

Outlining and Arrangement

Let us do some review questions. What are six critical questions for sermon preparation? The first three are “What does it mean?” “How do you know?” and “What concerns caused it to be written?” Those are the first three. The final three are the three critical questions that turn a lecture into a sermon. They are “What do we share in common with those to whom and about whom it was written?” “How should we respond?” and “How can we best communicate these aspects?” These questions help us convert our message from informational to transformational. That is the critical turn, from dispensing information to actually ministering to people.

Something else to remember from the last lesson, taught by a guest professor, Dr. Eswine, is “You owe nothing more to exposition than what is necessary to make the point, but no less than what is necessary to prove the point.” In other words, as you answer those six questions, you will get much information. Then the question becomes, “How much do I dump on people? How much can I get out here?” You have to say only enough to make the point, but you cannot say less than what is necessary to prove the point. Where people usually begin to be bored and tune out what you are saying is when you have made the point, proven the point, and just keep proving it, and proving it, and proving it—because you read so much more Greek commentary on it. We should ask, “What is the most efficient way I can make and prove the point?” rather than just giving more and more and more information. For example, if it is clear in the English that a verb in the verse is a completed action, I do not think you need to also point out that it is a Greek aorist. Does that make sense? Now, if it is not clear in the English that it is a completed action, then you may need to point out, “In the Greek language, this is a completed action, and we call that an aorist verb.” I would say that most of the time you do not need to say that. Ask, “Is it clear so that people can understand?” You need to keep going until you prove your point. But once it is proven, you do not need to keep going. Let us pray.

Father, we enjoy even the idea that there is a certain challenge in accumulating information. But even in our own hearts we recognize what the goal is, and we ask for Your blessing. The goal is that we would be prepared to proclaim Your Word to Your people, and that our minds, and even our hearts in our humanity would not just focus on the grade. What we are about is the Gospel. Help us to prepare for that above all things, that those who are in darkness would know Your light, those who are hungry would receive Your bread, those who are thirsty would receive living water—and may it even be from us. Grant that we would be faithful to Your Word above all things, we pray. Equip us for it, we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

If you were following some of the wonderful things Dr. Eswine said last time, you understand that there are basic features of good outlining. We now need to begin work on those basic features, to take the information that comes out of those six questions in preparing a sermon and move that into an outline form from which we will preach. Thus the goal of this lesson is to understand the basic features of good outlining. The key thought today is that outlining provides structure for the truth to be related. It is important that you know that every passage does not have to be preached the same way. That seems strange, since it is the same truth. Yet, if you go to two churches to hear 1 Corinthians 2 preached, they would probably use very different outlines, different illustrations, and different applications even though (hopefully) both pastors are preaching truth from the same passage. You might say, “How can that be? If they are outlining correctly, will it not always be the same sermon?” Well, think about it for a moment. If you were going to a hardware store to prepare to do some construction, you would say there are all the same materials that any carpenter can work with, right? There are two-by-fours, dry wall, hammers, and nails—it is all the same raw material. Will the construction all look the same? You say, “No, it could be

quite different.” Even though it is the same raw materials, why will the construction vary? What will make it different? The purpose for which the constructor is building will change the way he uses the raw material. What will determine the purpose of the builder? The needs for the people will call for the raw material to be constructed according to what they need. But the raw material will be the same. Now, we will be using two terms that I want you to learn. One is the “exegetical outline.” That is the raw material. The exegetical outline is where you go through the text to look at the grammar and structure, and you simply outline the exegetical outline. You are doing exegesis, figuring out the material that is there. But the exegetical outline is in essence the raw material. It tells you what you need to know in order to construct the “homiletical outline.” This is the sermon outline.

Tell me things that are not in the exegetical outline (simply outlining the text) that will be in the homiletical outline. Often the exegetical outline will not answer the question, “How are you supposed to respond (particularly in your situation)?” It will not have that material, which we know is essential to good sermons: “How do you respond in your situation?” That will not be in the exegetical outline. What other things will not be in the outline of the passage? Illustrations will not be there. What else will not be there? Supporting texts may not be in the exegetical outline. Supporting text are various supporting materials that are not in the text you are studying, but, depending on your purposes, you may need to bring them in from other parts of Scripture. What other things will not be in the exegetical outline? The context may not be there. The context includes the historical context, what else was going on during the time of the passage. For example, where was Paul when he wrote this? That will not be in the exegetical background. Context includes historical background, and it also includes literary background. We have said that you will mistake what Romans 15 is about if you do not know what Romans 14 is about. Thus, if you only outlined Romans 15, you may not have the appropriate literary background. Now, you will have to ask, “How do I know what context will be appropriate? How will I know what information to bring in, what supporting texts to bring in, what illustrations to use, and what applications to use?” What is the ultimate question? We do not only exegete the text, but we also exegete the people. It is those two things in cooperation with each other that will form the blueprint for the homiletical outline for the construction of the sermon. The exegetical outline is the raw material. The homiletical outline is the fruit of exegeting the text and exegeting the people. Therefore, the form will follow function to some degree.

