

Exposit God's Word

Reasons Why Biblical Exposition Is Best

When considering the many teaching methods and styles used by 21st century ministries, the choices can become quite bewildering. As Bible teachers, we wish to minimise the potential communication tensions between teachers and listeners.

The apostle Paul declared the Church to be *“the pillar and buttress of the truth”* (1 Timothy 3:15).

“A pillar is a concrete column that holds up the roof of a building. A buttress is anything that supports, strengthens, or stabilizes a structure. The picture emerging is that the church holds up the truth for all people to hear it amid the howling winds of error in the world. The truth remains constant and unshakable when the church faithfully discharges its duty. It is a pillar and buttress of the truth.”
(Conrad Mbewe. God's Design for the Church – A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leaders.)

That's a fearful responsibility for teachers to accept and live up to. In today's amoral world, it's more important than ever for Church teachers to strive for the same degree of integrity as the apostles had. Paul explained to the Church in Corinth that *“we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we*

commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2 NIV). Like the apostles, we are not permitted to do whatever we like with God's Word. We do not have the luxury of creating inaccuracies or softening Biblical truth to appease our listeners. Like Paul, we are to teach God's truth plainly and clearly so that our hearers recognise it as God's Word.

Preachers and disciplers are called of God to emulate the teaching model found in Nehemiah 8:1-8, where the Law of Moses was brought before the assembled congregation and read. The priests then *"helped the people to understand the Law ...and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading."*

- The priests did not give their opinion or personal interpretation. The meaning came from the text itself, allowing people to understand the text. Neither the opinions of the priests or the people concerning the Law of Moses was of any value.
- All the priests worked from, and explained, the same text from the Law of Moses. There was unity in their ministry as they exposed God's people to God's Law.
- All the priests *"helped the people to understand,"* signifying a humble attitude working to elevate the people's realisation of God speaking through His Word.

- The priests did NOT help the people to explore what the Law of Moses meant to them. No, the meaning of the Law of Moses when God delivered the Law to Moses was the meaning that the priests explained to the people.

Put simply, expository preaching involves the detailed explanation of the biblical text. It's explaining the authors intended meaning at the time of writing in such a way as to be understood today.

G. Campbell Morgan, pastor of London's Westminster Chapel (1886-1919 & 1933-1943), taught that a sermon is limited by the text it is covering. Every word from the pulpit should amplify, elaborate on, or illustrate the text at hand, with a view towards clarity. He wrote, *"The sermon is the text repeated more fully."* A sermon's primary function is to present and explain the text.

As a method, expository preaching differs from topical preaching. With a topical sermon, the preacher starts with a topic and then finds material or passages in the Bible that speaks to that topic. For example, if the topic is "Laziness," the preacher may refer to Proverbs 15:19, 18:9, possibly touching also on Romans 12:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10. None of the passages would be studied in depth; instead, each is used to support the theme of laziness. To do this, the texts being used are typically treated superficially in

order to support the topic. This permits the teacher great liberty to insert his own thoughts into the study and teaching process.

Topical sermons use a Bible passage as support material for the topic. Whereas expository teaching uses the Bible passage as the topic, with other support material, including other Bible passages being used to explain and clarify the primary biblical text. Continual topical preaching brings out the preacher's pet subjects, and in effect, even unknowingly, it can end up discipling the congregation towards the preacher instead of towards Christ.

While exposition is not the only valid method of preaching, it is the best for teaching the plain meaning of the Bible. Expository preachers and teachers usually approach Scripture with the following prerequisites in their thinking:

- * The Bible is God's Word. Since every word of God is pure and true (Psalm 12:6; 19:9; 119:140), every word deserves to be examined and understood in its own context.
- * Men need divine wisdom in order to understand God's written Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-16). Therefore, diligent Bible study, while being dependent upon the Holy Spirit is essential.
- * With exposition, the preacher is subject to the text, not the other way around. Scripture is the authority, and its

message must be presented honestly and apart from personal bias.

- * The preacher's job is to clarify the text and call for a corresponding response from the hearers. This calls for expository listening by the hearers, where they are watching and listening for truth rising from the text of Scripture.
- * When teaching by exposition, all stories and illustrations are secondary and should point directly to the truth of the passage being taught.
- * An expositor cares little if his audience says, "*What a great sermon.*" Rather, the expositor genuinely wants to hear his listeners say, "*now I understand what that passage means.*"

Biblical expository teaching educates God's people sequentially, which is God's design for discipleship. Primarily, God's people need to grow their understanding and experience of Jesus Christ through the Scriptures in the order of revelation as the Holy Spirit intended. When we read a letter from someone, we naturally begin reading at the start of the letter and continue to the end. It is the same with God's Word. We begin teaching at the start of the book or letter in Scripture and continue sequentially and

logically through to the end of it. Learning God's truths in the order in which they were revealed by the Holy Spirit. Biblical exposition covers more thoroughly all the required topics needed for the job of discipling believers to maturity. The preachers imagination and creativity is not needed, just his faithfulness to teach God's Word as it was written.

Further reasons and benefits for expository preaching:

- a)** Expository teaching seeks to deliver the Word of God in the same revelatory sequence and groupings of truths that God delivered them in the original Scriptures.
- Expository teaching follows the Holy Spirit's order of subjects in keeping with the context of each passage.
 - Expository teaching recognises the contextual, grammatical, and subject boundaries of a passage. This assists the teacher by preventing him from following personal preferences and pursuing subjects outside of the primary theme within the context.
 - Expository teaching limits the human vulnerability of teachers having hobbyhorses, favourites, or pet subjects. There is a consistent flow of differing subjects as the text develops its contextual theme.

Frequent repetition of the teachers' subjects are avoided.

