

HOW SHOULD WE PREACH EXPOSITIONALLY?

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INTRODUCTION

The question's design is to direct us to consider the "How" of preaching expository sermons. For some, the first question may be "What," or, "Why," rather than "How." Hopefully, we shall be able to comprehend the what, why, and how of expository preaching, and begin to utilize effectively this powerful way to proclaim the powerful Word of God (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16; KJV). Every preacher must recognize the necessity to continue to study "preaching," and to improve both the preparation and the delivery of sermons. The preacher's goal must be to do his very best in preaching the greatest message ever given to man; that is, the glorious Gospel of Christ.

Expository sermons are far different from what most preachers preach most of the time. No doubt, some preachers may never have preached a truly expository sermon before, and some may not have considered the need, or the benefits of doing so. This may be because of a lack of time, or understanding, as well as a lack of exposure to others preaching expository sermons. Or, it could be a failure to see the need to seek a better way than one's longtime habit of sermon preparation and delivery.

Most sermons are topical sermons that focus upon a biblical topic--rather than an in-depth study of a particular text. There is a place for such sermons. Some sermons are (more) textual, beginning with a text, and expounding upon that text, with the incorporation of other supporting passages. Even then, many sermons that began with the preacher's intent to prepare a textual sermon turn out to be more topical than textual, or to be a blend of the two. For simplicity and clarity, these introductory remarks consider the three basic kinds of sermons: topical, textual, and expository, without more specific delineation, without examination of hybrid sermon types, and with emphasis upon expository sermons.

The expository sermon is very different from both topical and textual sermons; however, experience teaches us that few preachers have a clear understanding of these differences. Many years of teaching expository sermon preparation have shown that the great majority of students have no idea of what an expository sermon is, or how to prepare one. The reasons are many, but primarily THE reason is that they have not heard expository sermons preached.

So, let us consider how we should preach expositionally, but before we proceed to the "How," let us consider the "What," and the "Why."

WHAT IS EXPOSITIONAL PREACHING?

Expository preaching, as all God-approved preaching, has, as its goal, the proclamation of the Word of God. In preaching, men follow the command of God to herald the Truth (2 Tim. 4:1-2). The purpose of all preaching is to bring about man's salvation (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:4). In order to accomplish this, the preacher seeks: to present the good news of the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, and the revelation of the Holy Spirit; to bring honor and glory to God; and, in doing all this, to accomplish God's will by faithful service.

Expository preaching seeks to carry out God's purpose by a presentation of the Word that more clearly, concisely, and comprehensively exposes, or "places out," the meaning of a Bible passage. This kind of preaching, done correctly, is better preaching--

at least in many ways. Does expository preaching forego preaching topics? No, but it might offer a better way to address a topic. Does expository preaching eliminate preaching from texts? No, but it may help to give the preacher a better way to present the truth in a text. According to Tom Holland, "The expository method of preaching is the method most consistent with the apostolic charge to 'Preach the Word'" (49).

WHY PREACH EXPOSITORIALLY?

"In its simplest explanation expository preaching is putting God's Word on display before an audience for the purpose of informing the audience leading to a practical application of God's Word to the lives, choices, decisions, and responses of the audience" (Holland, 15-16). An eloquent performance may be very poor preaching, and is, when the message suffers in order to exalt the man, or the method. In a day when some are turning from "proof-text preaching" to attention getting dress, well-rehearsed theatrics, poignant stories, inspirational quotations from the latest denominational author, humor for humor's sake, and vague references to Scriptures that are neither quoted or cited, expository preaching holds great possibility. It has the possibility of setting forth God's Word in a way that the listener will more easily and readily understand God's will, and will more fully and favorably appreciate the depths and beauty of Bible passages. At the same time, the preacher will know the true joy and sustaining satisfaction that comes from accurately and powerfully proclaiming the wisdom of God while displaying the precious jewels of Truth that he has uncovered in his diligent study. He will rejoice to know that he has delivered a message, from God, that has helped people, fulfilled their needs, and directed them to a better life, an abundant life, now and eternally (John 10:10).

