

# Giving the Sense

**Studying and Teaching the Bible**

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Calvary Fellowship – A Bible Church

<http://teaching.cookieofdoom.com>

January 2012

# Table of Contents

*Where to find stuff*

## *Introduction – page: 3*

Make Disciples – page: 3; Where We're Headed – page: 3; General Recommended Resources – page: 3

## *The Bible? – page: 4*

What is it? – page: 4; What is the Bible about? – page: 4; How do we read the Bible? – page: 4

## *Studying, Applying, and Teaching – page: 5*

Exegesis – page: 5; Application – page: 6; Exposition – page: 6

## *Studying the Bible – page: 7*

Know the Audience – page: 7; Understand the Content – page: 7; Condense the Content – page: 8; Read the Commentaries – page: 8; Rinse, Wash, Repeat – page: 9

## *Excurses: Actually Doing It – page: 9; Application – page: 10*

Textual Exegesis – page: 10; Summary – page: 12; Excurses – Prayer – page: 12

## *Exposition – page: 13*

Don't Teach Everything – page: 13; Who's Word? – page: 13; Regarding Analogies – page: 14; How You Speak – page: 14; Specific Kinds of Teaching – page: 14; In Conclusion... – page: 15

These materials are provided free of charge and are not copyrighted. You may copy and redistribute them as you see fit. You are not permitted to sell these materials.

Also note that the online version of these notes may prove (in some ways) more useful than the printed copy because the online version includes hyperlinks to various websites. The online notes are available in PDF format at <http://teaching.cookieofdoom.com>

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Some Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked HCSB are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Some Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

# Introduction

*Why are we here?*

**E**very Christian is, in some manner, called to teach the Bible. When I say teach, though, the image that probably comes to your head is that of one person standing in front of several other people and giving a sort of speech. That certainly is one form of teaching, but it isn't the only one.

## Make Disciples

At the end of Matthew's Gospels, Jesus tells his disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." (Matt. 28:19a NASB®). If this is applicable to more than just the disciples (which, by the way, it is), then it sounds like we're all called to be missionaries. Or are we?

The footnote of the NASB admits that "go" might not be the best translation. Several of my professors have told me that a better way to translate it would be "In your going, make disciples of all the nations." Everyone traveled back then. We still travel today. Of course, we move a lot faster with our cars. Staying with friends and family on a trip doesn't happen nearly as often as it happened back then.

The idea Jesus was getting at, though, was "You're going to be going places and doing things. As you're going, make disciples of all the nations." He said "in your going" to indicate that disciple-making was to be a part of your daily life. He said "of all the nations" to indicate that they weren't just supposed to make disciples of Jewish people; the gentiles could now be saved as well!

We're not all called to go to Zanzibar and convert the Zanzibarbarians into Zanzi-Bereans<sup>1</sup>. We are all called to take the opportunities we're given to help and teach people the Bible. This might mean meeting for coffee with a new believer at work, or it might mean preaching in church. The method isn't entirely clear (baptize them if need-be, then teach them to observe Jesus commands), but we are commanded to—somehow or another—make disciples. That's what this class

is here to teach you to do.

## Where We're Headed

Before you can learn how to teach the Bible, it's important that you learn how to read the Bible, study it, and apply it to yourself. Once we're through that, we can start working on teaching it to others. The majority of this class will be a class on how to study and apply the Bible. We'll get into things like presentation methods and such later, but first we need to make sure that you've gotten something out of the word that's worth teaching.

## General Recommended Resources

There are several books I'd recommend to anyone who wants to teach the Bible. Some are geared for more specific purposes than others. I'll list them below.

- ["Understanding the Bible" by John Stott](#) – *Mr. Hall told me about this book. I'd actually bought it for \$1 at a book sale but hadn't read it yet. I've still only skimmed it, but it's my favorite book on the subject so far. You can find it used on Amazon for under \$5.*
- ["Grasping God's Word" by Duvall and Hays](#) – *This is a book on how to study the Bible. It's written at a college freshman level. It provides lots of pretty pictures, so I like it a lot.*
- ["Counterfeit Gods" by Tim Keller](#) – *This is a great book that talks a lot about application. It's an excellent example of cultural exegesis (which we'll talk about later).*
- ["Disciple" by Bill Clem](#) – *Great for disciples or anyone who is making disciples (so basically it's good for anyone).*
- ["Lectures to my Students" by C.H. Spurgeon](#) – *This book is a good read for anyone, but I would say it should be required reading for anyone who does or plans to do a large amount of teaching or preaching (vocationally or not).*
- ["Church Planter" by Darrin Patrick](#) – *Another good one for men who want to take on a role in teaching/preaching.*

<sup>1</sup> I'm sorry, this is just an awful Bible pun. See Acts 17:11.

# The Bible?

*It's why we're here*

**Y**ou might be surprised how many Christians would have trouble answering even a basic question about the Bible like “What is it about?” Even older Christians who have read the Bible through multiple times may have trouble answering such questions. This class is composed of members from a lot of different backgrounds, so I need to start from with the basics. Even if you know the answers to these questions, a refresher course can be helpful, so I'd suggest you keep reading.

## What is it?

This is one we often forget. The Bible isn't so much a book as it is a collection of books, 66 books actually. It contains lots of several kinds of literature: stories, poetry, prophecy, and letters to name a few. The Bible was written to a several different audiences over a period of around fourteen hundred years. All of those audiences are long dead.

