

The Elder Teaches

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THE ELDER AS TEACHER

An Address Presented by Sjirk Bajema
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Before the believing man comes to this point of being elder, and so being being a teacher within the church, there are the two preliminary steps we considered last time - that of being eligible for the office of elder in the first instance (1 Timothy 3), and that of having a consistent and meaningful prayer life with the Lord.

I will not repeat these, but refer you to those talks for that vital information.

1. The Elder As Teacher Prepares

There is phrase we use as parents, or at least it is a phrase we have heard parents use.

This phrase occurs when a parent takes aside their particularly obstreperous child, and, in administering the appropriate physical discipline, says, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you!"

Now, I have to say, from the child's point of view that seems far from true. He's the one getting it on the bum!

From the parent's point of view, I think we would all know how true this is. This phrase goes beyond that moment, and takes into account the whole process behind it. There's disappointment because of what that child's done; there's the worry about whether it might be done again, perhaps because it's happened before - and usually it has if it's got to the point of a smacking; and there's the pressure to be consistent as a parent.

What the child learns out of it is definitely useful to him, as Hebrews 12 puts it. But what the one giving that lesson learns is even more.

a) The Teacher Learns First of All

It is the same in teaching. It's not only the pupils who are meant to learn, but the teacher, too, is learning even more. That's why I can assure you that being an elder, is a tremendous blessing. In a special way you will know the Lord's guidance and strength. Ask any of the senior elders amongst us today, and they will say they've learnt heaps - and they're still learning!

One elder made the comment to me about how privileged I was to be able to deal with the Word as much as I did. He said he envied the blessing I had, while also acknowledging the awesome responsibility it was to proclaim God's Word each Sunday. This is so true. Studying and preaching God's Word teaches me first of all. Perhaps you have heard the story of a minister converted by his own preaching, but that convicting work of the Spirit is also going on all the while we're researching the text, working out a structure in the form of an outline and points, and writing it out. Then there is the rest of the worship service preparation.

Anyway, back to the elder who made that comment to me. Realising the blessing I get from preaching and teaching in the church, what choice did I have but to help him enjoy the same blessing, when these training days came up. And he has! The preparation he put

into that day, including all of the physical, mental, psychological strain, blessed him first of all.

b) Every Extra Effort Before Is Less Work During

A teacher prepares. Or, I should say, a good teacher prepares. And a good teacher prepares in a way which makes that teaching good. Whether that occasion for teaching is a catechism class, an elder's training day, or a home visit. As Berghoef & De Koster point out in 'The Elder's Handbook', "Planning is the key to a good visit."

One example of this is in the area of the Home Visit. This is a teaching occasion. You don't go on that visit socially. You don't go either to 'share' your faith with them. You go there to declare to them! So it's most appropriate to work out a plan for the devotions you use, and when you use them. Perhaps it's dealing with their personal walk with the Lord. Maybe it's an area the Session already has a concern with them about. Berghoef and De Koster, on pages 92 & 93, have a helpful list. But they don't give you the answers! You have to do the hard work! *Please refer to Appendix #1 for an example*

Appendix # 1

**HOME VISITATION WITH THE OPENING THEME,
"WHAT IS IT TO BE REFORMED?"**

Suggested passages:

Psalm 119: 33-40; 73—80
Ephesians 6:10—18
2 Timothy 2:1—13
14—26
3:10—17
2 Peter 1:12—21

Focus on the importance of the Word, of our love for that Word, and of how we are to live on that basis.

Suggested Questions:

- * What attitude should you have towards the worship service this Sunday, so that you follow this Bible passage?
- * Taking into account our Bible passage - what do you see as distinctive and unique in the Reformed Church? (Or, what does it mean that you are a Reformed Christian?).
- * Do you know what T.U.L.I.P. stands for?
- * Which good things do you see in other churches?
- * (If they see good things in other churches) Could you describe why they are good and why we should have them?

Avoid being negative to their point of view. Rather, lead them back to the Bible, and prove your points from there. Be open - but precise. It means you need to know your own position well.

Following this discussion you can then divert into the other areas of their walk with the Lord.

2. The Elder As Teacher Preserves

The next aspect to consider goes hand-in-glove with your preparation. For not only does a teacher prepare he also preserves.

Naturally, the thought that would come into our minds here is what has come down to us from the past. That what the preservation of artifacts means. But the past isn't just what was centuries ago. It is also what you learnt yesterday. And that's what I want to emphasise here. What you have learnt must not be wasted. And what others have learnt before you should also be used wisely and extensively by you.

a) The Resources On Paper

When we came to New Zealand there was one thing which I soon missed. No, it wasn't Australian Rules Football; it wasn't the great Perth weather; it wasn't even being in a country when the men actually ruled the country! What I missed was something which was part of when I edited a magazine in Australia, called THE CALL. In connection with this work, I used to get a number of magazines in exchange for our magazine. What a resource they were - and are! It's like being in a seminar everytime you get one in the mail! It wasn't as though every bit was useful, but it's listening to others - learning from them. Because of that I kept subscribing to several. Magazines like The Briefing from the Sydney Anglicans, The Australian Presbyterian, and Sword & Trowel, from the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Now I have that privilege all over again with Faith in Focus!

The good thing about magazines are the length of their articles. You can pick it up and put it down five to ten minutes later, having read at least one article. Without realising it, you have soon taken in quite a bit.