- Expository teaching recognises where and how the passage fits into the overall scheme of the book or letter, as well as Scripture as a whole.
- Expository teaching best integrates biblical truth with human listening abilities. That is, the Holy Spirit has maximum exposure through the Scriptures, which He authored (2Pe 1:20-21), to minister within the hearers. Therefore, His work of conviction within the hearers is potentially maximised.
- Expository teaching best provides for expository listening and expository prayer by the hearers. That is, people learn to listen and pray in alignment with the actual truths of the biblical texts. Hearers are listening for textual explanations and not opinions.

b) Expository teaching covers more themes and topics than if you relied on the preacher's creativity for choosing topics or themes.

- By textual design, the Holy Spirit dictates the order (sequence) of truth to be learned by the hearers via the ebb and flow of biblical text.
- It also helps restrict domineering people in a congregation from dictating the teaching schedule according to their desires and preferences.
- Expository teach limits the opportunities for man-made traditions to dominate the preaching.

c) Expository teaching submits the teacher to the sovereignty of God for the Holy Spirit's work of applying His truth into the hearer's lives.

- Expository teaching best heightens a sense of dependence upon the Holy Spirit, rather than the preacher hoping that he chose the right topic for the occasion.
- Exposition naturally takes the teacher and the hearer alike on the Lord's exploration of biblical truth. The textual narrative draws everyone into the context and therefore, into its truths which are to be applied.
- It raises the hearer's appreciation for the genius of Scripture, and the grace of God in giving it to His people.

- It accelerates the hearer's exposure to consecutive truth, application, and accountability.

Expositional teaching considers the grammatical, historical, and geographical content, causing the Bible to become an exciting adventure as hearers increasingly discover God. The Bible comes alive, allowing the fascinating truth of God to speak for itself, from the text itself. The Old Testament stories, and particularly the Gospel accounts in the New Testament, powerfully accomplish this, drawing readers into real life stories and lessons.

As the apostle Paul reminded Timothy; *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16). It is this Word of God that saves, changes, and grows believers, not the preacher's cleverness.

There are 2 foundational and personal biblical issues that every student of the Bible must come to grips with. These are best stated as questions:

1. *Does the student believe God the Holy Spirit is able and willing to say what He means and mean what He says in every line of Scripture?*
2. *Does the student's integrity hold him/her to a single and consistent method of interpretation for all of*

Scripture? (Refer to chapter 2 of “He will reign forever” by Michael J. Vlach.)

It is possibly the most challenging discipline for any student of the Bible, to maintain a single method of interpretation for all of God’s Word. This must be a priority if we are to faithfully teach God’s truth as He intended at the time of writing. This single discipline guards against manmade interference with Scripture.

Authors John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue speak to the matter of how to approach Scripture in the Preface of their book “Biblical Doctrine.”

Five interpretive principles guided our explanation of biblical revelation and doctrine:

- 1. The literal principle. Scripture should be understood in its literal, natural, and normal sense. While the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, they are intended to convey literal truth. In general, however, the Bible speaks in literal terms and must be allowed to speak for itself.*
- 2. The historical principle. A passage should be interpreted in its historical context. What the author intended and what the text meant to its first audience must be taken into account. In this way, a proper, contextual*

understanding of the original meaning of Scripture can be grasped and articulated.

- 3. The grammatical principle. This task requires an understanding of the basic grammatical structure of each sentence in the original languages. To whom do the pronouns refer? What is the tense of the main verb? By asking simple questions like these, the meaning of the text becomes clearer.*
- 4. The synthetic principle. This principle, the analogia scriptura, means that Scripture is to be its own interpreter. It assumes that the Bible does not contradict itself. Thus, if an understanding of a passage conflicts with a truth taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, that interpretation cannot be correct. Scripture must be compared with Scripture to discover its accurate and full meaning.*
- 5. The clarity principle. God intended Scripture to be understood. However, not every portion of the Bible is equally clear. Therefore, clearer portions should be employed to interpret the less clear.*

MacArthur, John; Mayhue, Richard. Biblical Doctrine (Kindle Locations 609-624). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

“Got Questions” includes the following when speaking about expositional preaching.

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/expositional-preaching.html>)

There should be two main goals of expositional preaching. First is the goal to discover and explain the original, historic, and grammatical meaning of the passage, or, to put it another way, “God’s intended meaning.” This is the divinely inspired message that God had for the original audience. The second is closely related—to help people apply to their lives the truths revealed in the passage. Some discount the ability of expositional preaching to address the needs of today’s churchgoers, but that overlooks the fact that “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The power to transform lives is found only in the Word of God as applied by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men and women. Great presentation is good but it is not life-changing. While there is a place for topical preaching, it needs to supplement expositional preaching, not replace it.

The work of teaching God’s Word begins with a devoted attitude and commitment to declare the truth of God’s Word. This motivates the teacher to study and preach the mind of God which is found in the inerrant Word of God. A

consistent method of study uses a consistence method of interpretation. This requires disciplines of *hermeneutics*, which deals with **how** we interpret Scripture, and *exegesis*, which is the **explanation**, or interpretation, of Scripture. To exposit God's Word faithfully, dedication to consistency in these disciplines is required.

Accuracy in preparation should lead to faithful expository teaching and preaching as the text of God's Word is opened and explained to God's people. Therefore, typically, exposition teaches through books and letters of the Bible, beginning at the start of the text and finishing at the end. Even when a specific passage is taught as a standalone message, it is treated with the same careful and contextual study so the text can be expounded by the teacher. This allows the truth of God to speak for itself without personal ideas becoming the dominant theme being taught.

May we all pursue sound doctrine through our study and expositional teaching of God's Word. The goal is *"to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,"¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that*

we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes”
(Ephesians 4:12-14).