

PREACHERS' STUDY PAPERS

PREACHING

“A good preacher should have these qualities and virtues: first, he should teach systematically; second, he should have a ready wit; third, he should be eloquent; fourth, he should have a good voice; fifth, a good memory; sixth, he should know when to stop; seventh, he should be sure of his doctrine; eighth, he should go out and grapple with body and blood, wealth and honour, in the word; ninth, he should let himself be mocked and jeered at by everybody.”

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

These Study Papers were originally written for use in South India. They have been reformatted into booklet form to help any pastor/preacher to fulfil his Christ-given task. This study book is an introduction to the series and examines the subject of preaching.

Since its first publication these study papers on preaching have been used widely in events such as pastors' workshops, conferences and training.

These papers may be translated but permission from Grace Baptist Mission should be sought first.

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Abbreviations for Bible Books

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Exodus	Ex.	The Song of Solomon	Song.
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Is.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obadiah	Obad.
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jonah	Jonah
1 Chronicles	1 Chr.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chr.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament

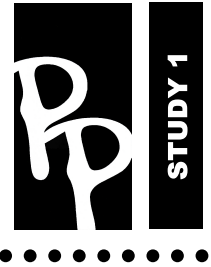
Matthew	Matt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mark	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philemon	Philm.
The Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	James
1 Corinthians	1 Co.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Co.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 John
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 John
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 John
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.		

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only those men who it knows have been recognised by them as a church as having the God-given gift of skill in teaching spiritual truths as a ministry.

MINISTRIES IN THE LOCAL CHURCH



Introduction

The purpose of these Study Papers is to help in the task of preaching and teaching in the churches. However, before we come to study the work of preaching and teaching in particular, in this first paper we will think briefly about Christian ministries in general. Preaching and teaching is not the only ministry that should be taking place in a local church.

Biblical Principle 1

The human body as an illustration of the church

There are several places in the New Testament where the human body is used as an illustration of the Christian church. See:

Romans 12:4
1 Corinthians 12:12
Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:12
Colossians 1:24; 2:19

In a human body each part has its own function which benefits the whole body.

So in the Christian church each member has some gift, some ministry, which can help the whole group. In a local church each member should add something to its total ministry. In the worldwide church churches can minister to each other.

We must not, therefore, think that a church is where only one person has a ministry – i.e. preaching and teaching, while everyone else has no ministry at all. Each member should use whatever gift God has given him or her.

In 1 Corinthians 12:5 Paul teaches us that there are “different kinds of service” in a church, not just the one ministry of preaching and teaching. The Greek word that Paul uses for “ministry” is the word DIAKONIA. That same word is used of various forms of Christian service, so proving that preaching is only one among various ministries to be found in a true church.

For example:

Luke 10:40	“distracted by all the preparations ” i.e. domestic service.
Acts 6:2	“to wait on tables” i.e. domestic service.
Acts 11:29	“to provide help for the brothers” i.e. financial help.
Romans 15:31	“my service in Jerusalem” i.e. famine relief.
Acts 1:17	“shared in this ministry ” i.e. the life of discipleship.
Acts 6:4	“the ministry of the word” i.e. preaching and teaching.
Ephesians 4:12 ¹	“for works of service ” i.e. the work of helping each other, so that an edified church results.
1 Corinthians 16:15	“the service of the saints” i.e. giving hospitality.
1 Timothy 3:10	“let them serve as deacons”

From such passages as these, it is clear that preaching and teaching is not the only **ministry** in a church. Every member adds something to the church’s ministry. Every member has some gift.

¹ This verse seems to mean that the pastors and teachers are to work for the perfecting of the saints’ ministry to each other, so that the whole church is edified.



Application

The local church

This means that the members of every local church fellowship need to examine themselves to discern what gifts each has, and so to plan to do all available ministries, each member serving others in whatever ways they can. Some may read, to help those who cannot read. Some may help other members of the fellowship in domestic ways. Some may visit homes and talk of Christ. Some may help the needy. Some may give large financial help. Some give tracts. All are **ministering**.

Always remember that the New Testament requires parents to teach their children (Eph. 6:4); older women are to teach younger ones (Titus 2:3,4); all believers should teach each other (Col.3:16); and some are recognised as special teachers (2 Tim.2:2).

So the picture of a local church that we gain from the New Testament is of a group of believers all serving each other in a variety of ministries, only one of which is that of the preaching elder.

This means that the questions needing to be asked by each member are:

What is my gift?

What is the ministry that God has prepared me for in my local church fellowship?

And it is important that the answer be one with which other members of the fellowship can agree. In this way, the whole church discovers what gifts and abilities the Lord has given it.

The preaching elder

When a church fellowship discovers that God has given the ability to preach and teach to one of their members, then they must call that person to use that special gift. Every member needs to be encouraged to develop whatever gift God has given him or her to its fullest usefulness.

So we are not to think of those who are good talkers as automatically being preachers. Just because a man says he is a preacher, we are not to assume it is truly so. It is a good thing for a church to invite to preach

a preacher. Greater responsibility rests on the teacher than on the student. Therefore the teacher will receive a more severe judgment if he is wrong! See James 3:1. There must therefore be a clear understanding of the Bible message before beginning to preach it! To preach without knowledge is to ask for condemnation! Because of this solemn aspect of the task, there will actually be a feeling of reluctance to take up preaching. Compare Exodus 3:11; 4:10; Jeremiah 1:6.

In some cases, those whom God calls to be preachers are aware of a strong sense of compulsion upon their spirits (Acts 18:5; 1 Co. 9:16). In other cases, it may be the church members who recognise a gift of ministry in a member which is not being fully used, and then it will be the fellowship as a whole who will urge that member to begin to preach, even if he is reluctant to do so. Compare Acts 13:2. **In either case**, the man's own feelings are not the only guide as to whether he is called to a preaching ministry or not.

If God has given the gift of preaching to a believer, then it must have been given for a purpose. Sooner or later that purpose must be made clear. A truly God-called preacher must expect that God will use him in that ministry. If no opportunities to preach occur, then it may be doubted if the gift is given to that person.

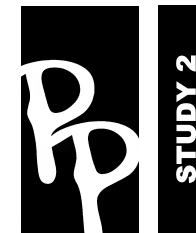
There are some **wrong** reasons why people sometimes become preachers. Make sure none of these is the reason why **you** preach!

The wrong reasons!

1. A person can be mistaken in judging himself, feeling he has a gift of preaching when he does not. Listen to a number of other godly people's opinions as to whether you have the gift; do not rely on your own opinion alone.
2. A person may have a lust for the sense of power that can arise in public speaking. Human pride can enjoy feeding on human adulation. See Matthew 23:5-7.
3. A person may feel that to be a preacher is the only way to give God truly spiritual service. This is quite wrong. For example, a faithful housewife, an honest labourer – if they are believers – both give God spiritual service by their work. Sometimes people may “dedicate” their son to be a preacher and then, because of parental pressure, the son becomes a preacher. This also is a wrong reason, unless **God** has called him.

PREACHING

WHO CAN BECOME A PREACHER?



Introduction

In some ways preaching is like any other work. As with every other work, there are things a good preacher needs to study and practise; there are things he must avoid or his preaching will be spoiled. Yet, in other ways, preaching is not like any other work that men do.



Biblical Principle 2

The preacher is called by God to preach

Preachers are Christ's special gifts to his church (Eph. 4:8-13). Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are all people who preach. But it is Christ who appoints them. He is giving them, after his return to heaven, to help the church that remains on earth. Preachers are people specially sent to preach (Rom. 10:15). You may be able to choose to be a farmer, a soldier, a shop-keeper, or a school teacher. But only those whom God appoints have any right to be preachers. Preachers are not self-appointed people.

Every believer should be ready to witness for Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). The fact that only some believers are called by God to be preachers does not mean that only they need be witnesses. Every believer should be able to give a testimony about God's work in his life. But the fact that all believers should be witnesses does not mean that all believers can be preachers. Preaching is a special work, different from general witnessing.

It is clear from the words of Jesus that there are many people preaching who have no authority to do so (Matt. 7:22-23). God never sent them. Christ never gave them to his church. Yet they were preaching in the churches! In John's epistles, he warns his readers to beware of false

preachers (1 John 4:1). So if **we** are preaching, we need to be very sure that God has sent us.

There are many examples in the Old Testament which show that God called certain people of his choice to be spokesmen for him (Ex.3:1-10; 1 Sam.3; Is.6; Ezek.3:17). God always decided who would speak for him.

The same rule is seen in operation in the New Testament (Mark 3:13,14; Acts 9:15 – Saul was a “chosen vessel”; Acts 20:28 – “the Holy Ghost has made you overseers.”) Paul thought of himself as an “ambassador for Christ” (2 Co. 5:20). No ambassador is self-appointed. The ruler chooses his own ambassadors.



