

Old Friends in New Clothes

In this lesson, we take the next step forward. In Preparation and Delivery of Sermons, we used very formal forms of preparing sermons. We used the most formal form. We talked about how a proposition, or a main point, is a combination of a principle and an application. It is a universal truth in a hortatory mode. At the same time, we recognize that those long statements are boxy, and very few people actually preach that way. Even though you see them in my book and Haddon Robinson's book, you recognize that those long statements of principle and application are not ordinary speech. The reason we prepared that way was due to our location in the curriculum. Without having much exegesis and hermeneutics yet, we wanted to force you to simply look at a passage and consider what is true and what, with the authority of God's Word, you can tell somebody to do about it. By forming main points and propositions with principle and application, you are forced to think about what is true and what you must do about it.

But we want to take the next step. That next step is to consider how we take these formal forms and reduce them to more common language. The big picture is that we are basically going to chop them in half. We are going to talk about how we take those formal structures and do a fundamental reduction. What we are going to do this semester is teach you to preach with the fundamental reductions. You are still going to go through the process of a formal formulation of a proposition and main points. But when you preach, we want you to do the fundamental reduction so that the way you say things is more normal in the way you hear people preaching. That is the goal for this lesson.

In this lesson we will be talking about more outline forms. We are taking another step forward in structure. We will still be talking about principle and application. They will be the same old friends, but we will shorten their clothes, as it were. In converting traditional structures to short forms, let us first think of where we were before. When we looked at the formal forms, we said that in a principle-consistent outline, the principle stays consistent. For instance, if the principle is "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation," then that principle would be in the proposition and all the main points. That means the anchor clause stays the same. That principle happens to be in consequential form. This is old, familiar material. We have even used this outline before, which says, "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity." It is principle consistent, so the application clause changes throughout the outline while the principle remains the same. That should sound familiar.

In talking about application-consistent outlines, we said very similar things. In an application-consistent outline, the anchor clause is the application. For instance, "Since Jesus alone provides salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity. Since Jesus alone possesses salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity. Since Jesus alone bestows salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity." In an application-consistent outline, the application stays the same all the way through.

In the formal proposition and main point examples, the universal truth was in the hortatory mode. The universal truth was based in the text, with application based from the universal truth. The old formal proposition main point was always a combination of principle and application. I just gave examples of both principle-consistent and application-consistent outlines.

Now we can take the next major step, which is a fundamentally reduced outline. In a fundamentally reduced outline, the consistent clause, which is the anchor clause, becomes the proposition. That is the simplest way to say it. You part the statement in half, and whatever stayed the same becomes the proposition. Whatever changed become the main points.

If you were using the application-consistent outline, such as “Since Jesus alone provides salvation, therefore we must present Christ at every opportunity,” and you see that the application is staying the same, in a fundamentally reduced outline you delete the word “since,” and whatever stayed the same—“we must present Christ at every opportunity”—becomes the proposition. The anchor clause becomes the proposition alone. Then we will ask a question of the proposition. We talked before about interrogating the proposition. It is a standard way that people move through their outlines. They make a strong statement, and then they ask a question, and then they answer the question with what were developmental clauses, or magnet clauses. The clauses that were changing, still using parallel wording, now become the main points.

The simplest rule is that you take the long, formal wording of the proposition main point and chop it in half. Whatever was staying the same becomes the proposition. Whatever points were changing now become the main points. That happens whether you are dealing with application-consistent outlines or principle-consistent outlines. In the case of the example I just gave, the principle was staying the same, which was “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation.” Thus, in the reduction, the proposition is “Jesus is the only hope of salvation.” Notice that the word “because” has been dropped out. The proposition is simply the anchor clause. Then you ask a question, and you begin to answer it with the application clauses that were changing.

There is a step-by-step conversion process, which simply repeats in a more elaborate way what I have just said about chopping the proposition in half. In the step-by-step conversion process, we are going to note which element—principle or application—remains consistent in the outline. That means we simply identify the anchor clause. Second, we develop the concept of the consistent element in the introduction and proposition.

In a fundamentally reduced outline of a principle-consistent outline, if the principle is “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” I still have the same obligations. My introduction still has to prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. My introduction still needs to prepare for the proposition. Let me give you an example of doing that.

When my brother was in high school, he was one of the finest Christians I had ever known. After high school he went into the military. He was stationed all across the world in various places. His particular branch of the military often involved him in negotiations regarding American technology with other international military leaders. That put him in locations around the world. Eventually it began to bother him a great deal that what he had been taught as a child, that Jesus is the only hope of salvation, seemed to excluded hundreds, thousands, and millions of people from salvation. Eventually he believed he could no longer affirm that. The fact that Jesus is the only hope of salvation became to him the aspect of the Gospel that he could no longer receive. My brother has gone through many stages of life. At that stage of his life he shared with many people, maybe some of you, that which is the most onerous part of Christianity. In a pluralistic world, we say that Jesus is the only hope of salvation. Yet if it is true, if Jesus is the only hope of salvation, what are the consequences?

