

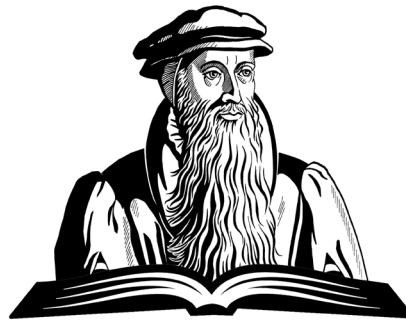
Video Lecture Series

HERMENEUTICS

*Principles of Scripture
Interpretation*

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Lecture 10
EXPOSITION



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Principles of Scripture Interpretation

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1. Introduction
2. Foundation
3. Sense
4. Comparing
5. Context
6. Words
7. History
8. Genre
9. Christ
10. Exposition

HERMENEUTICS

Principles of Scripture Interpretation

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Lecture 10

Exposition

Imagine building a barn on a prepared sight. What would this entail? Well you would first need a plan, a blueprint, or a design. You would need to purchase and collect the raw materials, carefully selected boards and beams of wood. You would need screws and nails, roofing material, and so on. You would also have to assemble the appropriate tools—hammers, screwdrivers, saws, instruments for measuring and leveling, and ensuring things are plumb. Then you would need to employ these tools and materials in building the barn. But what is the goal? You do not aim at merely admiring the fine quality of the wood, or enjoying the use of the tools, or even seeing the end product of the completed barn, as wonderful as each of those steps can be. The purpose is to use the barn you built, to house animals in it, or store other items in it, to benefit from having the barn, by putting it to good use.

Over the course of this module, or course, we've been studying the principles of Scripture interpretation. In the process, we've considered the materials—the Bible itself. And we've been assembling tools for rightly dividing the Word. We've been learning the principles of how to interpret Scripture. We've seen how this brings us to an accurate understanding of what the Bible teaches and means, all of which is essential and enjoyable. But before we conclude this module, we should also consider how we can use the fruit of our labors, especially as teachers and preachers of the Word, for those men who are called by God to that task. Having said that, ordinary Christians can also derive profit from this instruction, by using the ideas in this lecture to better communicate what they've gleaned from their study of Scripture, and what they say to other believers in their private fellowship and discussions. So it is relevant for both proclaiming it publicly in preaching, and in explaining it privately in conversation. But our primary focus will be on the preaching of gospel ministers. We can only preach the Word after, and only after we have studied the Word.

So to summarize, the previous lectures supplied us with tools, and how to use the tools for interpreting Scripture. In this final lesson, we will forge an important link between exegesis and Exposition—between accurately interpreting the Bible, and faithfully proclaiming the Bible. Now, to be clear, this is not—not at all—intended to cover the whole topic of preaching. We hope, the Lord willing, that the John Knox Institute will provide a whole module, maybe more, on preaching

in the future. The scope of this one lecture is far more modest and limited. We only seek to introduce the basics of how we are to move from the interpretation of a passage to communicating the message of that passage.