Some people will tell you that the Bible is a love letter from God to man. Well, Song of Solomon is sort of a love letter. However, the parts of the Bible where God says things like “I'm going to kill you all” don't sound too much like a love letter.<sup>1</sup> This idea sounds pretty and has some truth to it, but it falls apart upon close examination. I would argue that **the Bible is a story**. But if the Bible is a story, that brings up another question...

## What is the Bible about?

This is a question that will get all kinds of answers. Some would say that the Bible is all about what we ought to do, how we ought to live. Some would say the Bible is about all the things that are wrong with us. Some would say the Bible is about the nation of Israel. Some would say that the Bible is a book of helpful tips on life. Some would say the Bible is a bunch of stories with morals in them. Some would say the Bible is about how we can get eternal life.

While the Bible addresses all of these issues, these issues

are not the main subject of the Bible. The Bible is not silent when it comes to discussing its own purpose and topic. Jesus Himself has declared that Scripture, all of Scripture, bears witness to Him. When on the road to Emmaus with some followers, he told them that they were foolish because they had read the Bible but didn't understand that it predicted and explained His suffering and glorification.<sup>2</sup>

Put simply, then, the Bible is about Jesus. It makes sense, too. Homer Simpson is said to have read through the entire Bible and made the remark “All of these people were really messed up except that one guy.”<sup>3</sup> The guy to whom He referred is Jesus.

The Bible tells us that all of humanity is so messed up and evil (if you don't believe me, look around) that we need someone who isn't human to come fix it. Jesus, fully God, came to do what we could not. He lived the life we could never live and died for all the horrible things we've done and are. **The entire Bible is a library of books all explaining—in various ways—the person and work of Jesus.**

## How do we read the Bible?

The task sounds simple enough, but we often make assumptions about how the Bible is to be read that simply aren't correct. You would not read a letter to from David Cameron to Barack Obama and assume that David Cameron was referring to you (yourself) every time he used the pronoun “you.” In a letter to Barack Obama, the word “you” refers to Barack Obama. This is “duh” inspiring and yawn-worthy to most of us; yet for many of us it is common to read Paul's letter to the Galatians or Jeremiah's prophecy to Judah as if it were directly addressed to twenty-first century Americans like ourselves.

Perhaps, then, the most important thing we need to realize is that although the Bible is that—although the Bible contains helpful information for us—it was not written directly to us. We play the role of eavesdroppers; we are listening in on a conversation which began long before we were born. Our

<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:25–26

<sup>3</sup> No, I don't watch the Simpsons. I heard this from [Matt Chandler](#).

<sup>1</sup> My favorite example of this is probably Isaiah 6:9&c.

goal, then, is to try to read the Bible like the original audience would have. We seek to find the message to that audience and then find out what that message implies for us.

There are many ways to accomplish this. One is to simply

read the introductory notes in your Bible to whatever book you happen to be reading. Just that quick step can be helpful for reading the Bible. We're out to do more than just that, though, we're out to study it.

## *Studying, Applying, and Teaching*

*An extremely brief introduction*

**T**here is a difference between merely reading and truly studying. All reading should have some basic studying to it: we shouldn't skip over important questions as we read part of the Bible (henceforth a "text"). When we're studying for application and teaching, though, we're concerned with asking and answering hard questions about our text. We want to do *exegesis, application, and exposition*.

### Exegesis

Exegesis is from the Greek and it literally means "to draw out." That's probably not terribly helpful, so here's a more specific definition. **Exegesis is the process of understanding what a particular author said to his specific audience.** Exegesis stands in contrast against trying to make the Bible say what we want; that's called eisegesis.<sup>1</sup> It also stands in contrast against reading the text and assuming that the author was talking directly to us; that's called careless reading (or at least that's what I call it).

#### *The Importance of Exegesis*

The importance of exegesis, in contrast to other methods of Bible study, should be fairly obvious. I already explained on the previous page (under "How do we read the Bible?") why it's silly to read the Bible as though it were addressed to us. Let's talk about eisegesis.

When we eisegete, we make the Bible say whatever we want it to say. We're not listening to God; we're just listening to ourselves. You can do eisegesis with any book; there's no reason to use the Bible since all you're doing is making someone else's words (in this case, God's) mean what you want them to mean.

We study the Bible because we're convinced that what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 is true, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in." We want to hear and understand the words that God breathed out.

#### *The Method of Exegesis*

If exegesis is the process of understanding what a particular author said to his specific audience, we've got our work cut out for us. We'll need to understand a bit about the author, a bit about his method of communication, and a bit about his audience. Practically speaking, we'll need to study history to understand the author, we'll need to know whether his message was originally spoken out loud or written down, we'll need to know the language our text is written in, and we'll need to study more history to understand the audience. We want to try on the shoes of both the author and the audience.

Understanding the author and the audience is fairly simple, but information about them is sometimes hard to come by. For example, we don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews. We also don't understand a great deal about the audience (other than the fact that they were Jewish). We can learn about each by studying the book itself (to begin with, we just read it over and over again), by studying the history of the time during which the book was written, and by studying other similar works from the same time period.