Let us see how it works with a few examples. Here is the key thought, before we look at these examples: expository messages are obligated to provide the truth of the passage but not necessarily the pattern of the passage. They are obligated to present the truth of the passage, but not necessarily the pattern of the passage. If you have a Bible, look at Luke 18. Can you be faithful to the truth of the text but not necessarily follow the pattern of the text? I will read Luke 18:1-8:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she will not eventually wear me out with her coming!’ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Could you preach from this that we do not pray enough, that we should be encouraged to pray more? Would that be an appropriate theme to preach from this text? It seems pretty clear that that would be a possibility. What if I approached it this way, though? What if I said, “We do not pray enough” as the fallen condition focus (FCF)? (Notice it is stated in the negative. The FCF is something that is wrong, it is the burden of the passage). “We do not pray enough.” Thus my outline might begin, “Pray because prayer is an indication of the believer’s faith. Pray because prayer reaches God’s heart. Pray because God commands it.” Where does that first point come from? “Pray because prayer is an indication of faith.” Where does that come from in the text? It is in the last verse. What about the next point, “Pray because prayer reaches God’s heart,” where does that come from? It comes from the middle of the text, verses 5 and 6—if even the unjust judge would be moved by pleading, how much more would God be moved with the pleading of His own. How about this one, “Pray because God commands it”? Where do we find a simple command to pray? It is in verse 1. Now, we moved backward through the text, did we not? But we are still dealing with the idea that we should pray because we do not pray enough, and we kind of build from the lesser to the greater, right? We say, “Pray because it is an indication of your faith” and “Pray because God hears.” But ultimately, why should we pray? “Pray because God says to.” Therefore I end with the imperative that the passage begins with. That is one approach.

What if my FCF were different because I recognize the people I am dealing with, their struggles and needs that I am aware of as a pastor? The FCF could be “We doubt God hears us when He does not answer immediately.” Would that be legitimate from this text? Was Jesus dealing with this? Yes, as He says, “You should pray and not worry because God will hear and He will answer quickly.” So if your people are saying, “He does not seem to hear,” could you address that concern, that fallen condition from this text? Yes, you could. Now we have a different purpose, with the same raw material. How would we deal with it, then? We could begin with these main points: “Do not doubt, because God desires our example of persistent prayer,” “Do not doubt, because God tells us some requests will not be met except by persistent prayer,” and “Do not doubt, because God will answer persistent prayer.” Where does the first one, “Do not doubt, because God desires our example of persistent prayer,” come from? Where do you get that from the text? That comes from the beginning. How about “Do not doubt, because God tells us some requests will not be met but by persistent prayer”? That comes from the middle. And where does “Do not doubt, because God will answer persistent prayer” come from? We see this toward the end, in verses 6-8, in Jesus’ conclusion. This time, what are we doing? We are moving right through the passage. We go straight from beginning to end. Now, we are being, I hope, true to the truth of the text, but we are not necessarily following the pattern of the text. I will tell you, I think the most frequently appropriate and best way is to go straight through. I would do that most of the time. I would move straight through, in order. But there may be strategies that are significant for communicating the truth of the text that may vary as to whether or not you follow the pattern.

Here is a key: when you are in a written medium, when you are writing an essay, for example, where do you say the most important thing? You state your theme statement, your thesis, first. That is typical of a written medium. You say the main thing, and then you move down to the particulars. When you are in an oral medium, when do you say the most important thing that you want people to walk away thinking about? You say it last. Remember, we said we need to learn some of the differences between essays and sermons. To be fair to the truth of the text, if the most important thing is said first, when might you choose to say it in the sermon? To be true to the truth of the text, you might say it last. To be fair to the truth of the text, you will devise a strategy that best communicates the truth. Transferring from a written medium, you may need to realize, “There are certain things I need to adjust in an oral medium.”

If that logic does not persuade you, here is another reason it could be best to change the order of the text when you preach it. If you are preaching from Ephesians 3, you will recognize that Paul starts, and then has a 12-verse long parenthesis before he comes back to the thought of the first verse. Do you think you would want to preach that text in that pattern or a different pattern? You have to recognize that you could completely lose people in an oral medium if you start a thought, exegete 12 verses, and then finish the thought. My guess is that you will find a different oral strategy to deal with that written information. Your exegetical outline will tell you, “Here is the beginning of the thought, here is the end of the thought, and there is much in between.” But you will probably not preach that exegetical outline. You will probably have to convert it to a homiletical outline. You will find that some of the psalms are acrostics built on the Hebrew alphabet. Sometimes, as in Psalm 119, they might repeat verses seven or eight times before moving to the next letter. Do you think you can do that well in an English, oral medium? It can be very hard. You will probably find another way to orally communicate the truth of the text rather than follow the pattern.

