

Requirements for Exegesis Papers (Bible Study and Sermon)

You will need to prepare an exegesis paper for both your Bible Study and ~~for~~ your sermon.

When you prepare an exegetical paper, select a text (of five or more verses), examine it, and include the following items as you relate how you have wrestled with it:

1. **Initial impressions:** Indicate your thoughts and feelings upon an initial read through of the text, before you began your scholarly sleuthing: observations, questions, disturbances, things you never noticed (or can't remember) from previous reads of this text.
2. **Language notes:** Your own paraphrase of the passage, including scholarly evidence for the accuracy of your paraphrase when you deviate from either the NRSV or NIV.
3. **Review of context:** A briefing for the reader on what has been happening (or argued) up to the point your passage begins. In other words, regarding the book of the Bible upon which you are drawing, bring us up to date.
4. **Related texts:** Provide an annotated list of scriptures which provide background on your text and which elucidate its meaning.
5. **Historical setting:** Provide historical and cultural background information that gives us a sense of the text's meaning for its original readers. Cite your sources.
6. **Literary analysis:** Analyze and catalogue your literary observations about the text. Comment about its structure, style, word choices and pairings, mood, and narrative elements (characters, conflict, plot, theme) if applicable.
7. **God's message:** What key messages do you think this text conveyed to its original audience? How did it change them?
8. **Wrestling with the message:** If there is material in the text that seems incompatible with other biblical teachings, how do you organize and sort through and prioritize that contradictory material?
9. **Application:** What messages (see #7 above) overlap with needs and situations today? How might you teach or preach this text?
10. **Bibliography:** Provide a bibliography of what you used, hard copy material and online material.

You may cover these ten items in any order you wish.

You may also be creative in your exegetical presentation. (But creativity cannot be a substitute for doing the foundational work of exegesis.)

When you apply the text to today, be sure your teaching and preaching is solidly connected to your exegetical work.

Your exegetical paper should be 1500+ words.

Commentary on Doing Exegesis

When we *exegete* a passage of scripture, we explore the language, culture, and spirit of that particular text. In the midst of such study and exploration, we begin to discover the *meaning* of the text, both for the past and for the present.

The set of principles that guide our exegesis of scripture is called “hermeneutics.” In other words, if we were to teach a course on how to do a Bible Study, *hermeneutics* would be the lecture part of the course; *exegesis* would be the lab. Through seminaries, courses of study, and multiple books, we have access to numerous experts who can lead us through the concepts of hermeneutics. We expect our pastors and deacons (and candidates for such) to avail themselves of this expertise.

A more intriguing question is this: *who should do the exegesis*...week after week...sermon after sermon...Bible Study after Bible Study...life application after life application? More specifically: will the exegesis be done ‘in house,’ by pastors and deacons who are known by their congregants and neighbors? Or is exegesis best done when out-sourced: gleaned from commentaries and famous preachers and distant academics?

Exegesis done from afar boasts a sort of efficiency. After all, what busy pastor or deacon has 2-5 hours each week for reworking an ancient language, traveling back in time to play detective, or decoding the literary characteristics of a text? It takes far less time to pull a commentary off a shelf and simply quote a smart scholar.

But the fact that the Board of Ordained Ministry requires candidates for elder and deacon to prepare and present an exegesis hints at a different answer: we think that people are best served when someone who knows both *them* AND *the Bible* does the exegesis. And these are some reasons behind our thinking:

The Bible is not an inert archive. It is an organic text, used by the living God to communicate with maturing individuals who live in an ever-changing world. Exegesis is an ongoing and essential task of each local Christian community. Whenever local and contemporary scholars do exegesis, people are blessed with a *specific, timely, and living* word of God for them. For *God’s sake* we want our elders and deacons doing on-going exegesis.

Any person who engages in the deep study of the Bible usually gets drawn into deeper questions: the role of the Bible in the overall work of the pastor and deacon, the importance of the Bible in the life of the church, the authority of the Bible in the life of the Christian, the use and abuse of the Bible in argument, the treatment of the Bible in preaching, the biblical literacy of both the public and the ‘person in the pew,’ the dismissal of the Bible by many modernists, the idolizing of the Bible by many fundamentalists, the unexamined logical fallacies committed when applying biblical content to contemporary life. In order to maintain integrity as we

venture our way through this thicket of issues, it is necessary for us to do solid exegesis with more passages, more frequently, more skillfully.

Essential Tasks of Exegesis

1. Explore and examine:
 - a. The language of the text
 - i. Key words from Greek or Hebrew text
 - ii. Variations on how key words might be translated into English
 - iii. Attention to how the words are arranged in structure
 - iv. Attention to how the words are arranged with style
 - v. Note how particular words are used in a particular way by a particular writer
 - b. The culture of the text, honoring its antiquity
 - i. Anthropology
 - ii. History
 - iii. Sociology
 - iv. Economics
 - v. Religion
 - c. The spirit of the text
 - i. The personal impact of a text by evoking questions, observations, and objections in a first reading
 - ii. Other passages of scripture that relate to the particular passage and how those other passages clarify the meaning of the text
 - iii. The text's place in the context of a wider biblical narrative
 - iv. The relevance of the text to germane theological themes
 - v. The message of the text then and now

Primary Mistakes in Exegesis

1. **Proof-Texting:** refusing to do or acknowledge any scholarly study on a text because a position has already been decided and the text is merely there to prove the point.
2. **Neglecting Cultural disequivalence:** assuming that customs and definitions are the same in all cultures, when in fact, some of them are quite different. Therefore, when a biblical passage speaks to a specific custom, the exegete must demonstrate sufficient cultural equivalence in order to apply those biblical teachings to the customs of our own society.
3. **Ignoring clashing texts:** failing to wrestle through the conflicts caused by scriptural texts that seem to contradict each other, scripture passages that neglect our experiences, scripture passages that defy reason or doctrine or ethics, or scripture passages that are inconsistent with church tradition.
4. **Spiritualizing a text:** ignoring the wider narrative or historical realities of a text and immediately transposing its message to a spiritual generality that can be applied at will to contemporary situations.
5. **Psychologizing a text:** imputing intent, emotion, or experience to a biblical character that will likely confine or bend interpretation of the text to the point we want to make, or to a very individualistic application of the text.
6. **Failing to let the Bible be its own commentary:** neglecting other biblical texts that shed light on the meaning of a passage.
7. **Committing Logical Fallacies:** introducing irrational logic into how a text should be interpreted and applied. Examples of illogical thinking include: denying the antecedent, affirming the consequent, begging the question, false assumptions, substituting for the force of reason, reductionism, misclassification, the inability to disprove does not prove, the false dilemma, post ergo propter hoc, the fallacy of expediency, and the red herring.
8. **Proposing Rogue Translations:** straying too far from the obvious meaning of the original text, or being too rigid in translating a text, thus leaving out legitimate words and concepts that might faithfully transmit the depth and nuance of a text.
9. **Disregarding the context:** not reading the whole biblical book which contains the text, not seeing the text in the context of that whole, not connecting a text with the passage that come both before and after, not seeing how a text integrates into the whole document.
10. **Stopping Short at Analysis:** taking apart a text with academic tools but not using academic tools to put it back together again so that it might bless the reader.