A COMPARISON OF LISTENERS' PREFERENCES  
FOR INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE SERMONS  
DELIVERED IN THE UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH OF  
SAULT STE. MARIE, ONTARIO

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Jeffrey Paul Hoag  
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ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF LISTENERS’ PREFERENCES FOR INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE SERMONS DELIVERED IN THE UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH OF SAULT STE. MARIE, ONTARIO

by

Jeffrey Paul Hoag

This research project examined listeners' preferences for two sermonic forms, inductive and deductive, as demonstrated in a series of sermons delivered in the United Baptist Church of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. "Sermon preference," in this study, was determined by twenty-five participants chosen from an alphabetical listing of regular attenders. Participants were not informed of the purpose of the research until the end of the project.

The project was designed so that participants could evaluate the sermons in three ways: through a questionnaire to be completed immediately following each sermon, during individual interviews, and during one group interview. The sermons included three of each form, inductive and deductive, and were preached in alternating fashion over six consecutive Sundays. The completed questionnaires were gathered each Sunday, and the interviews took place over a two week period following the conclusion of the series.

Research findings showed that there was a strong preference for the deductive sermon form, which was said
to be effective because of its clear statement of the sermon’s central idea during the introduction, and its frequent use of sermon points. The inductive sermons were said to be effective as well, but not as effective as the deductive sermons. Strengths of the inductive sermons were their appeal to the personal experiences of the listeners, vivid illustrations, rhetorical questions, and the use of narrative. Toward the conclusion of the project, participants were told the purpose of the research. At this point, they still saw the deductive sermon form as more effective, but acknowledged that the two forms might be combined with good results.

INDEX WORDS: Preaching, Homiletics, Sermon, Sermon Form, Sermon Structure, Inductive Preaching, Deductive Preaching, Sermon Evaluation, Sermon Feedback Group
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This project-dissertation is concerned with that particular form of Christian discourse known as "the sermon." A functional definition of "sermon" is "a religious discourse delivered in public, usually by a clergyman, as a part of a worship service" (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary 1971 792 s.v. "sermon"). Though brief, this definition adequately states the meaning of the word as it is used in this project-dissertation, with only minimal qualification as will be shown below.

Others, however, notably preachers and teachers of preaching (homiletics), might accept such a dictionary definition but would prefer to begin any discussion on sermons by defining, not "sermon," but "preaching." For example, preaching has been defined as "the communication of truth by man to men...(having) two elements, truth and personality" (Brooks 1877, 5). Or, similarly, preaching is "the truth of God voiced by a chosen personality to meet human needs" (Blackwood 1948, 13). Or, more recently, preaching is "poetic speech...(It is) shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always to new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities" (Brueggemann
1989, 6). Or to place preaching within the context of the believing community at worship, preaching is "peculiar speech." It is continuing conversation, Sunday by Sunday "with the baptized or about to be baptized" (Willimon 1992, 1-23). These citations illustrate the vividness with which several homiletitians define "preaching," and the urgency with which they do so, evidenced by how early such definitions appear in their books.

Furthermore, those who have an interest in sermons and write about them often include in their works brief histories of preaching. One work, for example, finds the roots of Christian preaching in the Old Testament prophetic tradition, which was later influenced by Greek rhetoric as well as the synagogue system leading up to the time of Christ (Brown, Clinard and Northcutt 1963, 18-22). Elsewhere, one may find a fuller development of the history of Christian preaching dating after the time of Christ (Stott 1982, 15-47).

The point being made here is that many writers in the field of homiletics do not define "sermon" except implicitly, but, rather, exercise great care in defining "preaching," and tracing its theological and historical development. Such authors usually include discussions about sermon development in their latter pages, where practical considerations are addressed. These may include: choosing a text for a sermon, writing introductions and conclusions,
using humour in a sermon, the delivery of a sermon, and even sermon length (Stott 1982, 211-295). But the assumption in such books seems to be that the reader knows what a sermon is once preaching is defined and defended.

"A sermon," defined by the researcher after even the most cursory survey of books on homiletics, is "that which is preached." Or, to be specific, "a sermon is a self-contained unit of preaching, usually having an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, communicated orally within the context of religious worship." This definition is not too different from the definition previously cited, but emphasises with greater clarity that: a sermon is dependent upon human speech; a sermon generally has some kind of form, or structure; a sermon is preached within a context (or contexts, see Craddock 1985, 31-50). These emphases were further explored during the course of this research.

The above definition also raised questions of a practical nature in parish ministry. For example, if a sermon is human speech, what part, if any, does an audience play in the process of communication? In the area of context, sermons are assumed, here, to be communicated most often in a worship service. The assembled congregation, however, is made up of people who have come from a week (or more) of life situations that may bear no resemblance to a worship service. How can a sermon have meaning for such people? And as to sermon form, can the "shape" of the sermon (and
its constituent parts, called "moves" by David Buttrick 1987, 23, 24) have any bearing on the effectiveness with which it is communicated to an audience? Can sermon form help or hinder people in their hearing, understanding, and application of sermonic material? These are the kinds of questions that drove this research.

Problem and Purpose Statement

Several years ago I enrolled in a Doctor of Ministry Course on homiletics. One of the required texts for the course was Ralph and Gregg Lewis' Inductive Preaching (1983). Although I had been vaguely aware of the presence of deductive or inductive movement (fully defined and explained in Ch. 2, pp. 24ff.), within sermons, I had never seen them compared in any comprehensive way until I read the Lewises' book. As the title of their book might imply, they are advocates of the inductive sermon form because of their perceptions of the changes in North American society during the twentieth century. Such changes, for them, carry great implications for today's preacher.

With a typical Sunday morning congregation in mind, the Lewises proceeded to ask several questions (25ff.): "Who are these people? What concerns them? What moves them to respond? How do they learn?" Their answers to these questions led the Lewises to conclude that the contemporary preacher must "shape" his/her message in such a way as to involve his/her listeners in the sermon, hold their attention, and, "...transform our Sunday morning preaching
from a spectator sport into a participation period of growth, insight and cooperation (32)." For the Lewises, this is best achieved through use of the inductive sermon form (see section "Definitions of Terms"). They further suggested that "inductive preaching" has had its proponents throughout Christian history, and was, in fact, the sermon form most often used by Jesus of Nazareth (pp. 68-78). The Lewises expanded on this argument in their follow-up book, Learning to Preach Like Jesus (1989).

From that introduction to the inductive sermon in the Doctor of Ministry Course, I began reading other authors who expressed similar concerns (for example Fred Craddock, As One Without Authority, 1974), as well as proponents of the narrative sermon, which is simply one kind of inductive preaching (Lewis and Lewis 1983, 89). Representative of the latter group is Richard A. Jensen, who has written Telling the Story (1980) and Thinking in Story (1993). As I read these relatively recent books I began to wonder why there is such a need to compare deductive and inductive preaching, and why so many recent authors come out in favour of the latter.

I was answered, in part, by the authors themselves, who are unanimous in their belief that preaching must relate to the experiences of today's audiences. Such experiences may include: the challenges of a secular society, materialism, hedonism and rapid change (Lewis and Lewis 1983, 26).
Others contend that such experiences are mere symptoms of a larger, epistemological issue involving a paradigm shift in the way modern society communicates information and truth. Richard Jensen, for example (1993), offers the lengthy argument that western society is now in a "post-literate age," characterized by a pervasive electronic media that influences the way we live, think, and even the way we hear the Sunday sermon (17-44). Such philosophical and cultural analyses, while important, were not the focus of this project-dissertation. The problem addressed was more narrowly focused, and is best stated in the form of a question: From the perspective of the listeners at the United Baptist Church of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, would an inductive or deductive form of sermon be most preferred in my preaching ministry?

I have been preaching since I was a university student (1973), and began a student ministry long before I had any formal homiletical training. During the years since that time I have prepared many sermons without any real awareness of deductive and inductive movement. Looking back at old sermon notes I detected a predominant deductive form (based upon my definition in the section, "Definitions of Terms"). Since my arrival at the United Baptist Church (1986) that reliance on the deductive form has continued until recently, when I became aware of alternatives through my studies in
the Doctor of Ministry program already mentioned. Beginning in 1995, I generally used a combination of sermon forms but had little knowledge of what my listeners preferred, or even what they would describe as an "effective sermon." The purpose of this research project, therefore, was to evaluate listener response, through qualitative inquiry, to two sermonic forms, deductive and inductive, and to ascertain listener preference for them in the United Baptist Church of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

The Research Task

In light of the above statement of the problem and purpose underlying the project, a survey of selected literature in the fields of biblical hermeneutics and homiletics was included. The question driving this survey was, "What trends are there in biblical interpretation and preaching, that roughly parallel each other during the last two decades?" One might have expected that since homiletical experts have noticed a shift in sermonic form, perhaps they have also noticed a shift in biblical hermeneutics. Before a preacher delivers a sermon, he (or she) spends at least a minimal amount of time as an interpreter of the biblical text (Craddock 1985, 127). As such, the preacher employs hermeneutical tools in the process and it was appropriate to inquire as to possible changes or shifts of emphasis in such resources during the time in which preaching is said to have changed. This section did not attempt to establish any
causal relationships, but merely pointed to trends and themes in both areas of study that contributed to the modern preacher's context.

As to methodology, which is discussed in Chapter Three, the research project included the preaching of six sermons, in which both sermon forms (deductive and inductive) were demonstrated for the listener sample. The sermon forms were not identified to the listeners until the very end of the project in order to maintain credibility during the evaluative process. An evaluation form was used by each member of the sample, and was completed after each sermon. This took the form of a questionnaire. As noted below, interviews were also conducted, but because of Sunday morning scheduling, they could not be conducted immediately following the sermons. The questionnaire was meant to allow for immediacy of response.

