

# Homiletics: Rightly Handling Scripture - Part 5

by Tim Conway

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*Handling Scripture correctly is essential for maintaining credibility and authority as a preacher, requiring precision, accuracy, and attention to detail.*

**Duration:** 30:44

**Scripture:** Proverbs 30:5

**Topics:** "Biblical Interpretation", "Preaching Effectively"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of handling Scripture accurately and seeking perfection in articulating the truth of God. It discusses the credibility of preachers when presenting information, the need for precise handling of Scripture, and the impact of making inaccurate statements on the listeners' perception and understanding of God's Word.

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## Transcript

From this point on, I really want to begin to talk about handling Scripture, handling the text, asking questions of the text. And I just want to ask you guys a question right off. Did Paul, when he was still called Saul, while he made that well-known trip down what we call the Damascus Road, did Paul fall off a horse when the Lord spoke to him? Last time we met two weeks ago, I said he fell off a horse.

Did he fall off a horse? Does it matter if he did? It does matter as far as the credibility, even in a minute detail like that. Right, the reason I'm bringing that up, I'm bringing that up for a reason. When I said that, I immediately thought, I mean, you know, you're talking, Spurgeon could talk and have eight separate thoughts going on in his brain at once.

Now, I can talk and have a thought going on in my brain at the same time, but probably not eight, probably not two. It's probably enough for me to talk to you about one thing and be thinking about another thing in my brain. But when I said that, I was actually thinking, the night before I watched the latest Martin Luther movie, and it showed him walking up the trail in the thunderstorm, and the lightning hit, and he fell down.

Well, Luther was not walking, Luther was on a horse. Ruby, our guy is back. You want to grab that door? Okay.

Yep, Ruby, would you go test the internet? Just pull up the internet on your laptop there. So, I was saying, why'd they make the movie and show him not on a horse when he was on a horse? Well, I suppose it's

easier to fall down if you're acting than to fall off a horse, but people fall off horses all the time in movies, so why not portray it right? Anyways, I had that in my mind. Here's an instance where he's on the trail, the whatever road to wherever, and he thinks the Lord comes to him in a bolt of lightning, or at least the Lord's sending him a message, and you know he cried out, not to the Lord, but to Saint Catherine or whatever, and committed to going to the monastery at that point.

But I was saying, he was on a horse. Why didn't they put him on a horse? Why are they showing him not on a horse? And then, Tawfiq preaching just a couple weeks back, had actually mentioned Paul falling off a horse, and I had that in my mind. And then when I said it, I said, my mind was going through the three accounts in the book of Acts.

It's Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. You get the three different... The first time that it actually happened, and then you get the two accounts that Paul gives. None of them say that he was on a horse.

In fact, here's what's very interesting, is actually after he was struck blind, he was led by the others by hand. Which, if they had horses... Now you might say, well, when the Lord appeared, the horses were scared and ran away. Okay, whatever.

But anyways, none of the texts say there was a horse. And the fact is, if there were horses, they very likely would have gotten on the horses, and the horse would have been led along by... You know, the horse would have followed the other horses, or you just hold the reins and you pull the horse along. They wouldn't have had to lead him by his hand.

He was obviously being led on foot, which is probably a very good indicator that there weren't any horses. But, much like Jesus, falling under the cross never happened. There's no biblical evidence for it.

There's no biblical evidence that Jesus fell. And yet, when you hear Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones, they both make reference to Jesus falling under the cross. I don't like that.

Now, that doesn't make me necessarily lose respect for these guys as preachers, because they've already kind of established themselves as premium preachers. Men that walked with God. Men that are very respectable.

Men who you can allow on that little gaffe. But you know what? Most of us are not. All of us are not like those guys.

And when we say things like that, what it does is it brings down the credibility level. And I'm bringing this up because, men, we want to be exact. We want to seek perfection here.

You want to articulate the truth of God exactly. You want to do your research. You don't want to make clumsy statements.

Because I'll tell you this, you talk about obstacles. Not only do you put obstacles in the way of people, if they know things about your life that aren't upright and righteous and Christ-like. You put obstacles in front of people if you say things from the pulpit that aren't true.

Here's a problem. You can say one thing like that that's not true, and then go on to say a bunch of things that are true. But you've put up an obstacle now, and the force you would have had, the authority you would have had is lost.

And look, that happens. When I hear a guy in the pulpit, and he is making clumsy statements, he's making just obviously untrue statements. And quite honestly, I've heard some of the more beginner preachers in the last six months or so, not all, but I've heard some make errors that are far greater than whether Paul was on a horse or not.

