

Interpreting Scripture
by Scripture

MICHAEL S. HORTON

The Goals of
Biblical Exegesis

JOHN PIPER

Embrace the Task:
Bible-Based Exposition

STEVEN J. LAWSON

EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

{ EXEGETICAL
EXCELLENCE }

JESUS PRAYS FOR
HIS DISCIPLES, PT. 2

John 17:6–10

JOHN MACARTHUR



ISSUE

11

MAY/JUN16

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WHAT IS EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES

Many talk about expository preaching, but few understand what it entails. Still fewer practice it. So many ministers resort to little more than philosophizing in the pulpit, yet others to moralizing, politicizing, and even storytelling. And the reason is quite simple—either they do not what God requires of them in preaching His Word, or they know but they have lost confidence in the power of the Word to perform its work. Where either condition exists, Philip Ryken warns, “Their congregations rarely hear the voice of God’s Spirit speaking in Scripture. The post-Christian church no longer believes in the power of biblical preaching, plain and simple.” In a day in which biblical preaching is a lost practice, it is important that, if it is to be recovered, we clarify what it actually is.

What is expository preaching? The word “expository” is an adjective that describes a certain kind of preaching—expository preaching. The word itself means that which “explains or interprets,” or what is a “commentary” or is “explanatory.” That is to say, expository preaching is chiefly *explanatory* preaching, or pulpit ministry that interprets a biblical passage. It is Bible-based preaching that gives a careful explanation of a text of Scripture, correctly interpreting the passage and presenting it in a compelling way with relevant application. This approach to the pulpit is distinctly *biblical*.

Expository preaching gives the sound interpretation of a biblical text, presenting the proper meaning of a passage in a logical, unifying manner and showing its practical relevance for daily living. This kind of preaching is Trinitarian, which is to say, it is centered upon the glory of God, magnifies the supremacy of His Son, Jesus Christ, and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through sound exegesis, it is preaching that arranges and presents its truths in an orderly sequence of thought and is related to the everyday life of the listener. The one who would be an expositor must be committed to these basic essentials in pulpit presentation.

In short, true expository preaching is biblically grounded, God-centered, and practically relevant, and comes through a man who is passionate for God and sovereignly enflamed by the Holy Spirit. The Puritans stated that expository preaching builds a fire in the pulpit. The most noted Puritan John Owen observed, “The word is like the sun in the firmament,” yielding “spiritual light and heat.” This is to say, a pulpit fire yields both light and heat—the light of instruction and illumination combined with the heat of conviction and transformation.

The sterling qualities of Scripture—its inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency—lay the bedrock upon which rests all expository preaching. Biblical preaching is that public proclamation that explains the Scripture itself by laying open the biblical text before the listener, clearly setting forth its meaning while making relevant application. True preaching is always *biblical* preaching, always giving the God-intended meaning of the Word, always relating it to everyday life. ♦

EXEGETICAL EXCELLENCE

FEATURES

06 Embrace the Task:
Bible-Based Exposition
by Steven J. Lawson

14 The Goals of
Biblical Exegesis
by John Piper

20 Interpreting Scripture
by Scripture
by Michael S. Horton

34 So What?:
Homiletical Analysis
by David P. Murray

40 Knowing the Text:
Contextual Analysis
by Keith H. Essex





DEPARTMENTS

28 THE PULPIT: Jesus Prays for His Disciples, Pt. 2 by John MacArthur

46 THE STUDY: Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian by Dustin W. Bengé

EXPOSITOR

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MAY/JUN16 ISSUE 11 © 2016 ONEPASSION MINISTRIES EXECUTIVE EDITOR Steven J. Lawson EDITOR Dustin W. Bengé
 DESIGN DIRECTOR Dustin W. Bengé MARKETING DIRECTOR Grace Anne Lawson PROOFREADER C. Rebecca Rine

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EMBRACE THE TASK: BIBLE-BASED EXPOSITION

STEVEN J. LAWSON

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

In the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

been betrothed⁶ to together she was for the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹A being a just man and shame, resolved to do he considered these of the Lord appeared ing, "Joseph, son of Mary as your wife, for in her is from the Holy son, and you shall do will save his people took place to fulfill v by the prophet:

²³ ^a"Behold, the virgin bear a son and they shall

It would be impossible to overstate the importance of exegesis to expository preaching. Before there can be any effective exposition, there must first be effective exposition. If there is no exegesis, there is no exposition. What a firm foundation is to a large building, exegesis is to exposition. In this sense, exegesis upholds the entire superstructure of the sermon. Rightly dividing the biblical text is what undergirds rightly preaching it. Exegesis is that important to the pulpit.

When we say exegesis, what do we mean? The word is a transliteration of the Greek word *exēgesis*, which means an explanation or interpretation. Exegesis as a noun does not appear in the New Testament. However, the verbal form (*exēgeomai*) is found six times in the New Testament. It is a compound word, combining *hēgeomai*, which means “to lead,” with the prefix *ek*, meaning “out of.” Literally, it means “to lead out of.” The idea is to lead the meaning out of Scripture.

A brief survey reveals this. *Exēgeomai* is found in John 1:18, which states that the Lord Jesus has “explained” who God is and interpreted what He does and says. On the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion began to “relate” what Christ had taught them (Luke 24:35). That is, they explained to the disciples exactly what occurred when He appeared to them. In similar fashion, Cornelius “explained” to Peter what he had seen in a vision (Acts 10:18). Likewise, Paul and Barnabas were “relating” to the Jerusalem council what God had done on their first missionary journey (Acts 15:12). Again, he “related” how God had converted Gentiles in Galatia (Acts 15:14). Moreover, Paul began to “relate” what God had done through his ministry (Acts 21:19).

In each passage, the main idea of *exēgeomai* is to relate or explain what was said or done.

This is precisely what the exegesis of a passage of Scripture entails. The word simply means to correctly interpret a biblical text. It involves the careful explanation of a passage of Scripture. This is the opposite of eisegesis, which is reading *into* a text a meaning that is not there. Exegesis, on the other hand, involves leading *out of* a biblical text the proper meaning that is there. Closely related to exegesis is hermeneutics, which concerns the laws that underwrite the science of interpretation. Hermeneutics deals with the principles of interpretation that govern how the expositor carries out his work of exegesis.

Diving for Pearls

An illustration may be helpful. Exegesis may be compared to the work of a pearl diver who plunges deep below the surface of the ocean. To find the valuable pearls, he must submerge and swim to the bottom of the ocean. He must carefully gather up the precious jewels that lie on the ocean floor. He will never find these ivory-white gems in the shallows along the shoreline. Neither will he discover them floating on the surface of the water. To secure these pearls, he must plunge deep to the bottom of the ocean.

Once these precious gems are in hand, the diver must bring the pearls to the surface. No one can benefit from them as long as they remain on the ocean floor. He must swim to the surface with them and take them to market. He must give them to a jeweler, who can string the pearls onto a strand, making a beautiful necklace. This collection enhances their luster and makes them attractive and desirable to their observers.

Going Deep Into the Text

The same is true for every expositor. He must descend to the depths of his passage of Scripture. He must gather up the valuable pearls of truth that are found beneath the surface of the text. These valuable gems do not lie on the surface of his passage. The expositor must go down deep into his verses. This requires his discipline and dedication to this demanding work. Further, it necessitates that he has received the proper training in how to find these pearls in Scripture.

This is the role of exegesis. The preacher must dive into his text. He must plunge deep into his passage if he is to gather up the pearls. The exegete must not only go down deep into the text, but stay down for an extended period. He must get to the bottom of his passage, and this requires time in the text. He must plunge below the surface of his verses. He must submerge himself in the text to discover these lustrous jewels. The success of his pulpit ministry is dependent upon the exegetical pearls he finds. When he steps into the pulpit, he must bring out and show the priceless necklace he has collected

THE PREACHER MUST DIVE INTO HIS TEXT. HE MUST PLUNGE DEEP INTO HIS PASSAGE IF HE IS TO GATHER UP THE PEARLS.

from his passage. He must string together the findings of his exegesis and present them in the pulpit. This requires a high degree of commitment and competence on his part.

Sunbathers and Snorkelers

Tragically, though, too many preachers are like sunbathers who never leave the comforts of the beach. They never dive into the deep for these pearls. They would much prefer to lounge on the sand and chat with other sunbathers. They never immerse themselves in the biblical text. They never even get wet by swimming in their passage. Every Sunday, they are dry in the pulpit.

Other preachers are like snorkelers, who merely paddle in the shallows. They always stay near the shoreline and never venture out into the deep. Consequently, they lack depth in their preaching. The reason is because they lack depth in their study of the biblical text.

Sunbathers and snorkelers do not make good expositors. Their findings in the passage are superficial. They never get to the bottom of their verses. They never plunge into the depths of the Word. They never leave the beach or knee-high water. They choose instead to remain on land or float on the surface. Their study languishes in the tiny ripples near the shore. Consequently, their preaching remains shallow and ankle-deep.

Submerged in Scripture

By stark contrast, authentic expository preaching requires depth in exegetical study. The one who would preach the Bible effectively must be proficient in the skills required to properly

interpret it. To the extent that he can immerse himself in the text, his preaching will be marked by precision and profundity, and even power. The deeper he can plunge into the Word, the higher will be his knowledge of God and His truth.

Since this is the case, what areas of study are necessary for effective exegesis? The discipline of exegesis requires that the expositor give careful attention to what his passage means by examining it on multiple levels. He must dive into his text contextually, linguistically, verbally, grammatically, syntactically, historically, culturally, geographically, and theologically. It will be important that we briefly address each of these areas in order to understand the exegetical process.

Consider the Context

First, the expositor must study the context in which his passage is found. He should start by noting the larger context and proceed to its immediate context. He must be aware of where his text is located in the overall flow of the Bible. In the progressive revelation of Scripture, where does this text find itself? On the grand scale, do these verses look forward to the first coming of Christ? Or do they look back at His first advent? Does the biblical author write before, during, or after the ceremonial law? Many other such time references must be considered.

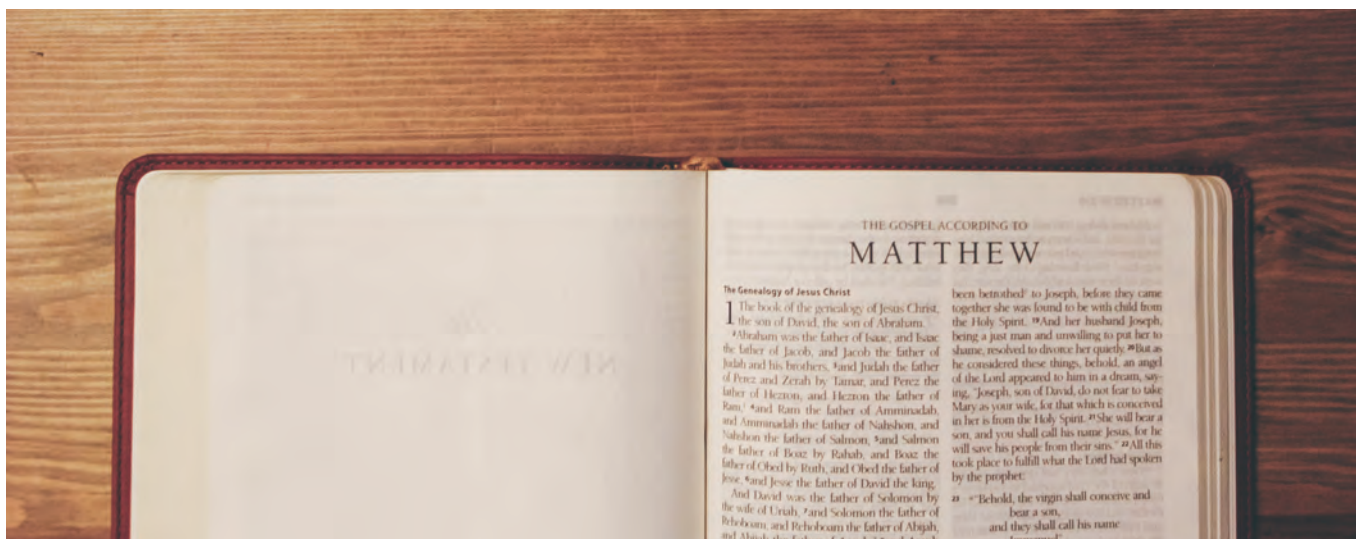
Further, the expositor must ascertain: Where do these verses find themselves within each Testament? Is this passage found in the Law section of the Old Testament? If so, what part of the Mosaic Law was fulfilled in the death of Christ? What part of it is still in effect today? Are these verses found in the Hebrew poetry section? Are they in the prophecy section? Where in the New Testament is this passage found? Is it in one of the four Gospels? Is it located in Acts? Is it in one of Paul's epistles? Is it in one of the general epistles? Is it found in the book of Revelation? This placement will affect one's handling of the text.