There are other resources as well. A good library is an essential one. And by good library I don't mean huge shelves loaded with thick theological tomes. I would recommend a few key books. For the Bible a good general commentary is the New Bible Commentary, from IVP. To be frank, there's not much difference between this one book and the general evangelical series covering each the books of the Bible. And also, be careful with Study Bibles. They look like an easy way out, but we have to remember that God's Word is only God's Word, not what some men have added below it.

Tied in with this goes a Bible Dictionary. I'm used to the twin volume to the New Bible Commentary, from IVP - the New Bible Dictionary.

For books that give a good overview to what is happening throughout the Bible, it's hard to go past S.G. De Graaf's 'Promise & Deliverance.' These have now been reprinted, and should be available through Geneva Books. Another set like this is Cornelius van der Waal's 'Search the Scriptures'.

Next, you need a good general theological work. The classic work here would be John Calvin's 'Institutes'. Most of us are more familiar with a recent classic - Louis Berkhof's 'Systematic Theology'.

Putting the principles into practice comes next, and here 'Baker's Handbook of Practical Theology' has been useful for many years. But IVP have provided a useful addition to their series in this area with the 'New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology'.

As this specifically affects you as an office bearer in the church, 'The Elder's Handbook', and 'The Deacon's Handbook' by Berghoef & De Koster, are a tremendous asset. Don't forget, either, for our New Zealand situation, the RCNZ's 'Office Bearer's Handbook'. Then we move into the areas of church history and other religions. These are areas where there are general works, but it depends on your need. I have generally bought books, and tapes, and videotapes, as I have needed them. Yes, don't forget the useful resource that these different tapes can be.

Apart from these key works, your church library, or your minister's library, will give you any extra information you would need.

b) The Resource In People

There is a further resource, though. Does anyone know what we have missed as we have gone through these various sources of information? That source is actually just as important as any of these others. In fact, I would say that a day like today proves that it is even more important. Because what else can I be speaking of than the resource found in people themselves. As we use others in our churches, and elsewhere, we not only have a valuable source of information, but a precious fellowship along the way. A wise elder or minister, or other Christian, doesn't only help you to prepare to teach, they teach you. If, that is, you are open to being taught. In our time we can become so warped up with these other sources of information, and the internet seems to be the way everyone's going, that we forget about the human dynamic we spiritually need.

It's not only human relationships suffering in this press button age, it's also the communion we have with Christ through the parts of His Body.

Who hasn't found that in a Men's Prayer Breakfast, or Bible Study, or other fellowship? A precious time. An uplifting time! And this is also because it's far more than what you learn!

In this connection, I find the Internet can work against what really matters. While it can give us lots of information, it can also give us misleading information - and it can take so long to get it. It's fine if you know where you're going, and you treat no more than getting that familiar book off your shelf, but otherwise it just sucks you dry.

3. The Elder As Teacher Practices

a) The Learning Curve

An old saying saying goes, "Practice makes perfect." It is true for our everyday Christian walk with the Lord - and it's just as true for those called to the offices of the church.

That's why when a man first comes into office he needs to be teamed up with an experienced office bearer.

In fact, a man eligible for office should be showing that ready long before he considered for office. 1st Timothy 3 speaks of a man 'desiring' to be an elder. He shows he's keen. So watch out young men, your Session is watching you!

b) The Serving Verve

There is more to this word 'practice' in connection with the eldership. For while it is true we must be practising better, there must also be the aspect that we are putting our

eldership into practice. This means we don't see our office as an end in itself, but as the way to the end.

Paul describes this quality, in 1st Timothy 3, by pointing to a man managing his own household well, as being an essential attribute before office. It's in his heart already. You see him taking a concern for others, too. He'll be popping in socially; remembering special occasions (with the help of his wife!); and generally going out of his way to help in his local church.

4. The Elder As Teacher Preaches

Reading services. The down-side of the Reformed Churches? That time when we become profusely apologetic? 'Oh, I'd like you to come to our church. But not tonight, it's just a reading service'.

Just a reading service? Or a time of tremendous growth for that man asked by Session to lead in worship, and for the congregation he leads? Personally I have participated in some very encouraging reading services. People have commented, having heard the sermon both from the minister who wrote it, and the one who read that same sermon later, that the reader did it much better. People get convicted and converted in reading services, too!

A) Who Does It?

For reading services the legitimacy is there. Church Order Article 55 states:

In reading services only sermons approved by the sessions shall be used.

The ideal, and Lord willing, the usual situation is of a man called to the office of minister of the Word and sacraments, leading the Lord's people in worship. That's his special gift. But there are vacancies. There are churches where ministers are unwell, or away on holiday. Perhaps a church cannot at this stage afford calling their own minister. What then? Do we suffer a self-despair, in a circle that becomes even more vicious over the passing of time, and which reading services seem to compound?

I can speak from personal experience here, having grown up in a congregation which was vacant for some 13 consecutive years. And some stories stand out then! Like the visitor we had every New Year's Eve service. He approached the Reader after one of these services, and said to him, "That was the same sermon you read last year!" The Reader replied, I think trying to be helpful, "Oh, perhaps you should come more often!" ("What - to hear it again" he later jibed me.)

Or do we encourage those who are performing a very valuable task for the Lord? That's what the purpose of this article is. Let's build each other up and in that way glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

B) How Does He Do It?

I- Preparation is a keyword. If we are unwilling to plan prayerfully and work well in advance, then we cannot expect too much on the Sunday either.

