

Lesson / Sermon Development and Delivery

Speaking for God

Philip Strong

Introduction

To answer your first question, “No, I’m not an expert at preaching the gospel”- or teaching others how to do it, or anything else for that matter! But, I have been preaching for some 40 years now. To answer your second question, “Yes, of course I should be better at it by now!”

However, it is not the purpose of this effort to “train” preachers. Instead, the goal is to provide some basic instruction that will enable Christian men to:

- Develop their study skills;
- Increase their understanding of what’s involved in speaking for God; and,
- Provide some fundamental considerations that will help them to grow their abilities to teach and encourage others from the Word of God- whether publicly from the pulpit or class lectern, or privately across the kitchen or coffee table.

This basic study will not be quoting from the volumes of quality works on public speaking generally, or from those that deal with principles of preaching more specifically. It is not within the scope of this effort to collect, compile, and regurgitate the wealth of information they provide. Suffice it to say that there are many such resources readily available, and anyone interested in committing their life to the public proclamation of God’s word should avail himself of the valuable information they offer. A few good choices in these regards, with which I am familiar, would be: Speaking for the Master (by Batsell Barrett Baxter); On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (by John A. Broadus); and Common Sense Preaching (by Dee Bowman).

Let us be perhaps blunt, but clear: We are not herein attempting to produce polished preachers- just to help those willing to use their knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and abilities to do so in better and more effective ways in teaching God’s word to others. To that end, these brief basics are prayerfully submitted.

Philip C. Strong

P.S. These are merely class notes meant to guide discussion and further explorations of the topics contained, and are thus not intended to be exhaustive, or to stand alone as complete.

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Lesson / Sermon Development and Delivery

I. Topic/Text Selection

A. Relevance and Need

Preaching, which from this point forward should be understood to also include *teaching* either publicly or privately, is somewhat analogous to a *dietary supplement*. That is, in regard to topic or passage selection, and lesson development and delivery, consideration must be made of what is already present in contrast to what is needed to round out or produce a more complete diet, or at least to provide something healthy and helpful right now!

To emphasize this point, consider the first thing Philip said when joining the Ethiopian in his chariot. Philip asked a question to determine what the eunuch already knew, cf. Acts 8:30. Paul did much the same thing in Acts 19:2.

Therefore, one of the first considerations in topic or passage selection for the lesson should be, “What relevant need can I meet with this lesson?” In other words, there should be a point to the lesson, and it should be one which you feel is needed. All too often, lessons are presented because “I have to say *something*” rather than from the perspective of “I have something to say (which I feel is relevant).” A lesson may be entirely true and accurate according to the Scriptures, but still yet have no real relevance to/for the audience. In such cases, their attention will be hard to maintain, and the application value (*i.e.* “take home points”) will be negligible. Thankfully, the *public* audience of most congregations is sufficiently varied in composition (of biblical knowledge and experience) as to allow for a wide range of appropriate topic and passage choices.

Therefore, the first major step in the lesson delivery is the careful selection of a relevant topic or passage. **Does it have application value for the intended audience?** Col.4:6, though speaking more of *one to one* rather than *one to many* teaching, makes this point very clearly.

B. Appropriateness and Propriety

After carefully considering the *need* of the target audience, the second major step in topic/passage selection should be, “Is this a proper topic for the audience **in this setting**?” Obviously, there may be some topics that the audience may *need* to hear, but not need to hear in a *public* setting such as the Sunday morning or evening assembly. It might be better handled in a class situation, or not treated publicly at all. For instance, while the Song of Solomon is inspired and part of the biblical text, therefore implying God thought it valuable information for mankind, portions of it may not be appropriate for an audience of mixed genders and ages! Thus, the **aggregate “make-up” of the potential audience**, and **the setting in which the lesson will be delivered** should rightfully influence topic selection. Ignoring such is indeed unwise and shortsighted.

Associated with these types of considerations is another important matter: “Even if this is a relevant, needed, and appropriate topic for the audience, **am I the ‘right’ person to deliver it?**” For example, I once delivered a well-organized and needed lesson on “How to Raise Godly Children” from Deut.6:1-9 to a congregational audience of nearly 200 people. The only problem was that I was a young preacher who had yet to father a single child! Additionally, I was from a

different congregation. It was a great lesson- and I preached it in one form or another many times over the years, but **I wasn't the proper person (at that time) to be delivering it!** Aside from having no practical experience or wisdom on the subject myself, that subject would have been much better coming from the local evangelist or Elders. But I, in my naïve "wisdom," failed to fully grasp these things, and have regretted the subject choice for all of the years since!

Priority of subject choice also should force us to ask: "Even if this is a relevant, needed, and appropriate topic, and I am an appropriate person to deliver it, **am I capable of doing so?**" In other words, "Does my current level of knowledge and skill enable me to adequately handle this topic or passage?" This consideration is often overlooked or ignored by the beginner who wants to "prove himself" publicly. So, he picks the most difficult topic or passage he can think of, and then proceeds to prepare and deliver a lesson on it. But what is his real purpose? Is it to teach a *relevant* and *needed* truth that is *appropriate* to the *setting* and *potential audience*? Or, is the purpose to feed his selfish vanity in hopes of gaining some standing or regard as a "teacher of the law" with the congregation which he has not yet earned, cf. 1Tim.1:3-7 and Phil.1:15-17?

