

## ***Artizo Discussion Paper – Section: Teaching God’s Word***

### **The Pointy End of Application**

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Probably more exacting than us modern preachers, Puritan divines were careful in ‘applying’ the biblical text. Though it was a familiar pattern, there was a refreshing directness as the Puritan preacher typically laid out the passage’s “doctrine” before expounding its “uses.”

One aspect of this second step was the practice of targeting specific groups within the congregation. By doing this, the preacher can then make pointed application to their ‘cases.’ If this sounds new to you, William Perkins (in “The Art of Prophesying”) can help get you started. Below I’ve summarized the seven main targets he suggests for application, with a paragraph of his further explanation.

**1. Those who are unbelievers and are both ignorant and unteachable** These must first of all be prepared to hear the doctrine of the word. This preparation should be partly by discussing or reasoning with them, in order to become aware of their attitude and disposition, and partly by reproofing any obvious sin, so that their consciences may be aroused and touched by fear and they may become teachable (Acts 9:3-5; 16:27-41; 17:17; 17:22-24). When there is some hope that they have become teachable and prepared, the message of God’s Word is to be given to them, usually in basic terms concentrating on general points.

**2. Those who are teachable, but ignorant** . Milk must be set before babes, that is those who are immature or weak in knowledge...Milk is a brief, plain and general explanation of the principles of the faith: that we must believe in one God, and in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that we must rely only upon the grace of God in Christ; that we ought to believe in the forgiveness of sins; and when we are taught that we ought to repent, to abstain from evil and do good.

**3. Those who have knowledge, but have never been humbled.** Here we need to see the foundation of repentance stirred up in what Paul calls godly sorrow (1 Cor 7:8-10). Godly sorrow is grief for sin simply because it is sin. To stir up this affection, the ministry of the law is necessary.

**4. Those who have already been humbled.** Here we must carefully consider whether the humbling that has already taken place is complete and sound or only just begun and still light

and superficial.....Faith and repentance and the comforts of the gospel ought to be taught and offered to those who have been fully humbled (Mat 9:13; Luke 4:18; Acts 2:37)

**5. Those who already believe.** We must teach them i) the gospel; ii) the law: but as it applies to those who are no longer under a curse; iii) the opposition of the law to their remaining sin

**6. Those who have fallen back.** A fall from apprehending Christ leads to despair. In order to restore such we need to diagnose their condition and then prescribe the remedy. We must analyse either the cause of their temptation or of their condition.

**7. Churches with both believers and unbelievers.** This may be the typical situation in our congregations. Any doctrine may be expounded to them, either from the law or the gospels....This was what the prophets did in their sermons, when they announced judgment and destruction on the wicked and promised deliverance in the Messiah to those who repented.

Questions:

- 1) What is the purpose of application in a sermon?
- 2) Should we always apply in a sermon.
- 3) How do we know if our applications are not doing what they are supposed to?
- 4) What is the most helpful thing to you as a preacher from this passage?
- 5) How do you determine if an application of a bible passage is faithful or unfaithful to the passage?