Did you hear what I did? I used the statement “Jesus is the only hope of salvation” as the proposition. I prepared for it with an illustration, which was my brother’s experience. Having said the proposition, I asked an analytical question. I interrogated my own statement. I asked, “What are the consequences?” The answers are what would have been the developing side of the formal main points, the magnet clauses, such as, “We must present Christ in difficult situations.” If it is true that Christ is the only hope of salvation, then we must present Him to difficult people. We must present Christ despite our difficulties.

Let us consider the case of an application-consistent outline. In my example application-consistent outline, the proposition was “We must present Christ at every opportunity.” That was the anchor clause, the thing that was staying the same. I might prepare for that proposition in this way.

Some years ago my washing machine broke down. As a consequence, we needed to do our laundry at the local laundromat. I had not done that in a few years, but my wife stayed with our young children, and I went to do the laundry at the laundromat. While I was there doing my laundry at the laundromat, I was sitting down, reading my paper, and enjoying myself. Then somebody took his wet clothes out of the washing machine and put them into one of those coin-operated dryers. He put his coins in, pushed the button, and nothing happened. That person began to beat on the dryer, curse at it, and say, “If there is a God in heaven, why does He let these kinds of things happen?” Then he looked over at me and said, “Do you have an answer for that?” Of course, what I was thinking was, “Lord, I just came here to do my laundry.” Yet here was an opportunity to present the Gospel to someone. If there is a God in heaven, why does He let these kinds of things happen? It was the opportunity to present Christ. What the Bible is telling us is that we must present Christ at every opportunity. Why does the Bible say that? First, it is because Jesus alone purchased salvation.

After that you will get explanation, illustration, and application. Then I may ask the question again. Why else must we present Christ at every opportunity? It is because Jesus alone possesses salvation. That is followed by explanation, illustration, and application. There may be seven or eight minutes of material with that point. Then I might say again, “Why else must we present Christ at every opportunity?” It is because Jesus alone bestows salvation.

Notice the things that were happening. There is still strong parallelism in your main points. You retain the oral flag for the ear—here is another main point. You have key word changes. The parallel language helps identify the specific thing that each main point is going to be about. It is either going to be about how Jesus purchased salvation, possesses salvation, or bestows salvation. My subpoints are going to be about the specific wording of the magnet clause, just like it was before.

What we are doing, however, is throwing the anchor clause into the transition question. The way I said it was “What is another consequence of Jesus being the only hope of salvation?” Why else must we present Christ at every opportunity? Instead of saying that big, boxy, long statement, we are using the transition to ask a question and get ready for the next main point. It may be another, much shorter form of the proposition. Maybe I will not use the phrase “at every opportunity.” I am getting the proposition back in view during the transition by the use of the question.

Again, if you listen to pastors preach, you will find that they do this repeatedly. There will be a strong statement. Then they will ask question about it. Then they will answer the question with the main points. When one main point is done, you ask a similar question again. That gets the next main point in view. The way you keep tying the main point back to the proposition is with the question that links together the main points.

We are not saying that it is much different than what you have done before. It is actually not much different. It is what you have done before, yet it is taking the formal elements and putting them in more conversational language. That is the goal. We want to make it more conversational and presentable. In the step-by-step conversion process, we note which element—principle or application—remains consistent in the outline. That is, we identify the anchor clause. We develop the concept of the consistent

element in the introduction and proposition. Whatever that anchor clause is about, we will use the introduction to develop that anchor clause concept.

The third step is where things really begin to flow. We create an analytical question, or implicational questions, based on the consistent element. That is, we interrogate the proposition. We ask who, what, when, where, why, and how. What are the consequences? What else should I do? We interrogate that proposition.

The fourth step is that we answer the questions with the developmental clauses. They become the main points. One hint is that, to enhance unity and flow, the anchor clause reappears in the transition between main points as the analytical question. For instance, I asked, “What is another reason that we should proclaim Christ in all situations?” Another example would be “What is another implication of knowing Christ as Lord over all of life?”

While there could be a complicated way of doing this, the main idea is that you are still using both a principle and an application. You can still do that as you create an outline in your preparations. What you should preach, however, is not that long statement. Take those long statements, chop them in half, and whatever was staying the same becomes the proposition. Whatever was changing then will become the main points. The way you set up those main points is with analytical questions.

You will also answer other questions as part of the process of preaching. I did not give you any subpoints. Certainly the subpoints would have to be answering question such as “Why is He the only hope? or “What are the consequences of Him being the only hope?” There will have to be other questions that are answered by the points that He bestows and He possesses and so on. There are other questions in the sermon, but all I have shown you are the main points. You will have to answer further questions in order to be consistent with what that story was setting up. All I am asking you to do so far is to structure your main points according to the system I have explained. That would not be a complete sermon, however, if that is all you did.

