FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

BIBLIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Word of God

UNIT 10: THE POWER AND WORK OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson 22

PREACHING THE WORD — THE CENTRALITY OF EXPOSITION

Why Expository Preaching Is the Heartbeat of Faithful Ministry

Key Texts: 2 Timothy 4:1–5; Nehemiah 8:1–8; Acts 20:26–27

> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*
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> **2 Timothy 3:16–17, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Lesson 21 examined what the Word of God does in the life of the individual believer: it regenerates the dead, sanctifies the living, equips for spiritual warfare, produces saving faith, and will serve as the standard of final judgment. These works of Scripture are primarily individual: the Spirit applying the Word to the mind, heart, and will of the person who receives it. But the primary vehicle through which the Spirit deploys the Word in the life of God's people is not private reading; it is public proclamation. The Word comes to the community, week after week, through the ministry of preaching.

Preaching is not one option among many for communicating the Word's content to a congregation. It is the divinely mandated, apostolically modeled, historically central means by which the living and active Word is brought into direct encounter with the assembled people of God. The relationship between Bibliology and homiletics is not incidental; it is constitutive. What you believe about Scripture determines how you preach it. A preacher who truly believes that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient, and living Word of the God who cannot lie will handle it very differently from a preacher who regards it as a valuable religious resource to be supplemented and shaped by the needs and preferences of the contemporary audience.

This lesson makes the case for expository preaching as the form of preaching that most fully honors the doctrine of Scripture we have established in this course. We will examine the biblical mandate for preaching the Word, define expository preaching with precision, explore the relationship between Bibliology and homiletics, consider the preacher's role as herald rather than innovator, identify the marks of faithful exposition, address the dangers of topical preaching untethered from the text, and close with the congregation's corresponding responsibility to receive and submit to the preached Word. This lesson is addressed equally to preachers and to those they serve: the doctrine of preaching concerns the whole covenant community, not only its ministers.

I. THE BIBLICAL MANDATE: PREACH THE WORD

Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1–5 is the foundational New Testament statement of the preaching mandate:

> *"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."*
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> **2 Timothy 4:1–5, NASB 1995**

The charge is surrounded by the most solemn possible framing. Paul invokes God and Christ Jesus as witnesses, reminds Timothy that this same Christ will judge the living and the dead, and calls on the reality of His appearing and His kingdom. The gravity of this setting communicates that what follows is not pastoral advice but a divine commission. And the commission is simple: preach the word.

Not "preach what works." Not "preach what the audience needs to hear." Not "preach the timeless principles that Scripture illustrates." Preach the word: the specific, inspired, authoritative Word that God breathed out through the human authors of Scripture. The content of faithful preaching is determined not by the preacher's creativity or the congregation's preferences but by the text of God's self-revelation.

Paul then specifies what preaching the word entails: being ready in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, with great patience and instruction. The charge covers the full range of the Word's functions (it teaches, confronts error, corrects the wayward, encourages the faithful), and it specifies the posture: great patience and instruction. Faithful preaching is not flashy, urgent, or driven by the excitement of novelty; it is patient, instructional, sustained, and relentless.

The warning in verses 3–4 explains why the charge is necessary. A time is coming, and Paul implies it is already present, when congregations will not endure sound doctrine. They will accumulate teachers who tell them what they want to hear, and they will turn aside from truth to myths. This is the pressure every faithful preacher faces: the congregation's capacity to choose teachers who scratch where they itch. The charge to preach the word is the charge to resist this pressure, to deliver the full message of Scripture regardless of its cultural reception, and to trust the Spirit to work through the preached Word even when the audience would prefer something else.

II. DEFINING EXPOSITORY PREACHING: THE MEANING OF THE TEXT IS THE MESSAGE OF THE SERMON

Expository preaching is best defined by its central principle: the meaning of the text is the message of the sermon. The expository preacher does not begin with a topic and then search for texts that support it; she begins with a text and then determines what to say from what the text actually says. The text sets the agenda. The text provides

the structure. The text supplies the content. The sermon is an exposition, an unfolding, of what is already there in the text, placed there by the divine Author who breathed it out for exactly this purpose.

