

## **SECTION 9**

### **The Exegetical/Interpretive Process: Guidelines, Principles and Aids**

# THE BASICS OF EXPOSITION THE EXEGETICAL PROCESS

John MacArthur has said,

“The proper elements in an expository sermon may be summed up as follows:

***Preaching is expository in purpose. It explains the text.***

***Preaching is logical in flow. It persuades the mind.***

***Preaching is doctrinal in content. It obligates the will.***

***Preaching is pastoral in concern. It feeds the soul.***

***Preaching is imaginative in pattern. It excites the emotion.***

***Preaching is relevant in application. It touches the life.***

The task of the expository preacher is to take the mass of raw data from the text and bridge the gap between exegesis and exposition.”

-(*Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 289)

Explaining the text and examining the raw data involves exegesis. This in turn entails hermeneutics.

## Some Definitions of Key Terms Related to Hermeneutics and Exegesis

1. Hermeneutics: The science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined.
2. Exegesis: The determination of the meaning of the biblical text in its historical and literary contexts (as opposed to *eisegesis* which is reading meaning into the text).
3. Exposition: The communication of the meaning of the text along with its relevance to present day hearers.
4. Homiletics: The science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning and relevance of the biblical text are communicated in a preaching situation.
5. Pedagogy: The science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning and relevance of the biblical text are communicated in a teaching situation.

## Luther and Calvin on Hermeneutics

“What I have advised elsewhere I here repeat and shall advise again: the Christian reader should devote his first effort to searching for what is called the literal sense.”

Martin Luther

“The literal sense of Scripture is the whole essence of faith and Christian theology. Every word should be allowed to stand in its natural meaning, and should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to it.”

Martin Luther

*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*

(Scripture is its own interpreter.)

“That is the true method of interpretation which puts scripture along side of Scripture in a right and proper way.”

Martin Luther (Works, 3:334)

“It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”

John Calvin  
(Preface to *Romans*)

“We must ever be on guard against wresting Scripture from its natural setting.”

John Calvin  
(*Psalms*, 2:388)

“Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us not only neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions which lead us away from the natural meaning.”

John Calvin

## **MODERN HERMENEUTIC: A BRIEF SYNOPSIS**

- ❖ **The Allegorical/Symbolic School (Idealism)**  
Approaches the text looking for a deeper symbolic meaning. Looks beyond the surface narrative to a more spiritualized meaning. Very popular in the early centuries of the church when the Platonic worldview was dominant.
- ❖ **The Literal/Historical/Grammatical School (Realism)**  
Approaches the text assuming that the plain sense meaning is to be taken unless there are clues that symbolic language is being employed. Textual Criticism is employed to discover the original text. Takes narrative more seriously than the allegorical school.
- ❖ **The Critical School (Naturalism)**  
Approaches the text with naturalistic presuppositions, particularly about the method of inspiration. Expressions of the Critical Method include:
  - Form Criticism (Rudolf Bultmann) –  
Analyzes how the oral tradition/forms shape the literary form utilized by the biblical author as it impacts the text.
  - Source Criticism (Julius Wellhausen) –  
Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis found in the two creation narratives of Gen. 1 and 2 the clue to four sources for the Old Testament: J (Jahwist), E (Elohist), D (deuteronomistic), and P (priestly). In New Testament studies, source criticism has focused on the Synoptic Problem and what written sources are behind our gospels (Q, M, L, Markan priority).
  - Redaction Criticism (Hans Conzelmann) –  
Attempts to discover the unique theology of each author.  
(Compare Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-39)
  - Structuralism (Ferdinand de Saussure) –  
Views language as synchronic and ahistorical. There are intrinsic structures in all languages which are not time-bound. The exegete should look for these intrinsic linguistic structures in the text.
  - Reader Response Criticism –  
Interpretation is a dynamic interaction between the text and personal application to the reader's situation. The reader determines meaning.
  - Deconstruction (Jacques Derrida, Mark Taylor) –  
Much more radical than reader response criticism. The text has no fixed meaning. The author is dead and the text relativized by the reader. There are as many meanings as there are readings.

❖ The Devotional School (Pragmatism)

Approaches the text with a view to finding not a timeless truth but a truth that works for me. The focus is on application, not authorial intent/textual meaning.