Topic/passage selection, then, necessarily includes consideration of **relevance, need, appropriateness** (both to **setting** and **audience**), and **propriety** for the person preparing and delivering the lesson. "**What is needed and appropriate that I can convey?**" is the right question to ask, and to answer with the right topic or text.

II. Study and Research

A. The Importance of Critical Thinking and Analysis

Critical thinking is sometimes defined as "reflective reasoning." For our purposes, critical thinking is an important component to evaluating the merits of any topic for a lesson, and also in understanding any passage within the framework of its context.

Relative to a **topic**, a critical thinker asks and answers, for himself and *sometimes* for his audience (see next paragraph), pertinent questions such as:

1. **What** is the specific subject?
2. **Why** is it worthy of consideration?
3. **How** does it apply to my audience and me?
4. **When** is it applicable- *always, sometimes, or never?* And,
5. **Where** does it apply- collectively *in the assembly*, as a couple or individually *in the home*, individually *at the workplace* or *in society, etc.*?)

While all of these questions need not necessarily be addressed in the **delivery** of the lesson, **they should all be asked and answered in its development!** This is how "critical thinking" applies to topic selection. "**Have I thought through this particular topic in these ways?**" is an important consideration.

The same "critical thinking" approach is also important to the selection of a passage for a **textual** lesson:

1. **What** is the specific subject being addressed in the text?

2. **Why** is this verse or passage included in the context?
3. **How** does it apply to my audience and me?
4. **When** is it applicable- *always, sometimes, or never?*
5. **Where** does it apply- collectively *in the assembly*, as a couple or individually *in the home*, individually *at the workplace or in society, etc.*?)
And,
6. **Who** is speaking, and **To Whom** is he speaking?

Unlike a *topical* lesson- where all of the questions should be asked and answered in *developing* the lesson, but not necessarily covered in the *delivery* of it, a **textual lesson typically needs all of these questions to be asked and answered in both the *development* and the *delivery* of it.** Generally speaking, we cannot assume to be able to properly interpret and correctly apply a text (verse or passage) unless we have asked and answered them. It then also follows that we cannot adequately **teach** a text unless we do the same for our audience.

Analysis is another important mental exercise in the selection, development, and delivery of a lesson. By “analysis” we mean the “separation of a whole into its component parts” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), as well as the process by which we determine *how* and *why* those “component parts” fit together to produce the whole. For example, if a fellow can completely take apart a single-cylinder lawnmower motor, and then reassemble it so that it works properly (with no parts left over!), he then understands how the “whole” works because he understands *where* and *how* each individual part fits and *why* it is necessary. He has “analyzed” it!

Thus, being able to “analyze” a topic or text is integral to clear understanding. And, if we have not been able to adequately analyze a topic or a text, we certainly cannot (yet, at least!) explain it to an audience. Perhaps “analyzing” is just another way of “critically thinking” through a topic or text to arrive at clear understanding. Certainly, the questions stressed in the section above on critical thinking are involved in the process.

By whatever name we identify it, there must be a careful, logical, and sequential “fitting together” of all the component parts of a topic or passage that takes place in both the selection and development of the lesson. If we cannot achieve a clear picture of the topic or text under consideration in the selection and development stages, **back up and start over with a different topic or text!**

B. Researching and Studying a Topic

Most experienced preachers, and perhaps some less-experienced ones also, will tell you that the most difficult aspect of preparing a lesson is determining the topic or text to be taught. Obviously, the attention and space given to that aspect above should at least indicate that selecting a *relevant, appropriate, and proper* topic or text is perhaps the most important part of the overall process of preaching the word. Still yet, after a topic or text is selected, it has to be studied and researched. Here are some basic suggestions to guide the research of a topic:

1. **Research your subject fairly.** Don't decide what is "right" or "wrong" about a topic beforehand, and then start looking for passages or verses to confirm your conclusion. This is "proof-texting," and never yields a just conclusion. Instead, fairly consider all that can be found in the Bible on the topic before formulating your conclusion(s) regarding it. Avoid the tendency of "cherry-picking" one verse or passage that seems to agree with your position on the subject while ignoring (or not looking for) other passages that may not agree with it. Properly done, this thoroughness will remove your personal opinions and judgments on the subject, and allow God to speak for Himself. Then, you will be speaking for God in the presentation of the truth found on the subject instead of just convincing others of your particular bias or slant on it.
2. **Be skeptical of non-biblical resources.** This doesn't mean to avoid them; it means to be sure to remember that they are not inspired. While reference works such as Lexicons, Concordances, and Encyclopedias are, by their nature, fairly dependable resources, Commentaries are very much like the men who write them: some *good* and some *bad*, some *honest* and some *dishonest*, and thus, some *profitable* and some *worthless*. How accurately they interpret and present Scripture always determine their value. So, be careful to use them advisedly.

Additionally, while it is usually not a good idea to accept a "single-sourced" concept or interpretation, remember also that "multiple sources" aren't any guarantee of validity either. Jesus' words in Matt.7:13-14; John 8:14 should confirm this notion. President Ronald Reagan once famously said of the Russian's accounting of their nuclear weapon stockpiles, "Trust, but verify." Such is good advice in using extra-biblical resources also!

