

Application

Let us review a little bit. The difference between an illustration and a mere allusion is that an allusion refers to a story, but an illustration retells the story. The key difference between an allusion and an illustration is lived-body detail. An illustration has the detail of what you see, sense, hear, smell, and experience if you were in the situation reliving it. That is lived-body detail. An allusion does not have those things; it just refers to the story. The retelling of the story involves lived-body detail. Listeners automatically assume a preacher illustrates the last thing he said prior to the illustration. Afterward an interpreting or grouping statement appears at the end of the illustration. It reaches up and gets pertinent details and relates to the principle that was illustrated. It is the interpretation of the illustration that comes at its end.

We will see in this lesson that the interpreting statement also does something else. It is the automatic introduction to the application. There are some important cautions to be aware of when illustrating. I will not list them all, but they include being precise, accurate, and not thinking more highly of it than you ought to think. The key terms for “expositional rain” originate in the subpoint statements. They rain down in the illustration and the application. If you do not have subpoints they are the key terms from the magnet clause of the main point. If these are bullets or answers to analytical questions, the key terms are in the statements. If the subpoints are interrogatives, the key terms are in the answers to the questions. Whatever we say is the point of the subpoint is what holds the key terms. In analytical question responses and bullets, the subpoints are actually statements, and the key terms are in the statements. If you have interrogatives, multiple questions, the key terms are in the answers to the questions. The focus is in the answer to the interrogative, and in that case the key term is in the answer. This points out that not only the interrogatives are parallel in wording but the answers are also parallel in wording. Otherwise you cannot find the key terms.

Let us pray, and we will move forward with today’s lecture.

Heavenly Father, the Word that You have given us is true, and not only is it true but it has been opened to Your people. We pray, Father, that not only would it be opened to us but the mysteries of life that are there, which Your Spirit reveals, would be ours to give. Use us as instruments of Your glory though we be earthen vessels. Time and again we remind ourselves that though our brokenness, sin, and ability seems to remove from us the task of carrying Your holy Word, it is yet being committed to our care. When we speak, Father, when we are committed to Your truth and speak it faithfully, You work beyond us. Your Spirit engages the hearts of others and takes to them that which you want them to know from all eternity and for all eternity. Grant this day as we move to this step that the preachers of old have said is the chief aim of preaching, even its application to the lives of people, that You would instruct us well. We ask that not only the information that we desire but also the transformation that we desire for Your people would be well within our hands for Your purposes. Grant us insight, we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Yesterday I spoke with a pastor who is a long-time friend. He was in a position and said, “When I gathered with friends about 10 years ago in the city that I minister in, we as pastors talked a whole lot about the things that we would do to reach a community that was largely unreached at that time, at least from Presbyterian and Reformed circles. We came up with all kinds of strategies of what we would do for this region, and we have had a lot of success. If you look at the size of churches now, they are typically quite large churches. They have multiplied, and they have lots of people. But at this stage, 10 years later, while our churches are big, we have lots of people, and our strategies have worked well, I

wonder what difference we have made. If we were not here, would our people be living any differently?” That is a rather remarkable statement. They are in our churches, they worship, and we have had some good strategies here in human terms that have resulted in people coming. But as I look at the people who are here, if we were not here, would they really be living any differently?

The question he asks is a tough one for pastors. It is “What is the effect of the word that I preach? Do I see lives not only informed but also transformed? Is there any difference as a consequence of the Scriptures?” This is a question for evangelicals that is particularly difficult in this day and era. There are some statistics that are mentioned in the introduction of your reading. Let me add a few to them. Approximately a third of American adults say they are born-again believers. You know there is a lot of variation to what that means, but it is a figure that has not changed in almost three decades. However, there seems to be little difference in the behavior of those who are born again from the time that they say they are born again and after that point. In fact, surveys say that in each of three major categories (legal drugs, driving while intoxicated, and marital infidelity), behavior actually deteriorates after people said they have been born again. The incidence of drug use and illicit sex roughly doubles after people say they have been born again. The incidence of drunken driving actually triples after people say they have been born again. Recent surveys indicate the incidence of divorce is actually higher among those who indicate that they are born-again believers. A recent Zogby pole indicated that Internet pornography sites are visited by 18% of born-again believers, a figure that differs only by 2% from the general population.

