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**How Do I Preach Expositional Sermons to Uneducated Hearers?**

**March 1, 2010 – Phil A. Newton**

“All true Christian preaching is expository preaching,” wrote John Stott. Though some consider exposition a dated method for preaching, its ability to become a mouthpiece for the biblical text insures constant relevancy. Since the pastor’s responsibility is to “preach the word,” then he must labor to understand the biblical text and communicate it effectively and passionately to his congregation (II Tim. 4:2). The expository approach seeks to let the biblical text speak to the varied needs of one’s congregation, regardless of the church’s educational background. J. W. Alexander expressed this well: “The expository method is adapted to secure the greatest amount of scriptural knowledge of both preacher and hearers.”

Both preacher and hearers can be aided in expositional preaching by keeping a few things in mind.

**The preacher and exposition:**

1. Recognize that the expository method may be foreign to your hearers; so annually preach an exposition on why you preach expositionally. In this you need to explain why exposition is necessary, what you seek to accomplish, and how to listen to the sermon.
2. When developing the sermon, be conscious of gauging your vocabulary to match your audience. Also, never presume that your hearers understand terms that might be common to you, e.g., justification, sanctification, and ecclesiology. Simple explanation of terms and examples can increase the congregation’s understanding.
3. Provide sermon outlines to aid listening. You might also consider printing your sermon manuscript and making it available before the service to aid people in listening and understanding. This becomes a good follow-up and outreach tool for your people.
4. Encourage your congregation to develop their capacity for thinking and understanding by providing additional reading material to supplement your regular preaching. This might be brief articles or sermons or booklets to begin with, and then move on to small books. Provide “Read through the Bible” guides to challenge the congregation in this spiritual discipline. Start small so that you do not overwhelm those unaccustomed to regular reading.
5. Have dialogue times so that people can ask questions related to the sermon without fear of embarrassment. It is important that you refrain from a defensive posture with the questions or comments. This might be done after an evening service or during mid-week service. Carefully and humbly answer questions by directing the questioners back to the biblical text, and using the time to explain a few hints on how to interpret Scripture.
6. Think about a “target person” as you prepare the sermon. This would be someone that represents the common level of understanding in the church. Visualize communicating to this person as you develop your outline, explanations, illustrations, and applications of the text. Seek occasions to dialogue with the “target person” about the sermon. Candidly inquire about how well he/she is grasping the sermons; ask questions about how you can be clearer, what was most helpful in the sermon, and identifying anything that hindered understanding.

**The hearers and exposition:**

Regularly challenge your hearers to make the most of each sermon by considering the following.

1. Recognize the authority of Holy Scripture and its primacy in public worship. Prepare each week to hear the Word by regularly and systematically reading through the Scripture.
2. Ask the Lord to give you ears to hear the Word and hearts to obey. (Remind the congregation that they have the responsibility to prepare to hear as much as you have responsibility to prepare to preach.)
3. Search the Scriptures like the Bereans to see if the things expounded are faithful to the Word of God (Acts 17).
4. Ask questions toward making a response to the exposition of Scripture:
   * Is there some area of my life, thought, deeds, and behavior that I’m now convinced through the Word that needs to be changed?
   * Is there a sin or disobedience or wrong attitude or excuse that has been rebuked by the truth of Scripture, and that I now need to confess and repent before the Lord?
   * Is there instruction that I need to embrace and put into practice in my life?
   * Is there a doctrine that I need to further study and apply to my understanding of Christian truth?
5. Reflect upon the text and message. Here you may arrive at your greatest insights upon the Word of God. Take notes and review them after the sermon.
6. Repeat the truths of the text to someone else, perhaps using this as a chance for testifying of the gospel or encouraging a fellow believer.

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**Recommended reading:**

Alexander, J. W., Thoughts on Preaching (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988, reprint)

Packer, J. I., God has Spoken (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988)

Piper, John, The Supremacy of God in Preaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990)

Spurgeon, C. H., Lectures to My Students, (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, 1990, reprint)

Stott, John, Biblical Preaching Today (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1961)

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