Since this research was qualitative in nature, the task required that significant attention be given to the issue of research validity. In keeping with the research paradigm described by Michael Q. Patton (1990, 460-472), this research project employed several methods of data collection, including the questionnaire already mentioned, interviews with individual participants, and a group interview.

As to the nature of the sample, I chose members from the congregation (see Chapter Three for a fuller
description). An alphabetical listing of regular adult attenders was made up, and, judging from past records, it was assumed this would be approximately 120 members. Then by choosing every third name on the alphabetical list to introduce a certain random quality to the process, a new list of approximately 40 names remained. These individuals were invited to take part in the project. My goal was that half of those invited (at minimum) would commit themselves to the project, including being present for the six sermon series.

Members of the sample were reminded the first week of their involvement in the project. Absenteeism due to illness was impossible to foresee, but since the research was predominantly qualitative in nature, this potential problem was rectified, to some degree, in the length and detail of the interviews with sample members.

Parameters and Limitations

Ministry Context of the Researcher

This research project dealt specifically with the United Baptist Church of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. I did not intend to generalize findings over a larger context since my concerns were in the area of professional development within my specific ministry context.
Liturgical Context

The sermons evaluated in the research project were preached during regularly scheduled worship services at the United Baptist Church in Sault Ste. Marie. An alternative approach would have been to preach the sermons to the research sample alone, in a setting different from an ordinary church service, but this seemed artificial. The purpose of the project was to evaluate sermon forms as they were utilized in a liturgical setting, with the ultimate goal being an awareness of whether those forms were factors in the way people heard and understood sermons. To set up a "homi-letics lab" context, where I would preach to the sample alone, seemed unnatural for the members of the sample, who may have lost the sense of preaching as a part of worship. The validity of the project depended upon the evaluation of sermon forms in my normal homiletical context of the Sunday morning service.

Theological Presuppositions

It was a presupposition of this researcher that preaching is distinct from public speaking in general in that the former is theological in nature (i.e., it is about God, specifically as he is understood from a biblical context). Donald Miller even suggests that preaching is a redemptive event. Speaking of the preaching of the early church, Miller writes:
...as the words of the early apostles became a part of the deed of redemption, the very nature of revelation as redemptive action was expressing itself...To preach is to so bear witness to that which is done for men that it is actually done in men. Preaching is a part of the doing of it (Miller 1976, 24, emphasis the author's).

In addition, preaching involves both the preacher and the listener in experiencing the Word of God. Karl Barth writes:

Preaching is the Word of God which he himself has spoken; but God makes use, according to his good pleasure, of the ministry of a man who speaks to his fellow man, in God's name, by means of a passage from Scripture (Barth 1964, 65).

William Willimon, citing St. Augustine, emphasizes this latter aspect of preaching, but, perhaps unlike Barth, defines effectiveness as that which should take place in the experience of the hearers (1993 55, 56). Sermons should:

1. Teach, that is, instruct and inform.
2. Delight, that is, awaken faith, excite wonder, and gratitude for what God has done in Christ.
3. Move, that is, engage people so deeply that they are changed by the sermon.

Willimon does not discount divine activity in the preaching ministry of the church. But he does express the concern that in the human part of the equation there can be a total failure to engage the preacher's message, "a failure to hear" (1993).

It was my position that what was necessary for the preacher, is a threefold attentiveness to biblical text, modern listener, and methods of speaking that would bring ancient text and modern listener together while maintaining the integrity of both. Further, this research project would
have been far less important were it not for the belief that God, historically, used proclamation as a means of revealing himself to human beings.

At the time of the Exodus, for example, Moses was chosen to proclaim to the enslaved Hebrews that he had been sent by God to take them out of Egypt (Exod. 3:15-18). Later, at Mt. Sinai, Moses proclaimed to the gathered tribes what God had communicated to him on the mountain (chs. 19, 20). And later still in the history of Israel, proclamation was common in the ministry of the prophets. In the commissioning of Isaiah, for example (Isa. 6), there was a vision that included the touching of the prophet's lips, symbolising his consecration as a spokesman for God.

The divine commissioning of Isaiah included the further injunction, "go and tell..." (6:9). Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah was commissioned, after his own hesitancy ("I do not know how to speak", Jer. 1:6), and was reassured by God that his speaking would carry the weight of divine authority (1:9, 10). In both of these instances human speech is of vital concern because it was the means whereby God's word would be made known, i.e., proclaimed, or preached.

In the New Testament one finds Jesus applying Isaiah's messianic prophecy to himself, which includes the statement:
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to **preach** good news...to **proclaim** freedom...to **proclaim** the year of the Lord (Luke 4:18, 19 emphasis mine).

Clearly, Jesus thought himself to be, among other things, a preacher. And during his ministry he commissioned his disciples to preach (Mark 6:7-13), and later called them his "witnesses" (Acts 1:8) who would carry his message throughout the world. The word "witness" may not exactly mean "preach" but a study of the ministry of the apostles would suggest that proclamation, or preaching, was a significant aspect of their mission (e.g., Peter’s address on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2; Peter’s address at Solomon’s colonnade, Acts 3; Paul’s address at Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13:16ff.).

Arguably, much of the New Testament material regarding proclamation is written in the context of evangelizing unbelievers. It is possible that there was a different kind of address used in worship settings for the edification of the believers. C.H. Dodd made such a case. He distinguished between proclamation (kerygma) and teaching (didache). The former was used to evangelize unbelievers. The latter was used for the edification of Christians (Dodd 1964, 3–6). If Dodd was correct, then what passes for preaching today, in worship settings, is not really preaching by New Testament standards. It is, rather, teaching, or religious instruction, since, for the most part, it is directed toward believers. The implications of Dodd’s position would mean that this research, from a biblical
point of view, was misdirected, and should, rather, have been concerned with educational matters, but certainly not preaching. Dodd's distinction between proclamation and instruction, however, has been challenged in recent years. Sidney Greidanus, for example, maintains that the New Testament does not separate preaching and teaching into "rigid, ironclad categories" (1988, 6, 7). He demonstrates from the Bible, how proclamation and teaching were inseparable, and took place in open air meetings as well as synagogues, among believers and unbelievers alike. Greidanus asserts that the activity of preaching, from a New Testament perspective, is a multi-faceted activity that is described by numerous terms such as, "proclaiming, announcing good news, witnessing, teaching, prophesying, and exhorting" (1988, 7). With a broad understanding of preaching such as this, one may conclude that the contemporary preaching of sermons in worship services remains within the tradition of biblical preaching, as seen in both Old and New Testaments. I assumed, therefore, a theology of proclamation that included preaching as an essential element in the overall ministry of the church.

I assumed, further, that a sermon evaluation process that takes place during and after the event of preaching need not diminish the theological or devotional character of the sermon. To put it another way, participating in a research project such as this need not have prohibited a
person's being "moved, or helped, or inspired" by a sermon. Neither would such experiences have prevented a person from evaluating sermons in a qualitative research project, since a main premise of qualitative research is "thick description," or the presentation of descriptive data in such a way that others can understand and draw their own interpretations (Patton 1990, 375). Statements about particular sermons, such as "I was inspired," could add to the data gathering process, particularly if such a statement could be clarified to include "why?" or "how?" (Issues of research validity are further discussed in Chapter Three).

While focusing upon methodological concerns, such as research strategy, I did not mean to minimalize philosophical and theological considerations, or, for that matter, cultural considerations, although I mentioned that the narrow scope of this research would not allow for lengthy discussions of such considerations. As implied earlier in my use of biblical supporting material, I accept the Bible as the ultimate source of authority for preachers. In addition, the Bible provides texts upon which sermons are constructed. Phillips Brooks defined preaching as, "the communication of truth by man to men... (having) two elements, truth and personality" (1887, 5).

For me, as for Brooks, "the truth" is God's written word. "Preaching" is the proclamation of the word of God through the use of human speech, fallible though it may be.
While one may equate the word of God with truth, that does not necessarily equate preaching with truth because of the fallibility of the preacher. The notion that any truth is communicated at all, in preaching, is, at the same time, an act of faith in the God of the Bible, and a methodological concern regarding how people speak so others may hear. The latter concern was the major focus of this research project.

Definitions of Terms

Sermon Form

Although homiletical theorists and practitioners have reached no consensus on terms used to describe sermons that are either deductive or inductive, the word "form" was used to describe the two types of sermons in this project, the deductive form and the inductive form. The word "form" was arbitrary, and was used throughout the study to maintain consistency. Other terms would also have been appropriate (e.g., style, structure, type), but "form," as it was used in this research, implied a structure and shape, and so was the more inclusive term.

Deduction and Induction

In defining "deduction" and "induction," I began with the more general term "logic" which has been defined as:

a science that deals with the canons and criteria of validity of inference and demonstration: the science of the normative principles of reasoning (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1971, 497 s.v. "logic").
Two of those principles of reasoning, articulated since the time of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), are deduction and induction (Reese 1980, 120). "Deduction" refers to those instances of reasoning in which the conclusion follows from the premises necessarily. An argument or presentation using deductive reasoning moves "from general premises to specific conclusions" (251).

Induction, on the other hand, moves from specific facts and instances to general conclusions. While Aristotle described induction in *Rhetoric* (1954, 26), it was Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who is considered the founder of modern inductive method, particularly as it applies to the natural sciences (Russell 1961, 526). More recently, the principle of induction has also been employed in the methodologies of the social and historical sciences (Cothen 1990, 26). One might also include in this list the field of homiletics, as noted in the definitions to follow (as well as a more developed discussion included in Chapter Two).

**Deductive Sermon**

A deductive sermon is one in which "the idea appears as part of the introduction and the body explains, proves or applies it" (Robinson 1980, 125). Deductive sermons are "those that lay down a thesis and spend themselves in proving it" (Sangster 1951, 80). Deductive preaching is
preaching that is "ordered around the human mind's ability to proceed from general principles or statements to specific examples or particulars of experience" (Cothen 1990, 58).