Application

If you are preaching, consider the following questions:

How do you know God has chosen **you** to do this special work?

Are you sure **he** wants you to do it?

How can you **know** this?

1. First, and most importantly, whoever preaches about God must himself know God by personal experience. He must be a born-again believer or he will not have any experience of the very kingdom he is to preach about (John 3:3). He must have the spiritual life of Christ in him or his preaching will not produce spiritual fruit (John 15:5).

2. He who preaches without having had the experience of being born again is an **ignorant** preacher. He does not know the things he speaks of. He might as well be a blind artist or a deaf musician or an injured athlete. The unconverted preacher is disabled where he most needs ability. How can a dead man talk winsomely about life?

3. He who preaches without having the life of Christ in him will be an **unhappy** preacher. He speaks of the spiritual life which he may see in the lives of his hearers while not having it himself. The unconverted preacher talks about spiritual food which others, but not he, can taste. Poor, unhappy, hungry man! (1 Tim.1:7).

4. He who preaches but is not called to do so by God will be **shamed** and **embarrassed** when eventually he meets God. In the presence of God he

will know shame, realising that he had impudently claimed for himself a commission to which he has no right. And in the presence of the ungodly in hell, he will be profoundly embarrassed to find he is **not** different from them, though he tried to preach about a different way to them when they were on earth.



Biblical Principle 3

How God calls a person to preach

Preaching is a task to which God specially calls and appoints some people. Preaching is not every believer's work. A man should not preach without some evidence that God has called him to do so (Gal.1:1).

How can a person know that God is calling **him** to be a preacher? First, he will need to be a person who has had an experience of new birth, as we considered in points 1 and 2 on page 6. But, in addition, other things will also be true if he is to be God's appointed preacher. Just as there were certain qualifications for high priesthood (Heb.5:1-4), so there are certain things true of those who are appointed by God as preachers. Compare 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6.

We know which part of our body is the eye because that part has the ability to see. The ability to do something identifies the part of the body which is to do that work. We do not try to see with our feet! So, in the church (which is the body of Christ), if a person has an ability to teach, that will be one sign that he can be a preacher (2 Tim.2:2). Timothy was to look for men who were “able to teach”. The authority to teach supposes the ability to do so, as much as an eye supposes the power of vision. Church members need to be looking for those among themselves who have an ability to teach. That is the sort of person God calls to preach.



Application

Every believer needs to examine himself in order to discover what are his gifts (Rom. 12:3-8). The most important rule for any man is “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think”. It is a solemn thing to be

4. A person may be psychologically ill and only feel well when he receives the glare of publicity which preaching to a large audience gives. He will mistake this psychological feeling of “wellness” as if it were a God-given spiritual call to preach. The truly called preacher can equally well enjoy a tiny congregation as a large one, can be as happy in his study as he is in his pulpit! The preacher is to glorify God, not himself.
5. God’s call to a person to be a missionary is the same thing as the call to be a preacher. The only difference is in the actual place where the preaching is done – whether among his own people, or among some other people. The same evidence must be present if a person is called by God to be a missionary, as for a preacher. And the same wrong reasons can deceive a missionary as well as a preacher!
6. A person may think that preaching (in the sense of being a pastor) is an opt-out of secular employment.

So we need to examine our motives for preaching and to be sure we are called by God. How tragic if God should have to say of us: “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied” (Jer.23:21).



Summary

All these things will be true of anyone whom God has called to be a preacher:

- He will be a born-again believer.
- He will have an ability to teach **which others will recognise.**
- He may himself be aware of God’s call. Sometimes however that call may come to him through other believers.
- He will be hesitant to take on himself the responsibility of preaching.
- Yet he **may** also feel a sense of compulsion upon him to preach.
- He will be willing to put things other than preaching in second place in his life.



Can Women be Preachers?

In the changing attitudes that are taking place in many twenty-first century societies there is much confusion about the role of women in the Christian church. Is there a difference between male and female? The majority view in these societies is that women must not be denied equal opportunities and should be allowed to pursue their careers.

The biblical view

The Bible does not follow this line at all when it comes to the matter of church life. Some criticise this and say that the apostle Paul was writing for the social and cultural conditions of his time. Life has moved on and we cannot expect to follow practices that are now 2,000 years old. Such a view is to completely misunderstand the Bible, which has been consistent on this subject all the way through its pages. If we want to follow the Bible as our guide for living and mixing together as Christian believers, then it is important that we understand the underlying principles that are present through the whole of the Scriptures.

Male headship

Paul in writing to Timothy makes it plain that women are not to teach or have authority over the men in the church (1 Tim.2:13). This command does not suddenly appear out of nowhere as if it were new teaching. What Paul is doing is setting out the principle of male headship amongst the people of God. This is part of the creation order: Adam was formed first then Eve. In the Old Testament the patriarchs, kings, priests and prophets with preaching ministries were all leadership roles where men were appointed. This is continued in the New Testament with apostles, elders and overseers.

Paul is not expressing views that could be deemed personal or reflecting the culture he was living in, but those based upon biblical principles. We too must follow this example and not be diverted by claims of adjusting to the practices of the modern age. After all, would the Christian church change if a society were at some point to move again and look upon one gender as inferior to the other?

The principle of male headship is further emphasised in family life (Eph.5:22-33) with the relationship of Christ (husband) and the church (wife) being used as the example to follow.

Male and female equality

The Bible's distinction of male headship does not in any way suggest that women are in some way inferior to men. All are equal in Christ and there is no difference in their status. This applies to both the relationship between God and people, and to relationships between people themselves. Whilst the Bible is clear on equality of status, it does recognise a difference between male and female in the roles of submission and authority. We see this perfectly demonstrated in the Godhead. God the Father and God the Son (Jesus) are in nature equal (status), yet Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing (submission to the Father) (Phil.2:6-7).

Teaching role for women

The subject of male headship does not take away from a woman the gift of teaching. Many women are gifted in this way and the Scriptures do not deny them the use of such a gift. Women do have a vital teaching ministry, in teaching one another (Titus 2:3-5). In fact it is implied that it is not the role of men to teach the younger women outside the context of the congregation; that responsibility belongs to the mature women.

Conclusion

Whilst these Preachers' Study Papers are written to help preachers who teach and declare God's Word before congregations, their usefulness is not limited to such men. The Study Papers will be of benefit and a help to women who have had a gift of teaching recognised and are using it amongst the women.

Therefore, to rightly understand what God is saying in Scripture, we must ask a third question each time we consider Bible teaching:

Q3 Is this verse written in poetry or prophecy? Is it a plain record of history, or does it use symbols that we must carefully interpret?



Biblical Principle 8

The meaning of the text

So far in this study we have thought about the way God has revealed his truth **as a gradual development** through the Scriptures, how those historical events have taken place in **different countries and cultures** and what different **writing styles** have been used to record all this information.

These three principles lead us to the fourth consideration in our preparation for preaching. We have to establish the meaning of the passage. Some parts of the Bible are written as poetry (i.e. Psalms); other parts as proverbs, histories, parables, or plain teaching. We must, therefore, understand each kind of writing according to its nature. We do not interpret poems in the same way as we interpret laws. However, when we study plain teaching, rules of grammar become very important in working out what **each word** is saying. When we study histories, or parables, we do not ask: What does every word say? but: What is **the one main idea** of the whole paragraph?

In Hebrew poetry and prophecy a thought is often expressed in different ways in the same verse. The preacher must examine all the expressions **together** to obtain **the one meaning**.

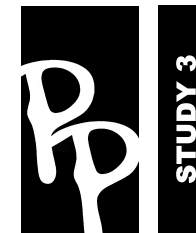
So it is good practice, when preparing to preach about any Bible passage, to ask yourself:

Q4 What sort of writing is this passage? Is it a long story with one important lesson? Is it saying one thing in several ways? Is it making a plain statement of truth? Does it use picture language? And in the light of the answer to these questions, next ask:

Q5 Exactly what is the subject these verses talk about? Write that subject on a piece of paper – **in only one or two words**. Then ask:

PREACHING

WHAT IS IT AND HOW DO WE START?



Introduction

What is preaching? Is preaching talking in public about a religious subject? No! Preaching must be more than that. If preaching were merely talking about a religious subject, then a sermon might be preached without reference to the Bible, or to God's actions in human history. Such a sermon would be no more than human speculation about God.