So first of all, the purpose of Scripture—God gave us his Word with a purpose. He reveals truth to us, chiefly regarding who he is and what duties he requires of us. He shows us his glory in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, and he presses upon us all the implications that flow from that knowledge. And so, we should be concerned about the effect of the Word upon our souls and the souls of others. We want all men to respond appropriately to the Bible, to move from hearing, to understanding, to actually doing. Remember the language of James 1, verse 21 to 25, which says that we are to “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” He says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in the glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed.” Very similar to what you read at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7—the man who builds his house upon the rock contrasted with the man who builds his house upon the sand. The end goal includes the use of Scripture. Remember where we began in this module. Think back to 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” To that end, Paul writes a couple verses later, in chapter 4, verse 2, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Well, if you put together these very steps, we see that the Bible teaches us to read the Scriptures—the Bible says explicitly to search the Scriptures, it says to study the Scriptures, to rightly divide the Scriptures, so that men who are called by God might faithfully teach and preach the Scriptures. And the result should be that hearers respond with faith and love in obedience to the Scriptures, bringing forth fruit to the glory of God. So to be clear, we aim at edification. The word “edification” is the idea of spiritually building up our souls, or the souls of our hearers. So how do we achieve edification by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, especially in preaching? Well, there are several components that are indispensable. We begin, as we’ve learned in this course, with exegesis. We begin with interpreting Scripture, understanding exactly what it says, how it is to be interpreted. That leads from exegesis to comprehension. It leads us to understanding the meaning of the Bible. And then that is followed by Exposition. So we can only explain what the Bible says after we have understood it accurately. But this ultimately results in edification, and both ourselves and others profiting from what we understand from Scripture, and all that we’ve heard in terms of the explaining of what we understand. The Bible teaches us that the interpretation, exegesis, of Scripture is not an end in itself. Rightly understanding the Bible is God’s appointed means to the end of edification, through the use of the truths we learn. The Bible conveys the saving and sanctifying knowledge of the truth. First Timothy 6, verse 3 speaks of “the doctrine which is according to godliness.” And Titus 1:1 says, “And the acknowledging of the truth, which is after godliness.” This is why Jesus prays, in John 17, verse 17, “Sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is truth.” And so we’re getting an idea of the importance of the use of Scripture, and how we move from our reading and interpretation to our exposition and explaining of it, which eventually leads, as we’ll see, to the application of it.

Well secondly then, we need to consider the *Exposition of Scripture*. So since we’ve learned a

little in this module about exegesis and comprehending the meaning of a Bible passage, we need to especially focus now on how to connect that to the next component, the *Exposition of Scripture*. Preaching is God's primary New Testament ordinance for the advance of his kingdom and the salvation and sanctification of souls. You think of how the Lord Jesus Christ makes this clear, when he sends disciples into all the world to teach them all the things that he's commanded them. You think of the book of Acts, which, chapter after chapter, speaks about the preaching of the apostles. We see their examples in their epistles as well. Remember the words of Acts 8, for example, in verse 4, it says, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." And verse 25, "And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, return to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many village of the Samaritans." Preaching was at the center of the New Testament church, and it remains the center of the church today. So our focus here is especially on preaching. We could choose, for illustration purposes, any text of Scripture, but in what follows, I will use Ephesians 2, verse 1 to 3 as an example.

So first of all, we begin with a passage of Scripture. So a ministry must first select the portion he will preach. He will want to ensure that his chosen text contains one complete and coherent thought. Now, that can be a large portion with an overarching thought and theme, or a small portion with a more particular and narrow point. But it is best not to divide out a portion from a disconnected thought that ignores the transitions in the flow of the text. So, we're using as our example Ephesians 2, verse 1 to 3. But you know, one could select verses 1 to 10, which is a larger portion and choose that to preach on. And in doing so, the minister would see that in verses 1 to 10, we're learning about how God saves sinners—that's the point. And so he begins by speaking about a person's previous state of sin, what their condition was. Then he moves on to God's provision of Christ, and how he comes to deliver his people from their sin. And then, thirdly, he goes on to explain how faith is a means of receiving Christ and all that he's done. And then, lastly, and fourthly, he speaks about the works that flow as fruit from this saving conversion. Well, that would be appropriate, covering the basic theme of how God saves sinners under these four points. But you can also narrow the scope and choose just verse 1 to preach on, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And here we see that the point is speaking of man's deadness in sin, and God's quickening to life in regeneration. And so one would preach on what it means to be born again, of what is entailed in the deadness of man's sin, and how it is that God is the one who comes to work in their soul, and the fruit is quickening them unto life, the work of regeneration. All of that could be expounded. But for our purposes, I've selected verses 1 to 3, which primarily deals with, From what is the believer saved? And we're told there are three things from which the believer is saved. Well, we'll consider that more in a moment. But you'll notice how verses 1 to 3 hold together, and they come immediately prior to the words that follow in verse 4, which say, "But God." And then, there's this additional thought about the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in delivering them from sin. And so, first of all, we're talking about the selection of a portion of Scripture to preach.

