

Initiate Your Spiritual Maturity With These 10 Keys to Sound Biblical Interpretation

The following are different approaches to biblical preaching:

Prophetic, Rhema Word Preaching

This kind of preaching is when a pastor waits upon the Lord during the week and (hopefully) God downloads a prophetic exhortation on the pastor to deliver to the church. This is a very common style of preaching, especially in the Pentecostal and Charismatic church world. The advantage of this approach to preaching is that there is an excitement in the air every week since folks do not know what is coming next. This approach also enables the pastor to deliver a word spoken in season that can specifically minister to the needs of certain people in the congregation.

The disadvantage of this kind of preaching style is that it is very difficult for the average person to mature since there is no systematic approach to Scripture they can wrap their brain around. It can also lead to a pastor imposing their own views and subjective insights upon the text of Scripture, which greatly hinders the congregation from learning how to interpret the word for them.

Thematic Preaching

This is when the pastor engages in topical preaching (similar to a systematic theological approach) that lends itself to teaching a series of messages rather than a different topic every Sunday. This is perhaps the most popular approach today in the church world. Involved in this approach are popular

homiletic structures that employ:

1-Point Topical Message

A one-point message is very advantageous since it forces the preacher to build his whole message on one primary train of thought. Everything in the message (personal examples, Scripture reading, insights and storytelling) all points to and builds upon one primary topic. This method is also the most fluent and conversational because it flows more naturally and organically, as if one person is having a detailed conversation with another person. The focus is always practical, and often the message can end with practical application bullet points.

Three- to Four-Point Topical Message

A three to four-point message is less natural than a “one-point message”; however, it can still be effective if there is enough focus. Generally, in this style, you read the text to start off the message and include an introduction with personal stories or metaphors that frame the message to make it easier to understand. Then the passage is unpacked with three to four points with a practical conclusion at the end for application.

Expository Preaching

In this article, I am referring to an exegetical approach to Scripture when I say expository. By exegetical, I am referring to unpacking the Scriptures as God originally gave it instead of connecting passages together to prove a topical point. In other words, instead of preaching topically on holiness (a topical message that connects verses from both the Old and New Testament to prove the point), the expositor would deal with a whole passage of Scripture that deals with holiness; and/or, they would not pick one subject but teach weekly through a whole book of the Bible, unpacking it verse by verse. The advantage to this approach is that it is much easier for the

church to follow along; the people even know what to study for the next week's sermon. It can also teach the congregation how to understand the author's original intent when that particular book of the Bible was written.

Another advantage is that a local congregation can utilize more people to preach the word since they can all refer to the same commentaries and biblical resources that buttress the text at hand, which greatly aids them in teaching and preaching. Also, these approaches almost force the expositor to stay on point and not go off into subjective tangents since their goal is biblical exegesis and not subjective isogenesis.

Furthermore, it also forces the pastor and preaching team to deal with passages of Scripture they are not familiar with and or would have never taught the church, it gives the church a more balanced awareness of the council of God revealed in the Bible. This approach can also be more convicting to the church because the people will know that the pastor did not plan the next week's topic or passage that it is merely next in the chronological order; hence, if the subject matter is the giving of finances to God, then the congregation knows that this was not the idea of the pastor, because money came up naturally in the text.

Topical preachers intentionally deal with the subject matters they choose; so, the people can possibly think that any given subject matter taught was due to the intentionality of the preacher not necessarily the will of God for them at that time.

A disadvantage to this approach is that at times, the church may need to hear a prophetic word or teaching on a certain topic that will not be touched in that week's text. Although I have rarely seen this happen with this approach (it amazes me how relevant every week's passages are), this can easily be resolved if the church knows that the lead pastor has the liberty to put the expository approach on hold for guest

speakers, and or for short seasons of the church life to give room for the prophetic word of the Lord to come forth. Mixing it up like this can keep the excitement in the church going and at the same time give the church the opportunity to mature and be equipped in the word from many different angles and styles

The Importance of Proper Biblical Interpretation

Last but not least, perhaps the most important aspect of causing believers to mature is to equip them to learn the science of biblical interpretation or hermeneutics. This has to do with several different aspects that I will only briefly cite because of a lack of time.