The deductive sermon is often characterized by a central idea which is broken into points or sub-points, followed by an explanation of those points. The sermon is based upon propositions which are presented logically (Cothen 59), and often in sequential order. The deductive sermon, therefore, has its distinctive elements, such as logic, propositional statements, and a central thesis stated early in the sermon. And the deductive sermon also has a distinctive movement, or direction from general truth to the particular experience(s) of the audience.

Inductive Sermon

An inductive sermon "moves from the particulars of experience that have a familiar ring in the listener's ear to a general truth or conclusion" (Craddock 1979, 57). "An inductive sermon is one that starts where people are, with particular elements...and leads to general conclusions" (Lewis and Lewis 1983, 43). One characteristic of inductive sermons is that they are more descriptive than hortatory (Craddock, 58). They begin with concrete experiences familiar to the listeners and move toward a general conclusion by incorporating narrative, dialogue, analogy, questions, and
parables (Lewis and Lewis, 43). These elements are not the sole domain of the inductive form. Deductive sermons may use such illustrative material as well, but usually in a clarifying role. Inductive sermons use such elements without the necessity of a previously stated thesis. They are designed to involve the listeners in the sermon process so that they can reach the conclusion with the preacher. Listener involvement is achieved largely through an appeal to the imagination using graphic description and multisensory words (Lewis and Lewis, 147), as well as the previously mentioned narrative, dialogue, analogy, questions and parables.

Sermon Effectiveness and Sermon Preference

Throughout this dissertation the terms "effective," and "effectiveness" were used in relation to sermons. Broadly speaking, the effective sermon, for me, was one that was designed to fulfill the three criteria of the Augustinian model which are to teach, to delight, to move, (11). But while "effectiveness" was one thing to me, it may have been something else to the research sample, and the word "effective" is open to many ambiguities subject to the opinions of the participants. The word "preference" may ultimately be more accurate when considering the project participants. And it is the participants that the project
was focusing on for purposes of discovering criteria of preference.

Whether sermon form played a role in this preference (as evaluated by the sample members) was the primary focus of the project. No attempt was made to quantify preferences in order to conclude which sermons in the series were successful or unsuccessful based upon content. The research looked, rather, at what sermon forms and characteristics of those forms made a given sermon preferable (or more preferable) in the opinions of the sample members. The term "preferable," therefore, constituted a kind of continuum, running from "less" to "more," based upon listener perception. The word "continuum" is used here not with precise measurement in mind, but relative comparison.

It should also be noted here that listener preference is important because of its significance to my preaching ministry. If a clear preference for one sermon form can be established, the implication is that such a form may engage the listeners' attention and interest in ways that the alternative form may not. The research goal, therefore, of an improved preaching ministry is significantly reached, at least as far as the listeners are concerned. As to the connection between the terms "effective" and "preference," the former is used not to establish a general norm for sermons but to ascertain what, for the listeners, made a
particular sermon convincing or appealing enough to emerge as preferable when compared to other sermons of a different form.

The nature of qualitative research is such that a degree of ambiguity and subjectivity may be expected, and such was the case with the use of the above terms. One might have discovered, for example, that a listener expressed that a sermon was "effective," on a questionnaire, but later, in an interview, expressed that it might have been more effective and indeed, preferable to other sermons, had it used certain elements, such as more illustrative material (or less, as the case may be). The research design (Chapter Three) was intended to allow for such responses while assuming that as data collection progressed, a holistic picture would emerge that would lead to some conclusion.

Summary

One conviction motivating this project-dissertation was that the more preachers and laity understand the process of communication, the more effectively they can engage in it. This research project was a quest to more adequately understand the process of communication between preacher and listener, specifically as it related to the methodological concern of sermonic form.
My task was to ascertain how the listeners at the United Baptist Church would respond to two specific sermon forms (inductive and deductive) and to determine listener preference with respect to those forms. Through a multi-stage data gathering process (triangulation) I anticipated discoveries that would lead to a more effective preaching ministry, of future benefit, to both preacher and parishioner at the United Baptist Church.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The first section of this chapter addresses theological considerations specifically related to the field of biblical hermeneutics. The rationale for this stems from the logic that authentic biblical preaching must be preceded by biblical interpretation, or at least some methodological approach to the ancient text (Craddock 1985, 127). Furthermore, the field of biblical hermeneutics has undergone many changes in the last several decades (Greidanus 1988, xi), as has the field of homiletics. This chapter will briefly examine parallel trends in both fields of study, with the acknowledgement that the ultimate goal of hermeneutics is preaching (Osborne 1991, 339).

The second section of the chapter deals specifically with preaching and recent trends in homiletical theory as described by advocates of both inductive and deductive sermon forms. Finally, a brief summary of the chapter will integrate the aforementioned sections and serve as a background for succeeding chapters, and indeed, the research project itself.
Biblical Hermeneutics

A theological principle that underlies this research project is that Christian preaching must be rooted in the Bible. The precedent for this is found in the New Testament, where Paul encourages his younger colleague, Timothy, to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Presumably, Timothy's preaching was to be based not upon direct revelation (e.g., a dream or vision), but upon prior revelation preserved in the form of written scriptures (Greidanus 1988, 8). Elsewhere, Paul instructs Timothy in the right handling of "the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), implying that Timothy's ministry was rooted, of necessity, in the written scriptures. These scriptures, moreover, required proper "handling," or interpretation, as a part of the preacher's responsibility.

Since preaching is biblically based and since one's hermeneutical approach will affect how one develops the sermon from the text, a brief review of contemporary approaches to hermeneutics will be given. Bernard Ramm defines biblical hermeneutics as "those principles which pertain to the interpretation of Holy Scripture" (Ramm 1974, 10). Hermeneutics is a set of rules used with all materials requiring interpretation. Biblical exegesis, on the other hand, is the application of the principles to an actual text. But Ramm suggests that the two function together and include preaching as the result:
Hermeneutics, exegesis and preaching form one continuum... the minister must treat his text exegetically before he treats it homiletically. If he is to be a responsible exegete he must have a responsible working theory of biblical hermeneutics (11, 13).

The difficulty facing the contemporary preacher is that biblical hermeneutics as a theological discipline is in transition. Thomas G. Long states that, "the landscape of biblical hermeneutics has been altered rapidly, radically, and with profound effect upon biblical preaching" (1990, 342). Long sees a shift away from historical criticism toward literary criticism with an emphasis upon human imagination in biblical interpretation:

One of the hallmarks of recent biblical interpretation has been the discovery of the role of human imagination, both the imagination employed by those authors who composed or compiled the biblical text and the imagination required of those who read and interpret the text (347).

Sidney Greidanus suggests that biblical hermeneutics is in the process of a "paradigm shift from historical to literary studies" (1988, xi). Interpreters in the past have narrowed their focus to details of the text or its pre-history in an atomistic approach which has led to a crisis in homiletics (48). The crisis for the preacher, according to Thomas Troeger, is a proliferation of hermeneutics, with the result that there is "a loss of authority from within the community of western literary critical discourse" (1988, 30).

Literary critic Northrop Frye, commenting on the analytical and historical approach that has dominated
biblical criticism for a century, suggests that the so-called "higher criticism" has had a fragmenting effect on the biblical text:

Instead of emerging from lower criticism, or textual study, most of it dug itself into a still lower, or sub-basement, criticism in which disintegrating the text became an end in itself. As a result its essential discoveries were made quite early, and were followed by a good deal of straw thrashing (1982, xvii).

The Bible, in Frye's analysis, redeems history with a visionary, poetic perspective. He attempts to demonstrate that the Bible has a unified structure consisting of narrative, and recurrent imagery, such as the mountain, the garden, the cave, and the furnace (1983; 1990). Frye calls his approach "imaginative literalism" which locates the basis of Christianity not in creeds and dogmas, but in myth and metaphor (1991, 17). The legacy of the Bible, for Frye, is found in its imaginative energy, expressed in literary language intended "to convey a vision of spiritual life that continues to transform and expand our own" (1991, 17).

Many pastoral theologians who seek to apply current biblical scholarship to practical ministry concerns, embrace the trend toward "imaginative theology" (Troeger 1988, 28-32). This is not only true of homiletics but other areas as well, such as Christian counselling, which now has a sub-category called "narrative counselling" (Vitz 1992, 20-27). An advocate of the narrative approach, Paul Vitz, argues his case based upon the work of various psychoanalysts and a prominent literary critic, Northrop Frye (Vitz 20).
The current trend in biblical scholarship toward literary studies and its emphasis on narrative, metaphor, imagery, and human imagination, may be the result of an increasingly image-based society. Thomas Troeger suggests that Christian communicators and biblical interpreters must embrace an imaginative theology because of the power of mass media culture (1988, 29):

The imagery supplied by the mass media reveals not only an implicit gospel but an implicit epistemology as well. Watching television conditions us to a way of knowing reality which operates not through reason and principle, but through the capacities of the imagination to identify with vivid images and narratives of human life.

Troeger advocates an approach to biblical interpretation that will result in effective preaching. This he describes as "the imaginative presentation of the gospel as a compelling alternative to the myths of the media" (1988, 31).

Whether Troeger’s suggestion about the power of the modern media is correct is not within the scope of this research project. Suffice it to say that he, along with Sidney Greidanus, sees the paradigm shift in biblical hermeneutics away from historical to literary studies, with the new focus being on genres of literature. In homiletics, there has been a corresponding paradigm shift, with the new emphasis being on forms of sermons (Greidanus 1988, xi).

Homiletics
This research project is primarily concerned with homiletical preferences in a specific ministry context in
Canada. The literature surveyed thus far in this review has been representative of a wider body of literature that describes trends in biblical interpretation which have developed, at least in part, as a response to perceived changes in contemporary Western culture. Whatever else may be said about such perceptions, contemporary preachers and homiletical theorists share the concerns of biblical scholars that the present generation be given a "hermeneutical bridge" (Frayne 1990, 54) by which the chasm between the ancient scriptures and the modern world may be closed.