❖ The Existential School (Existentialism)

Approaches the text as that which prompts the reader to existential choice and an authentic life. Bultmann and Tillich sought to reinterpret the Bible in the light of Heidegger's existential categories. Popular existentialist simply posit their own subjective meaning onto the text.

**A COMPARISON OF HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVES**

	<b>PRE-CRITICAL</b>	<b>MODERN</b>	<b>POST-MODERN</b>
<b>HERMENEUTIC</b>	Traditional dogmatic interpretation	Historical Critical method	Reader Response criticism
<b>PHILOSOPHICAL ONTOLOGY</b>	Platonism and Aristotelianism	Enlightenment rationalism	Existentialism and Pragmatism
<b>EPISTEMOLOGY</b>	Fideism	Rationalism, Foundationalism	Subjectivity, Antifoundationalism
<b>HERMENEUTICAL FOCUS</b>	Church doctrine	Reason, historical criticism	The reader
<b>ROLE OF TEXT</b>	The text is inviolable; seek to understand authorial intent	Use reason to determine the cultural and historical forces which shaped the author and text	The text has no closure; it is incomplete without the reader's response
<b>ROLE OF READER</b>	To understand and accept the author's intended meaning	To investigate the background and presuppositions of the author	To interact with the text pursuing one's own perspective
<b>HERMENEUTICAL EXPRESSIONS</b>	Traditional, plain sense interpretations	Source, form, and redaction criticism	Post-structuralism, reader response, deconstruction

## A MODERNIST CHALLENGE

The definition of the meaning of a text changed dramatically in 1946 with the announcement that it is a fallacy to depend on what an author meant to say as a guide to determining what a text means. Since that time, three figures have tended to dominate the continuing refinements or protests to this announced fallacy: Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and E.D. Hirsch. Gadamer stressed a "fusion of horizons" (almost in a recasting of the Hegelian dialectic in new terms), Ricoeur envisaged a whole new set of operations when communication is written down, while Hirsch claims it was impossible to validate meaning if it was not connected with the author's truth-assertions and distinguished from significances [applications] of a text.

At present there are four main models for understanding the Bible: 1) the proof-text method, 2) the historical-critical method, 3) the reader-response method, and 4) the syntactical-theological method. The first is often naive, the second has been judged sterile, the third is often reactionary to the second, but the fourth is holistic and involves both historical and practical applications. Amid all this dramatic change, we have come to realize that the word "meaning" is currently used to include the referent, the sense, the author's intention, the significance a passage has, its value, and its entailment. Hermeneutics has become a multifaceted discipline. Here, we give our attention to only one aspect, the most basic and fundamental.

## A Guide to the Exegetical Process

Introduction:

- I. Spiritual Qualifications of an Interpreter of Holy Scripture
  - A. Born again (John 3; I Cor. 2:14-16). You cannot truly understand the Bible without the new birth. Unbelievers may achieve some degree of knowledge and appreciation of the text (see Stein), but they cannot embrace it in all its fullness without the new birth and the illumination of the Spirit.
  - B. Passion to know and obey God's Word (James 1:22-25)
  - C. Deep respect and reverence for God and His holiness (I Peter 1:13-16)
  - D. Complete and utter dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide and direct (John 14:25). "To pray well is to study well."

- E. A total confidence in the Bible as the inerrant and infallible Word of God (Matt. 5:17-18; John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:21)
- II. The Perspective of the Interpreter
- A. The question of critical methods
- Summary: Never let any commentary or interpreter place himself in judgment above the Word of God; watch critical interpreters who correct the biblical authors as though they had a superior vantage point and ability. The Revelation of God is superior to the reason, experience, and the traditions of man.
- B. The need for interpretive tools--pitfalls of neglect:
1. A veiled egotism – “I don’t need the help of more than 2000 years of spiritual insight, scholarship or interpretation.”
  2. The danger of confusing biblical inspiration with biblical illumination.
  3. A caution about interpretive tools; never let them replace your work in the Scripture.
- III. The Exegetical Process

The exegetical process consists of several steps. These steps may overlap, but it is important to examine them one at a time. Followed consistently, these steps will become good habit. The habit will improve the quality of your studying and teaching by increasing the thoroughness of your study. It will also help you be diligent in the study of God's Word on days when you feel like doing something else (or nothing at all!). Furthermore, the steps break the process into manageable pieces.