Probably everyone has read through a letter or an email a dozen times, examining each word to understand exactly why the author wrote the way he or she did. High school girls have to answer the question "What does he mean by 'I'd love to hang out sometime?'" with some regularity. What we're doing with the Bible isn't all that different. We'll examine sentence structure, do word studies (in the original languages), and reread our text countless times. We have a huge advan-

<sup>1</sup> Eisegesis carries the idea of putting something in so that it can be pulled back out later.

tage over the high school girls in our example, though. Guys who write seemingly cryptic emails to girls aren't typically inspired by the Holy Spirit. When a girl reads an email, she's got to wade through the grammatical problems, misspellings, and misusages of words. The authors of the Bible didn't do that. They meant every word, every letter.<sup>1</sup>

Still, though, this is hard work. We'll read our text until we've practically memorized it, write notes all over it, study any unclear wording in the original languages, and read what other members of the body of Christ have said about it (commentaries, Bible dictionaries, study Bible notes, sermons, and so forth). We'll get into this more next week.

## Application

Once we're fairly confident that we understand what the author was saying to his original audience, **we need to answer the question "If this author gave this message to those people, what does that mean for me today?"**

At times, the message may seem straight forward. The application may seem obvious. Exodus 20:13 says "You shall not murder." The application seems pretty obvious. Jesus went beyond the surface of this commandment, though, when He said that calling your brother a fool is just as bad (Matthew 5:21–22). The commands Scripture gives us are not just given to address our actions; God wants to change our hearts. We need to ask what kind of heart was being addressed in the Bible and what kind of heart we have.

### *The Heart of the Original Audience*

You'll usually find out a bit about what the heart of the original audience was simply by reading the context. In our above example, Martin Luther pointed out that breaking any of the commandments happens because we've broken the first commandment, to not have any gods before God (Exodus 20:1–3).<sup>2</sup> It also might be helpful to take into account the historical context (which God reminded them of in verse 1). God

<sup>1</sup> This is basically the doctrine of "verbal plenary inspiration." Put simply, we believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of Scripture to write each and every letter exactly the way God wanted them written. The mechanics of how this worked varied a bit, but Scripture—because it is God's Word—is perfect and true in everything it states. cf. Matthew 5:18, John 10:35.

<sup>2</sup> "This [first] Commandment is the very first, highest and best, from which all the others proceed, in which they exist, and by which they are directed and measured..." Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*.

had just redeemed this people. He had gone through all this trouble to show how much He cared for His people. It stands to reason that He didn't want them killing each other. If He loved them enough to drown an Egyptian army; it actually even stands to reason that He wouldn't want them calling each other fools.

### *Our Own Hearts*

We need to know our own hearts better. This is a difficult thing to do. We need to spend time asking ourselves why we do the things we do. Often we're blinded by our sinfulness and we need to pray. Sometimes we're blinded by our own biases and we need to ask other people. Often, we're blinded by our own culture and reading books from other time periods can be helpful.<sup>3</sup>

Once you figure out something of what the heart the author wanted his original audience to have, you should compare your heart with that heart. Find what's different and pray that it can be changed. If you're teaching, you'll also need to be analyzing the heart and motives of those you're teaching. It's fairly similar, but know that just like you have to ask yourself tough questions in order to know your own heart, you'll also have to ask those you're teaching some tough questions so you can know their heart. You're going to have to talk to them (this is something a lot of preachers are genuinely bad at). This brings us to exposition.

## Exposition

This is an extremely broad topic and one we won't have much time to cover. Exposition can be done in a one-on-one Bible study over coffee at McDonald's, or it can be preaching to a crowd of thousands. Put simply, **exposition is the art and science of explaining and applying a given text for someone else**. Much of exposition can be learned through books on teaching, but remember that the Holy Spirit alone can bring true change. Prayer is probably the most important thing you can learn. We'll talk more on this in the last couple weeks.

<sup>3</sup> "Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books." C.S. Lewis, 'Introduction' to *On the Incarnation: the treatise De incarnatione Verbi Dei* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), p. 3.

# Studying the Bible

*What does the Bible say?*

**W**hat we're learning this week is something that I taught over a period of five weeks last year. I still have twenty-three pages (over 16,000 words) of notes from that class. My goal for this class is to teach the same thing in one week and three pages of notes. Obviously, I'll be condensing a lot and even skipping topics. I will, however, be publishing the full notes from last year on the website I've created for this series: <http://teaching.cookieofdoom.com>. If you're interested in taking your study to the next level, check out that website. You can also check out the recommended books section (page 3) for further reading on this subject.

Also: keep in mind that the method I'm giving you is just my method. You may want to do things in a slightly different order, leave steps out, add steps, etc. You're free to do that. I have to teach a method or else I'm not teaching anything. If you find a different method that works better for you, use it. My method is not the only method.

## Know the Audience

Obviously, if your goal is to read the Bible like the original audience did, you're going to need to know a little bit about the original audience. You're not going to do a very good job impersonating Santa Clause if you don't understand that he's an elderly, overweight, bearded man who likes to wear red and give toys to children. I would encourage you to do a small amount of background research *before* you start really studying the book.

The easiest way to do this is to grab whatever resources you have (study Bibles, commentaries, survey books, etc.) and simply read the introduction to the book you're studying. Don't read the commentary on your particular passage yet; we'll get there. For right now, read the introduction. It will tell you things like when the book was written, who wrote it, the kind of people the original audience was, and where they were. Information like that is critical.

If you don't have a study Bible, I'd suggest getting the *ESV Study Bible*; it's a great resource to have and their notes are quite detailed and accurate.

## *Excurses: Redemptive History*

I mentioned "when the book was written" and I want to rant a little bit about that. Knowing when your book was written will tell you a great deal about how to read it. Does the book look forward to Jesus' coming or back on it? What kind of Revelation did the people have so far? Abraham couldn't even read Torah (Genesis through Exodus) because Moses hadn't written it yet, but Paul had the entire Old Testament.

