor to visualize or imagine what it is he labors toward in the study. His labor with the language tools, contextual attention, commentary evaluation, and research is all for a purpose. He seeks to uncover the historical meaning so that it can be presented straight to the present hearers. He is building a straight road of application.

Accuracy in application is so important that it functions as “the specific activity that in this context is to be the criterion of approval before God as an unashamed worker.”<sup>17</sup> The actual result for which God is searching, the specific measurement God is taking is this: does the workman accurately handle the Word of truth so that it profits the hearers? The approved workman will teach the Word of God accurately and correctly in such a way that his treatment of the word of truth is useful for God’s purposes in the life of the church.

**Challenges from 2 Timothy 2:15.** Most of the class members teach, at least occasionally, in church meetings, small groups, or other studies. Before the study of 2 Timothy 2:15 closed, several personal and practical challenges were taken from the text.

**Do your best.** Paul told Timothy “do your best to present yourself.” Every time one teaches, is he or she giving God their best? Or does one find that it is easy to make excuses and settle for mediocrity? Notice also that it is personal. One is to do one’s own best to present oneself to God. Each person’s presentation is individual to that one’s gifts, capacities, and abilities. One need not measure one’s effort by who someone else is but by who God has made and called oneself to be.

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<sup>17</sup>Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, The IVP New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 521.

**To God.** The teacher should always be conscious of his or her audience. But this verse reminds the teacher that the human audience will never be the ultimate judge. Teachers may struggle with people-pleasing tendencies. They may falter to the fear of man. The challenge of this text is to present oneself to God. It is his approval the teacher seeks first and foremost.

**A worker who need not be ashamed.** This simple descriptor gives a great point about identity. The teacher is not called a talker, a dreamer, or an expert, but rather, a worker. Leadership must never lead to laziness. The leader or teacher is the worker who does the work so that others can benefit from it. It is the leader's responsibility to put in the work, in the study ahead of time, every time he or she stands up to teach.

### **Sessions 5 and 6**

The central image in this course is the bridge. Expository preaching builds a bridge from the past to the present as the historic word is preached with present relevance. These sessions describe the bridge and briefly show the presence of these concepts in Scripture itself. The bridge concept is then expanded to include the task of bridge inspection. This course trains persons to listen discerningly and evaluate preaching, the present application of the Word, carefully. Principles for bridge inspection are shared and also shown from Scripture.

### **Bridge Building**

Consider accurate application in expository preaching through the metaphor of the bridge. What does a bridge do? It spans a gap so that open space is covered safely and securely. How does the bridge do this? Basic bridge construction involves constructing supporting anchors on both sides of the gap. This illustration is quite suitable to what needs to occur in expository preaching. Open space exists between listeners today and what is said in God's Word. Application in preaching must be anchored in both authorial intent and contemporary relevance. Expository preaching requires a supporting anchor in

the past and the present. Just as a bridge must be firmly anchored on both sides in order to present a trustworthy walkway, so expository preaching combines accurate hermeneutics with present relevance. Authorial intent for original listeners forms the anchor in the past. Principled exhortation for contemporary listeners forms the anchor in the present. The two banks preachers build upon are the original setting and the contemporary setting. The walkway is the clearly communicated sermon filled with exhortations about attitudes and actions. These attitudes and actions are relevant for the listeners today but clearly arise from the historic text. The first anchor provides interpretation and accuracy. The second anchor provides penetration and relevancy.

The two anchors of the bridge which are required for expository preaching are as follows:

Historical	Contemporary
First Audience	Later Audience
Interpretation	Application
Meaning	Significance
Accuracy	Relevance

### **Bridge Building in Scripture**

If this process is so important, then one might expect to find it on display in the Word of God itself. Scripture does not disappoint. The Word of God fulfills this expectation. The writers of the New Testament themselves bridged the gap between the Old Testament (which they expounded) and their contemporary hearers.

The Apostle Paul is explicit about the process in 1 Corinthians 10:11. The author to the Hebrews models it in every chapter of his epistle. It is even on display throughout the pages of the Old Testament. Many times the Psalmist brought contemporary application to his exposition of the Exodus narrative or similar historical events (Pss 66, 78, 105, 136). The Psalmist was contemporizing, for the audience present in his day, the significance and relevance of previous revelation. So the psalmists,

prophets, and apostles themselves show that the recorded events of Scripture can and should serve as applicational templates for subsequent hearers. Bringing an application over the centuries from then to now is nothing innovative.

**Romans 15:4.** The Spirit of God has spoken in Scripture with two audiences in mind. These two audiences are the generation that was present at the time of the original revelation, and future generations who will hear this revelation (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:15-16). The Apostle Paul wrote Romans 15:4 to the church at Rome in the first century after Jesus' death and resurrection. When he utilized the first person plural "our learning . . . we might have hope" he applied the Old Testament word to his first century hearers. The context of Romans 15 finds Paul quoting from the Psalms in verse 3, Deuteronomy in verse 10 and Isaiah in verse 12. It is Paul's straightforward statement in Romans 15:4 that these things provide present direction and application to his hearers.

**Hebrews 3:7-19.** Examples of this bridge building abound in the New Testament. One uniquely interesting example occurs in Hebrews 3 and 4. Hebrews 3:7-19 is an explanation and application of Psalm 95 to the Jewish converts who made up the original audience of the epistle to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 3:7 the author quotes Psalm 95, introducing the quotation with "as the Holy Spirit says." Thus he is implying that the Holy Spirit is saying (applying) to his contemporary audience the same thing that He said back when the Psalm was first written. What makes this example all the more compelling is that Psalm 95 is itself an example of bridge building. Psalm 95 is an explanation and application of revelation from Exodus (Ps 95:8-11). The meaning of the Word is bridging through four levels of application: the time in the wilderness when God spoke to Israel, in Exodus 17, giving the original warning, the audience of Psalm 95 when they were exhorted not to repeat Israel's mistake, the Hebrew Christians of the first century to whom the author of Hebrews wrote, and a fourth bridge may be added, in that the Spirit speaks to hearers in the present day as they read that text.

## **Bridge Inspection**

It would certainly be unusual to travel with someone who insisted on inspecting all bridge anchors. One imagines the frustration and delay of constantly pulling over, exiting the vehicle, and tromping down muddy hillsides in order to stare at concrete and steel. Normal people gladly drive over bridges without ever inspecting them. Most persons, rather thoughtlessly, dismiss that work to county inspectors of some sort or another. In the same way, most people typically listen to sermons without carefully inspecting them. Either they give no thought to it or their thoughts rest in the trust they have in their pastor. One of the goals of this course was to help listeners develop discernment in evaluating the accuracy of the preaching that they hear. To that end, two key texts regarding this issue were covered, Acts 17 and Ephesians 4. The more one understands the process of accurate hermeneutics, the better equipped one is to judge the first anchor. The reading assignment and discussion about Bible interpretation were designed to provide some of this understanding. The more one understands the dynamics of application (implication, extrapolation and principlization) the better equipped one will be to judge the second anchor.

## **Inspecting the First Anchor**

Interpretation is an essential and definitive component in expository preaching. The first anchor for the bridge is accurate interpretation of authorial intent within the text. Without this first anchor, the exercise is skewed from the start. With it securely in place the goal of preaching can be accomplished in the sermon

**References to the text.** A simple way to begin inspecting the first anchor is simply listening for references to the text. It may come as a surprise to find that many sermons include far too few references to the text. Indeed it is difficult to inspect something that is not there. If observation is a key component in Bible interpretation then one would expect a preacher to share relevant observations about the text with his audience. Listen for them.

When constant referral to the text is lacking it may indicate that the preacher is more concerned with what he wants to say (what he wants it to mean for his audience) than what the text is actually saying (what it meant). Pastors are especially prone to this danger. After all, because of their proximity to the congregation and people's needs, they usually know what they feel needs to be said to the people. Also, because of their education, training, and experience, they have a good idea of what the text will say before they exegete it. Hence the danger is very real that the authority in the sermon may not actually arise from the Word of God itself. As one listens to the sermon, is one hearing the preacher predicate his statements on what is stated in the Word of God?

**Explanations of the text.** Intelligent inspection requires far more than a raw number of references to the text. Specifically, one listens for references that include explanations of the text's original meaning. Listen for historical data about the original author and audience or the background and setting. More than bits of data, what one listens for is an accurate explanation of original meaning. The text first seeks to accomplish something in the lives of its original hearers. It may have been written in order to answer a question or provide comfort and encouragement. It may have been sent to the original recipients in order to correct, teach, or warn them. Study of the Scripture uncovers this purpose. Accurate interpretation explains why the author wrote these words to this audience. It answers the question "What did it mean?" Faithful preaching transfers this purpose through contemporary application that is built upon this meaning.

Most listeners do not take this step of inspection. On the contrary, most listeners actually grow impatient with ancient details and hard to pronounce names. But it is the accuracy of meaning which ensures that the point of the sermon is, in fact, the point that God himself is making in his Word. As one listens to the sermon, is one hearing the preacher explain what this text meant as a basis for what it means in contemporary application?