Biblical Principle 4

Preaching is an expression of God's thoughts to men

When the Bible talks about preaching, it means far more than human speculation. Both in the Old and New Testaments, God's spokesmen are said to speak God's word, not their own. The prophets often used the phrase "Thus says the Lord." Paul speaks of his preaching as "God's Word" (1Thess. 2:13). So preaching is more than an expression of human thoughts about God. It is an expression of God's thoughts to men.

As we saw in our first study, an unconverted person cannot be a true preacher. If he is unconverted he has nothing of the life of Christ in him. He will only have his own ignorant, human thoughts. He will be unable to say: "What I speak is God's Word." The life of God is not in him. God will speak of him as he did of false prophets long ago (Jer. 14:14). But the believer, having spiritual life in him, is different. He can know something of the thoughts of God.

Biblical examples show that preaching means declaring what God has done, and will do, in human history. The content of the sermons of preachers in the Bible was always the acts of God. This is why the Bible is the preacher's book, because only the Bible gives us a record of what God has done and will do in human history. The Bible is God's own account of his acts.

Unlike other religions, Christianity regards actual historical events as important. This is because Christianity consists of definite acts of God and the consequences of those acts worked out in human history, from Adam to Christ. Christianity is the result of what God has done and what he will do. These historical, verifiable acts of God, culminating in his entering our history himself in Christ are the bases of Christianity. And it is the fact of the resurrection of Christ which God has offered as reason for belief in the truth of Christianity (Acts 17:31). So biblical history is the material the preacher must work with.

The Greek words which the New Testament uses to describe preaching emphasise the fact that preaching is about God's acts. The most frequently used word is "evangelizo", which the Greeks used to mean "announcing a joyful event, especially a victory". The second most used word is "kerusso" which means 'to be a herald'. The third common word is "katangelo" which means 'to make a public proclamation'. The meanings of all these words makes it clear that preaching is the joyful announcing of God's victorious and redemptive acts in history.



Review

So far we have learnt that a true preacher

- Must be a born-again believer.
- Must be appointed by God to preach.
- Must use the Bible histories of God's acts as the basis of his sermons.



Biblical Principle 5

The revelation of God's truth through history

We must think about how the preacher is to use the material of Bible histories for his preaching. We cannot simply preach that people must copy everything that happened in the Bible, nor even that people should do everything the Bible says.

God has been slowly revealing his truth through the history of the world from its creation to the coming of Christ (Heb.1:1-2). This means that

there is one common purpose throughout all Scripture but that it is unveiled gradually as history has continued. Later Scripture will have fuller information than earlier Scripture, though it will not be different information. So when we look at any part of Scripture, we must first ask: Is this early or later in the history of God's revelation?

If our Scripture passage is early in Bible history, we must ask: How do later Bible histories increase and explain the revelation of truth that is being made in this early Scripture?

- Q1** Where does this verse come in the history of God's slowly developing revelation?



Biblical Principle 6

The books of the Bible are set in different countries and cultures

We must also remember that God revealed his truth through historical happenings in different nations and different cultures. We have to determine, therefore, what those historical happenings meant to the people of **that** nation and **that** culture. If similar events took place nowadays, we might understand them differently. We have to ask: What was the meaning in the place where it happened? That is the meaning we must preach.

- Q2** What was the meaning of this passage in the language and culture where it first came?



Biblical Principle 7

The text of the Bible has been written in various styles

Things are described in the Bible in different ways – some parts of Scripture are poetry; other parts are proverbs; other parts are prophecy, using symbols; some parts are historical records. We must understand the meaning of each part of the Bible according to whether it is poetry, proverb, prophecy or plain history.

There may not be many of these sorts of books available in your country. Some commentaries and books on doctrine are available through Grace Baptist Mission's literature ministry.

The Preachers' Study Papers that are being produced as part of this series are intended to provide material to cover point 1 on page 18. Some doctrine (point 2) and other material covering points 3 and 4 will also be included.

Conclusion

The message we preach will depend on our getting the right answers to the questions set out under Biblical Principles 5 to 8. Preaching is a work that involves a lot of careful study.

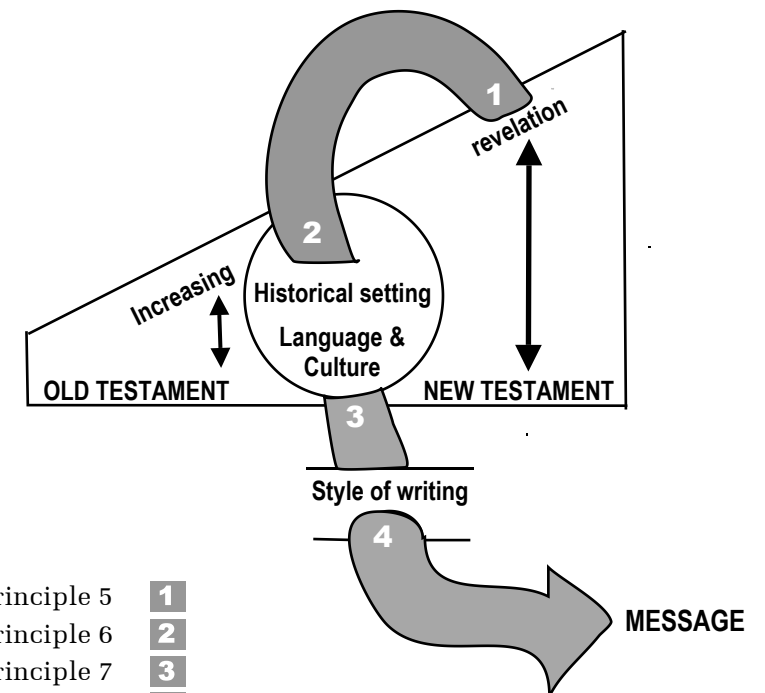
We have made our start. We now know what preaching is and the questions we need to ask of the passage to find out what the message of the text is. We still have more work to do! We must see how that message applies to us, in our circumstances, today. To help us to do that, we will look at some case studies in our next Study Papers, which will show us how to deal with the different writing styles used in the Bible.

Q6 What is the reason for that subject being introduced in these verses? There may be some historical circumstances lying behind the verses, or even the writer's own experience. The verses may be part of a longer argument being worked out by the writer. You need to discover all the circumstances which, directly or indirectly, relate to that subject.

Q7 Next, try to find out what the verses say about that subject. Then try to ask:

Q8 Do other parts of Scripture, especially later Scriptures, say anything about this subject?

So in this section we have studied how the information given in Biblical Principles 5-7 is actually put into use, in order to discover God's message in the verses that are going to be used as a basis for a sermon.



Key

- Biblical Principle 5 **1**
- Biblical Principle 6 **2**
- Biblical Principle 7 **3**
- Biblical Principle 8 **4**



Case study 1

Preaching from a text that deals with a subject

Take the Scripture passage of James 1:5 and answer questions 4-8 set out on pages 16 and 17.

Answer to Question 4

This is a verse of plain teaching. There are no symbols, no metaphors, no parables to interpret, no story to analyse. We therefore must understand each of the words literally.

Answer to Question 5

One important subject of this verse is “wisdom”. Wisdom in the Bible means “understanding the will of the Lord” – see Ephesians 5:17. “Folly” in the Bible – meaning “the ignoring God” – is the opposite of biblical wisdom.

Answer to Question 6

James says trials and difficulties are a means of producing spiritual fruit in the life of the believer (verses 2-4). It is not easy for a believer undergoing great trial to be joyful. Joy is not a normal reaction to trial. But if we understand what God’s will is in sending that trial – i.e. that we might develop the lovely fruit of patient faith – then we **can** be joyful. The trial will do us **good**! Now, says James, if you lack the wisdom to understand the will of the Lord like this, then ask God for the necessary wisdom.

Answer to Question 7

James goes on to say how to get such wisdom. We are to ask God for it without doubting that God will give it; first, because God gives gifts generously even when we do not deserve them (verse 5) and, second, because double-minded people are not true believers (verses 6,7). To think, one minute, that the trial is unfair and God is cruel to allow it, is to think like an unbeliever; and then, the next minute, to think like a believer that the trial is God’s way of doing you good, is to be double-minded. Both views cannot be true. So if you want to know the will of the Lord, if you want wisdom, then do not ever allow yourself to think like unbelievers who have no knowledge of God! Seek God wholly, always, not half-heartedly, or only at some times!

Answer to Question 8

There are a number of other passages in the Bible which illustrate how unbelievers think foolishly, not knowing God, and how believers think wisely because they know God’s ways.



