

Applying the Main Argument for Transformation

I. We start with ourselves but are called to help each other with sin

Last lesson we saw how we must start with applying the text to our own hearts and lives. The truth must change us. We want to people people of faith who live in light of our convictions with a clear conscience. We want our hearts sensitive to God's Word. Only after we have sought to apply the truth to ourselves should we seek to help others with it.

We can't see clearly to take the speck out of our brother's eye until we take the log out of our own!

Matthew 7:3-5

Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

We are called to bear one another's burdens by gently restoring each other, after looking to ourselves first.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

If we see our brother in sin, we should privately go and show him his fault.

Matthew 18:15

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

We all should be teaching and admonishing one another

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

We can be living out of step with the gospel we believe. That means that the gospel has clear implications that we need to live in light of.

Galatians 2:14

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

II. Two dangers as we move toward application

Some people love truth and doctrine and are wary of application. Others are quick to apply the text without rightly understanding it.

- A. But we must apply the Word because it was all written for transformation

All Scripture is useful

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

All Scripture was written for our instruction

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

All Scripture accomplishes God's intent for it

Isaiah 55:11

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

If we don't see how a particular passage is life giving and transforming, we don't understand it yet!

- B. And before we apply it, we must properly understand every passage's intent

- i. The goal: to Synthesize the Main Argument

We want to get to the point where we can summarize a passage into a single sentence. Boiling a passage down to a single sentence forces us to wrestle out what are the most important truths. And these are the truths we focus on explaining when teaching.

Finding the Main Argument forces us to not just use our favorite part of the text, but the heart of the text. Ancillary truths not related to the main argument can easily miss the point and be misapplied.

It can be helpful to have a longer Main Argument that captures more of the details of the text and shows how they all relate together. But then we also want to be able to summarize the whole passage in a short sentence of 10 words or less so that it's clear we see what the most important ideas are.

- ii. The Main Argument of our talk should be the Main Argument of the passage

We don't want to use a passage in a way other than the author intended. We want to handle and use Scripture carefully. 2 Peter 3:16 warns about the danger of 'twisting' Paul's writings, which implies not using it straightforwardly as intended. That distorts the meaning.

- iii. Table Discussion: In six words or less, how would you articulate the Main Argument of Ephesians 4:17-24?

iv. Table Discussion Part Two: What are the PROs and CONs of these Sample Summaries? Which one do you think best captures the passage (or one of your own)?

- Be renewed like Christ through truth
- Wear your new self embodying truth
- Discard deceitful desires for Christlike renewal

III. People need to see the point for themselves from the text

The preacher's job is to **minimize his own opinions** and deliver the **truth of God**. Every sermon should **explain** the Bible and then **apply** it to people's lives.

The preacher should do that in a way that enables you to **see** that the points he is making **actually come from the Bible**. If you can't see that they come from the Bible, your **faith** will end up resting on a **man** and not on **God's word**.

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-i-mean-by-preaching>

Piper Preaching Quote

A. Teaching and Exhortation

We are called to exhort each other every day. God's truth applies to the heart.

Hebrews 3:12-14

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end...

Paul pleaded with Philemon concerning Onesimus.

Philemon 1:9

...yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you— since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

If you're talking to your friend, trying to help them not to get a divorce, you shouldn't just unemotionally give facts and reasons. Truth matters, so there should be exhortation. Truth can never be dry, like it doesn't matter. But if it's all emotion with no truth, you can't really help someone. The Greeks broke down the three types of appeal in argumentation into *ethos* (an appeal to credibility), *pathos* (an appeal to emotion), and *logos* (an appeal to reason). While as believers *logos* is what has the true weight since we are driven by the truth, our emotion and credibility are not irrelevant.

Table Discussion: In your own argumentation what do you tend to lean on most? Raw unemotional facts? Emotional appeal? Appeals to experts? Something else?

B. So we persuade people

Our goal is not merely to dump facts on people, but to argue from the text of Scripture with how the truth should change them. What we are persuading people of is the Main Argument of a text. The Holy Spirit is the One who applies the truth, but we are called to persuade with it.

Since we want them to see the truth for themselves we must explain the text. Must must walk people through enough of the exegesis of the passage so they can see what God means for themselves.

So we seek to persuade men and hold their conscience in light of the day when everyone will be judged for everything that we have done.

2 Corinthians 5:10-12

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.

Paul was constantly reasoning and persuading with Scripture

Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4; 19:8; 28:23

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures...

So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

Furthermore, people are not simply called to obey and submit to leaders, but (literally in Greek) to be persuaded and yield to them. This implies not a blind adherence to them, but a humility that seeks to understand the Word they are teaching and to allow that Word to shape us.

Hebrews 13:17; 13:7

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Paul wants to see faith working out through love. So he equates running the Christian life well with being persuaded by the truth. To be driven by faith you have to believe in and be convinced of what you live for.

Galatians 5:6-8

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.

Even when confronting heretical false teachers the correction should be gentle and winsome.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

True transformation comes through the Holy Spirit applying God's Word to peoples' hearts. So remember the close connection between God's Word and His Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18-19

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord...

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

IV. Direct vs Indirect Application

But we also need to be careful in what we try to convince people of, since we represent God.

Whatever goal the original author was trying to accomplish in his hearers' lives **will apply** to us in our lives. God's truth is always intended to be lived out. The question is "How?" Some texts are more geared towards changing our worldview than a specific action. If the point of a text is to change the way we think, we may have to help people think about what to do with that truth. So there are different kinds of application. There are direct applications (where the Bible is telling us what to do) and indirect applications (where the Bible is telling us how to think).