Those are scary figures. We could debate every one of them regarding whether the survey was done properly. Focus on the Family particularly debated the divorce statistics, and there was a lot of news about it. But would anyone really contend that even if the incidence of divorce is not greater among evangelicals than in the general population that it is common among evangelicals as well as in the general population? If that is so, how can we say that we, who are committed to the Word of God and seeing it take root in the lives of people, are being effective? What are we being called to do? It seems clear that, while we have been communicating information for generations, something is not communicating. There is not contact being made between what people know to do and what they are doing. At least for preachers in all eras that easy disconnect is application. It is actually easy to preach information and not think about how it applies. I will tell you, when we had the Connect Conference here this year with over 200 pastors, I simply said to them, “What you recognize after you have preached a while is that outlines jump off the page at you. That is not the hard work anymore. The hard work is making it real to people.” What difference is this going to make in your life? Now that you know it, what difference will it make? That is always the sweat and the blood of preaching. We want to talk today about both the importance of application and how to do it. Next time we will talk about how to get past some of the very real hurdles to doing application well.

As we think about why we do application, one of the reasons we do it is the recognition that, without application, meaning is hidden. That means that application is essential for full exposition. To say, “Here is the tense of the verb,” “Here is what ancient Israel was like at that time,” or “Here is what it meant to be a shepherd in the oriental fields,” can all be good exposition. But if the information does not come into our lives, then even though you can know that information, you still do not know the meaning of the text for us. For those of you in hermeneutics already, it is the very important difference between meaning and significance. I can know the meaning of something, but I can still not know the significance of it. For instance, “pray without ceasing” means you should keep on doing it, but I may not know what that means for my life. How am I supposed to pray when I do not feel like doing it, when I am too busy to do it, or when I do not think to do it? What is the significance of the instruction if you have not related it to my life? You have not really explained the meaning of the text in terms of significance if application is not apparent.

Let us think about what application is. Application is the personal consequence of the truth the Scripture presents. It answers the question “So what?” Application converts lectures to sermons, information to exhortation, and intellectual acquisition to life transformation. Almost any preacher will tell you that application is the most difficult feature of preaching. Application requires the preacher to take a stand and therefore demands courage. It is far easier to dispense information than to seek transformation.

If it is so hard and difficult and seems to be ignored so often, do we need to do it? Let me you give some quick ideas about application. Those of you who were trained in the Westminster Standards, the third catechism question asks, “What do the Scriptures principally teach?” The answer is “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.” Explanation is what man is to believe concerning God. Application is what duty God requires of man. The Westminster Divines were not willing to push those apart. They said the Scriptures principally teach both what man is to believe and what God requires as a consequence. It is not either/or; it is the two together. That is a very modern concept that the Westminster Divines came up with. Some of you are now reading John Frame’s *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, which is the idea of praxis theology. He makes the point that if one does not know how to apply the truth, it is not really true to you. William Ames, the Puritan who wrote *The Medula*, said, “Theology is the science of living to God.” He said theology is not just the science of knowing God, which is what you would think it to be. He said it is not just the study of the information about God, but he said it is the science of living to God. We think of people who are informed in Scripture, committed to our standards, and committed to doing what Scripture says. When they think about preaching, it is not just communicating the informational truths. It is saying what difference it makes in your life. In preaching, we need to tell both parts of what the Bible says. We need to say what this text principally teaches and what duty God requires of man. I cannot adequately explain the Bible to you if I have not put both hands in front of you. So application concentrates on what duty is required of man. Application answers, “So what?”