## **Inspecting the Second Anchor**

Application is an essential and definitive component in expository preaching. The second anchor for the bridge is contemporary significance in the sermon. Without this second anchor the exercise is pointless. With it securely in place the goal of preaching can be accomplished in the sermon. This goal lands within the second anchor, applying the text to the lives of the hearers.

**Continuity of meaning.** Two key questions can be used to gauge the biblical accuracy of application. The first question was already required in order to inspect the first anchor. What was the text intended to change in the attitudes and actions of its original recipients? The second question seeks for continuity of meaning. Is the principle which is being advocated in the sermon clearly derived from the principle present in the text? Both of these questions are aptly summarized in this scenario. Imagine that the Biblical author was brought into the contemporary setting. Grasping the differences in time and culture, would the ancient author be comfortable with the preacher's contemporary use and application of his original principles?

**Contemporary relevance.** Does the sermon have contemporary consequences? Does it deliver present pertinence? Are these principles true but too distant to intersect with life? Is the doctrinal truth left in the abstract? Or is it brought out of theory and into practice? Listen for suggestions, commands, corrections, rebukes, or encouragements about personal attitudes and actions. What steps might one take in response to this teaching? Is the preacher offering a vision of what life will look like if these principles are incorporated? Is he warning about what will happen if they are ignored? If the listeners give the sermon a fair hearing, will their attitudes and actions be challenged and changed?

## **Bridge Inspection Required and Modeled in Acts 17**

The narrative of Acts introduces an exemplary group of people in Acts 17:10-12. These people, the Bereans, provide a paradigm of congregational discernment in listening

to expository preaching. These listeners, who were unconverted Jews at the time of the recorded events, rise out of the narrative as a model for how to listen to a sermon and inspect the bridges presented through the preaching.

**Noble-minded.** The way the Bereans listened earned them the description of “noble-minded.” The term *eugenēs* originally meant “of noble birth” or “well born” but it came naturally to be applied to noble behavior.<sup>18</sup> The word came to have a more general connotation of being open, tolerant, or generous. In the passage these qualities are most evident in their willingness to take Paul’s scriptural exposition seriously. They did not accept his word uncritically but, at the same time, they did not reject it with unthinking prejudice. Rather in a noble fashion, they courteously listened and then carefully considered.<sup>19</sup>

What would this noble-mindedness look like in church members today? It would mean a refusal to reject preaching out of personal prejudice. It would also mean a refusal to believe the teacher simply because “he is my pastor.” Such sentiments can border on gullibility and open the door to manipulation. Church members should take what a beloved pastor or teacher says back to the touchstone of Scripture. If the pastor is Christ’s true undershepherd this is what he would want his listeners to do.

**Searching and examining.** During his brief stay, Paul taught the Berean Jews in the synagogue. The content of his teaching is not listed in the Berean narrative but may be assumed from the statement of his customary teaching in verses 2 and 3 of the same chapter. He reasoned from the Scriptures, explaining that the same Jesus who suffered and rose again is the Christ. Therefore, when verse 11 says that the Bereans “examined the

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<sup>18</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 816.

<sup>19</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 363.

Scriptures,” the things that the Bereans needed to examine would have included the identity of the Christ along with His suffering, death, and resurrection. Their searching was prompted because this teaching about Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ presented a reading of Scripture, which was novel to these Jewish hearers. Paul’s interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures was particularly novel compared to all they had been taught in that same synagogue. If they were going to accept it they needed to put it to the test first.

The process by which the Bereans examined or tested the teaching is described by the word *anakrinein*. This verb is most often used to describe the legal examination of witnesses in a court case.<sup>20</sup> It is used with that definition (legal examination of an accused person) by Luke further on in the Acts narrative (24:8 and 28:18). What does this term imply? The usage of this verb emphasizes the careful, fact-finding, fact-checking, written record scouring nature of their study. The parallels to modern expository listeners are straightforward. After listening to a sermon filled with data and application that arises from interpretation, the listener should examine his or her own copy of the Scriptures to ascertain if this teaching does indeed accurately convey what is found therein.

### **Bridge Inspection Required and Modeled in Ephesians 4:12-15**

This paragraph presents one of the New Testament’s most profound descriptions of spiritual maturity in the church. Maturity is clearly in view throughout the chapter. This ideal of full Christian maturity is characterized in 4:14 from its negative aspect; in 4:15 from the positive. In advancing toward maturity the believers are to grow past the stage of children and into the stature of adulthood.

What are the characteristics of infants that are highlighted in the description? The two participles in verse 14, “being tossed” and “carried about,” describe the ones who are childish. They lack the stability that comes from discernment. These church

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<sup>20</sup>Barrett, *A Commentary on Acts*, 818.

members are easily misled. They form prime targets for false teachers. They are far too easily deceived. Advancement out of this stage is defined as maturity, which is one of the primary growth goals for Christ's body in Ephesians and all of the epistles.

It is growth toward maturity, manifested in increased discernment in listening to preaching, that will protect believers from being such easy prey. Moving believers along in precisely this growth process is a primary reason Jesus provides gifted expository preachers to his church. Christ giving these gifts, after taking captivity captive in his ascension, is the pinnacle point of chapter 4. This serves as a culmination to the teaching on the composition of the church that makes up chapters 2 through 4.

How does this growth toward maturity progress? This question can be answered from the context. Members of the church exercise character qualities of love toward each other (4:1-3) while gratefully receiving the grace-produced fruit of gifted ministers (4:7-12). It is this reception that is the subject of this training course. When receiving teaching from a gifted pastor teacher, the discerning listener will apply only that which arises from accurate interpretation for legitimate application.

### **Discussion on Bridge Inspection**

The class homework assignment for this session was to have read an article by Thadeus Bergmeier on examining the preaching of the Word.<sup>21</sup> The class devoted extensive time to discussing this reading assignment; members received the following discussion questions and used them to interact with the reading and one another.

On page 67 this important statement is made. "Many of us fail to realize that one of our callings in listening to the preaching of God's word is to examine the preaching we listen to each week. All Christians are called to examine all things that claim to be truth." This sweeping statement summarizes many references. The following may be

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<sup>21</sup>Thadeus L. Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 66-99.

considered as a sampling: Isaiah 8:20, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 2:14-15; 14:29, and 1 Thessalonians 5:21. The class members made observations from these texts.

Discernment is defined on page 68. Discernment is the skill in reaching understanding and knowledge by the use of a process of separation . . . it is the divinely given ability to distinguish God's thoughts and ways from all others. Or, more simply, discernment is the ability to examine and distinguish truth from error. The class considered whether or not they found these definitions sufficient. They discussed what, if anything, they would add to it.

The first principle for discernment listening is "listen alertly" on pages 69 to 72. Page 70 presented this question, "Do typical church attendees ever think that their churches, their pastors, their teachers can ever teach something that is untrue?" The class was queried as to how they would answer this question.

The second principle for discernment listening is "listen prayerfully" on pages 72 through 77. The story of Solomon's prayer for wisdom is retold on these pages. The class was asked if anything from that story stood out to them. The passage in James 1 about asking for wisdom is then summarized on the pages that follow. The class discussed what, if anything, stood out from that section as especially applicable?

The third principle for discernment listening is "listen spiritually" on pages 77 to 80. This section covers the key doctrinal and practical concept of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit in John 14 and Paul insists upon the utter necessity of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2. Should one then just sit back and let the Spirit do it all? The class was asked to form a response to someone who insists that let go and let God is all that is needed. If the Holy Spirit plays the determinative part, then what is left for men and women to do?

The fourth principle for discernment listening is "listen energetically" on pages 80 through 82. A warning is taken from Hebrews 5. It is possible for those who sit under solid teaching to benefit and grow very little because of their lazy listening. The class

discussed relevant points from this section.

The fifth principle for discernment listening is “listen humbly” on pages 81 to 84. The class considered these questions: What does it mean to be teachable? How does one acquire teachability? What is the difference between teachability and gullibility?

The sixth principle for discernment listening is “listen relationally” on pages 84 through 87. Several passages about relationships were referenced in this section. These relationships require respect and submission, even extending to the humble willingness to imitate. Hebrews 3:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17 and 4:9 were included here. The class discussed what these passages say about attitudes toward those who teach. What practical steps can persons take to live out these principles?

The seventh principle for discernment listening is “listen patiently” on pages 88 and 89. The section candidly admits that preachers may seem too repetitive, too long, or too doctrinal. For these, and many other reasons, preachers do require patience. The class discussed relevant points from this section.

The eighth principle for discernment listening is “listen homiletically” on pages 92 and 93. An understanding of homiletics, the art of preaching, yields four key factors to listen for in the sermon. Identify the principle taught, the primary outline, the purpose of illustrations, and the practice of application. The class discussed helpful tips on listening to a sermon that they gleaned from this section?