Now, I want to go back and say that most of the time I think it is best to follow the pattern. But I do not want you to come to a passage where the pattern is difficult to follow and think, “Oh no, I cannot see how to follow the pattern, but I have to follow the pattern!” It is fine to sometimes not follow the pattern of a passage. The expositor’s obligation is to the truth of the text, not necessarily to the pattern of the text. This is because our purpose drives pattern, but it does not determine truth. Do you hear the difference? Our purpose drives pattern, but it will not determine truth.

Think of the purpose of the outlines themselves. The rather classic statement from homiletical books for centuries in the West is “An outline is a logical path for the mind.” This is pretty simple. If I want to tell you how to get somewhere, I will not just tell you, “Go east.” I will say, “You take this street to this other, go south on this highway...” I will tell to go from here to there to there in order to show you how to get to the destination. I will create a logical path to get to where I am telling you to go. An outline is a logical path for the mind, and, like directions, it has steps in it.

There are two purposes of outlines. The first purpose for an outline is that it clarifies parts of the sermon in the listener’s mind and ear. It provides a logical path to the mind, by clarifying parts of the sermon in the listener’s mind and ear. Thus by what the listener hears, he or she gets the path to the truth we are developing. The second major reason preachers have outlines is because they clarify parts of the sermon in the preacher’s mind and eye. I am, right now, speaking to you from an outline. I see a major point, then I begin to see the supporting material under it. I sometimes circle things I will use as illustrations while I am talking to you. I expect you to pick up the steps, but the mere fact that I have created an outline helps me while I am speaking to note the major thought, supporting thoughts, illustrations, and how I will apply it. My outline communicates that to me. I have spoken enough from outlines that I will recognize that if there are large gaps, there is something missing that I need to include. The creation of the outline itself gives signals to me as a speaker as to what to say, what to include, and in what sequence to do that. Thus while the outline is great for the listeners, it also helps me organize my thoughts by giving my eye signals about what I will be saying.

As you think about outlines, here is a thought of why we organize along a frame. As you aid the listener’s ear and your eye, you are ultimately working hard on *ethos* as well as *logos*. You are working on *logos* because you are working hard on an argument. You are proving something is true. How is *ethos* helped by the outline? It indicates that you are credible, that you are thinking. It shows you cared enough to get organized. Those are the two pieces of *ethos*, right? *Ethos* is credibility and compassion. You show

credibility from organization because it indicates you know what you are talking about, you can put thoughts together, you have analyzed this text. You show compassion from organization because it indicates you care enough to put it in an organized way. It is interesting—outlines accomplish many things for us, not just in organization but also in *ethos*.

What are qualities of good homiletical outlining? There are five. The first quality of a good homiletical outline is unity. A sermon is about one thing, and therefore all the parts of the outline should support one central idea. You do not want to be in the position of a pastor who, in the middle of point number two, realizes that point number three misses the point entirely. You want to make sure each point deals with the point of the message. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. That does not work when the points of your outline do not deal with the main thing. Thus unity is something you would expect outlines to reflect.

A second quality of good homiletical outlines is brevity. That is, the parts will pass the 3:00 AM test. We want to say things in outline form as concisely as possible. You know that if you have a main point that goes on for 15 words, it is far too long. If it goes on for more than seven or eight words, it is probably too long. We want to shrink these things down. Now, we have much more to say—much more to say! But that will be the information, the exposition that comes under the main point statement. The main point statements and the subpoint statements we try to make as brief as possible. They are kind of like “thought pegs” that you hammer on the door, and then you can hang many things on them. But we do not want the peg to be 10 feet long. We want that peg to be as concise as possible, and then we can hang many things on it. Sometimes we will say things so briefly that people may think, “What? What did he just say?” For example: “What God needs is spoilers.” People may think, “What? What does that mean?” Well, you almost want that reaction. “God wants spoilers. He wants those who are willing to spoil the wicked.” I will explain that more and more as I go, but I want the concise statement first to get people’s attention, to let them know, “Here is what I will be talking about.” And then I can hang many things on that thought peg. Thus a quality of good homiletical outlines is brevity: the parts will pass the 3:00 AM test.

The third quality may be a new thought for you: parallelism. Good homiletical outlines reflect parallelism. That is, the word order between the main points—and even between subpoints within a main point—is similar. Think of it this way: “Christ’s word demands honor. Christ’s word demands obedience. Christ’s word demands love.” These could be three main points in a sermon. The modifiers line up in the same position in each statement. The subjects line up in the same position in each statement. Even the verbs are in the same position. In this case it is the object that keeps changing. That is known as the “key word change.” When things remain parallel but something changes, it is known as a key word change. What does everyone know the first of these three main points will be about? It will be about honor. What will the second and third main points be about? Obedience and love. Parallelism with a key word change is like a verbal flag from the speaker. Remember, people are not reading with you, they are listening to you. Key word changes are verbal flags saying, “Hey! Here is another main point!” The parallelism is a signal that it is another main idea, similar to another one that was stated earlier, maybe three, five, or even seven minutes previously. But the parallel language says, “Here is another main idea.” And its development is indicated by a key word change.