## Step 1: Selecting a Text

- I. Choose a complete text (not a fragment to be used out of its context). Of course working straight through a book of the Bible will greatly assist you here. Paragraph preaching is an excellent model to follow.
- II. Select a genuine, properly translated text. See step 3 below.
- III. Approach the text with a mind that is willing to be stretched and taught by the text.

## Step 2: Determining the Limits of the Text

- I. The Aim
  - A. Seek to identify where a passage of Scripture begins and ends. Look for a complete unit of thought (paragraph or pericope). Remember that chapter and verse divisions are relatively recent additions to the Bible. The original manuscripts had no such divisions. Sometimes they fit, but on some occasions they do not.
  - B. Try to find the natural breaks in the text (seams). Discourse analysis and strategies are especially helpful at this point.
- II. The Procedure
  - A. Check the paragraphing indicated in the Hebrew and Greek texts (if you can!) and in English translations using paragraphing. The New American Standard Bible, for example, indicates a new paragraph by boldfacing the verse number of the first letter in the new paragraph. The NIV and NKJV also do this.
  - B. Consider how what goes before and after your text (context) influences the interpretation of the text. Would broadening the scope of your text by a verse or two in either direction alter your understanding of the text?
  - C. Look for literary clues: introductory statements; indications of time, place, or location; and concluding summary statements. These elements often mark beginnings and endings of units of thought.
  - D. Look for thematic elements that hold a passage together and set it off from surrounding verses. Reoccurring phrases or words are a valuable clue.
  - E. Consider the way commentators arrange the text into sections.



### Step 3: Exploring the Text

- I. Read the passage repeatedly from one of the more literal English translations: the New American Standard is the best option available today. If you have the ability, you should read directly from the original languages. Note any significant differences in translation for future investigation.
- II. Read the passage aloud several times. This will assist you also for the public reading of the word in worship.
- III. As you do these first several readings, jot down quickly whatever observations, questions, initial impressions, and related thoughts come to mind. Do not worry about evaluating them now. Just record them. Think, feels, and imagine. Ask God to speak to you personally from the text. Do not bring in commentaries and reference books just yet unless you hit a wall. Let them wait until after you have spent considerable time exploring the passage yourself.

### Step 4: Establishing the Text (Textual Criticism)

- I. Definition – “The procedure of checking for any variant or alternative words or phrases in the text and determining which reading is the original.” This does not refer to differences in translation: it refers to questions about the actual wording of the Greek or Hebrew manuscripts. This is an issue of the transmission of the text not the inspiration of the text!
- II. Why Establish the Text
  - A. It shows respect for the Bible by seeking to be true to exactly what God inspired and the author wrote.
  - B. It promotes a habit of honesty in handling the Scriptures, helping you learn to resist the temptation that whispers, “But the people I teach would never know the difference.”
  - C. It affects what you believe and thus what you teach.
  - D. People you teach have study Bibles that point out textual variations. Some will have legitimate questions that need answering.
  - E. It increases your confidence and your effectiveness as a preacher/teacher because you know you are prepared. You need not dread having someone ask a question that will expose the shortcuts of your preparation.

### Step 5: Studying the Text in Its Contexts

It is at this point that it is helpful to turn to reference books and commentaries. It is important to delay using these works until you have done your own research and had time to think

about the passage for yourself. Having done that, it is valuable to compare your first impressions with the conclusions of devout scholars who have given the passage a lifetime of study.

At this stage you may possibly adjust (or reject!) some of what you wrote during the first reading of the text. That is to be expected. What remains may well be valuable material when it comes to teaching. Your first impression may give you a good idea about the first impressions your hearers will have when they hear the text read. Often the things about the passage that intrigued you will make effective teaching introductions. But you will want to be sure that your interpretation squares with the findings of reliable interpreters. If you were the only person to interpret and understand a text in a particular way you may be right, but you are probably not! Your search will cover several areas.