Moreover, where in this book of the Bible is this passage found? Does it teach foundational truth in the opening prologue of the book? Does it assert didactic or polemic truth in its main body? Is it a climactic summation in the book's conclusion? Furthermore, each book in the Bible has a central theme. How does this text support the larger theme of this book? What has been the building argument of this book? What focus immediately precedes these verses? Has the dominant idea of these verses been previously addressed in this book? What is the literary unit in which these verses are found? How does this text contribute to the main idea of this paragraph? The answers to these questions will shed important light upon understanding and interpreting the text.

Identify the Literature

Second, the exegete must identify the type of literature with which his text is written. The form of writing is known as the literary genre. Identifying the genre has a significant effect upon how the text will be approached and interpreted. The entire Bible is not written in one and the same generic literary form. Many different styles of communication are used throughout the Scripture. Each literary classification has its own unique way of recording the truth. In the Bible, the basic forms of literature are narrative, law, song, wisdom, discourse, parable, epistle, and prophecy. Any proper exegetical study requires understanding the nuances of these literary types. Knowing the common traits of each of these categories is essential in rightly interpreting each writing style.

By way of overview, narrative is the recording of an event that occurred within real time and space and involves actual people, places, things, or action. Law includes legal regulations with their preambles, codes, and punishments. Song is written as poetry in stanzas with parallelism and figures of speech. Wisdom contains pithy sayings of general observations of life and



reflections upon it. A discourse contains the sermons delivered by a preacher. A parable is a hypothetical story told to convey one basic truth. An epistle is a letter written to a church, group, or individual. Prophetic literature communicates near and far catastrophic events with rich symbolism. Each literature genre has its own unique features.

Examine the Original

Third, the exegete must also undertake a careful linguistic analysis of his passage. This necessitates studying the biblical text in its original language. The Old Testament was mostly written in Hebrew, with a few chapters in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek, the common language spoken in the ancient Roman Empire. If the expositor is to

TO DETERMINE THE PRECISE MEANING OF KEY WORDS, THE EXPOSITOR MUST PERFORM WORD STUDIES IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE.

rightly interpret his passage, he must study it in these original languages. This requires that the preacher know the original languages. If he does not, he must, at least, be able to access this information through the various study tools available to him. Either way, operating in the original language is a necessary discipline in exegesis.

This begins with the expositor translating his text from the Greek or Hebrew. He may want to compare his translation work with other reputable English translations. He should read his passage in the original language. If he does not have this capacity, he nevertheless must use the available tools that

will enable him to interact with the passage in the original language. One way or another, he must have an awareness of his text with his eye on the original language in which it was written.

To determine the precise meaning of key words, the expositor must perform word studies in the original language. This includes identifying the root word, researching the word's etymology, and supplementing one's understanding with any extra-biblical uses of the term. This also involves knowing what prefix may be added to the root, making it a compound word. Such word studies require discovering the primary and secondary meanings of the word. This necessitates tracing the use of this word by the same author in other passages and how other authors have used this word in Scripture.

The efficiency with which the expositor is able to correctly interpret his passage will be dependent in large measure upon his work in the original language. Operating at this level is not incidental but fundamental to sound exegesis. Further exegetical study in the original languages requires parsing the verb, noting the tenses, moods, voices, and persons. He must give attention to the main verbs and note how the participles modify them and infinitives function. Many other aspects of working in the original language are involved here.

Grasp the Grammar

Fourth, the next essential part of the exegetical process is investigating the grammar of the passage. This involves noting the structure of sentences, specifically the relationships that words have to each other. This involves studying the role that each word plays in a sentence. The expositor must determine what is the subject, verb, and object of the sentence. He must identify the adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. He must discern what each word modifies. He must also note the conjunctions—what they connect and what transitions they form.

In this study of grammar, the exegete must understand the role of nouns and pronouns. What is the gender, case, and number of the word in question? How is it typically, and in this instance, used in sentences? Moreover, he must be aware of prepositional, participial, and infinitival phrases. These phrases are comprised of a small group of related words forming a unit without a verb. Further, the expositor must be aware of the clauses, which are units of words with a subject and verb that forms part of a sentence.

All of these observations about the words in the passage work together to help the exegete understand the full import of their syntax, that is, the arrangement of words and phrases into larger units known as sentences. He can then distinguish between simple, compound, broken, and inverted sentences. The more the expositor can see how each word works and relates to others in the sentence, the more correctly he can interpret it.

Discern the Figures

Fifth, the exegete must interpret any figures of speech found in his passage. These manners of expression communicate the truth of the text with vivid and memorable expressions. Figures of speech are picturesque forms of expression that enable the author to arrest the reader's attention. These poetic terms and phrases are designed to paint pictures on the canvas of people's minds. Rather than simply stating the truth, a figure of speech shows it.

A sampling of the more common figures of speech are as follows: A simile is a direct comparison using "like" or "as." A metaphor compares two realities without "like" or "as." Hypocatastasis compares two things by naming only one of them while implying the other. An allegory is a series of extended metaphors built around a central theme. Metonymy conveys meaning by association. Synecdoche involves a part that stands for the whole. Hyperbole is a deliberate exaggeration. Personification assigns human-like qualities to an inanimate object. Apostrophe addresses a lifeless object as though it is a living person. Anthropomorphism represents God as having a human body. Zoomorphism attributes animal qualities to God. Many more figures of speech are found in the Scripture, but these are just a few examples of the many patterns of speech that an exegete must be attuned to.

Research the History

Sixth, an exegete must study his passage in light of its historical setting. If it is to be rightly interpreted, the background of a passage must be well researched, and various resources must be consulted. A text must never be divorced from the time-space setting in which it was originally written. Most passages involve actual people and real events that occurred in specific places. Understanding the historical background opens up the meaning of the passage in significant ways.

The biblical interpreter must be able to place his selected text within the chronological flow of the larger historical framework. He must ask: Where does this passage fit in the linear progression of redemptive history? What world events affect the significance of this text? What political, military, agricultural, or economic information enhances the understanding of this passage? The preacher must grasp the historical setting of a biblical passage. To do so, he must consult Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and commentaries.

Check the Culture

Seventh, the exegete must also take into consideration the cultural background of his passage. Rightly understanding its meaning requires that he know something of the customs in the ancient Middle East. Without knowledge of the manners and customs of the ancient Jews and the surrounding empires and nations, it will be hard, if not impossible, for him to grasp what many texts actually mean. Consequently, it is incumbent

upon the expositor to view Scripture in light of how the different aspects of daily life were conducted long ago.

This requires an understanding of life on many different levels in Israel, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Asia Minor, Europe. This means researching the political environment of the day. This includes a knowledge of kings, pharaohs, caesars, tetrarchs, and centurions, such as understanding their jurisdiction and how they operated. There must be the knowledge of ancient social customs such as banquets, parties, meals, betrothals, weddings, and funerals. There must be insight into ancient economic policies such as banking practices involving loans and interest rates. There must also be an understanding of ancient military procedures, including battles, chariots, shields, swords, helmets, and the like.

In addition, the exegete must have a working knowledge of the climate conditions and weather in the Middle East. He must have background information concerning the agricultural procedures of ancient farming such as sowing seed, tilling soil, pruning branches, gathering grain, and enduring famines. He must know about the various native flowers of Israel such as myrrh, aloes, and cassia. He must also be acquainted with the minerals indigenous to Israel—brimstone, miry clay, mire, flint, gold, iron, and silver.

Bridging the cultural gap also requires a basic knowledge of zoological life in ancient Israel and the surrounding region. This includes accessing information regarding bees, dogs, badgers, doves, sea monsters, eagles, flies, foxes, sheep, horses, and more. He must also research shepherding practices in ancient Israel, attending to the importance of a flock, fold, gatekeeper, rod, staff, green pastures, still waters, wolves, and the like. In addition, he must know about hunters in the ancient world, who used bow and arrow, sling, snare, net, pit, and more.

Survey the Geography

Eighth, the expositor must study the geography and terrain of Israel and the surrounding regions. The historical accounts of the Bible occurred on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. This diverse terrain with land, sea, and rivers requires careful research. It is necessary to consider a broad range of geographical and topographical features, including mountains, valleys, plateaus, pastures, wildernesses, oceans, seas, rivers, and streams. The expositor must research the full breadth of the geography in which his passage occurred.

This requires a working knowledge of the land and topography in Israel, Egypt, Kadesh Wilderness, Babylon, Assyria, Arabia, Asia Minor, Europe, and many more places. This understanding is essential in grasping a necessary insight into many biblical passages. Also, the exegete must have an understanding of bodies of water such as the Red Sea, Jordan River, Dead Sea, Sea of Galilee, and others. He must also know something of mountains, valleys, deserts, and highlands.

THE EXPOSITOR MUST LABOR IN PRAYER THROUGH HIS STUDY OF THE TEXT AS HE DEPENDS FULLY UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BE HIS DIVINE GUIDE THROUGH THE EXEGESIS. REMEMBER, BROTHERS, OUR EXPOSITIONS WILL RISE NO HIGHER THAN THE DEPTH OF OUR EXEGESIS.

Consequently, the faithful expositor must note the geographical references found in the text if he is to properly grasp the meaning of the text.

Document the Theology

Ninth, the expositor must see the biblical doctrine taught in his passage. The theological truth found within the text must be connected to the larger framework of biblical and systematic theology. Important doctrinal questions must always be asked: What does this passage teach about God? What does it reveal about Jesus Christ? What does it make known about the Holy Spirit? What does the doctrine in this passage contribute to our understanding of angels, Satan, and demons? What instruction do we gain from these verses concerning the truth about man, sin, and salvation? What doctrine is explained regarding the church, Israel, and last things?

The expositor must be a student of biblical theology, which is the doctrine taught in one particular portion of Scripture. It may be the theology of the Old or New Testaments, the theology in one section of one Testament, the theology of one biblical author, or the theology of one book in the Bible. When these areas of biblical theology are combined together into one comprehensive theology, the result is systematic theology. This is the study of each major area of doctrine through the entirety of Scripture. Simply put, systematic theology is the discipline that attempts to arrange the doctrinal content of Scripture in an orderly and coherent fashion.

To rightly interpret his passage, the exegete must have a working knowledge of theology. He must see his passage in

light of the overall theology of the entire Bible. Knowing biblical and systematic theology will be a governing factor in interpreting what this particular text is teaching. Every passage must be consistent with what the rest of the Bible teaches. The Bible always speaks with one voice and never contradicts itself.