Where do you see Jesus doing this? In the Sermon on the Mount. There are two ways parallelism is demonstrated in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you remember anything that was parallel in the way Jesus stated things in the Sermon on the Mount? The beatitudes are parallel: “Blessed are the poor...for they will be... Blessed are the meek...for they will be...” Do you hear the first parallelism? “Blessed are

the..." This is followed by a key word change: "poor," "meek," etc. Then the latter part of each beatitude is also in parallel form. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will be... Blessed are the meek for they will be..." Thus we have parallelism with key word changes in the beatitudes. There is another way in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus uses parallelism to indicate subject change. "You have heard it said...but I say to you..." Each time He moves to a new subject, He begins with a parallel statement with a key word change.

So this is not some new, modern innovation. This is the way people have heard things throughout the ages. The way in which we give them our outline is parallel phrasing with key word changes. We will look at more examples later. By the way, does the key word change always have to come at the end of the phrase? No, it can be in the middle or the beginning. And does it have to be just one word that changes? No, it will vary. But it is the form of parallelism with some shift in it that is a quality of good outlines. We will talk at various times about doing those key word changes. But we basically want some shift that causes people to say, "That is the main idea again...oh, and there is the shift." That is what the key word change is about.

So far we have unity, brevity, parallelism, and now we add proportion. Another quality of good homiletical outlines is proportion. Some of the readings you will do will call this simply "symmetry." Proportion, or symmetry, is the proportion of similar components of the message should be about equal. The main points are about the same length. If you have multiple subpoints, they are about the same length. Think what would happen otherwise. If your first main point lasts 25 minutes, you know the next main point will only last three minutes. Nonetheless, if you have been preaching for 25 minutes and then say to people, "And my second main point is..." what will the people think? "Oh no! He will be talking another 25 minutes!" This is because the Western ear expects things to be in proportion. Again, no one has a stopwatch on. But we do expect the components to be in roughly equal proportions.

The last quality is progression, meaning the thought should move forward with each component. We should move toward greater understanding, broader understanding, of what has been said. If we feel like we are stuck in the same place and have not moved forward, we may think, "It does not seem like anything happened to move us along." Let us use the three main points we saw before, "Christ's Word demands honor. Christ's Word demands obedience. Christ's Word demands love." If instead of this I said first, "Christ's Word demands honor" and then said, "For my second point, 'Christ's Word demands praise,'" what will people be thinking? "It is a different word, but it seems like we just talked about that." It does not seem that there is progression.

Here is where you will often develop a difficulty with an exegetical versus a homiletical outline. Will a text ever repeat something? Sure it will. And if you are just following through the exegetical outline, you might speak about honor, then find that honor is repeated later and have to speak on that again. If a word or concept is repeated, what will you likely do? You will probably group them together under the same point rather than dealing with it, applying it, and so forth, only to come to it a few verses later and do it all again. I will try to pull ideas together in a way that explains the text in an oral medium. That means there will be parallelism, symmetry, proportion, and also progression.

Let us look at some types of homiletical outlines. We will do this very quickly, but I want you to know there are some different ways homiletical outlines can be put together. The most common one, and the one we will most frequently use, is the logical type, a logical outline. It shows the logical development of the passage's thought.

As an example, let us look at the following statements: “We should trust God because His nature is loving,” “We should trust God because His nature is all-knowing,” and “We should trust God because His nature is all-powerful.” What if I were dealing with the FCF of “People just are unwilling to trust God.” I would say, “Listen, you should trust God because His nature is loving.” But the objection to that is “Even if I trust Him to be loving, if God does not know what will happen next, it is not enough. God being loving is not a sufficient reason to trust Him.” Therefore you say, “The second main point is “You should trust God because His nature is all-knowing. He is loving, and He also knows what will happen and the consequences of everything.” Someone may respond, “While that helps me more, it is still not enough. I believe He loves me and knows what will happen, but if He cannot stop the truck from hitting my child, I still do not have reason to trust Him. Thus I have to say, “Not only is He loving and all-knowing, but He is also all-powerful. He can control all things. He is loving, He is all-knowing, and He can control all things according to His knowledge and according to His love—in ways that are eternal and beyond us, surely. But nonetheless, we can trust Him.” I am building in a progressive way the logic that runs through a passage. That is a logically developed message. When you preach from the epistles, and some of the psalms, logical development is the easiest way to go, and it is very, very common.