Don't just try to find out the year in which your book was written; try to understand its place in all of redemptive history. Who had been prophesying before? What knowledge did the people at the time have? The Bible is not just a series of random, disjointed stories. King David was familiar with the story of Noah's ark.

I wrote a summary of redemptive history for the class I taught last year. It goes through the entire Bible in about 4,500 words. You can read it in about ten minutes and it may help you to understand timeline of the Bible, the redemptive narrative. It will be available online soon

## Understand the Content

Once you know a bit about the audience, you should try to understand the content. I'd suggest reading through the book several times. This isn't necessary with Psalms, since—for the most part—there's no order to it. Even the longer books of the Bible (25 chapters or more), I'd suggest reading all the way through once or twice. This will give you a feel for the entire book. You'll be able to make connections from other parts of the book to the specific part you're studying.

## *Mark the Text*

We talked about this a bit already, and we'll do it a little more in class. You're going to want to write on your Bible.<sup>1</sup> I think this is helpful to just about everyone. Even if you don't think it will be helpful for you, give it a try. I'm not an immensely visual

<sup>1</sup> How do you do this? You can print out your text and write on that, you can write out your text and write on that, or you can just write on your Bible. The first two options give you more room. I suggest using a pencil.

person, but I still find it helpful.

This can be done any number of ways and the way I do it varies even from passage to passage. I usually like to circle words that seem important. I'll draw lines from words or phrases to the words or phrases that they modify. I'll also read the Bible in multiple translations<sup>1</sup> and write alternate translations above words where there are deviations; then I'll do word studies where these differences seem important.

### *Use Cross-References*

You'll want to look up the cross-references that your Bible has. If you're using a church pew Bible, you usually won't have cross-references. Find a nice Bible with superscripted letters next to phrases. If you don't have one, try going to [esvonline.org](http://esvonline.org). There you can find the ESV translation with cross-references. Look especially at the references to verses that were written before your text; those are the ones the original audience would most likely think of as they read your passage.

### *Do Word Studies*

A lot goes into a word study. I can only give an overview here. You're going to want to go to a website where you can use the Strong's Concordance. Using the NASB translation on [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com) will let you turn on "Strong's Numbers." Each word will become a link you can click. Clicking the link will take you to a page with information about that word in the Greek or Hebrew. You can find every place in the Bible wherein your particular Greek or Hebrew word was used.<sup>2</sup>

I need to give you a few rules, and then refer you to my website. First: not every author uses a word the same way as other authors; don't assume that because a word was used one way by Peter, that Paul meant it that way. Second: words often have multiple meanings, but you can't import every meaning to a given word; you'll need to figure out what meaning your author was trying to communicate with the word (for example: the word "mean" in English has several meanings and you figure out what it *means* by context; to do anything else would be *mean* to the author). Third: exam-

ine word usage by proximity; find out how the word is used in the chapter you're reading, then the book you're reading, then the author's entire body of work, then the style of literature you're reading, then the entire Bible.

There are lots of mistakes that can be made in word studies. I'd suggest reading the materials available on my website. Do a search there for "word meaning" for more information.

### *Ask Questions*

We talked about how the Biblical authors wrote every word exactly as they meant it. You will need to constantly be asking why the author phrased things the way he did. Why did he write the words in that order? Why did he tell the story this way? Why did he leave this out? Why did he use that word? Why is this verse even in the Bible?

Don't try to answer these questions too early. If you can answer them right off the bat, either you know the book really well or your answer lacks depth. Write the questions down and let them sit while you mark the text. They may answer themselves as you go. Let the fact that you don't understand the text like you should sink in. Don't rush to conclusions. Admit that you can't answer the questions, then work to understand better.

## Condense the Content

This step is easy to describe, but tricky to do. One way to demonstrate an understanding of a text is to rephrase it, especially putting it in fewer words than the original author did. I'd suggest condensing the paragraph in which your text is found into a single sentence (perhaps a sentence with a semicolon for longer paragraphs). Do that for each paragraph in your passage's chapter, then condense the chapter into a single sentence (perhaps two or three sentences for longer chapters). Once you're done with that, you may want to do the surrounding chapters. If you have time, do it for each chapter in the book; then you can summarize your book into a small paragraph (or sentence, if you feel lucky, punk).

## Read the Commentaries

Now it's time to read the commentaries. If I'm doing serious study in a book, I like to purchase one or two modern com-

<sup>1</sup> Translations is a subject I'd love to cover here, but can't. I'll write a blog post on it soon. For right now, I'd suggest studying with the ESV, NASB, and NIV. All of those translations can be read online for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

<sup>2</sup> Using websites and software to do this isn't something I could cover in depth in these notes. Some people will be naturals at it, others may need more help. I'll try to upload a video tutorial on my website soon.

mentaries (actually, I usually borrow them from my school's library). I like to have three or four really good commentaries that I'm reading, then I'll read a well-written commentary that I know I'll disagree with. That way, I can be challenged to know why I think the text is saying what I think it's saying.

### *Where to Find Commentaries*

I like to ask around to know to find out what the best commentaries on various books are. I'll read Amazon reviews, ask pastors and professors, and check BestCommentaries.com. Once I know which ones I want, I go to Amazon and try to find them *used*. I won't lie to you; sometimes price is a big deciding factor in which commentaries I use.

There are also a lot of good free commentaries. I just about always refer to John Calvin's commentary; it can be read online for free. I'll publish a list of free commentaries on my website for you guys to check out.