John R.W. Stott, in his *Between Two Worlds* (1982), uses the metaphor of the bridge and bridge-building, suggesting that the preacher is the bridge-builder while the sermon is the bridge. And just as bridge-building is a difficult task, so preachers encounter difficulties in the task of sermon preparation. Some of them, for Stott, are the anti-authority mood in modern society, the "cybernetics revolution," and the church's loss of confidence in the gospel (50-91). One approach to overcoming such obstacles, especially the second one, is to examine sermon forms and movement within the sermon. Stott touches on this in his wide-ranging book, but the concept is greatly expanded and examined in detail by proponents of the "inductive sermon."

The Inductive Sermon

One trend in homiletical theory which has paralleled the shift in biblical hermeneutics, is the emphasis on...
inductive preaching, where the sermon begins with the experience of the listener and moves toward a general conclusion. One proponent of the inductive sermon is Fred B. Craddock, whose first book on the subject was *As One Without Authority* (1974). Early in the book Craddock suggests that contemporary North American society has become more visually oriented, largely because of media influences: "The visual has removed the oral from the field, or at least has created a crisis between eye and ear" (9).

Craddock’s solution to the problem, as set forth in *As One Without Authority*, as well as two later works, *Overhearing the Gospel* (1978), and *Preaching* (1985), is for the preacher to communicate the gospel in a way that most closely approximates the way people experience life, that is, inductively:

The plain fact of the matter is that we are seeking to communicate with people whose experiences are concrete. Everyone lives inductively, not deductively. No farmer deals with the problem of calfhood, only with the calf (1974, 60).

Another advocate of inductive preaching is Ralph Lewis, who, with his son Gregg, authored *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (1983) and *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* (1989). The Lewises define the inductive sermon as "one which starts where people are, with particular elements - the narrative, dialogue, analogy, questions, parables, the concrete experiences - and then leads to general conclusions" (Lewis and Lewis 1983, 43). The
deductive sermon, on the other hand, "starts with a declaration of intent and proceeds to prove the validity of what the preacher says is already determined to be true" (43). For the Lewises, the benefits of inductive preaching are many, but three of them are particularly relevant to this research.

First, inductive preaching involves the listener in reaching conclusions. While the deductive sermon typically begins with a propositional statement often resembling a conclusion, the inductive sermon "is a quest for discovery" (1983, 32), in which the hearer joins the process "to inquire, to venture forward, to incur risk, to gaze into the unknown, to synthesize, to test" (44). Second, inductive preaching is most compatible with modern learning theory and discoveries in brain research. Like Marshall and Eric McLuhan in their book on modern communication theory, The Laws of Media (1983), the Lewises cite the research of Roger Sperry (30), whose conclusions about the hemispheres of the brain and the ways they process information have implications for preaching. Whereas the McLuhans spoke of the duality of the brain in the context of modern electronic media, the Lewises suggest its importance for preaching. The implication, for Ralph and Gregg Lewis, is that inductive preaching may explore avenues to the listener's brain (i.e., the right hemisphere) that are not utilized in other kinds of preaching (1983, 30).
In their section on the preparation of inductive sermons, the Lewises advocate a technique called "brain-storming" (126ff.), whereby the preacher can arrive at an abundance of sermon ideas. "Brainstorming" is an exercise that begins by writing down a subject or need and then proceeds with a kind of free association where related ideas are jotted down as they come to mind. This technique, however, was actually developed by a professor of creative writing, Gabriele Rico, who refers to the technique as "clustering" (Rico 1983, 28). Rico credits the method’s effectiveness in writing to its strong appeal to right-brain thinking and devotes an entire chapter of her book to the discoveries and implications of cerebral duality (63–87). The importance of cerebral duality (or right-brain, left-brain theories) to this project will not be overstated. But insofar as it is discussed by communications theorists (McLuhans), homiletical theorists (Lewises), and writers (Rico), it may be considered a unifying theme relevant to any project that seeks to assess listener response to communication.

If, for example, the right hemisphere of the brain processes information holistically, creatively, and emotionally, as the McLuhans suggest (68), then there are implications not only for the study of media influences on individuals, but for listener response to sermons as well. How, for example, does an individual accustomed to many
hours of right-brain stimuli (from visual media) respond to an oral sermon which may be logically structured in sequential, linear sermon points in a printed manuscript? As was alluded to in Chapter One, this is just one of the complex factors (i.e., electronic media) that contextualizes the modern church attender, and while such influences will not be measured in this research, it is significant that advocates of inductive preaching consider it (i.e., electronic media) important, along with the theories about cerebral duality.

Related to the aforementioned theories regarding cerebral duality is the research done in the area commonly known as "learning styles." Prominent in this field is David Kolb, who wrote *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (1984), and who, earlier, devised a testing instrument called the *Learning Style Inventory* (1981). Kolb suggests that there is a four-stage cycle of learning (1981, 4), consisting of concrete experience ("feeling"), reflective observation ("watching"), abstract conceptualization ("thinking"), and active experimentation ("doing"). Different learners begin at different places in this learning cycle and learn effectively to the extent that all four stages of the cycle are experienced.

Kolb further suggests (1981, 5), that individual leaning styles may not be adequately described by one of the
four modes within the learning cycle but are, in fact, a combination of those modes, with tendencies toward one mode or another. Thus, an individual who learns most effectively by combining the modes of abstract conceptualization and reflective observation is called an "assimilator" (7). Other learning style "types" (as Kolb calls them) are labelled "converger, diverger, and accommodator" (7).

From the perspective of Christian ministry, Penny Zettler surveyed such learning style theories as Kolb's, as well as several testing instruments, in her article, "Not Everyone Learns Alike" (1978, 28-33). Zettler recommends using such testing instruments as Kolb's Learning Style Inventory in the church. While her field of ministry is Christian Education, it is possible that insights gained from using such instruments might inform a pastor's preaching ministry as well. Cinda Gorman considers just such possibilities in her article "Preaching for the Senses" (1990, 112-117). While her article focuses more on those whom she calls "visual, auditory, and kinesthetic souls" (112), her awareness of different learning styles demonstrates that preachers might benefit from learning style research.

This project took such theories into account, in both the sermon series and the data gathering process. While I did not use a learning style testing instrument, I did take into account Kolb's learning style modes and Zettler's
injunction that "not everyone learns alike." The awareness of such theories may be seen in my use of the two sermon forms (deductive and inductive) during the preaching series, as well as in my questionnaires and interview guides.

Third, the Lewises advocate inductive preaching because it so closely approximates the biblical message itself:

...if you delete from Scripture the elements of narrative, questions, dialogue, analogies and imagery, and references to common human experiences, you would reduce Holy Writ to a few scattered shreds (1983, 60).

And Frederick Buechner, in his book *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (1977) suggests that the Bible is endearing because of its tendency to draw the reader's interest through experiences common to people everywhere. The surprise and laughter of Abraham and Sarah, for example (50), to the announcement that Sarah would become pregnant at an advanced age are reactions people understand, not as a doctrinal treatise, but as concrete human experiences from which they might see the more abstract principle of God's provision against all (human) odds. Donald Wardlaw takes a somewhat similar approach in his *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (1983). And Ralph and Gregg Lewis devote an entire book to the inductive preaching style of Jesus in *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* (1989).
Other homiletical theorists and preachers have contributed to my understanding of the inductive sermon form without using the terminology of Fred Craddock or Ralph and Gregg Lewis. Narrative preaching, for example, which is inductive by the definition employed in this project, is advocated by Eugene Lowry in his books, *The Homiletical Plot* (1980), and *Doing Time in the Pulpit* (1985). Other works dealing with this form include Richard Jensen’s *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching* (1980), and *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age* (1993); Thomas Boomershine’s *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling* (1988), Stephen Shoemaker’s *Retelling the Biblical Story: The Theology and Practice of Narrative Preaching* (1985), and Bruce Salmon’s *Storytelling in Preaching: A Guide to the Theory and Practice* (1988).

None of the works cited above, beginning with those of Craddock and Lewis, contain any suggestion that the inductive sermon form precludes use of deductive elements. Lewis and Lewis even suggest that an effective sermon may combine both induction and deduction (1983, 110). Such a sermon, however, will begin inductively in order to establish what the Lewises call "common ground" with the listener. Once this is accomplished, deductive elements such as doctrinal statements and even the use of sequential sermon "points" may be utilized, but as a secondary function.
Before concluding this section, it must be acknowledged that the use of inductive elements in sermons (as described, for example, by the Lewises) is not unique to the twentieth century, nor has it depended strictly on any scholarly consensus regarding hermeneutics. Long before any so-called "crisis" in biblical interpretation in our century, preachers were using induction, although not necessarily stating it in the terms I am using in this chapter. Nineteenth century preachers employed a variety of sermonic forms, and included in their sermons the very things the Lewises list as being inductive elements. Phillips Brooks (1877), Henry Ward Beecher (1872), and Charles Spurgeon (1875) all employed what could be seen as inductive elements, and described their wise use in their lectures on preaching.

Dwight K. Nelson, in his doctoral dissertation (1986, 54ff.) presents an historical survey of sermons taken from the thirteen volume 20 Centuries of Great Preaching (Fant and Pinson 1971). In his survey, Nelson conducts a brief analysis of these sermons and finds that many of them are in the inductive form. Noteworthy examples of such sermons in the twentieth century are those of G. Campbell Morgan (Nelson 1986, 67), Clovis Chappell (70), Peter Marshall (75), and Helmut Thielicke (76).

It became clear to Nelson, from his unscientific survey, that induction has been used in sermon development
since the inception of Christian preaching. But it was also clear from his survey that deduction was dominant in most of those sermons (covering nearly two millennia), with an upsurge of inductive preaching in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (78). Nelson had no explanation for this upsurge, nor do I. Suffice it to say that inductive preaching is no new development in the field of homiletics.

But, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, such scholars as Thomas Long, Sidney Greidanus, and Thomas Troeger, see great changes taking place in biblical interpretation that will have an equally great effect on preaching. Insofar as biblical hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics constitute a continuum (Ramm 1974, 11), this may be what is happening today, with the result being a renewed interest in the inductive sermon form advanced by Craddock, the Lewises, et al. But to suggest that inductive preaching is an entirely new development would be incorrect.

The Deductive Sermon

Nathan H. Cothen, in a doctoral dissertation (1990), surveyed an extensive body of literature in deductive homiletics covering a period of over one hundred years. The present review will not include all of the materials Cothen gathered, but significant proponents of deductive methodology in preaching will be cited for their influence on twentieth century preaching. Cothen begins with John Broadus, whose work, A Treatise on the Preparation and
Delivery of Sermons (1870), is still in print. Broadus was critical of inductive reasoning and believed the sermon form should consist chiefly in deduction from scripture (Cothen 1990, 32).

Advocates of deductive preaching in the mid-twentieth century include Andrew W. Blackwood, whose work, The Preparation of sermons (1948), encouraged the development of the sermon around "points" (Blackwood 1948, 139), although he also encouraged variety. Blackwood devoted a brief section of his text to the inductive method but cautioned that it was open to abuse (1948, 144). A contemporary of Blackwood, W.E. Sangster, wrote The Craft of Sermon Construction (1951). In his work, Sangster classified all sermons as deductive (or "argument") if "they lay down a thesis and spend themselves in proving it" (Sangster 1951, 80).

Two contemporaries of inductive homileticians Fred B. Craddock and Ralph Lewis, are Lloyd Perry and Haddon Robinson. Their books, Biblical Sermon Guide: A Step-By-Step Procedure for the Preparation and Proclamation (1970), and Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages (1980), respectively, maintain that a deductive form for sermons is most effective. Haddon Robinson, for example, describes deductive and inductive "shapes" of sermons, including a section on how the two might be combined. In such a sermon, "the expositor
develops his introduction and first point inductively, leading up to his statement of the idea. Then the remainder of the sermon proceeds deductively to explain, prove, or apply the idea" (Robinson 1980, 127).

Robinson’s dominant method, however, is deductive throughout his book. For him a sermon is deductive when "the idea appears as part of the introduction and the body explains, proves, or applies it" (1980, 125). The preponderance of works on inductive sermon forms in this literature review, as opposed to works on deductive sermons does not imply that the deductive form has been replaced. To the contrary, the deductive form has been dominant throughout most of the history of the church and probably still is. Dwight K. Nelson, in a doctoral dissertation similar to this project, traced the form of sermons from the New Testament times to the present (Nelson 1986, 36-80), and concluded that while New Testament preaching was largely inductive, the dominant form from Augustine to the present has been deductive due to the lingering influence of Greek rhetoric on Christian preaching (Nelson, 77).

The lack of recent works explicitly devoted to the deductive sermon form may be due to the historic dominance of the form in homiletical practice. Until Craddock and Lewis appeared as advocates of inductive preaching, very little was written on the subject. And when the inductive form was discussed, it was given brief treatment (as, for
example, Andrew Blackwood’s two pages, 1948, 143-144). Nathan Cothen’s work cited only two works from the eighties which gave explicit endorsement to the deductive form (Cothen 1990, 40). Other works were cited for their implicit support of the deductive form (1990, 41-44). This seems to suggest that until the recent trends toward the inductive form there was a general consensus among preachers that the form which had been dominant for centuries, the deductive form, needed little revision. Proponents of inductive preaching, however, have published many works in the past two decades. Cothen cites at least twelve such books (1990, 12-14), and this review includes three works not cited by Cothen (Brueggemann 1988; Lewis and Lewis 1989; and Long 1990).

**Summary**

As was suggested earlier in this review (p. 28), the trend in homiletical theory toward inductive preaching is a concomitant of the trend in biblical hermeneutics toward literary studies. Biblical interpreters who have moved away from historical criticism toward literary criticism use descriptive terms similar to those used by the advocates of the inductive sermon form. Northrop Frye, for example, speaks of the wide appeal of the Bible due to its use of narrative, imagery, metaphor, and myth (Frye 1991). Ralph and Gregg Lewis advocate inductive preaching based upon similar reasoning, suggesting not only that the Bible’s
message is itself inductive, but that human beings experience life inductively (Lewis and Lewis 1983; 1989). They recommend the inductive sermon form because it incorporates such characteristics as narrative, imagery, analogy, and parables. These characteristics of inductive preaching are not only faithful to the biblical literature but also to the preacher’s goal of "helping people listen," as the Lewises’ book title implies (1983).

Does this mean, as Thomas Troeger has suggested (1988, 28-32), that Bible scholars and preachers need a new theology based upon human imagination? Does this also mean, as Fred Craddock, Ralph Lewis et al. suggest, that preaching must take a predominantly inductive form? These are the questions that serve to drive the present research. The current polarization of views among homileticians regarding sermon form, and lack of consensus among biblical scholars on hermeneutical questions support my position that a research project such as this is justified. Coupled with this is the fact that my research took place in my own ministry context, and was thus motivated by the question, "Will greater attention to sermon form assist me in 'helping people listen' (to use the Lewises’ sub-title)?" The bulk of my research was devoted to answering this question.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The research strategy followed in this project was one of qualitative inquiry. The word "strategy," as suggested by Michael Q. Patton (1990, 38, 39), allows greater flexibility than "paradigm," since the latter seems to imply a one-sided methodological allegiance. "Strategy," however, implies a pragmatic approach which allows a wide range of possibilities inter-connected by themes, such as natural inquiry, inductive analysis, holistic perspective, and context sensitivity (Patton 41, 42).

The justification for utilizing the qualitative approach in this research may be found in its purpose, which was context specific (the United Baptist Church of Sault Ste. Marie), and concerned with the professional development of the researcher. This project, in addition, gathered participants from a much smaller population (the church) than is necessary for quantitative research, and the results of the research were analyzed specifically for this ministry context. Any conclusions which may seem applicable in other contexts were not the result of any intentional goal of synthesizing generalizable conclusions. While I realize
that the potential for such generalization is present, such a result was not due to any pre-research goals. Qualitative inquiry is usually characterized by its lack of attempt to generalize its findings "to a universe beyond that bounded by the study" (Owens 1982, 7). Any application of my findings in this research to other ministry contexts, therefore, would have to take place in conjunction with inquiries specific to those contexts.

Another justification for the qualitative approach was the observation that there is a certain subjectivity in the way individuals hear and respond to sermons preached in a liturgical context. Since listener response to sermons is a significant part of this project, it seemed difficult to investigate the research problem through quantitative methods. How would one quantify, for example, a response such as: "The sermon really hit home today"?

Using a qualitative approach, however, data is gathered from the participants' own frames of reference, making their subjectivity an essential part of the research. Through multiple data gathering procedures (triangulation) there emerges what has been called "thick description" (Owens 7, 8), which conveys the sense of the research process as experienced by the participants, and, in effect, "takes the reader there" (8). In such a research process, results are not measured, but written into a narrative of the participants' experiences. It is the use of multiple
data-gathering procedures in such a project that lends it the necessary credibility.

In addition, qualitative research recognizes that data can be generated even from the researcher, through a "research log," or "research journal" (Meyers 1993, 69-72). I recognized the inherent weaknesses of such a statement (e.g., that such a log or journal may include material that would "skew" the research) but such an item might also access the "internal hunches, questions, concerns, and insights of the D.Min. student..." (72). Such things, tracked over the life of the research project, may add significantly to the project and were not to be dismissed. A qualitative research strategy, then, recognizes both the limitations and strengths of subjective data generated from participants and the researcher, but allows for possible meanings in such data that may emerge through triangulation, the resulting "thick description," and, finally, the analysis of the data.

Research Design

Units of Analysis

The research project was predicated on the assumption that a preacher's pulpit ministry may be evaluated, for the most part, by the listeners' assessments of the sermons he preaches. This research, therefore, was formative evaluation (Patton 1990, 156) in that it sought to improve
effectiveness within a particular setting. The units of analysis in this case, were six sermons, preached in a series over six consecutive Sundays. Half of the sermons were in the deductive form and half were in the inductive form (following the descriptions of each form in "Definitions of Terms," p. 18). The sermon forms alternated each week until the series was concluded. Transcripts of the sermons are included in Appendix F.

Evaluation of the sermons took place in three ways: First, there was an immediate evaluation following the delivery of each sermon, through use of a questionnaire (see Appendix A). Second, there were personal interviews with each sample member after a review of representative examples of each sermon form from an audio tape, sermon outline, or transcript (see the interview guide in Appendix B). Finally, there was one group interview with the entire sample, after each member reviewed the sermon titles, and were briefly reminded of their style and content (see the interview guide in Appendix C). The researcher assumed that printed sermons, outlines, and audio tapes were valid records of the sermons in this project since they are available to the congregation every week during the normal course of the year. In other words, while sermons are primarily oral/aural events, sermon transcripts, outlines, or audio tapes, if requested by sample members, were not to be considered intrusive. Nevertheless, I preferred to use
such materials only as reminders of the original sermons and the participants' recollections of them.

Population and Sample

The research population was the congregation of the United Baptist Church of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada (pop. 80,000). The congregation on any given Sunday numbers approximately 120 (teen through adult), and the actual membership of the church is 210. Not everyone who attends worship services is a church member, however, since he, or she, may be a visitor or an adherent (any regular attender who is not formally a member). The population from which the sample is chosen, therefore, is the regularly attending congregation, made up of approximately 120 members and adherents (teen through adult).

The congregation is a mixed group of people, representing all age groups, from infants to nonagenarians, and a variety of occupations. Many are retired, some are professionals (e.g., teachers, physicians, social workers), and some work in manufacturing jobs, such as in the local steel plant. Others are homemakers and students, and a few are unemployed.