Take the example of a minister. If he doesn't put the time into preparing the worship service, of which the sermon is the major part, then he shouldn't expect much of a response on Sunday. There may be pastors who grab a text during the service, lay claim to it, stand upon it, and become apparently inspired by the Holy Spirit. But what is far

more important than this impoverishing emotionalism, is the careful, planned, studious, exact interpreting and application of God's Word well before. It's when we do that in faithfulness that the Holy Spirit blesses us.

Now if this is true enough of a minister, isn't it just as relevant for the reader?

II - Practice is another keyword. There are readers who can deliver a sermon in such a way that visitors to that church service think he is actually a minister. There are even readers who conduct the service better than some ministers! And yet our general thought towards reading services is quite negative. So, let's make it positive!

Think about this question: What's in those good readers?

Let me suggest an important thought in this. A thought that taken on, and which kept on, will help to change the way you lead the worship service, as it has helped to change the way I lead public worship. This thought is to **see yourself as others see you**.

Dear friend, you may think that your voice is fine. You may even believe, as I thought, that anyone having trouble hearing you should get their ears checked out. Who were those seniors to say that they could not quite hear the end of my sentences? What - me slur my phrases? And what could I learn out of the Session's suggestion to get some specialised speech training? Most of the people weren't complaining? In fact, some were very positive about my preaching. What was this about the Session paying for something I didn't think I needed?

We have a lot of pride caught up in how we present ourselves. I didn't realise how much until I went through that speech training. That was humbling. Here was a man who had been both a BBC and an ABC Radio Broadcaster - the voice! When he read Ecclesiastes 12, in the King James Version, that description about the aging of the body, he made it come alive! Then he got me to read the same into a tape recorder! I couldn't have killed that passage more! There was more life in a door nail!

Those lessons really made me hear myself as others heard me. You know, I still hate my own voice - and everyone straight away knows it's my voice! But I have learned to hear myself more as other hear me. I have to put myself in other people's shoes. It's a valuable principle when we deal with pastoral problems. We need to put ourselves, as much as is appropriate, in their shoes then. But it's also for preaching, too.

And this brings me to another equally valuable thought. It was what I learned in that training. A thought which actually seems to go against what we are as Christians. A thought which can even appear as though we're not being Christ-like at all. Because what that speech teacher told me was to do this - "Bung it on!", "Ham it up!" Yes, speak as though you were performing. In fact, don't feel you are doing your best until you think others are going to think you are going over the top!

An exercise to help you in this, is the use of a good size cork. A rounded cork which you put in your mouth, gripping with your teeth, while you read out pieces of Scripture or other suitable prose (the KJV is one suggestion). Do this for 5 - 10 minutes each day. As I was told, since the mouth is the 'organ' which gives shape to the air coming from your chest, through your throat, you need to learn how to play it.

C) **Where Do You Start?**

But, let's begin. Your first dilemma will be choosing a sermon. On the basis of that sermon you will have a theme for the service as a whole.

It's relevant here to choose a sermon that ties in with what your church is concerned with. Maybe the choice has to fit in with that stage of the church year, e.g. Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Thursday, Pentecost Sunday. Or, perhaps to fit in with the current order of the Heidelberg Catechism. We shouldn't hesitate to do this. In the event that your congregation has a minister, confirm with him the nature and structure of the preaching programme. Otherwise contact that person whom Session has co-opted to plan and co-ordinate its preaching-teaching programme.

What we need to avoid is the type of subject that we ourselves are personally drawn to. It's better to think in terms of the congregation as a whole.

D) What About The Parts?

Having chosen the sermon one needs to see how that fits in with the structure of the worship service. For this your church's order of service, whether AM. or P.M. as appropriate, is essential.

This order of service is the out-line, adopted by Session, for the ordered and peaceful worship to the Lord upon His Day. Please resist trying to draw up your own. (Session should have a copy available for you to use.) If many of our members of a congregation fail to realise all the different parts to their own worship service, then the reader can easily make the same mistake.

I- His Call To Worship

With this before you the different parts can be tied in with the theme as a whole. For example, the sermon concerns Lord's Day 36, which is our confession regarding our use of the Name of God. A suitable 'Call to Worship' would be Psalm 99, the verses 1 to 3. Here, already at the beginning of worship, our focus is lifted to God (where it should be), and to the theme of what will follow. It's a positive reinforcement. Naturally, though, it also requires work to tie in these parts. Here a concordance is most beneficial, or books on worship (such as Robert Rayburn's *'O Come, Let Us Worship'*.) See Appendix #2 for a list of such passages.

II- Our Looking Up

The Votum and Salutation are not just fancy Latin words ministers use to keep us in the dark (though the use of these words from an archaic language do add a certain mystery!). Rather the Votum is our combined congregational recognition of where we need to focus as we begin our worship. Thus: 'Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth' (Psalm 124:8).

III- His Coming Down

The Salutation, in turn, is God speaking to us His greeting upon our worship of Him. For example: 'Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen' (1 Timothy 1:2b).

There are other suitable greetings in other New Testament letters. One point to note here, though, is that as reader we are different from a minister. Thus, in the greeting and benediction we would say 'we' or 'our', indicating that we ourselves are not called to the position of minister of the Word; standing rather with the congregation in this aspect of our calling. *See Appendix #3 for a list of suitable verses.*

The same applies for the benediction at the end of the service. Rather than the commonly heard, 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all,' the 'you' becomes 'us'. Likewise with other benedictions (e.g. Numbers 6:24-26; Romans 15:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; Hebrews 13:20-21).