Far greater. I mean, statements that just foundationally are not true. And certainly wasn't gotten from the text.

It's just guys preaching their own opinions and saying things. And sometimes I almost get the feeling that sometimes when guys stand in the pulpit, it's just they start talking, and they're talking, and they're talking, and things are coming out. And it's like stuff gets mixed in there that shouldn't be coming out.

And when that happens, it's like okay, all the fences are up, all the guards are up, and all the obstacles are up. Because now I can't, I personally, it's not that I can't sort out the truth that is going to be forthcoming after that. It's I'm just on edge now that I'm not certain that, you know, I'm just not certain what's going to come out of this guy because there's stuff coming out that's not right.

And I think all of you can probably relate to that. When you are a listener, and you hear somebody from the pulpit, and they claim something, they state something, they assert something, and you know it's not true. I mean, basically, I don't know how it is with you guys.

Maybe some of you guys can just pass by that real easily. To me, it's an obstacle. To me, it just tells me shoddy preparation, shoddy handling of Scripture.

We want to seek to be precise. As we're going to talk now about handling Scripture, guys, you've got to do your homework. You've got to do your homework.

And you've got to make sure when you stand in the pulpit that you are not simply filling blank spaces with fluff that's untested and unproven by Scripture. You know, we can go in and we can study, and then we stand in the pulpit, and outside of what we confirm by Scripture, we may have some ideas about something, but we didn't track it down. We didn't sufficiently investigate.

Look, you stand in the pulpit, you're there as an ambassador of Christ. You're there to speak for God. You have a high calling.

And you do not want to stand in that pulpit and say, and you don't want to downplay whether or not somebody fell off a horse, and you stand and say that he did. You want to be very careful. Look, if you say traditionally, because traditionally, it is thought that he fell off a horse.

Just like traditionally, it is thought that Christ stumbled under the cross. If you want to say that you know it can't be substantiated in Scripture, but it's a commonly held view that this happened. Okay.

It's just like this idea that the wise men, the magi, came to the stable and to the manger. That didn't happen. You know, you can say, well, it's basically commonly held that this happened, but it's erroneous.

I mean, that isn't only something that's commonly held to, but the Scripture doesn't have anything to say about. That's something that's commonly held to and Scripture very blatantly shows us that it's not true. So, I have a question.

So this is what I'm thinking. I want you to either, like, do you agree or do you think it's wrong? Does that free up someone if they go the extra mile? You would say to say, now I know traditionally, this is what it means. Does that kind of back up their credibility in that it shows that they've done the work and they're not just, they're not just mouthing all these things and they kind of prove to you that they've done work.

Whereas if they just say it without clarifying that, they leave room for you to be thinking, well, they didn't do what I took the time to do when I read that passage. Would you say that that's what frees up and maintains credibility when they at least make that reference? What maintains credibility because you recognize that the guy has thought through what he's saying. He doesn't clumsily or lazily just throw things out there.

Because the thing is, if a guy makes a statement and he sets something forth as factual when I know that it's not, see, now I'm on high alert. What else is the guy going to say? Is this going to go further? It tells me something about a man's handling of Scripture. And so, all I'm saying is it throws up an obstacle.

Because now rather than, look, there are some men while they're preaching, you're not sitting on edge worried that some untruth is going to come fired off that pulpit. You're hearing and it's coming with authority and it's being backed by the Word and you see it and it's there and it's like God's dealing with you and you're not worried about the truthfulness of what's being said because it's being affirmed to you over and over and over and over. But when a man stands up and he begins to say things that are questionable or that he's not proving or that the vast majority of the audience knows just simply isn't true, you now have a man that's in the pulpit and he is not having a great effect with the people.

Now, it's true that some people may say some things from the pulpit that the vast majority of people, you know, they don't know about and so it kind of goes over their head. But look, I had a professor in engineering school, Dr. Ari Gurr. He was the professor I had for machine design.

He said this, when you design a machine, every part of it should be designed with a purpose. Everything you do, every member in the frame, every piece in the machinery, everything should have a purpose. And I would say the same thing in constructing a sermon.

Everything should be constructed with a purpose. What you say in the pulpit should not just be fluff. It shouldn't just be filler.

It shouldn't just be because I don't have anything else to say. I've got to say something about it. We should be calculated.

We should be saying what we say because we're seeking to set forth this message of God and it should be done well. And when you start mixing error in, that's not done well because you're representing God. And if you're saying things that simply are not true, you're stressing your own opinions as though it's universal law.

