

TheWordWorks

Expository Preaching Module 1: For the Preacher

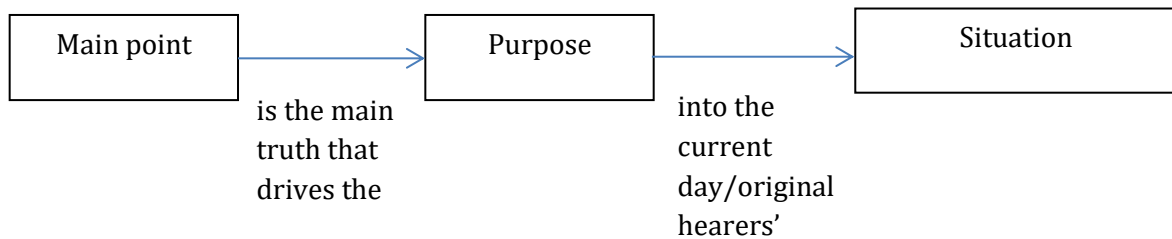
What is not expository preaching?

Aim of this module:

Based on the definition of expository preaching covered in the Module “What is expository preaching?”, to show why some kinds of preaching commonly thought to be expository preaching are in fact not.

Recap (See modules in “General bible handling training” section and module “What is expository preaching” in the expository preaching section)

Expository preaching is preaching which teaches the author’s **main point** in order to achieve the author’s **purpose** in a **current day situation** similar to the situation of the original hearers



What is not expository preaching?

Editor’s note: Where possible, we have used old sermons we’ve preached as examples of what is not expository preaching. So, the examples below are an exercise in self-critique!

- 1. Verse by verse/Section by section preaching: Fails to integrate all the verses in order to get the big idea (main point + purpose) and therefore applies the passage in a piece meal kind of way**

These kind of sermons have a feeling of comprehensiveness i.e. the preacher explains most of the verses in a systematic manner. However, what is lacking is integration. The preacher doesn’t show the relationship between verses or the relationship between sections of the passage. In other words, the teaching resembles pearls on a string: they are stand-alone units of thought with no organic relationship with each other. The applications that flow from this kind of teaching then becomes stand-alone applications rather than purpose-driven applications flowing from one single, integrated main point (see module on “Applying the purpose”).

Here's an example from a sermon on Titus 3. Here's the sermon outline that shows a failure to integrate.

1. Your duties (Vs 1-2)
2. Your former state (Vs 3)
3. Your salvation (Vs 4-7)
4. Your mission (Vs 8-11)

Section by section preaching that doesn't integrate looks like this:

1. The speaker will start by speaking about the list of 6 Christian **duties** and seek to apply it: Speaker will give some practical ways Christians can be submissive, do good works etc.
2. Next, the speaker will say "Let's move on to Point 2" (Vs 3) and then talk about the **former state** of a Christian and say that Christians shouldn't live in this way. Speaker will give concrete examples of how Christians might be currently living in malice and envy etc. Application here is about how Christians must avoid all these.
3. Next, the speaker will say "Let's move on to Point 3" (Vs 4-7). Speaker will talk about the wonder of **salvation** (the grace of incarnation, unmerited salvation, regeneration by the Spirit, the hope of eternal life etc). The application here might be to be thankful or to evangelise their friends with this great news of salvation.
4. Next, the speaker will say "Let's move on to our final point" (Vs 8-11). Speaker will talk about the Christian's single minded **mission** to do good works and to not be distracted from the mission by engaging in foolish and pointless debates about the law. More examples of the good works a Christian should do and examples of current day foolish controversies to avoid.

Why this sermon is not expository:

1. It fails to show the relationship and logic between the 4 sections i.e. a failure to integrate. Sections 2-3 are the main point (*You were once like this but now God has saved you to become this*) which drives the purpose contained in Sections 1 and 4 (*do good works and not other stuff*).
 - a. Sections 1 and 4 contain the imperatives (i.e. this is Paul's purpose in writing this section): He wants Titus to remind the Cretan Christians to do good works (this is the common theme in both Sections 1 and 4, a theme also repeated in 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:14). They are to focus on this and not other stuff.
 - b. Sections 2-3 starts with the word "For" which tells us that 3:3 onwards is Paul giving the reason why they should do good works. The reason is that they were once like "this" (Vs 3) but now (notice the "But" which starts Vs 4), they are like "this" (Vs 4-7)

by God's gracious salvation in Christ. The motivation for doing good works is their *before* (Section 2) and *after* (Section 3)!

