



# Organizing the Sermon

*By Jess Hall Jr.*

The purpose of the sermon often dictates the sermon's organizational structure. While each outline should have three main sections - introduction, body, and conclusion-there is a wide variation of structural approaches. For example, an architect may emphasize either function (what the building does) or form (what the building looks like). Either structure may have the same square footage and the same number of floors, but the end results are strikingly different. As with buildings, two sermons on the same text may vary immensely depending on the structural approach chosen.

For example, a deductive approach may be used to appeal to the mind. A deductive structure begins with a biblical principle from which it moves to the hearers' needs. The thesis is stated in the introduction; the points in the body prove it to be true; the conclusion calls for action based upon the truth established. The sermon is logical and linear in the development of the thesis.

On the other hand, an inductive approach may be fused to appeal more to the hearers' experience. An inductive structure begins with the hearers' experience and moves to the text or logical truth. The thesis is stated in the conclusion. It has been compared to a good mystery novel-who did it is revealed in the last chapter. The inductive approach is valuable when preaching to unbelievers who do not accept the authority of scripture. The sermon begins with their experiences, establishes principles based upon those experiences that they admit to be true. and then takes them to a text that invokes the same principle. To deny the truth of the text they must deny the admitted truth of their own experience.

Proper structural organization does not happen accidentally-it is the most demanding aspect of sermon preparation. But it is also the most rewarding. Working through the process has benefits for both the pulpit and the pew that make the sermon more powerful. If it refines the relationship between the points in the preacher's mind, will it not do the same in the hearers' minds? If it enables the preacher to view the sermon as a whole and provide a sense of unity, can it do less for the hearers? If it crystallizes the sermon's points so that they are presented to the hearers in the proper sequence, will they not be more easily remembered?

A preacher's failure to communicate with his hearers may result from several things (e.g. poor diction, poor grammar, poor delivery). Thus, while proper organization does not guarantee good communication, poor organization guarantees failure (no matter what a captive, polite audience may say at the door, and no matter what "spit and polish" a preacher may bring to the pulpit).

The preacher who wants to feel better about himself, his sermons, and his hearers, and who wants to help his hearers drink from the Living Water, will take time to properly organize his sermons.

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