

Biblical Exegesis And Exposition ¹

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Introduction

What is the relationship between exegesis and exposition? What is Bible exposition or expository preaching? This article gives a method for moving from exegesis to expository preaching. Think of a tower with two spigots: high and low.

Exegesis is the **top** spigot; exposition is at the **bottom**. The pastor using exegesis deals with Greek and Hebrew syntax, hermeneutics, theological arguments, and so forth. Exegesis (the high spigot) discovers the text's meaning. But the pulpit is for teaching our congregations. Teaching from the high spigot lays our exegetical work before the congregation. Teaching from the low spigot permits teaching to flow from a level more comprehensible to the flock. Our objective is to communicate Bible truth, not to drown people in the depths of our technical analysis. A pastor must start with exegesis of the text, before seeking to communicate and illustrate it. One cannot communicate Bible exposition clearly and accurately without first discovering what the text means. A pastor must know the passage's exegetical truth, but that truth *should be communicated in expository language*. Many people do not

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² The late Chester McCalley was the pastor of Beth Haven Church in Kansas City for 40 years. He was on the National Board of Advisors of Chafer Theological Seminary, a frequent Bible conference speaker, and author of many publications and tapes, which are still available.

understand when teaching is from one's exegetical notes. Further preparation is required to produce expository teaching that the whole congregation can understand.

When pastors do not understand this—I speak as one who has made this mistake, and it is a mistake—they [sometimes come to a premature conclusion]: "I taught a hundred people for a year, giving them good stuff! Now, we are down to fifteen, proving how negative people are to doctrine."

Are there people who are negative to Bible doctrine? Certainly; but a pastor ought to go back to the drawing board and ask, "Does my study move from exegesis down to expository teaching? Does everyone really understand the teaching?" If not, the pastor certainly bears the blame. The pastor is responsible both for teaching both children and his parents, both novice believers and advanced Christians? Yes, indeed, a shepherd cares for both adult sheep and lambs.

Exegesis: Exposition's Foundation

The foundation of exposition is exegesis, but what is exegesis?

Exegesis is the process of determining the meaning of a text of Scripture, the word of God.

It is important to understand how to determine the meaning of a Bible passage. Sometimes people think that they can simply read the Bible, ask, "How does this apply to me?", and decide for themselves how to apply it. But application, though essential, is the last step in a process that begins with careful exegesis.

Moreover, one must base one's understanding upon the text's meaning to the original audience, in the language and the culture in which it was spoken. The objective meaning must be the focus. Exegesis is to "lead forth", to let the word speak for itself. Imposing a sermon on the Bible (not letting it speak) is *eisegesis* (reading into God's word). The basis of a pastor's teaching to a congregation is the meaning that comes from Scripture.

The word *exegesis* (or *exegete*) occurs six times in the New Testament.

Usage of this word-group in Scripture is more useful than any definition that a dictionary may offer. Context is the key. What is the Biblical concept for the word ἐξηγήσομαι (*exēgeomai* “to exegete”)?

Luke 24:35 “And they (began) to *relate* (**exēgeomai**) their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.”

Here, two disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. After walking with them, He broke bread and they recognized Him. The disciples began to relate something to others. The word relate is *exegete* (*exēgeomai*).

The New King James Version translates the word as “told”: “And they **told** about the things that had happened on the road...”

The disciples began to tell or relate their experiences on the road and how they recognized Jesus during a meal.

Exegesis deals with objective truth, because what they said was true. They began to *exegete* or tell about their objective experiences. It refers to explaining objective truth.

John 1:18 “No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has *explained* (**exēgeomai**) Him.”

The New American Standard Bible translates the verb “explained” as “has explained.”

The New King James Version assigns the meaning “told” in Luke, but now uses “declared” in John 1:18, ... He has declared Him.

Did Christ give a subjective or objective explanation of the Father? Again, this is objective truth!