- c. Section 4 is Paul looking back at what he's just said and calling Titus to teach these things so the Christians might devote themselves to good works.
2. The application in Section 3 ("Be thankful" or "Evangelise") is not purpose-driven. To put it another way, Paul did not write Vs 4-7 in order to elicit a response of thankfulness or to call the Cretan Christians to evangelise. Section 3 is part of his argument (see Pt 1 above) to call the Cretans to do good works.
3. Sections 2 and 3 belong together as one unit. It's the main point (Section 2 and 3) that drives the purpose (Sections 1 and 4). So, to apply at the end of Section 2 risks losing the flow of Paul's "before and after" logic and makes Sections 2 and 3 feel like piecemeal sections.
4. An objection might be raised at this point: "What's so wrong with not integrating all the sections/verses? As long as the sections I'm preaching on help people in their Christian walk, that's ok right?" The answer to this goes back to what was discussed in the Module "Why expository preaching?" We reproduce the relevant parts here of that module here (see esp the bolded italic words):

"Expository preaching respects the dual authorship of Scripture. God is the author of Scripture but he uses human agents in the authorship of Scripture. The human agents he uses are not robots or scribes just writing what is dictated by God. They use their human minds, their human writing styles, their human personalities in writing Scripture. And yet, what they write, in God's sovereignty, is exactly the message God wants to convey. This dual authorship of Scripture is the theological foundation for expository preaching. As the preacher seeks to uncover (or exposit) the human author's mind (his main point and purpose), he is at the same time uncovering (or expositing) God's mind.

Expository preaching thus lets the bible (and its divine and human authors) be in the driver's seat. It lets God's Word set the agenda and determine the application for His people. We say nothing more and nothing less than what the Word says (***in other words, we make every effort at integrating everything!***) in the context in which it is said and for the purpose for which it is said. This guarantees that God's people hear exactly (and without omission) what God wants his people to hear"

2. Selective preaching: Ignoring parts of the passage or failing to show how it relates to the main point

These kind of sermons teach a clear main point (i.e. they integrate well) but they don't integrate far enough. There is usually one section which seems out of sync with the sermon's main point and because it seems out of sync, that section is preached as a separate, subsidiary point that doesn't have a strong connection to the main point.

Here's an example from a sermon on Mark 8:11-30. Here's the sermon outline.

1. Jesus rejects the sign-asking Pharisees (Vs 11-13)
2. Jesus warns the hard hearted, deaf and blind disciples (Vs 14-21)
3. Jesus' amazing healing power (Vs 22-26)
4. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ (Vs 27-30)

Selective preaching looks like this:

1. The speaker's purpose-driven application will be "Don't be hard hearted, deaf, blind. Confess Jesus as the Christ". The main point behind this purpose-driven application will be something along the lines of "Jesus warns his disciples not to be hard hearted, deaf and blind". The Pharisees (Section 1) and the disciples' own behaviour in Section 2 will be given as examples of what hard hearted, deaf, blind behaviour looks like.
2. The opposite of hard heartedness, deafness and blindness will then be explained from Section 4: It is confessing Jesus as the Christ
3. Section 3's story of the blind man that Jesus heals in 2 stages (a surprising development but the speaker won't dwell too much on it) will be preached as an example of Jesus' amazing power and how it points to his identity as Christ.

Why this sermon is not expository:

1. It fails to integrate Section 3 sufficiently well into the main point of the sermon. One clue that this is so is to see that if Mark had cut out Section 3 from his gospel, the sermon's main point ("Jesus warns....") and purpose ("Don't be hard hearted, deaf, blind. Confess Jesus as Lord") would still stand.
2. Why does Mark insert this story of a 2 stage healing into his narrative at this precise point of his gospel? The clue is in observing that in Section 2, the disciples don't see who Jesus is but in Section 4, Peter sees. What has happened in between? Is it that the disciples summoned up enough will power to not be hard hearted? Is it that the disciples got enough evidence of Jesus' power that they finally are convinced? None of the above. The physically blind man in

Section 3 is a picture of the spiritual blindness of the disciples. What happened to him is what happened to Peter: He needs Jesus to heal his spiritual blindness so that he can see. It is a 2 stage healing because Peter's confession in 8:29 is a partial seeing. At 8:29, he still hasn't seen the full picture that Jesus is the Christ who must suffer, die and rise again (8:31-33).