## I. Historical Context

### A. Information Sought

1. Identity of the author
2. Date and place in which the book originated
3. Identity any circumstances of the recipients
  - a. Identity
    - (1) Believers or unbelievers
    - (2) Ethnic or religious background
  - b. Problems they faced
  - c. Their manner of life
    - (1) Social customs
    - (2) Material context
  - d. The relationship of author and recipients
  - e. Historical events of that time that have a bearing on the understanding of the passage
  - f. Geographical information

### B. Sources of Historical Information

1. Primary source - the Bible itself -- Sometimes this material is stated openly by the biblical writers. Read the beginning and ending portions of that book of the Bible to see if there are statements given about the author, recipients, date, or circumstances. In other cases the information can be gleaned from something elsewhere in the Bible.
2. Secondary sources of information -- Often we find help from extrabiblical sources. In still other cases the best that can be done is to make an educated guess. Recommendations from faculty members teaching in the departments of biblical backgrounds, Old Testament, and New Testament are the best guide to secondary sources of information about the historical context. Be careful to note a scholar's background and theological perspective (Conservative vs. Liberal). The following list will offer an idea of the types of reference books which are helpful.

a. Bible Dictionaries - definitions of biblical terms, brief biographies of biblical characters, information about people and places, etc.

Example: *Harper's Bible Dictionary*  
*\*Holman Bible Dictionary*  
*New Bible Dictionary*  
*New International Dictionary of the Bible*  
*Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*

b. Bible Encyclopedias - more extensive coverage of subjects than that which is found in Bible Dictionaries, plus articles about theological subjects.

Example: *International Bible Standard Encyclopedia*  
*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*  
*\*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*

c. Bible Atlases - maps, plus information about geography, topography, climate, etc.

Example: *Macmillan Bible Atlas*  
*Oxford Bible Atlas*  
*Harper Atlas of the Bible*

d. Old Testament and New Testament Introductions

Use your textbooks or consult textbook lists for current recommendations by faculty members in Old and New Testament departments. See Akin's *Building A Theological Library*.

e. Bible Commentaries

(1) Types as to Arrangement

- (a) One-volume commentaries on the whole Bible, though useful in some respects, are not detailed enough to be fully adequate in the kind of careful study done in sermon preparation. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* with a volume on the OT and a volume on the NT is the best available in my judgement.
- (b) Individual commentaries on one or more books of the Bible are excellent sources of information. The key question is knowing who the writer is, whether his expertise covers this particular part of the Bible, and the theological perspective from which he writes.
- (c) Sets of commentaries in which each volume covers one or more books of the Bible generally have a common format and usually reflect a common perspective, either denominational or theological. The quality of the commentaries often varies considerably from volume to volume, depending on the ability of the author of that particular volume of the set.

## (2) Types as to Aim

Commentaries are as unique as the authors who write them. Even within a series they will vary somewhat in emphasis. Yet they can generally be divided into three classes. It is likely that some people would place a given series in a different category. But to give some guidance, the following list is offered:

- (a) Devotional/Sermonic commentaries emphasize the relationship of the passage to modern hearers. Often the volume is the outgrowth of a sermon series. Usually they are written for laymen, pastors (sometimes without theological training), and others who are more concerned with the significance of the passage for today than with the historical, linguistic, and grammatical details of the passage. They may help preachers and teachers see how to apply the Bible to modern life.

Examples:     \*Be Series (Warren Wiersbe)  
                  *Communicator's Commentary*  
                  *Daily Devotional Bible Commentary*  
                  Exploring Series (John Philips)  
                  *Interpretation series*  
                  \**Preaching the Word* (Kent Hughes)  
                  *Pulpit Commentary*  
                  *Proclamation series*  
                  *Speaker's Bible*

- (b) Exegetical Commentaries are written for the pastor with seminary training and for other well-informed readers. They are more detailed in their analysis of the passage's original meaning and they focus less on its contemporary application. They are scholarly, but not written exclusively for scholars. These are an important part of the pastor's library.

Examples:     *The Bible Speaks Today*  
                  \**Expositor's Bible Commentary* (EBC)  
                  *Harper's New Testament Commentary*  
                  \**New American Commentary*  
                  *New Century Bible Commentary*  
                  \**New International Commentary on the N.T.* (NICNT)  
                  \**New International Commentary on the O.T.* (NICOT)  
                  *Old Testament Library*  
                  \**Tyndale Commentaries*  
                  *Word Biblical Commentary*

(c) Technical Commentaries assume an audience with considerable theological background, including a healthy knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. They focus on some of the finer points of interpretation and usually deal with matters of history, linguistics, theology, and grammar and syntax more completely. They often are a source of information not found in other commentaries.