Exegesis in Expository Preaching

Each of these nine aspects of exegesis is essential in rightly interpreting Scripture. If the expositor is to plunge to the depths of his passage and find the pearls that lay in his text, he must pursue each of these areas of exegesis. Without practicing each of these aspects, the preacher will easily devolve into allegorizing, moralizing, or spiritualizing his text. He will even be vulnerable to psychologizing or editorializing the passage to fit his whims. Proper exegesis is absolutely necessary for expository preaching. These skills are not mastered completely at one setting, but are built up and learned over a lifetime of ministry. The expositor must labor in prayer through his study of the text as he depends fully upon the Holy Spirit to be his divine guide through the exegesis. Remember, brothers, our expositions will rise no higher than the depth of our exegesis. ♦



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THE GOALS OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

JOHN PIPER



It is an awesome thing to confess that in the Bible we hear the Word of God. And there is no hope for the exegete who never trembles in his trade; God has no regard for him, and he will come to nothing, though he write a thousand books.

I believe that the Bible is God's Word. Therefore, I must define the ultimate goal of exegesis so as to embrace the heart as well as the head. The Scriptures aim to affect our hearts and change the way we feel about God and His will.

The exegete, who believes that this aim is the aim of the living God for our day, cannot be content with merely uncovering what the Scriptures originally meant. He must aim, in his exegesis, to help achieve the ultimate goal of Scripture: its contemporary significance for faith. It is the will of God that His Word crush feelings of arrogance and self-reliance and that it give hope to the poor in spirit.

“The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may sustain with a word him that is weary” (Isaiah 50:4).

Exegesis that does not sooner or later touch our emotions, and through us, the emotions of others, is ultimately a failure, because it does not mediate the effect which the Scripture ought to have.

“Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by the steadfastness and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

Therefore, Biblical exegesis should be the intellectual enzyme that transforms the stupor of our worldly and futile affections into a deep and glad and living hope. Jesus said: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy

may be full” (John 15:11).

Biblical scholarship that does not share this goal works ill in two ways: by extinguishing in some people the flickers of affection with a frigid indifference and by alienating those whose candles will not go out. But neither of these is necessary if biblical exegesis is handled for what it really is, the cognitive catalyst that triggers a combustion of divine joy in the human heart. Theology very quickly becomes idle chatter if it does not give birth in the heart to doxology. There is no reason why the most rigorous biblical scholar cannot and should not say with Jonathan Edwards:

I should think myself in the way of my duty, to raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can, provided they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.

Of course, defining the ultimate goals of biblical exegesis in this way assumes that the exegete is convinced that the Scriptures do mediate truth. However, many exegetes do not share this conviction. The goal I have described so far does not apply to them. That is why I described it as an ultimate goal.

There is a more immediate goal that I as an evangelical share with all good exegetes whether they believe the Scriptures are true or not. We both want to understand and state accurately what the original biblical authors willed to communicate. A person who has no vested interest in confessing the Bible’s truth may be able, in any given case, to understand and restate the meaning of the original author as accurately as an exegete who believes the Bible is true. This is why we can make profitable use of biblical scholarship from all sorts of people. I add this note to avoid confusion: the goals I am describing are those that I think should be set in view of my conviction of the Bible’s truth. As such they are different from, yet overlapping with, the goals of exegetes who do not share this conviction.

The Intellect

I referred to exegesis as an intellectual enzyme and a cognitive catalyst. This means that the exegete is inevitably somewhat of an intellectual. He is very much occupied with the life of the mind. The most obvious reason for this is that the truth he cherishes comes to him in a divinely inspired book. But a book must be read, and good reading is an intensely intellectual act.

An evangelical believes that God humbled Himself not only in the incarnation of the Son, but also in the inspiration of the Scriptures. The manger and the cross were not sensational. Neither are grammar and syntax. But that is how God chose to reveal Himself. A poor Jewish peasant and a prepositional phrase have this in common: they are both human and both ordinary. That the poor peasant was God and the prepositional phrase is the Word of God does not change this fact. Therefore, if God humbled Himself to take on human flesh and to speak human language, woe to us if we arrogantly presume to ignore the humanity of Christ and the grammar of Scripture.

But it is not enough to say that God’s revelation in Scripture comes to us in human language. It comes in the language of particular humans in particular times and places. There are no distinctively divine language conventions. That is, when God spoke through men, He

did not always use the same language or the same style or the same vocabulary. Rather, all the evidence points to the fact that God always availed Himself of the language, style, vocabulary, and peculiar usages of individual biblical writers. Even in the prophetic speeches where God is directly quoted, there are language traits that distinguish one author from another.

The implications of this for setting our goal in exegesis are crucial. Let me illustrate. In view of this conception of inspiration, if we want to construe what God intends by the word “wisdom” in James 1:5, we do not import the meaning of “wisdom” from Proverbs 8. That is, we do not assume that

**"THIS IS THE MAN
UPON WHOM I
WILL LOOK, HE
THAT IS HUMBLE
AND CONTRITE
IN SPIRIT, AND
TREMBLES AT
MY WORD."**

ISAIAH 66:2

since these two uses of “wisdom” have the same divine author, they will likely have the same meaning. Rather, we recognize that since God avails Himself of the language conventions of His individual revelatory spokesmen, we would do better to go to James 3:15 to see how James employs the word “wisdom,” and thus discover God’s intention.

I conclude, therefore, that God’s meaning in Scripture is only accessible through the particular language conventions of the various human authors. My belief in inspiration, therefore, is a belief that to grasp what these human authors willed to communicate in their particular historical situation is also to grasp God’s own intention for that situation. Consequently, the most immediate goal of exegesis is to understand what the biblical authors willed to communicate in their situation. The goal is to see reality through another person’s eyes.

This has two further implications.

For those who think the Bible is infallible and authoritative in matters of faith and practice, good exegesis becomes a very humbling task. It demands that our own ideas take second place. The way we feel and think about life is restrained as we allow ourselves to listen to what the author feels and thinks. Good exegesis becomes a threat to our pride. By it, we run the risk of honestly discovering that the prophetic and apostolic view of life is different from our own, so that our view—and with it our pride—must crumble.

Can we fallen creatures, who proudly love our own glory so much, ever do good exegesis? Will we not use every connivance to hide our ignorance or rebellion? Will we not twist and distort the meaning of Scripture so that it always supports our own view and our own ego? We all know this happens every day. But must it always happen?

It is precisely at this point that I believe the Holy Spirit performs a crucial role in the exegetical process for the reliant believer. He does not whisper in our ears the meaning of a text. He cares about the text which He inspired and does not short circuit the study of it. The primary work of the Holy Spirit in exegesis is to abolish the pride and arrogance that keep us from being open to the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit makes us teachable because He makes us humble. He causes us

to rely wholly on the mercy of God in Christ for our happiness so that we are not threatened if one of our views is found to be wrong. The person who knows himself finite and unworthy, and who thus rejoices in the mercy of God, has nothing to lose when his ego is threatened.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is crucial for exegesis. Love seeks not its own; is not puffed up. On the contrary, love rejoices in the truth. This is the mark of the good exegete. He seeks not his own; he seeks the truth. If the truth he finds conflicts with his own idea, he rejoices to have found the truth and humbly acknowledges that his own thinking is wrong.

The Holy Spirit makes possible the exhilarating experience of growth. Only the open, humble mind truly grows in understanding. The proud mind is more interested in protecting itself than in expanding and correcting itself. It must therefore stay small. Arrogant people are always little people. Humble people look little, but they are inheriting the whole world. So, while good exegesis is humbling, it is also tremendously enlarging. It reduces us to our true finiteness, so that we may see and enjoy the magnificent eternal truth revealed in the Scripture.

A second implication which follows from our goal in exegesis is that exegesis involves what all reading involves, namely, the intellectual and often tedious work of construing an author’s language conventions. To become a good exegete means simply to continue refining the skill we began to learn at the age of three. Then we struggled with, “Sally’s hair is curled.” Now we struggle with, “God so loved the world.” Then we asked our mommy what “curled” means. Now we use concordances and commentaries.

God has spoken to us in written, human languages. We cannot grasp the meaning of language unless we understand the language conventions which a biblical author employed. Therefore, we must make every effort to deal with the Bible grammatically (and historically, since an author’s specific use of language is determined by his situation in history).

This article is excerpted from John Piper’s booklet “Biblical Exegesis,” available at desiringGod.org





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INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE BY SCRIPTURE

MICHAEL S. HORTON





As Paul reminded Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is [therefore] useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16, *esv*)—all Scripture, not just our “life verses.”

At the same time, the Westminster Confession properly reminds us that not everything in Scripture is equally plain or equally important. We have to interpret the more difficult passages in the light of clearer ones. Scripture interprets Scripture, and we learn the whole meaning of Scripture by studying its parts and its parts by learning the whole. You need the box top and the puzzle pieces.

Of course, there is disagreement about which verses are “difficult” and which are “clear,” as well as which are more important. I think we’d all agree that the meaning of Christ’s descent into hell is less clear and less important than His incarnation, active and passive obedience, resurrection, ascension, and return. Nevertheless, on a host of other points, the roads diverge. Most evangelicals would place church government in the “Who Cares?” category. Far from being at the core of the faith, such a view was at least important enough to divide the Reformed tradition over Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational polities. For Eastern Orthodoxy, episcopacy is essential to the very existence of the church, and Rome takes it one step further, insisting on the primacy of the bishop of Rome.

Even when it comes to the gospel, there are quite different assumptions at play. Eastern Orthodox churches think that the clear and important passages emphasize *theosis*—a process of being conformed to Christ-likeness that leads to final salvation

through a combination of grace and free will. Roman Catholics have traditionally maintained that the clear and important passages teach the reconciliation of humanity in the church through its management of the treasury of merit.

Arminians think that the clear and important passages teach the primacy of God's love (over other attributes), the universality of grace, and the libertarian free will of human beings. While Reformed theology never teaches God's sovereignty (predestination) as a central dogma from which every other doctrine is deduced, the love of God and a libertarian view of free will do function that way in standard Arminian systems. Arminians often acknowledge a stand-off: Calvinists enshrine God's sovereignty and predestination, while they make God's universal love and human freedom normative. "You have your verses and we have ours" is the oft-heard shrug that can only weaken the believer's confidence in the unity, consistency, and reliability of Scripture.

Truth be told, we don't have "our verses," and they don't have "their verses." God has "His verses," and therefore all of them belong to "us." If we have "our verses," then not even these teach what we think they do. After all, Scripture interprets Scripture, and if we feel compelled to embrace some passages over others in order to maintain consistency, we haven't really understood "our verses."

Arminian theologians Clark Pinnock and John Sanders share the presupposition that all of God's attributes are subservient to His love and that His purpose is to save every person. In fact, Pinnock recognizes that these theses function as presuppositions or "axioms" by which exegesis must be tested. For example, from Arminian premises Pinnock defends "inclusivism": the view that even apart from explicit faith in Christ, people are saved if they respond to the light they have been given. He adds, "I agree that inclusivism is not a central topic of discussion in the Bible and that the evidence for it is less than one would like. But the vision of God's love there is so strong that the existing evidence seems sufficient to me." Here Pinnock seems to admit that a general principle trumps the weak exegetical support of his position. The box top is more important than the pieces of the puzzle.