A second major form of outlines is sequential. That is, we show not the logical development but the chronological development of a passage. We show the chronological outline of a passage. For example, “Because God offers salvation, we must come to Christ.” “Because God offers salvation we must abide in Christ.” “Because God offers salvation we must testify of Christ.” What does that describe, “Come to Christ, abide in Christ, testify of Christ”? What chronology is that? It is the chronology of the Christian life. We come, we abide, and we testify. Thus that particular chronology is logical, but it also sequentially moves through what happens in someone’s life. Have you ever heard a sermon where someone says, “This is what happened in the life of David: obedient, disobedient, repentant.”? They may move through the life of David to show how we must respond to God. Something like that would be sequential.

Another major form of outline is (I will be giving you two terms here) picturesque or imagistic, a picture or image. Why do we need this for our culture today? Are we more linear, logical, or visual? Which are we more oriented toward? You would have to say that in this era (at least in the United States) we are very image-oriented. I will list for you here what I will even confess is an absolutely awful outline. But hopefully it will make the point well. “If we are to be effective fishers of men, we must use proper tackle”; “If we are to be effective fishers of men, we must go where the fish are”; and “If we are to be effective fishers of men, we must react when we get a nibble.” If you are a fisherman, that may mean a little something to you. But what am I doing? I am talking about the process of missions through a fishing analogy. I am bringing to mind people’s idea of some fishing experience of their life in hopes that they will understand. This is a terrible outline, though.

I will tell you, one of the best imagistic outlines I ever heard was by a seminary student who had been in the Air Force. His career in the Air Force was as a crash investigation specialist. He would investigate what happened when planes crashed. He went to the life of King Saul, and he said, “There has been a spiritual crash that happened in this man’s life. How did it happen?” And he took us through the steps of a crash investigation to say, “First we need to determine the point of impact. Then we need to determine whether it was pilot or mechanical error. Then we have to say, what steps do we take to avoid recurrence?” Now, could you explain the life of Saul that way? Sure you could. It is a pretty good outline: “Point of impact,” “Pilot or mechanical error,” “What steps can we take to avoid recurrence in our lives?” He uses an image and takes people through an image or picture process. You may have heard pastors do

this. Did Jesus ever do this? He said, “I am the vine, you are the branches,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the bread of life.” He took images people are familiar with and tied them to spiritual truth in order to communicate what needs to be known. Thus this type of outline is called picturesque or imagistic.

I think with just knowing about the logical, sequential, and imagistic types of outlines you will have much of the raw material you will need for much of what we will do in this class. There are others, but these are some of the basic outlines. If you are dealing with the epistles, which is where many of the passages assigned in this class come from, what outline do you think you would mainly use? The logical outline. What goes into an outline? What are the components? We will be looking at each of these more later, but just to give you an idea of what we will continue to develop, let us look at them. There will be these various components: some indicator of introduction and conclusion, proposition, main points, subpoints, illustrations, and applications. There will be some indication of what the introduction is about and some indication of what the conclusion is about.

Thus the first thing that goes into outlines is some indication of introduction and conclusion. The second thing that goes into outlines is a proposition, the theme statement. What is the main thing this sermon is about? That is a proposition. Obviously, beyond the proposition there will be main points. Here is a main point: “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ in difficult situations.” Here is another main point: “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ to difficult people,” “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ despite our difficulties.” Now, those are longer for a reason we will talk about shortly. But I hope you see that even though they are long statements, they have key word changes. They are parallel with key word changes. Thus you know the first main point will be about difficult situations, the second main point will be about difficult people, and the third main point will be about our difficulties. You see that by the parallel language. You probably recognize that, in addition to the main points, there are various developmental features. Here is one of those: subpoints. Subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. In addition to subpoints, there are illustrations that are indicated in the outline. In addition to the illustrations, there are applications that typically are indicated in the outline.

Something I said with some care just a minute ago was that subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. I said it that way so that hopefully something begins to come to your mind, which is this: an illustration is not a subpoint, and an application is not a subpoint. Yes, they are supporting materials under the main point. But the subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. They are typically developments of a principle of some sort. The illustrations will illustrate, demonstrate what the subpoints and the main point have been about. Thus illustrations are demonstration. The applications will apply what the subpoints have been about. But neither the illustrations nor the applications are subpoints. The subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. You may, depending on how full your outline becomes, include transitions of some sort. Thus, for contents of good homiletical outlines, we have indicators of introduction and conclusion, proposition, main points, developmental features, and sometimes transitions. Throughout the rest of the course we will talk about each of those.

Now let us look at some developmental principles for good homiletical outlines. We said that the raw material gives us information we need, but purpose determines the actual construction of the message. You may wonder how many points you are supposed to use. The answer depends on your purpose.

In the history of preaching, there is a standard way we think about the number of main points in a sermon. Depending on if it is a three-point sermon, a two-point sermon, or a four-or more-point sermon, we tend to have certain expectations of what will be accomplished according to the different numbers of points.

This will vary greatly by culture.