### *How to Use Commentaries*

You'll notice that we're using commentaries last. That's because, when we're teaching, we want to make sure that we're trying to teach what the Bible says and not what the commentaries say. We want to be so soaked in the text that we're actually more critiquing the commentary than relying on it.

Commentaries will be very helpful for setting you straight when you've missed something important. There are often things in the original languages or historical background that I miss; that can cause me to come to wrong conclusions. When you've read the commentary and seen something that you missed, always go back with that new piece of informa-

tion and try to re-understand the text. Don't let the commentary do the work for you.

## Rinse, Wash, Repeat

You've probably noticed by now that this is a long, complicated process. If you were expecting a series of tips that would make you able to immediately understand every text you read, I'm sorry. It will get a little easier with practice, but it's always tough and time-consuming.

It's important that you don't give up half way through the process and just teach your initial conclusions. We're working hard to make sure that we're rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Showing disregard for the process of studying God's Word shows disregard for God's Word and for God Himself.

The process won't be exciting; you'll want to write in pencil because you'll be redoing things a lot. Check your emotions at the door initially. Don't take your initial interpretation to be the Word of God. The Bible is inspired; your thoughts while reading it aren't. Studying is the process of trying to understand what God has to say; it's not the exciting part. The exciting part is—once you've done the due diligence—trying to figure out what the message you just fished out means to you and the people you're trying to help. A text when wrongly understood may produce worship "in spirit", but a text rightly understood will help you to worship "in truth." If you work hard to know what God actually said, striving to learn so that you can know Him better, you won't be disappointed; all the hard work is worth it.

## *Excurses: Actually Doing It*

*Remember, Remember, Remember*

**P**lease remember to actually do this stuff when you teach! I have seen dozens of pastors who are trained in exegesis simply ignore the studying process and rip texts out of context. They know better, but they don't seem to care. Now that you're learning how to study the Bible the right way, you've got no excuse for not doing it.

I know it's hard work and that it's time consuming. If you really love God and His children, though, you'll work as hard

as you can to make sure what you're teaching them is truth. Presentation and even application are of secondary importance. It doesn't matter if you're applying something right or speaking eloquently about it if what you're saying is empty. You're a very shiny, well-wrapped gift with nothing inside.

If you're having difficulty understanding any parts of this, let me know. You really can do this well and I want to help by making sure you understand how.

# Application

*The hardest part*

The two aspects of application we are going to be looking at are textual exegesis and cultural exegesis. The former deals with the universal principals we can extract from our text, “What does this text say about the nature of God and/or man?” The latter deals with principals about ourselves or our audience we can extract from behavior, “What does the fact that we do, say, or think x say about our hearts?”

## Textual Exegesis

Virtually anyone can look at a command like “do not steal” (Exodus 20:15) and interpret it to mean “don’t steal.” Of course, that’s absolutely a huge part of what’s meant by the command. Our study, though, should tell us a great deal more than just “don’t steal.” Some of the questions we should have asked when studying this would have been “Why should we not steal? Why is this command important enough to be listed in the Ten Commandments.”

We’re not asking those questions because we’re like the obnoxious six year-old who wants to prove how wrong his parents are. We ask these questions because we want to learn about who God is; we want to be able to obey Him better and love Him more.

### *Answering the Questions*

These questions ought to be answered by the text. In our Exodus 20:15 example, we would probably find Exodus 20:2 particularly enlightening since it is the statement wherewith God chose to preface all of the Ten Commandments.

We may also find it helpful to remember that Genesis and Exodus were part of the single volume known as Torah (comprised of Genesis through Deuteronomy); the Ten Commandments, then, are prefaced by sixty-nine chapters of historical narrative about who God is and what He has done. It’s worth noting that there are no books of the Bible composed entirely of rules; there is always theology (words about God) in every book and it usually comes first.

In our Exodus 20:15 example, we might say that God didn’t want His people to steal because (at least in part) He

had given them everything they needed. They used to be slaves, but now they were delivered. They were going to the Promised Land and they were going to be blessed more than they could imagine! What need could they possibly have to steal? If the question is asked by an Israelite, “Why shouldn’t I steal?” the answer wasn’t just “because God said so.” The answer also came back “because Y<sup>HWH</sup> your God brought you out of slavery! Look at all you have!”

Another important question we are Biblically licensed (if not compelled) to ask is “how is obeying this command a way of loving God and loving my neighbor?” Our rationale behind this question is Jesus in His statement “that the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”<sup>1</sup> That is, all of Scripture hangs on the commands to love God and love our neighbor. In our example, it’s obviously unloving to your neighbor to steal from him because you are depriving him of something; it’s also unloving to God in light of everything He has done for your neighbor as described in Exodus 20:2.

### *Excurses – The Three Uses of the Law*

The reformed/Lutheran traditions teach about three uses for the law. (I) It is given quite simply to keep evil men in check from becoming more evil than they otherwise would; (II) it is given to condemn us, to show us that we are guilty and cannot live up to God’s standard; and (III) it is given so that regenerate people (Christians) can “have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life.” Keep in mind all three of these principals when you come across a command.

If you do what the command forbids (or fail to do what it commands), you show that you are evil. You show to yourself and to God that you deserve hell. You show that you’re the sort of person who, if left unattended, would just become more and more evil. You would do well, though, to remember the rest of Scripture. The law doesn’t just give us commands so we can try harder; the entirety of Scripture testifies that even men who tried their hardest couldn’t keep the law. They needed a savior just like you and I do.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:40

Remember, when teaching the command, to teach also the grace whereby we are free from the command's condemnation and supernaturally empowered to obey. Remember that the law, by showing us what we lack, points to the only one who was ever completely sufficient. Remember Jesus.