Application may be behavioral or attitudinal. We often think, particularly early in preaching, that application is primarily about things to do. “Do not do this, do that, read this book, pray more...” All those are appropriate applications, but remember that the Scripture says out of the heart are the issues of life. I often find that when young people get frustrated or angry in the pulpit it is because they see people not doing what they have said to do. “I told you to do this, and you are not doing it.” We have to do some self-analysis at times. If anybody knows to do what the Scriptures say, it is the preacher. Yet the preacher still sins. We know what to do, and we do not do it. So the fault is not that our information basis is too low, it is that our hearts are weak. As I listen to starting preachers, they usually emphasize the behaviors. When I listen to pastors who have preached for 20 to 25 years, they almost always emphasize the heart. They do not ignore behaviors, but they know the real issue is the heart. Until I deal with that, the behaviors will not result. Application has to take both into account: behaviors and attitudes.

There are various specific types of application possibilities. One application possibility might be a command to obey. Application could also be an attitude to be changed. It could be a faith concept to be reinforced. Moses often said, “Remember the God who brought you thus far...” “Here I raise this Ebenezer.” “Thus far has the Lord helped us.” “Every time you pass this stone, remember what God has done.” To reinforce a faith concept is a form of application. To identify a sin to be corrected is also a form of application. We could come up with many more, but those are some of the basic categories. Think about the positive and negative sides of obedience: obey and repent. It could also be a faith concept to be reinforced or an attitude to be changed. “You must love people enough to forgive them even when they have wronged you.” That works at the attitude. Because application seeks heart and life

transformation rather than mere mind expansion, Broadus, the father of expository preaching, calls application “the main thing to be done” in expository preaching. Even to this day it surprises me that Broadus would say that. I expect him to say, as the father of expository preaching, that explanation is the main thing to be done. But he kept driving it home and said that we really need to be about transforming people, not just informing them. He said application is the main thing to be done. Spurgeon said it this way, “Where the application begins the sermon begins.” He did not mean that on paper the application did not come until the end of the sermon. But he says that until you have really thought about what difference this makes in people’s lives, you do not have a true sermon yet. We typically think of Spurgeon as the greatest of the Reformed preachers, but he also recognized the importance of application.

Let us talk about why application must be included. It explains the reason for the exposition. “Why did I tell you all those things?” It is like the doctor telling you to take some pills but not telling you what they are for. Who is going to take the pills? Why did we get all the information from the explanation if we do not know what to do with it? The goal is the application, which explains the reason for all the information. If I go through a main point statement and then two subpoints, by the time I do application I need to refer to those statements again. If I do not refer to them, people will wonder what all the information was for. “If you break down the text this way and it has no significance for me, why did you spend the time doing it?” This means that if we break the text down into subpoints like this, we know we need to apply them. We told people to “take these pills,” so now we need to tell them why. In the sermon we want to get leverage for the application. The argument that we have developed in the explanation, the tone that we use in the message, the illustrations, grammar discussions, and the context we refer to is all used as weight on the fulcrum of exposition to move application. What difference will this make in your life? If you think about the typical academic sermon, explanation takes up three-fourths of the point, illustrations are one-fourth of the point, and application is “go and do likewise.” You really need to focus on the main point and build everything to give leverage for the final instruction of the transformation that results. You cannot do that in one sentence; there is more to it than that.