IV- Our Opening Up

In the morning service most of our churches have a time of humbling before the Lord, as, following the opening Psalm/Hymn of praise, there is either a prayer of confession or a song sung expressing this genuine desire for the Lord's pardoning grace. We should make this as personal and meaningful as possible. Too easily this becomes a comfort zone for Readers, as they slip back into the same Scripture they have used before. There is the story one member told me about the elder he was impressed with, because he always read the Ten Commandments (he had a particular view about its necessity each Lord's Day. To which the elder replied, "Oh, using the Ten Commandments makes it easy - trying to look up other suitable passages is too much work!"

(See Appendix #4 for an example of this part of the service, and what follows, tied in with the theme of the sermon.)

V- His Cleansing Inside

We have a faithful and loving God! A God who has spoken: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' (John 1:9.)

In these words, or a similar passage, we can reassure the covenant people of God's pardoning grace. Thus we are renewed for divine service. *See Appendix #5 for a list of these passages.*

VI- Our Walking Beside

And we turn expectantly to the Maker's instructions for holy living in the week ahead. We are thankful. We want to love Him back - to serve Him to whom we owe everything! This can be done with the words of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5), which is prescribed in some churches, and certainly to be read on a regular basis Or we may use an equally relevant passage.

In the New Testament, for example, we find Matthew 5:1-16; Romans 12:1-8, 9-21; Galatians 5:13-6:5; Ephesians 4:17-32. Indeed, the list can be added to greatly. *See Appendix #6 for a list of these (by no means comprehensive!)*

VII- His Living Outside

Following this we may commit ourselves to this path by standing and singing an appropriate Psalm or Hymn. Make this a good, strong tune. From personal experience, be

a little careful with what you might find a good song. Think about how the congregation will take it. If like me, you aren't too hot musically, get some advice. But err on the side of what people know and what they know well!

VIII- Our Lifting It Up

We come now to the time when many churches have their so-called 'congregational prayer'. This is most often a prayer where the joy, thanks and suffering of the body of Christ are brought before God's mercy seat, in the Name of Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Scripture is full of prayers to use as patterns for this time. The Lord's Prayer is the ideal basis (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4 cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45-52). To simply codify it we can use the acronym A.C.T.S. (Adoration; Confession; Thanksgiving; Supplication). It's important, though, to balance carefully our congregational prayers. They form an example for our people. And we need our people not only to be a praying people, but also a Scripturally balanced people. *See Appendix #7 for a list of Biblical prayers.*

Prayer is important. It too needs to be carefully thought out, and yes, even written out. If one as great as John Calvin wrote out his prayers, we should not be afraid to do likewise. You will certainly not be any less 'spiritual' because of it. Rather, the Spirit will guide you as you prayerfully prepare.

The congregational prayer can also have a place subsequent to the sermon. It may flow quite well from where the sermon has left off. But this depends, naturally, upon the agreed upon order for service.

IX- His Guiding Us

Before the sermon comes the Scripture Reading(s) and the text. In relation to the first Scripture reading it's appropriate to add a few words describing its link to the text. For the text of Lord's Day 36 I chose Leviticus 24:10 to 23, and Matthew 10 the verses 32 and 33.

For Leviticus 24 the comment was made as to how seriously the Lord saw the misuse of His Name among the Old Testament Israelites. And with Matthew 10 the emphasis lay upon the eternal consequence of a right use of God's Name. So from the physical aspect in Leviticus, (with spiritual direction), to a directly everlasting spiritual punishment in Matthew.

Before the sermon you need to ask the Lord's blessing upon His Word. This can be done, either with a short prayer, or at the end of the congregational prayer, or with the congregation singing that prayer, in the form of a Psalm or Hymn.

Then there is the sermon itself. Always seen as a highlight, though sometimes lifted too far above the rest of our worship. Yet, certainly important. We listen now, with our ears open and hearts responsive, to God's Word for His people. Here we are challenged, comforted, and built up in our knowledge of who God is and how that demands a reaction from His people.

To have this effect it needs to be stated in a clear and convincing manner. Unfortunately the format of the *Word of Salvation* sermons make this difficult. The type is small and closely spaced. Not that this needs to be seen as an overarching negative point. There are ways around this. One often used, is to enlarge these sermons on a photocopier. And

having done that, the liberal use of coloured marker pens differentiates various pauses and sections.

There is another alternative, though more time-consuming; yet it makes one far more familiar with the sermon.

This is to type out the sermon completely, leaving much room in between for appropriate pauses, and a good eye contact. This latter aspect is important. It needs to be seen that the Word is vital, and a living part of the reader's life. Thus being familiar with the sermon makes for a more meaningful worship service.

There is much work here. For you, the sermon reader, it will be several evening's work. Yet, what a reward! To know for yourself more fully what you are leading in. To have that confidence that you have done your best.

X- Our Taking It In

Following the sermon a prayer is appropriate. Ideally it should be short, unless it forms part of the congregational prayer. Its purpose is to ask the Lord's guidance to work out that application of the sermon.

Sometimes they are found in *The Word of Salvation* sermons.

After this prayer the congregation is encouraged to also respond in song. Usually a list of songs is made available in *Word of Salvation*. Otherwise using the subject index at either the beginning or end of the hymnbook gives a useful guide.

XI- Our Giving It Back

The place of the offering(s) within the worship service comes now to our attention.

Although in this order it is placed following the sermon, it would also be appropriate, as some churches practice, to have it before the Scripture readings. (As one day said to me, "That way, if the sermon's no good - at least the money's in the bag!")