Haddon Robinson's widely accepted definition captures the essence: expository preaching is "the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher and then through the preacher applies to the hearers." Several elements of this definition deserve attention.

First, the concept is biblical: it is derived from the text through the grammatical-historical method. The expository preacher does the exegetical work that Lessons 19 and 20 described: attending to the grammar and historical context of the text, identifying the author's intent, understanding the text's genre, and tracing its canonical connections. This is not optional background work that precedes the sermon; it is the work that generates the sermon.

Second, the concept is communicated: it is transmitted to the congregation in a form that is clear, engaging, and applicable. Exposition is not a lecture on the text's technical details; it is the proclamation of the text's meaning in a form that enables the congregation to encounter the living Word. Faithful exposition requires both exegetical rigor and communicative clarity.

Third, the Spirit applies the Word first to the preacher and then through the preacher to the congregation. The preacher is not a pipeline for information; she is a person whose own encounter with the text during preparation should result in personal transformation that then shapes how she proclaims it. The preacher who has not been personally encountered by the text she is preaching has not yet prepared her sermon.

III. BIBLIOLOGY AND HOMILETICS: WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT SCRIPTURE DETERMINES HOW YOU PREACH IT

The relationship between the doctrine of Scripture and the practice of preaching is not a theoretical connection; it is an intensely practical one. What a preacher believes about the nature of the Bible will shape every aspect of her homiletical practice, from sermon preparation to delivery to the expectations she brings to the pulpit.

A. Inspiration Drives Textual Fidelity

If the preacher genuinely believes that the Bible is the inspired, breathed-out Word of God, and that the specific words of the original text carry the authority and intentionality of the divine Author, then she will handle those words with corresponding care. She will work to determine precisely what those words mean in their historical and literary context. She will not substitute her own ideas for what the text says or paraphrase its content to the point of distortion. She will present the congregation with the text's actual meaning rather than her preferred meaning.

By contrast, a preacher who regards Scripture as a valuable religious resource but not as the uniquely inspired, authoritative Word of God will tend to use it instrumentally, as a source of illustrations, launching pads for her own ideas, or validation for conclusions she reached independently. The doctrine of inspiration is the theological ground of textual fidelity in preaching.

B. Inerrancy Drives Confidence

If the preacher genuinely believes that the biblical text, in what it affirms, is without error, then she can preach its content with confidence. She does not need to hedge her proclamation with apologies for the text's difficult claims, footnote its historical assertions with scholarly qualifications, or soften its ethical demands to avoid offending the contemporary sensibility. She can say, with Luther's cadence, "thus says the Lord" and mean it.

The preacher who is uncertain about the inerrancy of the text she is preaching will inevitably preach with a corresponding uncertainty. Her sermon will be peppered with qualifications, her ethical applications will be softened, her doctrinal assertions will be hedged, and her congregation will receive not the bold proclamation of the Word of the God who cannot lie but the tentative suggestions of a person who is not fully confident in what she is saying. Inerrancy and confident proclamation are inseparable.

C. Sufficiency Drives Contentment with the Word

If the preacher genuinely believes that Scripture is sufficient for the formation of the man of God for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17), then she will not feel the need to supplement the Word with the latest insights from secular psychology, management theory, or cultural commentary. She will preach the Word and trust the Spirit to apply it, because she trusts that the God who breathed out the Word for exactly this purpose has breathed out enough.

The preacher who doubts sufficiency will constantly supplement the Word with other material, producing sermons that are partly biblical and partly self-help, partly theological and partly therapeutic. The congregation receives a mixed diet that, over time, trains them to regard the Bible as one resource among many rather than as the fully sufficient Word of the God who has given them everything they need.

D. The Living and Active Word Drives Expectation

If the preacher genuinely believes that the Word of God is living and active, and that the Spirit works through its proclamation to regenerate, sanctify, and equip, then she will preach with expectation. She will not deliver her sermon merely hoping that something interesting is said and that the congregation found it worth their Sunday morning. She will preach in the confidence that the Spirit who works through the Word is present and active in the congregation, ready to do what only He can do with what He breathed out.