Beyond that, application focuses the exposition. Exegesis and exposition are bottomless pits of infinite commentary possibilities without a purpose clearly in mind. This has already happened. In working on sermon projects, my students go to the commentaries. Even though they only have a paragraph of the text, they ask me, “Do you expect me to cover all of this text? There is so much here!” That is a really good understanding. There is so much information. You need to determine what you will narrow in on and talk about by deciding your application. Application becomes the purpose-driven sermon. It is what drives the sermon, not because you have not researched it. But once you see what the significance is for the people whom you have exegeted, as well as exegeting the text, you begin to recognize how to marshal your forces. You know what to group and what to separate. You will know what your best leverage will be and what you can leave to another time. Knowing what the application will be for the sermon helps you focus the exposition that you will use. Application is the end of sermon research. You do not want to cover what you are to do or believe until you determine what the text means. You do not want to come up with the application until you have researched the text. But it is the beginning of sermon writing. Application is the end of sermon research, but it is the beginning of sermon writing. It converts the exegetical material to the homiletical message. First I have to exegete the text and determine what is there. Next I think about what the applications should be. Then I have to think about the most salient information to bring in order to move people. What do I need to concentrate on, and what can I diminish in importance because I recognize it is not so central to the application? How will I word these things given the people to whom I am speaking? What is their background knowledge, and what am I driving at? How am I going to word these things if I do not know the application? Having application clearly in mind helps me structure and word the homiletical message. It should not make me

structure and word the exegetical message. There is a difference. Application is the end of the research, but I should know what the significance is before I begin writing the message in homiletical terms.

I have told you before about the left field rule, which is the way to know when your message has gotten off track and you have missed the bus. You are in left field when at the end of explanation and illustration you say to yourself, “I wonder how I am going to apply this.” At that point you have missed the bus. How did you even write the explanation and illustration if you did not know what the application was going to be? Application is the target; it is the main thing to be done. If I fired all my arrows of explanation and illustration, but I did not have a target, how did I know what to shoot at? The application becomes the target of the message. I am not the only one who says this. Jay Adams, when he refers to the way in which we form messages, does not use the term application. He uses the *telos* principle, which in Greek means the end or the goal. He says that before you develop the explanation and illustration, you must have the goal in mind. The goal is always transformation. Swanson uses the “aim” terminology in order to form its various structures. What does the sermon take aim at? I told you already that Brodas says application is the main thing to be done. I have told you about the fallen condition focus (FCF). What is the burden of the message? The FCF happens prior to any of the main points, so everything that you form, including the individual main points, point back to the burden. This also means that the application of every main point is directed at the FCF.

One of the ways that you can really ensure that you have sermonic unity is by looking at the applications of the main points and asking, “How do those applications deal with the original FCF? Does every application deal with this?” A shotgun sermon is one that is all over the place: love your neighbor, read your Bible more, tithe, go to the childcare center and help people, and remember the starving people in Africa. That happens because the preacher typically gave explanation and illustration and threw in application to go with it. Somewhere a homiletics professor told them they were supposed to do application, so they knew they had to come up with something. But they did not go back and ask what the basic aim of the whole text was. They did not think about the burden or ask why the Holy Spirit put that passage in the Bible. They should ask, “What was the wrong thing, the damaged aspect of our existence that the Holy Spirit wanted to deal with?” When you do application, you need to determine if you are still on point. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. You need to make sure that you are still on the main thing, the burden of the message. When you do application, you may come to the conclusion that you drifted. I often begin to tangentially think as I progress through the text. One thing might remind me of another, but I really did not deal with the Holy Spirit’s purpose for the text, which is the FCF. Application begins to focus the exposition.

Application also clarifies and gives meaning to exposition. That is harder to relate until you see it happening. Try and picture explanation, illustration, and application as the dominoes of understanding. I explain something, then I demonstrate it, and people really know it when they see its significance in their lives. Ultimately application tells people that they know it in their head and their heart, but now they need to do it. Then they really understand because they can apply it. We will see later on that these dominoes can fall in different orders. This is a very standard deductive order: principle, particular, application. Sometimes we will go the other way. We will go up the ladder. The point is not the order; it is that they all have to fall. For exposition you have to unfold the text and open the door so people can go and live it. All three have to fall so that you truly have exposition. That is all by way of theory.