The research sample consisted of twenty-five members and/or adherents of the congregation. At the suggestion of Patton (1990, 180) this project utilized a "purposeful random sample," which was relatively small in size but a credible sample nonetheless because members came from a
larger number of "information-rich" cases (169). As to the sample selection, an alphabetical listing of regular adult and teen attenders was made up, and, judging from past records it was assumed this would be approximately 120 people. Then by choosing every third name on the alphabetical list a new list of approximately 40 names remained. These individuals were invited to take part in the project. The invitation was sent to them in the form of a personal letter (see Appendix D), which included a response form to be returned to me, along with a brief contractual statement that assured their privacy and included their signed permission for me to include them in the research (see Appendix E).

My goal was that half of those invited would commit themselves to the project, including being present for the six sermon series. If 20 people did not respond in the affirmative, I would go back to the list of regular attenders (minus the 40 names chosen) and begin again, choosing every third name, as before, and inviting them to participate in the project. When the sample reached 20 members the invitations would stop. The actual affirmative responses were 25 in number.

Members of the sample were reminded the first week of their involvement in the project. Absenteeism due to illness was not possible to foresee, but since the research was qualitative in nature, this potential problem could be
rectified, to a point, in the length and detail of the interviews with sample members. The actual absentees during the sermon series were few. Two participants missed one sermon each.

Data Collection

The data collection process in this research was validated, in part, through triangulation, or the use of multiple methods to confirm emerging findings. One such method was a questionnaire (see Appendix A) to be filled out by members of the research sample following each sermon in the preaching series. The questionnaire was a combination forced-choice and open-ended questionnaire, allowing for a degree of flexibility in the responses. It was important, in this project, to allow evaluators to put responses in their own words as much as possible. Pragmatically, however, the time necessary for thoughtful written responses was limited following a worship service, and a number of forced-choice questions alleviated this problem, as well as providing a certain consistency in the type of data collected.

The questionnaire also had some demographic questions regarding the age, sex, and educational level of the participants. These questions, of course, did not need to be repeated once I had obtained the information from all the participants. At that point they were dropped from the questionnaire.
In addition to the questionnaire, a second data gathering procedure was the personal interview. Each member of the sample was interviewed after the sermon series was concluded. These interviews were conducted privately, by myself, using an interview guide (see Appendix B) which provided a semi-structured format. The questions directed the listeners to the sermon series as a whole, as well as two of the sermons (one of each form) that were reviewed by the interviewees via audio tape or printed outline (transcript, if desired), prior to the interview. All interviews with individuals were kept confidential and the ethical concerns connected to the research were addressed in the initial letter requesting their participation, but also in the permission form which was to be signed by each individual participant prior to the sermon series (see Appendices D and E).

Finally, the sample members were interviewed together in one group interview, after hearing a review of the six sermon titles. This group interview, like the individual interview, was recorded. Respondents' impressions of the series depended in part, on the time gap between the series and the group interview. I sought, therefore, to narrow this time gap as much as possible, scheduling it the second week after the series was completed.
In addition, the group interview differed from the individual interviews in that I revealed to the participants my problem and purpose statements from my introductory chapter. My rationale for this was that the participants were, in a sense, my co-researchers and may have had insights into the problem under study that I had missed. Furthermore, my motivation for this research was professional development in the area of preaching, and if this would be enhanced by the participants' "knowing what we had been doing" at the end of the project, then it would be worthwhile. The reason for not revealing everything at the beginning was to avoid "the Hawthorne Effect" (Davies 1984, 3, 4), which is the problem of participants responding in ways they think the researcher desires.

I further justified using the group interview, because, added to the other methods of data collection, it reinforced the principle of triangulation, and also provided a group setting where participants could hear and respond to comments by others in the group. Relevant data emerged in this setting simply because of the group dynamic involved. Again I used an interview guide similar to the one used for the personal interviews (see Appendix C).

Analysis and Interpretation

Although analysis and interpretation make up the final two chapters of the dissertation, a brief description of my methodology for them is included here. Following Patton
(371-436), I began by organizing the data collected during the research. This was to be a significantly large amount of material: a minimum of 120 questionnaires, 20 taped interviews with individuals, 1 group interview, and the researcher's journal, consisting of thoughts and tentative conclusions made during the entire process. In addition, there were the related materials, the six sermon transcripts and audio tapes of the sermons.

Much has been written about qualitative analysis (Patton 1990, Myers 1993, Owens 1982, Merriam 1990) and methods of organizing data. In terms of organization, I used Myers' suggestion of "coding the data" (73-78), and then searching for patterns and themes. It is important, at this point, however, to acknowledge that the organization of the data was merely logistical, a step taken to avoid being overwhelmed by the amount of data. The larger task was in analyzing the data, which, according to Merriam (119), is an activity simultaneous with data collection. Emerging from this ongoing process are "insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses," which, in turn, lead to a refinement of one's questions.

The presentation and interpretation of the data was, in the end, in narrative form. It was an attempt to offer critical reflection that engaged the theory, the ministry context, the project, and the data, in what amounts to a story that "takes the reader there" (Owens 8). In that
sense, it was an inductive process, culminating in a brief conclusion.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter, after a general introduction, presents a brief report of my research schedule, a description of the project participants and the sermons preached in the series, and the project findings, according to each of the three data gathering procedures described in the previous chapter. Following each section reporting project findings there is a summary of that particular section. In the case of the latter two sections (the individual interviews and the group interview) the summaries interact with the findings of the previous sections. In this way there is a cumulative effect in the summary sections as results are related in an integrated fashion. Finally, there is a section reporting the significance of age, sex, and education levels of the project participants in the research, as well as a general summary of findings.

Schedule for Research

The research portion of this project began with the mailing of letters of invitation and two copies of the consent form (one to be kept by the participant and one to
be signed and returned to me). This mailing occurred in the middle of April 1996. As consent forms came back to me I filed them and began preparing my first sermon in the preaching series. This sermon was preached the first Sunday in May 1996. The remaining sermons came immediately after, on consecutive Sundays, and the series ended on the second Sunday in June 1996. That same week I began the individual interviews, which were conducted in my study, over the course of the next two weeks to accommodate all the participants. Three days after the completion of the individual interviews (25 June 1996) I conducted the group interview, and so completed the research portion of the project just over two months from its beginning, with the mailing of the letters of invitation. All of the necessary (signed) consent forms were in my possession before any data gathering commenced (a sample copy of this form, the letter of invitation, and the six sermons are included as appendices).

Description of the Participants

A general description of the United Baptist Church, Sault Ste. Marie was included in the previous chapter. It was only after I chose my participants (by the method also described in the previous chapter) that a clear picture emerged of the people who would be my "co-researchers" for the next two months. In an attempt to make sure I would have the necessary twenty participants I felt I needed for the research, I mailed fifty-two letters of invitation,
using the selection process described in Chapter Three. In response I received twenty-eight signed consent forms. Three of these individuals, however, indicated that they would miss two of the six sermons in the series and said they would understand if I could not include them in the study. I thanked them for their willing response and excused them, believing that more than one absence from the series would upset the continuity I sought to achieve in the project. This left twenty-five participants in the project when the sermon series began.

The participants ranged in age from thirteen to eighty years, with many different ages between them. Educational levels varied with age (thirteen year-olds being in school, of course) and included many high school graduates and a significant number of college and university graduates. No participant over the age of nineteen lacked a high school diploma at the very least. The twenty-five participants included sixteen females and nine males, and represented a number of occupations, including: school teachers, steel mill workers, an accountant, retail clerks, a bank teller, a nurse, a carpenter, a secretary, several students (elementary through university) and a number of retirees.

In retrospect, the project participants constituted an excellent cross section of the United Baptist Church congregation. Females greatly outnumbered the males in the project, but this is also true of the congregation as a
whole. In addition, while no age group constituted a majority of participants, the group representing adults aged sixty and older was the largest single group. But again, this is also true of the church membership as a whole.

**The Sermons**

During the research portion of this project, six sermons were preached over six consecutive weeks. These sermons demonstrated both deductive and inductive sermon forms which were used on alternating Sundays. An examination of the sermons will show that the sermon forms are most evident in the introductions and conclusions. In the case of the deductive sermons there is also the prevalence of sermon "points," in keeping with the characteristics of the deductive form. The representative inductive sermons used "points" on occasion, but usually toward the end of the sermon, and not to argue the central idea of the sermon.

The sermons were also related as six parts of a series on Paul's Letter to the Galatians. I chose this epistle because of its combination of doctrinal, biographical, and practical emphases, which proved conducive to alternating sermon forms. My second sermon, for example ("I, Paul"), was biographical in nature, and was based on the second chapter of Galatians which is also biographical in nature. My third sermon, ("Protective Custody"), on the other hand, was more doctrinal, addressing the subject of legalism and the
Christian's relationship to the law. This was based on the third chapter of Galatians, which is also quite doctrinal in nature. The epistle was also chosen for the very practical reason that it is six chapters in length, and would lend itself to a six week sermon series. I might add, by way of clarification, that I read the sermon text (biblical) immediately before each sermon, rather than earlier in the service as is found in some churches. This was true not only in the series, but in my normal preaching ministry at the United Baptist Church. While preparing the sermons I used a wide variety of resource materials which are listed following the Reference List.

**Project Findings**

**The Questionnaires (By Sermon)**

At the beginning of each worship service in the preaching series, participants were reminded to pick up a questionnaire from a well marked table in the church narthex. Before the first Sunday, I had phoned each participant as a reminder of the procedure to follow. After this initial reminder I did not phone them again since many indicated it was not necessary. In addition, there was a printed announcement in the church bulletin each week reminding participants to pick up a questionnaire. I also announced this reminder from the pulpit, asking for a show of hands from those who may have forgotten their questionnaire. During the first two weeks, two people
raised their hands and ushers handed them a questionnaire. In succeeding services all participants had picked up their questionnaires before the service.