Examples:     Augsburg series of commentaries  
                  *Hermeneia Commentary*  
                  \**International Critical Commentary*  
                  \**New International Greek Testament Commentary*

(3) Selecting Commentaries. This is a highly individual matter, depending on your skill with Hebrew and Greek and your familiarity with the Bible. Once again the recommendations of faculty members in the Old and New Testament departments are invaluable.

Daniel Akin's *Building a Theological Library* is a helpful tool in making commentary selections. Other similar books are also available. Remember that some very fine commentaries on individual books of the Bible are not part of any commentary set. If you use only sets, you will miss some treasures.

You will want to work with the exegetical and technical commentaries. Avoid the exclusive use of the devotional/sermonic commentaries. Otherwise you may be tempted to take their sermonic treatment for your own and you may not deal as accurately with the text as you ought. That would rob you of the joy of formulating your own message. Additionally, the focus of the exegetical process is determining what the author intended to say to the original hearers. The text's significance for today is not the primary aim of this stage of the process.

## II. Literary Context

A. Genre identification (see Fee and Stuart, *How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth* for an excellent discussion of the literary genre of Scripture and the unique hermeneutical questions relating to the different genre).

1. Identifies the literary form or method used in a given passage. Is the passage a historical narrative? A parable? A prophecy? Poetry? An epistle? An apocalypse?
2. Determining the type of literature being studied helps you know whether to take language in the passage as figurative or in a more straightforward sense. It also can help you see how verses relate to one another.

B. The purpose of the book

Sometimes this is explicitly stated, as in Luke 1:1-4 and John 20:31. More often the purpose is discerned by reading the whole book and noticing recurring themes and emphases. Outlining the book of the Bible being studied is often helpful in seeing the purpose of the book. The outline need not be excessively detailed: as a beginning point, see if you can summarize in a complete sentence each chapter, then each paragraph.

C. The author's method of presenting the material

1. Usually the sequence in which materials are presented is significant.
2. Sometimes the author speaks directly; sometimes the message comes indirectly, between the lines.
3. Sentence flow diagrams of didactic passages are excellent helps in this regard. They give a visual depiction of the flow of the passage, showing how ideas relate to one another. Narrative texts can be "plotted"; describe the scenes, action, characters, climax, etc.

D. The relationship of the text to the overall flow of the book.

1. Some books of the Bible are tightly woven arguments in which every paragraph has a clear function.
2. Narrative portions of the Bible often have an essential unity that gives each section a clear reason for being there.
3. Some stories, especially in the Gospels, do not have as obvious a connection with their context. Yet even there it is wise to look and see if there is a connection. There probably is one.
4. The outline done previously is an excellent way of seeing how the passage being studied relates to the book as a whole.

### III. Linguistic Context

In this stage of studying the text, the point is to understand what the words mean as they work together to form sentences.

A. Lexical Study

1. Nature- It deals with the origin and development of word meanings. While origins of words are important--and often fascinating--what you want to know is what it meant the way this particular writer used it in this particular place. Beware of "exegetical fallacies!" (see D. A. Carson and his important work by the same title).
2. Need for lexicography- Most words which survive long in a language acquire denotations (specific meanings) and connotations (additional implications); these must be distinguished and defined.

### 3. Reference books for use in word study

#### a. Old Testament (Hebrew)

\*Brown, Driver, and Briggs (BDB), *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

Botterweck, G. Johannes, and Ringgren, Helmer. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by John T. Willis. Grand Rapids:

Harris, R. Laird; Archer, Gleason; and Waltke, Bruce, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody, 1980.

#### b. New Testament (Greek)

\*Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker (BAG), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

\*Brown, Colin, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-78.

Earle, Ralph. *Word Meanings in the New Testament*. 6 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974.

\*Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. 6 vols. Nashville: Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1930.

Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gergard, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-75.

“Little Kittel,” one volume work.

Vincent, Marvin. *New Testament Word Studies*. 4 vols. New York: Scribners, 1887-1900.

\*Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. London: Oliphants, 1939-41.

Wuest, Kenneth. *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

## B. Grammatical and Syntactical Study

1. Nature - Grammar and syntax deal with the way words, phrases, sentences and even paragraphs work together to convey meaning. “Syntax” is derived from two Greek words, “syn” (with) and “tassein” (to put in order). Therefore, “syntax” means “to put together in order.” Syntax is the study of sentence structure, the arrangement of word forms to show their mutual relationships in the sentence.