Focus Point

Tools to help

In Biblical Principle 5 we saw how God’s revelation of truth **has developed gradually** throughout Scripture. This means that every preacher must have a good knowledge of the Bible, from beginning to end, in order to know if later Scriptures give more information about a subject than earlier Scripture. **Reading the whole Bible is a very important part of preparing to be a preacher.**

The meaning of what God has said in different times and cultures arises from **what those words meant in those circumstances**. What we have to find out is – what did the words mean when God first gave them? So we need to learn about the languages and the histories of the Bible nations – especially what God taught the Jews in the Old Testament and the early church in the New Testament.

To understand what God has taught, the preacher must use helpful “tools”, just as a mechanic has to use tools for his work. The following can be helpful tools for the preacher:

1. Explanatory commentaries on the Bible books. Try to find out if the writers of the commentaries are evangelical Christians; if they are not, the commentaries may be misleading.
2. Books about biblical doctrine. Again, try to find out if the writer uses the teachings of the Reformation.
3. Books about Bible lands and the customs of people in Bible times.
4. Books which study Hebrew and Greek words and their grammatical use.
5. Concordances which show what are the actual Hebrew and Greek words from which the translations in your own language have been made.

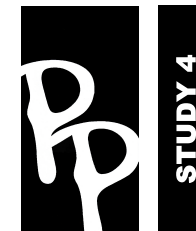
4 The epistles are full of exhortations for believers to “put on the new man”; to “walk as children of light”; to “abstain from every appearance of evil”. Jesus taught that known sin must be put right before we can truly worship (Matt. 5:23,24). Fellowship and love to all the brethren are repeatedly taught in the New Testament. Jesus turned God’s anger away, through his death on the cross, from those who have trusted by faith that Jesus was punished for their sin.

5 The story can teach us :-

- i. That God’s anger is turned away from all those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation; their sin has been punished by the death of a substitute. They now experience God’s generosity and goodness.
- ii. That every church member, being a part of a group that has agreed (by baptism and church membership) to live as one body, must be very careful:
 - a. not to be disobedient to God’s will and
 - b. that every member should seek to do only those things that make the fellowship in the church stronger and happier.

PREACHING

THE LONG NARRATIVE



Introduction

In our last Study Paper we established that preaching is the declaration and explanation of God’s thoughts to people. God has set out this information in his Word, the Bible. The preacher has to use the Bible as the basis of his message. As we considered this subject it became clear that the preacher needs to read and know the Bible.

God has revealed his truth through the events of history using different nations and cultures. As time has progressed, so the information has increased. The New Testament, for example, provides us with fuller information, so that we know in more detail who the promised Messiah is than those who lived in the Old Testament times. We also began to consider the fact that all the passages of the Bible have not been written in the same way. As part of our preparation to preach a message, it was suggested that we ask ourselves a number of questions to try to begin to have a better understanding of the passage we are considering. The aim of all this examination is to help us determine what the meaning of the text is.

Recognising the different writing styles is essential otherwise we will have difficulty in answering questions 4 - 9 set out in the previous Study Paper. This may lead us to a wrong understanding of the text. We will therefore spend the next few Study Papers looking at the different styles, starting with a passage that is all about a specific subject. We looked at the passage from James 1:5 as an example of preaching what the Bible teaches about a subject - i.e. wisdom. Now we will look at the longer Bible passage.



Case Study 2

A long narrative

In this paper we will think about preaching from a longer Bible passage – perhaps whole chapters. In this case, we look for one or two main messages and do not need to concentrate on all the words used in the passage.

Preaching from a lengthy passage of Scripture may mean preaching from some historical event recorded in the Bible, or from a parable, or from a miracle. In Study Paper 3 we learned that Christian truth has often been revealed as God has worked in the events of human history. So the story of God's dealings with people teaches truth about God (Rom.15:4). We neglect Bible histories at our peril! But to preach from a story is not merely to recount the story. We must explain what truths God is teaching through that story.

Read the whole passage very carefully. Make sure you have the narrative correctly in your mind.

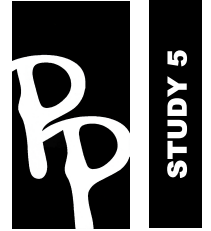
Now:

- 1** Try to discover how this incident arose from what has gone before; and what difference the incident made afterwards to the people who were in it.
- 2** Using your imagination, go through the story as if you were each character in turn. Try to see the event from each of their points of view.
- 3** In the light of what you learn from (i) and (ii), try to decide what is the chief lesson God taught through that event. Are there any other lessons?
- 4** Work out how those lessons are also taught in other parts of Scripture. God never contradicts himself, so the lesson you draw from the history must agree with what other Scriptures teach.
- 5** Now work out how the lesson taught by the story applies to yourself and to the people to whom you preach.

AN EXAMPLE: Joshua chapters 7 and 8: the capture of Ai.

Reading these two chapters carefully, we learn that God is angry. The children of Israel, having spied out the city of Ai, thought it small enough to capture it with 3,000 men. But they were defeated. Achan had been disobedient to God's clear command. Achan was punished. God's anger was turned away and Ai captured, following the instructions given by God. Israel rededicated themselves as God's obedient people. Now, going through points **1 – 4** on page 22:

- 1** This defeat followed a most remarkable victory at Jericho. So why are the Israelites defeated by a small number? After the defeat, Joshua learns of the reason for the defeat. There is sin in the camp, God has been disobeyed. What does this tell us about sin? How does God regard sin and what must we do? The sin of Achan happened at the very outset of the entry into Palestine. Is that why God punished it so severely – because it was a **first** disobedience? Compare Numbers 15:32-36 (the first Sabbath breaker) and Acts 5:1-11 (the first sin within the fellowship against the whole church).
- 2** Joshua was amazed at defeat. (We are usually amazed at victory because defeats are more often our experience!). Achan saw, coveted, took (7:21). Compare Genesis 3:6 – Eve saw, desired, took. Achan thought no-one saw him sin (God did!). Achan thought it did not matter if **he** alone sinned. (It mattered, because he was part of the whole people of God. When one part of the body is ill, the rest suffers).
- 3**
 - a. The reason for the defeat was not because Ai was strong, nor because Israel lacked resources, but because someone had deliberately sinned. (Israel had captured Jericho without resources). God's anger burned against Israel. Sin is more crippling to the power of the church than lack of money. God's anger could be turned away if the sin were dealt with. When the sin was removed God's anger was turned away and his blessings were poured out on the people.
 - b. The disobedience of one person can affect the welfare of the whole group. In any group which has made a covenant to work as one body, each individual must carefully avoid wilful disobedience.



Introduction

We have been looking at the preparation of different kinds of sermons; preaching about a subject (“wisdom”, Case Study 1 in paper 3); preaching from a long narrative (Joshua 7,8, paper 6). In this Case Study we shall think about preaching from a short statement of doctrine. There are many places throughout scripture where God has revealed some truth (about himself, or about his deeds, or about us and our life) in a brief sentence. And whereas in preaching from a long narrative we use only the main lesson of the story, in preaching from a concise statement of divine truth we must carefully examine every single word.

There are certain general rules to follow in preparing to preach from a doctrinal statement.

- 1** Find out what is the general subject of the section of Scripture in which this statement occurs. Find out if there is a special reason why the writer is writing about that subject in this place and what are the special circumstances of the people to whom he is writing.
- 2** Understand the meaning of every word in the statement; compare **other** places in the Bible where the main words of the statement are used again, to make sure you understand what meaning **the Bible** gives to those words. (This is best done by knowing the Hebrew or Greek words; if you do not, try to find a commentary that explains these things for you).
- 3** Now put together your findings from **1** and **2** and decide what the statement really says in relation to the original readers, and work out how that truth relates to today’s hearers.
- 4** Make very sure that your understanding of this statement does not contradict the plain teaching of any other parts of Scripture. If it does you must have wrongly understood the statement.



Case Study 3

AN EXAMPLE: Hebrews 10:22

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

1 The general subject of the section 10:19-25 is how Christian believers should worship God. The letter is written to Jewish Christians, to teach that since Christ has risen and ascended to heaven, New Testament worship is very different from Old Testament worship. Jewish Christians no longer used the old temple, nor the old rituals of animal sacrifices, to worship God. Having Christ as their great High Priest (verse 21) who had offered **himself** as a sacrifice for sin, meant that Jewish Christians now could worship “in spirit and in truth” and not in physical ceremonies. So we learn here how **we** should worship God today!

2a “A guilty conscience sprinkled”. The word used here for “guilty” can have the force of “troubled, pained, sorrowing”, more than “bad in character”. The meaning is “a good conscience troubled because of feeling ashamed of sin”. Such a conscience should understand that Christ died for sin. Blood sprinkled on anything in the Old Testament ceremonies meant “an animal has died for this thing”. So **anyone** who has faith in Jesus Christ can tell his anxious conscience “**Christ died for my sin**” and come unafraid to worship a holy God.