For hyper-Calvinists, God's sovereignty trumps other attributes, and predestination often marginalizes or even cancels out other passages that seem equally clear and important. For example, although Scripture just as clearly and emphatically teaches the universality of God's external call through the gospel, God's gracious care for all creatures, and the missionary imperative, hyper-Calvinists simply repeat the "TULIP" passages instead of seriously incorporating the whole teaching of Scripture into their faith and practice. For others, "Reformed" means transformation of every cultural sphere, even when that means marginalizing or even downplaying the soteriological questions that are at the heart of the Reformed confession. More recently, some argue that "union

with Christ," not predestination, is the central dogma of Reformed theology. "Central dogma," however, has a particular meaning. It's a thesis from which everything else is deduced, rather than a central teaching that emerges inductively from the whole teaching of Scripture.

In the history of Lutheran theology, justification has sometimes functioned as a central dogma that downplays or even contradicts other clear and important teachings of Scripture. Radicalizing Luther's call to privilege in Scripture "whatever preaches Christ," many liberal Protestants advanced a "canon-within-a-canon" hermeneutic. We need not accept everything in Scripture, but only that which proclaims Christ. Even in confessional Lutheranism, one may sometimes discern a tendency not only to give proper weight to the Bible's own testimony to justification, but to treat it as a central dogma from which all other biblical teachings are deduced.

Some conservative evangelicals treat creationism and a literalistic hermeneutic in this manner, with strict dispensationalists reading the Bible primarily as a series of predictions concerning present-day Israel, Armageddon, and a literal millennium. At least in the older version, dominated by the Scofield Study Bible, the seven-dispensation scheme becomes a grid into which all of Scripture is pressed.

The Forest and the Trees

On one hand, there is the danger of missing the forest for the trees. Treating the Bible as a catalogue of timeless principles, doctrines, and proverbs, some expositors assume that they are just restating the Bible in so many words. A noted pastor once told me, "When I'm preaching through the Sermon on the Mount, I sound like a legalist; when I'm preaching through Galatians, I sound like an antinomian." Although this sounds like fidelity to the text—wherever it leads us—it is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it's naive. No one comes to the Bible without presuppositions. We all have some doctrinal framework we have acquired over years of studying the Bible together with other believers in a similar doctrinal background. Second, this assumption undermines confidence in the unity of Scripture. Jesus did not teach legalism and Paul did not teach antinomianism. As an apostle commissioned with the authority of Jesus Himself and writing under the Spirit's inspiration, Paul's message is Christ's message. If we interpret the Sermon on the Mount as something completely unrelated (much less, contradictory) to Galatians, then we haven't gotten either right.

Many of us were raised in churches where the pastor boasted that it took him years to get through one book. This is the glory of expository preaching, we were told. But is that a good way to read a story? The historical books of the Old Testament and the gospels of the New provide the overarching narrative within which the laws and doctrines make sense. The Epistles are, well, epistles: letters that were addressed to a



particular church (or group of churches) and were generally read aloud as such in public worship. We get a lot out of these letters when we hear them read in their entirety, yet it's also important to unpack the rich content week by week—always bringing our people back to the basic argument. Typically, the historical books and the gospels have a storyline and the epistles have an argument (or series of arguments). But in this verse-by-verse approach, both the plot and the arguments can be easily lost to atomistic exegesis.

On the other hand, there is a danger of turning a legitimate—even important—biblical motif or doctrine into a central dogma from which we deduce everything else. This is missing the trees for the forest. If the danger in the first view is to focus on the pieces of the puzzle without the box top (a broader biblical and systematic theology), this view suffers from a tendency to marginalize or even ignore important aspects of “the whole counsel of God.”

Scripture is a canon. Although it is properly said that the Bible is more of a library than a book, because of its diverse genres and authorship spread over many times and places, there is a unity inherent within the Bible. We do not impose this unity on Scripture from without. We do not force the pieces to fit, even though deep down we might think that they are contradictory. Scripture is inherently unified in its basic plot and teachings. And yet, revelation follows redemption. It keeps pace with the history of God's unfolding plan. Neither the unity nor the diversity is sacrificed to the other.

The Bible not only has diverse genres; it was written by diverse human authors “at many times and in many ways” (Heb 1:1, esv). Because inspiration is organic rather than mechanical, Scripture reflects the humanity as well as the divinity of its authorship. Galatians is not just a restatement of the Sermon on the Mount. Yet both are part of the same new covenant canon. Therefore, they have to be interpreted together.

When we do this, we discover more richly what each actually means. In Galatians, Paul is talking about the difference between the covenant of law (Sinai) that points forward to Christ by types and shadows, and the Abrahamic covenant

of promise that is realized in Christ as the seed in whom all the nations are blessed. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is announcing a regime change, as the old covenant theocracy (including its holy wars) gives way to a new society of forgiven and blessed heirs who endure persecution and love their enemies for Christ's sake. Jesus and Paul are drawing us into exactly the same reality of the kingdom of grace, though Jesus does so as its inaugurator and Paul does so as an apostle, exploring the ramifications within the unfolding plan of God in history.

Restless and Reformed: Predestination/God's Sovereignty

Since the “central dogma” thesis cuts across traditions, I might as well start with my own. Richard Muller and other scholars have systematically dismantled the idea that predestination operates as a central dogma in Reformed theology. In fact, these historical theologians demonstrate that no doctrine functions like that in the Reformed system.

Nineteenth century historical theology was especially drawn to the “Great Idea” approach: locating a central dogma from which everything else in the system could be deduced, explained, and contrasted with rival systems. Of course, Calvin defended an Augustinian doctrine of God's sovereignty and predestination when exegetical and polemical occasion required. This emphasis, however, can hardly be considered a central dogma from which the whole system is deduced, especially when it is not even mentioned in his summary of the Christian faith (the Geneva Catechism). Nevertheless, God's sovereignty and predestination became a way of explaining or criticizing Calvin and Reformed theology, by friend and foe alike. By contrast, the entire Lutheran system was allegedly deduced from the doctrine of the justification of the ungodly.

Especially in cases of fresh discovery, it's understandable that God's sovereign grace swallows our whole horizon. It changes everything. We begin to see passages we had overlooked before. It's a paradigm shift. But that's exactly why we have to be careful at just that point: a paradigm can arise naturally from a fresh reading of Scripture or it can be imposed upon Scripture from without. For example, if one has been

raised to believe that salvation depends on the individual's free will, predestination reasserts God's freedom. God is free to elect and to condemn. But is this merely because God is sovereign? Of course not. There is a kind of teaching of the sovereignty of God that is close to an arbitrary portrait. No, in Scripture we learn that God is free to elect whom He will and to condemn the rest because everyone deserves condemnation. In other words, God's sovereignty cannot be separated from His justice and righteousness—or from any other attribute, including His love. Just as we can't use one passage or list of verses to cancel out others in Scripture, we cannot enshrine one attribute of God above others. There is a real danger in worshipping an attribute rather than God Himself.

When predestination is made the central dogma, Christianity becomes indistinguishable from Islam. I've seen and heard a few hyper-Calvinist presentations that extolled the sovereignty of God without ever mentioning Jesus Christ. And yet, Calvin said that it is only in Christ that we find our election. I have also heard presentations in which God's activity in condemnation was treated as equivalent to His activity in salvation. This, however, ignores the clear biblical teaching that God has chosen some to be saved from the mass of condemned humanity. There are lots of passages that celebrate God's mercy in electing grace. But God is praised as directly and solely responsible for the salvation of the elect, not as directly and solely responsible for the condemnation of the nonelect. That is why the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618–19)—from which we get the so-called “five points of Calvinism”—affirm that “Reformed churches detest with their whole

heart” the view that God is as involved in damnation as He is in salvation. When predestination or the sovereignty of God is made the foundation on which we build a skyscraper of a theological system, we end up picking out some passages of Scripture to stand over others in judgment. It becomes a canon within a canon. This is something Reformed orthodoxy never allowed.

Critics, however, may be forgiven for thinking otherwise. First, there is a growing tendency right now to reduce Reformed theology to the five points of Calvinism. Sometimes the impression is given that anyone who believes in predestination is Reformed. Of course, that would make Thomas Aquinas as Reformed as R. C. Sproul! However, these “five points” are themselves a summary of the Canons of Dort, which are much richer and fuller than that summary. Furthermore, the Canons were drawn up by Reformed Christians on the Continent (with representatives from the Church of England) as a refutation of Arminianism. They serve along with the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism as a standard for Reformed faith and practice, subordinate to Scripture. The Westminster Standards confess the same faith. Whenever the whole counsel of God is reduced to a few “fundamentals,” we lose the richness and depth of those very doctrines. Furthermore, when these doctrines are isolated from the broader system of faith and practice, they easily yield to one-sided emphases.

Second, critics often paint Calvinism as hyper-Calvinism. And, unfortunately, they may actually encounter people who embody this caricature. Falling into extremes is always a

JUST AS WE CAN'T USE ONE PASSAGE OR LIST OF VERSES TO CANCEL OUT OTHERS IN SCRIPTURE, WE CANNOT ENSHRINE ONE ATTRIBUTE OF GOD ABOVE OTHERS. THERE IS A REAL DANGER IN WORSHIPPING AN ATTRIBUTE RATHER THAN GOD HIMSELF.

temptation for new converts. There are popular versions on the ground that do make God's sovereignty or predestination the center of Scripture. Of course, we have to interpret Scripture in the light of Scripture. It may be confusing for some people to read verses like this alongside other equally clear passages concerning God's unconditional election. The problem, however, lies with us. The Spirit who inspired "all Scripture" employs the richly diverse voices of different biblical writers—each with his own personality, style, and even beliefs—while nevertheless teaching a unified message. God indeed knows how to communicate "at many times and in many ways," yet without contradiction. So we must beware of flattening out biblical teaching, as if it taught only one truth or even concentrated on one truth. At the same time, we have to be careful not to turn diversity into contradiction.

Just as often these days, neophyte Calvinists have begun to realize the wealth of classical Reformed emphasis on union with Christ. Perhaps this, rather than predestination, is the central dogma. Among others, such as Max Goebel, Matthias Schneckenburger (1804–48) was particularly successful in defining Reformed Christianity as the champion of union with Christ over and against the Lutheran emphasis on forensic justification. This is sometimes used to critique or reevaluate the *ordo salutis* by contemporary Reformed thinkers.

Surely, if there is any central dogma in Scripture, it is Christ. However, not even Christ's person and work function as a central dogma. There is an important difference between the centrality of Christ's person and work in Scripture and a central dogma. A central dogma is a thesis from which everything else is deduced. Such a dogma may even be biblical. But when it functions as a central dogma, it distorts instead of illuminating everything around it.

Reformed exegesis does not start with predestination, the sovereignty of God, justification, or union with Christ. Its system arises from Scripture rather than being imposed upon Scripture. It does not, however, pretend merely to interpret individual passages apart from an account of the Bible's own broader motifs. There are three hermeneutical (interpretive) motifs that we believe arise naturally from the Scriptures themselves: a law-gospel distinction, redemptive-historical exegesis centering on Christ, and a covenantal scheme.

Law and Gospel

When law and gospel function as a central dogma, every sermon—regardless of the passage—sounds the same. Somehow, the sermon has to conform to "Here's how you've blown it" and "Here's how Christ saves you." As preaching goes, this may not be the worst thing in the world, but it is not itself an exposition of Scripture.

The Reformers affirmed the importance of distinguishing between law and gospel. It is one of those basic distinctions that a preacher or reader of Scripture must bear in mind when

coming to any passage. Nevertheless, it is the passage that must be interpreted. We are not exegeting the categories of law and gospel but the Scriptures in the light of that important distinction.