My instructions to the participants were brief: they were to be candid in their responses; they were not to discuss their responses with anyone during the series, and they were to deposit their completed questionnaires in a box provided for collection purposes before they left the church building. Each Sunday I gathered the completed questionnaires, filed them in separate weekly files, and locked them in my study. The return rate of the questionnaires was very high. There were two absences during the entire series and every participant who was present during the weeks of the series completed a questionnaire.

Sermon One: "Variations on a Theme" (Deductive)

This sermon was presented in a deductive form and was introductory in nature, as a start to the series on Galatians. Participants clearly indicated on the questionnaire that they understood both the central idea of the sermon (freedom in Christ) and that it became apparent to them from the beginning of the sermon (questions 1-3). These responses are important to the research since sermonic form, as it is being studied here, deals largely with the location of the central idea of the sermon. Deductive sermons locate their central idea early in the presentation
and then "spend themselves in proving it" (Sangster 1951, 80). Respondents appear to have sensed this in the first sermon. Furthermore, all respondents except one indicated that they prefer to arrive at the sermon’s central idea at the beginning of the sermon (question 4) after which it can be demonstrated by several points.

As to whether they thought the sermon was effective (question 5), all respondents circled either "strongly agree" or "agree." They were not so certain as to how (or even if) the form could have been improved. Some participants indicated that more illustrations and examples would have improved it, and others indicated the need for more sermon points, clearly stated. Still others were uncertain. Some of the written comments described the sermon form as "excellent as it is," or having "clear points," or that it was "clear."

As to the responses to question 7, which was designed with the sermon’s overall impression in mind, most participants indicated that it was most like a lecture or a debate. This would confirm that they sensed a deductive form as well, since, by definition, deductive sermons tend to support, or even argue the validity of a central idea (much like a lecture would, or a debate). Question 8 was designed with inductive preaching in mind, since two of its proponents, Ralph and Gregg Lewis, suggest that the inductive form helps people join the preacher in arriving at the
sermon's conclusion (1983, 81). In this initial deductive sermon, however, most participants said that they joined in arriving at the conclusion. This may indicate that they were sufficiently involved in listening to the sermon that they felt they were joining me in the conclusion (this response, after all, is not exclusive to inductive preaching), or they were not clear about the question itself. Only three respondents, however, said that they made their own conclusions, which would seem to indicate that the participants understood the choices well enough. Otherwise, there would probably have been a more even distribution among all three choices.

The next question (9) had to do with whether sermon form helped the participants hear God’s word speak to them. Overwhelmingly, respondents either "agreed," or "strongly agreed" that this sermon’s form did help them. Written comments tended to support their circled responses. One respondent wrote that the central idea, followed by points, helped her stay with the sermon. Another person cited its "concise points," and another, that "it was easy to follow." Two participants mentioned the helpful illustrations, and a few people mentioned the content of the sermon, rather than form, confirming a hunch of mine (which was confirmed in the subsequent questionnaires) that form and content are not easily distinguishable by every listener. Those who mentioned content in this question said the sermon
"reinforced" their concept of grace, or "reminded" them of their freedom in Christ. These words seem to bring an instructive role to mind regarding a sermon's effectiveness and would support Augustine's assertion that an effective sermon "teaches, delights, and moves" (Willimon 1993, 55, 56).

It was with Augustine in mind that I designed the second part of question 9, asking about any emotions that were stirred during the sermon. Of those who answered this question, one person suggested "anger at the false teachers in Galatia." Several others wrote "gratitude to God," and one commented, "I have a desire to be more like Paul."

The last two questions (10, 11) were about sermon delivery and other parts of the service that contributed to or detracted from the sermon. Overall, delivery was judged to be adequate, and there was nothing that detracted from the sermon. Some things that contributed to the sermon were mentioned by several respondents, however, and included the pastoral prayer preceding the sermon, the reading of the sermon text, and the choir anthems. Two participants mentioned the communion service following the sermon (which we hold the first Sunday of each month, year round).

From the responses to this first sermon, several observations might be made. First, the participants clearly sensed the sermon form in this sermon and believed it to be effective. Second, suggested improvements were that it
might have included more points, and more illustrations and examples (but never less of either). Third, participants felt the sermon form helped them hear God's word but were not always clear on distinguishing form from content. And fourth, in a number of cases there was an emotional, or "feeling" response that may or may not have had anything to do with sermon form but was present nonetheless, and was complemented by certain other aspects of the worship service (prayers, music, readings, etc.).

Sermon Two: "I, Paul" (Inductive)

This sermon was unique in the series because it was a "first person" sermon in narrative style. As such it was inductive by the Lewises' definition, but different from other inductive sermons because of the first person voice. It must be stated here that I informed the congregation before the sermon began that I would "be" Paul during the sermon, speaking in his voice. No mention was made of sermon form, however, just voice.

The sermon received very strong responses, both positive and negative, from the project participants. From responses to the first three questions on the questionnaire, it is not clear that everyone felt the sermon had a clear central idea. Some wrote that it was "Paul's conversion." One person said the central theme was "God's enduring love." Several were not sure what it was, and a small minority indicated that it was about the Christian's identity in
Christ based upon Galatians 2:20 ("I have been crucified with Christ...").

As with the first sermon, all but one participant said they preferred arriving at the central idea of the sermon at its beginning, after which it can be demonstrated by several points. Having expressed that opinion, however, most respondents felt that this sermon was effective, and only three marked "disagree" (to question 5), indicating that for them it was not effective. As to improvements in form (question 6) there was a great deal of uncertainty. Those who did mark a choice favoured "more sermon points clearly stated." Written comments were mixed. Two respondents said that I "should have dressed like Paul." One said he had "great difficulty" with the first person form, and still another suggested that more "reminders" should have been given during the sermon that it was in the first person. And one person wrote "it was a great presentation."

In regard to overall impression, most respondents said that the sermon was either like a painting or a television drama, with the latter getting more check marks. No participants felt it was like a lecture, and two compared it to a debate. As to arriving at the sermon’s conclusion, most felt that they were joining me but equal numbers believed that the conclusion was made for them, or that they had made their own.
The strongest negative reactions came in response to question 9. Several people "disagreed" that the form of the sermon helped them hear God's word, and several others were "uncertain." While most "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that form was effective, on this question, the negative responses were noteworthy. One person wrote: "I couldn't understand the point of this sermon." Another said it was "confusing." Others, however, wrote that the first person technique made the biblical story "real," or Paul's testimony "up-to-date" and "real." There was an appreciation for the text as it was woven into a narrative (although it is already a narrative, for the most part).

In response to the question regarding emotions, many one word answers were written, such as: anger, joy, peace, strength, happiness, etc. Another respondent said the sermon motivated her "to try to be more like Paul." Sermon delivery was judged to be adequate, and contributions to the participants' understanding of the sermon included the reading of the text (Gal. 2:20), the scripture readings throughout the service, and the music.

To sum up, sermon two received a mixed response, especially in regard to the first person style. Most thought it was effective in its form but a significant number of respondents could not state the central idea of the sermon, nor whether the conclusion was offered to them or absent from the sermon (in which case they would draw
their own). Effectiveness, therefore, seemed to be judged more on the novelty of the first person style rather than form, and how the sermon made them "feel," rather than its form. The presence of the negative comments suggests that not everyone learns alike (or hears alike). The very positive comments and the very negative comments made me think of two poles, north and south, with a few responses scattered between. This is, perhaps reminiscent of the material in Chapter Two on brain duality and learning styles (29-32). In other words, participants' comments reflected the way their minds worked as they listened to the sermon (this will be discussed further at the conclusion of the chapter and in Chapter Five).

Sermon Three: "Protective Custody" (Deductive)

Responses to the first four questions on the questionnaire indicated that participants understood something about the form of this sermon. Most "strongly agreed" that the sermon had a clear central idea, and that it became apparent from the beginning. And again, an overwhelming number of respondents said that they prefer to arrive at the sermon's central idea at the beginning. All but two participants "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the sermon form for this sermon was effective. As to possible improvements to the form of the sermon (question 6), most marked "uncertain," although a few suggested "more illustrations and examples."

Written comments included: "OK as is," and "good points,
good title, good text." One writer said "too many points and illustrations can be confusing."

The overall impression of the sermon (question 7) was that it was most like a lecture or debate, and all but three respondents felt that the conclusion was made for them or they joined in arriving at the conclusion. As to whether or not sermon form aided them in hearing God’s word (question 9), there was strong agreement that it did, but a few participants marked "uncertain." Written comments revealed mixed opinions. One person wrote, "this sermon didn’t come together for me." Another said "this is not an area I have trouble with." Of those who wrote comments, two mentioned sermon form ("it had a clear outline," said one), and two others answered this question from the perspective of content rather than form. One participant said, "I learned about salvation." Another wrote, "the sermon confirmed my salvation."

Emotional responses that appeared were: gratitude, gladness, joy, and happiness (including laughter). Sermon delivery (question 10) was acceptable, with no criticisms. And aspects of the service that contributed to the participants’ understanding of the sermon were the reading of the text and the music.

In short, sermon three was judged to be effective and participants clearly sensed the form of the sermon. While they demonstrated again their overwhelming preference for a
clearly stated theme followed by points (deductive form), they also indicated room for improvement with more illustrations and examples (which are more prevalent in the inductive form). A pattern also began to emerge after sermon three, indicating that participants often had difficulty distinguishing sermon form and sermon content. Those whose written comments stressed content seemed to see the sermon as a whole, whereas those who distinguished form, often commented on a discernible outline within the sermon and their preference for sermon points. The appearance of blunt, almost negative comments from some respondents made me aware that the questionnaire was credible, and that participants were not simply answering the way they thought a question "should be answered" according to a pre-conceived notion (or according to what I might think, i.e., "The Hawthorne Effect").