Secondly, we now begin to employ the *principles of interpretation* that we've learned. So in Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 1 to 3, we look at the *textual context*. We go back to chapter 1, and we remember that Paul opens by giving us the broad scope of salvation. He looks all the way back into the past, and sees God's electing grace in choosing sinners. And then he goes the other direction, and looks all the way into eternity in the future, the inheritance that will be the believer's on the last day. And he covers many things in between. So this gives us the scope. And then he goes on to tell the Ephesians about how he's praying for them. And latterly in the chapter, he begins to speak

about who Christ is and what is to be known of him. And you'll note, in considering the *context*, some of that language actually carries over into chapter 2. And then, again considering the *context*, you look at what follows verses 1 to 3, in verses 4 and following, a description of what Christ has done in purchasing the salvation of his people, and how faith receives that and the fruit that flows from it, and so on. Or you zoom out, and you look at the whole book, and really, it can be divided into two parts. Chapters 1 to 3 give us the doctrine of the gospel, and chapters 4 to 6 give us the *application* of those truths to the church corporately, and to the individual believer particularly. And then we can also look at the *historic context*, the setting of Paul's writings, where he was in his ministry, and the background for Ephesus. What was Ephesus? What do we read in the book of Acts about Ephesus being the place where the temple of Diana was, and all sorts of other things. This fleshes out our understanding. And then if that's not enough, we come back to verses 1 to 3, and we begin to apply the principle of *comparing Scripture with Scripture*. The truths that we learn in verses 1 to 3, where do we find those truths elsewhere in the Bible? And what light does that shed on verses 1 to 3 and our understanding of it? You see what's happening—we're gathering insight into the right interpretation of the text. What does it mean? How are we to understanding it?

But then thirdly, we can narrow our scope, in considering verses 1 to 3. What do *the words* in these verses mean? And where do we find *the words* used elsewhere? What do we learn from the syntax, the way in which the words are related to each other? There's all sorts of details here. So in terms of the syntax, we recognize he's describing something in the past. This is what the believer was, when they were lost, when they were unconverted. Which means, this is what every unbeliever is, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that helps us. We learn from our study of *the words* that Paul is describing something that God did, not that they did for themselves, but "You hath he"—that is, Christ—"quickened." It's something that the Lord does. And we think about these words. You know, the word "quickened," to be brought to life, to be enlivened. The significance of the word "dead"—"dead in trespasses and sins." How is the unbeliever dead?—spiritually dead, right? It's speaking about the soul. It's not speaking about their body. They're not physically dead. And what does that spiritual death include? The inability to see the truth, hear the truth, respond to the truth—all sorts of things that we could unpack there. It speaks about the "prince of the power of the air"—who's that? Well, that's the devil. And what's the significance of that, of being under his reign? It speaks about "the lusts of the flesh." What are those lusts? What does that mean? and how does that apply? It's speaking about indwelling sin within the believer, which corresponds to the enticements and temptation in the world. It speaks about being under the wrath of God. What is the wrath of God? How does that reflect his justice, his righteousness, his holiness, his just indignation against sin? There are all sorts of things we could explore there. The point is, at this stage, you're actually doing meditation. You're meditating, you're soaking in the text. You're looking at it from different angles. You're asking the question, What is the point and purpose of verses 1 to 3? What is it saying? Why is Paul saying it at this point and in this way?

Well, the fruit of this includes deriving the doctrine that is taught in the text, taught from the text, which, as I noted earlier, is this, it's describing from what the believer is saved. It's describing the condition of the natural man. In other words, it's talking to us about the bad news of man's sinful and lost state. And more specifically, we see that this doctrine is unfolded in three ways. It tells us that the natural man is dead, in verse 1; that the natural man is disobedient, in verse 2; and that the natural man is under damnation, in verse 3. This was the condition of the believer before they were saved, the condition of all men: dead, disobedient, and damned, if left to themselves.