10 Keys to Biblical Interpretation

1. We must understand the author's original intent.

Instead of imposing our cultural and subjective views on the text of Scripture when preaching, our first order of business is to explain the author's original intent when he wrote the passage or book; after establishing this, then we can give our own insights and personal and moral applications without doing violence to the text.

2. We must understand the historical /cultural context.

Although the Scriptures are applicable to every generation and are transcultural, we must first understand the historical, cultural context to arrive at a proper understanding. This is because idioms or sayings may have been employed thousands of years ago, that can alter the meaning of the text in contemporary language. We also have to understand that the biblical writer at times employed literary genre that made use of hyperbole, poetry, allegory, typology and symbolism.

3. We must understand the biblical context.

Before we can understand one particular word and or verse, we

need to understand the author's original intent for the chapter, then the context of the whole book as well as understand that book in the context of the Old or New Testament, depending on in which testament it appears.

4. We must understand the antecedent use of a theme.

This has to do with learning how to build a foundation of doctrine to understand a text or a theme of Scripture by understanding its first mention in Scripture, then building from there to the present text you are preaching from to arrive at a proper understanding.

5. We must understand covenant language and biblical metaphors.

In every profession, there is a particular nomenclature that its practitioners and adherents understand and use. (For example, in baseball there are "balls and strikes"....Scripture is no different, the Bible uses covenant language to communicate certain truths that can only be understood by studying Old Testament symbols, typology and metaphors, especially in apocryphal literature.

6. We must take the Word literally unless otherwise indicated.

In the second and third century of the church, from the city of Alexandria, arose great church fathers (like Origen) who taught that with every passage of scripture there is the literal meaning but to know God's will we have to uncover the spiritual or allegorical meaning. This view can be dangerous since allegorical meaning can be very subjective unless the Scripture states that the passage is allegorical (Gal. 4:24).

7. Scripture always should interpret Scripture.

Perhaps the most important hermeneutical lesson we can learn is that the Word of God has to interpret itself.

Hence, it is very dangerous to isolate a verse and build a

doctrine from it. If there are not at least two to three other passages that arrive at the same conclusion, you cannot build a doctrine upon one mere verse or passage.

8. Understand the grammatical structure of the passage.

Scripture was written primarily in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. It is important to have original language grammatical tools that give you the possible meanings of a word along with its tense and sentence structure.

Most of the time, this is not absolutely necessary for preaching. Understanding the context is probably more important to understand a verse most of the time (since the original languages can also have various shades of meanings—giving license to the preacher to prove various points); however, whenever possible, use some tool that aids the interpreter to exegete the word with the original languages. One of the things that helps me in biblical interpretation is understanding that the original writings did not have grammatical notations that we have today in English such as capital letters, commas, periods and the like. Thus, I usually ignore chapters, verses and grammatical notations, and read the text like one flowing letter, which gives me a better understanding of the context of a passage.

9. The Christo-centric Principle

According to Luke 24:44,45, the whole Old Testament points to Jesus Christ. With that in mind, having a Christo-centric view of Scripture helps us understand its ultimate end regarding its primary and typological meaning.

10. The Numerical Principle

The Bible does give symbolic meaning to certain numbers that can aid in biblical interpretation;

For example, often, Scripture's use of "one thousand" is not

literal but symbolic of a lengthy period of time (Rev. 20:1-7). The number seven is very special and seems to have divine connotations (i.e. the seven-fold spirit of God in Revelation chapters 1-5; the seven miracles of Elijah, the seven miracles of Jesus in the book of John).

The number 12 seems to connote government as we see when Jesus chose 12 apostles, the New Jerusalem has in heaven 12 gates with 12 angels, with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and the city is measure to be 12 thousand stadia. Three is the number of the triune God, and five is the number of His ministry gifts as shown in Ephesians 4:11. We can go on and on, but you get the idea.

In conclusion, there is much more that can be said about biblical interpretation (I spent much time studying this subject) and about everything written in this article.

Let us all endeavor to study to show ourselves approved, a worker who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (see 2 Tim.2: 15). {eoa}