For the Western ear, people who have been educated in Western culture, we tend to have certain expectations of what will be accomplished according to the different numbers of points in an outline. A three-point outline is known as “developmental.” That is, “This idea leads to that idea, which leads to a culminating idea.” This comes right out of Greek and Roman rhetoric and the idea of what a syllogism is. This is a reflection of the way we in Western culture became accustomed to hearing an argument: major premise, minor premise, conclusion. We develop a thought by moving to a culminative idea. A three-point outline often reflects that Western, syllogistic method. By the way, homiletics will always debate, “Where did the three-point sermon come from?” It is the most common in Western culture. I would say it is the most common because in Western culture we are typically more comfortable preaching out of the epistles than out of narratives. Narratives often will not follow a three-point, developmental form. But didactic passages will almost be able to develop that way. Thus we are often more comfortable with this logical development, which often folds into a three point outline. We often use minor idea, more major idea, most major idea. That is typically what a three-point sermon does. You can think of it as going up the mountain: start here, move up to here, move up to the highest perspective and most important idea. Even the language I gave you before of a sermon being progressive has the idea that you are moving to a higher culmination. And a three-point sermon accomplishes that very readily to a Western ear.

A two-point message has a slightly different purpose. It is not developmental but balanced. Two things typically are in tension, or balanced, to one another. There is hot and cold. There is inside and outside. There is earthly and heavenly. Do you hear these duos? Typically, one is in balance against the other, in some form of tension. If you do not have that tension in a two-point message (in Western culture), do you know what people will feel? They will feel that it is incomplete. “Did you forget the third point? Did you run out of time?” This is because, you see, the third point is really there. Do you know what it is? The third point is the tension between the two. Thus if there is not tension between the two, if they are not counter-balanced in some way, then it makes people feel that you have not communicated anything to them, or you just did not finish. We will do this frequently, and the apostle Paul certainly does it very readily. Paul uses duos between the flesh and the spirit, between the earthly and the heavenly, between the inside and the outside, between the old man and the new man. “Put on the new clothes, put off the old clothes.” He uses these duos. Typically in a two-point sermon as we move from the first main point to a second main point, we create the tension. We say, “Here is what we have been looking at, and now here is the flip side we will be looking at.” We do not expect people to simply figure out the tension. We tell it to them because they need that information to be able to tell how these two ideas play off of each other.

What about a four-or more-point sermon? It may be summative, meaning it gives you many ideas that are added up to create an overall impression. Summative can also be called additive (because you add this to this to this) or even catalog (because it gives you many ideas). Now, you are not moving up the mountain, typically, in a four-or more-point message. Each of these points has equal weight, but you need them all to develop the overall idea. I think the longest catalog I ever heard were the “14 attributes of a biblical preacher.” The pastor who preached that sermon probably was not saying that one was more important than the others. He probably wanted us to hear all of them. He was saying, “You need to hear all of these to get the big picture.” It was not minor premise to more major premise to most major premise, rather it was, “You need this, and this, and this...” If you go beyond four points, in this era and culture it is very hard for people to retain it. At four or five points, you are pushing the max. At seven, eight, or nine, you may leave impressions, but your hearers (again, in American culture) will not remember specifics. At 14,

you are really just giving the big picture, as your hearers are not likely to remember any of the specifics. Thus a four-or more-point sermon is summative, or additive.

Then there are, in American culture, one-point messages. These are simply called, as you might guess, “essay form.” It is simply an essay. The one main point is the proposition or theme statement, and it is developed pretty much like an essay. This is very hard for people to listen to in our culture. Thirty minutes with no breaks, no road signs in between, just paragraph leads to paragraph leads to paragraph... Think if you were listening to this sermon. Typically they are read; very few people have this memorized. By the way, one of the reasons we use outlines is because they are very easy to get into our heads so we do not have to read off a manuscript. We do use essays, and there are some fantastic essay preachers in our culture. Can you think of any preachers who present essays in sermons that are effective? Colson. I would certainly say Colson is an essay preacher. He gives wonderful, marvelous social essays. Usually these are not expository sermons, not taking a text and unfolding it. James Kennedy is the other essay preacher I would mention. These sermons are often essay forms rather than expositions. We will talk later about why that is—often an essay form is a way of addressing an issue, as opposed to developing a text. Thus there may be a reason for an essay sermon, but we will not do it this semester.

Another developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is the principles of subordination. Here I will follow in the tracks of your English teacher. If you have one subpoint, what must you have in addition? You must have another. You cannot have one subpoint under a main point. If you have one subpoint, what should it have been? It should have been the main point. If you have a main point statement and only one subpoint, it will seem to the listener that they are in competition. “What is the main point here? Is that a restatement of what you just said, or did I mishear you? Did you mean to state that instead of the main point?” Thus if you have one subpoint, you must have another. You must have at least two subpoints, if you have any at all. Can you have three subpoints? Sure. Can you have four? Sure. Can you have five? Oh, you are stretching it... Usually two or three subpoints is most common. You do not have to have subpoints. Maybe the main point will carry the thought in itself. But if you do have a subpoint, principles of subordination say you have to have at least one more. Typically there are two or three.