We come prepared for worship, and this should include our offerings (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The key note here is gratitude. God has been, and is, good to us in Christ. And we are deeply thankful. May this gratitude pervade the whole worship. And, then, having given of our material riches, which are our trust from the Lord, and having dedicated these to His service in prayer (if that is indeed the usually established service order), we continue to praise God with a closing doxology (Hymn of praise).

An appropriate scripture reading can accompany the invitation to give of our offerings and tithes. *See Appendix #8 for a suggested list of scriptural passages.*

XII- His Going With Us

The benediction is the promise that the LORD is with His people. The LORD told Moses that Aaron, as the High Priest, was to pronounce it upon His people (Numbers 6:24-26). This was what the Lord Jesus did as He was ascending into heaven (Luke 24:50-51). This way God's Name is put upon His people and it is symbolically shown that He is with them - always. *Appendix #9 has a list of these.*

C) Take It Apart!

Did you notice anything about this outline to worship (I - XII)?

It is shaped as a dialogue. This is because it is a meeting of the covenant God with His people. Those leading must remember this.

But it is such a meeting that it does not stop when it's over. And for you as the reader this has an added blessing. Afterwards there's a valuable time of review. Invite a few friends around for coffee. Discuss together how it went. Consider the presentation, the speech, the response. A helpful way of growing together.

Don't forget to check, either, with the most severe critics - your wife, your children, and/or any other family. Your wife, in particular, has no favour to curry with you!

In times past discussing the sermon was often an essential part of the Lord's Day. Fathers would grill their children on how well they were listening! But we can use such a time still today. Creatively we can still discuss us with our children, but also together as adults we should already begin the application that will come from God's Word in this new week ahead of us.

And it's all for His glory - Wonderful!

Appendix #2

Call to Worship Passages:

This is drawn from one of my years in ministry. As you can see, the Psalms are an ideal source for these passages.

Nehemiah 9:5c-6a

Psalms 8:1-2a

Psalms 9:1-2

Psalms 16:5-6

Psalms 29:1-2

Psalms 33:1, 4-5

Psalms 43:3-4a

Psalms 47:7-9

Psalms 48:1-2a

Psalms 55:16-18

Psalms 84:1-2

Psalms 92:1-2

Psalms 95:6-7*

Psalms 99:1-3

Psalms 103:17-18

Psalms 105:1-4

Psalms 113:1-3

Psalms 115:1

Psalms 119:1-2

Psalms 119:89-92

Psalms 145:1-2

Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 22:17-19

Isaiah 40:3-5

Isaiah 59:21 (Pentecost Day)

Lamentations 3:25-26

Zechariah 9:9 (Palm Sunday)

Matthew 5:6-9

Luke 19:38

John 1:12-13

John 1:29b-31 (Christmas Day)

John 3:14-15 (Easter Sunday)

John 6:35

John 10:14-15

John 14:6

Romans 6:8-10

Romans 8:1-3a (Good Friday)

Romans 10:11-12

Romans 14:7-8

Ephesians 1:3-4

Ephesians 1:19b-23

Colossians 2:9-10

Hebrews 2:9 (Ascension Day)

1 John 1:1-4

Appendix #3

Greeting Verses:

1 Corinthians 1:2-3

Galatians 1:3-5

1 Timothy 1:2b

Titus 1:4b

1 Peter 1:2

2 Peter 1:2

Appendix #4

Example of Confession of Sin Opening:

Congregation, we have come here to be together before the Lord.

So, because we are in a group with other people, we put on our best clothes, or at least we will be putting on our best attitude.

I don't think anyone would think it appropriate that people see us at our worst.

That's the last thing we want the other people here to see!

The Duke of Wellington, a famous English army commander, once coined an expression for what we are like at our worst.

He called it "three o'clock in the morning" courage.

Quite a perceptive phrase!

For what you think, or do, or decide, when things are at their worst, makes or breaks your future.

Bitter disappointment, broken trust, the fading of your special dreams - they set off a crisis at that point for your soul.

How are you going to handle it then?

Would you choose hate, bitterness, and despair?

Are things really that unfair?

Or, do you have the courage to forgive?

You are going to move on.

Okay, it may be just to the next battle.

But you know this war is nearly done.

Revelation 4:11

Revelation 7:9-10

Revelation 19:5-7

2 John 3

Jude 1b-2

Revelation 1:4b-5a*

* - well-known

In fact, you know Someone Who has already won!
Let's pray...

O God,
Most merciful and gracious;
We confess that we have sinned against You,
and against each other.
We haven't fought the good fight,
we've become caught in the mud of despair,
leaving Your Way, ignoring Your Word.

Lord, forgive us, and please clean us.
Let Your mercy come upon us in great fullness,
and so help us to see,
the newness of life in Your Son.

Give us courage, insight, and a deeper faith;
help us to more truly serve and follow You;
for the sake of Jesus,
our Lord and Saviour.

Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

In the Bible there is one book where, instead of God speaking to His people, His people are being open to Him.

That book is the Psalms.

And in Psalm 37, we hear these words...

[v23f]

GRATITUDE READING:

And how does the LORD keep firming up our steps?

Friends, it is through what He says to us in the rest of His Word.

And He says it summed up to 'T', in the well-known Ten Commandments.

Let's turn to them now.

We go where they're found in Exodus chapter 20.

Exodus 20, the verses 1 till 17...

HYMN:

In response to God's Word, let's stand and dedicate ourselves with singing psalm 16...