The connection between Bibliology and homiletics is ultimately a connection between what we believe and how we act. Every element of the doctrine of Scripture established in this course has a direct homiletical implication. The preacher who has internalized the whole doctrine (inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, perspicuity, the living and active efficacy of the Word) will preach differently from any preacher who has not. And the congregation that sits under such preaching will be formed differently than any congregation that does not.

IV. THE PREACHER AS HERALD: PROCLAIMING WHAT GOD HAS SAID

The New Testament's primary image for the preacher is not the entertainer, the teacher, the counselor, or the visionary leader. It is the herald (the keryx), the official messenger who is commissioned to deliver a specific message from a king or general, with the full authority of the sender behind him and without the freedom to modify, embellish, or update the message for the convenience of the audience.

The herald model defines the preacher's relationship to the message in a way that every other model cannot: the herald does not originate the message; he delivers it. The message belongs to the one who sent him, not to him. His task is not to be creative with the message but to be faithful to it. His authority in the pulpit is entirely derivative: he speaks with the authority of the God whose Word he is proclaiming, and exactly to the extent that he actually proclaims that Word. The moment he substitutes his own ideas for the Word, he loses the only authority he ever had.

This has profound implications for the preacher's posture in sermon preparation. The question that drives exposition is not "What do I want to say to this congregation this week?" but "What has God said in this text, and how do I communicate it clearly and faithfully to this congregation?" The preacher who begins with the first question is functioning as an innovator; the preacher who begins with the second is functioning as a herald. The innovator's authority is her own; the herald's authority is God's, mediated through the proclamation of God's Word.

Paul's description of his own apostolic ministry captures the herald model in its fullest form. In 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, he describes his arrival in Corinth: "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." The apostle who could have dazzled his Corinthian audience with rhetorical brilliance deliberately set aside the power of eloquence in order to deliver the message (the testimony of God) in a form that would demonstrate the Spirit's power rather than human persuasive skill. The herald trusts the message to do what eloquence cannot.

V. THE MARKS OF FAITHFUL EXPOSITION

What distinguishes faithful expository preaching from its alternatives? Four marks identify the genuinely expository sermon.

A. Textual Fidelity

The most fundamental mark of faithful exposition is textual fidelity: the sermon's main idea accurately reflects the main idea of the text, the sermon's structure arises from the text's own structure, and the content of the sermon is determined by what the text actually says rather than by the preacher's prior agenda. Textual fidelity can be tested by a simple question: Could this sermon be preached without the text? If the text is merely a launching pad, so that the preacher reads the text at the beginning of the sermon and then says essentially what he would have said regardless of the text, the preaching is not genuinely expository.

Textual fidelity requires that the preacher spend more time in the text during sermon preparation than in any other activity. The exegetical discipline (the grammatical analysis, the historical research, the genre identification, the canonical context) must precede and govern everything that happens in the sermon's construction. The

preacher who has not done this work thoroughly will inevitably default to her own ideas, her favorite theological themes, or the cultural concerns of the moment, and the congregation will receive those instead of the text.

B. Doctrinal Substance

Faithful exposition is theologically rich. Every text of Scripture has theological content: it makes claims about God, about human beings, about the relationship between them, about the way the world is and the way it ought to be. The expository preacher does not strip the text of its theological content in the name of accessibility or practical application; she expounds the theology of the text precisely because the congregation needs the knowledge of God that only the Word provides.

Paul's description of Scripture's profitability for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16) is a description of a fully orbed expository ministry. Teaching (doctrine), reproof (confronting error), correction (restoring the errant), and training in righteousness (sustained moral formation) all require theological substance. The preaching that avoids doctrine in favor of practical tips and motivational encouragement is not faithfully expository; it is a half-sermon that provides the congregation's emotions without forming their minds.

C. Christological Focus

Faithful exposition reads every text in the light of the canonical story that culminates in Christ. The Christocentric hermeneutic of Lesson 20 is not only a reading principle; it is a preaching principle. The faithful expositor does not preach isolated biblical information; she proclaims the Word that testifies to the Word made flesh. Every sermon, whether from the Old or New Testament, should arrive at Christ, not by force or by allegorical imagination, but by following the canonical story where it actually goes.

