

WHAT KINDS OF SERMONS SHOULD WE PREACH?

I. VARIETIES OF EXPOSITORY SERMONS

A. Topical exposition

1. **Definition:** A topical expository sermon is one in which the main divisions are determined by the topic rather than any one passage of Scripture, and are developed by way of data taken from several portions of Scripture.

Example: The reasons for unanswered prayer

2. **A distinction:** "Topical expository preaching" is to be distinguished from what is often called "topical preaching," in which the topic is taken from outside the Bible.

3. **The dangers** in topical preaching:

- a. There may be a tendency for the preacher to preach on those subjects that interest him, rather than preaching "the whole counsel of God"

- b. There is sometimes a tendency for topical preaching to become unbiblical.

"It is deplorable that God's hungry sheep, hoping for the pasture of the living Word, should be fed on disquisitions on the themes of the latest headlines. It is calamitous that men and women, coming up to the church on Sunday--with God only know what cares and sorrows, what hopes and shadowed memories, what heroic aspirations and moods of shame burdening their hearts--should be offered nothing better for their sustenance than one more dreary diagnosis of the crisis of the hour." [James Stewart, *Heralds of God*, p. 11]

- c. There is the danger of using proof texts taken out of context.

B. Textual Exposition

1. **Definition:** A "textual expository sermon" is one in which both the theme and the main divisions are derived from a brief text (no more than three verses), but those divisions may be developed from elsewhere in Scripture.

2. **A false distinction:** Though most writers on homiletics use the criterion of the length of the text to distinguish between expository sermons (usually more than two verses) and textual sermons (fewer than three verses), that is really an artificial distinction.

"Whether it [the text] is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang . . . miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said." [John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*]

3. The danger

The chief danger of textual preaching is that the text will be considered apart from its context. ["A text without a context is a pretext."]

3. An example: Ezra 7:10

Theme: If we want to be successful in the ministry we must determine to be people of the Word.

The main divisions of the outline are relatively simple:

But how do we expand the outline and develop each of the main divisions?

a. Examine the context

I. We Must Set Our Hearts On Knowing the Word
["Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord"]

A.

B.

b. Think of biblical ways to develop a point, even though they may go beyond what is actually said in the text and the context

II. We Must Set Our Hearts on Obeying the Word
[" . . . and to practice it"]

A.

B.

C.

c. Consider other passages beyond the immediate context that are closely related to the text

III. We Must Set Our Hearts on Teaching the Word
[" . . . and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel"]

A.

B.

Deu. 26:16

Neh. 8:1

C. Consecutive Exposition

1. **Definition:** a series of related sermons which systematically open up a book or extended portion of Scripture

2. **Defense:** a case for consecutive exposition
 - a. The nature of the Bible

 - b. It helps people learn

 - c. It encourages personal Bible reading

 - d. It promotes balance

 - e. It promotes breadth

 - f. It makes preaching on controversial subjects easier

 - g. It encourages the preacher's personal growth

 - h. It reduces "preacher's panic"

 - i. It ensures that the voice of God, and not just the voice of God, is heard in the church

3. Difficulties

- a. It requires work

- b. It can become tedious