Our pianist will play this new tune through the once, before we sing...

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O God, You our only Saviour and our mighty Lord,
We are before once again, this - Your Day!

The day You have set aside for us for us to especially come before.

This is the time You want us to particularly humble ourselves before You;
to offer up ourselves and all we have to serve You; and through all this to worship You -
and You alone!

You are seated upon Your throne!

So, Lord, we pray for what's on the hearts of everyone one among us, and those
who are not with us.

We pray that this won't be a formal, rigid, occasion, where we are not
ourselves, but that this cuts deep into our hearts!

We can't dare to hide from You - You see us through and through.

And right now You do give us whatever we need for
following You, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Individual Prayer Points...

Congregational...

Denominational...

World-wide church...

National...

International...

And now. Lord, as we turn to the reading and preaching of Your Word, may it
come fresh to us again.

Don't let us plug up our ears but make them to be the channels Your Word
reaches deep into our hearts.

For we pray this all in the name of the Living Word, Jesus Christ
Himself, Amen.

1ST SCRIPTURE READING:

Congregation, we turn now to the reading of God's Word in connection with the
preaching of it.

So, let's turn now to the 11th chapter of the letter to the Hebrews...
Hebrews 11, the verse 32 till 40...

Chapter 11 is the famous chapter about the faith of the Old Testament saints.
Our text this morning very much concerns one of these.
Let's hear about what they show us...

2ND SCRIPTURE READING:

We turn now to the passage where we find the text for this morning.
This is in the 1st book of Samuel, chapter 13...

1st Samuel 13, we read from verse 16, through till verse 15 of chapter 14.
The text is from verse 23 of chapter 13 through to verse 15 of chapter 14...

Appendix #5

Pardon Passages:

Isaiah 60:1-2

*Again, this is what I used in one of my
years in ministry*

Jeremiah 17:7-8

Lamentations 3:19-24

Psalm 5:11-12

Luke 12:6-8

Psalm 25:8-10

Luke 18:14

Psalm 28:6-7

Psalm 32:3-7

John 8:34-36

Psalm 33:16-19

John 14:1-4

Psalm 102:19-21

John 14:15-17a

Psalm 103:1-5

Psalm 103:8-12

Romans 3:23-24

Psalm 139:7-10

Hebrews 7:24-26

Proverbs 28:13

1 John 1:8-9*

Isaiah 1:18*

Isaiah 40:29-31

* = a well-known passage for this use

Isaiah 57:15

Appendix #6

Gratitude Readings:

*This is a quite comprehensive listing of
all those I have used in the last 15 years.
One may use the Ten Commandments,
and any of a number of these, as a first
use of the Law also i.e. to show how we*

*have sinned. In this case you could use
Matthew 22:36-40 as a short summary
of what that means.*

Exodus 20:1-17

}

Used On A

Regular Basis

Deuteronomy 5:1-21 }

Leviticus 19:1-4; 11-18
Deuteronomy 6:1-25 or 1-9
Deuteronomy 10:12-21a
Psalm 15
Psalm 37:1-24
Psalm 139
Proverbs 4
Proverbs 6:1-9
Isaiah 58:6-14

Matthew 5:1-16
Matthew 5:17-20; 27-37
Matthew 5:13-16; 38-48
Matthew 6:1-8; 16-24
Matthew 6:19-34
Matthew 7:1-12
Matthew 22:36-40

Luke 6:17-38
Luke 12:22-34

John 10:11-30
John 13:31-14:14
John 14:15-15:8
John 15:1-17

Romans 12:1-8 (Or 11:33-12:8)
Romans 12:9-21
Romans 13:1-14

1 Corinthians 3
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
1 Corinthians 12:12-31
1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13
2 Corinthians 5:1-10
2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Galatians 5:13-26

Galatians 6:-18

Ephesians 4:1-16
Ephesians 4:17-32 (or till 5:2)
Ephesians 5:1-21
Ephesians 5:22-6:18 (or till 6:9)

Philippians 2:1-18
Philippians 4:4-13

Colossians 3:1-17
Colossians 3:18-4:6

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
1 Thessalonians 5:5-22
2 Thessalonians 3:1-15

Titus 2:1-15

Hebrews 10:19-31
Hebrews 11:1-16
Hebrews 12:14-28
Hebrews 13:1-21

1 Peter 1:13-2:3
1 Peter 2:4-17
1 Peter 2:13-25
1 Peter 3:1-17
1 Peter 4:7-19
2 Peter 1:1-11
2 Peter 3

James 1
James 4:1-17

1 John 2
1 John 2:28-3:10
1 John 4:7-21

Appendix #7

Biblical Prayers:

The psalms contain an enormous number of prayers - in fact, that's what

they essentially are. They cover the whole range involved in A.C.T.S..