The ninth principle for discernment listening is “listen actively” on pages 93 and 94. Two practical suggestions are made in this section. The first is note-taking. The class discussed note taking and shared advice on taking good notes. How should one use those notes after the sermon? The second suggestion from this section is prioritizing the teaching. Why is it important to be able to discern the relative importance of various doctrinal issues?

The tenth principle for discernment listening is “listen lovingly” on pages 94 through 99. The main verse dealt with in this section is Ephesians 4:15 that says that

believers should be “speaking the truth in love.” Two extremes are detailed. The first is a cold-hearted arrogance, which becomes a critical spirit that is too quick to point out faults. The second extreme is a warm-hearted ignorance, which always avoids confrontation and conflict. The class considered how they could resist each of these tendencies.

### **Sessions 7 and 8**

Since teaching the definition of expository preaching in week 1, the class has covered many scriptural texts and hermeneutical concepts. These two concluding sessions build on that knowledge in reviewing and expanding the concepts of preaching, interpretation, and application. The process of principlization serves as a one-word summary of the bridging concept. Teaching this concept in the concluding sessions served the students well as it summarized many principles already covered in the course. The important concept of principlization is defined and broken down into three movements, or levels. These concepts would remain abstract and hard to understand unless they are put to use on actual texts in ways that make sense. These sessions apply the concepts of principlization to various Old and New Testament texts to further aid in comprehension.

In the final session of the course, participants took the same survey administered during the first session to measure their knowledge and valuation of expository preaching.<sup>22</sup> In addition, they participated in another exercise, similar to the first week, in which they identified and recognized proper or improper interpretation and application in preaching.<sup>23</sup>

### **Principlization**

Application in exposition is dependent upon the concept of principlization. In the picture of the bridge principlization is the bridge itself. The bridge is the clearly

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<sup>22</sup>Appendix 3.

<sup>23</sup>Appendix 6.

worded principle that connects one anchor to the other. This principle must accurately communicate the original concept (interpretation) and move it forward to a more universal or contemporary audience (application). Walt Kaiser has described and defined this process: “To ‘principlize’ is to state the author’s propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church.”<sup>24</sup> Kaiser further expands this definition of principlization:

Principlizing a Biblical passage is that procedure which seeks to discover the enduring ethical, spiritual, doctrinal, and moral truths or principles which the writer himself set forth by the way in which he selected his details and arranged the contextual setting of his narrative. Principlization seeks to bridge the ‘then’ of the text’s narrative with the ‘now’ needs of our day; yet it refuses to settle for cheap and quick solutions which confuse our own personal point of view (good or bad) with that of the inspired writer.<sup>25</sup>

### **Three Movements in Principlization**

Principlization moves from exegesis through theology to preaching. Exegesis uses biblical language, theology uses timeless language, and preaching uses contemporary language.<sup>26</sup> Exegesis is time bound to the historical audience. Principlization covers all time and has no specific audience in view. The preaching application is time bound and specific to the contemporary audience.

These three movements can be considered in various ways. The three movements can be conceived temporally as history, timeless, and present. In these three stages the point is made first in the passage, secondly as a principle, and thirdly as a point in the sermon.

The three movements can be summarized according to the data. The first yields

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<sup>24</sup>Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 152.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>26</sup>Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 65.

Bible data, the second presents the data summarized, and the third details the ways in which the data is applied. The three movements can be summarized as exegetical process, exemplified principle, and expository preaching. A final alternative is to consider the three movements with one word each. The three words are passage, principle, and preaching.

### **Examples and Exercises**

The book of James provided two examples of principlization and the three movements, which were discussed in class.

#### **James 1:2-4**

1. Various trials produce endurance leading to good results
2. Trials should be embraced because they help faith to grow which is a good thing.
3. Our attitude toward trials needs to change. Our expectation from trials needs to change. Our endurance needs to be developed.

#### **James 1:13-16**

1. God does not tempt anyone to evil rather each one is tempted by the lust in his own heart.
2. Temptation should not be blamed on God but rather on the lust in each human heart.
3. We need to trust God and distrust our own hearts. We should be aware of and afraid of the lust in our hearts. The desires of our hearts will lead us to death. We must look to God for life and deliverance.

Following the presentation of these examples, the class broke into discussion groups with this assignment. Each group was to find an answer for each of these three movements and present it to the class. What is the passage saying in its own language? What is the principle drawn out in timeless language? What are one or two specific contemporary applications for that principle? These are the passages which the groups worked on: Genesis 6:1-8, Psalms 46:1-3, Psalms 56:1-7, Luke 11:5-10, and Luke 17:11-19.

### **Three levels of Meaning: Statement, Implication, and Extrapolation**

In the following paragraph, Ramesh Richard uses these three terms with their technical definitions. While this may sound to the sermon listener like advanced hermeneutics, it is actually a process that most listeners engage in intuitively. This process is fundamental to accurate application:

Since the Bible consists of many ‘expression complexes,’ the meaning of the passage goes beyond what is explicitly affirmed. That is, there is a field of meaning around each statement. This field of meaning is on three levels: *statement*, *implication*, and *extrapolation*. All three levels are founded in the text. By analysis, deduction, induction, and extension, meaning is constructed and made available to the reader. This is done in all interpreting, theologizing, and preaching. The command ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’ is a *statement*. The sanctity of marriage is an *implication* drawn from the statement. By *extrapolation* one sees the condemnation of all sexual sins, as substantiated by the rest of Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

The average listener would not identify these three levels of meaning by name but would intuitively go through this process. Most listeners would understand that the statement is the statement in Scripture itself. Statement is exactly what is said on the page. If interpreters do not grapple with the statement itself, then serious injustice will be done to the communicative process. The first step in inspecting the bridge was simply to listen for references to the text. This should prove that the preacher is grappling with the most basic level of meaning, the statement itself.

Most people also understand implication and extrapolation intuitively, though most of would not use this terminology. Implication is a legitimate extension of the stated meaning. It draws out, or builds up, from the meaning itself. The statement, in itself, contains exactly what the author said. Meaning can only be unpacked by considering implication. Extrapolation unpacks meaning so that it can be applied in the present.

### **Examples of Three levels of Meaning**

**Matthew 5:22.** As a first example of these three levels of meaning, consider

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<sup>27</sup>Ramesh P. Richard, “Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (1986): 124.

the statement of Jesus in Matthew 5:22. The terms *raca* and “fool” are used in the text. A preacher interprets or explains, and applies the text. But exactly where does the explanation end and the application begin? The statement of Jesus begs for further implication and extrapolation. What is forbidden here? The statement stands specifically on two words. But there are implications, undeniable and easily discoverable, resident within the statement.

*Raca* expresses contempt for the head. It means something like “stupid” or “idiot.” “Fool” shows contempt for the character. It means something like “jerk” or “lowlife.” Knowing this makes the implications more clear. By legitimate extrapolation, the statement forbids all such insults. Perhaps one has never actually called someone *raca* or “fool.” But such a one may still violate this principle. What about when someone cuts them off in traffic? Would calling such a person “jerk” or “idiot” violate this principle? Or what about when someone in a business place should be serving them and fails? Surely one could not speak against them with other, more contemporary names or insults, and say that he or she was still obeying this word from Christ.<sup>28</sup>

**Exodus 20:15.** Consider another example with the meaning and application of the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” The English text of Exodus 20:15 contains only four words. It is a clear command offering a basic principle that needs to be unpacked. There are no specific limitations or implications given in the text. Suppose a seventeen year old church member reproduces copyrighted materials, illegally downloads music, and watches bootleg copies of films on disc. When a spiritual leader confronts him, he claims innocence. He claims that he did not break the law of God because he never actually took anything from another person. Viewing his actions as a violation of the command in Exodus 20:15 does not stretch the command. It is a clear case of implication

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<sup>28</sup>Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 21.

and extrapolation. These truths were present in the “expression complex” as part of the original meaning.<sup>29</sup>

**First Timothy 2:1-2.** In this text the Apostle urges the church to pray corporately for all men, for kings and all who are in authority. In the second verse, to pray “for kings” is the specific command. Surely the implied meaning is that other governing authorities should be prayed for as well. To pray also for the mayor of Racine or the governor of Wisconsin or the President of the United States is the principle legitimately applied through implication.

**John 13:12-15.** In John 13 Jesus states that he has set an example in washing feet that His followers are to follow. What is the specific statement? “You also ought to wash one another’s feet. You also should do as I did to you.” But what is the principle? Take the initiative to serve one another. In the immediate historical setting it was washing feet. But how is this principle to be extrapolated into other contexts? Wash a brother’s feet if they are dirty but serve him in other ways if he does not need such help in your setting. Jesus’ statement contained a principle with many implications. In humble love, Christians should be willing to serve others by performing even the most humble sorts of tasks for them. That principle might extend to bathing a bed-ridden Christian, cleaning up after someone who is weakened by illness, or doing any number of other unclean or menial tasks one might ordinarily shy away from.<sup>30</sup>

**First Corinthians 9:7-11.** In verse seven, by three simple illustrations, Paul establishes his principle. The principle is that a person who works is supposed to enjoy the fruit of his labors. In verse eight, with the phrase “does not the Law also say these

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>30</sup>Jay Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1990), 50.

things?” he turns to the Old Testament to support his principle. Paul takes a command from Deuteronomy 25:4 that has to do with oxen and applies it to preachers, making the point that the preacher should live (be paid) from the work he does.