A direct application is an application or command that is in the text itself we feel or preach with force and power because it's clear in the Word of God. But we need to be careful about understanding or preaching an indirect application of a text as if it is God's Word. That is overstepping God's Word. If we teach an (indirect) application of the text as if it is the text, we have overstepped God's authority and are not teaching faithfully. All of the direct application of the text should be the convictions we saw in the previous lesson. But not all texts have direct applications, some text don't have clear and direct commands, but are focused on changing our thinking.

A. Examples of direct application

Paul teaches that we have been bought with a price, and therefore since God owns us we should honor God with our bodies. The application is clear and direct and in the text, "Don't fornicate."

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that God will take care of His children, and exhorts the disciples therefore not to worry. The application is direct and in the text itself, "Don't worry."

Matthew 6:30-32

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

B. Examples of indirect application

One of the principles that is clear in Luke 16 is that everything is God's and He wants us to be good stewards of it. We could help people think about possible applications to their life like, "It may be wise to talk to your spouse before a large purchase to help think through your motives and reasons." Or "Think about whether an expensive car actually furthers God's kingdom or is just a selfish purchase for comfort." But God's Word doesn't tell us to do these things, and so we cannot think about or teach these kinds of applications as if they are actual commands of God.

Luke 16:10-12

"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"

Or a classic example, many passages of Scripture call us to pray, even unceasingly. A fine application to put forward for people to think about is, it may be good to start off your day with prayer to help remember and live in light of Him. But praying first thing in the morning is not a command from God, and that would be wrong to think or preach it as right and wrong.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

...pray without ceasing...

- C. Table discussion: Is telling someone that because Ephesians 4:19 warns us about 'greediness,' that we shouldn't get a job as a high paying CEO a direct or indirect application? What about telling someone that the word in Ephesians 4:19 for 'sensuality' means a lack of self-constraint, and that anything that we feel like we 'have to have' is an idol? Which of these should hold the weight of everyone's consciences?
- D. The Old Testament doesn't directly apply in the same way to us as the New Testament

We also have to beware of trying to directly apply an OT command to a believer since we are no longer under the Law. So even if an application *was direct* to the original audience of Israel, many or most of those applications will **not** be direct to believers in the church age.

We have died to the Law.

Galatians 2:19; 5:18

For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Romans 7:4

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Christ is the end of the Law, so that we live by faith.

Romans 10:4

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:14, 6:2

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 13:10

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

1 Corinthians 9:21

...to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

An illustration of the OT Law: If you were building a house in Montana, you wouldn't be under California's building codes. You wouldn't have to follow them at all, you wouldn't be held accountable for breaking them. However, there are some universal principles about building. So while you are not under California's building code, it could be helpful to read and understand it. Especially if the same author wrote both Montana's and California's building code, it might help you to better understand Montana's building code. Or imagine you wanted to make your house especially earthquake safe for some reason, reading California's building code might shed insight on how to do that.

So too as believers, we aren't under the OT Law. We have died to it in fact. But we are under the Law of Christ. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. We are required to love. But the OT Law still reveals God's values and plan. So even though we aren't under it, it's extremely helpful to understand God's worldview.

There are two dangers of throwing out the Law, or holding closely to it.

V. Rules can't motivate transformation

We want people to change to become more like Christ, but that doesn't happen through simply telling people what to do and how to live.

The Law exposes our sinful passions, which is good, but doesn't transform us. Only the Spirit does that by faith.

Romans 7:5-6

For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

We don't get saved by faith and then grow by works. The same faith that saves us, changes us.

Galatians 3:3-5

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain— if indeed it was in vain? So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Strict rules appear to produce real transformation because externals change, but they have absolutely no value in changing the heart.

Colossians 2:20-23

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)— in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

VI. Don't go beyond Scripture

We don't have the authority to command what God doesn't. It's easy to think that extra commands can't be bad, they just safeguard people from sin. But that's not true. Adding commands beyond what Scripture gives makes it about changing people to our image, not God's. Legalism is deadly, it's a burden no one can bear.

Because God is the one who will judge the intentions of the heart in the end, we should not pass judgment before the time. Therefore we cannot go beyond Scripture in evaluating right and wrong, which is arrogant.

1 Corinthians 4:1-7

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

When we judge someone based on our opinion rather than what God clearly says, that is in effect proudly declaring that we know better than God how someone should live. We think God should have included a command in the Word that He didn't. So when we go beyond God's Word we actually make ourselves out to be God.

James 4:10-12

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

Scripture can rightly be applied by people all over the globe from a multitude of different cultures. If the principle or rule you are putting on someone shouldn't be applied to all believers worldwide, it's not a Timeless Gospel Principle. Even something that seems like it is an obvious application may just be cultural. For example, our definition of being on time. Some cultures don't even have watches! The gospel can be beautifully embodied in every culture in the world. A good question to ask ourselves is, "What would this look like if lived out in Africa, India, South America, etc...?"

VII. Discussion Questions

Everyone share their main argument of Ephesians 4:17-24 to your audience. Go around and encourage what each other did well, and interact about what other aspects of the passage could or should have been included that their statement missed.

What would be a legitimate application we could personally come away from Ephesians 4:17-24 with that would be illegitimate to impose on someone else? Why?