#### a. Two kinds of syntax:

- (1) Analytic: word order as guide (English)
- (2) Synthetic: word-endings or case endings as guide (Greek)

#### b. Importance

(1) Martin Luther: “at its root, theology is grammar”

(2) Hebrew Example: Genesis 3:12

(a) Translation: the woman / the man / and he said / with me / you gave / whom / the tree from / to me she gave / she / and I / ate: “And he said the man the woman, whom you gave to me, she gave to me from the tree and I ate.”

(b) Significance: use of the personal pronoun “she”, subjective case, before verb, places focus not on the action but on the person performing the action; thus Adam is directly and emphatically blaming Eve for his action.

(3) Greek Examples:

(a) 1 John 3:9 – “does not commit sin” = “does not continue in the habit or pattern of sin”

(b) Matt. 28:19 – “go into all nations” = “as you are going into all nations”

### Step 6: Gleaning the Theological Context of the Text

#### I. Get the Big Picture of the Passage as a Whole.

At this point in your study of the passage, you are moving from the details of grammar and syntax to see the big picture and understand what the passage as a whole is affirming. Exegesis is incomplete until the parts are properly put together, reassembled. Understood in context, the words and phrases have a theological message.

#### II. Understand How the Author’s Message Flows.

Identify the key affirmations of the passage. Note how the writer supports those affirmations with evidence and arguments. Write a paraphrase of the passage, trying to capture the essence of the passage in modern terminology. Then expand the paraphrase by elaborating on the various ideas involved.

#### III. Identify The Key Theological Statements and Related Implications.

Determine what the passage has to say about God and His nature, what it indicates about humankind, what it indicates about Christ, the gospel, the nature and mission of the church, last things, etc. You may discover yourself answering some of the questions you asked in the initial reading of the passage.

#### IV. Compare Scripture With Scripture - Theological Principle of the Analogy of Faith

A. Definition: Scripture is best interpreted by Scripture, viewing the Bible as a whole.



1. Presuppositions:
  - a. The Bible is unified, as God is a unity
  - b. The Bible is coherent: there are no contradiction between Paul and James, for example (Eph. 2:8-10 and James 2:14-26)
  - c. The Bible is inspired, of divine origin and therefore infallible and inerrant
  - d. The whole Bible is profitable for edification
  - e. The whole Bible is completely true and trustworthy
  
2. General Principles:
  - a. Obscure passages give way to clear
  - b. No major doctrine should be based on one verse or a few miscellaneous verses--(ex. the time of the rapture should not be a test of orthodoxy)
  - c. Points of doctrine not settled by specific reference may be settled by the general tenor of Scripture
  - d. Doctrines are more secure as they are taught in many verses and various parts of Scripture
  - e. If two biblical doctrines humanly appear to be in contradiction, (like human freedom/predestination) we must accept both (antinomy or compatibilism).
  - f. Passages which are brief should be studied in light of passages of greater length - Acts 2:38 in light of Romans 3:21-8:39
  
3. Specific Principles:
  - a. NT is the norm for interpreting OT
    - (1) OT moral laws should still be followed (Matt. 5:17-48)
    - (2) Dietary laws are rejected (Acts 15 council)
    - (3) Some civil laws are rejected or reinterpreted (ex.. an eye-for-eye)
    - \*(4) OT is promise, NT is fulfillment
  
  - a. First three gospels and historical portions of Acts should be interpreted in light of the Epistles
  
4. Priority of systematic passages over incidental; when purpose of passage is to teach a doctrine, it should take precedence over incidental allusions.
  - a. 1 Cor. 15:29-30 baptism for the dead is not mentioned anywhere else; but cf. The elaborate Mormon system build on this one text.
  - b. 1 Peter 3:19, "preach to those imprisoned," must consider Hebrews 9:27, "it is appointed unto all men once to die, then the judgment."
  
5. Seek universal principles in the midst of local ceremonies.
  
6. Teaching passages are helpful for the meaning of symbolic passages.

7. Each part of the Bible should be seen in light of its overall emphasis: God's glory and the salvation of man.

#### Step 7: Contextualizing (Applying) the Text

- I. Identify cultural elements present in the text.
- II. Evaluate cultural elements in the text as to their influence on the theology and ethics of the passage.
- III. Use principles of contextualization to determine the application of the text to modern recipients. The teaching may transfer directly or may require adaption of some sort. Specify which and why.
- IV. Specify culturally-relevant beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that should flow from the teaching of the passage.