One of the things that we have to do as preachers when we're confronted by certain commandments or certain principles in Scripture, we have to figure out how do I apply this to brothers and sisters without legalistically reading my own interpretation into this and applying it to people? Like for instance, yes, here's a text that deals with modesty. Oh God, help us to be able to preach modesty without preaching legalistically. Or here's a guy who is not rich towards God.

He was condemned for that. Jesus is over here saying lay up treasure in heaven. I just recently received an email from a guy that says, I have a friend and he and his wife just got nursing jobs and they're out of school now and they're buying a really nice house.

And he basically felt like he needed to rebuke him for buying this house. He was asking me how to do it. And I said, quite honestly, I don't think you should do it.

You need to leave it alone. This guy needs to walk before the Lord. I mean, who are you to say he's not being rich towards God because he buys a nice house? It might be, but to say that is just simply legalistic.

And so, we're all watching and we're all listening. And what happens is guys can say things that put up obstructions to us being really convicted. If a guy is preaching on money or a guy's preaching on modesty and he's just setting forth one opinion after another and he just keeps doing it as though it's God's law, as though Scripture actually said this, it's not coming across with authority because I'm thinking this isn't true.

Not only pastorally, I'm not only thinking this isn't true, I'm thinking this is misleading the people. This is this guy preaching his opinion. No, I mean, obviously if we see too much of it, if things are happening to a certain degree, one of several things is going to happen, either among us elders, we'll just recognize this guy shouldn't be in the pulpit or we might talk to somebody.

I mean, once in a while. We all have to be discerning. We all have to be Berean.

We're all going to hear things that come forth from the pulpit. You know, I can hear things that come from John MacArthur all day long that I don't agree with. I've heard Piper say some things I don't agree with.

I mean, we all disagree with some things. Lloyd-Jones has certain views on baptism, which he didn't think baptism was that big of a deal and I would probably take issue there. I don't know, but this will take us kind of on the other side.

If you don't want to answer it, that's fine. What's the right way to respond to in the local church? Like if an established preacher who's proven himself to have some type of a giftedness with a life that's holy and qualified, what's the right way to address and love that brother, preacher, teacher in a way where you kind of let them know that you took that as an obstacle because you don't want to be having those obstacles while you're receiving God's word from him. And what's the right response that you might have if someone, say, for example, came up to you and said, hey, you said that and the text doesn't say that.

So how should somebody address that? And how should the preacher respond? Well, the thing is if somebody comes and says... like the incidents with the horse. I was thinking in my mind when I said it. I was scanning those three chapters in Acts and I had a question, but James is actually the one that called me out on it.

Even though in my own mind, I was calling myself out. None of you guys knew that, but James is actually the one who called me out on it. I said, you're absolutely right.

I was wrestling in my own mind over Luther that I had watched the night before. And Luther and Paul were kind of... and then I had heard Tawfiq say it from the pulpit. And then I looked it up to say, and I saw it was historically, it's been something like Jesus falling under the cross.

It's basically a commonly held to belief that isn't warranted from Scripture. But if somebody comes up and they ask, if I did make a statement like that, I'm immediately going to say, and the likelihood is that if I said something wrong, I want to be pretty calculated in the things that I say from the pulpit. That doesn't mean that sometimes I don't feel like God kind of carries me away.

But typically, if I say something that's questionable, I know it. And so if you come up afterwards, I'm going to say, I wondered about that when I said it. It's probably not going to be very common, but it may be.

I mean, it could happen and it could happen with others as well that there's just a total blind spot. I mean, something was said and it's like, but sometimes it's opinion. I mean, sometimes there are people who say, you reference this text in a way that if you actually go look at the context where it was used, it isn't actually used that way.

But see, the reality is, there are principles in Scripture that get applied to specific situations, that that general principle can be applied to this other situation too. And even though I'm quoting it from over here where it's used specifically with regards to that, it doesn't negate the fact that in a general use, I can use it over here too. And some guys like to be very particular there.

Well, in context, this is the way it's used over here. Yeah, but as a general principle, that applies over here too. And so, you're wanting to be very particular there, but I would claim my own liberty to take biblical principles and to use them more broadly.

And I think that we have that liberty because I think we can look at certain principles in Scripture and find that they are in fact used like that in Scripture. Certain principles where, even the way New Testament authors sometimes quote certain texts from the Old Testament, they're taking a principle and they're using it in the New. Where when you look in the Old, you kind of scratch your head and say, ah, it doesn't seem to me that that's exactly how He was using it.