Acts 10:8 ... and after he had *explained* everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

An angel explained to Cornelius that he should arrange for Peter to meet him. Cornelius gathered like-minded men together after the angel had explained [*exegeted*] everything to them....

Acts 15:12, 14 “And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were *relating* what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles...”

“Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.”

The New King James Version uses **declaring** and **declared** for **relating** and **related**. Paul and Barnabas relate or declare (*exegete*) certain facts at the Jerusalem Council (verse 12). Paul related objective signs and wonders? Simon Peter does likewise in verse 14. Peter related/*exegeted* objective facts.

Exegeting a text explains objective truth or fact.

Acts 21:19, “And after he had greeted them, he (began) to *relate* one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Again, the New King James Version uses a slightly different translation: “... he **told in detail** those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.”

Paul objectively related or told (*exegeted*) what God had done among the Gentiles during his evangelistic journeys.

Conclusion: exegesis refers to the explaining, declaring, telling, or relating of objective truth.

Now, what elements of exegesis are necessary for an accurate textual meaning?

Elements of Exegesis

Language

Why should a pastor examine the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament? The strongest claim made by the Bible is this:

Thus saith the Lord (“This is God speaking”). The Old Testament uses similar expressions about 3800 times. The reminder that “This is God’s word” appears an average of four times per page.

The fact that Scripture is God’s word means, even dictates, that we ought to be careful and precise in studying it. Exegesis requires examining original languages.

My [Chester’s] first Greek class motivated me to do scholarly work, but to **avoid parading it**. Students always made it a point to be early to that class (a five hour course), not to get on the front row, but the last row. Dr. Brunner, the beginning Greek teacher, had been an assistant to A. T. Robertson, so no one wanted to answer his questions in class. He was too awe-inspiring. He did not need to carry a New Testament, because he had memorized it. Good texts, grammars, and lexical tools exist for the rest of us! Our congregations need teaching that results from solid scholarship, but we should not make our abilities seem unapproachable. Rather than intimidating the flock, we should challenge and equip them for the work of ministry.

Expository preaching never implies sacrificing exegesis. For those who share our belief in the absolute authority of the Scripture, the accuracy of little things argues strongly for careful study. The gospel record sometimes focuses on little things. Consider Matthew 26:16: “So from that time he (Judas) sought opportunity to betray Him”. Matthew consistently uses παραδίωμι (**paradidōmi**, “to betray”) to describe the act of Judas in betraying Jesus (cf. Matthew 10:4; 26:16, 21, 46; 27:3). The one who betrays (in Matthew) is always singular.

After the death and resurrection of Christ, Peter makes a fascinating point (Acts 3:13a). He also uses **paradidōmi**, but this passage is different. Peter preaches and says, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus, the one whom you (plural) delivered up (**paradidōmi**) and disowned... .”

You delivered up is the same word, but it is a second person plural you! Whereas Matthew spoke of betrayal as the singular act of Judas, Peter addresses the nation saying, “You (plural).” In one sense the act uniquely belongs to Judas, but it is also the whole nation’s responsibility. A change to the plural reveals this. Pastors ought to respect the word of God, painstakingly interpreting its words.

Sound Hermeneutics

Although sound hermeneutics is the foundation of accurate exegesis, some interpretive systems distort the literal meaning.

The most common method of destructive hermeneutics is allegorizing (spiritualizing). This makes the literal meaning subordinate to the supposedly superior allegorical meaning. An example of this disastrous method is the Epistle of Barnabas, a veritable loose cannon of speculation. He merely uses Moses as a springboard.

Now, in that Moses said, “Ye shall not eat swine, nor an eagle, nor a hawk, nor a crow, nor any fish which has no scales on itself,” he included three doctrines in his understanding.

Moreover he says to them in Deuteronomy, “And I will make a covenant of my ordinances with this people (emphasis mine).”

What are those doctrines to which the Epistle of Barnabas refers? He introduces them with the phrase “he means”.