### *Excurses – The Christocentric Aspect*

We talked in week one about how the entire Bible is about Jesus. You've probably, in your studying, found it difficult to find out how your passage is about Jesus. When we're talking the entire Bible being about Jesus, remember that we're not looking for each and every detail to correspond to some detail of Jesus' life (though that does happen in a few places). What we're looking for is a way in which the main message/principal we've found in our text is completed, fulfilled, or made better in Jesus.

Our Exodus example of not stealing is a good one. Paul echoes this command in Ephesians 4:28 when he says, "Let the thief no longer steal." It's ironic that Ephesians begins in chapter one with something similar to what Exodus 20 did. Exodus 20 told the people of Israel what God had done for them. Ephesians 1:3 tells us that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. You think Israel had it good? We've got every spiritual blessing in existence because of Jesus! You want to talk about stealing now?

One aspect to the Old Testament message in Exodus 20 was "God is so good; therefore you have no reason to steal." This is actually just an echo of a New Testament concept that we have in Christ. Look at Jesus and all He's given you. Therefore don't steal.

### *More Online*

I've got a lot more to say about this, but I need to move on and talk about cultural exegesis. I'll be posting more online at <http://teaching.cookieofdoom.com>, though. I'll post more information on how to do this and even a few short examples. Make sure to check it out.

### *Cultural Exegesis*

One way to know our hearts is to look at actions. Evil actions point to the heart from which they flow. Cultural exegesis is the act of asking "He/she/they did this thing that the Bible says not to do. Why are they doing it?" If the greatest com-

mand is to love God first and love our neighbor as ourselves, it stands to reason that when we're sinning it's because we've gotten things out of order. We're putting something above God and in the process putting ourselves above others. We're worshiping idols.

### *Identifying Idols*

Tim Keller talks about this a lot in his book "Counterfeit Gods" which I strongly recommend. He distinguishes between two kinds of idols. There are idols that lie on the surface like watching too much television, eating too much, and so forth. There are also deeper idols that explain why we worship the surface idols: idols like comfort, affirmation, attention, and so forth.

We can answer the question of surface idols by asking a few questions. Tim Keller writes: "the true god of your heart is what your thoughts effortlessly go to when there is nothing else demanding your attention. What do you enjoy daydreaming about? What occupies your mind when you have nothing else to think about? Do you develop potential scenarios about career advancement? Or material goods such as a dream home? Or a relationship with a particular person? One or two daydreams are no(t) an indication of idolatry. Ask rather, what do you habitually think about to get joy and comfort in the privacy of your heart?"<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Jonathan Edwards also pointed out that the things that make us angry often make us angry because they are assaulting something that we hold as an idol. For example, if you absolutely hate the Mets, you may have set the Phillies up as a (surface) idol in your heart. That may seem a rather silly example, but you might be surprised at how often it happens.

The deeper idols are the idols that lie behind the surface idols and explain why we worship the surface idols. You may have set the Phillies up as an idol in your heart because you really want to be affirmed; you want to feel as though you're worth something. If you can identify yourself with the Phillies when they're winning, then you are a winner too! Their accomplishments, in your mind, become your accomplishments. Anyone who dares oppose their winning opposes you and will incur your full wrath.

Another example would be watching too much television. There are many reasons people watch too much televi-

<sup>1</sup> *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller, pp. 168–169

sion. Comfort is often the reason: the television allows you to escape and forget about the uncomfortable parts of your life like a failing marriage or lousy work situation. What you watch can be quite telling, too. If you watch a lot of action shows, you're idol might be affirmation or power. You want to identify with Jack Bauer or Chuck Norris because he's cool and powerful. You like to imagine yourself killing terrorists and just being generally awesome. You watch television less to escape from discomfort and more because you want to feel like you're a part of something really big.

### *Killing Idols*

What you'll find is that the people in the Bible had similar root idols to you. The desire for affirmation, comfort, attention, etc. is not necessarily an evil thing. The question is where we're going for it. The Israelites would often worship other gods for various reasons, always thinking that this new god would give them something that Y<sup>HWH</sup> wouldn't.<sup>1</sup>

God's consistent refrain was to return to Him; Israel could trust God to keep His promise and provide for them. Similarly, we're instructed to look to Christ because in Him (as we said before) we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. Israel worshiped idols because they felt they had a need that Y<sup>HWH</sup> couldn't or wouldn't provide and we do the same. Israel was instructed to look back on everything God had done for them.<sup>2</sup> We're instructed to look back on what God did for us in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

So the question we're seeking to ask and answer for ourselves or our people is "What is it about this text that we're failing to believe?" Figure out what you would do if you really took the meaning of the text to heart and then try to understand where you fall short. When teaching, do the same for those whom you're teaching. How would your people behave if they really believed that God was who the Scriptures say He is? Where are they failing? Explain that to them. Tell them why we do what we do and why Jesus is better. Tell them they need to quit worshiping idols and start worshiping Jesus.

### *Preach Jesus to Yourself and Your People*

Remember that it's in Christ that we see the fullness of who

<sup>1</sup> cf. Jeremiah 2:11–13

<sup>2</sup> A good example of this is Passover, but many of the feasts and rituals carried the same meaning.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Communion and Baptism.