3. **Give your study/research plenty of time.** Time is a valuable resource because it always seems to be in short supply and high demand. However, failing to give yourself adequate time to thoroughly research a topic will usually result in a shallow, poorly organized, and mostly meaningless lesson. Obviously, the amount of time required depends on the difficulty of the topic, the current knowledge of it already possessed, and the capability of the researcher. More difficult subjects, limited current knowledge of them, poor study habits/procedures, and severely limited resource materials will mean that you will have to spend more time to adequately research a topic. However, these are not insurmountable obstacles. In fact, simply choosing a subject with which you are already familiar and fairly knowledgeable dramatically reduces the required time expenditures to adequately research a topic. Again, this reinforces the importance of *topic selection!*

C. Researching and Studying a Text/Passage

If the lesson is to be *textual* rather than *topical*, there are also some guidelines that will help in studying and researching it:

1. **Understand that *textual* studies still wind up being *topical* to some degree.** For instance, unless you are going to do a *word by word* exposition of the verse or passage, and really even then too, a particular point of application or conclusion on some topic is going to be manifested.

So, care still needs to be taken to look for and examine other passages dealing with the same subject or topic. But remember, every passage or verse you studied or considered in comparison to your selected text need **not be presented in the lesson**- they just need to be studied and considered to be sure you have the right understanding of the verse or text you are presenting. Listing and reading to your audience fifteen verses which all say the same thing as the one being treated will not help them. If God said it once, and we correctly understand that one statement, such is surely sufficient to make the point. While there is value in using another passage that says the same thing *in different words* to help clarify things, care should be taken to keep from overdoing it.

2. **Remember, “Context is Critical.”** A verse before and after the one you’re studying is usually not sufficient (unless perhaps you’re in Proverbs, and sometimes still isn’t enough to get the context). At the very least, review the context sufficiently to know **who** is speaking/writing, **to whom** they are speaking/writing, and **what** subject is under consideration in the passage. A paragraph may be enough to accomplish this at times, but other times a chapter, multiple chapters, or even everything in the book up to the verse (e.g. Romans) is required. In still other instances, a general knowledge of the Old Testament is essential (e.g. Hebrews), or a working knowledge of the whole Bible (e.g. Revelation) may be required to adequately understand “the context” of a verse or passage. Whatever is required, be sure you understand the setting of the verse, and how it fits into that setting, before you attempt to prepare and deliver a lesson from it.
3. **Let God help you.** I **don’t mean** that the Spirit will whisper the right interpretations and applications in your ear. I **do mean** the following:
 - a. Pray for knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, Jas.1:5-8; then be willing to work to attain them so that God can bless your efforts bountifully.
 - b. When you’re reading (anything) and come across a word you don’t understand, often the surrounding words and sentences will help you to comprehend its meaning. The same thing happens in the text, not only with individual words, but also with phrases, sentences, and concepts. Let the *inspired* context help you.
 - c. Use clear and simpler passages to help you understand and correctly apply more complex and difficult ones. Never attribute a meaning or application to a verse or passage that contradicts another passage. The harmony of the Scriptures is not only proof of their inspiration, it is a tremendous tool that God has provided to assist our understanding of difficult concepts and passages, cp. 2Pet.1:16a; 1Cor.2:1-5; and 2Pet.1:19-21.
 - d. Remember that the point of the Bible as a whole, or any particular part of it, is to educate and enlighten mankind about God and how to serve Him to attain eternal life. Therefore, no passage is given to confuse us, or to obscure these truths, 1Cor.14:33. Look for explanations, interpretations, and applications which are conducive

to God's purpose and the overall intent of the Scriptures, cf. 1Tim.2:3-4 and 1:5.

4. **Be noble-minded in your study.** Why were the Bereans more *noble-minded* than the Thessalonians? If "because they searched the Scriptures daily" is your answer, then you are only one-third correct. Acts 17:11 reveals much more about the *noble-mindedness* of the Bereans:
 - a. They "*received the word with great eagerness*"- the **right attitude**;
 - b. They "*searched the Scriptures daily*"- the **right practice**; but,
 - c. They also did so "*to see whether these things were so*"- the **right purpose**.

You too, if you have the right *attitude, practice, and purpose*, will be "*noble-minded*" in your study and presentation of God's precious and soul-saving word! Of course, the inverse is also true.

III. Planning the Outline

- A. **Know where you're headed.** Have a clear idea/picture of what you hope to accomplish by formulating a **concise thesis statement**. The thesis (the main point; the "take home" point of what you want to communicate to your audience) should be concise enough to be contained in one sentence, or at the most two. However, it must be broad enough to encompass each of the needed and included subordinate points of the outline.

There may be times when, during the course of your research, or even in the process of developing your basic outline, that you need to alter the thesis. Perhaps research has shown it to be invalid, or too broad, or even not broad enough. That is perfectly fine and proper- I do it often, and even the Lord's brother seems to have done it also, cf. Jude 3! Such just demonstrates: the value of in-depth study and research; the ability to adapt to present need or relevance; and, a well-planned outline. You can even, especially when developing a *textual* lesson outline, wait to the end to formulate the thesis- in fact, I recommend this method. It will allow the Spirit to show you the main point of the verse or passage through your study of it. Remember that in *textual* lessons, the object is **not** to "create" an outline from the text; it is to "**find**" the outline that is already there, and such certainly includes the thesis!