So then the ordinance of God is not abstinence from eating, but Moses spoke in the spirit. He mentioned swine for this reason: you shall not consort, he means, with men who are like swine [who forget the Lord when they have plenty to eat]... . “Neither shalt thou eat the eagle, nor the hawk, nor the kite, nor the crow.” Thou shalt not, he means, joint thyself to such men [who do not work, but steal from others (emphasis mine)]... .

The writer’s (supposedly Barnabas) interpretive errors are rife. As a start, he: (1)

denies that God literally forbade eating certain animals, (2) allegorizes “eating” into “associating with,” (3) allegorizes various animals into classes of people.

His approach lacks hermeneutical controls. Not only does he speculate about theology, but biology, “For this animal [the weasel] gives birth with its mouth.”

The lesson is that we must be more careful than the Epistle of Barnabas in interpretation.

Allegorizing is not the only type of interpretive problem. It is also easy to distort the historical meaning with a parallel-passage approach (saying, “Let’s go over to this passage”). When Dr. Merrill Unger taught the book of Zechariah, he would not allow us to use a typical Hebrew Bible. It seemed crazy to buy Zechariah bound separately. He said, “Read Zechariah with reference only to Zechariah. Cross-reference is fine, but not now. Read it only with reference to Zechariah.” This is insightful. Other methods try to read Ephesians into Exodus, intra-biblical eisegesis: reading Scripture into non-parallel Scriptures.

Teaching emphatically from the text and emphasizing doctrine eventually causes a congregation to ask, “How do you know that this is what it means? What is the proof? Is the whole world wrong and you alone are right? What says that this interpretation is correct? That is not the way my denomination interprets it! Are we not all free to interpret as we wish?” Interpreting as one wishes reduces God’s word to a subjective, confusing thing. The congregation must be able to say, “I can prove what it means.” The congregation’s growth in this area is an important aspect of the saints being equipped to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12). How one interprets Scripture is a crucial issue.

Again, sound hermeneutics are essential to proper exegesis.

Expression or Exposition

A good definition of Bible exposition is: **The process of translating careful exegesis into food for sheep.** Scholarly work in exegesis is

necessary, but we are not here to impress scholars. We have congregations that come for food.

People come to a Bible church to grow in Christ and to develop the ability to solve their problems and to make decisions according to divine viewpoint. Exposition takes all the technical data and presents Bible truth in a form that sheep can understand and apply.

The pastor who knows how to feed sheep will have sheep. If he does not have a consistent growing flock, he ought to look at one of two things. Perhaps he needs to assume responsibility and say, “Perhaps, my thinking about exposition needs to change.”

Many Bible churches have a revolving door. People come to a Bible church expecting to be fed; many leave because the spiritual food developed by scholarly exegesis is not served as nourishing meals. Just because people come only sporadically on Sundays or do not return, should we suppose they are negative to doctrine? It is important for a pastor to say, “Perhaps, I am not converting my exegesis into food for them. Perhaps, my message uses a spigot that is too high on the tower.” This is a problem that pastors cannot ignore.

Summarizing, **exegesis** has to do with determining the truth of the text.

Exposition follows by converting the technical matters into concepts that are readily grasped. This is an added workload for the pastor, perhaps adding as much as 50% to the time required to prepare lessons; but the pastor is ready to present the truth determined by exegesis.

Clarity Is Essential to Presentation

Clarity is achieved by collecting the results of the scholarly exegesis then reducing that material to the simple declarations that communicate the truth. The purpose of teaching is not to confuse or impress. The task is to communicate! It is difficult to present the pure exegesis as clear and accurate exposition. Spend time on “translating” the esoteric doctrines into the “language” of the people.

Should one preach grammatical terms? They can be meaningless, even for many people who know them. What is a Hebrew *casus pendens*, or a Greek aorist passive?