2b “A body cleansed with pure water”; for the meaning of “cleansed” see John 15:3 where the same word occurs. The teachings of Jesus, when obeyed, produce clean living. “Pure water” – the use of “pure” (meaning, not containing any impurity) indicates that everyday washing water is **not** meant; that it is never pure. “Body” stands for the public, visible, everyday physical behaviour. So, **whoever comes to worship God must come prepared to obey the pure teachings of Jesus and have a clean life**. (Baptism will be one way of obeying Jesus’ teaching – though that is not the first meaning of this phrase about water).

2c “A sincere heart”. The word used for “sincere” means “not imitation”. Our hearts are deceitful; they do contain wickedness. God does not say we must be perfectly pure before we come to him. (If

he did, we could never come!). But **he does require us to be sincere when we come**.

2d “Full assurance of faith”; i.e. **being fully assured that faith in Christ, as the only Saviour, is the only way to come to God**. The meaning cannot be, having perfect assurance and no doubts whatever; if so, then **few** could come to God; and their own assurance would be their reason for coming, instead of God’s grace being the reason for it).

3 We should examine ourselves when we come to worship to see if:

- a. We do trust in Christ’s death on our behalf to cleanse our sin (or whether we trust in our own good works);
- b. We do obey the Scriptures as we know God’s Word ought to be obeyed;
- c. We are sincere (and not being hypocritical);
- d. We really are convinced that Christ is the **only** way to God.

Then we can approach near to God! Coming near to God is something Old Testament believers never dared to do! See Exodus 20:18; Leviticus 16:2; 2 Samuel 6:6,7. “Draw near” means “to approach close to” God. How can **we** come close to God? Is it not by learning his thoughts from Scripture and by obeying his will? Is it not by becoming holy, as he is? The four things, a,b,c,d are essential ways for the believer to learn God-likeness.

Staggered Parallelism

Sometimes the parallelism is staggered. Two good examples from the New Testament are:

Matthew 7:7, 8

verse 7:	a.	Ask and it will be given to you
	b.	Seek and you shall find
	c.	Knock and it shall be opened
verse 8:	a.	Everyone who asks receives
	b.	He who seeks, finds
	c.	To him who knocks, the door will be opened

and Matthew 11:28-30

verse	28:	Come to me	
	29	Take my yoke	synonymous parallelism
		Learn from me	
verse	28:	I will give you rest	synonymous parallelism
	29:	You will find rest	
verse	30:	My yoke is easy	synonymous parallelism
		My burden is light	
verse	28:	You are weary and burdened	antithetical parallelism
	29	I am gentle and humble in heart	

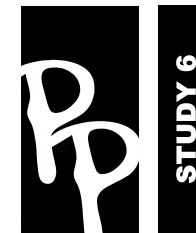
See also Psalm 33:13-14.

Acrostic Poems

Some Old Testament poems are **acrostic poems**: i.e. each verse, or each verse in a group of verses, begin with the same Hebrew letter, the 22 sections completing the whole alphabet. Other acrostic psalms are 25,34,37,111,112,145. So also, Lamentations 1-4 and Proverbs 31:10-31 (the ABC. of a perfect wife!).

PREACHING

THE POETICAL PASSAGE



Case Studies dealt with so far

So far we have looked at:

- Preaching on a Bible topic (wisdom, Case Study 1 on page 18)
- Preaching on a Bible narrative (Joshua 7,8, Case Study 2, pages 22-24)
- Preaching on a doctrinal statement (Hebrews 10:22, Case Study 3, pages 26-27)

Introduction

In this Case Study we are looking at the preaching from a poetical passage of the Bible.

The books of Psalms, Song of Solomon, Proverbs, Job and some parts of the prophetic books, are written in the form of Hebrew poetry; parts of the New Testament are also written like Hebrew poetry.

Style of Hebrew Poetry

Hebrew poetry is full of symbols. In order to try to describe their feelings about a subject, Hebrew writers liked to draw illustrations from nature (they were an agricultural people). Sometimes they expressed the **intensity** of their feelings by combining several illustrations, which would never happen together in real life! The rapid assembling of different symbols is not confusing to the Hebrew but expresses his very intense emotions. For example, see 1 Kings 14:15:

smitten Israel is like: —
 → reed swaying in river flow
 → uprooted plant
 → dust scattered to the winds

Parallelism

Hebrew poetry does not often use words of similar sound, but instead thoughts are expressed by **pairs** of statements. The same thought is written in two similar ways. This is called parallelism. There are three kinds of parallelism.

Example 1: Synonymous parallelism

A good example of **synonymous parallelism** is Psalm 114. Every verse of the psalm can be split in two; each half expresses a similar thought to the other half of the same verse.

For example:

v.1	Israel came out of Egypt	=	Jacob from a people of foreign tongue
v.2	Judah became God's sanctuary	=	Israel his dominion

Each verse of this psalm can be treated in this way!

Example 2: Antithetic parallelism

There are two other kinds of parallelism; sometimes statements are made which express two opposite thoughts – **antithetic parallelism**.

For example:

Psalm 37:9:	evil men	▷ ◁	those that hope in the Lord
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See also Psalm 37:17, 21, 22. And many of the Proverbs use this form of contrasting statements.

Example 3: Cause and effect parallels

Sometimes the parallel statements express a cause (in one statement) and then an effect (in the other statement).

For example:

Psalm 37:31	the law of God is in his heart	▷	his feet do not slip
Psalm 119:18	eyes opened	▷	result in new understanding

Sections of passages that are parallel

Sometimes whole sections, comprising a number of verses in a Hebrew poem, are paralleled with other whole sections of the poem.

For example, Psalm 1 can be divided

Verses 1-3: synonymous parallelisms,
all describing the believer
BUT

contrasted with:

Verses 4, 5: synonymous parallelisms,
all describing unbelievers
AND

leading to:

Verse 6: a conclusion, expressed as
an antithetic parallelism



Some basic facts about Bible prophecies

Fact 1

Prophets did speak **about** other nations, but those prophecies were always addressed to Judah and Israel. (The only exception is the brief ministry of Jonah **in** Nineveh). God so loved his people that he continually taught them through the prophets so that they would repent and return to him. So, **the prophets prophesied in order to cause moral and spiritual improvement in the lives of their hearers.**

Fact 2

Although Israel as a nation was God's chosen nation, the people were not all true believers. Their nation was chosen to illustrate how God graciously makes and keeps covenants with people, as he now does with all who are in Christ. Many Israelites were always **unbelievers**. **Therefore, the prophets often needed to preach for their conversion and true belief.**

Fact 3

In order to be understood in their own day, the prophets **MUST** have spoken in language that had some meaning in their own day and culture, even though they described events of a future day and different culture. **They had to describe the future by using picture language drawn from objects known in their day.** For example, they could only describe the coming New Testament worldwide church as a "Jerusalem" or a "Zion" or a "temple" to which all nations come. They could only describe the kingdom of God which Christ founded, and which includes all believers, as an "Israel". So the everlasting reign of Christ is described as "David's throne, lasting for ever".

Fact 4

It is clear that, while some prophecies are fulfilled exactly and in a literal way, others are not. For example, Genesis 3:15 "bruised heel" and "bruised head" cannot be said to be fulfilled literally anywhere in the conflict between Christ and Satan. In Psalm 22 there are a number of prophecies clearly describing the literal crucifixion of Christ – verses 1,7,8,14,15,17,18. And in the same psalm, there are verses NOT fulfilled literally – verses 6,12, 13, 20, 21. We cannot therefore say: "Prophecies always mean something different from what they describe." Sometimes they are fulfilled precisely as they describe. **Whenever possible, New Testament teaching must guide how we understand the Old Testament.**

There are certain rules to observe when preaching from a poetic passage of Scripture:

i Try to discover what historical incident has caused the poem to be written and read the history carefully. Sometimes the history is evident from the psalm itself – e.g. Psalm 126 is obviously a song of people returning from exile. Sometimes the history is indicated in the heading of the psalm – e.g. behind Psalms 52 and 120 is the history of 1 Samuel 21,22. **To know the history will help to understand the symbols used in the poem.**

ii Symbols used in poetry often have a special meaning. In Psalm 69:2 the psalmist talks about deep mire and floods of water pouring over him. We are not to think he was physically drowning. Verse 1 indicates the experience was in his soul. Floods, storms, mire, waves, seas – these symbols all mean "trouble, distress, desperate difficulties". **NAMES OF PHYSICAL THINGS ARE OFTEN USED TO DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF SOME TRUE EXPERIENCE.**

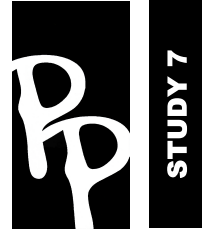
Even geographical places can be symbolic e.g. Psalm 120:5: Mesech was in Turkey; Kedar was in Arabia; David was not actually in either place, but fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 22). Mesech and Kedar were two quarrelsome, trouble-making tribes. What David means is that he was living among quarrelsome people **like** Mesech and Kedar. **Try to understand what meaning the symbol has in Bible use.**

iii Never interpret one half of a parallelism to mean something which makes the other half of it ridiculous. Always use one half to explain the other half.

iv Reading the psalm through carefully, and adding all the information you have gained by i,ii,iii above, decide what is the subject that the psalmist is writing about and find out what he did about it. Then see how his situation is like that of those to whom you preach. Perhaps the psalmist's way of meeting his situation will guide your congregation as to what to do about their problems.