God. You need to preach Jesus to yourself and to your people. You need to understand and explain why the text says Jesus is better. We're not just talking about the notion of going to any god. People will hear that from you unless you are explicit about Jesus. We aren't just talking about any god. We're talking about the God who became like us. We're talking about the God who died in our place, for our sin. It's easy to disobey and ignore a god who will punish you for disobeying. It's harder to disobey and ignore a God who punished Himself for your sins.

Your people need to hear this and you need to hear this. Otherwise you or your people will get the idea that you can work your way to God. That's just another form of idolatry, seeking salvation in yourself and your works instead of from Jesus (whose name means "Y<sup>HWH</sup> is salvation").

## Summary

That was a lot, so I'll try to summarize. First we want to understand what the text is saying about God and man. We want to make sure that we're using commands the way they were intended, not just as a rule but also as something that shows our inadequacy and points to Jesus. We want to understand how Jesus completes, fulfills, and/or shows Himself to be a better version of whatever message our text is giving us.

Next we want to try to understand what it is about the message we just fished out of the text that we're not believing. To do this, we'll look at our actions and try to understand on a deeper level why we do the things we do. Once we see the contrast, we'll point ourselves and our people to Jesus as the ultimate proof that we really can believe what God says.

## Excurses – Prayer

Everything we've done so far will require prayer. Application, though, is something that is entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit; we're to mortify sin *by the Spirit*.<sup>4</sup> We are utterly helpless to fight our sin and kill our idols if God isn't doing it through us. Our people won't be changed unless the Holy Spirit is working in them.

The point in all of this is to say that you are powerless to affect change in anyone, including yourself. Pray for help.

<sup>4</sup> See Romans 8:11

# Exposition

*Explaining the Bible*

This part of teaching is often overlooked; actually, all of the three parts we're discussing (studying, applying, and exposition) are often overlooked. People often focus intently on one to the exclusion of the others. Knowing what the text says and how to apply it are probably the most important parts, but they are far less helpful to your people until you can explain it to them.

I'm going to cover a few basic principles that are applicable to virtually any form of teaching; then I'll spend a brief amount of time talking about the various kinds of teaching individually. Obviously, I'll not have time to cover any of them in any kind of depth. I'd suggest, regardless of what kind of teaching you're going to be doing, that you read Spurgeon's *Lectures to my Students*. It's probably been the single most helpful book I've read on the subject of teaching (and preaching) to date.

## Don't Teach Everything

A lot of teachers and preachers will try to teach or preach their people everything all at once. For various reasons (it could be a simple desire to be helpful, or perhaps they want to appear smart or godly) they feel the need to give every ounce of background information, every vaguely related cross-reference, and every commentator's opinion.

Virtually the only time it is appropriate to give all the information you possibly can is when you are writing a commentary or teaching an in-depth, academic level class. Even in the latter case, some discernment ought to be used. The simple fact of the matter is that—despite the fact that humans have more ears than mouths—most people are incapable of receiving the full volume of content that another person is able to present in one hour.

What do you remember from last week's sermon? If it was well done, you could probably explain the topic and a major point or two. Sermons that try to present way too much often result in even the major points being lost in the sheer volume of content being projected by the preacher. That's why you need to figure out what the main points the text is trying to

make are (best to limit this to three whenever possible) and only present the information necessary to make the points seem coherent and believable. Build your case, but do so with great care in choosing what blocks of material are necessary.

Again, this is true in virtually every area of teaching, from preaching to 5,000 people to going over a text or topic one-on-one at McDonalds. Figure out what needs to be said and try not to say too much more.

## Who's Word?

What might be considered the opposite extreme to the above mistake might be that of hardly mentioning the Bible at all. You may learn a text so well that you can explain the truth that it explains without ever referring to the text. There is nothing wrong with knowing the text that well; actually, I'd encourage it. The trouble is that when we teach like that the source of authority appears to change in the mind of the audience. Since you haven't actually mentioned the Bible, you appear not to be giving them the Word of the Lord; you're not telling them what God said in the Bible. Rather, you appear to be giving your opinion on the subject.

You want to make sure that it is clear to your audience (again, in whatever setting and size group you may be) that you're not making this stuff up; you're explaining a text. Draw one-to-one correlations between sections of your text (sentences, verses, groups of verses) and the points that you're drawing out. Tell them "Verses 3–4 seem to be saying this." Don't just speak in concepts, speak the actual words of Scripture and explain them. Keep your deviations from the Scriptures as short as you can reasonably manage while still making sense. Obviously, there will be times when you'll need to step away from the text like when you're explaining background information, grammatical structure, word usage, and practical application. Just make sure you're always coming back to the text in an obvious, noticeable way.

Most people are not going to start thinking that you yourself are theopnustos (God-breathed/inspired), but a lot of people will simply tune you out because they don't think

you're teaching the Bible; they might be right to do so considering that they don't know all the background information that you do.

## Regarding Analogies

Analogies are important. Scripture uses them all the time. In some sense, every story in Scripture is a sort of analogy. While the stories of Scripture are absolutely true and accurate, they are told in a way to communicate a point. That's what we do with an analogy: we tell a story to explain or illustrate a point. Analogies are important for a few reasons: (1) they help make a point more understandable by making the abstract more concrete, (2) they make your point clearer since people tend to remember stories and pictures better than words and abstract concepts, and (3) they can often help keep things interesting when you're teaching a group that has a shorter attention span.