But He's taking a principle, applying it over here. So, I could say something. Kind of like how the pastor that's preaching from the pulpit, and say if he's preaching from a text and the majority of the congregation really doesn't know the context of it, and he kind of just takes it out of place and misapplies it as authority from it.

Like for instance, I mean, I won't say anything, but for example, the Lord's anointing. That's a good one. One of the elders I've heard at my church, personally, he was preaching on Philemon, that little epistle.

And there's this slave in there, Anasimus, that was, I guess, the slave of Philemon. And he ends up running off, you know, and now it's tied up with Paul. And then Paul sends him back with the letter or the epistle.

Well, you know how back in the day, if the slave was going to be the master, he's imprinting them as fugitive. Well, they use it in such a way where, and it didn't sit right with me, like how you're saying to put up barriers, is that he was using that to a reference that the brothers and sisters fall away from the faith or whatever. Don't stamp that fugitive like the Philemon would have done too.

And for me, I could be wrong, but I was thinking how he was misimplying that because Anasimus wasn't even saved. And he was referencing that to his brothers and sisters. Right, it's a bad parallel.

Because you're right, Anasimus was a lost slave until he crossed paths with Paul. Working with Paul, or coming in contact with Paul, he was converted. And then he began to, it seems like, be a help to Paul.

And then Paul recognizing he was a slave that actually belonged to him, and now he's converted, he sent him back. And yeah, you're right. It's not a good parallel.

But I mean, we could go up to him and say... Alright, that's mishandling Scripture. There is, I mean, yes, if we're seeing some guy mishandle Scripture, I'm just saying in this case, if I take a general principle and it's used in a very specific way, to take that same general principle and apply it in another situation, I don't think that's mishandling Scripture. To actually take something and apply it in a situation that it doesn't even have a parallel with.

I mean, because here's the thing. We need to compare Scripture with Scripture. And so if we're going to start talking about not branding fugitive on brothers and sisters who fall away, well, I would just say this.

Why are you going to Philemon when it's not even about a brother or sister who's fallen away? It's about a lost guy who gets saved and is sent back to his master. Why are you even using that text when there are plenty of texts that talk about people falling away? So why are you trying in an obscure fashion to apply something that doesn't even apply when there's all sorts of texts that deal with people who do fall away? You've got texts that deal with shipwreck, texts that deal with antichrists who go out from us who were never of us. I mean, you've got this reality of people defecting.

You've got the parable of the soils. I mean, then you've got disciplinary passages. People that fall into sin and how they're dealt with by the church.

I guess I would just wonder why go there. Obviously, he's wanting to make a case for something that if he really sought to compare Scripture with Scripture and compare other places, what he would find out is what he's teaching is actually probably not supportive. Okay, guys, why don't we at least pray here at the end as we wrap up with prayer.

Father, I pray that days, weeks, months, years, as we move forward, Lord, I pray that grace would truly be gifted with teachers, preachers, who are called of You, who are vessels fit to be used of You, that are cleansed and holy, prayerful, gifted. Lord, we pray for laborers. We pray that You would raise up such men.

We pray men from this group, Lord, may the gifts be honed, our dependence on You be ever deepening. Lord, we pray that if any of us here are being smothered by a pride that hinders from greater usefulness, Lord, we don't doubt more prayer would make us more useful. More holiness would make us more useful.

We pray for these things, whether it's useful in preaching or in any other thing that we do, that we would not be ineffectual and unfruitful in whatever part of our life, whatever things You bring into our life. Lord, we're specifically meeting for the sake of preaching, preachers, sermons. We pray that Your hand would be upon us for good.

Move us forward in these things. May there be an excelling, a reaching higher, deeper. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

So like I said, men, next time we really want to start nailing asking questions of the text. This is key to producing sermons. We've got to ask proper questions.

I'm just going to leave this thought with you. You guys think about this over the next two weeks. When you present, see these questions that you ask of the text, you want to take into the pulpit at least some of them.

You want to bring them up. When people that are listening to a sermon are confronted by a difficulty, it sets their minds on edge. People will sleep if you just blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

When you actually present difficulties, present dilemmas, present problems, it's amazing how the mind engages. We want to do that in our study and we want to bring that into the pulpit with us. Seeking to get to the root.

People that don't ask questions don't really go that deep. They don't go near as deep. People that ask questions, scientists that really make the greatest inventions are always asking the questions at the deepest level.

How, how, how, what, why, where, when? And so, anyway, that's where we're headed next time. Lord willing.

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