However, through whatever methods and means utilized to arrive at your main point/thesis, **you must have it clearly formulated and understood in your own mind before you can clearly convey it to your audience.**

- B. **Know how you're going to get there.** Formulate a plan of attack. There are multiple options when it comes to types of outlines. Here are three common types.
 1. **Thesis, then Proof (standard).** The thesis is stated, perhaps even in the introduction (D), then supportive points (A, B, C) are given to prove it, with the conclusion being a restatement of the thesis.
 2. **Logical Sequence.** In this method, the audience is *led* to the thesis by a logical and sequential process. For instance, if A is true, then B must logically follow, and C after it, which proves D (thesis), cf. Rom.2:17-24.

This type of outline and presentation sometimes requires careful preparation and presentation of its points to engage the audience to a high degree in the process of “developing” the thesis (at least in their minds; you obviously already know where the lesson is headed) as you progress through the presentation. But, depending on the thesis, it may also be fairly easy to lead them to point, cf. 2Sam.12:1-29!

3. **If, Then.** This method also requires a high degree of audience engagement. It proceeds as follows: If A is true, then B would have to also be true- but it isn't; therefore C must be true- but it isn't, so then D must be true- it is the Thesis. Paul also uses this method in the Roman letter, cf. Rom.5:12 – 6:23.

- C. **Know when you get there.** It's hard to know when you're finished (there) when you don't know where you're going. You should know the destination; be sure to quit (stop talking) when you get there.

Many good lessons have their impact lessened, damaged, or ruined because the speaker was trying to “fill time” after coming to the end of his outline. There is no divinely specified time limit (on either end, though effectiveness wanes eventually among even well-intentioned and receptive audiences) for a sermon. A lesson needs to be long enough to get to where it needs be, but no longer than that.

There are no other preachers in my family, but my dad (who spent 30+ years teaching high school vocational agriculture) gave me some classic advice when I began to preach: “**Stand up**- people need to see you when you speak; **speak up**- people must be able to hear and understand you when you speak; and then, **shut-up** when you're finished- people don't need to hear you ramble or fill time!”

I may not have *always* followed this advice as well as I should have, but it is great advice nonetheless.

IV. Preparing the Outline

- A. **Introduction.** The importance of the introduction is often either neglected, or overlooked completely. It is not the speaker's job to make announcements, and/or welcome visitors- though there is certainly nothing wrong with doing either of these things as a matter of courtesy or expediency. But, neither the welcome nor announcements should be allowed to *be* or *overshadow* the proper introduction of the lesson. The introduction, when well thought-out and specifically planned and delivered, accomplishes two primary objectives that are essential to the overall success of the lesson:

1. **It arrests the attention of the audience.** Audiences are naturally distracted with putting away hymnals, settling children, and “re-fixing their nest” (after standing for the song before the lesson) during the first few minutes after the speaker gets up and begins to speak. Therefore, you have a couple of choices in this regard:
 - a. Use this time to welcome visitors and make any announcements that *must* be made- though, in my opinion, it is better to avoid the latter altogether whenever possible; or,

- b. Simply stand silently and wait for all of this “settling” to be accomplished, and for the audience to give their full attention to you; or,
- c. Wrest their attention away from these things with an intriguing question or challenging statement (or something similar).

However it is accomplished, the audience’s attention must be gained first. Unfortunately for some people, if you do not gain their concentration *initially*, you may never really have it, or they may only start really focusing on what you’re saying after it is too late to completely follow the progression of the lesson.

2. **The introduction also, and just as critically, establishes *the need and relevance of the subject you are about to present*.** Many good, scriptural, and even necessary lessons fall “flat” with the audience because the *need or relevance* of the message has not been first clearly established in the initial minutes of the presentation with a good introduction. If your audience understands the need and/or relevance of your message **to them and from the very beginning**, it will be much easier to maintain their attention throughout the lesson to its ultimate conclusion and point (again, the thesis).

Because of these things, do not overlook the importance of the introduction in either your *preparation* or *presentation* of the lesson. Though I often preach from a fairly “skeletal” or minimal outline (with just fragmented phrases and scripture notations to guide me), I typically write out the introduction in complete sentences, and then present them verbatim, or close to it. This provides the greatest opportunity for the effectiveness of the lesson to and for the audience. Obviously then, the introduction is very important to the overall success of the presentation- **don’t ignore or neglect its potential!**

- B. **Body.** This is the “backbone” of the lesson. It provides the presentation form, integrity, and function. It allows the lesson to stand on its own, and “walk out of the auditorium” with your audience.