When we used those long statements before, it seemed kind of unnatural. Even though it forced us hermeneutically to say what the text said, we are now moving toward a more conversational type of presentation. You will still be doing the same thing, however, in terms of thinking through the process.

There are some results of using reduced forms. First, a principle-consistent outline in reduced form will have a principle for the application, because that was the anchor clause, and applications for the main points. The proposition will say what is true, and the main points will say what to do. That may be more complicated than it needs to be said. The idea is that if your proposition is a principle, then all of your main points will automatically be applications. If your proposition is an application, then all of your main points will automatically be principles. In essence, the application will stay the same, and you will be answering the questions “Why should we do that? What is another reason we should do that?” That is the pattern for an application-consistent outline.

Here is a hint: whatever the proposition is, whether principle or application, the main points are the opposite. For example, if my proposition is “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” then my main points cannot be “Jesus alone bestows salvation” or “Jesus alone possesses salvation” or “Jesus alone purchased salvation.” The first statement, “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” is a principle. All of those other statements, “Jesus bestows, Jesus possesses, and Jesus purchased,” are also principles. They go with another outline somewhere. We cannot have principles and principles. Whatever the proposition is, the main points are the opposite. Will we always preach that way? No, but we are at a certain place in

the curriculum in which we say what is true and what to do about it. We are thinking in those terms in the way that we form things now.

The second point is just the opposite. In an application-consistent outline, we will have an application for the proposition and principles for the main points. The proposition will say what to do, and the main points will say what is true. That is, the main points will give the reasons for why to do the application.

There are goals for using these short forms. One is that the main points will hopefully be more concise and memorable. Earlier on, we said that the sign of a good proposition or main point is that it passes the 3:00 AM test. It will be brief. In contradiction to that, however, we formed long main points and propositions. Now we are trying to shrink those down and be more consistent with our own principles when we can. Main points should be concise and memorable.

Second, subpoints will still support or prove their specific main point. Subpoints will still be about what the magnet clause was. Subpoints will still be about their specific main point.

Third, and perhaps most important to remember, we still want to rain key term changes from the subpoints to tell the illustration and form the application. My sense is that after this lesson you will be glad that you can finally word main points more naturally. The thing that is often difficult at this stage, however, is to maintain the principle of using key words from the subpoint statements in the illustrations and applications. That is usually the more difficult thing to do. It has not changed from previous lessons. Make sure you continue to use expositional rain. Use the key words from the subpoints in the illustrations and applications.

What we are dropping are the “if” and “then” terms. We are not using the “because” and “therefore” terms. Those terms are implied. Simply by saying, “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” and asking, “What are the consequences?” you have implied the “because.” You drop the term “because” in order to shorten the language. The question that you ask about the statement will automatically imply whether you are using a conditional or consequential concept. It is so much more conversational this way.

You may write out a full manuscript before you preach, but if you preach from a full manuscript, you will end up reading it. The goal is to write out a full manuscript. Before you write out that manuscript, you should have prepared a formal outline with at least proposition and main points. Then write out the manuscript, but what you preach from should be a pulpit outline. The pulpit outline includes whatever it takes for you to preach the message with prompting. For most of you, it will probably be two to three pages of outline material that prompts you in what you want to say. The manuscript helps you get prepared. The pulpit outline hopefully helps you preach freely. Some people use a broadcast-style outline. They put the manuscript on two-thirds of the page and the outline on a third of the page. They use the outline as much as they can, but they have the manuscript if they need it. Others will use a one-page fold, which has the introduction, first, second, and third main points, and the conclusion. That is a standard way that preachers put their outlines together.

Should you allow freedom for the Holy Spirit to work when preaching a sermon? Yes, definitely. The notion of Robert Murray M’Cheyne was that he wanted to write out a manuscript in order to prepare carefully what he wanted to say. Then he would put his manuscript aside and speak freely as empowered by the Holy Spirit. There is a gentle mix. You can be under-prepared and therefore not confident in what you want to say. You can also be over-prepared and practically stiff in what you are trying to say. There is a dynamic middle ground in being very prepared, very sure of yourself, so that when you see somebody is not getting it, then you can repeat it. You can also develop your own sense of when you are

saying something so important that you need to focus on that topic more than you anticipated. I have the wonderful advantage of being able to preach sermons in many different places, but they are never the same. I am always reading people. I am always feeling the dynamics of the people. The church situations are always different.

A pulpit outline is not simply a listing of propositions, main points, and subpoints, but rather an organized presentation of all your material that allows you to see at a glance—usually in one to three pages—what you intend to say about the entire passage. A good rule of thumb is to keep main points segregated on different points of the pulpit outline so that your eye always knows where the next main point starts. If you want further tips on preparing extended pulpit outlines, look at *Christ-Centered Preaching*, pages 334-336.