The third use of the law (to guide believers) is affirmed in the Lutheran as well as Reformed confessions. Our preaching and reading of Scripture should not be embarrassed by the calls in Scripture to wise and grateful living. Sometimes, imperatives die the death of a thousand qualifications, worried as we understandably are that imperatives can lead to self-righteousness or despair. I've been reading through Proverbs in family devotions, and while there are remarkable places where Christ is personified as Wisdom, a lot of the book is simply wisdom for daily living. We have to beware of overreacting against one form of reductionism (using the Bible as a handbook for daily principles), only to fall into another form (ignoring its wisdom for daily living). Always bearing the proper distinction between law and gospel, aware that each does different things, we nevertheless need to listen to every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Redemptive-Historical Interpretation

The same can be said of looking for Christ in all the Scriptures. This has become something of a mantra in Reformed as well as in Lutheran circles. Wilhelm Niesel observes:

Reformed theology, just like Lutheran, knows that it is God's Word which addresses us from the Bible and produces faith and that this Word is Christ Himself. But this address does not become an experience within our control on the basis of which we can read through the Bible and test whether it "sets forth Christ." Calvin read the whole Bible expecting to find Christ there.

Again, this healthy emphasis can become a distortion when it is the focus of exegesis rather than an interpretive lens.

Sometimes we are bewildered by the diversity of the Bible, wondering how Leviticus or Esther bears any relation to the Gospel of Matthew or to Romans. What is the thread that pulls together all of the narratives, laws and wisdom, prophecy, poetry, instruction, and exhortation? There really is a unifying message from Genesis to Revelation, and it is Christ who brings all of the threads together. When we read the Bible in the light of its plot, things begin to fall into place. Behind every story, piece of wisdom, hymn, exhortation, and prophecy is the unfolding mystery of Christ and His redemptive work.

Jesus Himself told us how to read the Bible—all of it. The Pharisees were the guardians of the Bible. For their followers, they were its authoritative interpreters. Yet for them the Bible was primarily a story about Sinai: the covenant that Israel

CHRIST IS THE THREAD THAT WEAVES TOGETHER ALL OF THE VARIOUS STRANDS OF BIBLICAL REVELATION.

pledged to fulfill all of the commands of His law. It was not the subplot—the “schoolmaster” leading to Christ, as Paul described—but the main thing. When the Messiah finally arrived, He would drive out the Romans and reinstitute the Jewish theocracy. The Messiah was a means to an end, not—as Paul called Christ—“the end of the law.”

Jesus Himself told the religious leaders, “You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39, ESV). Jesus taught His disciples to read the whole Bible (at that point, the Old Testament) in terms of promise and fulfillment, with Himself as the central character (Luke 24:25–27; 44–45). No matter how well they had memorized certain Bible verses or how quickly they could recall key moments in Israel’s history, the Bible was a mystery to them before Jesus explained it as His story.

Christ is the thread that weaves together all of the various strands of biblical revelation. Apart from Him, the plot falls apart into a jumble of characters, unrelated stories, inexplicable laws, and confusing prophecies. The disciples finally seemed to understand this point, since the gospel went from Jerusalem to the Gentile world through their witness. Even Peter, who had denied Christ three times, was able later to write as an apostle:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he pre-

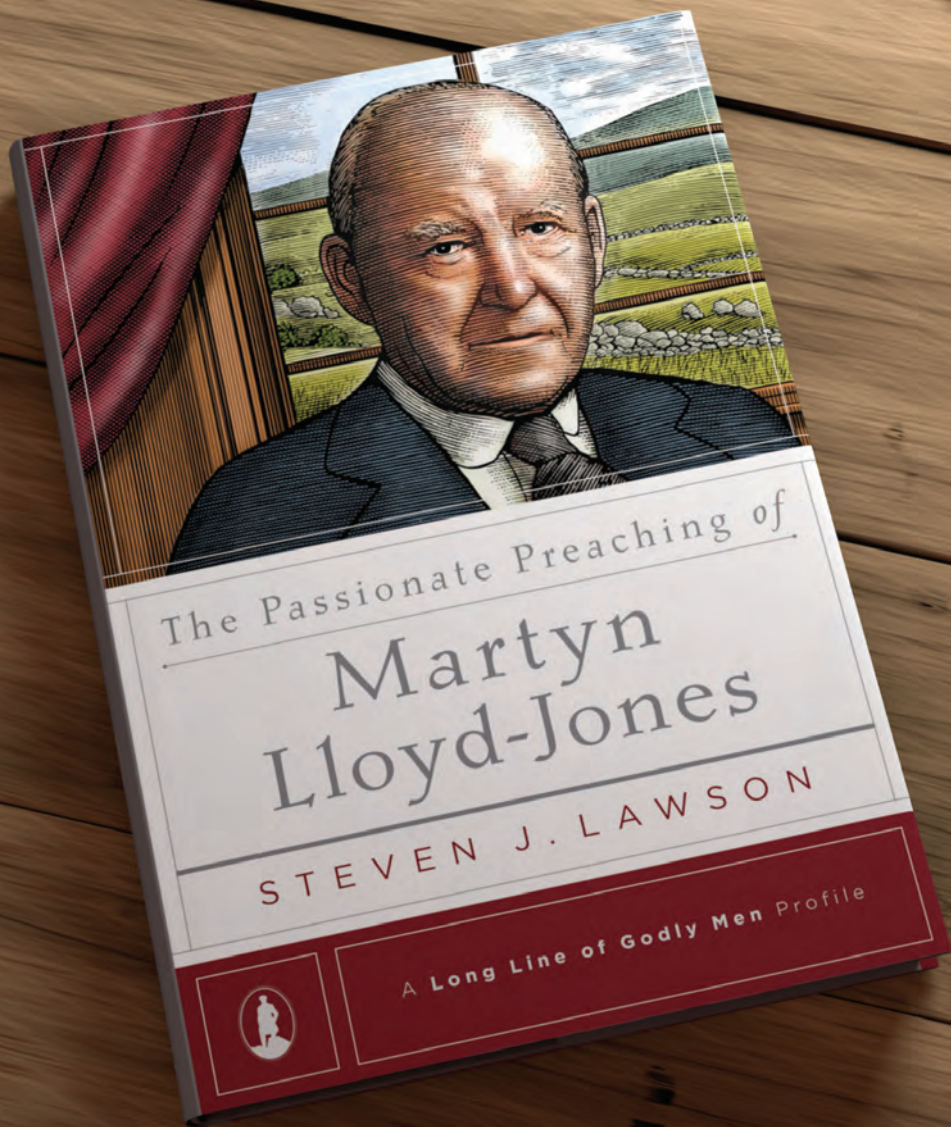
dicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Peter 1:10–12, ESV)

God’s eternal Son is present at the beginning of the story at creation (John 1:1–3; Col 1:15–20). He is the Rock struck in the wilderness for Israel’s sins (1 Cor. 10:4). And in the Bible’s closing book He is God’s last Word, too: “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17–18, ESV). In the heavenly scene, only the Lamb was able to open the scroll containing the revelation of all of history: “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’ And everyone in heaven fell down before the Lamb in worship” (Rev 5:9–14, ESV). That is the goal of God’s good news.

Many of us were raised in churches that didn’t quite know what to do with the Old Testament, except perhaps to find moral examples: “Dare to be a Daniel!” When we read the Bible in the light of the unfolding plot of redemption around Christ, otherwise unrelated books become a unified canon. Nevertheless, as with law and gospel, a redemptive-historical approach can sometimes turn every sermon into the same sermon. Regardless of the passage, the message is basically creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Ironically, the very goal of redemptive-historical preaching is not met, because believers are not led to see how this passage fits within the broader history of God’s purposes in Christ.

There is therefore no “canon within a canon”—all Scripture is God-breathed and therefore useful (that is, canonical) for norming the church’s faith and practice. We need the box top and the pieces, the forest and the trees. In fact, it’s the pieces that make up the puzzle and the trees that make up the forest. We need to recover our confidence that the Father who inspired these texts by His Spirit, with His Son as its central content, is Lord of the parts and of the whole. ♦

This article was originally published and is taken with permission from: “Interpreting Scripture,” *Modern Reformation*, July/August 2010, Vol. 19, No. 4, 10–15. modernreformation.org



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THE
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JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES, PT. 2

John 17:6–10

The disciples were infinitely precious to Jesus, not because of anything intrinsically valuable in them, but because they were promised to Him by His Father before time began. As the next few hours would prove, Jesus considered the Father's gift so precious He was willing to die to receive it. In addition to recognizing that they were a gift from His Father, the Lord also described the disciples as those who have kept the Father's Word. That statement introduces the element of obedience essential to salvation.

That obedience, of course, is not a meritorious work that contributes something to salvation, but is rather the inevitable result of genuine saving faith. Thus, to say that the disciples had obeyed the Father's Word is merely another way of expressing that their faith was genuine.

The New Testament inseparably joins saving faith and obedience, so much so that obedience is often used as a synonym for faith. It is also the sure mark of sincere love for Jesus Christ. The disciples, then, were among those who kept the Word that had been revealed to them. From the heart, they had responded in genuine faith to the truth they had received. At the same time, Scripture recognizes that they had done so because they were a gift from the Father to the Son, having been among those whom He sovereignly chose in eternity past and effectually called in time for salvation.

The rest of this section (vv. 7–10) builds on those inseparable twin truths. Having summarized them in verse 6, Jesus continued to explain why He knew the Father would grant His requests regarding the disciples: because they had believed in Him as the Son (vv. 7–8) and because they were a gift to Him from the Father (vv. 9–10).

Though they had been with Jesus for several years, it was not until now that His disciples were beginning to truly understand the mission His Father had given Him. It would still be a few days until Christ arose, when they would begin to fully grasp the reasons Jesus had to die. Yet they clearly believed that Jesus was whom He claimed to be, that He came from the Father, and that He alone spoke the words of eternal life. As Jesus had already stated in verse 6, they had kept His Word and thus had proven to be His true disciples.

The content of the disciples' faith offers further proof of its genuineness. Though before the cross there was still much that they did not grasp, they sincerely believed the truths they did understand (in contrast to the false faith of many others).

The eleven had come to know first of all, as Jesus said to the Father in John 17:7, that "everything You have given Me is from You" (a statement that again highlights His intimacy with and dependence on the Father). The disciples believed that Jesus worked by the power of God and did everything according to His Father's will. This was in contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, who accused Jesus of operating through the power of Satan. Such conclusions, as Christ Himself pointed out, were not only blasphemous and unforgivable but foolish, since Satan would never empower someone to further the work of God (vv. 25–29).

The disciples, of course, knew the truth. They had seen Jesus' miracles, which were marked by divine compassion; they had heard Jesus' sermons, which pierced the heart with divine authority; they had seen Jesus pray, knowing that He spent long hours in communion with His Father; they had watched Jesus minister to sinners, and yet never sin Himself; they had even witnessed the Father's visible and audible approval of His Son. They knew that He came from God, and as a result, they followed Him wholeheartedly.

The disciples likewise believed that the words which the Father gave to Jesus were true. Jesus had given those words to them, and they received them by both affirming them and subsequently acting upon them. They truly understood Christ's divine origin, that He came forth from the Father. They also believed in His divine mission, that the Father had sent Him into the world. They had come to realize what John's prologue articulates: that He is the Son of God, equal in essence and eternally coexistent with the Father (1:1–2), the Creator of all things (1:3), and the source of eternal life and spiritual light (1:4). They recognized the glory of the Word made flesh, and knew that it was "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). Soon they would also understand the wonders of His death and resurrection. Those realizations were revolutionary for the disciples.

After Pentecost, the proof of their faith would be demonstrated in dramatic ways, as they boldly proclaimed Jesus as Lord to all who would listen. Though they suffered severe persecution and (for nearly all of them) martyrdom, the disciples would not abandon what they knew to be true. Even the threat of death could not undermine the undying conviction that God had placed within them. The saving faith they were given was enduring by its very nature.