Jay Adams gives a good explanation of what is happening:

There is no indication that Paul read anything into the passage. No, exactly not that. His argument for paying preachers for their work comes from and is founded on the passage. How?

Paul saw in the Deuteronomy passage a principle that applied to oxen but also to all sorts of work situations, of which oxen threshing grain was only one example. Indeed, as he points out, God’s main concern was not for oxen—that would be too narrow an interpretation of the passage—but rather, by the example of the ox, he wanted to set forth the general principle that the laborer should reap the fruit of his labors. The fact that this biblical principle applied even to oxen (arguing from the lesser to the greater) all the more indicates that it applies to soldiers, to farmers, to shepherds, and, preeminently, to preachers, who sow spiritual seed.<sup>31</sup>

Adams goes on to summarize this principlization process as it relates to application. The work of the preacher is not to find analogies and force application. Rather it is to discover how the truth is applied in its biblical setting and then bring this forward to the contemporary setting. Adams finds the beginnings of implication and extrapolation in the text itself when what is found within the text is an already applied principle.

The interpretative issue, then, has to do with application. It is not as if the preacher has to “find” situations to which to apply a passage. No, the principle comes, not as an abstraction, but as an already-applied principle. God set forth the principle in terms of oxen; that is, He gave us the truth applied. Therefore, it is the preacher’s task to discover the principle operating in his preaching portion. When he does so, he will learn not only the general, abstract principle, but how God has already applied it. Then he must preach the principle in his own context, to the people before him, applying it to them, exactly as God applied it when first revealing the truth.<sup>32</sup>

## **Review and Summary of Exposition**

In conclusion, consider another definition of expository preaching which summarizes much of the material that has been covered in the course. Ramesh Richard provides this definition:

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

Expository preaching is the contemporization of central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness.<sup>33</sup>

Contemporization is a key word in this definition. It explains the content of expository preaching. It answers the question, what is really happening in expository preaching? What is contemporization? It is the task of taking what was written centuries ago, to a different audience, and presenting it to a contemporary audience so that they can understand and apply its truth. There is no sense in which this improves the Bible's message or "makes the Bible relevant." The Bible is relevant. The preacher's task, however, is to so interpret and explain that the Bible's relevancy can be seen and heard, felt and experienced by his people.

Interpretation is another key word in the definition. It explains the "how" of expository preaching. How does it work? How is the content decided upon and formed? A proper method of interpretation is the process by which this is done. The first anchor of the bridge must be grounded in proper interpretation.

Inform, instruct, and influence are three key verbs in the definition. These describe the why of expository preaching. Why is it done? What is its purpose? Informing the mind is foundational because the whole process depends upon knowledge. But it does not stop with knowledge in the head. This knowledge must pervade the whole person so that the heart is instructed as well. Finally the behavior must be influenced. This is a verifiable, practical test. Can one see altered attitudes, new behaviors, and ultimately changed lives?

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<sup>33</sup>Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 19.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

#### **Introduction**

An evaluation of this project encompasses the view from behind the pulpit. Three things dominate that view: a Bible open upon the pulpit, sermon notes filled with explanation and application, and rows of persons who will be listening to the preaching of the Word. How can that Bible be effectively communicated to those people? What can be done to ensure that those notes represent accurate interpretation that is also coupled with dynamic application? These three factors are integral to the purpose and goals of this project.

#### **Evaluation of Purpose and Goals**

The purpose of this project was to improve application in my own preaching while teaching congregants to recognize and evaluate proper application in expository preaching. The project yielded significant improvement in application in my preaching. The project had four goals, each of which was met. The four goals were to improve application in my preaching, to develop and teach a curriculum on application in preaching to lay leaders, to train these lay leaders through teaching this curriculum, and that these class participants would gain knowledge of sound interpretation and application in preaching. Each of these goals was met.

#### **Improvement of Application in My Preaching—Motivation**

I was surprised to find that of all the reading and studying I did, the most motivation to improve the application in my preaching came from Scripture itself. The

Psalms display contemporary application of passages and events from the Pentateuch (Pss 66, 78, 105, 136). The book of Hebrews applies Old Testament texts in every chapter. In fact, every New Testament epistle applies the unchanging truth of God's Word to a changing church context. Finding the process of bridge building, which I taught in class, modeled so often in Scripture itself heightened my assurance and motivation to do application more often and with greater skill.

### **Improvement of Application in My Preaching—Urgency**

Application must be incorporated into the very definition of expository preaching. The text itself is preached in the present through explanation that is focused toward application. Preparing this project convinced me that, in preaching, information is presented for the purpose of transformation. This does not make information and exegetical accuracy any less important. But it defines their importance to a greater purpose than merely teaching content. The truth of the text is taught so that its importance is felt and followed by the hearers.

Application in expository preaching is probably a stated goal for almost every expositor. It is one of those things that all preachers would agree upon as important. But does this stated value actually valued? Does its importance lead to its being included regularly and effectively in each sermon? The value I place on application increased as a result of this project. My accountability to include application, regularly and specifically, has become more integral in my study and preaching. The depth of biblical data and practical experience through this project will give it staying power throughout my preparation and delivery.

### **Improvement of Application in My Preaching—Specificity**

Application is too important, too definitive to expository preaching, to merely be tacked on to a sermon. The present purpose of the passage, what the Spirit wills for

today's hearers as they encounter the living Word, must come through. At times I have used the spiritual nature of the preaching enterprise as an excuse to stay on a broader level in my application. This project has made me more adept at drilling down to specific attitudes, feelings, and actions that must change. The sermon includes a confrontation and call for this change, as well as suggestions and directions for how to make these changes. My sermons also show a more realistic and specific view of application. It is becoming a practice for me to think through the challenges listeners may face or obstacles that must be overcome and address those appropriately in the sermon.

### **Improvement of Application in My Preaching—Skill**

Each biblical text was intended to change something in the attitude or actions of its original recipients. I am more committed to uncovering this in my study and interpretive process. Those attitudes and actions challenged in the original situation can find clear parallels in contemporary situations. I am becoming more adept at identifying contemporary situations that are comparable to those faced by the original audience.

Preparing and teaching material about the two anchors of the bridge to the class increased my skill in application. The first anchor, interpretation, is a process I have been reasonably competent at since my seminary training. However, accurate interpretation does not make for skillful presentation. At times I fall into trap common among expositors who care about accuracy. The trap is the tendency toward sharing information merely for the sake of information. I am more convinced than ever that information about the text must be presented for the purpose of transformation through the text.

At times I have also fallen into a trap on the other side of this matter. This trap is to jettison accuracy for relevance and attention. The fear that too much information will cause me to come across as disconnected and boring can cause me to skip necessary explanation. Any preacher who is conscious of his audience, can sometimes sense them wiggling and thinking, “Can't we just skip all this grammar and history and talk about

today?” I am aware of the middle school students in my audience. I see the unemployed and underemployed who might or might not make their next mortgage payment. Seeing them, I cannot help but wonder, how much interpretive data can they take? I am tempted to jump right to the second anchor. But it is the first anchor, properly grounded in the text, which validates the second anchor as God's own voice of authority speaking into their present situation.

### **Class Participants Gaining Knowledge of Sound Interpretation and Application in Expository Preaching**

This goal was met. Class members grew in knowledge through participating in the class, listening to lectures, and reading the homework assignments. While it was not possible to track this knowledge increase with precision, it was evident that it did occur. Though this goal was met, it was probably at the lowest level of the four goals. Further explanation and analysis of the class test results is provided below. Knowledge did grow, but for many class members the knowledge was already high to begin with. For others there was only a small amount of growth.

## **Evaluation of Methodology**

### **Class Size**

Class size was satisfactory. The class attendance each week was approximately 40-45. Complete pre and post-test results were compiled for 36 participants. The discrepancy was due to some incomplete exams, and a few class members who simply did wish to fill one out. This class size was appropriate. Anything much larger would have made questions, answers, and interaction more cumbersome. Approximately half of the class consisted of church members who teach regularly in adult bible fellowships, small groups, youth or children's ministries. This worked well. The material was designed for those with a sound foundation in interpretation and teaching. It would not have worked as an introductory class on how to interpret and teach. The class needed to have that

foundation upon which to take the offered material and improve their skill in these matters.

### **Class Duration**

The class duration was slightly unsatisfactory. Class duration was eight weeks. This was a couple of weeks too short. Ten would have been better. Administering the tests on the first and final weeks took longer than expected. The teaching time on those two weeks was seriously limited. The material which we covered over the eight weeks was quite ambitious. We kept a rapid pace from principles of interpretation to how to evaluate teaching and grow in discernment, through to the mechanics of application. This rapid movement from one topic to the next hindered us from taking time for all the follow up questions on each topic.