It should, therefore, be a logical, sequential, and cohesive **proving** of the thesis, whether that thesis has been previously stated or not (see again “B. Know how you’re going to get there” numbers 1,2, and 3 on pages 9-10). Let’s take a moment to consider the importance of these points individually:

1. **Logical.** This simply means that the points (A,B,C, etc. under I, the thesis; and/or A,B,C, under I, II, III, etc. under the thesis) should be **rational, reasonable, and sound**. In this connection, please consider the following:
 - a. The points should first be *sound-* or true to the Book, obviously. But all too often, otherwise good points are “proven” with wrong passages. For instance, in Matt.18:20, Jesus is not talking about the assembly of a small number of saints for worship, but of the agreement of the inspired disciples/apostles, vv.18-19. So, carefully consider context, and **use the right passage with the right point!**

- b. But the points should also be logically “connected” to the thesis (of the overall lesson, or the sub-point under the thesis). This simply means that the points will be obviously connected to the thesis in a way that will be readily apparent to and easily followed by the audience. This isn’t as difficult as it perhaps sounds. The Bible is written *for* humans in ways that match our cognitive abilities and tendencies. So, don’t dilute the power of the inspired text by making things more difficult for the audience with “stretched” logic and difficult-to-follow reasoning.

Additionally, “Chasing/running rabbits” may be profitable and interesting in private study, but usually winds up only confusing the audience in a public presentation. Stay on point, unless there is a logical reason to momentarily depart. For example, think about the parenthetical statements found in the Bible. They are usually a *departure* from the main point being made, but are *logical* departures to cover points naturally connected or questioned in the minds of the audience, cf. Mark 7:3-4.

Though more will be covered later on “illustrations,” be sure that they *match* the point being made as closely as possible. If undue effort is required to “explain” the connection of the illustration to the point being made, it is probably not the best logical choice, and should be discarded for a better one.

- 2. **Sequential.** There should be a “natural progression” from one major point to the next one, and from one sub-point to the next one. This means the major and minor points of the lesson should be in the right *logical* order. Half or two-thirds of the way through presenting a lesson is not the right time to figure out that the point you’re now covering should have been located before the previous two!

In preparing a lesson, I often move both major and minor points up or down in the presentation to improve the sequential order and logical flow of the lesson. To borrow from the legal proceedings of the courtroom, you can’t draw a conclusion from facts not yet in evidence! Having things in the proper sequential order prevents this problem, and dramatically improves the odds of your audience following your points to the natural (thus, the *logical*) conclusion you intend.

- 3. **Cohesive.** This point is perhaps just restatement of the importance of the previous two, or, it is the result of having done a good job on and with them. In other words, if the lesson outline is *logically* and *sequentially* arranged and delivered, its points will be cohesively connected, and will flow quite naturally. Again, this allows for the greatest possible benefit of your efforts to the audience.

I have listened to (and surely delivered) lessons in which everything that was said was “true to the Book,” but didn’t really seem to “fit” together at all. The end-result was either confusion of what was really the point (the thesis), or being “underwhelmed” with the lesson, or both!

Remember the proper hierarchy of an outline: Each major point should support the thesis; and each minor or sub-point should support the major

one above it, as well lead naturally to the one below it. This is not just a “form” to be followed, it is the way most of us think and process information! Therefore, when proper attention is paid and proper effort is made to this method of organization and delivery, the lesson will be *logical, sequential, and cohesive*.

- C. Conclusion.** If you have given proper attention to the *introduction* and *body* of the lesson, the *conclusion* should be obvious. It should embed the thesis in the mind of the audience. But, don’t leave the thesis/conclusion unstated. **Draw it out clearly and concisely for your audience.** If they haven’t gotten the point just yet, help them to see it plainly by stating the conclusion in unequivocal terms, 2Sam.12:7ff! After all, if the audience leaves without really “getting” the point, the lesson has been just a collection of biblically true statements with no real purpose to them.

Additionally, the conclusion should **call for a decision from the audience**. If it doesn’t, the lesson does not have any real “application value” for them. Human beings don’t typically remember, or contemplate further, a lesson in which we are not asked to render a decision regarding personal application. Instead, we will just chalk it up to being “true” or “good” but not personally applicable, and forget it about the same time we get home and turn on the television (or sooner). Don’t help your audience to be the “*forgetful hearer*” of Jas.1:23-24; use the conclusion both to **restate your thesis**, and then **call for a decision regarding it!**

You don’t have to be *accusatory* or *demanding* to ask for a decision from your audience. Appeal to them on the basis of the *soundness* and *reasonableness* of the lesson you have just presented. But do so with compassion and courtesy unless the thesis/conclusion warrants otherwise, 2Tim.4:2; cp. Gal.4:19-31 with 1:6-8; 3:1-7.

V. Delivering the Sermon

- A. Dress, Posture, and Gestures.** Does how we dress (and therefore present) ourselves to the audience make a difference? Some might be tempted to respond, “It shouldn’t,” but it does make a difference. No one is suggesting that you don a priestly ephod or some sort of clerical robe, but your attire should be appropriate to the task at hand, cf. Heb.9:1ff. Remember that you are speaking words of truth and salvation for the “*King of kings and Lord of lords*,” 1Tim.6:15. Therefore, it seems appropriate that our attire show no less honor when speaking for the Lord than we would in attempting to show respect to another person when attending a special occasion for that purpose.

Aside from the matter of respect for the occasion of worshipping and speaking for the Almighty, our clothing and overall personal appearance also affect the attention of the audience. One older lady answered my greeting at the door after the services with, “Philip, I didn’t hear a word you said this morning- your hair is sticking straight up in the back!” Then she promptly tilted my head over and began to smooth down the offending, and evidently, distracting hairs that were sticking up. Apparently my efforts that morning were completely lost on her, but I learned a valuable lesson: **How you dress and present yourself may not make the lesson any better, but they can prevent your lesson from being heard.** Should it be this way? Perhaps not, but it *is* this way for some audience

members. Don't allow your clothing and personal appearance to hinder your presentation of God's word.

