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THE TEXTUAL SERMON

Preaching-9/Steven P. Vitrano

the local church elder

YOU ARE READING a passage from Scripture. As you read, you are impressed that a portion of what you are reading would be helpful to the church you serve and would make a good sermon. Moved by the Spirit, you decide to use this text the next time you are called upon to preach.

This is how a "textual sermon" begins. You are impressed to preach a Bible passage, rather than a topic. In either case you will be preaching Bible truth, but the approach is somewhat different in terms of the development of the sermon.

Remember, whether the sermon is topical or textual it must still have the qualities of a good sermon. That means it must be clear and coherent, it must have unity, organization, and progress. It must have a *theme*, the *amplification* of the theme, and the *application* of the theme, and all of these qualities must come from the text as much as possible. How is all of this to be achieved?

Let us begin with a simple sentence. Every complete sentence has a subject and those elements of the sentence that modify the subject. It might be said that the subject is "amplified" by the adjectives, verbs, and adverbs that tell us something about the subject. In the sentence, "God is love," God is the subject and *is love* amplifies the subject by telling us what God is like. The sentence could be outlined:

God (theme)
Is love (amplification)

If we add to the sentence, "The great God is love," we might outline it thus:

- God (theme)
A. Is great (amplification)
B. We stand in God's grace

It is obvious, of course, that the shorter the text, the less there will be of amplification in the sermon which comes from the text. That is why a sermon is not "strongly" textual that uses one sentence as the text. A much stronger textual sermon results from the use of a paragraph as the text rather than a single sentence.

Since a paragraph is a unit of thought, it usually has a topic sentence and other sentences, clauses, and phrases that modify the topic sentence. In this case, then, the topic sentence is the theme and the other sentences, clauses, and phrases amplify the theme.

Because the paragraph is the basic unit of thought, it is recommended that when studying the Bible for purposes of preparing a textual sermon a Bible be used in which the text is organized into paragraphs. A number of the newer versions and translations are printed in this way. Caution should be observed when using one of the newer paraphrases because, while the text might be in paragraph form, the paraphrase may be a misrepresentation of what the text actually says.

Micah 6:8 is often used to illustrate how a text can be structured or outlined for purposes of preaching a textual sermon.

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (R.S.V.)

The outline looks like this:

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you . . . (theme)

- A. To do justice (amplification)
B. To love kindness (amplification)
C. To walk humbly with your God (amplification)

Obviously this is just the outline. The outline must now be filled in with further amplification. The material may come from a number of sources such as: (1) The Bible itself; (2) The writings of Ellen G. White; (3) Life's experiences; (4) Illustrations. The textual sermon does not exclude the use of other Bible texts or material from without the specific text, but it uses these materials only to *amplify* the passage that is the text of the sermon. Since Micah 6:8 is one sen-

tence in length, it can readily be seen that most of the material for amplification will come from without the text itself. This would not be as true of a longer passage such as Roman 5:1-5, R.S.V.

The outline of this text could look like this:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, (*theme*)


- A. we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (*amplification*)
- B. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand. (*amplification*)
- C. and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. (*amplification*)
- D. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings,
 - 1. knowing that suffering produces endurance,
 - 2. and endurance produces character,
 - 3. and character produces hope,
 - 4. and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. (*amplification*)

In preparing the sermon the outline would probably be reworded something like this:

Theme: The Blessings of Justification

- A. We have peace with God
- B. We stand in God's grace
- C. We rejoice in the hope of sharing in God's glory
- D. We rejoice in suffering
 - 1. Because suffering produces endurance,
 - 2. Endurance produces character,
 - 3. Character produces hope,
 - 4. Hope is not disappointing, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit

This sermon is a textual sermon—it preaches the text. The amplification of the theme is developed in the text. True, other materials are used to fill out the sermon, but they will all amplify the theme in keeping with the amplification in the text itself. Unity, organization, and progress are present just as they are in the topical sermon.

Not much has been said yet about *application*. This will come later. 

Bible Conferences in 1974

IT HAS BEEN more than twenty years since the Seventh-day Adventist Church entered into a comprehensive Bible conference to study some of the fundamental Adventist concepts. In the light of changing times, historical clarifications, extensive Biblical and archeological research, it would seem to be time once again for us as Adventists to look in depth at our understanding of revelation, inspiration, and the authority of the Word of God, along with our presuppositions and resultant principles of interpretation.

A comprehensive plan has been carefully developed and approved by the Annual Council to bring together a large number of our ministers, Bible teachers, educators, and administrators, as well as student and laymen representatives, for an in-depth study of some of our foundational truths. About eight days have been set apart for each of three identical Bible conferences for North America. Other divisions are also sending small delegations.

The first of these conferences will be held at Southern Missionary College, Collegedale, Tennessee, May 13-21; the second at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, June 3-11; and the final one at Angwin, California, on the campus of Pacific Union College, June 17-25.

I have had the opportunity to review some of the topics that will be presented. They are indeed challenging, as well as inspirational. As a background for the Bible conferences, *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* has been prepared by the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference.

If we can clarify our principles of Biblical interpretation, then I think the underlying unity of doctrine and concept that marked the study of

the pioneer Bible scholars of the church can be preserved.

In this age that is marked by widespread liberalism, existentialism, and neoorthodoxy, and in the light of the various forms of Bible criticism to which conservative Christians are increasingly exposed, we need these Bible conferences to help us in taking our bearings, to bring us together in fellowship, to give us opportunity to discuss our problems as we face our challenges, and to reaffirm the centrality of the Scriptures in the preaching ministry, in the Adventist classroom, in all administrative councils—indeed, in the total life of the church.

The Bible conferences have been so organized that following each major presentation we will divide into discussion groups, hopefully small enough to get into some of the details of the topics under consideration. We believe this will be an effective method of approaching issues and prove helpful to each participant in meeting the steady erosion of confidence in the authority of God's Word as His revelation to man.

We are eagerly anticipating these periods of Bible study and are earnestly praying for a special endowment of the Spirit of God. We recognize that it will not be possible for every Seventh-day Adventist worker to be invited to attend, but it is our hope that those who are privileged to do so will bring the instruction and inspiration of the meeting back to their fellow workers and members.

Let us all pray earnestly that these conferences will be times of marked spiritual refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

WILLIS J. HACKETT, Chairman
Steering Committee for Bible Conferences