#### A Brief Word on Principles For Interpreting Prophecy

1. Follow the normal hermeneutic of historical-grammatical-rhetorical interpretation. The historical element means that the cultural background and circumstances of the prophets are considered. The grammatical element means (a) that words are taken in their normal sense unless it is evident that a figure of speech or symbol is used, and (b) that words are considered in the light of their immediate and broad context. The rhetorical element considers the special features of apocalyptic and prophetic genres and considers the place of figurative and symbolic language.
2. Compare parallel passages, and fit all prophetic passages together in a unified whole. An understanding of the Book of Revelation, for example, is aided by an understanding of the Books of Daniel and Ezekiel.
3. Recognize the principle of "foreshortening: or perspective, in which events separated by many years are sometimes seen together (e.g., Is. 9: 6-8; 61: 1-2).
4. Recognize the several themes of both fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecy.
5. Follow consistency in interpreting prophecy.
6. Determine if the predictions are conditional or unconditional.
7. Determine if the predictions are fulfilled or unfulfilled.

Adapted from notes by Dr. Roy B. Zuck of  
Dallas Seminary

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERPRETING THE TEXT OF SCRIPTURE (A Second Summation)**

### I. Study the book as a whole.

1. Consider the questions of date, authorship, recipients, and purpose (general matters of introduction).
2. Develop an outline of the entire book (study Bibles and commentaries will be helpful).
3. Examine the relationship of the passage under consideration to the book as a whole.

### II. Establish the best textual base possible.

1. Use the original language if you can.
2. Compare various versions and translations.

### III. Investigate the text linguistically (e.g., word by word).

1. Make a lexical (definitional) study of crucial words.
2. Research the passage for key words, phrases and ideas.
3. Track the verbs!

### IV. Examine the form or forms of the material in the passage.

1. What is the literary type (history, poetry, prophetic, apocalyptic)?
2. Is there any indication of the life situation from which the material came?

### V. Analyze the structure of the passage.

1. Determine if the material constitutes a literary unity.
2. Is there a logical sequence of ideas present?
3. Outline the passage you are studying.
4. Use the outline as the framework for your teaching.

**SEVEN STEPS TO STUDYING AND PREACHING/TEACHING  
THE BIBLE  
(A Summation)**

1. Observation      What do I see?
  
2. Interpretation      What does it mean?
  
3. Correlation      How does it fit together?
  
4. Application      How do I put this into practice?
  
5. Illustration      How has this principle worked in other areas and in other people's lives?
  
6. Proclamation      How do I communicate this truth to others?
  
7. Motivation      How do I encourage others to love God by obeying God?

## QUESTIONS TO AID TEXT INTERPRETATION

by James Cox (Sr. Prof. of Preaching, Southern Seminary)

1. What is the text about?
2. What does the text mean to you?
3. What crucial exegetical issues in the text might bear on a correct interpretation?
4. What is the significance of the text in relation to Jesus Christ and the history of redemption?
5. What has the text meant to other interpreters?
6. What is the point of immediacy? Where does the text strike closest home in your own life?
7. What is there in the text that would make it difficult to communicate?
8. Can the truth in the text stand alone, or does it need to be seen in relation to a counterbalancing truth?
9. What are some of the causes of the condition or situation discussed or suggested in the text?
10. What are the theological implications or practical duties that grow out of the truth of the text?
11. What objections may be raised to your conclusions about the implications and applications of the truth of the text?
12. What would be the results of knowing or failing to know, believing or failing to believe, or doing or failing to do what the text suggests?
13. What must you do to make the message of the text real and true in your own life?
14. What is there in general literature, in biblical resources, in personal counseling, and in personal observation and experience that will exemplify or illustrate the truth of the text?

-(*Preaching*, by James W. Cox, pages 73-76)

## **“GETTING THE GOLD OUT OF THE ORE”**

### ***How to Study the Bible to Preach effectively***

by Joel Gregory (former Professor of Preaching, SWBTS)

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The contemporary preacher finds it essential to discover a secure, repeatable, practical way for finding, studying and preserving biblical material. The week-by-week challenge to find the text, research materials, understand and analyze the text so it can be explained and applied... is a major task. The key is learning how to “get the gold out of the ore.”