However, *too much* can be just as distracting as *too little* when it comes to clothing. One older preacher was perhaps as famous for his diamond tie tack and cuff links and flamboyant shirts and neckties than he was for his presentation of Truth! Another had his patent-leather white dress shoes given almost equal attention as his prolific writing and preaching at his funeral (not really, but the shoes were mentioned!). The bottom-line point in the matter of dress and appearance is simple: **We should dress and groom ourselves for the task of speaking for the Lord in a way that shows adequate respect for the occasion without drawing undue attention away from the Truth and to ourselves.** You want the audience's attention to be focused on what you say, not *how you look*- either positively or negatively. So don't *overdo* it, or *underdo* it!

Posture is also important. Stand erect; the audience will listen better if they can see you well. Lessons presented even by appropriately dressed men are less effective when they slouch, constantly look up at the ceiling or back wall of the auditorium, or down at their shoes or the floor when speaking. People generally don't listen well when forced to look at your neck because your face is to the heavens, or the top of your head because you're constantly looking downward. The old adage of "Stand up, people need to see you (when addressing them)" is still good advice.

We're told that a high percentage of communication is "non-verbal." Therefore, body language is important to your message. Good posture communicates that your message is worth the audience "sitting up and taking notice" of it. But at the same time, neither do you want to give the impression of being "stiff" or "rigid." You want the audience to listen "to" not "at" you, so stand up and speak "to" rather than "at" them! Be relaxed, be yourself, and "*stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this life!*" (Acts 5:20)

Gestures- hand and facial, should add to the message, but should not be excessive, phony, or distracting. Holding onto the pulpit or rostrum and never relinquishing your grip on it by moving around a little, convey to the audience one of two things: 1) that you are sacred to death (which you may be initially, but a few gestures and a little movement will help them and you); or, 2) an impersonal message. Typically, we are speaking to those who want listen and learn from us, and have every wish for us to do well. This is the very best audience for which anyone could ask! So speak to them *naturally* and *personally*, and your gestures will be just as natural and personal as on any other occasion.

B. Diction and Grammar. Your audience neither wants nor expects the "King's English" to roll off your tongue with the eloquence of Aaron, cf. Ex. 4:10-16. But as with your appearance and gestures, your speech can *add to* or *detract from* your message. Good speaking and speech making have two background supports besides content: 1) voice; and, 2) grammar. Let's take these one a time.

1. Diction: A "preacher voice" isn't necessary, and is most often a distraction at best, or off-putting at worst. Use your normal voice, but project it by speaking from the diaphragm loudly enough to be heard by the little old sister or brother sitting near the back. Most places of worship utilize a

microphone to assist with volume, but it won't work if you don't speak up. Remember the second verse of that old adage on public speaking: "Stand up (for they need to see you), and **speak up** (for they need to *hear* you)...!" But speaking loudly is not all there is to it.

Enunciation is also critical to the audience being able to understand you. Enunciation is simply pronouncing your words clearly and distinctly. Just as words run together without spaces are hard to comprehend when written, so too words run together without spaces are hard to comprehend **when spoken**. Slow down, open your mouth and pronounce all the letters in each word that aren't meant to be silent- that's why they are there. "Colloquial slang" is fine out in the woods with your buddies, but the audience in the church building may include English and Speech teachers. "Butchering" the language with slang terms and mispronounced or poorly enunciated words will surely detract from your message for them like fingernails on a chalkboard!

Speak loudly enough to be heard, and slowly and distinctly enough to be understood, but avoid being "monotone." You don't speak at one pitch and speed when conversing, so remember you're still speaking "to" people when bringing a lesson. Therefore, varying your volume, tone, and speed will promote interest and attention in the audience just as it does in normal communication.

2. Grammar. You need not be an English Major, but again, you may have one (or more) in the audience. Generally speaking, minor grammar mistakes are less of a distraction than poor volume and enunciation when speaking publicly, especially when the speaker is not a "professional." But at a minimum, grammar should be at least sufficient to prevent distraction from the message. The most typical grammatical mistakes made in preaching are as follows:
 - a. Incomplete Sentences. Incomplete sentences convey incomplete thoughts. Finish both of them by having a *subject* and a *predicate* in each sentence.
 - b. Subject-Verb Agreement. If the subject of the sentence is *singular*, then the verb should also be *singular*. This is also called "number agreement." A *plural* subject shouldn't have a *singular* verb completing the sentence. Subjects and verbs must also agree in *tense*. A *past* tense subject should be matched with a *past* tense verb. Likewise, *present* or *future* tense subjects need to have corresponding *present* or *future* tense verbs.
 - c. Ending Sentences with a Preposition. Grammatically, sentences should not end with a preposition. "What are you thinking **about**?" should instead be, "What are you thinking?" or, "About what are you thinking?" The common vernacular of our particular hometown locale may not help us any in this regard, but we can do "better than our raising" if we work at it.