Through their obedience, they demonstrated that they were among those whom the Father had elected as a love gift for His Son. Their works did not save them, but they did evidence that true saving faith was alive in their hearts. The Bible teaches that God will certainly bring to glorification all those whom He predestined in eternity past. It also teaches that those whom God has truly chosen will respond in faith to the gospel, and will also persevere in the truth to the end.

On the one hand, this perseverance requires diligent ef-

THE SUPREME GOAL OF EVERYTHING A CHRISTIAN DOES IS TO BRING GOD GLORY. BELIEVERS ARE TO REFLECT CHRIST'S GLORY IN A WORLD OF DARKNESS.

fort on the part of believers. On the other hand, it is a work that God ultimately does through believers. In fact, all of the Christian life (including the desire to pursue godliness) is a result of God's grace. As those who had received, believed, and persevered in the truth, the disciples proved themselves to be among God's elect. Of the twelve, only Judas Iscariot was not chosen, betraying the Lord "so that the Scripture would be fulfilled" (John 19:36).

Because they had responded with belief, and demonstrated the genuineness of that faith through their continued obedience, the disciples showed evidence of what Jesus had always known to be true of them and said earlier—that they had been chosen out of the world by the Father as a gift for Him. This then provides the second and ultimate reason why Jesus was confident that the Father would grant His prayer for the disciples; the Father would be sure to protect and purify them because they were His gift to His Son. By reiterating that

He was asking exclusively on behalf of those whom the Father had given Him, Jesus made it clear that He did not ask on behalf of the world. Rather, He was asking on behalf of His own, who remained in the world after He had left.

It is true that God shows a kind of love to all people in the world (what theologians call common grace), even to those who reject the gospel. He pleads with sinners to repent, extends the gospel invitation to them, "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45). But Christ's intercessory work as High Priest is only for those who belong eternally to Him because they have been given by the Father. In fact, the only recorded instance in the New Testament of Christ praying for the unregenerate is His cry from the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

That prayer is a model for believers, who are to "love [their] enemies and pray for those who persecute [them]" (Matt 5:44; 2 Tim 2:26). But the unredeemed world was not His interest in this prayer. His attention was on those whom the Father had given to Him and for whom He was about to die to provide atonement—that they would be protected from the world, especially during the immediate events surrounding His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Jesus' statement in John 17:10, "they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine" underscored His confidence in the fact that the eleven belonged to God. Like the disciples, all believers belong to the Father, having been adopted into His family through the Son and sealed and cleansed by the Holy Spirit.

Since the Father and the Son have all things in common, believers also belong to Christ. Those who belong to the Father belong to the Son, and vice versa. The Lord further noted that He had been glorified in them. Even now, their faith in Him as the Son of God brought Him glory. Here then Christ gives testimony that the gift of faith given to the disciples enabled them to recognize and to confess Him even in His state of self-humiliation.

After His ascension, Christ's glory would continue to be displayed on earth through His followers even in His absence. That request was in perfect harmony with the Father's purpose—to give the Son a redeemed humanity who would glorify Him forever.

The supreme goal of everything a Christian does is to bring God glory. Believers are to reflect Christ's glory in a world of darkness. The desire to glorify Christ will continue into all of eternity, as believers join with angels in magnifying and exalting the Son forever. That the disciples (and all other believers) could be changed from rebellious lovers of this world into sanctified worshipers and glorifiers of God is the miracle of God's grace in salvation.

Though regeneration takes place at a moment in time, it is a miracle that was planned in eternity past and that has unending implications for eternity future. All believers (in-

cluding the eleven disciples) were chosen and claimed by the Father before the world began and promised to the Son as a tangible expression of His infinite love. That is the divine side of salvation. The human side is persevering faith and obedience, by which the disciples had demonstrated that they truly belonged to God.

Believers at all times can be likewise assured that they are truly saved. Objectively, that assurance comes from the Bible's promise that anyone who sincerely embraces Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be saved (Rom 10:9–10). Subjectively, that confidence stems from the fruit of enduring faith and continuing obedience in a person's life no matter what the temptation or test. Hear the powerful words of Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to

result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3–9)

Like the eleven, all true disciples of Christ abide in His Word and lovingly obey His commands. Such behavior is only possible because their hearts have been changed by God, who has drawn them to the Son and regenerated them through the Spirit.

Ensuring the preservation of the disciples' faith is a divine work that the Lord does by His power. Nothing can separate His own from His love, and He is willing and "able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

In the face of His absence in sin-bearing, though only for a few hours, Jesus proceeded to ask the Father to take up the protection of those whom He had given to Him. Yet, in making that request, Jesus expressed absolute certainty that the Father would do what He asked. His confidence was not in the disciples' steadfastness or ingenuity, but in the love and power of His Father. He knew that what the Father had promised in eternity past He would certainly accomplish and ensure in the present. ✦



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SO WHAT?: HOMILETICAL ANALYSIS

DAVID P. MURRAY



We've all heard them. Sadly, many of us have preached them: sermons that leave our hearers asking the title of this article, "So what?"

Engaging introduction, sensitive contextualization, beautiful structure, outstanding exegesis, impressive oratory, but "So what?" A sermon is not a sermon if that's the takeaway. A sermon is only a sermon if its outcome is, "I have something to do." Truth must result in action, principles must produce practice, and exposition must end in application. As Jay Adams wrote in *Truth Applied*:

Application is the...process by which preachers make scriptural truths so pertinent to members of their congregations that they not only understand how these truths should effect changes in their lives but also feel obligated and perhaps even eager to implement those changes.

Although the need for such application may seem obvious and instinctive to most preachers—indeed, Spurgeon went so far as to say “where the application begins, there the sermon begins”—some refuse to do it and even argue against it, believing that once they've explained the meaning of the text, we can all go home. They do not even attempt to bring the meaning and direction of the text into the here and now. The unfairness of this approach is highlighted by Douglas Stuart in his book *Old Testament Exegesis*:

The exegete, who has come to know the passage best, refuses to help the reader or hearer of the passage at the very point where the reader's or hearer's interest is keenest. The exegete leaves the key function—response—completely to the subjective sensibilities of the reader or hearer, who knows the passage least.

What can we expect from such sermons? John Calvin answered, "If we leave it to men's choice to follow what is taught them, they will never move one foot. Therefore, the doctrine of itself can profit nothing at all."

Scripture itself is replete with examples of scriptural application. Christ applied the law to the rich young ruler (Matt 19:16–22), the apostle Peter applied the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament to his generation (Acts 2:14–36) with the intention of moving them to action (vv. 37–38), the apostle Paul says that the history of Israel was written as an example, an admonition, and a comfort to all later generations (1 Cor 10:11; Rom 15:4).

Application is not only warranted by Scripture; it is defined by it. As I have surveyed the Bible's own application of itself, I've developed the following definition: Application is the painful process of bringing the primary unchanging principles of the preaching passage into life-changing contact with people who live in an ever-changing world. Now, let me exposit that for you.

Painful Process

If you ask many preachers how long they spend in preparing the expository part of the sermon compared to the appli-

cation part, I'm guessing the ratio would be something like 99:1! This probably explains why many of us don't do application, or don't do it well. However, as Douglas Stuart writes, "An application should be just as rigorous, just as thorough,

and just as analytically sound as any other step in the exegesis process. It cannot be merely tacked on to the rest of the exegesis as a sort of spiritual afterthought."

This requires time, work, concentration, and, above all, prayer. Application is particularly painful because it is usually the last step in sermon preparation, occurring after we have done the exegetical work, when our brains are fried and we are longing to be done and relax. So, if we needed prayer for exposition of the Word, we need it even more for the application of it. We pray that the Holy Spirit would not only help us know our text but also help us know our hearers and guide us to the exact applications people need to hear (1 Cor 2:11).

Past Purpose

Although the first question in application is often, "What does that mean for *me*?" the first question should be, "What did this mean for *them*?"

Every book in the Bible had an original purpose. The original writer wrote the words to the original audience with an original purpose in mind. In some cases, especially in the New Testament, the purpose is clearly identified. For example, the apostle

John told us that he wrote his Gospel to prove that Jesus is the Son of God and to persuade his readers to find eternal life in him (John 20:31; cf. 1 John 5:13). Luke clearly told us why he wrote his Gospel (Luke 1:1–4). A number of Paul's epistles also have an explicitly stated purpose (e.g. 1 Cor 1:10ff.; Gal 1:6ff.).

APPLICATION IS THE PAINFUL PROCESS OF BRINGING THE PRIMARY UNCHANGING PRINCIPLES OF THE PREACHING PASSAGE INTO LIFE-CHANGING CONTACT WITH PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN AN EVER CHANGING WORLD.

Although the purpose may not be explicitly stated in every New Testament book, we can usually work out the purpose from the contents. New Testament Introduction studies and Study Bible introductions are especially helpful here. It's more difficult in the Old Testament, especially with the historical books, but, again, modern Study Bibles and Old Testament Introduction books can help us work out why the writer wrote, what problems or opportunities he was addressing, and how the material in the book serves that purpose (See also Richard Pratt's *He Gave Us Stories*).

The point is that each biblical author was inspired by God to write to a specific audience with a specific purpose to meet specific needs, whether or not that purpose is explicitly stated. Each book had an original meaning with an original application. The task of the preacher is to discover that and use it as a guide in teaching the meaning and application of a passage. The original meaning and application are like two train tracks to help make sure that we stay within the original intention of both God and the human writer.

Our interpretation and our application may go farther along the tracks than the original writer's knowledge (because we have further revelation and more of the Holy Spirit), but the meaning and application may never leave these tracks. As Jay Adams put it, "The truth God revealed in Scripture came in an applied form and should be reapplied to the same sort of people for the same purposes for which it was originally given. That is to say, truth should be applied today just as God originally applied it." Once we know the original purpose of the original book, we can then turn to the particular passage we are exegeting and ask how it specifically contributes to that overall original purpose.

Primary Principles

Apart from failing to apply the text at all, or applying it to a modern audience without asking about the original application, the most common mistakes I've come across in application are basing it on anecdotes or on another passage than the one preached. In the former, the preacher may tell an inspiring story that he saw in the news or read in a book and then call the congregation to similar action. In the latter, the preacher may exposit one biblical passage, but then turn to another for application. The former mistake has no attachment to God's Word while the latter is attached to a different portion of God's Word than the one exegeted. However, for the application to be convincing and effective, the hearer, Adams writes, "needs to see how you derived the application as the natural and final stage of the entire process of careful, analytical study of your passage." If we have done our exegetical work well, and explored the original purpose, the primary application of the passage to ourselves should be easier to discover.

Some of the questions I ask as I explore this question are:

- What is this text asking me to believe about God and

myself, sin and salvation, the world and the world to come?

- What sin is this verse forbidding? What duty is this verse commanding?
- What grace, fruit, or gift of the Spirit is this passage calling for?
- How should this verse impact my relationships with God, my family, my friends, my neighbors, my enemies?
- Is this passage addressed to believers, unbelievers, hypocrites, doubters, etc.?
- What does this teach me about my responsibilities as a church member, a citizen, an employee?
- Is there an example here I'm being urged to avoid or follow?
- What is there in this verse to draw me to worship?
- Does this text admonish, rebuke, convict, or warn me? How and why?
- Does it encourage, comfort, console, or promise me? How and why?
- What is this verse asking me to question and examine?
- Does this verse ask me to look to the past, the present, or the future?
- Is this verse addressing my mind, my emotions, my will, my desires, or my conscience?
- Is this verse focused on me as an individual or upon the body of Christ, His church?
- What is this verse intended to change in me, my family, my church, my workplace, my world?