Exodus 15
1 Samuel 2
1 Kings 8
1 Chronicles 17
Ezra 9
Nehemiah 1
Isaiah 37
Jeremiah 32
Lamentation 5
Daniel 2
Jonah 2
Habakkuk 3

Prayers of Jesus:

Matt.6:9-13
Matt.11:25-26
Matt.26:36-44
Mark 15:34

Luke 1:46-55
Luke 1:68-79
Luke 18:10-13

Appendix #8

Offering Passages: *Scripture texts used to introduce the Offertory*

Exodus 22:29
Exodus 23:19a
Exodus 34:20b

1 Chronicles 16:29
1 Chronicles 29:14

Nehemiah 12:43

Psalms 23:5
Psalm 50:22f
Psalm 98:8f
Psalm 116: 12,14

Proverbs 3:9f

John 11:41-42
John 17

Acts 4:24-30
Acts 7:59-60

Prayers of Paul:

Romans 1:8-10
Romans 10:1
1 Corinthians 1:4-9
2 Corinthians 1:3-4
Ephesians 1:8-14
Ephesians 1:16-23
Ephesians 3:14-21
Philippians 1:8-11
Colossians 1:3-14
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
2 Timothy 1:3-4
Philemon 4-6

1 Peter 1:3-5
3 John 2

Proverbs 11:25
Proverbs 18:16
Proverbs 19:17
Proverbs 21:13
Proverbs 22:9

Haggai 2:6-9
Zechariah 7:9
Malachi 3:10

Matthew 2:11
Matthew 5:7
Matthew 6:19-21
Matthew 7:12a
Matthew 25:40

Mark 12:17

Luke 1:45
Luke 2:22-24a
Luke 6:38
Luke 12:48b
Luke 14:12-14
Luke 21:1-4

John 3:16
John 13:34-25

Acts 20:35

Romans 12:13
Romans 13:7

1 Corinthians 15:58-16:2
2 Corinthians 2:14
2 Corinthians 8:1-5
2 Corinthians 8:7
2 Corinthians 8:9
2 Corinthians 8:10b-12
2 Corinthians 8:13-15
2 Corinthians 8:18-21
2 Corinthians 8:24
2 Corinthians 9:1-2
2 Corinthians 9:6-7
2 Corinthians 9:10f
2 Corinthians 9:12ff

Appendix #9

Benediction Verses:

Numbers 6:24-26*

Psalm 67:1-2 (adapted)
Psalm 115:14-15
Psalm 128:5-6

John 20:21

Romans 15:5-6
Romans 15:13

1 Corinthians 1:9
1 Corinthians 16:23

Galatians 6:6
Galatians 6:10

Ephesians 4:28

Philippians 4:17
Philippians 4:18b-19

Colossians 3:17
Colossians 3:23f

1 Timothy 5:17f
1 Timothy 6:17f

Hebrews 6:10f
Hebrews 10:23ff
Hebrews 11:17ff
Hebrews 13:15f

James 1:17f
James 2:14-17
James 2:21-22

1 Peter 2:2

1 John 3:16f

Revelation 19:10

2 Corinthians 13:14*

Galatians 6:18

Ephesians 6:23-24

Philippians 4:7

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 (adapted)
1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
1 Thessalonians 5:28
2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
2 Thessalonians 3:16

Hebrews 13:20-21

5. The Elder As Teacher Presides

Last year we had quite an involved example of this presiding - or ruling - by the eldership within our Presbytery. Perhaps you're wondering what I'm speaking of. I know a number of elders have wondered how I could connect what took up so much of Presbytery's time, with the everyday work of the elders.

So, what was it that took up so much of Presbytery's time, and what is this vitally important matter that our elder's must manage?

I'm speaking of the preaching of God's Word in the public worship service, for it was the examination of a candidate to the ministry of the Word which took up three of our Presbytery meetings.

During that year it was interesting - and at times most disconcerting - to hear the comments that office bearers made during that process.

One of these comments was that they had not discussed examination sermons this way before. The idea of analysing sermons was something they either hadn't thought of, or had not thought too much of. "That's something we thought the ministers do."

a) You Direct!

Thinking this way, you may well wonder why I have the sub-title, "An Elder Presides". You would think that it's the minister who chairs and directs. The elders are kind've his assistants.

If I may say, that is being too Presbyterian! In their church government, the elder often is little more than an assistant. That is because the minister isn't actually accountable in the first instance to his local session - he's not even a member of the local church. He is a member of Presbytery, a body above and beyond the local church. Any concerns regarding his preaching or teaching, or his lifestyle, may only be dealt with through Presbytery. And their Presbyteries are made up mainly of ministers - serving and retired. Our Reformed Churches have always placed a tremendous importance of the eldership, and rightly so. While the minister may be especially blessed to be a teaching elder, the other kind of elder in no less. In fact, I put it to you that if those elders think themselves less, you have a church in much danger! The strength of the local congregation hinges, I believe, not on how good the minister preaches, or even how vibrant and active the congregation is, but on the strength and wisdom of her ruling eldership. When the Session is an effective ruling body, the Word is guarded, and very much applied into the hearts and lives of the congregation.

Still, it is one of those things you don't realise the blessing of until it's gone. Those who have come from pastor-dominated, or congregation-dominated, churches can tell you a story or two about that! And speaking personally, it was strongly Session-ruled church which gave me a blessed apprenticeship for the first twelve years of my ministry.

b) The Directions For Directing

Let's move on, then, to consider the oversight of the Word which is your calling, brethren. And let's do that using our synodically approved guidelines for sermon evaluation in a Presbytery examination. If you can, I would suggest, that you take time out during your next session meeting and/or men's prayer breakfast, to evaluate one of your minister's sermons this way (or another minister's, if appropriate).

GUIDELINES FOR SERMON EXAMINATIONS

I. The sermon content to be evaluated on the basis of the following:

Notice, the evaluation begins by a piece of objective data. It is a written document, which is to be assessed using an established criteria.

In an age when postmodernism tells us that everyone has their own 'story', which is what needs to be true for them, we declare the ultimate Story - His Story - the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. accuracy of exegesis;

In the first place, because this is an exposition of God's Word, it must open up the Word, also from the original languages, because they are where our translations come from.