Too many members of the Lord's church lack any more than basic Bible knowledge. Members often use denominational terminology, espouse denominational concepts, forfeit blessings that could be theirs, and endanger their souls--because of a lack of knowledge. Admittedly, few study outside of assemblies, and the misunderstanding of key concepts and foundational doctrines is the result. Expository preaching will help them to see the riches of the revelation from God, to know the answers that come from God, and to realize the strength, comfort, and hope that follow (2 Pet. 1:3; John 8:32 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Preaching that exposes the Truth from the Creator will help to remove doubt, to instruct, to correct, to call, and to guide. It will, when properly done, be a great deterrent to error's influence upon the individual, and upon the congregation. No amount of showmanship will put such saving power into the superficial, shallow "talks" that masquerade as Gospel preaching.

So, the purpose of expository preaching is to preach the Word by exposing the text, explaining the text, using appropriate illustrations, and helping the listener to make the proper application. "The expository sermon provides the occasion for God to work powerfully through His powerful Word in saving and sanctifying people" (Holland, 50). Illustrations, when properly used, help the listeners' understanding, and their effectiveness should not be overlooked. Application is a very vital aspect of the sermon. What is the point of preaching without application? One member bewailed the sermons of the "new" preacher, stating: "What he says is right, but he makes no application." The result is that when the preacher concludes the sermon, members ask (if they even ask), "So what?" They have invested time in listening to an array of verses that they do not know how to apply to their lives. They agree with the

Truth, but what do they do with it? So, Koller wrote: "An 'Exposition' becomes a sermon, and the teacher becomes a preacher, at the point where application is made to the hearer, looking toward some form of response, in terms of belief or commitment" (21).

HOW SHOULD WE PREACH EXPOSITORIALLY?

There is a process to follow in preparing and presenting expository sermons. Be forewarned that expository preaching is not just a verse-by-verse study (but this does not preclude following the God-given line of thought if that occurs in sequential verses). True expository preaching stays within the selected text, and does not introduce other passages (and this is the hardest point to get across to students who have heard, for all their lives, mostly topical sermons).

Simply put (considering that entire books have been written to define the process of expository sermon preparation), after selecting a passage upon which to preach: the preacher must study to understand the context; he must discern the main point(s) of the passage--discovering the key thought(s)/word(s); and, he must then determine the supporting points (from the passage). To accomplish this, he should dissect the passage word-by-word (from the original language), looking at meanings and usage; and then prepare his outline with proper organization, cohesion, logical progression, and connective transition. Building an expository sermon begins with tearing apart the passage to be preached, looking at each individual part, in order to see its function in the whole, to discern how it is put together, and to learn what makes it "work." The process continues by the preacher's putting those pieces together into a sermon, and concludes by his preaching that exposes the marvelous truths of the passage in a way that listeners understand and can use.

After immersing himself in such in-depth study, the preacher will be excited about presenting this sermon. His presentation (after practice and prayer) will not be dull, dry, boring, and coma inducing. He will not resort to recycling the same few verses each sermon (which brethren recognize, and which is the most effective and powerful sedative the preacher could ever use). He will not default to current events, preaching headlines, or highlights. How ironic that preachers lament the lack of attention and response to preaching, while they may be contributing to this problem by the way they prepare and present sermons.

Essential to one's understanding the "How" of expository sermon preparation is an awareness of the six parts of a sermon: title, text, thesis, introduction, discussion, and conclusion. The title, of course, directs the listener to the theme of the sermon. The preacher should announce the text, allow the audience members time to find it in their Bibles, and he should read or quote it clearly, and slowly and loudly enough that he may be heard and understood. The thesis is a one-sentence summary of what the preacher intends to accomplish in his sermon. The introduction has two objectives: to gain attention (some say the preacher already has the listeners' attention, but even so, he needs to secure it) and to give direction (tell where he and they are going in this study by giving the main points). The discussion (which some call "the body") is just that, a discussion of the main points and supporting points to accomplish what the thesis states. The conclusion has two goals: to summarize, and to call for action.