Acrostic psalms often need a different method of study. If their verses are a collection of doctrinal statements, they should be used in that way (Case Study 3).

PREACHING THE PROPHETIC PASSAGE



Introduction

Lastly, we come to what can be the hardest kind of preaching – sermons from any of the fifteen prophetic books of the Bible. The prophets often spoke or wrote in poetic language, so the rules for preaching from poetical writing (Study no.6). will also help when preaching from prophetic passages.

Sometimes the prophets spoke in plain language, to teach some doctrinal truth; e.g. Isaiah 40:28,29; Jeremiah 17:9; Ezekiel 18:4; Hosea 14:9; Joel 2:12,13. So the rules for preaching from a doctrinal statement (Study no.5) should be used for such verses.

Many times, however, the prophets speak of events in their near or distant future and use much symbolism. To interpret and preach from such passages needs much careful study. There are certain basic facts which must always be kept in mind. We are not left to guess-work!



Two kinds of interpretation

Literal

taking words on their face value, without looking for any other meaning.

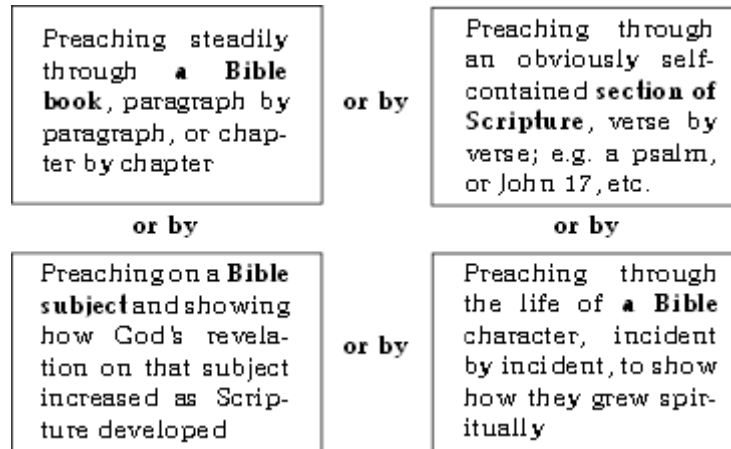
or

Spiritual

understanding words to be symbols of some religious truth.

Prophecies are to be interpreted either as **literal** or as **spiritual**, or even, sometimes, **in both ways**.

This means that it is good to prepare sermons which follow on from each other. This will help the congregation to see how successive Bible truths relate to each other. We can do this by:



To preach a planned series of sermons to the same congregation has some important advantages:

- A.** It prevents the preacher from repeatedly preaching on one or two favourite subjects only. As he works through a passage of Scripture, the preacher will find that a variety of subjects occurs.
- B.** It shows the congregation the fullness of Scripture and how it relates to all aspects of our lives.
- C.** It encourages the congregation to think ahead and study for themselves the next section of Scripture in the plan.
- D.** It saves the preacher from the criticism that he chooses particular texts to attack the congregation.

Yet, while recognising the value of consecutive study of the Scriptures, the preacher must be careful to ensure that there is a healthy “balance” in the preaching. Variety is essential in our daily food. So also in our spiritual food. We must avoid having **all** our series from the New Testament, or **all** from the Old Testament, or **all** studying doctrinal subjects, or **all** studying practical issues of Christian living. If any one series of sermons seems to be growing too long, we need to stop and deal

Fact 5

We can find examples in the New Testament of Old Testament prophecies being explained according to Fact 3. For example, in Galatians 6:16 Paul is talking about people who follow a certain rule; i.e. the rule that circumcision is not important now (verse 15). In that case, the word “Israel” in verse 16 cannot mean the Jewish nation, for whom circumcision was still essential. “Israel” must therefore mean “all true believers”. This agrees with Galatians 3:7 where believers are called “children of Abraham”.

Again, in Acts 15:7-12 Peter and Paul reported the conversion of Gentiles. In verses 16,17 James explains that such conversions were exactly what the prophet was talking about in Amos 9:11,12.

In Hebrews 12:22 Christian believers are said to come to “Mount Zion” and “the heavenly Jerusalem”; i.e. the presence of God. God who used to be especially in the temple of Jerusalem is now present in Christians and in churches. **We** must interpret Old Testament prophecy as the apostles did.

Fact 6

The meaning of a prophecy is sometimes fulfilled in more than one way. The life of a fruit tree can be expressed by its foliage, its flowers or its fruit. The promise of a land to Abraham (Gen.13:15) was literally fulfilled in Solomon’s day (2 Chr.9:26), as Nehemiah said (Neh.9:7-8). Yet in the New Testament, it is clear that Abraham knew the promise was also about a heavenly country (Heb.11:8-16) which is God’s spiritual kingdom of all believers. We can say that **if an Old Testament prophecy describes events taking place after Christ’s death, in terms of Old Testament objects, then we must not expect a literal fulfilment but understand that there is a real spiritual fulfilment.** See John 4:21-24.

When a prophecy moves from Old Testament origins to New Testament fulfilment, it will change its form, as the old ceremonial worship of the tabernacle and temple changed to spiritual worship in the church.

N.B. Remember the rules for preaching from poetry in Study 6.



Rules for preaching from a prophetic passage

Rule 1

Try to find out about the historical situation when the prophet preached. Try to find out what sort of person the prophet was. These will influence the way he preached. E.g. Ezekiel was a priest in exile from Jerusalem. It is not at all surprising therefore that his vision of the perfect kingdom of God is described in picture language as a temple and its ceremonies (Ezek. 40-44). Amos was a shepherd. His prophecies are full of illustrations from wildlife and farm life.

Rule 2

If the prophecy refers to the nation of Israel **before the coming of Christ** then it must be understood in a literal sense; e.g. prophecies about the captivity in Babylon and Israel's return from it were fulfilled in literal detail.

Rule 3

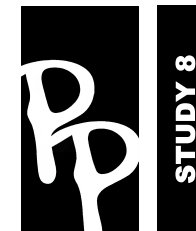
If the prophecy refers to events taking place **after the death of Christ**, then it must be understood in a Christian way – i.e. the Old Testament picture language of ceremonies and symbols must be understood to mean spiritual truths of the new covenant; e.g. prophecies about another temple or another kingdom over which David reigns for ever are fulfilled by the spiritual kingdom of believers under Christ the Lord.

Rule 4

Sometimes a prophecy may refer to **both** the Old Testament nation of Israel **and** the **New Testament** spiritual Israel of all believers. In such a case, try to work out what was the religious truth God was teaching old Israel and then see how believers today ought to use that same truth. E.g. in Zechariah 2 the prophet sees Jerusalem re-populated after the Babylonian exile (verses 1-9). Then in verses 10-13 the prophet sees people from **all** nations becoming God's people. This is a picture of the gospel age, from Pentecost, when Gentiles have become believers. Israel is no longer exclusively God's people – verse 11: "many nations shall be my people". (See Isaiah 19:25; Psalm 87). So verse 12 must refer to the worldwide church of all believers, under the picture language of "Judah" and "Jerusalem". All that was true of God's relationship with Judah and his presence in Jerusalem is now true of every believer.

PREACHING

PLANNED PREACHING



Introduction

In previous Study Papers we have learned some rules to help understand rightly different types of Scripture – doctrinal statements, narrative passages, poetry, prophecy, etc. It is essential to interpret Scripture rightly if we are to preach its message truthfully. It is a serious sin to declare that our message is God's word, if we have misunderstood the Scripture by failing to interpret it aright.

In this Study Paper, we are going to consider one aspect of our preparation for preaching, planning. There is a tendency for some preachers to wait upon God to give them a text to preach on. How and when do they receive this information? There have been instances when the preacher has been climbing the pulpit steps and has still been waiting for that divine revelation. When Paul addressed the elders of the church in Ephesus, he told them that he had proclaimed to them the whole will of God (Acts 20:27). In others words, he had been careful to teach the church the whole of God's truth. Today, that means the whole of the Bible.