Let me give you some texts that should affirm some of what we have been saying. First Thessalonians 2:7-12 tells us that application of truth is required in Scripture. It says, “But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you

remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” Paul says that they taught them the truth, they lived it among them, they tried to comfort them, and ultimately they encouraged them to live lives worthy of the Gospel. They wanted to see transformation. They wanted to see something changed in them. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The Scriptures principally teach what is doctrinally true, and they also teach us what we are doing wrong (reproof). They teach what we should do right (correction). And they instruct us in righteousness that we would be thoroughly furnished for all that God has called us to do. It teaches what is necessary to live the truth of God. Titus 2:1 says, “I urge you to teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.” Paul gives very explicit instruction for how people are to live. It is, after all, the pattern of all of the epistles. You get a salutation greeting at the beginning of the Pauline epistles, then you get doctrinal instruction, and then come the practical applications. There is a pattern. You might say you are only going to preach from the doctrinal part of the message, so do you still need to do application? If you really pressed me to the wall, I would tell you that technically you could do doctrinal instruction and wait until next week to get to the application portion. But it might take you several weeks to get that far in the text. Paul expected it to be done in one reading. The epistle was to be read in the church. He expected one to hear the doctrine and applications in one reading. We might not fulfill the aim of the apostle if, while preaching on the doctrinal sections, we might not get to the application portions for weeks and weeks. It would seem, to fulfill his ethic, we would make sure that application and doctrine stay wed.

If you think of how application occurs and how important it is, it is unlikely it can occur in a sentence. I want us to begin to think about the components of application. How is it made up, and what goes into it? There are four basic questions of application. When you hear them you will recognize that you cannot do this in one sentence. The four developmental questions include, first, “What should I do?” (instructional specificity). Application has specific instructions, which could be attitudinal or behavioral. We need to ask, “What does God now require of you as a consequence of the truth of this text?” The “what” question deals with instructional specificity.

The second question is “Where should I do it?” (situational specificity). This tells where the instructions apply. Give me the situations in which these instructions apply. We want to identify where in real life the principles apply. This carries significance because if I tell you what to do but you do not see where in your life it makes any difference, then I might as well not have told you what to do. It is not only what to do but what the situations are in your life where this will make a difference.

The third is the “why” question, which is the motivation. You need to give instructional specificity, situational specificity, and now proper motivation. “Why should I do that?” A lot of people in the Christian world do the Christian disciplines because they want to buy God off. “I will do this so God will not hurt me. I will pray more so He will not get mad at me.” They do the right things, but the motivation is wrong. I have turned God into the ogre in the sky. I have turned God into Satan; I have made them exchange places. I do a right thing for the wrong reason, which means it is wrong. So I want

to make sure that the motivation is correct in application.

Last, I want to deal with the “how” question, which is enablement. We need to explain not only what to do and where to do it but also why and how. “Why” is proper motivation. The “how” question is enablement. “You told me I have to do something, but I do not know how I am going to do that. I have struggled with this all my life. I failed yesterday; I just assume I will fail tomorrow. You told me to change, but how am I going to do that?” You need to tell people how to carry out God’s commands. This is part of application.

So the “what” question is instructional specificity, and the “where” question is situational specificity. This semester we will say that those two questions have to be answered in every main point. The “what” and the “where” has to be in the application of every main point. The “why” and the “how” must be answered somewhere in the sermon. We will not require them in every main point. But before our listeners walk out the door, we want to make sure that their motivation is correct and that we have enabled them to do what we have called them to do.

I will grant you that there is some artificiality in that. The reason I want to make sure that the “what” and the “why” are clearly stated is so that when we construct our explanation and illustration we have a target. We know that we will tell people to do something. We will exhort them as a consequence of the explanation and illustration. I well recognize that to say why and how in every main point may actually destroy the strategy either of your sermon or of the apostle. At times the apostle says to do several things, and then he says why to do it. At times it is far more powerful to save the “why” and the “how” for later portions of the sermon and to drive with the heart the instruction that you have already given to the hands. We will not forget the “how” and the “why.” Before the sermon is done, the “how” and the “why” need to be in there, but they may be saved for particular points. Every point needs to have the “what” and the “where.”