The outline produced from following these steps may go through numerous refinements and rewriting. It may be that further study reveals a need to adjust

emphasis, or to reconsider points in order to portray more accurately the thrust of the passage. Do not be afraid to change the outline – for the better. After such intensive study, immersing himself in the passage, and producing a final written outline, the preacher should be well on his way to communicating the Truth effectively.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, this cursory examination into the “How” of expository preaching will encourage more, deeper, fuller study, and promote expository preaching among our brethren. Following is a sample, that has been condensed for publication, but that has all the pertinent points, and that, hopefully, will help to convey the "How" of preaching expositively by showing an outline that results from the process described above. It does move verse-by-verse, but that is the natural organization of the passage, as God gave it, and as the inspired apostle Paul wrote it.

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

2 Corinthians 1:3-12

THESIS: Our purpose is to encourage Christians by showing that we are not alone in times of trouble, for the Father of mercies, who is the God of all comfort, invites us to draw near to Him, and to rest assured that He will console us “in all tribulation.”

INTRODUCTION:

1. Troubles come to all who live (long enough) in this world.
 - a. Christians are not immune to the difficulties of this life.
 - b. We are not isolated from contact with the pressures that bear down so heavily.
2. What shall we do when trouble comes?
 - a. Shall we be unprepared, as if we did not expect tribulation?
 - b. Shall we be overwhelmed, unable to endure?
 - c. Shall we give up our faith, wondering if God knows we are suffering, and if He cares, why do we suffer?
3. In trouble, we need comfort.
 - a. The Father of mercies is the God of all comfort.
 - b. He comforts us in all tribulation.
 - c. By His comfort, He enables us to be comforters.
 - d. When troubles abound, His comfort abounds also.
 - e. Paul is an example of one who was afflicted and comforted.
 - f. He is also an example of how we might face such troubles that we despair.
 - f. As God delivered Paul, and the Corinthians, so He will deliver us.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE FATHER OF MERCIES IS THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT (2 Cor. 1:3).

A. Our God is the Father of mercies.

1. As the FATHER of mercies, God is the One from whom mercies originate; that is, He is the "generator" of merciful kindness.
2. He is the Father of MERCIES, the One from whom compassions proceed, the very source of pities; thus He is pitiful (full of pity).
3. What joy we should have, as we face the troubles that come upon us, and the sufferings we must endure, to know these wonderful attributes of God, and our blessing because of them!

B. As the Father of mercies, He is the God of all comfort.

1. GOD is the supreme, sovereign spring of comfort, and the holy, infinite fountain from which all consolation flows, and for this, we should be deeply and eternally grateful.
2. He is the God of ALL comfort, of every comfort, of all consolation; thus, there is no comfort that we need that our Creator cannot supply, there is never a time that the troubles are so great that His comfort falls short.
3. Sometimes, we wonder, "Does God know what I am facing? Does He care that I am hurting so badly?" but we never experience trouble that God cannot feel, or a need, in that trouble, that God cannot fill.

C. He is the God of all COMFORT.

1. This key word, comfort (often translated consolation), includes the idea of calling near, as in the sense of inviting us to come to Him.
2. The young boy, who was hurt playing soccer, limped off the field crying, but he saw his grandfather's outstretched arms, and heard him say, "Come here," and as his grandfather held him close, and wiped away his tears, he heard, "It's okay. You are going to be alright."
3. So, the merciful, compassionate Father calls us to come to Him that He might console us, even in the time of our deepest pain and most trying trouble.