### **Class Curriculum**

Overall the course curriculum worked well. It was biblical and ordered properly. Beginning weeks 1 and 2 by defining expository preaching clearly got us off to a good start. The pictures of preaching (pegs, trampoline, sound system, steward, and seed thrower) helped the lights go on for many class members. Proceeding with a detailed review and discussion of hermeneutics on weeks 3 and 4 was the right placement of this material. Covering the importance of accuracy in interpretation with these class members helped achieve the project's purpose of helping them to recognize and value proper application that is grounded in proper interpretation in expository preaching. Hearing myself teach this material to this portion of my flock definitely increased my own accountability in these areas. This helped to accomplish my first and primary goal for the project, that of improving application in my own preaching. Ending the fourth week with Nehemiah 8 and 2 Timothy 2 was the right placement for this material. The concepts from the first three weeks helped elucidate these passages. Class members could read these texts more intelligently, seeing their pertinence to interpretation and application, with the

material from the first three weeks in mind.

Weeks 5 and 6 were devoted to bridge building and inspection. This material relied heavily on the concepts presented in the preceding weeks. I presented several directions on evaluating each of the two anchors. Class participants completed a reading assignment on examining the preaching of the word. Class discussion on this topic seemed especially helpful at this point. Members spoke about how they try to listen intelligently and discerningly to preaching. Discussion enabled us to share more discernment techniques and listening strategies with one another.

Weeks 7 and 8 were the least effective of the course. The material on principlization, statement, implication, and extrapolation seemed too technical and academic for many class members. I tried to apply it practically with examples about calling someone a jerk from Matthew 5:22 and downloading music from the internet from Exodus 20:15 but this was not enough. We devoted 30 minutes of class time in week 7 to an in-class exercise on principlization and this time appeared to be mostly wasted. The class sat at round tables of 6-8 persons each and these groups were too large for the exercise. The groups took too long working it through. Sharing the results with the rest of the room was not as helpful as I had hoped. The exercise would have been better as a work alone project with only a couple of people sharing results.

### **Church Context Reflections**

#### **Knowledge Evaluation Survey and Discernment Measurements**

Of these tests, 36 were filled out and tabulated both before and after the course. The sampling was of fairly mature believers. Twenty-six out of 36 had been believers for 12 years or more and 22 of those 26 had been believers for more than 20 years. Twenty-two out of 36 had been attending Racine Bible Church for 7 years or more. The responses on typical Bible teaching intake were also indicative of maturity and healthy appetite. Fully 34 out of 36 answered that their Bible teaching intake is, at least, listening to

preaching on Sunday morning and evening, daily personal reading of the Bible, and one other time (either attending a midweek study or listening to recorded teaching).

### **Test Results Measuring Knowledge and Valuation of Expository Preaching**

The test results on the knowledge and valuation of expository preaching showed fairly high marks to begin with and a small measure of improvement. This revealed what one would expect from Racine Bible Church's history. This church has valued exposition for over seven decades. Men such as R. A. Torrey, Lewis Chafer, and Haddon Robinson have visited the pulpit through her history. As the church changed locations in 2005, attendance has grown accordingly. The new location nearer to the Interstate has drawn many visitors from the communities surrounding Racine. Many of these new people mention that they appreciate the preaching. There is always a question about what kind of preaching they were used to in a prior church. As these newer people stay and become members it is important that they value exposition. This project provided a way to ensure this with a small subset of the congregation. The test results also gave reasonable assurance that expository preaching remains highly valued. Typical results from three representative questions (25, 19, and 20) show this to be the case.

Question 25 on the survey to evaluate participants' knowledge and valuation of expository preaching asked if preaching should be one of the highest priorities of the church. In the exam administered before the course, the average answer was 4.3 out of 5 with fully 31 out of 36 participants answering with either a 4 or a 5. This clearly shows that the class participants valued expository preaching in the life of the church even before taking the course.

Question 19 defined expository preaching by stating that exposition carefully communicates what the Bible actually teaches. The pre-exam answer was 4.2 out of 5. The post-exam answer was slightly higher at 4.6. Fully 35 out of 36 class members answered with a 4 or a 5. This result shows that they did understand exposition to be about

clearly communicating the substance of what the Bible teaches. The vast majority of class members understood this definition of exposition even before the class began.

Question 20 on the survey asked about application and expository preaching. The question stated that expository preaching applies the text's meaning to the spiritual needs of those who listen. The pre-exam average answer was 3.6 out of 5. The post-exam average answer came in slightly higher at 3.9. This shows that most respondents did include application in their functional definition of expository preaching.

### **Test Results Measuring Discernment in Evaluation of Application in Expository Preaching**

The test results measuring discernment in evaluation of application in expository preaching showed roughly the same type of results. A good number of participants scored well before the class and that number did not increase significantly after the class. A possible explanation is that the test was too easy. Of the four sermon samples two were meant to show proper application and two improper application. It is possible that the sermons showing improper application were too obvious in their misuse of Scripture, making the scores higher. Typical results from two of the sermons are set forward to show these factors.

Sermon 1 was on Deuteronomy 22:8 about building a parapet. This sermon shows proper exposition where application is based upon sound interpretation. Question 7 makes the straightforward evaluation that "the preaching was properly interpreting the Word of God." The pre-exam average answer was 3.58 out of 5. The post-exam answer was slightly higher at 3.75. This shows that, at least in this instance, most of the class members recognized proper interpretation in preaching from the beginning of the class. For examining application on this same sermon, question 8 inquired if "the truth was applied in a way that is consistent with the meaning of the Bible reference." The pre-exam average answer was 3.4 with the post-exam average being 3.6. This also shows that most of the class members recognized proper application at the outset of the course.

Sermon 2 was on 2 Chronicles 7:14 about the nation turning to God and His promise to heal their land. This sermon shows improper application based upon faulty interpretation. For question 7, which asks about the sermon properly interpreting the Word of God, the pre-exam average answer was 2.6 out of 5; 19 out of 36 respondents gave it a low mark with a 1 or 2. This shows that roughly half of class members rightly identified improper interpretation in this sermon. Question 8 on the pre-exam, which asks about the truth being applied consistent with the meaning of the text, received an average answer of 2.5. Again roughly half of the class members recognized improper application. Neither of these questions varied much in the post exam. The average answer for question 7 went from 2.6 to 2.8. The average answer for question 8 went from 2.5 to 2.6. These relatively stable numbers show that the results for this exam did not change much at all over the course. There are two likely explanations for this relatively small improvement. One explanation is that the class members were mature and well taught to begin with. A second explanation is that the sermon samples were too easy. In an effort to make the differences dramatic the samples in which exposition was done poorly may have been too exaggerated. This would have made it easy for class members to score higher to begin with, thus not showing marked improvement after the course.

### **Test Results Conclusion**

The fourth goal of this project was for class members to gain knowledge of principles for sound interpretation and application. As the church grows in spiritual maturity (Eph 4) members are enabled to resist false and inaccurate teaching (Eph 4:14). The test results revealed that most participants do have this maturity. The project did not necessarily give it to them, as many had it before the project began. Since the project participants, many of whom were teachers in the church, began the project with a fair amount of discernment this did not grow dramatically through the project.

## **Personal Reflections from Eight Class Members Evaluating My Preaching**

One of the strongest parts of the project was having eight class members evaluate my preaching after they took the course. Sitting through the course certainly strengthened their evaluative capabilities. This was a major area of class lecture, discussion, and homework reading for all participants. These eight class members put this to use immediately in evaluating my preaching. In discussing the process with them they shared ways in which the course prepared them to offer evaluation. Several things were common among them. They shared that the teaching on interpretation helped them know what to listen for in my explanations. The teaching on inspecting the first anchor of the bridge improved their ability to evaluate what clear biblical authority was underlying my preaching. Another factor was that they were primed to listen for applicational calls to change actions and attitudes that were grounded in what the text itself was meant to change. A third factor that they mentioned was a heightened awareness of the three movements in principilization. They listened for historic principle directly in the text, the timeless principle derived from the text, and the present principle pressed into the experience of the listeners.

I have had my sermons evaluated before. But the evaluation process in this project was uniquely helpful. Teaching those who would be evaluating me a definition of exposition and the mechanics of interpretation and application set the process up powerfully. Teaching on discernment and bridge inspection techniques gave me and my evaluators some clear marks to aim toward.

My evaluators ranged in age from a middle-school student to a 70 year old. They varied from an unemployed man in his 50s to a young mom in her 30s. Overall, they were very positive in their evaluations. I talked with them ahead of time about constructive criticism and sought to encourage them to be negative. I assured them that I was aware they might be intimidating to “take on the pastor” over Bible teaching but that I welcomed this process. However, their marks for the sermons were almost uniformly high.