That should be the reason and purpose for our analogies. You can draw analogies from personal experience, the experience of others, or even make them up on the spot. There are no rules on where to get analogies (although if—for example—your analogy is about a corrupting ring of power, you might want to credit Tolkien); pop culture can be great but be careful to make sure your entire audience will catch your reference. It doesn't make sense to use an analogy if you have to explain to half the people how the analogy works; it should just click or else you're kind of wasting your time. Another great source for analogies is Scripture; read the Old Testament and see if there is an analogy there. God was much better at stories than we are.

Three rules I would encourage. (1) Use analogies somewhat sparingly. There are things you almost need to use analogies for (like justification) and there are things everyone just gets and don't need an analogy. Make sure your analogy is genuinely helpful and you're not just telling a story for the sake of telling a story. (2) Analogies explain and illustrate. They do not prove anything. Don't prove your point through an analogy. Scripture proves its own point. Analogies really can't prove anything since they are never a one-to-one correspondence and eventually break down when taken too far. Use analogies to explain, not to prove. (3) Think of your analogies in advance whenever possible. Most people can't think

up analogies extemporaneously and you'll often watch them fall apart on you as you go. If you think of a good one while teaching, that's fine. For the most part, though, think through your analogies in advance.

## How You Speak

God's Words deserve to be explained using our best words and using our voice as best as we can. Please think about the words you're using. Be as creative as you can. Use your words to portray the beauty of the truth you're communicating. Use your voice to communicate the highs and lows of the text. Talk louder when you're excited, quieter when you're solemn. Some people are better at this than others, but you ought to do the best you can. You might be doing something wrong if you can put someone to sleep while explaining God's victory over Satan, sin, and death. Reading good books and listening to good sermons from a variety of preachers can help you in this a lot. You don't have to be the next Chrysostom or Spurgeon, but you should do the best you can.

## Specific Kinds of Teaching

Obviously, each kind of teaching is different. I'm going to take some time here to address each of the most common kinds. Expect to see more content on my website on many of these subjects in the future.

### *Discipling One or Two People*

This might be meeting for coffee or having lunch together. It might even just be in discussions after church. Remember the advantage that you have. You can teach here through dialogue more easily than in any other circumstance. Rather than simply explaining something, you can ask questions that make the people you're talking to figure things out for themselves. They'll remember it much better.

You can also be a lot more personal when it comes to application. You can ask people the question of how their behavior would change if they actually believed the truth of the text you're talking about. You can dig down to their individual root idols and be a lot more helpful than you can to a large group. Also: don't forget to pray with and for the people you're discipling.

*Family Devotions*

I'm not a father, so I can't speak to this very much. I just want say that it's really important that you actually do this. A lot of guys don't do family devotions because they feel incompetent. That's not a good reason to not do it. I would say that you should start doing family devotions now and get better at it over time. Even just reading a text with your family, asking for comments, giving your comments, and then praying will tell your kids volumes about the importance of Scripture to you. Do them as often as is reasonable and be too legalistic about the when and how.

*Home Group or Small Group*

Small group, when done well, will be a lot like working with just one or two people. You will need to get everyone to open up about their lives. Talking about the gospel is the best thing you can do for this because if they really know Jesus doesn't condemn them, they'll not be afraid of anyone else condemning them. It is also helpful to open up and talk about yourself. How are you not believing the text? Lead by example. Teach through discussion as much as you can. Always bring things back around to Jesus. Remember to pray as a group.

*Preaching*

Preaching is when you explain a text and point to Jesus. You are less concerned with explaining the technical aspects of interpretation and more concerned with conveying the truth of the text. Your goal is to get to the gospel as the text has presented it. Explain the gospel for the people who aren't saved and apply it for those who are. Regardless of whether or not your audience is saved, preach as though they weren't. This is important because someone may well not be saved. Tim Keller points out that even if everyone is saved, you should preach like there are unsaved people present because your clarity on the gospel will encourage the saved people present to bring unbelievers next week.

*Teaching*

Many people can't or don't distinguish between teaching and preaching. A lot of people will preach in Sunday school and a lot of people will teach when they ought to be preaching. I believe there is a difference and I would also specify two dif-

ferent types of teaching. There is a teaching that you can do where you assume that your audience is saved and understands the nuances of how to apply the Bible. This is the sort of teaching that you might do in an academic environment or where you have selected fairly well-trained people yourself to be in your class. You'll spend all your time talking about things like background information, sentence structure, and word studies; you'll spend significantly less time talking about the gospel and how to apply it since you're assuming that they are going to do that themselves.

The second, more common (and I would argue more needed) kind of teaching is what I like to call preaching with long division. The idea is what it sounds like and you probably remember the concept from math class. You show your work. You give significantly more background information than you otherwise would and you make a point to explain to people exactly why and how you came to the conclusions that you came to. Keep in mind that you can't move through a book nearly as quickly because, again, people cannot process as much information as you can give them.

Keeping these distinctions in mind is probably the most helpful thing I can say about teaching. You need to take your audience into account and ask yourself what they need most. Most people are not capable of doing the work of application themselves or they're simply too lazy to do it. Sunday school is rarely the place to spend the entire class debating the precise date of a book and meaning of a word. You need to bring it around to Jesus and application for most people or they'll never get there; otherwise pharisaism and pride often rise up.

## In Conclusion...

It might be best to say that you should think about your audience almost as much as you think about the Biblical audience. You have to consider how the original audience would have received what the text said to them. Consider very carefully (even do background research) how your audience is going to receive your explanation of the text.

Remember too, as we've said all along, that prayer is far more important. Do your best and know that your best isn't enough. The Holy Spirit must move or all you have is pretty, well presented words. Beg for God to shine His light so people can see and be changed by Jesus.