This does not mean that every sermon ends with a four-step gospel presentation. It means that every sermon proclaims the text within its place in the redemptive-historical story, traces the connections to the new covenant fulfillment in Christ that the text's canonical context warrants, and presents the congregation with the full biblical Christ who is the center and goal of everything that Scripture says. The preacher who never arrives at Christ in her Old Testament preaching has not yet understood the Emmaus Road hermeneutic that the risen Lord taught His disciples.

D. Pastoral Application

Faithful exposition does not stop at the meaning of the text; it applies that meaning to the concrete life of the congregation. The Reformation slogan usus in vita ("use in life") captures the goal: the truths expounded must be applied in life. Exposition that ends with "what the text means" without addressing "what it means for us" is instruction, not proclamation.

Pastoral application is not the abandonment of textual fidelity; it is its completion. The application must arise from the text with the same fidelity that the exposition does; it must apply what the text actually says to the specific situations of the congregation rather than using the text as a pretext for the preacher's own pastoral agenda. The faithfully applied exposition leaves the congregation not merely informed but addressed: confronted, encouraged, corrected, or commissioned by the specific Word of God that the Spirit has deployed through the text.

VI. THE DANGERS OF TOPICAL PREACHING UNTETHERED FROM THE TEXT

Topical preaching, which organizes sermons around themes, questions, or life situations rather than around the sequential exposition of a biblical passage, is not inherently illegitimate. The apostolic sermons in Acts are topical in their organization. There is a proper place for thematic and occasional preaching that addresses specific needs or seasons in the life of the congregation. The problem is not topical preaching as such; the problem is topical preaching that is untethered from the text, in which the preacher's topic, rather than the biblical author's intent, governs the content and application of the sermon.

A. What Topical Preaching Does Well

When done with genuine textual accountability, that is, when the topical question sends the preacher to the texts that address it and the sermon's content is determined by what those texts actually say, topical preaching can provide valuable doctrinal instruction on specific subjects, address immediate pastoral needs with biblical substance, and help congregations understand what the whole Bible says about a particular question. The best topical preaching is, in this sense, a form of biblical theology: it traces what Scripture teaches about a subject across the canonical testimony.

B. What Untethered Topical Preaching Does Poorly

But topical preaching carries a characteristic danger that sequential expository preaching does not: it enables the preacher to determine in advance what Scripture will say on any given subject, selecting and arranging texts to support a predetermined conclusion. When this happens, the preacher's agenda governs the text rather than the text governing the preacher. The congregation receives the preacher's theology dressed in biblical vocabulary, which may or may not correspond to what the biblical text actually says in context.

Untethered topical preaching also tends to produce a selective diet. The preacher who chooses topics based on what she finds engaging, what the congregation finds comfortable, or what the cultural moment seems to require will systematically avoid the texts and subjects that cut against the grain. The hard texts, the doctrinally demanding passages, and the ethical requirements that press against contemporary sensibility will simply never appear in a preaching ministry governed primarily by topical selection rather than sequential exposition. Over time, the congregation is shaped by a partial canon of the preacher's choosing rather than by the whole counsel of God.

This is precisely the dynamic Paul warns against in 2 Timothy 4:3–4. When the congregation's preferences determine the content of preaching, the congregation accumulates teachers who tell them what they want to hear and turns from truth to myths. The preacher who allows audience preference to govern topic selection has not found a more effective way of communicating; she has abandoned the prophetic role for the role of a chaplain who administers religious comfort to those who already believe what they already believe.

C. The Corrective: Sequential Exposition

The most reliable corrective to the selective tendencies of topical preaching is the commitment to sequential exposition: working through books of the Bible in order, paragraph by paragraph, allowing the canonical text itself to set the agenda. Sequential exposition does not permit the preacher to avoid difficult passages, to skip the texts that challenge her congregation's comfortable assumptions, or to linger in the texts she finds most engaging. The next text is always the next text. The whole counsel of God is preached because the entire canonical text is the standard, not the preacher's preferences.