### **Evaluation March 20**

This sermon was titled “Self Denial as the Way to True Happiness” and sourced in Psalms 36, Mark 8:34-38, and Hebrews 11:23-26. I began the sermon with a funny story. One of my evaluators, a middle-school student no less, shared that the story was funny but was not worth all of the time it took to tell it. He was listening for exposition and wanted me to get to bridge building from the text itself.

In the course of the sermon I made some passing comments about Catholics. An evaluator asked me, “Were these comments worth the risk?” He stated that my brief comments seemed to stereotype all Catholics and could potentially cut off lines of communication with visitors. He was right. His was a perceptive critique. I recall feeling unsure as soon as the words were first out of my mouth during the sermon. It was something I should have slowed down and devoted five clear minutes to or not mentioned at all.

In this sermon, I illustrated points with incidents from the lives of Moses and Jim Eliot. Five evaluators mentioned that this was particularly helpful. People love to hear stories of other people for life application. Seeing truths lived out in the story of someone else's life is a key to understanding and applying the truth in one's own life.

### **Evaluation March 27**

This sermon was different than normal. My text was the entire chapter of Isaiah 40. In the introduction I announced that we were going to read the entire chapter after I prepared them for a “close reading” of the text. The substance of the sermon was this introduction about close reading. I highlighted literary features of the text for 20-25 minutes. Then I read the chapter. I closed with a three point sermon from the text in the concluding 8-10 minutes. I knew this change in style was a risk and was interested in the feedback. It was all positive. Almost all the key areas were scored with 5s. The evaluators felt that they received a very practical thing in being shown how to observe, appreciate, closely read, and carefully listen to the text. Several mentioned that the

applications in the sermon arose most clearly and directly from the text. The way it was presented made this connection undeniable.

### **Evaluation April 17**

This sermon was delivered on Palm Sunday, which is a very unique outreach day for Racine Bible Church. The children's ministry presents a musical program and this fills the church with unchurched relatives and friends. In our context, many of these visitors come from a nominally Lutheran or Catholic background. So I take this Sunday's sermon as an opportunity to present the gospel in a bold way before the audience. I am targeting nonbelievers, many of whom are nominal believers, Christian in a cultural sense, who have come to church for the children's program. My text was 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 with a title of "Of First Importance." The sermon lasted only 20 minutes and was delivered without a pulpit. I simply held my Bible and one small half-page of notes.

The feedback on physical presentation was almost all 5s. Minimal notes and no pulpit enabled me to have full animation and eye contact with the listeners. The application was a simple and pointed command to believe and keep on believing the gospel. Two reviewers suggested that I needed to take a bit more time to define the word "believe" and flesh out what that looks like in life. I also received some corrective feedback about my emphasis on the grammar in the passage. I mentioned that the text has seven verbs and highlighted the present progressive tense. One reviewer thought that this terminology may be off-putting to visitors. He felt that it was too technical, requiring too much education to understand. The question he challenged me most with was, "Was it necessary? Was your point contingent on explaining the grammar that technically?" It was not. I could have explained the meaning of the text and applied it with simpler language. Another reviewer gave a similar critique. She stated that I simply had too many points and gave too much detail from the passage for a 20-minute sermon. She felt that the first anchor took too much time and the second anchor was somewhat neglected. Her point was well taken. It is my tendency to linger too long in the opening part of my sermon

notes leaving the later portions to be hurried through. This critique reminded me to carefully measure to pace so that both anchors of the bridge receive proper attention.

### **Evaluation April 24**

This sermon was delivered on Easter Sunday. Like most churches, this Sunday brings our church the highest attendance of the year. The text was 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. The target, as on the previous Sunday, was the casual attendees who may think they are Christian, probably profess to be so, but have had not truly been born again through a living faith. The challenge for me in this sermon was that I began with a target (I knew I was headed for an invitation), but I did not want to violate authorial intent in getting there. The application was going to be: believe the gospel and trust Christ. I was looking to receive feedback as to the accuracy and helpfulness of this application.

Several reviewers mentioned that my pacing was a bit slower than usual and that this was a good thing for this sermon. “You gave us time to think. You let what you were saying sink in before you moved on to the next thing.” They also mentioned that I made it very personal. I stated several times that our tendency is to make this about general religious stuff but that it is about the living God doing something in each person through His Word. I made a clear call that every listener needed to respond personally and almost all of the evaluators noted and appreciated this. The sermon concluded with a very personal invitation calling each person to state “I am the sinner Jesus died for” and “Christ’s resurrection is my only assurance of hope.” The conclusion was the invitation and this served as the application. This received high marks from the evaluators as true to the text and effective as it was presented.

### **Evaluation May 1**

This Sunday was the first sermon in a new series on the heart of Christ. My intention in this series was to exposit portions from the gospels and epistles, which magnify the mercy, grace, and compassion of the Savior. My driving motivation for this series was

to see the congregation develop compassion for people. It is my hope that this compassion drives the expansion of true ministry in the name of Jesus for the glory of God. Speaking candidly, the prospect of the congregation applying these messages in their lives thrills me. What our Savior did for us is meant to be applied throughout our lives, changing everything about us. We are to love others as He loved us.

My text for this sermon was Matthew 9:36. This passage demands to be pictured and experienced on an emotional level. Most of the reviewers gave 5s for the illustrations and explanations. I illustrated the look in Jesus' eyes through looks we all remember: a groom watching his bride, a mother watching her son, a father watching his son march off to war. Most of the reviewers commented on the emotions evoked through these word pictures.

I used an illustration from Dostoevsky describing a character who did not care about anyone else and only listened to conversations for the opening to promote his own interests. I was gratified to hear from reviewers at both ends of the age spectrum that this illustration hit home. It was a reminder that classic literature describes the application of topics in memorable ways.

The application in this sermon was meant to challenge people out of complacency. I was trying to confront attitudes of indifference and provoke actions of compassion. Four of the reviewers commented that the directness of the challenge was appreciated. The concluding emphasis was how messy and costly Jesus' compassion for us was. Our compassion for others will cost and make our lives messy too. The reviewers commented that the open honesty about the cost alongside of the directness of the demand made for effective application.

### **Evaluation May 8**

This was the second sermon on Matthew 9:35-38, along with related texts, about the heart of Christ. The primary doctrinal point presented was the love of God. His love is strong and sovereign and sacrificial. My application was drawn from this doctrine. It was

explicitly theological. When people contemplate God's love for them, they are filled with compassionate love for others. God teaches them to love by loving them. He influences believers toward love by loving them. I looked for feedback from my evaluators as to whether or not the doctrine came across as applicable. Almost all of them ranked the application with a 5, assuring me that it did. This is significant because it means application in my preaching can be more contemplative rather than explicitly oriented toward external actions and still come across as acceptable. Additionally, 2 evaluators commented on aphorisms and striking sayings in the sermon. Compassion is one's pain their heart for another. Compassion is an emotion that sets one in motion. The evaluators stated that application, delivered with a memorable punch makes more of an impression. It is easier to remember and retain truths concisely stated toward the conclusion of the sermon.

### **Biblical and Theological Reflections**

The example of Ezra in Nehemiah 8 is central to this project. That text delivers a profound biblical foundation for the definition of preaching. Exposition, in that text, is defined as presenting the Scripture so that persons can understand and apply it in their present situation. Accomplishing this demands accurate interpretation and translation on the part of the expositor (8:7). The goal of this process is that all the people understand (8:2-3) so that they can confess their sin (Neh 9) and move forward in obedience (Neh 10). Week in and week out this remains the goal of proper expository preaching at Racine Bible Church.

Second Timothy 2:15 provided a sober and straightforward reminder of God's own verdict on the central issues in this project. In that text, the Apostle provides God's perspective on the matters of accuracy in interpretation and clarity of application. The criteria by which God will judge the preacher is that his teaching contrasts with the "useless" teaching of 2:14 and instead gets the intent of God's message directly through to the hearers. God is watching and listening to those who preach in His name. What is

it God is watching and listening for? To see and hear that the man of God works to handle the Word of truth accurately so that it profits the hearers.

Reflecting on the curriculum taught in class reveals it to be biblical. This subject had a more explicit treatment in Scripture, through a wider variety of genres and places, than I initially thought. The issue of application runs through the gospels (Matt 7:24) and the epistles (Jas 1:22-23). A working definition of preaching is not only in the Pastoral Epistles but also in the historic book of Nehemiah. Congregational valuing and discerningly receiving preaching is not only in the epistles but also in Acts 17:11. The dynamic process of preaching as bridge building is also seen in a wide variety of places in Scripture. From Psalm 95 to Hebrews 3:7-19 and Romans 15:4. The numerous biblical passages highlighted throughout the project grounded my improvements in these areas deeply in the biblical text. These improvements are not merely a tweaking of techniques but response to biblical revelation.

