

Preaching Clinic for Elders
First Reformed Presbyterian Church (PCA)
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Session #3 – Determining your EP (Continued) and Forming your HP

a. Determining the Homiletical Point (HP) of the Sermon

(1) The Homiletical Point of the sermon should (a) express the Exegetical Point of the text, (b) contain an application, and (c) connect with the congregation.

(2) See Brian Chapel, *Christ Centered Preaching*, p. 139-141.

b. Examples and Exercises:

(1) Determine an EP for 1 Corinthians 10:13 and a possible HP.

(2) Determine the Exegetical Point for 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

(3) See my work in preparation to preach on 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

thetic, and communication considerations all help determine the order of ideas: matters typically come first which explain others that follow; positives counterbalance negatives; abstracts precede concretes; a general principle may lead to particular applications; particular evidences may demonstrate a generic principle; causes render effects; actions imply motives; conclusions call for foundations; internal dynamics balance external forces; appeal follows instruction; imperatives warrant explanation. Each of these sequences (and many others like them including their inverses) naturally lead the listener down a recognizable path. Of course, at times the preacher will veil intentions in order to make an impact, but then the progression is into mystery or toward surprise that will also give the sermon a sense of purpose if the preacher builds suspense that drives home the ultimate concept.

Typically, progression stumbles when points become so compartmentalized that their relationships to the sermon's central purpose disappear. If the impact of the main points is simply "First we see God's wisdom," "In this other point we see God's providence," and "In this last point we gain insight into God's patience," listeners may well wonder what was the point of the whole discussion. In this example, these separate ideas do not appear to lead anywhere. They simply leave the listeners with a collection of impressions. If the purpose of each point does not become more and more evident as the sermon unfolds, a congregation rightly questions why the points were mentioned at all.

Progression also slows when the sermon contains too many divisions. If one main point has five subpoints and the next has seven subpoints, no one will remember the subpoints, and the sermon itself will get lost. Elaborate argumentation will tire and confuse rather than stimulate and clarify. Usually it is preferable to limit subdivisions to two or three ideas, and then use the discussion of those ideas to introduce more detailed analysis. A message that is all skeleton and no flesh holds little allure for most.²⁸

SPECIFIC OUTLINE FEATURES

The general principles of outlining apply universally to the construction of expository messages. Excellent communicators may purposefully break the rules for a particular purpose, but the principles still

28. Rayburn, "The Discussion," personal lecture notes, 1.

guide if only by providing a benchmark by which to evaluate the exceptions. These general principles in turn hold implications for the specific features of sermon outlines.

The specifics introduced below reflect a particular method that I have found useful while training students in expository preaching. This method has strengths and weaknesses, as does any other. My desire in presenting these features is not to suggest that preachers should always structure sermons with every specific exactly so, but rather that they understand the reasoning behind these structures so that they can construct messages suitable for their own purposes. There is no one right way of shaping expository sermons and there are always exceptions regarding general principles as well as specific features. I have simply found it more helpful to lay a foundation on which students can build rather than point them to the vast homiletics horizon with the encouragement to preach as the spirit moves. Clean what best serves your preaching preferences while learning the foundational principles these specifics represent.

THE PROPOSITION

Definition and Development

Sermons are built on propositions. Classic homiletics describes a proposition as "a statement of the subject as the preacher proposes to develop it."²⁹ The proposition usually follows the introduction, summarizes its concerns, and indicates what the rest of the sermon will address. As a consequence, the proposition points both backward and forward—reflecting what has preceded and illuminating what will follow. The proposition is the germ of the entire sermon, and as a result its construction is crucial. In picturesque language homiletics instructors have virtually made canonical, Henry Jowett once wrote,

I am of the conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, nor ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. I find the getting of that sentence the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labor in my study. To compel oneself to fashion that sentence, to dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, ambiguous, to think oneself through to a form of words which defines the theme with scrupulous exactness—this is surely one of the most vital and essential factors in the making of a sermon: and I do not think any sermon

29. Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 54.

ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.³⁰

By forming such a proposition the preacher isolates the message's dominant thought and, thus, orients the main points with the whole message, giving both definite direction and consistent unity. No matters are more vital for effective communication.

Most instructors advise preachers to form their propositions at the end of their sermon research.³¹ At this point, study has probably yielded any number of notes, scribbles, and exegetical insights. Thus, the formation of a proposition forces the preacher to determine a central focus. Of course, one's mind does not always think sequentially and sometimes one sees main points before one has had a chance to determine a proposition that will include them all. Still, preachers need to form a proposition in order to give listeners direction as the message unfolds.³² Every proposition should be stated broadly enough so that the main points are divisions (not additions) of its thought.

Balance

A simple statement such as "the effects of sin touch every life" might serve as an essay theme. A sermon proposition, however, is more than a theme. It establishes the concern that the message will address and sets the agenda for how it will be handled. Since an expository sermon applies biblical truth, the sermon proposition must also reflect the text's truth and what it requires. A proposition, then, is not merely a statement of a biblical truth, nor is it only an instruction based on a biblical principle. It is both.