Must every sheep be told every point of grammar or technical syntax? “This is a *casus pendens*”? How edifying! Who needs to know that! Take the names of the cases, for example, *genitive*. What does *genitive* mean to most people? Shouldn’t we translate a technical genitive construction into something people understand? All those good Latin terms, such as *accusative of general reference* or *dative of advantage* are just not part of the sheep’s vocabulary.

While a good exegete needs to know these things, as an expositor he must focus on making clear what he has exegetically determined from the text.

A professor said, “After making a beautiful cabinet, what should the carpenter display? His tools or his workmanship?” Proper description of the results of using language tools is far more important than trying to get people to understand the language tools themselves.

Similarly, when you use the tools to create a good meal, serve the meal, not the tools. Who would enjoy a dinner consisting of a raw piece of steak, a stick of butter, a pan, some garlic and sliced mushrooms? Are those things essential? Absolutely, but despite our imagination, they are not a meal until the steak is barbequed and the mushrooms sautéed. Likewise, exposition must display the end result of careful exegesis in a way that the congregation can recognize as food. Otherwise, much less edification takes place.

Compassion

Effective exposition may contrast truth with compassion against truth that lacks it. For example, in Acts chapter 9, did God answer Ananias’ wrong thinking with truth alone? Or, do Acts 9:11–13 communicate truth with compassion? “So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called

Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.’ And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’”

In effect, Ananias says: “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints in Jerusalem... and (by inference) do You think I will go to his house?” That deserves rebuke, does it not? He rebelled against divine viewpoint by challenging divine wisdom.

God says none of those things, but instead gives Ananias a little more truth to correct his ignorance.

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:15–16).

“Go... .” repeats truth. “Let Me give you reasons. Let Me support why you ought to do this. I am not going to rebuke your lack of wisdom, or your resisting My viewpoint. He is a chosen vessel, a chosen instrument to Me. He shall bear My name before the Gentiles.” Ananias went.

God did not sternly give truth without compassion, saying “Ananias, you rebel, you are rejecting truth.” Neither did He express compassion without truth, saying, “Ananias, I understand and would be scared spitless, too. Thank you for listening. Thank you for letting Me share this with you, but I will choose someone else.” The message was both compassionate and truthful. It corrected him without destroying him.

God presented truth with compassion. Likewise, it is important that a pastor stand for truth, but have some feeling and some compassion for his sheep. What does compassion have to do with communication?

1 Corinthians 13:1–3 says that it has everything to do with it.

When we are not compassionate, it shows. People understand this well. We must not only determine what the passage teaches (exegesis), but we must communicate it compassionately and clearly. It is God's part to prepare the hearers to receive that meal and (by it) to grow.

Those who hear us may include spiritual giants and those who have no background in the Bible. Give the poor soul coming for the first time a break! The fact that he found the church door may indicate that he has already overcome tremendous barriers. After all, sleep is so wonderful on Sunday morning. Give this poor fellow credit for hoping, "Maybe they can teach me something." He is looking to you for some teaching that clarifies.

What happens if the pastor's philosophy of the Sunday morning message is: "The name of this game is exegesis." The new believers says, "What is that?" Opening a spigot that is too high can still bless the spiritual giant. He is impressed because the pastor digs into the Word. However, that message does not do anything positive for the novice or the babe in Christ. A balance is necessary. Preaching should challenge the spiritual giants without neglecting those who are biblically illiterate.

Do not neglect exegesis. Do not lower the standards, but raise them by increasing your ability to exposit. Go deeper, but learn how to open the spigot a little bit lower. This is enormously helpful in the exposition of the Word of God. It may improve your ministry. It may even lead to saying, "Maybe he was not so negative to doctrine. Maybe he just did not understand what I was trying to say." It is our responsibility to find out exactly what the Bible means and to communicate that message clearly and accurately. We must both exegete and exposit. Unless we translate exegesis into exposition our message is as a sounding brass: Only the pastor, and a few well-educated advanced believers, receive edification. Exposition translates exegesis

into the language of the sheep and the lambs. Then and only then are the sheep fed.