### **Conclusion**

In summarizing the impact of this project, I return to the three things I see every Sunday morning at 9:00. In front of me lie an open Bible, my typed sermon notes, and a congregation of hungry souls. My sermon notes should represent a trustworthy bridge between the text in the Bible and the lives out in the congregation. Preaching is more than the explanation of a text. It is the stirring proclamation of objective biblical truth into the hearts and minds of those gathered listeners. This only happens as the God-breathed Scripture works its way through the life and lips of a Spirit filled minister. Application arises from the objective meaning and, to be authentic, must accord with my own subjective attitudes and aspirations. This type of preaching requires scientific skill (2 Tim 2:15) while at the same time it is dependent upon a divine unction that goes beyond the academic (1 Cor 2).

Exposition which builds a trustworthy bridge fashions two anchors securely. The hermeneutical questions are asked in light of the biblical audience and time. The

homiletical questions are asked in light of the preacher's audience and time. The purpose of information is final transformation. The purpose for the sermon arises from exegesis, which uncovers why the biblical author wrote what he wrote. What quality of life or good works should have resulted from this revelation? What new attitude or action did he intend for his original audience? Then exposition decides how to accomplish this purpose and outline the sermon. This process ultimately aims at the glory of God displayed in the lives of those who are listening.

## APPENDIX 1

### AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the level of your understanding relative to this class. This research is being conducted by Spencer DeBurgh for the purpose of dissertation research. In this research you will answer the following questions about preaching, discernment, interpretation and application. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving your informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

APPENDIX 2  
GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE

**The first section of the general questionnaire gathers demographic information about seminar participants**

1. Sex
  - Male
  - Female
  
2. Age
  - 10-20
  - 21-30
  - 31-40
  - 41-50
  - 51-60
  - 61-70
  - 71+
  
3. How many years have you known Christ as Savior?
  - 0-2
  - 3-6
  - 7-11
  - 12-15
  - 16-20
  - 20+
  
4. Are you a member of RBC?
  - Yes
  - No
  
5. How many years have you been attending RBC?
  - 0-2
  - 3-6
  - 7-11
  - 12-15
  - 16-20
  - 20+

6. Which best describes your education level?

- Finished high school
- Some college
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate/Master's degree

7. How much Bible teaching do you receive in an average week? (mark all that apply)

- Attend Sunday morning worship service
- Attend Sunday school class
- Attend Sunday evening meeting
- Attend some form of midweek Bible study
- I have a personal time of Bible reading or study almost daily
- I have a personal time of Bible reading or study, but not every week
- Listen to preaching in recorded form weekly
- Listen to preaching in recorded form occasionally, but not every week

### APPENDIX 3

#### SURVEY EVALUATING KNOWLEDGE AND VALUATION OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

**This survey evaluates participants' knowledge and valuation of expository preaching**

Please indicate a numerical response to each of the following questions with this scale:

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Uncertain 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree

1. I understand what expository preaching is.
2. Expository preaching clearly explains the original God-intended meaning of Scripture.
3. Expository preaching is essential for the spiritual growth of the church.
4. Expository preaching carefully communicates what the Bible actually teaches.
5. Expository preaching applies the text's meaning to the spiritual needs of those who listen.
6. Expository preaching can begin with a text but then spend much time away from the text of Scripture.
7. Expository preaching is a verse by verse commentary of the Bible.
8. Expository preaching is usually more Biblically accurate than topical preaching.
9. Practical application of the truth to life is a very important element of preaching.
10. Preaching should be one of the highest priorities of the church.
11. Expository preaching depends upon the careful exegesis of Scripture.
12. Expository preaching was not invented by men but ordained by God.
13. Expository preaching is that methodology that guards the proper authority of Scripture.
14. Preaching that begins with human needs is more relevant than preaching that begins with the Word of God.
15. Expository preaching is one of the most important ways the church honors God.

## APPENDIX 4

### FIRST SET OF SERMON SAMPLES

#### **Sermon 1**

“When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it” (Deut 22:8).

What is your favorite room in your house? Where do you spend most of your time when you are at home? In the kitchen, in the living room, on the sofa? I don't know what your answer is. But I know what it isn't. None of you would say, “The roof.” We use our roofs to keep the rain and snow out of our houses. That is about it. But if I asked that same question to a room full of Israelites, it is quite likely that some of them would have answered, “The roof.” They worked on their roofs. Sometimes they would entertain guests up there. Some of them made a habit of sleeping up there. Knowing that helps this law make sense. If your employees are going to be working up there, do you want them to slip and fall to their death? If your Aunt Ruth was sleeping up there, would you want her to roll over and down to her doom? Of course not. This law prevented such accidents through the foresight of homeowners installing walls on their roofs. Doing so prevented the guilt of bloodshed. Keeping this law would enable an Israelite, in this matter, to be free from the guilt of bloodshed through an accidental fall from his roof. “Not bringing the guilt of bloodshed” is a negative way of putting it, but important nonetheless. A more positive way of putting it would be, “in order that you may protect and love those who enter your home.” This law incarnates love of neighbor. This law shows consideration to others. Do you see the point? The point is that I should take actions, requiring planning and expense on my part, to show consideration for my

neighbor's well-being while they are in my home. How might this apply today? Is your driveway and porch accessible? Are there places on your front walk where it would be easy to slip? Do you have proper banisters on your staircases?

One way to apply this law when you get home today would be to simply park your car in front of your house, get out, and slowly walk up the drive and into your home. Walk around the rooms. Do you notice anything that appears unsafe? Any place where it would be easy to slip or stumble? Repair those places. And so love your neighbor and prevent the guilt of harming him.

## **Sermon 2**

“If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14).

What a wonderful verse! What a powerful promise! What an offer, from God himself, to all of his people!

God is speaking here in this verse. He is making an offer to his people who are called by his name. Do you know who that is? He was speaking to Israel when he first said it. But today it is his Word to us. We are his people, if we have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We are his people, indeed called by his name, if we are Christians.

God is calling us, asking us, to do four things. In a way these four things flow from the same source and express the same desire, but they are listed as four separate actions. Do you see them right there in the verse? God is calling us to humble ourselves and pray and seek his face and turn from our wicked ways.

Can you do those things? Sure you can. Humble yourself. Stop thinking that you can figure everything out on your own. Humble yourself and hear God's wisdom. Pray. Make it a point to set aside time to pray every morning and every evening. Seek his face. Are you prepared to seek him? If you seek him you will find him. And turn

from your wicked ways.

What will happen if we do these things? God himself promises two things. The first is spiritual and eternal while the second is physical and temporal. God promises to forgive us our sin (eternal blessing) and heal our land (blessing right here and now). This promise means that God can, indeed that he will, heal our country if we do these things.

Oh how we long for God to bless America. What greater blessing would there be than for him to heal our land? Don't you want it to happen? It can happen. But for it to happen we need to turn from our wicked ways. Pray for our nation. Help turn our nation back from its wicked ways. Write letters to state and local representatives. Make your voice heard. Stand up for God.

### **Sermon 3**

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Eph 6:18).

We would expect that God's Word would have something to say to us about prayer. But where it is said is important. Where this verse shows up is important. This verse comes at the conclusion of the description of the believer's armor for the spiritual battle. Prayer is vitally related to spiritual warfare. Prayer is that which permeates the whole of the Christian soldier's activity.

The location of this verse shows us that prayer is a spiritual battle. True prayer is always a struggle. It requires watchful spirit and a persevering will. Would you think a physical battle requires all of your attention and will? Well, so does prayer in this spiritual battle.

And prayer requires even more than that. Do you see it right there in the middle of verse? It requires the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit creates the prayer within us and empowers us to pray the prayer. He enlivens the heart. He directs the mind. He empowers the will. How does he do that? By his penetrating

sword which is the Word of God. He works in opposition to our flesh, fighting against our selfish, sinful fleshly tendencies.

Do you seek to pray in the Spirit? Do you even know how? The process is not mysterious but it is demanding. You need to repent of sin. The Spirit is opposed to all of our sin. Sin is an expression of our flesh and our pride. If we would walk by the Spirit and pray in the Spirit we need to turn from sin, repent of it and confess it. And you need to take in the Spirit's wisdom and truth and light which is the Word of God. The Spirit will enable you to pray by bringing his Word to your mind and heart as you pray.

So prayer requires the Holy Spirit of God. But we are not off the hook yet. Prayer requires being watchful with perseverance. You need to tell yourself to stick to it. You need to work on your perseverance. Set an appointment with God and keep it. Don't come late and don't leave early. Resolve to give it a full half-hour. Perhaps you don't think you can do it. But I urge you to give it a try. In obedient application of this verse, with the help of the Holy Spirit, seek to spend thirty minutes in prayer every day this week.

#### **Sermon 4**

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Phil 3:7-8, 13-14)

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What is important to you? What do you have that you are most glad you have gained? A college degree? A promotion at work? Maybe it is a nice home in a nice neighborhood? A bike or a boat? Or maybe it is more personal. Is it your marriage or kids or grandkids?

Why are these things so important to you? Why do they count as gain to you?