A third developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is that it is helpful to keep the text evident in the outline. As you develop homiletical outlines, it is often very helpful to use the words of the text. People will hear you say something, look at their Bibles, and see that you are using similar words. For example, if I said, “Christ’s Word demands honor,” and verse 2 had the word honor in it, that is very helpful to people. Now, can you always do that? The answer is no. It may be that the word “honor” did not appear in the text at all. It may have been something like “Give God praise, sing songs to him,” and I had to take two phrases and roll them into one main point. So, for example, “praise” and “sing songs,” what are those about? They are about giving honor. Thus I may have to take an entirely different word and use it as a summary word to get the biblical concepts. But if I can use the words of the text, that is often very helpful. It is good to keep the words of the text in the outline if I can.

The other thing I will do to keep the text evident in the outline is to tie main points and subpoints to relevant verses. That is how I keep the text most evident in my outline. If I cannot use the words of the text in my outline, I certainly will use the verse references. Think of how preachers develop this. They may say, “Christ’s Word demands honor. Look with me at verse 2; it says...” What I just did is a standard pattern. You state the truth (for example, “Christ’s Word demands honor”), then place the truth

(“Look with me at verse 2...”), and then prove the truth (“Verse 2 says this...”): state, place, prove. We will talk about various forms of proof as we go. What I often do in my outline is link the main points to the verses that they can be proven by. And if I have subpoints, I will link them to verses as well. So I will say something like, “We should give God honor. First this demands our praise—look with me at verse 3.” Then I will begin to explain how verse 3 explains praise. I may have another subpoint, “It also says, ‘Sing songs to him,’ ‘songs, and hymns, and spiritual songs,’ what are those things?” Then I will begin to explain what psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are. Then I may have something in addition. But what I am trying to do is to keep my main points and subpoints tied visually to the text. What is the strength of that? On whose authority do you speak? You speak on the Bible’s authority, not yours. Therefore I say, “Here is the truth, now look with me at the text.”

This does many things. It makes sure your authority comes out of the Bible, and it makes sure you are in fact explaining what the text says. You have to prove that what you just said comes out of the Bible here. Also, it does the expositor’s ethic. What do we do? We open our Bibles and say, “Let me tell you what this means.” And when I keep saying, “Look here, it says... Look here...” people will know that I am explaining what the text means. You keep taking them back to the text. One way to do this is to use the words of the text, though you cannot do that a lot of the time. Not only can you, but you must use the verses of the text. Identify the verse references.

A fourth developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is to create consistent visual markers in your pulpit outline. You know, what you take into the pulpit may not be what you have written up. It is often quite a bit more brief. Something I have done through the years to create consistent visual markers is when I have the outline I take into the pulpit, I always circle my illustrations. Why? Because then they are set off for my eye on what the subpoints are about. I work along and think, “I need to remember what the illustrations are,” and I just look down. I do not have to read through five sentences; the illustrations are circled. My eye falls immediately to them, so I automatically know what my illustration is. Before I became computer literate I almost always used little triangles to indicate my applications. Now I use a little parallelogram. When I see one of those, I know I am in an application. My eye is not trying to read, “Where is it?!” My eye just falls to the page, and I automatically know, “That is an illustration,” or I automatically know, “That is an application.”

Now, I do not mean to tell you what you should do. Our styles will vary hugely. But the thing to do while you are in seminary is to begin to develop your own system. What is helpful for you? Do you put a star by an application? Do you put a square over the illustration? Do you highlight the illustrations and applications in different colors? There the difficulty comes when you have 10 different colors, and you need a key on the side to be able to remember what each color stands for. That is really going too far. But the idea is to help me be able to maintain eye contact and speak to people. Having these consistent visual markers helps with that, among other things. Maybe you can make the major points boldfaced, larger, and over in the left-hand margin. Subpoints you might indent a little and make them smaller. This helps us know major ideas and minor ideas just by the way we put them on the page.

The fifth developmental principle for good homiletical outlines may surprise you. This is different, again, than what your English teacher told you. When we develop outlines for preaching, we typically number rather than alphabetize main points and subpoints. Let us say the main point is “1. Christ’s word demands praise,” and then I had subpoints here. My English teacher told me to use a, b, c, etc. But when you are talking to people, do you say “A...B...” No, you say, “First...Second...Third...” Thus in homiletical outlines we number rather than alphabetize, because that is the way we talk. Otherwise you will have to do some kind of conversion process in your brain, “Let us see: a, b, c...Third!” You will recognize the

unnaturalness of talking to people and doing this. We do not talk that way to one another. Thus it is often typical that we will number even subpoints as well as main points.