If the task for pastors is to teach the whole of the Bible to their people, it will require planning and preparation.



Preaching in a systematic way

We need to think about preaching sermons **as a series**, as well as thinking about each individual one. All Bible truths are related to each other. God's revelations of himself to men has been continuously increasing from Genesis to Christ (Heb.1:1,2). In our preaching, we need to teach the complete pattern of Christian truth (Acts 20:27). The aim is to bring about the "perfecting of the saints" (Eph. 4:12); i.e. teaching them **all** God's truths.

with something quite different for a while. The needs of the congregation, practical, intellectual and spiritual, must continually guide us. Babies need milk; mature persons can take meat. So in the spiritual life of our hearers also. Young Christians need simple teaching; older ones need deeper truth.

Clearly, if congregations like to have an arrangement whereby a different person preaches to them each week, then planned preaching is not possible.¹ That congregation will not have the benefit of consecutive study of Scripture that it ought to be enjoying from a regular ministry. They may never hear a sermon on some truths of God's Word! That is a serious weakness. And the preacher who goes to a different congregation for each sermon may well lose the valuable discipline of having to study the variety of subjects that he would find if he preached from successive parts of Scripture. Moreover, he may well not know what are the needs of a congregation he only visits irregularly. ***So the best arrangement is for the preacher and the people to study a subject together on a number of consecutive occasions.***



An example

As an example of the variety of subjects which are met, when a whole passage of Scripture is studied, consider the model prayer that the Lord gave to his disciples (Matthew 6:9-13).

Verse		Preaching subjects
This is how you should pray 1	➤	The place of prayer in the Christian's life; What is prayer? (Compare verses 6-7.) NB. v.9 worship The v.10 submission to God pattern vs.11-13 intercession v.13 worship (again)
Our Father 2	➤	The Fatherhood of God – of whom is he the Father? How is he Father? What is it to be his child?

¹. A congregation could stipulate which passages visiting preachers expound. This may not have the continuity of a single preacher but would be useful for congregations without a minister/pastor.

Verse		Preaching subjects
in heaven 3	▷	The transcendence of God; not identified with his creation but “in heaven”, i.e. distinct from creation. How does Scripture describe the nature of God?
hallowed be your name 4	▷	The holiness of God; what is holiness? How is God holy? How can God’s people also be holy?
your kingdom come 5	▷	The rule of God; what is God’s kingdom? How does God rule it? Who is in it?
your will be done 6	▷	God’s will and purpose. Is God in control of everything? Do God’s purposes ever fail? How does God’s will differ from fatalism?
Give us today our daily bread 7	▷	It is right to pray about the needs of daily life, but they do not come first in prayer! God gives, but we must also work. What is the right use of material possessions.
Forgive us our debts 8	▷	The forgiveness of sins; how can a holy God forgive sinners without punishing them? Isn’t it unfair to punish someone else for our sin? How can we know if we are forgiven?

Verse		Preaching subjects
as we have forgiven our debtors 9	▷	A gracious Christian spirit – if we debtors are truly forgiven much, how can we not forgive others? (Compare Matthew 18: 23-35). We cannot worship God aright if we will not forgive our brothers (Mat. 5:23-24).
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil 10	▷	Divine guidance – a blessing! It will include trials too. Why do believers need testing? How to endure when being tested. How are believers kept by God?
for yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever, Amen. 11	▷	The glory of God. The aim of all our living should be to glorify God His power is the basis of our hope that he will save us. He is unique. How are believers kept by God?

Thus, in a series of 11 sermons, a whole variety of subjects can be dealt with, all of which add to the knowledge every believer ought to have about God, about prayer and about himself.

Hebrew word used here for “see” means “to consider, with an understanding of the significance of a thing”.

4. The Hebrew word for “wonderful” in this verse is used, in almost every Old Testament occurrence, to refer to something miraculous or astonishing that **God** has done. It is not used of things men do. So the psalmist is thinking of the wonderful ways in which God had redeemed and preserved his people Israel. For us, with the whole Bible, there is all the wonder purchased by the Son and applied to us by the Spirit, to marvel at!

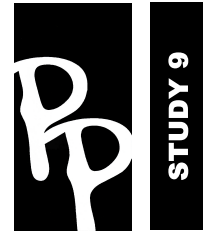
Conclusion

What will be the effect of our seeing wonderful things in God’s Word?

- i We shall long to know even more! To know a little is to know that there is more, in spiritual things!
- ii We shall be made anxious to live according to what we see in God’s Word.
- iii We shall be eager that others should have a similar experience for themselves.

PREACHING

THE PREACHER HIMSELF



Introduction

The person who speaks can be as important as what is actually said. If we have reason to distrust the person who is speaking, we shall not accept what he has to say. If we know the speaker to be an actor who is merely copying someone else, then we know that his words do not come from his own personal experience. Similarly, the character of the preacher’s life will affect the way in which people receive his message. They will judge the value of his words by their knowledge of **his life**. So Paul reminds Timothy of the need to live a holy life (1 Tim. 4:16; 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22-26).

The preacher as a unique individual

How a thing is said is also important. The speaker’s own personality will affect the way he preaches. His preaching will therefore contain an expression of **himself**. “God is pleading **through** us,” said Paul, about his own preaching (2 Co. 5:20). The words “through us” mean “using us as the instrument”. Each preacher should be his own natural self when preaching. It is quite wrong for one preacher to try to copy the personality of another preacher. A knife will not be very successful if used as a spoon; but there is a special usefulness for both a knife and a spoon when used in their normal way. So God uses as his instrument the particular personality he gave to each of his preachers to do the special work he wants done wherever he sends them. God has prepared them as his instrument. How foolish if they try to make themselves like someone else!

The preacher is a messenger

The preacher must never forget he is only a messenger. He does not originate the message. He merely passes on the message **from Scripture**. He must not change the message or give it a meaning different from the scriptural meaning. And he must not allow anything in his life, or any undisciplined display of his personality, to be more prominent than the

message of God which he preaches from the Bible. Even Jesus said: “I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak” (John 12:49). If Jesus spoke like that of his carefulness to teach only God’s truth, how careful we ought to be lest we preach what is not true.

The preacher’s inner state

That message will be most powerfully preached which the preacher has first received in his own heart. John said he was writing about what he had himself heard, seen, looked upon and touched (1 John 1:1-3). We read in Scripture several times that those who were to be God’s messengers were required to “eat the scroll” containing the message, before declaring it to the people (Ezek. 3:1-4; Rev. 10: 8-11); Compare Isaiah 50:4 and Jeremiah 15:16. This not only means that the preacher must be one who knows the experience of new birth (see Study Paper 2) but also that he needs to experience for himself the power of **the truths that he preaches**.

Through the Scriptures, the messengers of God were people who all had a sense of the greatness and reality of God. For example, Isaiah 6:1-8; Ezekiel 1:14-28; Daniel 10:2-9; Acts 9:3-9; Revelation 1:10-21. Unless he feels in his heart as well as knows with his mind the reality of God, the preacher will be without conviction. Little sense of the glory of God will mean little conviction in preaching about him.

The preacher has the full revelation of Scripture

Today we have God’s complete revelation of truth in the Scriptures, which God’s messengers in Bible times did not have. These Scriptures are given to help “the man of God to be perfect” (2 Tim. 3: 16,17). God can now speak to us through the Scriptures as he could not speak in the times before the Bible was complete. So the sense of the reality of God may not, nowadays, be given by special visions as it was in Old Testament times. Instead, the Holy Spirit will cause our spirits to be stirred and guided by the force of the truths of the Bible as we prayerfully seek to read, understand and obey them. Such an experience will give the preacher courage to present these truths to his hearers as the way of life for them. To know that what he preaches is nothing less than the Word of God will give boldness even amid difficulties. See Acts 4:13.



A meditation on Psalm 119:18

A prayer every believer ought to pray!

“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things
in your law.”

Introduction

There are many wonderful things in the natural world around us, but the psalmist realises that there are also wonderful spiritual things spoken of in God’s Word. (He probably had no more than the first books of the Old Testament. We have the complete revelation. So there are even more wonders for us to see in God’s complete Word than there were for him!) In order to obey God’s Word, we need to understand it and feel attracted to it. Hence this prayer.