Maybe you are too afraid to lose them. One of the reasons Paul writes this way here is that he wants us to be ready to lose everything. I know that is a tough message. But it is the biblical message. See it in the verse? I see the concepts of loss and counting it as rubbish and forgetting it used repeatedly.

God is calling you, today, to forget those things that used to be important to you. See it there in the verse? “Forgetting those things which are behind.” God is calling you to be ready to lose it all. See it there in the verse? “I have counted it loss for Christ.”

So I want to call on you to do something. I am calling you, in a radical way, to apply this right here and right now. Take those things that are most important to you. Get them there in your mind. And tell God “I count all of these things as loss.” Tell the Lord, right now in your heart, “I will leave these things behind so that I can know you and pursue you and be found in you.” I know this is hard. But it is worth it.

## APPENDIX 5

### TEST MEASURING DISCERNMENT IN EVALUATION OF APPLICATION IN PREACHING

#### **This instrument measures discernment in evaluation of application in preaching**

Using the following scale to rate the application which you heard/read in the sermon clip:

1 Strongly Disagree    2 Disagree    3 Uncertain    4 Agree    5 Strongly Agree

1. I understood what the preacher was trying to communicate.
2. The preacher spoke about a relevant issue.
3. The preacher spoke about a relevant issue in a way that was immediately applicable to my life.
4. The preacher was sharing God's thoughts, not merely his own thoughts.
5. It was very clear to me that the truth being shared came directly from this passage of Scripture.
6. I could easily imagine an audience in the Bible times hearing and applying this truth.
7. The preacher was properly interpreting the Word of God.
8. The truth was applied in a way that is consistent with the meaning of the Bible reference.

## APPENDIX 6

### SECOND SET OF SERMON SAMPLES

#### **Sermon 1**

“When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it” (Deut 22:8).

What is your favorite room in your house? Where do you spend most of your time when you are at home? In the kitchen, in the living room, on the sofa? I don't know what your answer is. But I know what it isn't. None of you would say, “The roof.” We use our roofs to keep the rain and snow out of our houses. That is about it. But if I asked that same question to a room full of Israelites, it is quite likely that some of them would have answered, “The roof.” They worked on their roofs. Sometimes they would entertain guests up there. Some of them made a habit of sleeping up there. Knowing that helps this law make sense. If your employees are going to be working up there, do you want them to slip and fall to their death? If your Aunt Ruth was sleeping up there, would you want her to roll over and down to her doom? Of course not. This law prevented such accidents through the foresight of homeowners installing walls on their roofs. Doing so prevented the guilt of bloodshed. Keeping this law would enable an Israelite, in this matter, to be free from the guilt of bloodshed through an accidental fall from his roof. “Not bringing the guilt of bloodshed” is a negative way of putting it, but important nonetheless. A more positive way of putting it would be, “in order that you may protect and love those who enter your home.” This law incarnates love of neighbor. This law shows consideration to others. Do you see the point? The point is that I should take actions, requiring planning and expense on my part, to show consideration for my

neighbor's well-being while they are in my home. How might this apply today? Is your driveway and porch accessible? Are there places on your front walk where it would be easy to slip? Do you have proper banisters on your staircases?

One way to apply this law when you get home today would be to simply park your car in front of your house, get out, and slowly walk up the drive and into your home. Walk around the rooms. Do you notice anything that appears unsafe? Any place where it would be easy to slip or stumble? Repair those places. And so love your neighbor and prevent the guilt of harming him.

## **Sermon 2**

“If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14)

What a wonderful verse! What a powerful promise! What an offer, from God himself, to all of his people!

God is speaking here in this verse. He is making an offer to his people who are called by his name. Do you know who that is? He was speaking to Israel when he first said it. But today it is his Word to us. We are his people, if we have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We are his people, indeed called by his name, if we are Christians.

God is calling us, asking us, to do four things. In a way these four things flow from the same source and express the same desire, but they are listed as four separate actions. Do you see them right there in the verse? God is calling us to humble ourselves and pray and seek his face and turn from our wicked ways.

Can you do those things? Sure you can. Humble yourself. Stop thinking that you can figure everything out on your own. Humble yourself and hear God's wisdom. Pray. Make it a point to set aside time to pray every morning and every evening. Seek his face. Are you prepared to seek him? If you seek him you will find him. And turn from your wicked ways.

What will happen if we do these things? God himself promises two things. The first is spiritual and eternal while the second is physical and temporal. God promises to forgive us our sin (eternal blessing) and heal our land (blessing right here and now). This promise means that God can, indeed that he will, heal our country if we do these things.

Oh how we long for God to bless America. What greater blessing would there be than for him to heal our land? Don't you want it to happen? It can happen. But for it to happen we need to turn from our wicked ways. Pray for our nation. Help turn our nation back from its wicked ways. Write letters to state and local representatives. Make your voice heard. Stand up for God.

### **Sermon 3**

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2)

This verse comes in the critical, pivotal section of Paul's letter. The word “therefore” in the first verse of chapter 12 transitions from the doctrinal section of 1-11 to what the Roman Christians ought to be doing about these truths with their bodies (12:1), minds (12:2), relationships with one another (12:3-12), relationship to governing authorities (13:1-7) and so forth.

Notice the two key words, both of them verb forms. The Romans are not to be conformed but instead to be transformed. Being conformed is to this world (which is evil). Being transformed is to the will of God which is good.

How might we be conformed to the world? The way for this to happen, in a way, is to simply do nothing. Since we are in the world we will be conformed to the world unless we resist. That is why the command is one of negation. “Do not be” implies a conscious resistance. Worldly ways make man and man's desires the source and goal of all things. But, in this very context is where Paul powerfully emphasizes

“from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Rom 11:36). Resist being conformed by constantly remembering that all things in the world were created by God’s power and are to be used for God’s glory. Resist being conformed by using your body to worship (12:1) and keep your conduct holy.

How might we be transformed? The answer is right there in the words of the verse. “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This means that you have to think about what you think about. This means that you have to intentionally input God’s thoughts into your thoughts. This could mean Scripture memory and focused meditation on the Word. It might mean that you write out a few verses and always keep them in your pockets. Maybe you should take a lunch break and read through a few chapters from the Bible, or listen to a God exalting sermon on an iPod in an effort to renew your mind in the middle of the day every day.

#### **Sermon 4**

The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Rom 13:12-14)

These verses represent some very important teaching for us. If we are going to be the people God wants us to be then we need to get really serious about obeying these verses.

Verse 12 says we have to lay aside the darkness and put on the armor of light. Where is the darkness in your life? Lay it aside. Make a decision to turn away from all of it. Verse 12 also says we have to put on the armor of light. Every day you should take some steps to put on the armor of light. The armor the Roman soldiers would have worn would first have been placed on the chest and then the legs and finally the helmet. This order means that first you need to get your heart right and then get your walk right and never neglect your helmet which represents godly thinking.

Verse 13 says that we need to behave not with sexual promiscuity and

sensuality, strife and jealousy. There is so much jealousy and strife toward others in this area of sexuality. Why become so envious of what others seem to have. Hollywood fuels this. Why promote more of it by constantly watching it. You should turn it off. It only leads to darkness.

Paul is not just telling us what to turn away from. He insists in the last verse that we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Like putting on new clothes, we put on the Lord Jesus Christ whenever we pray. We put Him on whenever we remember His promises. Paul ends with a great challenge to you. How much do you trust Jesus? He says if you put on the Lord Jesus you will “make no provision for the flesh.” Do you trust Jesus that much? Are you able to trust Him to provide everything your flesh needs?

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## ABSTRACT

### IMPROVING APPLICATION IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING AT RACINE BIBLE CHURCH, RACINE, WISCONSIN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011  
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The purpose of this project is to improve application in preaching while teaching lay leaders how to recognize, evaluate and appreciate proper application in expository preaching at Racine Bible Church, Racine, Wisconsin. Chapter 1 details the goals of the project, discloses key definitions, and project rationale.

Chapter 2 provides biblical and theological direction for recognizing and evaluating application in expository preaching. The necessity of accuracy in application is found through interpretation of Nehemiah 8:1-12 and 2 Timothy 2:14-16. Biblical and theological data about discernment in evaluating application in exposition is developed from Acts 17:10-11 and Ephesians 4:13-16.

Chapter 3 focuses on principles of hermeneutics and application. This chapter details the bridge, which preaching builds, between authorial intent and present application. Key factors for building a trustworthy bridge from accurate interpretation or historic meaning to relevant application of contemporary significance are covered.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and procedure followed in the project. Teaching materials, along with relevant in class examples and homework assignments, are summarized. The eight-week class which teaches the basics of interpretation, exposition and evaluating application in preaching is narrated.

Chapter 5 provides analysis and evaluation. Two pre and post-project exams

and surveys are analyzed. The first gauges knowledge of expository preaching and the second measures discernment in evaluating application in preaching. This final chapter also provides a summary of my own preaching development through receiving in-depth evaluations from eight class participants.

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