While this may seem to require study of the Hebrew and Greek (and Aramaic), you can use an Interlinear Bible, and also compare different translations, to help evaluate this.

b. does the outline carry the text;

This speaks of the structure of the sermon. Does it have a clear theme? Is that theme reflecting the meaning of the text? Do the different parts of the sermon bring out that theme?

If you cannot see how it ties in with the text, and how it simply brings out the text, how is it meant to benefit the congregation?

c. is the context, including the historical redemptive, taken into account;

There is a saying, which goes, "A text without a context is a pretext." When a preacher does this, he makes the text say what he wants it to say, instead of letting the text tell him what to say.

This is where our heritage as Reformed Churches is a definite asset. It gives a good "Big Picture" to the Scriptures.

d. is the basic thrust Christ-centred;

Now, this is the ultimate picture. This is the Story that should echo through each time any part of scripture is proclaimed. On a pulpit in the United Kingdom there is a plaque nailed to it with this inscription, "Sir, we would see Christ." (John 12:21.) If the Bible is His Story, then we must see that, but see it correctly, too, not forced as some kind of tradition. Thus an Old Testament passage should show itself looking forward to Christ's coming, a Gospel passage bring out what Christ was fulfilling then, and a New

Testament epistle would look back on what Christ has done and what that now means for His people.

e. is the sermon doctrinally sound;

In some reformed-presbyterian traditions there is a great emphasis place on expounding the key doctrine in the text, at the expense of the text itself. This is something which I believe we should avoid, as it forces scripture in a particular western mold. But it does show that we should be able to usually glean a doctrine or doctrines from the text.

f. is the teaching applied in a manner consistent with the teaching of the text;

At the Reformed Theological College a sermon used to illustrate this involved Elijah and his 'need' of a holiday, when he rested after fleeing from Jezebel. This is a part of preaching where preachers can be keen to connect with the congregation, but go overboard in doing that.

The other danger is the opposite, where a justified application failed to be made, and God's people miss the real crunch of the text for them, those words which put "the rubber on the road."

g. is the theme developed in a coherent logical manner?

A question for you to think about in connection with this aspect: "What is it that all great sermons have in common?"

The answer is simple, because those sermons are exactly that - simple. Though they may deal with difficult texts, though they may be long in length, they are simple. Those hearing them don't realise how quickly the time has gone by because they were always able to follow the sermon.

II. Does the presentation show evidence of gifts of communication and is the presentation edifying for worship?

It has happened that men were not able to enter the ministry, or had to be demitted from the ministry, because of this point. The key word is "gifts". It is something which not everyone has. In fact, most don't have it. That's why the Lord outlines the way in His Word to discern those who do have it.

So, here we have the distinction between the ruling and the teaching elder. While the former certainly must be able to articulate his faith and what that faith means, it may not have those gifts which are able to expound the faith in public.

6. The Elder As Teacher Precedes

a) *The Elder of Service Is There*

Earliness Is An Attitude

An irritation for a Session and a congregation is a minister who turns up late for the worship service, and even more so when he habitually does that.

We should be just as unhappy, however, with the duty elder who does that too. It is his turn to be 'in charge'. And he cannot be in charge if he's not there. Thus, I would suggest that he should be at church the time people first begin arriving - even a little earlier, so that he can welcome them. This usually would involve a time of thirty minutes prior to the service.

Everything In Order

While the caretaker has usually got everything in hand, and there is welcoming person at the door, with the musicians sorting out their material, the duty elder is responsible for it all. Does he know who's on at the door? Is the minister's glass of water there? How about who is on the music tonight? Any announcements should be in his hand well beforehand (and not just in the minister's!).

b) The Elder of Service Leads in Prayer

A Brief Word for the Service

Part of the duty elder's responsibilities is the prayer with the minister and/or the session before the worship service. Please note, this is not the time for a congregational prayer. Nor should it be a personal prayer. For example, to pray "a blessing on this hour of worship", may be how long you would like it to be, but we shouldn't limit the Lord should we?

It's interesting to realise where the tradition behind this prayer comes from. It was in the nineteenth in the Netherlands, that a number of ministers and congregations broke away from the State Church. They were severely persecuted, and often prevented from even worshipping together. It was those elders who had that prayer before the service, so that the service itself would be able to take place.

c) The Elder of Service Does Care

Looks Out for Any Disruption

As the duty elder be aware of everything that goes on. If someone is suddenly ill, you know what to do. You know any appropriate medical personnel in the congregation then, where the fold-up bed is, the nearest telephone, and so on.

If there is a disturbance outside the worship area, be quick to deal with it. Your task to do whatever is possible to make the worship service peaceful. If there is any possible risk to your health, have a prearrangement with someone to come with you. If cars are being interfered with, perhaps arrange a car park roster, with a radio link to the worship service, if possible.

Does Not Himself Cause A Disruption

A situation for you to imagine. You are the duty elder, and the sermon has been a real shocker. In fact, you are incensed. It has openly attacked the position of your Session/congregation/denomination. You don't feel you can shake that minister's hand after such a service. So, you refuse, and you leave him facing the consequences of his own action when the service ends. Is this justified?

It most certainly is not, no matter how right the elder may be about what was in the sermon. The elder is not on his own. He is delegated by the Session, and so, if he has a problem with the minister the Session has allowed to preach, must take it up with Session. Perhaps that may be at the next Session meeting - even straight after that worship with the minister involved.