We go through these four application questions because we want to enable people to apply scriptural truths. There are several things that equip people to do what the Bible says. The first thing is adequate argument. People need to see the reasons for what they do. That falls into the explanation part of the sermon. The next part is having people properly motivated. That addresses not only what they think but what they feel about this text. Motivation falls under the illustration part of the sermon. The supreme purpose of illustration is not to clarify; it is to motivate. That does not mean there is no purpose in clarifying, but the supreme purpose of illustration is to motivate. If that is the case, the next thing that enables people to do what the Scripture says is realistic application. That tells people what to do, where to do it, why to do it, and how to do it. Realistic application has all four components of the application questions. Exposition is the fulcrum, and application is the thing to be moved. Argument, will, and praxis are the enablement features that make up application. Argument deals with the intellect, will deals with the motivation, and praxis brings it into our lives in practice. Then we will understand the application.

Let us talk about how application is structured, and then we will look at it in the text. In a traditional sermon, a main point statement gets us into the explanation. The explanation is typically divided into subpoints with key terms. Those explanation concepts and terms rain down into the illustrations. Those same key terms also rain down into the application. The subpoints’ key terms come down into the application, and they form the instructional specificity. We tell what the text means using parallel language with key word changes. Because we use these key word changes, when we do application, if we do not use those terms, we move away from our authority base. The use of those key terms is not only a rhetorical communication tool, but it is also my authority device. What I told you that text means

and the way I framed it is precisely what I am telling you the Bible says you should do. The reason you see that and feel the weight of it is because of the way in which I developed the explanation. The old rubric of preachers is you apply what you explained. In addition, you apply it how you explained it; you use its terms. The terms of explanation are what you apply as well. The explanation's key terms and concepts rain into the application.

But something else goes on as well. I also deal with situational specificity. I not only tell you what to do, but I also begin to think about where in your life this will make a difference. When I think of situations, it becomes a concrete application. I identify a concrete place in your life where this makes a difference. When you are in this situation, you should do what I just said. A lot of people will theologially begin to struggle here. They will say, "Wait a second. The Bible is meant for all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. You just limited it. Once you put a concrete there, did you not just limit the work of the Holy Spirit?" Persons who are very concerned about the *sola spiritus* perspective feel they have won their case. They think the Spirit alone is the One who should apply the Word. "I thought that if you begin to do application you limit the work of the Holy Spirit, and by you saying, 'Here concretely is where it makes a difference in your life,' you just confirmed my fear. You just fenced in the application of the Spirit." It is a legitimate concern, so we need to do something about it. Having identified the one concrete, we do not leave it there. We then unroll it. We say, "Now that you see the principle and how it applies in a concrete situation, consider the other situations in life that are typical among you in which this principle would also be applied." In other words, I put the concrete down to make people see how this has meaning in real life. But I do not fence it in by having spoken of the concrete. I will say, "Consider another situation," and another and another. The first concrete is the one most fully developed, but we break the fence down around it by saying, "Consider this and this and this..." I might say, "God demands integrity of you even if it is difficult. Some of you are in business situations where even your boss requires you to do what is not honest. I can remember a situation where my employer said, 'We brought you in at a starting wage, and we recognize that. So when you fill out your expense accounts, it is not always wrong to add a little bit to help your salary out a little.' My own boss told me to write down what was not true. But it does not matter what your business situation requires. God requires you to operate with integrity even if it makes life difficult for you. But not all of you are in business situations. Some of you are students in school..." I just broke down the fence there. "There is a lot of pressure to do well for the college that you want to get in to. Some of you even here want to do well because you think people in churches are going to look at your grade card to find out how well you did in order to hire you for a job. They hardly ever look at your transcript, though. They want to know who you are, and they want to hear from your heart what you know. But you can be under intense pressure to cheat in almost any academic situation."