A sixth developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is to keep the main points in the pulpit outline clearly segregated. That seems plain enough. Our tendency is to cram things together. Again, we are thinking of essays rather than developing sermons. So, my first main point has gone about two-thirds down the page. Where do I start my second main point, if I am writing an essay? You just keep going down the page. But then some of your main points may be split between two pages. If you have sufficient paper, you could start each main point at the top of a new page. That way your eye does not have trouble navigating. “I finished that point, there is where the next one starts. Now I finished with that one, there is where the next one starts.” My eye is always coming to the same place on the page when I transition between points or major ideas. You could also just fold one page four times and have your introduction and each main point on a separate fold. People also use note cards—all kinds of things. My goal for you is to develop a consistent system, this way your eye will know what it is looking for and not be searching on the page. Then you can operate very quickly and efficiently. That is part of keeping the outline seeable.

Another hint is that highlighting or underscoring key word changes while keeping most of the wording parallel aids greatly in many ways. Going back to this rather silly outline, “Christ’s Word demands honor,” “Christ’s Word demands obedience,” and “Christ’s Word demands love,” If I highlight or underline “honor,” “obedience,” and “love,” my eye will go automatically to those words, and I will immediately know what each main point is about. Also, I will emphasize it with my voice, which makes it stand out to people.

Again, these are hints for the pulpit outline, what you take into the pulpit with you. This may be far different from the sermon outline you wrote in preparation for the pulpit outline. I write out my sermons word for word. But I never take the manuscript into the pulpit. I write it out word for word to get my brain and heart ready for what I will say. But I do not want to use a manuscript, because I will end up reading to people. I am talking about now what you take into the pulpit. I think the standard process for many preachers in our culture is exegetical outline, homiletical outline, manuscript, pulpit outline. It is four steps: exegetical outline, homiletical outline, manuscript—write your whole sermon out—and then pulpit outline, convert the manuscript to a pulpit outline. This is a lot of work, but it makes our preaching something that people can listen to and something that is easy to understand.

I also have some cautions for homiletical outlines. There are three. The first you already know: take out the “not’s.” A possible outline of Luke 18 is “Do not doubt, because God desires our example of persistent prayer,” “Do not doubt, because God tells us some requests will not be met but by persistent prayer,” and “Do not doubt, because God will answer persistent prayer.” Now, if you did not have the full explanation of those, if I left it at “Do not... Do not... Do not...” what have I left out of the sermon? What to do. “Do not do this... Do not do this...” I have left out what to do. This is a rule that we will only use as we learn the basics of preaching. We will break this rule later on. But for now, do not word main points in the negative. If I want to say not to do something, it is better to say, “Avoid...” rather than “Do not...” I will find another way to say it rather than putting it in the negative. That is something we will do this semester. We will get out of the habit of saying things in the negative by saying things in the positive.

The second caution is take out the passive verbs: “He was good...Christians are...” We will find an active verb. Make it active, make it gripping, take out the passive verbs. The third caution is use alliteration with caution. Alliteration is when your key terms all begin with the same consonant. For example, “Praise,”

“Power,” and “Plee,” or “Call,” “Come,” and “Convert.” You use some consonant in a pattern. This is a very powerful rhetorical tool. The ear is very much helped by it, particularly when preachers have picked up the importance of key word structures. Thus there are some preachers who use alliteration every week. Listen, this is a very powerful tool. If you use it every week, it can be problematic. Why? You begin to twist the text to fit your alliteration scheme. “It does not exactly mean that, but I have to use the same consonant word...” You end up kind of twisting the truth. The other thing is that people may find it too cutesy if you use it week after week after week. Now it becomes a word game rather than a proclamation of truth. It is a tool, but we will use it with caution. If it will work naturally, great. But if not, do not feel like you have to push it. Some of you are used to preaching that uses alliteration every week. I want to say, if it is natural, use it. If not, do not twist the text to make it happen. It is more important to say the truth than to say something untrue cleverly.

The bottom line for good homiletical outlines is be faithful to the text; what you say should be obvious from the text, it should be relevant to an FCF, and does it move toward a climax? You can make an acronym from this: FORM: Faithful to the text, Obvious from the text, Relevant to an FCF, and Move toward a climax. What you say should come from the text. It should be relevant to the FCF. I should ask myself, “This is the burden of the text; this is why I am preaching this! Is all the material of the sermon still dealing with that fallen condition, or have I gone down a rabbit trail?” I keep pointing back to that fallen condition. Is all of the supporting material, are all of the main points, dealing with the FCF? Does it move toward a climax? Conclusions carry the weight of the sermon. Have I said, “You must hear me now, this is what this is about.” This means all sermons have FORM: Faithful to the text, Obvious from the text, Relevant to an FCF, and Moving toward a climax. In the climax, how you are in essence trying to say, “This is what God is saying to you. You must act upon it.”? All sermons have FORM.

Now, these have been just basic criteria for outlines. I have tried to do two basic things: tell you what goes in an outline and give you some understanding that all your outlines will not look the same. Those are the two main things I have tried to accomplish today. The next task after looking at these general principles is to, next time, look at the particulars of formal propositions and main points.