II. GOD COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR TRIBULATION (2 Cor. 1:4).

A. God comforts US.

1. What a blessing to know that the God of Heaven seeks to comfort us (His children--the church, saints, brethren [2 Cor. 1:1, 8])!
2. He does know when we suffer!
3. He does care for us, and He does not sit aloof and scorning that we are in trouble, but manifests His matchless mercy.

B. God comforts us in ALL our tribulation.

1. How blessed we are to know that no tribulation, however dire and distressing, exceeds God's ability to comfort.
2. Always, in all places, at all times, in all situations, and in all our troubles, God consoles His faithful children.
3. Therefore, there is no person, and no power that can so afflict us that we are at their mercy – for we are "at" God's mercy.

C. God comforts us in all our TRIBULATION.

1. Tribulation means trouble, referring to the pressure that oppresses, afflicts, and burdens us.
2. We all face the pressures of life, and sometimes they seem overwhelming, and we are tired, and hurting, but God comforts us no matter what the troubles may be that so sorely press upon us.
3. When the pressures push us down, God lifts us up with His mighty hand.

III. GOD COMFORTS US THAT WE MAY COMFORT OTHERS (2 Cor. 1:4).

- A. How like God--that He blesses us that we might bless others; so, He comforts us that we may be ABLE to comfort.

1. Acquired ability comes from instruction, observation, and experience, and God utilizes all three avenues to equip us that we may accomplish His will by our comforting others.
 2. For example: a father may instruct his child in the way to use a certain tool (instruction), and then say to him, "Watch while I use it" (observation), but then he says; "Now you give it a try" (experience).
 3. We learn from God's comfort how to comfort.
- B. He comforts us that we may be able to comfort THEM.
1. We are comforted, for our benefit, but not just for our benefit, but also that we may be comforters.
 2. When we have suffered, and have been comforted, we understand what others must endure, and what they need to help them.
 3. Christians (who have known the comfort of God) are better able to offer this comfort, than any others, to those who suffer--for they have seen both trouble and consolation.
- C. He comforts us that we may be able to comfort them in ALL TRIBULATION.
1. Consider the additional benefits to the giver of selfless consolation to others, rather than selfish self-pity.
 2. As those who have experienced God's comfort in "all tribulation," we are able to offer comfort to those who are in "any trouble" ("all tribulation").
 3. An identifying characteristic of those who would be godly is that they are "god-like," and how could we ever be more like God than when we are compassionate to those in trouble?
- D. We are able to comfort others BY the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.
1. God's comfort is the channel that provides the motivation.
 2. God's comfort supplies the means of our refreshing and encouraging others in the troubles that weigh so heavily upon them.
 3. It is through God's comfort that we learn how to comfort, as we learned, by the comfort we received in childhood, how to comfort our own children.
- IV. AS SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ABOUND, CONSOLATION ABOUND (2 Cor. 1:5).
- A. Who would deny that SUFFERINGS of Christ abound in us?
1. Although we shall never suffer to the extent Christ did, as surely as we live faithfully, afflictions and hardships come.
 2. These sufferings challenge us, and call for our patient endurance for the Cause of Christ.
 3. That endurance opens the door to our consolation, unlike those who, in time of trouble, turn from God, accuse Him of not being a loving God, and bitterly denounce Him as uncaring.
- B. Sufferings of Christ ABOUND in us.
1. Not only do hardships come, they often seem unending, as they follow one after the other.
 2. Sufferings overflow and can overwhelm even God's own.

3. When they appear to be in superabundance, and we consider our inability to handle them, we wonder how shall we continue, for how shall we bear them--it is too much!

C. Our consolation also abounds BY Christ.

1. AS sufferings come in superabundance, SO comfort also overflows, for God's uplifting assurance is that the greater the sufferings we must bear as followers of Christ, the greater is the comfort we shall receive through Christ.
2. Our consolation abounds BY Christ; thus, there is never any pressure so great that we cannot find comfort through Him--

tribulations can

never exceed comfort.