If you need help with your grammar, and use a computer word-processing program (like Word or Pages) to write your outline, it will assist you by flagging the mistake and suggesting corrections. Don't turn this function

off, or ignore its explanations of what is wrong and how to correct it. Instead, read and use them to learn and do a better job of writing and speaking grammatically. Writing a grammatically correct outline will dramatically help you to present a more grammatically correct lesson, and then your audience will be more likely to notice *what you said* rather than *how you said it!*

The content is surely the most important part of your message, but if poor diction prevents your audience from understanding it, or poor grammar dulls their attention to it, what good has that content really done?

- C. Using Illustrations.** Good illustrations help both to explain and provide “color” to the points being made. They help your audience to “see” what you’re saying just as the parables Jesus used helped his audience gain understanding of the concepts He presented, *cf. Matt.13; et al.* So, choose your illustrations carefully in advance, and include them in your outline as completely as necessary for you to adequately remember and use them. Be sure they are easily discernable, and well matched to the point you want to convey. If an illustration requires a lot of “set-up” or explanation to make it “fit,” then it is probably not a good illustration. Bad illustrations do more harm than good, so it is generally best to avoid the temptation to choose and interject one “on the fly” (during the presentation).

There is another side to using illustrations, however. You can over-illustrate a point. One well-chosen and delivered illustration is sufficient. Additionally, so much time can be given to the illustration and its details that the point intended is dulled, or even lost completely. The illustration is supposed *illustrate* the point, not become the point! Remember this: If the illustration is remembered but the point isn’t, it was a **bad** illustration.

- D. Engaging the Audience.** (Some of the suggestions below were also covered “The Introduction,” “Posture,” “Gestures,” and “Diction” sections above, but are included here for additional clarity.) An audience that is not engaged in the process of communication- which requires both *speaking/delivering* and *hearing/receiving* information, is just “marking time” until they stand and sing. The importance of engaging them in the lesson is vital. There are several things that you, as the speaker, can do to assist them toward this goal.

- 1. Speak to them, not at them.** Preaching “at” your audience (or others not in attendance!) is not nearly as effective or appreciated as speaking “to” them. These are people who want to learn of God, His ways, and His word, otherwise they wouldn’t be in the assembly, or would have left after Communion. Help them accomplish this goal by speaking “to” them. Use language they can understand, and to which they can relate. Have a point that *is* or *becomes* important to them through your lesson. Using someone else’s outline can be helpful, especially for beginners, but it must be made *personal*. Do this by using *your* words, *your* illustrations, and the passages that *you* feel best make the necessary points. Then, make the lesson personal *to* your particular audience. The original author of the outline likely had *his* particular audience in mind when he wrote it. Therefore, it may or may not apply to *your* audience in exactly the same way or ways. Adapt the outline to *your* personality, knowledge, and

abilities, and then also adapt it to the needs of *your* audience as best as you can determine them.

2. **Make eye contact.** This doesn't mean to stare at one or two people as that gets unnerving to those one or two people! But it does mean to look at the audience instead of the ceiling or your shoes. Making eye contact personalizes the lesson and engages the audience, so spread the eye contact throughout the whole audience. In normal conversation, failing to make eye contact sends several "bad" messages to the other person. It makes them think you are insincere or lying about what you are saying at worst, or it makes them think you are disinterested in either the subject or them at best. The same messages are conveyed when we fail to make eye contact when speaking to a group. Engage your audience with eye contact to let them know that what you are saying is important, and that they, as listeners, are likewise important to you.
 3. **Ask questions- both rhetorical, and those you answer.** This is an extremely effective method of teaching, even when those listening are not a liberty to answer verbally. Because of this, Jesus used it, Matt.16:13-15ff; Paul used it, Rom.1-11; and Philip used it, Acts 8:30ff. Asking questions likewise engages the audience by challenging them to think and reason with you instead of you doing all of the work. It also, though perhaps less obviously, provides a natural "flow" and progression of the lesson. If a previous point has been understood, asking the audience a question that would naturally occur in their minds because of that point maintains their interest, and helps them to move with you from Point A to Points B and C.
 4. **Be yourself.** Don't adopt some sort of "preacher persona" of voice or mannerisms. If you have a good sense of humor, use it; but remember your goals are educate and encourage, not entertain. If you are an analytical person, help them to see the analytical nature of the Word, and the value of analyzing it. Etc. Etc. Etc.
- E. Calling for Conclusions/Decisions.** If good preaching is supposed to "storm the will" (Common Sense Preaching; Dee Bowman) of the audience, then allowing a lesson to conclude without calling for a decision or conclusion from the audience is surrendering the opportunity of speaking to mere mundane informational instruction. While preaching certainly should *transfer information*, **it should also transform lives**. Don't let your audience "off the hook" of making a personal decision regarding the truth you presented them. **Force the issue by calling for a conclusion or decision on their part.** If what you've said is "true to the Book," and well planned, prepared, and presented, it should have a personal point of application for each who has heard it. After all, such is supposed to have been the point of the exercise!