Remember, we are looking for the *primary* application of the preaching passage. There may be accidental, incidental, or coincidental applications that arise from these questions, but we must keep asking ourselves, "What was the primary purpose of the writer?" That will help us major on the majors and leave out the minors.

Precise Particulars

So far, we have been discussing passages in which the application is not immediately obvious (e.g. Old Testament narratives, the doctrinal chapters in the epistles). There are other passages that are already practical, and therefore we do not need to work out the primary principle of application (e.g. Romans 12, Ephesians 5). But whether the principal application is explicitly stated or whether we have had to work it out, we must not stop with mere generalizations (e.g. "you should be holy," "you should be a good husband," etc.) Additionally, we must show how that applicatory principle is worked out in specific, concrete, everyday situations by asking "How? Where? When?"

For example, John the Baptist preached the necessity of

fruit-bearing repentance, but then specified the exact fruit each specific group was to bring forth (Luke 3:10–14). Hearers must not be left to make the point to themselves, because they won't do it. As Bridges noted: "We must not expect our hearers to apply to themselves such unpalatable truths. So unnatural is this habit of personal application, that most will fit the doctrine to anyone but themselves." When we think we've arrived at the right general application, we must push ourselves to make it as concrete, as detailed, and as helpful as possible, so that it is impossible for people to misunderstand what is required and how to go about it.

Some of our sermons will have "hands and feet" application; others will have more spiritual application. The former is concerned with outward and visible actions; the latter is more concerned with the soul, the invisible. If anything is missing in application in our own day, it is the latter—application to the soul. Even where there is application to the soul in modern sermons, it is usually in accusing and convicting Christians of sin—which is necessary. However, God's people also need spiritual comfort and encouragement, especially when living in such an uncomfortable and discouraging world.

Present Power

The preacher stands, as John Stott put it, between two worlds. On the one hand, there is the unchanging world of God's Word; on the other, there is the ever-changing world that we live in. Though understanding God's Word is often difficult and challenging, at least it stays the same. When we turn toward the world, we see constant flux, transition, revolution, and fluctuation. The preacher's challenge is to take the unchanging Word and pin it on an ever-changing, ever-moving world. It often feels like trying to hammer a nail into jelly.

The task, however, is made considerably easier if we keep up-to-date with the world we live in. Without becoming "worldly," we must know and understand our world and the powerful influences of our own day. We need to keep up-to-date with the trends, movements, ideas, philosophies, morals, and influences of our times in order to apply the unchanging principles of God's Word to our ever-changing world in life-changing ways.

Personal Point

Daniel Webster exclaimed, "When a man preaches to me, I want him to make it a personal matter, a personal matter, a personal matter!" That means most application must not only be in the present tense but in the "second person." As Jay Adams explains in *Truth Applied*, there are times when we will identify personally with the application, speaking in "first-person" terms (e.g. Heb 4:1, 11, 14, 16); at other times, we may apply the truth in the third person (e.g. Titus 1:10–16; John 3:5); but the majority of applications will be in the "second person" (e.g. John 3:7; Rom 12:1, 2 Cor 5:20).

Such practice will avoid the common scenario highlighted by Pastor Al Martin: "Many sermons are like unaddressed, unsigned letters, which, if a hundred people read, they would not think the contents concerned them." The preacher's hearers must know that they are being addressed personally and even individually. One way to improve application in this area is to go through the congregation and try to describe each person with one or two words that characterize his or her spiritual condition or status. That should produce a ready-made checklist of the various kinds of hearers in the congregation to focus application on.

For example, *broad* categories of listeners may include Christian/non-Christian, Old/Young, Rich/Poor, Parents/Children/Singles, Employer/Employee, Government/Citizen, Male/Female, Married/Single, Parents/Children, or Atheist/Agnostic/Persecutor. *Narrower* groups that may appear in some or all of the previous categories may include the sick, dying, afflicted, tempted, backslidden, hypocritical, anxious, immoral, lonely, discouraged, worried, tired, seeking, doubting, proud, bereaved, broken-hearted, convicted, and more.

Passionate Preaching

Throughout the sermon, the exposition of Scripture has already begun to warm our hearts and those of our hearers. However, the temperature should increase still more as we move to application. There is no part of the sermon that requires more of the preacher's emotional involvement than the application. In his book *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*, R. L. Dabney wrote: "To produce volition, it is not enough that the understanding be convinced; affection must also be aroused."

To do this, our own feelings must reflect the nature of the application. Be solemn when warning; be warm when comforting; be confident when encouraging; be worshipful when calling to adoration; be happy when rejoicing.

Dabney sums it up well:

The preacher's soul should here show itself fired with the force of the truth which has been developed, and glowing both with light and heat. The quality of unction should suffuse the end of your discourse, and bathe the truth in evangelical emotion. But this emotion must be genuine and not assumed; it must be spiritual, the zeal of heavenly love, and not the carnal heat of the mental gymnastic...It must disclose itself spontaneously and unannounced, as the gushing of a fountain which will not be suppressed. What can give this glow except the indwelling of the Holy Ghost? You are thus led again to that great, ever-recurring deduction, the first qualification of the sacred orator, the grace of Christ. ♦



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KNOWING THE TEXT: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

KEITH H. ESSEX





Paul's words to Timothy summarize the expositor's responsibility: "Give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). The preacher is to publicly read the Bible, then teach, explaining the Scripture read, and exhort, pointing out the significance of the meaning of the scriptural text to his hearers. Paul probably placed exhortation before teaching in this text to emphasize that the expositor's responsibility was not completed until exhortation had been given. The order of explanation before exhortation is evidenced in the New Testament letters, especially Hebrews, which was self-described as a "word of exhortation" (13:22; cf. Acts 13:15 for the pattern of the public reading of Scripture followed by a "word of exhortation," explanation and exhortation, in a Jewish synagogue). Therefore, accurate biblical exposition is founded on accurate biblical exegesis. An expository preacher must be a precise exegete, a skilled interpreter of the scriptural text.

In this presentation, I am using the terms "hermeneutics," "exegesis," and "exposition" in accordance with their traditional meanings. "Hermeneutics" refers to the principles that are applied to a written text and result in interpretation. Interpretation includes discovering the meaning and significance envisioned by the original author with respect to his original audience. "Exegesis" is applied hermeneutics, the practice of interpreting the written text using the principles proposed by hermeneutics. The exegetical conclusions, the original meaning and the original significance of a biblical text, are the basis upon which the expositor builds his sermon. "Exposition" describes the contemporary oral or written

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE BIBLE ON THE PART OF THE EXPOSITOR.

presentation of the original meaning (and possibly also the original significance) and the present significance of the previously written text. The meaning of the biblical text never changes, but the significant implications of the meaning might be different for a contemporary congregation. For example, in the command, “And do not get drunk with wine” (Eph 5:18), the original alcoholic beverage was wine, and Paul’s audience at Ephesus was not to drink an excessive amount of wine. However, in a present situation, the significance is a prohibition of drunkenness for the Christian believer, whether the alcoholic beverage is wine, beer, whiskey, vodka, or another one based on one’s culture. Thus, the biblical expositor must understand hermeneutics and practice exegesis before he is ready to preach. Preaching is hard work!

The foundational hermeneutical principle of biblical interpretation is context. The sentence “I was right” can have different meanings; the surrounding words, which show if the subject at hand is logic, politics, driving a car, or golf, will aid the interpreter in knowing what the sentence means in the given context. There are two categories of interpretive context: 1. literary context—what precedes or follows a particular written statement in the text, and 2. historical context—what circumstances surrounded the writing of the text in which the statement is found. The first activity of biblical exegesis for the expositor is to gain a thorough understanding of the whole of the biblical book from which he will preach. Since every individual passage exegeted and expounded can only be understood in its greater context, the preacher must master the contents, purpose, themes, structure, and background of the book in which the passage is found. There are two steps needed for this mastery of a biblical book.

Step One: Reading and Rereading the Biblical Book

The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is what we preach. Therefore, priority is given to the literary context. There is no substitute for a thorough knowledge of the Bible on the part of the expositor. This familiarity with the biblical book can only be gained by repeated readings.

The expositor should begin by reading the biblical book quickly in one sitting; this he will do a number of times (at least three times) in the translation from which he preaches. He should note in writing some of his general impressions from these readings. Paul’s letter to Philemon illustrates this process. The reader is struck by the warmth of the relationship between the apostle and beloved brother in Christ. Paul prayed for his friend and emphasized the love Philemon had for the saints. Though Paul had apostolic authority to command Philemon to do the right thing, he rather determined to appeal to him instead. He had confidence that Philemon would do the right thing and even more than what he asked. Paul’s appeal was for Onesimus, Philemon’s slave, who had wronged his master in some way. Paul had led Onesimus to Christ while Paul was a prisoner. It is noteworthy that Paul was a third of the way through this letter before he even mentioned Onesimus to Philemon.

Then, reading more slowly, the preacher should stop and write short chapter (for longer books) or paragraph (for shorter book) titles of four to six words. These titles are designed to help the reader think through the book and also discover the structural units of the book. Using the NASB paragraph divisions, these are suggested paragraph titles for Philemon:

- vv. 1–3 Paul addressed Philemon and others
- vv. 4–7 Paul thanked God for Philemon
- vv. 8–16 Paul appealed to Philemon concerning Onesimus
- vv. 17–20 Paul requested Philemon’s acceptance of Onesimus
- v. 21 Paul had confidence in Philemon
- v. 22 Paul requested lodging from Philemon
- vv. 23–24 Greetings from Paul’s companions
- v. 25 A short benediction

From these titles, the basic structure is discovered:

- vv. 1–7 The Introduction: Paul’s address and thanksgiving
- vv. 8–22 The Body: Paul’s appeal to and requests of Philemon
- vv. 23–25 The Conclusion: Final greetings and benediction

The expositor is now prepared to do further reading in the text.

The subsequent readings of the biblical book can be in different translations, and if possible, from the original language. They can also be in shorter units, using the basic structure that has been discovered; this is especially beneficial in longer books. Expositors of the past have set targets on how many times they read through a book before commencing to

preach; each contemporary expositor should set a goal as well. During these further readings, the interpreter seeks to discover what the author stated about himself and his original audience, what themes he emphasized, and what his purpose was in writing. For example, in Philemon, Paul was a prisoner (1, 9, 10, 13), one with authority (8), an aged man (9), and the spiritual father of both Onesimus (10) and Philemon (19). Philemon was Paul's fellow worker (1) and partner (17), the master of Onesimus (16), and a refresher of the saints (7, 20). The audience also included the church that met in Philemon's house (3, cf. the plural "you" in vv. 3, 22b, 25)! As to themes, though a short letter, Jesus Christ was referred to often (1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 20, 23, 25); Paul used his own name three times (1, 9, 19); Paul's co-workers, including Philemon and Onesimus (1, 2, 13, 17, 23, 24), were mentioned; and "love" (5, 7, 9), "beloved" (1, 16), "heart" (7, 12, 20), and "refresh" (7, 20) were key terms. A proposed purpose statement is "Paul appealed to his ministry associate Philemon to accept his slave Onesimus as both a fellow believer in Christ and fellow worker in the gospel, confident that Philemon would release Onesimus for further gospel ministry with Paul."

The necessity of this first step of the exegetical process for an accurate and effective expository ministry cannot be emphasized strongly enough. The expositor must be thoroughly acquainted with the biblical book as he embarks upon its exposition. He must know the terrain that lies ahead as he preaches sequentially passage by passage through the book. Because of the importance of the reading and rereading the whole book, it is vital for the expositor to know that Genesis to Deuteronomy (the Torah or Pentateuch) is one book, as are 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, and Ezra & Nehemiah. Also, what appears as twelve different books in our English Bibles, the Minor Prophets, was considered as one book, "The Twelve," in the Jewish tradition. Each of these should be read first as one book. However, all the books of the New Testament are separate books, though Luke gives background to Acts, 1 Corinthians to 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians to 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy to 2 Timothy, and 1 Peter to 2 Peter. However, the relationship of 1, 2, 3 John and the Gospel of John is more complex, and each should be read as an independent writing.