3. This is the key, so let us make sure we understand: the more the suffering, the more the comfort, and there will never be such suffering that the comfort God gives is insufficient.

V. LIKE HIS BRETHREN, PAUL WAS AFFLICTED AND COMFORTED (2 Cor. 1:6-7).

A. Paul's AFFLICTION was for the Corinthians' blessing.

1. The affliction (trouble, pressure) Paul endured was for the purpose of their consolation (comfort) and salvation (deliverance).
2. The Corinthian brethren also suffered, but were able to endure because of comfort and salvation, and were encouraged by Paul's example.
3. We should be encouraged by Paul's example, and learn, as did the Corinthians about the "God of all comfort."

B. Paul's COMFORT was for the Corinthians' blessing.

1. Thus, he did not give in, or give up, but hoped steadfastly.
2. How comforting for Paul, in his affliction, to know that AS the saints partook of sufferings, SO they partook of the consolation.
3. Even in his trouble, he could help others, as he became a comforter.

VI. PAUL SAID, "WE WERE PRESSED OUT OF MEASURE, ABOVE STRENGTH, INSOMUCH THAT WE DESPAIRED EVEN OF LIFE" (2 Cor. 1:8).

A. Paul and his companions were PRESSED out of measure.

1. The pressure (again, the meaning is trouble and tribulation) came to Paul in Asia, and he wanted the Corinthian brethren to know that.
2. This pressure pressed down upon them with an exceeding great weight.
3. Just so, the pressure upon us often seems so great that we do not know if we can bear it.

B. They were pressed OUT OF MEASURE.

1. The pressure was so much, and the weight was so heavy that they were weighed down with trouble.
2. They were "de-pressed"; that is, pushed down by their burden.
3. The weight was abundant even beyond measure--it was just too much to bear!

C. They were pressed out of measure, ABOVE STRENGTH.

1. The troubles were so intense; they were over, above, and beyond their power to withstand.
2. Their strength strained and failed because the burden was so heavy.
3. Did God know they were so burdened, and did He care?

D. And then Paul wrote, "We DESPAIRED even of life."

1. The great apostle, and those with him, bowed down under the pressure, were out of resources (of their own), utterly at a loss, and hopeless.
2. Without strength and without hope, they saw death coming, and what could they do?
3. Seemingly hopeless, in despair, when troubles mount, we may come to the point where we just do not know what to do, for we have expended our ability to bear the burden any more, and we are utterly at a loss.

CONCLUSION:

1. In their time of trouble, what did God do for them--and what can we expect God to do when we suffer today?
2. Note: the God of all comfort delivered them from death (2 Cor. 1:9-12).
 - a. In doing so, He taught them a great (and much-needed lesson) that they should learn not to trust in themselves, but in God (2 Cor. 1:9).
 - b. He helped them to see that they should learn to have confidence in their Deliverer, for after all, He delivered them (past); He doth deliver (present); and, He will yet deliver (future) (2 Cor. 1:10).
 - c. Another great lesson is that times of trouble help God's children to learn to depend upon prayer (2 Cor. 1:11).
 - d. Throughout it all, Christians should learn to recognize the marvelous mercies that are theirs because of the grace of God (2 Cor. 1:12).
3. So, what shall we do when troubles come, and we are overwhelmed to the point of despair, and utterly at a loss?
 - a. We must trust in the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our tribulation.
 - b. We must put our confidence in the Father of mercies who delivers us.
 - c. We must learn, as tribulations teach us to pray, and to pray better, to depend upon prayer.
 - d. We must recognize (and rejoice in) God's amazing grace, for He is the God of all comfort.
4. The God of all comfort stands ready to deliver us.
 - a. He calls us to be His children.
 - b. In humble obedience, submitting to His will, we must answer His call (as penitent believers who are baptized into Christ).
 - c. Then, when trouble comes, and He calls us near, we can know His compassionate consolation – and it will be all right.
 - d. If we refuse, it will be all wrong.

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