After you've pressed the point of your lesson by calling for a personal decision/conclusion by the audience, you're ready for the third and final part of Dad's advice for preaching (the first two were "**Stand up** because the audience needs to see you" and "**Speak up** because the audience needs to be able to hear you"), "**then when you're finished, Shut-up! I don't care if the sermon was ten minutes or forty-five, when you get finished, quit!**" The potential

effect of many otherwise “good” lessons is diminished if not ruined because the speaker tried to “fill time” after he was finished. Repeating and going back over various points, providing additional illustrations, or otherwise trying to reemphasize the importance of what has been presented usually has more detrimental effects than positive benefits for your audience. So, when you draw your conclusions and call for a decision from your audience, stop talking!

VI. Conclusion (of this study rather than the lesson/sermon)

A. Addressing Responses. When I first began to preach- probably the third or fourth lesson, I was completely shocked when a very sweet little old lady started down the aisle toward me as we sang the invitation song. “Now what?” raced through my mind! I had so concentrated my efforts on preparing and delivering my lessons that it had never crossed my mind that someone from this tiny congregation of mostly senior citizens might actually respond to one of them! Thus, I was completely unprepared for it. I quickly glanced over at one of only two men in the congregation as the other one was leading the invitation song, but he wouldn’t even look at me! I was obviously completely on my own... and terrified to say the least! Fortunately, I regained my composure quickly enough to take her by the hand, sit down on the front pew with her, and ask, “Sister, how can we help you this morning?” She confessed that the lesson had caused her to realize that she was not doing “what she could” to serve the Lord and her brethren- at least not to the degree that she felt she should. So, I comforted her the best that I knew how, arose, and relayed her confession to the congregation. Knowing that public prayer was the appropriate response to her admission, I looked over again at the senior male member of the congregation, but he still wasn’t even looking my way! So I lead the prayer too, but never forgot to be prepared to deal with responses that might come from the lessons I presented.

If you are new to preparing and delivering lessons, either Wednesday evening devotionals/exhortations or Sunday sermons, hopefully there will be an Elder or preacher there to receive and assist with responses. But if not, receive the responder with a warm and understanding smile by extending your hand toward them, and then lead them to a seat on the front pew. Next, simply ask them (privately) what you or the congregation can do to assist them. They will typically have one of three desires:

1. To be baptized into Christ. If you are confident they understand what they’re doing (that this is not just some child who “escaped” from the pew and ran down front), ask them to stand and state their belief in Jesus as the Son of God, cf. [Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 8:37](#); then baptize them “*in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,*” [Matt.28:19](#).
2. To confess sin and ask the congregation to pray for their forgiveness. Stand and relay their confession to the congregation in appropriate terms. Be aware that on some occasions, the person may confess a *private* sin in details that don’t need to be made public. In such cases, you’ll do the person and the congregation a favor by editing and relaying their words in more general and appropriate terms. Then, ask one of the respected men of the congregation to lead that prayer, or do so yourself, [Jas.5:16a](#); [Acts 8:22-24](#).

3. To ask for the prayers of the congregation for strength to overcome a difficult situation or circumstance in their life. Again, stand and relay their request, then lead, or ask someone else to lead, a prayer specific to the request, [Jas.5:16b](#).

B. Reviewing Your Work. Once you have delivered the lesson (and even addressed any responses), your task is not really yet finished. You need to review your work. Consider these suggestions for doing so:

1. Set the outline aside for a few days, then go over it again to find and correct any typos. Having now presented the lesson, you may have discovered better ways (or passages) to convey the points you wanted to make. Make any changes you deem necessary or appropriate before filing or storing the lesson for future use, or otherwise publishing it.
2. If available, listen to an audio or watch a video recording of your presentation. Keep a notepad handy while you listen and make notes of things you would like to improve upon the next time you speak. Warning: This may be somewhat painful at first, but it is one of the best ways to improve and hone your abilities and techniques.
3. Listen carefully to the comments and criticisms of your lesson from audience members that offer them. It is not easy to *take* constructive criticisms, but it is also usually harder to *give* them. Those who offer constructive criticisms are trying to help, and have overcome their own fears to offer them. Be respectful and appreciative of them, and their suggestions. Then too, some criticisms are given simply for the purpose of being critical, and are usually made by those who have never spoken publicly themselves, nor who have any real desire to help you do better. Try to be long-suffering, patient, and respectful with them also.

Any preacher of significant years proclaiming the word will tell you that some church members are going to compliment the lesson regardless of its content, or even whether or not they were awake for it. He will also tell you that others may be critical of your attempts to “*preach the word*” for a whole host of less than admirable reasons. The long and short of these things is this: Take both compliments and criticisms graciously for what they are worth, but don’t allow them to displace your own honest, fair, and critical estimation of your efforts. If a lesson is well delivered that was thoroughly studied and prepared, don’t let the fact that no one “gushed” over it depress you. On the other hand, if you know you didn’t do the best you could have in preparing or delivering the lesson, don’t allow (perhaps insincere) compliments to cause you to become satisfied with mediocre efforts. Be your own best critic, and it will save others the task, [Gal.6:4a](#).

A Final Word: Though this study has not been about training “preachers” per se, contemplate whatever value it presents to be a good one, understanding that “**A good preacher/bible teacher: Knows the Book**, for it is his text; **Knows People**, for they are his audience; and, **Knows Himself**, for his capabilities and limitations determine the quality of his work.”

May our gracious God bless your every effort to select, prepare, and deliver lessons that educate in, and enliven your audience to, His precious Word. -PCS