#### **HOW DO YOU GET AT THE TASK OF SERMON PREPARATION?**

##### **A. TWO APPROACHES MAY BE TAKEN.**

1. Begin with the congregation and their needs, problems, challenges, opportunities and difficulties... then move toward the text.
2. Begin with the text and move toward the contemporary needs of the congregation.

##### **B. REMEMBER THAT THE BIBLE BY DEFINITION IS RELEVANT TO EVERY HUMAN NEED, TEXT BY TEXT.**

##### **C. DESIGN A PLAN FOR YOUR PREACHING.**

1. A plan is necessary in order to be free in terms of study and preparation.
2. Set up a calendar, taking into consideration the needs of the church family (i.e. seasons, special occasions, church programs, holidays, promotions).
3. Select a text and sermon title for each Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening message you plan to preach.

#### **SELECT A BIBLICAL TEXT FOR YOUR MESSAGE.**

##### **A. HOW MUCH TEXT IS A TEXT?**

1. Almost any amount of the Word of God can be used.

- a. Individual words - giving meaning, tense, mood, purpose and application.
  - b. A phrase or part of a sentence.
  - c. A biblical paragraph - including 3 to 5 or even 10 verses.
  - d. A biblical chapter - covering all of it in a narrative style.
  - e. An entire biblical book- using key words, catching major themes, setting the entire book out before the people.
2. Limit the sermon to the text, since “limitation” produces power in preaching.

## B. HOW DO YOU ANALYZE THE TEXT?

1. First, discover the three levels of context.
  - a. The immediate context - verses that precede and follow the text.
  - b. The book context - understand the place of the text in the whole of the book in which the text is set.
  - c. The canonical context - where the text fits in the whole broad sweep of the time-line of how God dealt with mankind in redemptive history.
2. Pay attention to the text before you try to interpret it.
3. Do what you can do through study and preparation, and God will do what only He can do when you stand to preach.

## COLLECTING, PRESERVING, EXPANDING, AND FILING YOUR STUDY NOTES.

### A. WRITE ONE VERSE AT THE TOP OF A PAGE.

1. Find out all you can about each word, phrase, and clause in that verse.
2. This procedure will allow you to make quick retrieval of the material as it relates to that text and passage.

### B. ADDITIONAL NOTES TO INCLUDE ON THE REFERENCE SHEET.

1. Write down you own best impressions, understanding and thoughts about the verse.
2. Turn next to comparative translations to make comparisons, contrasting the translations of the words, phrases and clauses in the text.
3. Review commentaries for analogy and validation from other students of the Bible.

**C. THREE LEVELS OF COMMENTARIES TO USE IN ANALYSIS OF THE VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY.**

1. “Heavy-weight” - analytical, critical or exegetical commentaries that address every word, phrase and clause, finding their root meaning, tense, mood, voice, etc.
2. “Mid-weight” - commentaries that look at a verse at a time, having digested the “heavy” commentaries and popularizing them. “Light-weight” popularized commentaries that comment in broad and sweeping examination of entire biblical chapters and books.

**D. GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT YOUR STUDY NOTES.**

1. Approximately one half of sermon preparation time should be spent researching the text and taking notes.
2. You should have 3 to 5 times more material than you will be able to use when preaching the message.
3. Speak out of the overflow of your study when you present the sermon.

**WHEN YOU GET READY TO SAY IT, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?**

**A. YOU STAND ON THE RAZOR’S EDGE BETWEEN THE PAST BIBLICAL REVELATION AND THE PRESENT HUMAN SITUATION.**

1. Take your technical study and transfer it into the popular, contemporary street language of the people.
2. People need to know and want to know how God can relate to them in their lives.

**B. MOVING FROM THE TECHNICAL STUDY - WORD BY WORD – WITH DIRECT BIBLICAL AUTHORITY ENABLES YOU TO BRING THE MESSAGE OUT OF “THEN” INTO “NOW”.**

**CONCLUSION:**

Preaching begins with a plan of action, followed by word-by-word, verse-by-verse study of the text and its context. After translating this into the present idiom of the people, it is then related to every point of the message with direct biblical authority. The message becomes a means of communicating life-changing truth to the congregation.