John Chrysostom, Luther, Calvin, and the great Reformation preachers all practiced sequential exposition as their primary preaching pattern. The congregation that sits under a sustained expository ministry working through the books of the Bible is being formed by the whole Word of God, in the order and emphasis that the Spirit who inspired it chose, without the distortions that any alternative selection principle inevitably introduces.

VII. THE CALL TO THE CONGREGATION: RECEIVING AND SUBMITTING TO THE PREACHED WORD

The doctrinal and homiletical principles of this lesson address the preacher's responsibilities. But the preaching encounter involves two parties, and the congregation's responsibilities are as real and as demanding as the preacher's. The Word preached faithfully does not accomplish its work automatically; it must be received faithfully, with the attentiveness, the hunger, the submission, and the active response that a genuinely received Word produces.

A. The Biblical Model: Nehemiah 8

The Old Testament prototype for the congregation's engagement with the preached Word is the great assembly in Nehemiah 8:

> *"And all the people gathered as one man at the square… And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly… He read from it before the square… from early morning until midday… and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law… Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground… They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood what was read."*
>
> **Nehemiah 8:1–8, NASB 1995**

The congregation's posture in this scene is a model for every congregation that receives the preached Word: gathering together with intentionality ("as one man"), attending for extended periods without distraction ("early morning until midday"), listening with active attentiveness ("the ears of all the people were attentive"), responding with corporate worship ("Amen, Amen!" with lifted hands and bowed faces), and receiving the Word with understanding because it was translated and explained. The congregation's engagement with the Word is an act of worship, not a passive attendance at a religious presentation.

B. The Berean Standard

Acts 17:11 provides the New Testament standard for congregational engagement with preaching: the Bereans "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." The Berean congregation was not passive; it was actively, enthusiastically engaged with the Word, receiving it eagerly and then testing it against the Scriptures. This is not insubordination; it is the proper exercise of the congregation's own accountability to the Word that the preacher serves.

The Berean pattern implies that the congregation should come to preaching with their Bibles open and their minds engaged. They should follow the text as it is read and expounded. They should ask whether what they are being told accurately reflects what the text says. They should bring their questions, their doubts, and their areas of difficulty to the community's engagement with the Word rather than simply accepting or rejecting the sermon without reflection. The congregation that actively, Bereaenically engages with the preached Word is a congregation that is being formed by the Word, not merely by one person's reading of it.

C. Responding to the Preached Word

The final and most decisive element of congregational responsibility is the response: what the congregation does with what they have heard. James 1:22–25 warns against the danger of being "hearers of the word" who deceive themselves: those who encounter the Word in the preaching event and then walk away unchanged, having heard without having received. The mirror of the Word is meant to produce change in those who look into it; the person who looks and then forgets is not a faithful hearer but a self-deceived one.

Faithful reception of the preached Word involves specific, intentional application. Not "that was an interesting sermon" but "that text called me to do X, and I will do it this week." Not "the pastor said something that was generally helpful" but "the Holy Spirit through the Word of God has addressed this specific area of my life, and I submit to that address." The gap between the faithful hearing and the obedient response is the gap between a congregation that is growing in grace and one that is accumulating religious experiences without being transformed by them.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

> *"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus… preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:1–2**

> *"Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."*
>
> **Acts 20:26–27**

> *"They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood what was read."*
>
> **Nehemiah 8:8**

