

The What & Why of Expository Preaching

I. What's *Required* for a Sermon to be Expository? (adapted from Liefeld, 6-7)

A. Definitions (a distinction is not made here between preaching and teaching)

1. "Expository preaching explains a passage in such a way to lead the congregation to a true and practical application of that passage" (Liefeld, 6).
2. "Expository preaching is the proclamation (or communication) of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit has first made vital in the personality of the preacher, and then through him applies to the experience of the congregation" (Robinson, 20, adapted by him in a preaching seminar).

B. Characteristics

1. *Explains one primary passage of Scripture*: Reference to other Scriptures is subordinate to the exposition of the main passage (e.g., 1 Cor. 13:1-7).
2. *Faithful to the author's intention*: It does not read into the text what the speaker wants to say but rather preaches the intended meaning (Neh. 8:8; Luke 4:16-22 on Isa. 61:1-2). The text is not a box of candy from which one selects his favorite treats. It is the Word of God, which has come to us to be master, not servant. For example, preaching leadership principles from Nehemiah 1—2 misreads authorial intent. You can preach a biblical message from the wrong verse! In other words, you can be held by a great theology so that you preach truth, but it may not be the message of the particular passage before you.
3. *Cohesion*: In Haddon Robinson's words, true exposition expounds the one, central idea of the text called the *Big Idea* (homiletical idea or main idea or synthetic statement). Real exposition is not a series of exegetical comments, unrelated truths, or a cute outline that gives a survey of a passage.
4. *Movement and direction*: The exposition brings the hearers towards the same point made by the author. The message does not simply state the main idea over and over without some design that brings the listeners along in truth.
5. *Application*: It relates biblical truth to the listener's life in line with the original purpose, meaning, or function of the text. Robinson correctly notes that the application must first be applied to the preacher's life to be effective exposition.

C. Summary: So then, what *is* expository preaching and what is it *not*?

Exposition is not...	Exposition is...
preaching from several texts of Scripture	focusing on a single passage*
selecting what <i>you</i> want to say from a text	discerning what <i>God</i> says through the author
many verse-by-verse exegetical comments or a captioned survey of a passage	focusing on the single main idea
a running commentary without direction	selected, pertinent comments towards an end
explanation without answering need	explanation which relates the text to life
preaching through a book of Scripture	preaching a text (even if not part of a series)

*I'm referring to textual exposition here. There is such a thing as topical exposition (pp. 154-55).

II. Why is Expository Preaching *Important*? (adapted from Liefeld, 7-10; cf. Greidanus, 15-16)

- A. It is *based on an inerrant text that shows God's will*. The closer we preach from Scripture, the less prone we will be to error.
- B. It *teaches God's Word in the setting chosen by the Holy Spirit*. This will guard against improper "prooftexting" (lifting verses from their context to prove a point) and "principalizing" (deriving a timeless truth or principle which applies to all people).
- C. It *has inherent authority and power*. God's Word is much more effective than the best of man's sermons to affect people's will and meet their needs. "The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching" (Robinson, 19).
- D. It *directs the attention of the hearer to the Bible*. By teaching his people how to get answers from Scripture itself, the pastor frees himself up from always being the authority. Expository sermons remind people that the final authority is the Bible—not the preacher! Scripture effectively gives us doctrine, rebuke, correction, and instruction in right relationships with people—all which equip us for good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- E. It *best meets people's true needs for spiritual nourishment*. Good expository preaching does not *impress* the congregation; it *feeds* them.
- F. It *protects against the improper interpretation of Scripture*. "Spiritualizing" (drawing a spiritual lesson while ignoring the actual meaning of a passage) is more difficult to fall into when one preaches from a single text than when the pulpit hits at verses all over the Bible.
- G. It *best enables the preacher to preach through entire books of the Bible*. Systematic exposition provides a vehicle for people to get to know the big picture of each biblical book.
- H. It *saves time by not having to decide what subject to speak on*. By preaching through texts in sequence the task is simplified into understanding God's message for His people.
- I. It *enables the preacher to speak by faith*. He must continually trust God that the content of the message for the morning sermon is what *God Himself* has decreed for the people to hear.
- J. It *guards us from some of the dangers of topical preaching*. These two types of preaching can be contrasted in several ways:

Topical Preaching	Expository Preaching
preaches 2 or more texts of Scripture	focuses on a single passage
more easily selects what the preacher wants to say from the text	discerning what <i>God</i> says through the author
the preacher designs his own outline	the preacher derives his outline from the text
time <i>may not</i> be available to put verses in their proper context	time <i>is</i> available to put verses in context
the preacher can be accused of speaking to certain individuals	the speaker is less easily accused of targeting certain subjects or people as he preaches systematically