Well then, fourthly, how do we *preach Christ*? We heard in the last lecture about the importance

of interpreting these passages in light of Christ. How do we *preach Christ*? Verses 1 to 3 seem to place the emphasis on the bad news of man's sin. But it is as a background of the believer's deliverance. Notice in verse 1, "You hath he quickened." So it's providing a background for deliverance. And it's tied to verse 5, which speaks of the believer being "quickened together with Christ." Well now things begin to emerge and we become clear. Okay, how is it that we *preach Christ* from verses 1 to 3? We begin to see, from the text itself, that indeed he's there, and we can develop that. We said that the natural man is dead, and disobedient, and damned, and we can come back to the passage, and we can show how Christ died for those who are dead in sins. He died as a substitute in the place of those who were spiritually dead, in order that they might live, in order that they might be quickened in him. He's the provision that matches this bad news, the good news that comes in the face of bad news. Secondly, he is the one who obeyed for the disobedient. He is the one who came and fulfilled all of the demands of God's law, and who has a record of perfect righteousness in our nature, which is credited to the account of those who come to him by faith. His obedience, and death, and conformity to the law is what answers the disobedience of the sinner. Thirdly, we have wrath, damnation. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who comes to suffer wrath for the children of damnation, his believing people. He stands in their stead. The wrath of God is poured out upon him in their place for the penalty and punishment of since, in order that they might be forgiven.

I'm just touching the surface here, but you can see how a passage which at first you might think, Well, this is just describing the bad news about the unbeliever's lost state. How am I supposed to *preach Christ* here? But you can get a sense in what I'm saying of how easy it is to *preach Christ* in this passage, and that can be further developed.

Well, using exegesis to open up and derive lines of thought aids the *Exposition* of the text. And so you take this natural condition, from which men are saved, you flesh out the three points of deadness, disobedience and damnation, drawing all of your studies together to explain and reinforce from elsewhere to illustrate the text, and exegesis is brought into *exposition*. You're interpreting it—interpreting the meaning, in order to unpack the truths that it contains.

But this is still not the end of our work, in drawing connections between interpretation of Scripture and the preaching of Scripture. But it is only after we have reached this point that we turn to the *application* of the text to the individual's soul. And so, thirdly, we'll consider the application of Scripture. We began with the question, What does it say? We moved to the question, What does it mean? We went on to see, How do I explain it? And finally, What does it mean for me and others? What are the implications that are to be applied to my life? So how do we move from *exposition* to *application* of the text?

Well first of all, the *applications* must be derived from the truths taught in the passage, rising out of the text itself, not unrelated or just picked randomly and then put into the sermon. People need to be able to look at their Bibles and see that the *applications* come naturally out of what they see there in the Bible. And so that means, as a minister, you need to be asking questions of the text. What does it reveal about God, yes? What does it reveal about Christ? What does it reveal about ourselves? What does it reveal about sin? What does it reveal about our duties and calls to obedience? What other responses? What does it reveal about our hidden motives? Go back now to Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 3. I'm going to leave you to actually ask those questions from those verses and see what it is that you uncover.

But then secondly, your primary focus, of course, is on the Lord—serving, pleasing, glorifying him—that's your focus in preaching. But never lose sight of *your audience*. God's Word is

being brought to them. The prophets, Jesus, the apostles knew to whom they spoke. They knew their spiritual condition, their needs, their issues, their background. And they aimed their words accurately to suit those who listen. So you need to ask yourself, What are the different categories of hearers that are sitting in front of you? Are there unconverted people? What about them? Are they unconverted people that are ignorant—they just don't know much about the Bible? Or, are they careless? Are they those who do know, and they're being spiritually reckless? Are there unconverted people who are hardened and obstinate, resisting the truth? Or, are there unconverted people who see their need? Yes, maybe no. Are they seeking? Maybe there's some unconverted people that are seeking and striving to come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Others may be struggling whether they have faith or not. And then you have believers, of course, and there'll be weak ones and strong ones. There'll be those who really need comfort from this passage, and others who need conviction of sin from this passage. Some may be drifting, others may be in hot pursuit of the Lord. Some may be under trials. Some may be facing strong temptations. There may be those who need wisdom and direction, others who need assurance, or who need the call to perseverance. I could go on and on. But how does this text speak to these categories of people? And how does preaching Christ from the text relate to these? Again, your homework is to take Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 3, and to think through it in light of what I am describing here.