I probably did more explanation of that than I would in a normal situation. I dealt with a business situation, I might deal with a school situation, and then I might open the horizon up. I might say, "There are other situations those of you here face that require your integrity. Even as I mention the issue of integrity, you know what they are." I really broke down the fence there. Now I said the Holy Spirit has to work in your heart to determine what this will mean. I give a concrete. The reason for the concrete is to specify where this has significance in real life. I do not limit it there though. I want to give other examples of where else it could apply.

For what it is worth, I will give you a little thought on the *sola spiritus* argument. On rare occasions, I will go to a conference, and people who have some exposure to *Christ-Centered Preaching* are concerned about the chapter on application. Almost always the concern is that it limits the work of the Holy Spirit. I ask them if they think that my instructing people to do application is wrong. They agree. I ask them if they think I should stop. They agree. I ask them if they think I should stop on the basis of

what the Scripture teaches. They agree again. “Did you not just do application? Do you hear it? Any time you say on the basis of a biblical principle you should stop doing something, you just did application. Even when you said, ‘You should not do application,’ that was application.” I know a fairly well known writer who objects to the use of illustration. So in a book on preaching he wrote, “I preached a wonderful funeral sermon one time, and I did not use a single illustration. The father of the girl who was killed came up afterward and said the sermon meant so much to him even though I did not use an illustration.” In saying that this author used an illustration to say it did not help to use illustrations! You will feel all the weight of that and theologically debate in other places what is right and wrong about application. Here is my thought. I want you to feel deeply what you want when you sit down at a sermon. If the pastor simply says, “God is sovereign,” then I would think what most of you would think, “I knew that before I sat down. It is not why I am here, pastor. I am here because I hope that you will show me the implications of that truth for my life, my family, my loved and lost ones. I was hoping that you would tell me where it makes a difference.” That is what application tries to do. It is the personal consequence of the principle. It is not always behaviors, and sometimes people tee off on application because they say, “You are just giving people behaviors.” But that is not what I have said. Application says what the significance for the heart is as well as for behaviors. In fact, the heart is more important than the behaviors, though not to be segregated from them. All these are to be done.

Let us look at how this unfolds in an actual message. We will look at a sermon that I gave you, specifically at main point two. My intention is to have you look first at the main point and the subpoints. Main point two is “Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word to defend the truth.” The subpoints after the interrogatives are “When must we defend the truth? When others abandon sound doctrine. When must we also defend the truth? When others flock to false teachers.” The third subpoint is “When others will not listen.” Remember in the illustration we found with the Martin Luther account that those key terms reappeared. “Luther knew that others might abandon sound doctrine. Others had flocked to false teachers. He knew even in speaking that others would not even listen, yet he had to speak the truth.” Here is the interpreting statement at the end of the illustration: “You and I are called to a similar task in this day and age where truth is relative and tolerance encouraged.”

Candidly I wish he had done a little more to summarize the key terms preceding, but let us see where he goes from there. His application is this: “Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who is a very young pastor in the city of Ephesus. Yet these words apply directly to us. Every day we are faced with challenges, and we must make a decision as to whether or not to defend the truth. In the business world there is pressure from every side to abandon doctrinally sound ethics as the old fashioned way of doing things.” Expository rain came down into that application statement. He used the key term “abandon sound doctrine” from the subpoint. It went through the illustration, and now they are being used here.

Now look at the situational specificity and the first concrete. He says the truth principle applies in the business world. Now it will be detailed a bit because the first concrete typically gets a little more detail to it. He says, “Whatever it takes is the slogan of the day. Whether dealing with money, the hiring and firing of employees, or company records, believers in the workplace often find themselves in situations where unethical behavior is not only overlooked but expected. In these situations, we must not succumb to our natural inclinations to follow the crowd and flock to those false teachers who claim such things are justifiable and will gain approval.” There is another drop of expository rain coming down, but it still deals with the same situation. He used the key terms of his explanation to deal with the business world twice. Now he says, “There are many things in this world more important than the favor of men, from the student who is encouraged by his peers to cheat on the big exam to the corporate executive who is offered a handsome bonus if she will look the other way with regard to the illegal business deal.”