A proposition is the wedding of a universal truth based on the text with an application based on the universal truth. A universal truth is the biblical principle derived from the sermon's dominant text.³³ The

30. J. H. Jowett, *The Preacher, His Life and Work* (New York: Doran, 1912), 133. Quoted in Hogan, "Sermons Have Structures," 2; Marquart, *Quest for Better Preaching*, 102; Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 226; Donald E. Demaray, *An Introduction to Homiletics* (1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 80; H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 37; and, many others.

31. Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 37; Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 228.

32. Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 100; Ronald J. Allen and Thomas J. Herrin, "Moving from the Story to Our Story," in *Preaching the Story*, ed. E. Steimle, M. Niedenthal, and C. Rice (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 158-59.

33. Rayburn, "Outlining," 1-2.

statement, "Jonah eventually went to Ninevah," is true, but it is not a universal truth because it does not provide a biblical principle that can be applied universally. Such a statement merely describes the text; it does not develop the message.³⁴ However, the Jonah narrative supports the principle, that "God's service requires obedience"—a universal truth applicable to all believers. When this truth is linked to an appropriate application such as, "Because God's service requires obedience, we must seek his will," a proposition emerges.

A truth without an apparent application or an instruction without biblical justification falls short of the requirements of formal propositions. Thomas F. Jones writes,

Two common errors experienced by students of homiletics have to do with the failure to fashion a balance in the propositional statement between truth and human response. The faulty propositional statement often tells us only: 1) That something is true; or, 2) That something is required.

An example of the statement which tells us only that something is true is given in the following: "Jesus Christ has provided the only hope of salvation through His death on the cross for sinners." This statement is true. The problem with such a statement however is that it leads us nowhere. . . . It may state a truth, but, as a propositional statement, it needs to do more. It needs to involve the hearer in the consequences of the truth. . . .

The second type of weakness in propositions is the statement which tells us only that something is required. . . . "The believer in Christ must be diligent in the gospel in every way." This statement points us to a definite response to some truth, but it fails to tell us *what* truth.³⁵

Propositions meet formal homiletical requirements when they will answer both *why?* and *so what?* The *why* question elicits the truth-principle component of the proposition. The *so what* compels the preacher to determine the application since ultimately that is what Scripture—and the sermon—requires.

34. *Ibid.*, 2.

35. Thomas F. Jones, "Truth Has Consequences: or, Balancing the Proposition," in *The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, Seminary Extension Training curriculum of Covenant Theological Seminary (1976; reprint, St. Louis: Multi-media Publications, 1992), 2.

OF THE
CONTEXT
OF THE
MESSAGE

I CORINTHIANS 10:1-13

SUBJECT: WHAT IS THE TEXT ABOUT?

ANSWER: GOD TESTING THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH IN THE SAME WAY HE TESTED THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS.

COMPLEMENT: WHAT DOES THE TEXT TELL US ABOUT GOD TESTING THE CHURCH IN CORINTH IN THE SAME WAY HE TESTED THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS?

ANSWER: THE CORINTHIANS MUST NOT FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS BUT REALIZE CHRIST'S PRESENCE & PERSEVERE

EP = COMBINE SUBJECT & COMPLEMENT

POSSIBLE E.P. - SINCE GOD TESTS THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH IN THE SAME WAY HE TESTED THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS, PAUL WARNS THE CORINTHIANS NOT TO FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE BUT REALIZE CHRIST'S PRESENCE & PERSEVERE IN TESTING.

E.P. TEST - CAN I SPEAK TO ALL PARTS OF THE TEXT USING THIS E.P.?

SIGNIFICANCE - PART OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS TEXT IS IN THE REASON FOR GOD'S TESTING. SEE DEUT 8:1-3. THE REASON FOR THIS IS THAT PAUL COMPARES THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS & THE N.T. CHURCH. CHRIST IS W/BOTH.

EXPLAIN

PROVE

TEMPTATION = TESTS

1-4

CHURCH IN WILDERNESS

CHRIST'S PRESENCE

MOSES / BAPTISM

CLOUD / SEA

REASON FOR TESTING DEUT 8

5

ISRAEL'S FAILURE

6-11

EXAMPLES / TYPES

6 - EVIL CRAVINGS

11 - END OF AGE

7-10

IBOLATRY

IMMORALITY

TESTING GOD

GRUMBING

RESPONSE TO TESTS

12

WARNING

CHURCH

END OF AGE

13

TEST / TEMPTATION

COMMON TESTS

LIMITED

OUTCOME PROVIDED

ENDURANCE

REFINED E.P.

POSSIBLE SERMON POINT OR HOMILETICAL POINT: "LEARN FROM THE O.T. CHURCH AND PERSEVERE IN YOUR TESTING."

PAUL EXHORTS THE CORINTHIANS TO LEARN FROM THE O.T. CHURCH IN WILDERNESS & WARNS THEM NOT TO FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE BUT REALIZE CHRIST'S PRESENCE AND PERSEVERE IN TESTING

APPLICATION

COMMON TESTS

PERSEVERE IN TESTING

LEARN FROM O.T. CHURCH

CHURCH IN WILDERNESS

AND CHURCH OF END OF AGES

SIMILARITY OF TESTING (SUBJECT IN E.P.)