We learn:

1. Only those who are divinely taught can see these wonderful things in the Bible. “Open my eyes” is a necessary prayer for us. Many heard God’s Word in Old Testament times, in Jesus’ day, in the apostle’s days, **and** hear it nowadays – yet have seen nothing wonderful in it! They are blind to spiritual things until God opens their eyes; i.e. gives new spiritual abilities by the new birth. This prayer of the psalmist is a New Testament prayer also – see Ephesians 1:17-19. We need to pray this prayer constantly. There is always more for us to see.
2. God is the best teacher so this prayer is made to him. He is the best teacher because he knows better than anyone else just how wonderful are the things in his Word. He alone knows how best to teach us, his creatures; and he alone can cause us to see the beauty of spiritual truth.
3. The psalmist is not merely asking for theological knowledge, though that is a good thing to have; he is certainly not asking for a revelation of truth additional to what is in God’s Word. The wonderful things he wants to know are **in** God’s Word already. He is asking for a sense of awesome wonder at the excellent things in God’s Word. The



Examples of Conclusions to some apostolic sermons

In each case there is a brief but strong call to some action on the part of the hearers.

Acts 2:38	Repent! Be baptised!
Acts 3:25,26	The blessing is for you first!
Acts 13:40,41	Beware! Behold!
Acts 17:30,31	Repent, judgement comes!
Acts 20:35	I have shown you how! Remember Jesus' words!

Study for yourself how these examples do what is suggested in the section, **The Conclusion** on page 52.



Focus Point

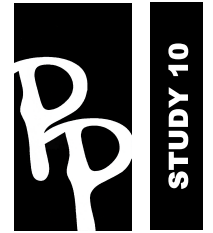
The ten constituent elements of great preaching

The following has been taken from a guide which has been produced by the Bryntirion Bible College for its students in preparation for preaching.

1. Exegetical accuracy

Foundational to all. Gives the raw materials for doctrine, structure, illustration and application!

PREACHING THE SERMON



Introduction

The preacher's task is to explain the message of the Scriptures and to show how God's truth should guide men and women in daily living. The sermon is the part of the worship service particularly devoted to this important work. So there is need to study how to make the sermon effective.



Sermon structure

The Introduction to the Sermon

The Introduction to the sermon has a special purpose. The congregation has gathered, each person with different problems and joys and different personal circumstances. The Introduction must bring them all to begin to think about **one** thing – the subject of the sermon. So the Introduction must catch their attention, rouse their interest, make them willing to forget all other matters, and convince them that it is worth thinking about the sermon subject.

So, the Introduction needs to include:

Something immediately attractive and relevant to **that** congregation

together with

Something to suggest the subject of the sermon to follow and how that subject will help the congregation

The Development of the Message

Following the Introduction there must be the Development of the message. By this is meant:

1. Explaining the general truths that can be learned from the selected passage of Scripture.
2. Showing what other parts of Scripture also teach those truths.
3. Showing how those truths can be used to shape our lives today, in ways that glorify God.

In this Development, it is very important to treat the Scripture passage honestly and not to make it teach something that is not really there at all. It is good not to teach too many truths at one time from the passage being studied. Better to come back to it again on another occasion if there is more to be learned. And the Development needs to proceed in a logical and orderly way, each point growing out of the previous point, so that the argument of the sermon is clear for people to follow easily.

In the course of the Development of the sermon, it is most helpful for those listening when the preacher uses illustrations, either to make it easier to understand the nature of some truth or to understand how the truth can be used in practice. Any illustrations are to be **added to** the message. They must not themselves become the message! The illustrations can be taken from a Bible incident or from natural life – but must obviously be about things well understood by the congregation, or they will not illustrate anything!

The Conclusion

The sermon finishes with a Conclusion. The Conclusion needs to be brief and clear. The purpose is to emphasise what is to be done now in the light of the truths that have been studied. The Introduction and Development of the sermon are to be aimed at the mind and the emotions of the congregation and the Conclusion is aimed at their wills! These are the last words of the preacher's sermon and are therefore the most likely to be remembered longest.

Because the Introduction and the Conclusion are so important, it is a good thing to have them carefully written out beforehand. Both need to be brief. (They are not the main content of the sermon). It is difficult to be brief unless careful preparation is made. And an introduction that

fails to draw attention to the sermon subject, or a conclusion that does not conclude with simple and powerful advice, can both make ineffective a good Development. So, work out exactly how the sermon can best begin, and end.



Examples of Introductions to some apostolic sermons

In each case there is some reference to the actual situation, which leads on naturally to the subject of the talk.

Acts 2:14-21	These men are not drunk! This is what was predicted!
Acts 3:12	Why does this surprise you? You stare at us as if we made this man walk?
Acts 13:16	You who worship God, listen to me!
Acts 17:22,23	You are very religious! . . . I will tell you about the unknown God.
Acts 20:18-21	You know me and my life!
Acts 22:3	I am indeed a Jew.
Acts 24:10	I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation...
Acts 26:3	I am fortunate to defend myself before such an expert in Jewish customs and controversies. . .

Study for yourself how these examples do what is suggested in the section **The Introduction to the Sermon**.

We must dig to find the intended meaning (principles and doctrines) of the text.

“Preaching = communication of a concept through the personality of preacher and power of the Holy Spirit.”

When preparing a sermon discover what the text said and meant **then** and means **now**! Stop, look and listen **until you know God has spoken**.

2. Doctrinal substance

Did this message advance people’s grasp of the system of truth taught in the Bible?

Pastoral work is theological. Evangelism is theological. Faith requires knowledge and assent before trust. “We have to deal with men who will either be lost or saved, and they certainly will not be saved by false doctrine!” (Spurgeon)

Always ask – what doctrines come naturally out of this text?

3. Clear structure – (try giving every sermon a title)

Isolate the dominant thought. What is the big idea? Reduce it to **one** proposition.

Announce your main points clearly – keep sub-points on your notes only!

Headings should be SIMPLE and SIMILAR

Remember – Recap! Recap! Recap! Say headings twice! Summarise at the end.

“When a man does not make me understand what he means, it is because he does not himself know what he means!” (Spurgeon)

Could an 8 year old give your main points later in the day?

4. Vivid illustration – (imagination might be a more helpful word)

Paint pictures with words. People must live in your sermon world.

Don’t tell the people to be afraid or glad, make them feel afraid or glad.

Linger over the text. Some stop at meaning. Some stop at structure. Wait for illustrations.

Use all the senses – sight / hearing / smell / taste / touch!

Prepare your text on paper turned so that the short length is at the side.

Have 3 columns:

STATE ILLUSTRATE APPLY.

Are you boring? Check clarity, structure and illustrations: treat illustrations like exegesis!

5. Pointed application

Application is the main thrust of every sermon. It is based upon the big idea.

Before you preach you must know what effects you want to see in your hearers.

- Tell them **what** they are to do. Broad principles are binding.
- Tell them **why** they should do it. “It’s for your good! It’s a delight to God! etc.”
- Suggest **how** they should do it. Specific examples may or may not be binding.

6. Spiritual urgency

Nobody will be moved by a man who isn’t moved! (by his message.)

Content must determine intensity and emotion not vice versa.

The preacher must be alive to God. Passion for souls, eager enthusiasm.

You are not sent to whiten tombs, but to open them! Cross question your own heart – are you in this? *“Our preaching must not be articulate snoring!”*

Prayer, meditation and trouble make a minister!

Start an eclectic society of ministers. All speak to one question.

Don’t seek consensus – just get fed!

7. Christo-centricity – (every book but not every verse)

All the Scriptures point to Christ – so must our sermons!

- Take the truth as originally applied to Old Testament readers.
- Extract the fulfilment in Christ – and principle.
- Apply this principle to believers through Christ. Don’t just moralise a passage! *David and Goliath* is ultimately about Christ – not us killing our giant problems!

Remember – every story is about God first, before any human characters.

8. Helpful delivery

Maintain eye contact, use pauses, rhetorical questions; speak to them as “You.”

Short sentences – simple vocabulary. Avoid all “non-words”. (*Umm, er, etc.*)

Be disciplined to vary your voice – high/low; fast/slow; loud/quiet; harsh/soft.

Spurgeon’s *Lectures to my students* 2 chapters: *Gesture, Posture and Action!* Brilliant!

“When capital punishment is abolished, those who are found guilty of murder shall be condemned to listen to a selection of the dreariest orators!” May that not be us!

9. Dramatic power

Preaching is unique in the field of communication. Dramatic presentation is often necessary.

Study to engage heart, mind, emotions and will in your messages.

Spend time studying our Lord Jesus’ preaching manner – he was dramatic and sometimes shocking!

Purge all distracting mannerisms.

10. Supernatural authority

Unction – *God’s sweet violence on the soul*. Without it, all we do has little force.

Much time in secret with God is the cost of God’s presence in the pulpit.

“As the eyes of a servant look to the hands of their master... so our eyes look to the Lord our God until he is gracious to us” (Ps. 123:2 – numerous other references as well!).

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