Step Two: Reading about the Biblical Book

Though the literary context is preeminent, the exegete also needs to give careful attention to the historical and cultural context of the biblical book. The human writer of the text led by the Holy Spirit assumed rightly that his original audience knew the background about what he was writing. However, the contemporary interpreter of the biblical text is now separated by about 2,000 to 3,500 years from the original texts of Scripture. The present-day exegete has to become a detective to track down this information that lies behind the text and

be informed about what is in the text. Therefore, while he is reading and rereading the biblical text, the expositor must simultaneously be reading all he can about the biblical book with which he is interacting.

A number of essential background questions arise from the reading of Philemon. Where was Paul when he composed and sent this letter? Where was Philemon located? When was this letter sent? How was the letter conveyed from Paul to Philemon? Initial detective work finds that some of these questions are answered in Colossians 4:7–9, 17–18. Philemon was in Colossae when Paul sent this letter to him delivered by Tychicus. With Tychicus was Onesimus, who originally came from Colossae. Paul himself was a prisoner, but many of his coworkers had access to him (Col 4:10–12; cf. Phlm 23–24). However, Paul's location and the date of the letter are not explicitly stated. The exegete will have to search commentary introductions, New Testament Introductions, and Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia articles on Philemon to find possible solutions to these questions. The best case is made for Paul's house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30) as his location and AD 61 as the year of the letter's writing and delivery.

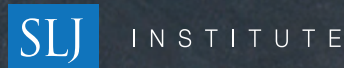
There are also a number of cultural factors that are vital to the proper interpretation of Philemon. Most vitally, Onesimus was a slave, and Philemon was his human master (16). The exegete must understand how slavery functioned in the Roman Empire in the first century. What exactly Onesimus was guilty of and why and how Paul was intervening have been matters of interpretive discussion. Additionally, Paul was a prisoner of Rome (1, 9); this fact leads the interpreter to investigate the Roman legal system and how prisoners were processed. The use of family terms throughout the letter (1, 2, 10, 16, 20) demonstrates the need for the exegete to comprehend the structure of a family in the Roman era and how it functioned. The church met in Philemon's house (2), and Paul anticipated lodging with him (22); a knowledge of the architecture of homes in Colossae, particularly of a man with slaves, would add insight into the statements. Archippus was called "our fellow soldier" (2); a knowledge of the Roman army and the function of a soldier in it can help the interpreter understand the figure of speech being used by Paul. Paul's description of himself as "aged" (9) raises the question of what was considered aged at that time and why he deemed it necessary to so describe himself in this letter. The references to "my account" (18) and "I will repay" (19) lead to an investigation of both finances and interpersonal relationships among the Romans. The best sources to begin to read about these subjects is in Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia articles.

In addition to the historical and cultural backgrounds, the exegete also needs to be aware of the geographical context of a text. Where events were located is interpretively significant. There is no explicit geographical reference in Philemon. However, through implicit evidence, we assume that Paul was in

Rome and Philemon was in Colossae. With the aid of a Bible atlas, these two cities can be located. They were separated by approximately 1,100 miles. A combination of sea and land travel was necessary to journey between the two. Rome was the capitol of the empire and was a haven for runaway slaves who wished to avoid capture. Colossae was over 100 miles inland from Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia. It was a small city located in the Lycus valley on the southern bank of the Lycus River at the foot of Mount Cadmus, 11 miles east of Laodicea and 15 miles southeast of Hierapolis. The city was not as prominent or as wealthy as Laodicea in the first century. The distance between Colossae and Rome has played a role in the interpretive discussion about Philemon; why did Onesimus travel so far to escape Philemon? Why did Paul

send him personally back again instead of getting Philemon's decision by writing?


Once the exegete/expositor has begun to master the general background and the historical and literary context of a biblical book, he is then, and only then, ready to exegete the particular passages in the book as a preparation for his preaching of the biblical text. More hermeneutical principles will be applied in the exegetical process, but all will be exercised upon the foundational hermeneutical principle of exegesis: context. While it is true that there are many levels of context (the Bible as a whole, the Testament, the words of a particular writer), for the expositor who primarily preaches sequentially through a biblical book, the most important context is the book as a whole. ♦



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ANDREW FULLER: MODEL PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

DUSTIN W. BENGE

In his book *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, Paul Brewster, pastor of Ryker's Ridge Baptist Church in Madison, Indiana, has provided readers a study that may deservedly become a standard by which other introductory works on Andrew Fuller should be measured. Brewster's purpose in writing this work is well summarized in this statement from the book's introduction: "This book argues that British pastor Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) is a model pastor-theologian... As men can benefit from a personal mentoring relationship with older pastors, so too can they benefit from the study of some worthy examples of past Baptist leaders." For Brewster, there is hardly a better model for pastors than Andrew Fuller, the eighteenth-century pastor, missions pioneer, and Baptist theologian par excellence.

At just under two hundred pages, Brewster's work is broken down into five chapters and two short appendices. The first chapter provides the reader a background of the state of the English Particular Baptists prior to Fuller and then begins a brief biographical study of his life and ministry. Chapter two surveys the theological method of Fuller. Brewster continues in the third chapter with an examination of Fuller's soteriology. The fourth chapter, entitled "From Doctrine to Practice," examines how Fuller's theology practically impacted his life and ministry. The fifth chapter provides some concluding thoughts

on Fuller, considers again what was important to him, and revisits the idea of how he is a model pastor-theologian to be emulated. The two appendices of the book explore Fuller's confession of faith and his definition of Calvinism. While the book is not the length of a definitive biography, its brevity makes it an ideal size for an introductory study of a pastor who puts doctrine into practice.

In the second chapter, Brewster outlines some important observations in his careful examination of Fuller's theological method. Brewster rightfully recognizes Fuller's understanding of the role of reason, an aspect of his thinking that pervades his theological framework. While Brewster highlights Fuller's admission of the importance of reason in the task of theology, he is careful to point out some of Fuller's important reservations about the limitations of reason with respect to theological method. Brewster sees three important concerns with reason in the work of theology. First, Fuller understood human wisdom "to be subject to error." Second, because of the first concern, Fuller accordingly understood that "it is wrong and presumptuous to set up *our* reason as a standard." Third, Fuller saw that human wisdom had didactic limitations in that it can only teach so much. The author's inclusion of Fuller's reservations for the place of reason is an important clarification for many theologians.

In the third chapter, an examination of Fuller's soteriology, Brewster briefly revisits the grim landscape of eighteenth-

century Particular Baptist life into which Fuller was born. He admits the Particular Baptists of Fuller's early life were not all exclusively Hyper-Calvinists, as has sometimes been imagined. However, the author still contends that the majority of Particular Baptists of Fuller's youth were predominantly of Hyper-Calvinistic persuasion and, like Fuller's boyhood pastor, John Eve, "had little, or nothing to say to the unconverted." Whereas Brewster is correct that Hyper-Calvinism was not all-pervasive within Fuller's community, he is also right to suggest that, as Fuller's own testimony reveals, something—or rather many things—were deeply wrong with the Baptist leadership that surrounded Fuller and so many other impressionable church members of his day. This work draws generously from Fuller's own testimony, where he makes statements regarding the impact of Hyper-Calvinism on Particular Baptist life such as "I conceive there is scarcely a minister among us whose preaching has not been more or less influenced by the lethargic systems of the age." Brewster admits that while the idea of discouraging—and even refusing—to make indiscriminate offers of the gospel to everyone might seem unthinkable today, it was a true sobering reality of the experience of many Particular Baptists.

Also in chapter three, the presentation of Fuller's understanding of the atonement is especially beneficial. On a subject that is inherently complex, the author shows the biblical simplicity of Fuller's "sufficient for all, efficient only for the elect" understanding of the atonement. Fuller states, "Calvinists in *general* have considered the particularity of redemption as consisting not in the *degree* of Christ's sufferings... or in any *insufficiency* that attended them, but in the sovereign purpose and design of Father and Son." Fuller goes on to include a most important point—for evangelical Calvinists, there is no tension between a full embrace of the particular redemption position and a full embrace of indiscriminate offers of the gospel to every sinner. Fuller writes, "Whatever difficulties there may appear in these subjects, they in general suppose that there is in the death of Christ a sufficient ground for indefinite calls and universal invitations." The importance placed upon Fuller's views regarding calls to believe in the gospel will be of great help and benefit to the reader who may be suspicious of the legitimacy of his two-fold embrace of Calvinistic soteriology and of a robust evangelistic commitment.

The fourth chapter, "From Doctrine to Practice," may well be the most important one for many readers of this work. In the evangelical theological landscape, bi-vocational pastor-theologians are sometimes looked down upon within the community of evangelical academia. Brewster crucially shows how Fuller serves as a much needed model and corrective to this fallacy. However, as is clear, some of Fuller's pastoral victories were only realized after tragedy. The first such occurrence happened upon the death of Fuller's father. Fuller later regretted that his father had never sufficiently been counseled

about the state of his soul. The second occurred when he made a final effort to speak the gospel to his wayward son before he died, after which Fuller was still uncertain about his son's final spiritual state. Brewster demonstrates that these events led to Fuller's embracing a conviction to never waste an opportunity to urge a sinner to trust in Christ.

Brewster's book will find a special place within the thought of many Southern Baptist readers who are suspicious of the recent resurgence of Calvinistic theology within the Southern Baptist Convention. Many of these readers may not have encountered an exemplary Baptist minister who is both Calvinistic in doctrine and passionate about evangelism and missions. Nathan Finn, professor and dean at Union University, has offered a similar opinion, suggesting, "Many readers will appreciate Brewster's commending of Fuller as a way forward in the current Southern Baptist discussions over Calvinism." Brewster presents Andrew Fuller as an imperfect yet incredibly impressive model who should be admired and followed even if people believe him to be mistaken in his soteriological convictions. Perhaps Brewster's presentation of Fuller will even convince some such skeptics to reconsider afresh the possible legitimacy of Fuller's convictions in this area.

The concluding statements regarding Fuller as a pastor-theologian are perhaps the most practically beneficial in the book. Jeremy Walker, pastor of Maidenbower Baptist Church in Crawley, England, writes, "The author's concluding sketch of Fuller as pastor-theologian shows that Brewster is no mere hagiographer, but an insightful and careful student as he gives us a sympathetic but carefully nuanced portrait of this man of God." Anyone looking for a clear portrait of a pastor who greatly desired to build his ministry upon truth and doctrine need look no further than this biography of Andrew Fuller.

Paul Brewster's new exploration of the impact of Andrew Fuller's life and ministry offers much needed encouragement for many readers. While not every reader will appreciate all of Fuller's doctrinal positions, nearly all can learn from his scholarly and pastoral example. Furthermore, Brewster's work will likely serve as a welcome mold for young Reformed evangelicals who are desperately seeking an example from history to emulate. For those skeptical of the legitimacy of a pastorate driven by rigorous theology, the picture of Fuller presented in this work will provide a possibility to be considered. In an age where terms like "theologian" and "pastor" are sometimes misunderstood as mutually exclusive, this book will go far to show careful and honest readers otherwise. Like William Carey, who asked Fuller and others to hold the rope as he embraced the task of international missions, may this book be used by God to raise up another generation of Andrew Fuller's who are eager to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. ♦



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