> *"And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God… that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 2:1–5**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Expository Preaching	A method of preaching in which the meaning of a biblical text governs the content, structure, and application of the sermon. The expository preacher's task is to determine what God said through the human author of the text (through grammatical-historical exegesis), and then to proclaim that meaning clearly, faithfully, and with pastoral application to the congregation. The distinguishing mark of exposition is that the text's message is the sermon's message.
Keryx / Herald	The Greek word for a herald, an official messenger commissioned to deliver a specific message from a king or general to those who hear him. The herald does not originate the message; he delivers it exactly as it was given to him, with the full authority of the one who sent him. Paul's description of preaching as "kerygma" (proclamation) and of the preacher as a herald frames the preacher not as an innovator or entertainer but as a commissioned deliverer of a message that belongs to God.
Homiletics	The study and practice of preaching; the theology, method, and craft of sermon construction and delivery. The relationship between homiletics and Bibliology is foundational: what a preacher believes about the nature, authority, and efficacy of Scripture will determine how she approaches the preaching task, how she prepares sermons, and what she ultimately delivers to the congregation.
The 2 Timothy 4 Mandate	Paul's solemn charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1–2: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." The charge is accompanied by a solemn invocation of God and Christ as witnesses and by the prophetic warning that a time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine. The 2 Timothy 4 mandate defines faithful preaching as the proclamation of the Word itself, in all seasons, regardless of cultural reception.
The Whole Counsel of God	Paul's self-description in Acts 20:27 ("I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God") as the standard of his apostolic ministry. The whole counsel of God is the complete range of biblical teaching: not merely the comfortable and popular texts but the hard sayings, the demanding ethics, the unpopular doctrines, and the texts that cut against the grain of every cultural moment. The faithful preacher does not shrink from any part of the whole counsel.
Textual Fidelity	The mark of faithful exposition by which the sermon's main idea accurately reflects the main idea of the text, the sermon's sub-points arise from the text's own structure, and the application derives from what the text actually teaches rather than from the preacher's prior agenda. Textual fidelity is the primary mark of exposition: if the sermon could be preached without the text, or if the text is merely a launching pad for the preacher's own ideas, the preaching is not genuinely expository.
Ear-Tickling (2 Timothy 4:3–4)	Paul's description of the congregation that "wants to have their ears tickled," that accumulates teachers who say what they want to hear rather than what God has said. Ear-tickling preaching is preaching whose primary goal is audience satisfaction rather than textual fidelity. The preacher who allows the congregation's preferences to determine the content of his preaching has exchanged the role of herald for the role of entertainer, and has abandoned the congregation to the consequences of hearing only what they already believed.
Nehemiah 8 Model	The scene of Ezra's public reading of the Torah in Nehemiah 8, which models the full preaching and teaching encounter: the public and authoritative reading of Scripture (v. 3); the attentiveness of the congregation (v. 3); the platform of accountability (v. 4); the blessing of God before reading (v. 6); the translation and explanation of the sense (v. 8); and the

	application that produces understanding and appropriate response (vv. 9–12). This scene is the Old Testament prototype of expository preaching.
Active Listening	The congregation's responsibility in the preaching encounter: not passive reception of entertainment but engaged, attentive, prayerful, and accountable reception of the Word. Active listening includes: praying before the service for the Spirit's illumination; following along in the text as it is preached; taking notes; testing the sermon against the Scripture itself (the Berean pattern); and acting on what was heard through deliberate application in the week that follows.
Paul's Pastoral Farewell (Acts 20:17–38)	Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, one of the most personal and self-revealing passages in the New Testament. In it, Paul describes his ministry as: declaring the whole counsel of God (v. 27); not shrinking from anything profitable (v. 20); teaching publicly and from house to house (v. 20); solemnly testifying of repentance and faith (v. 21); and not coveting anyone's silver or gold (v. 33). This passage provides the most intimate portrait in the New Testament of what faithful pastoral ministry looks like.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that preaching is not a human communicative event that happens to use biblical material; it is the Spirit's ordained means for bringing the living and active Word into encounter with the assembled people of God. This belief has specific content: expository preaching, in which the meaning of the text is the message of the sermon, is not one homiletical option among equals but the form of preaching that most fully honors the nature of Scripture as the inspired, authoritative, sufficient, living and active Word. A preaching ministry that is not fundamentally expository is not fully honoring the doctrine of Scripture it may formally confess.

We must also believe that the congregation's responsibility is as real as the preacher's. The preaching encounter is not a delivery system in which the preacher deposits the Word and the congregation passively receives it. It is a dynamic event in which the Spirit works through the Word proclaimed to produce the effects He intends, and those effects require an active, attentive, submissive, and responsive congregation. The doctrine of preaching addresses both parties.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

For the preacher: Let the charge of 2 Timothy 4:1–2 settle into the deepest place of your pastoral identity. You stand in the presence of God and Christ Jesus. You preach to people who will one day give account to the Judge of the living and the dead. The Word you proclaim is the living and active Word that accomplishes what God desires. These are not rhetorical intensifiers; they are the theological reality within which every sermon is preached. Let that reality produce in you not anxiety but reverence: the reverence of a herald who knows that the message he carries is not his own and that the One who sent him is watching.