But we can also ask, thirdly, further questions of the text, including the one that we're illustrating in Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 3. How does the text inform? How does it instruct? How does it change our minds? How does it change our way of thinking? This is a part of *application*. There are things in our thinking that have to be changed, that have to be conformed to the Word and will of God. What are they? What are those things? We can ask questions like, What motivations inside our souls does it address and influence. This is really helpful in preaching. What motivates people? What wrong things are motivating them? What are the good things in this passage that should be motivating us? I mean, you can think on terms of preaching to the unconverted—The Lord says that you're dead and disobedient, and that you're under damnation. This is a call to be motivated to flee to Christ, and to flee from the wrath that is to come. Or there may be the motivation of being drawn at the sight of the glory of Christ, and of his love and mercy in saving sinners, and so on. It may be that it imparts to the believer, as they reflect back on where they were and where they are, it causes their heart to swell with love and gratitude, and now they're motivated to serve the Lord, love him, walk in the path of obedience with greater fervency as a result of it. Much more could be said. How does the passage contain exhortations? Or how do other exhortations flow from this passage? Commands, beseeching the people, exhorting them, in their response to what the passage says. What warnings can be derived from the truths taught in this passage? We can explain this by illustrating it. We can supply examples from other places in Scripture, and history, and nature, all of these reinforcing the warnings that God has given.

In all of this, there are different types of application. You're getting a sense of that. There's *practical application*—so that would be applications that instruct people on things they should do. You know, we think in terms of marriage—how is the husband to lead his wife and love his wife? Well, here are *practical applications* of how to love your wife—how is the wife to submit to her husband? Here are applications from it. In terms of our relationships to one another in the church, we can derive *practical instruction*—how we use our mouths, and how we serve the Lord's people, and other such things. These are *practical applications*.

A second category, we could call experimental, or *experiential applications*. And here we're turning to questions of Christian experience—where the Christian finds themselves in their

experience, where they ought to be in their experience, and how it is that they can get there. We're dealing with things like sorrow for sin, or joy in the Lord Jesus Christ, and hope for what is to come, the inner exercises of faith, and repentance, and communion with God, and the condition of the soul, and prayer, and all sorts of things. We can make applications that address these.

Another category would be *evangelistic applications*, where we're preaching Christ and the gospel, and applying the text in a way that is calling sinners to respond with faith and repentance, to the open and free disclosures of Christ's gospel, and the presentation of Christ as a Savior to them.

So there are various types of applications. But the point is, you're beginning to put the pieces together, moving from what the text say, to what it means, how we explain and expound it, to then how we apply it. The tools we've learned contribute to this enterprise of Biblical preaching. As I noted at the beginning, much, much more needs to be said about the nature of preaching. My purpose here is to connect it with this particular course. So in this lecture, we've explored the connection between exegesis and *Exposition*. So we've sought to tie the lessons of the whole module to their use, moving from the study, and the interpretation of the Word, to the preaching of the Word. The subject of preaching includes far, far, far more than what we have touched on here. Our focus has been on this connection between what we've learned, and the transition to preaching.

Well, we've now come to the end of our course of lectures on the principles of Scripture interpretation. But this is only the beginning of your journey. We've explored an introduction, a basic introduction to the principles that guide our interpretation of the Bible, highlighting only a small selection of the dominant tools God provides. As stated at the outset of this course, the aim was to provide you with the building blocks for personal in-depth study. These lectures are a door, not the destination. So you must take up these tools to press on in your study of God's Word. There's far more to see and learn, and the prospects are exhilarating. May the Lord richly bless the time and energy you devote to your ongoing studies of Scripture. While I will not have the privilege of meeting most of you in this world, my prayer is that we will be brought together under the throne, to bask in the glory of the full revelation of God, no longer by faith through the Scriptures, but by sight. *The best is yet to come.*