3. Therefore, the main point of this passage (a main point which integrates every part of the passage rather than just selected parts) must be something like "Jesus heals spiritual blindness so that people can see He is the Christ". The purpose of the passage should not be "Don't be hard-hearted, deaf, blind..." but more along the lines of "Beg Jesus to give you sight".

3. Main point only: Fails to show why author was teaching this point

This kind of sermon integrates to get the main point very well. You can see exactly how each of the different sections are related to each other. However, the sermon ends at the main point. It doesn't go on to ask "What response is the biblical author aiming for from his readers by writing this main point?". Often, this occurs in passages where there isn't a clear imperative or the preacher is so excited about the theological content of the main point that he teaches that as an end in itself!

Here's an example from a sermon on Revelation 12-14. Here's the sermon outline.

1. The helicopter view of the war between Satan and the people of God (12:1-6)
2. Satan is conquered (12:7-12)
3. But he'll drag as many down as he can. But God protects (12:13-17)
4. Satan's two helpers (13:1-18)
5. The final outcome of the war (14:1-20)

In the main-point only sermon above, this is the **only thing that is preached**: God's people will be on the winning side in the end.

The preacher is excited to show his hearers the war that is currently being waged and how it ends. He'll explain the movement and transition between the 5 different scenes/sections. There will be explanations on the symbolism of the red dragon, the woman, the child, the powerful first beast, the deceptive second beast, the heavenly gathering of the redeemed in Zion and the final judgment.

Why such a sermon is not expository:

It ignores the **purpose** for which these revelations are given. The original hearers were the 7 churches in the province of Asia who, amongst other things, were going through persecution (2:9-10, 2:12-13, 3:8-9). Within Rev 12-14, there are 2 repeated statements which show us the purpose for which Rev 12-14 was written: "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (Rev 13:10; 14:12). Hence, the visions of Rev 12-14 of the war and its final outcome was meant to encourage persecuted Christians to endure and to continue trusting Jesus. To put it another way, main point (God's people will be on the winning side in the end) drives the author's purpose (endure) into a persecution kind of situation.

4. Main point but different purpose: Fails to use main point in the way author intended

Main-point-but-different-purpose sermons get the main point right but they use the main point to drive home a purpose not intended by the author.

Here's an example of a main-point-but-different-purpose sermon on Ezekiel 43:1-12.

Ezekiel 40-48 is the final vision Ezekiel receives. This is the vision of the new, utterly holy temple that God promises to build (Ezek 40-42) and of God returning to the temple (Ezek 43). This vision was given to Jews exiled to Babylon, judged by God because of their spiritual prostitution against God. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed earlier (Ezek 33).

In the sermon, the speaker highlights the key moment in the vision: the movement of the glory of God into the temple (43:4). The speaker explains the significance of this using 43:7: it is *God's promise to return and dwell with his people forever*. This is the main point of the passage.

At this point, the speaker explains that in the person of Jesus and the indwelling Spirit, this Ezek 43 promise has been fulfilled and it awaits its greater fulfilment in the new creation!

Finally, the speaker makes the application: How should the people of God respond? Rejoice! Because God is dwelling with his people and will dwell with his people in a fuller way in the new creation.

Why such a sermon is not expository:

It misuses the main point of God-promising-to-dwell-with-his people in a way never intended by the author. Look at 43:10. God says that as a result of this promise, "**Be ashamed** of your iniquities!"

In other words, as the Jews hear Ezekiel's glorious vision of God returning to his holy temple to dwell with his people, they are to be filled with a sense of shame at how they've prostituted themselves against God! This is the **purpose of this passage**.

For the Christian, the Ezekiel 43 truth that God, in the person of Jesus, has returned and now dwells with his people by the Spirit and promises to dwell with us in a fuller way in the new creation , ought to **make us ashamed** of the way we've treated God.