For the congregation: Let the preaching of the Word be an occasion for genuine expectation rather than passive attendance. The God who breathed out the Scripture is present in the preaching event, working through His Word by His Spirit. Come expecting to encounter Him. Come hungry. Come with your Bible open and your mind engaged. Come prepared to be challenged, corrected, encouraged, and commissioned. Come prepared to leave changed, because the Word that judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart is being proclaimed, and it does not return empty.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

For the preacher:

1. Commit to sequential expository preaching as the primary pattern of your ministry. Choose a book of the Bible, preach through it paragraph by paragraph, allowing the canonical text to set the agenda. Do this consistently enough that the congregation learns what it means to live under the authority of the Word rather than under the authority of the preacher's topical selections.

2. Do the exegetical work first and thoroughly. Before you ask "what will I say?" ask "what does the text say?" Spend more time in the text during sermon preparation than in any other activity. Use the tools of grammatical-historical interpretation (lexicons, commentaries, biblical theologies) to determine with precision what the divine Author said through the human author. Let that determination govern everything that happens in the sermon's construction.

3. Preach the whole counsel. Do not avoid the hard texts, the unpopular doctrines, or the ethical demands that press against the cultural moment. Paul declared himself innocent of the blood of all people because he did not shrink from the whole counsel (Acts 20:26–27). The preacher who systematically avoids the difficult texts has not found a more effective preaching strategy; she has partially abandoned her congregation to the consequences of hearing only half the Word.

4. Preach in the power of the Spirit, not in the wisdom of eloquence. Paul's deliberate restraint in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 is not a counsel against clarity or preparation; it is a counsel against the trust in rhetorical skill that would displace trust in the Spirit's power through the Word. Preach clearly, compellingly, and with all the craft you can bring to the task, but always in the dependence that knows the results belong to the Spirit, not to you.

For the congregation:

5. Come to preaching prepared. Pray before the service for the Spirit's illumination. Read the text that will be preached beforehand if possible. Bring your Bible and follow along. Take notes. Come with specific areas of your life or specific questions you are bringing to the Word.

6. Practice the Berean discipline. Test what you hear against the Scripture itself. This is not rebellious individualism; it is the congregation's proper accountability to the Word that the preacher serves. A preacher who does not welcome this testing is not a faithful herald; a congregation that does not practice it is not a faithful recipient.

7. Apply what you hear specifically and immediately. Before you leave the service, identify one specific, concrete application of the text that was preached. Write it down. Tell someone. Act on it during the week. The gap between hearing and doing is the gap between a congregation that is growing and one that is accumulating religious experience without transformation.

D. *For Every Season of Life*

For the pastor in the early years of ministry, uncertain about expository preaching: The pressure to be engaging, culturally relevant, and immediately practical is enormous in contemporary ministry culture. The temptation is to design the sermon around what the audience finds compelling rather than around what the text actually says. Resist this pressure by returning to the theological convictions of this course: if Scripture is what we have claimed it to be in twenty-one previous lessons, then the preaching that is most faithful to that conviction is the preaching that submits most fully to the text. Trust the Word to do what only the Word can do. Preach it faithfully, and watch the Spirit work.

For the congregation member who finds expository preaching demanding or unfamiliar: You may be accustomed to preaching that is immediately accessible, immediately applicable, and organized around questions you are already asking. Expository preaching sometimes requires more of you: following a text you might not have chosen, working through a passage that is initially unfamiliar, receiving instruction in doctrines you might not have sought. This demand is a gift, not a burden. The preaching that addresses you where you are comfortable is the preaching that leaves you there. The preaching that brings you to where the text is will take you places you could not have gone on your own.