A number of important things just happened there. The fence got broken down in a couple of ways. One of them is that we turned from the business world to school. Then another stereotype got broken down. The stereotype of the last generation is that men are the people in the business world. But he wanted us to think beyond our traditional categories and said in the business world “she” has been tempted in the same way. This does not just say that it is students or business people who deal with this. It says there is a whole spectrum of people from students to those in the business world who face this temptation. We picked up other categories by the means of expression. “How many heads would turn and mouths hang open if in these situations that person were to say, ‘I cannot do so because it would violate the Word of God.’ May you and I be motivated to say with Martin Luther, ‘My conscience is captive to the Word of God.’ With this as our motivation, we will be able to stand for truth even when others do not listen.”

There is a little more, but recognize that we have picked up the final raindrop of exposition. It is pointed not only to the exposition but also to the unrolled. It is pointed to the students, to the women in the business world, and to everybody in between in the way it was expressed. I often think about application in this way: we take the light of the Word, and the way in which I say, “This is what it means,” is by focusing the beam on a concrete situation. It is like those flashlights where you twist the top to turn them on and focus the beam on an object. I do enough twisting (specificity) and focus so that now you can see its significance in real life when you look at the concrete. Having focused the beam, I do not just keep pointing it at that situation. I say, “Those of you who are students and those of you who are young moms and are wrestling with kids...” I focus it and then I point to a few more places so that people see it does not just shine light there. It shines other places as well.

Truly I am concerned about the *sola spiritus* argument. I just do not buy that the best way to apply the work of the Spirit is not to mention where it applies. It is to give examples and then say, “And still you must deal with it in the way the Spirit speaks to you.” I want to make sure you see how this beam works in real life, even as you consider now how it should apply to your life. There will be times that I can be very specific about the concretes because I know what people in the congregation struggle with. I do not mention them by name, but I very well mention their situations. I do not say so much that I identify people. But you may deal with a whole church that is in unemployment crisis. I may have to say, “Those of us who are really struggling with where bread is going to come from tomorrow need to hear this word of God.” In saying that I speak to everyone in his or her situation.

As we end the discussion for this lesson, I want you to think of what is called the double-edged sword illustration. Some of you have pastors who are very experienced. I want you to listen with ears particularly tuned for something over the next few Sundays. Watch for how often very experienced preachers do not necessarily illustrate the explanation. They illustrate the application. They know the importance of having a concrete to the explanation. So they use their illustration to be the concrete of the application. The first concrete is not some abstract explanation of doctrinal truth. The illustration itself is of people who deal with that truth. The illustration itself is the concrete of the application. That saves you some time in application to say where else it might apply. I think you will find particularly in this generation of preachers and this generation of hearers that the ability to say, “Let me tell you about someone in your life whom you know, a real life that you can identify with who does apply this truth.” It makes it very powerful. It is a double-edged sword illustration. It both illustrates the explanation, and it is the concrete for the application. That is what gives it the double edge; it serves both purposes. It deals with the explanation and the application, but it actually illustrates the application to give concrete form to the explanation.

Next time we will talk conceptually and even with some particulars about what application involves. There is no question it is the breaking point of the sermon. When people say, “The people just stopped

preaching, and he went to meddling,” they mean that they do not think he had the authority or right to say what he did. “That may be his opinion, but I do not think it is what the Bible says.” People typically turn off in a sermon, not in the illustration or the explanation, but in the application. We need to face that hurdle and talk about how we as preachers deal with that reality. We will do that next time.