For the elder or deacon who helps shape the preaching culture of the church: The culture of a church's preaching is not determined only by the preacher; it is shaped by the expectations, the accountability structures, and the theological convictions of the entire leadership community. Advocate for expository preaching not as an aesthetic preference but as a theological conviction: the church that is most faithfully preached to is the church most

faithfully formed, and the church most faithfully formed is the church best equipped for every good work to which God has called it.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Describe the preaching you grew up hearing or have most consistently sat under. Was it primarily expository, topical, or something else? How has that preaching shaped your theological convictions and your reading of the Bible? Looking back, what do you wish had been different?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read 2 Timothy 4:1–5 carefully. What is the rhetorical weight of Paul's framing in verse 1? What specific activities does Paul charge Timothy to perform, and what is the stated reason for the urgency of the charge (vv. 3–4)?
3. Read Acts 20:17–27. What specific claims does Paul make about his ministry among the Ephesians? What does "the whole counsel of God" (v. 27) mean, and what does it mean to "not shrink from declaring" it?
4. Read Nehemiah 8:1–12. Identify every specific activity that occurred in this scene, both on the part of Ezra and the Levites and on the part of the congregation. What was the goal of the entire event (verse 8)? What was the congregation's emotional and practical response (verses 9–12)?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. The lesson argues that what a preacher believes about Scripture determines how she preaches it. Walk through the four connections identified in Section III: inspiration and textual fidelity, inerrancy and confidence, sufficiency and contentment, the living Word and expectation. Which of these connections do you find most compelling? Can you think of an additional doctrinal conviction and its corresponding homiletical implication?
6. What does it mean for the preacher to function as a herald (keryx) rather than an innovator? How does the herald model shape the preacher's relationship to the text, to her own ideas, and to her congregation? What is at stake in the distinction?
7. The lesson identifies four marks of faithful exposition: textual fidelity, doctrinal substance, Christological focus, and pastoral application. How do these four marks relate to each other? Can a sermon be strong in some of these marks and weak in others while still being genuinely expository?
8. The lesson argues that sequential expository preaching is the most reliable corrective to the selective tendencies of topical preaching. What is the logic of this argument? What are the strongest objections to sequential exposition, and how would you respond to them?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. The lesson describes ear-tickling preaching as preaching whose primary goal is audience satisfaction rather than textual fidelity. Where do you see this dynamic operating in the contemporary evangelical church? What specific forms does it take, and what are its consequences for the congregation that sits under it long-term?
10. The Berean discipline calls the congregation to test what they hear against the Scripture itself. How would you encourage this practice in a church without creating a culture of criticism or undermining the preacher's legitimate authority? What structures or habits would make the Berean discipline both accountable and charitable?

11. James 1:22–25 warns against being hearers of the Word who deceive themselves. What specific practices would help you and your congregation move from hearing the Word to doing it? How do you currently bridge the gap between Sunday morning and the following week?
12. This lesson completes Unit 10: The Power and Work of Scripture. Looking back over Lessons 21 and 22 together, how has your understanding of what Scripture does, in the individual life and through the preaching ministry, deepened or changed? What single conviction from these two lessons will most shape your own engagement with the Word in the weeks ahead?

Prayer Focus

Spend time in prayer as a group, asking God to make your church a community that both preaches and receives the Word with full faithfulness. Pray for your pastor, that he would have the courage to preach the whole counsel of God, the diligence to do the exegetical work that faithful exposition requires, the humility to function as a herald rather than an innovator, and the Spirit-given expectation that the Word proclaimed will accomplish what God desires. Pray for your congregation, that it would come to preaching with attentiveness and hunger, practice the Berean discipline of testing what is heard against the Scripture, and respond to the preached Word with the specific, obedient application that faithful reception demands. And pray for the broader church, that the Spirit would raise up a generation of expository preachers who preach the Word in season and out of season, with great patience and instruction, to the formation of communities that are fully equipped for every good work to which God has called them.

This lesson concludes Unit 10: The Power and Work of Scripture. In two lessons we have traced the Word's work in the individual life (regenerating, sanctifying, equipping for warfare, producing faith, and standing as the standard of final judgment [Lesson 21]) and its work through the church's central ministry of preaching (Lesson 22). In Unit 11, we turn from what Scripture does to how it has been attacked, examining the historical assaults on the authority of the Word and the church's faithful defense of it.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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