Sermon Four: "Up Close and Personal" (Inductive)

Participants indicated on their questionnaires that this sermon had a clear central idea, and were able, for the most part, to write down what it was. They were somewhat divided as to where this central idea came (beginning or end) but most were either uncertain or in disagreement that it came at the beginning. Those who thought it came at the beginning may have picked up on the quote regarding disillusionment with which I began the sermon, and concluded that this was the central idea. Several participants, in fact,
wrote "disillusionment" as the central idea, probably not waiting until the end of the sermon to complete this question. As with all of the other questionnaires, the vast majority of respondents indicated a preference for a sermon's central idea coming at the beginning rather than at the end of the sermon.

All but two respondents felt that the sermon form of this sermon was effective, and most were uncertain about ways to improve it. A few marked "more sermon points, clearly stated," and a similar number marked "more illustrations and examples." Written comments were very positive: "I liked the personal experiences in the introduction," wrote one person. Another wrote, "pertinent for all ages," referring to the introductory illustrations.

Interestingly, the overall impression of the sermon (question 7) was that it was more like a lecture than the other choices given. Perhaps this was due to the historical references to the Apostle Paul or the points made in the conclusion, rather than the concrete experiences offered in the introduction. In regard to participant involvement (question 8), most marked either the first or second choices, indicating that they felt either that the conclusion of the sermon was made for them or that they joined me in arriving at the conclusion.

Participants either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the sermon form helped them hear God's word, with only two
being "uncertain." Written comments, however, revealed that content was what helped them, not form. One person did comment on the introductory illustrations, and another appreciated my connecting Paul's experiences to life today, but most commented on their own struggles with perseverance and how the sermon encouraged them. Form does have something to do with this, according to Lewis and Lewis (1983, 83) in that an inductive form establishes "common ground" with the listener. This certainly was evident in the responses to this sermon.

As to emotions stirred during this sermon (question 9), again, single word responses were common. Among these were gratitude, hope, love, determination, and strength. Sermon delivery was judged to be adequate (question 10), and elements in the worship service that were complementary to an understanding of the sermon were the text, the pastoral prayer, and the choice of music.

To sum up, participants again sensed the form of the sermon and judged it to be effective, while repeating their preference for the deductive form (central idea at the beginning, followed by points). Positive comments were nearly all about the concrete experiences (my term) used in the sermon which bridged the time gap between our day and Paul's day. This use of concrete experiences early in the sermon is more inductive than deductive, and was obviously appreciated by the majority of the participants. In other
words, while the respondents continued a pattern of choosing the deductive form as a preference, they were very positive in their appreciation of the inductive elements used in the sermon.

Sermon Five: "Limited Freedom/Limitless Love" (Deductive)

Participants in the project found this sermon to have had a clear central idea that came at the beginning of the sermon. And as was the case with all of the previous questionnaires, they cited their preference for a sermon that has its central idea at the beginning, followed by several points. Nearly every respondent "agreed" that the form of this sermon was effective and two "strongly agreed." As to possible improvements to its form, participants were generally "uncertain," with a few indicating the need for "more illustrations and examples." Written comments were positive. One person wrote, "enough clear points." Others wrote "OK as is," or "complete the way it is."

Overall impressions were that the sermon was most like a lecture, with three respondents saying it was most like a debate. Participants' involvement in reaching the conclusion was said to have been a joint effort, with a small number saying that the conclusion was made for them. Only one person thought there was no conclusion offered.

In regard to sermon form helping participants hear God's word, most "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that this sermon's form was helpful, with three remaining uncertain.
Written comments were evenly divided, with some writing about content, and others writing about form ("the points helped me," or "the sermon form clearly pointed out the main message"). One person, writing from the perspective of sermon content, wrote: "I now feel a need to renew my love for family and friends."

Emotions that seemed to be stirred during the sermon were happiness in God’s love and freedom, gratitude, love for Jesus, peace, and happiness. The actual delivery of the sermon was said to be adequate, and aspects of the worship service that were seen to be complementary to the sermon were the prayers, the music, and the sermon text. Two people cited things that detracted from the sermon, one of them being a head cold (the listener’s, not the preacher’s), and the other being the communion service following the sermon.

In summary, participants by an overwhelming number understood the form of this sermon and could state its main idea. They continued the pattern of choosing this form (deductive) over the other (inductive) and were generally uncertain that the form could be improved. The overall impression was in keeping with descriptions of deductive sermons in the literature (particularly Lewis and Lewis, 1983), and the pattern continued of respondents confusing form and content. It is possible that "confusing" is too strong a word if participants saw no real difference between
form and content, or that they were simply unaware of sermon form but were able to respond, nonetheless, to what they heard. As was the case with previous sermons, such responses were very close to the Augustinian criteria of sermon effectiveness (Willimon 1993, 56, 57), that such a sermon "teaches, delights, and moves." This can be seen in the participant's comments about the sermon "re-affirming Christian guidelines" (teaching), or that it stirred "happiness in them" (delighting), or that it made them "want to show more love to their family members" (moving). That sermon form did not seem to enter the thinking of certain participants, except in a minimal way, appears to be a recurring pattern in the questionnaires.

Sermon Six: "The Agriculture of the Spirit" (Inductive)

The final sermon in the series was understood by most as having had a clear central idea (although a few were uncertain that it did, and one disagreed that it did). Fully half of the participants, however, indicated that the central idea of the sermon was not clear from the beginning. Since the sermon was in the inductive form this was not surprising. What was of interest was that so many indicated that the central idea of the sermon was apparent to them from the beginning. This may have been because of the reading of the text (along with its familiar "sowing and reaping" references) and my immediate telling of my farm experiences in the sermon's introduction. Perhaps some made
the immediate connection (especially after reading the sermon title in the bulletin). Another possibility could be "questionnaire fatigue," meaning that with this sixth questionnaire, some participants may have been less focused than they were earlier in the series and circled a familiar answer. I have no way of knowing if this was, in fact, the case, but I acknowledge the possibility. Safeguards against such responses were the spaces for written comments inviting participants' reactions to the sermons, and, of course, the triangulated data gathering process itself.

For sermons in general, participants continued the pattern of choosing the deductive form over the inductive (question 4). Since this sermon was inductive, I expected that some participants might change their pattern for this questionnaire. They did not. Only two indicated that they preferred the inductive form, based upon the sermon's central idea and presence (or absence) of sermon points and illustrations.

Participants generally indicated that the form of this sermon was effective, but many indicated "more sermon points, clearly stated" would have improved it. One person wrote that there were "too many examples" given in the sermon. Others appreciated the points in the conclusion, but one person thought I would never get to them, indicating his preference for points earlier in the sermon.
Overall impressions were that the sermon was either like a lecture or a painting. This is a curious combination, perhaps explained by the many written comments about my concluding points, which were definitely hortatory, or "lecture-like." As to participants' involvement in arriving at the conclusion, the majority indicated that they joined me in arriving at the conclusion. A strong number, however, felt that I had made the conclusion for them.

In evaluating whether or not this sermon's form helped participants hear God's word, most either "strongly agreed," or "agreed" that it did, with six people marking "uncertain," or "disagree." Written comments were mostly positive, with one person commenting favourably on the agricultural imagery, and others describing how the sermon encouraged them in general. One respondent wrote: "I couldn't relate to this sermon."

Emotional responses were mixed with this sermon. One person wrote that she felt "sorrow for the burdened," and another, "sympathy." Two others mentioned motivation: "I want to be more kind," and "I want to improve." Two others mentioned that the sermon "encouraged" them.

The delivery of the sermon was judged as generally adequate, with a small number "uncertain" about it. And elements in the service (apart from the sermon) that complemented participants' understanding of the sermon were the reading of the text, the music, the "Prayer of St.
Francis, and the presence of lilacs in the sanctuary (said to fit in with the agricultural theme). One person said "heat" was a mild distraction on this particular Sunday in June.

To sum up, this last sermon in the series was generally understood to be the kind where the main point comes at the end of the sermon. It was also said to be effective in its form although almost everyone preferred the other (deductive) form. This was clear not only from question 4 but the responses to question 6, indicating that more sermon points might have improved the sermon.

Responses to question 11, regarding parts of the service which either detracted from or contributed to an understanding of the sermon, revealed a continuing pattern in all of the questionnaires. This pattern was that music was seen as a contributing factor to the participants' understanding of the sermon, as well as the reading of the biblical text. These two written responses appeared with sermon six and on all previous questionnaires.

Summary of Findings from the Questionnaires

Upon conducting a thorough review of the questionnaires, the results of which are summarized above (according to each sermon), I discovered that one of the most significant findings was the way the participants responded to question 4. This is the question that asked whether participants preferred "to arrive at a sermon's central idea
at the end, having heard examples the preacher intends to address," or if they preferred "to arrive at the sermon's central idea at the beginning, after which it can be demonstrated by several points." The inclusion of this item in the questionnaire was crucial, since advocates of both deductive and inductive preaching define sermon form largely with reference to the sermon's central idea and its location within the sermon.

Respondents, with very few exceptions, indicated that they preferred to arrive at a sermon's central idea at the beginning, after which it can be demonstrated by several points. This answer was circled even after participants correctly identified an individual sermon as having its central idea at the conclusion. After the third week of the series, I noticed this pattern as I examined the completed questionnaires. At first I was surprised, since my background research for this project included a strong argument (e.g. Craddock 1974; Lewis and Lewis 1983) that people "live" inductively, and therefore would prefer that a sermon begin with the concrete experiences of life and end with a central idea, either strongly articulated or left "open-ended" so that listeners could draw their own conclusions. But the responses on the questionnaires in this project seemed to indicate just the opposite, a strong preference for a deductive form.
Because of the strong response to this question, I considered that the question might have somehow been flawed, since it was answered the same way throughout the sermon series. Question 6, however, was a safeguard against such a possibility because it gave participants an opportunity to indicate ways in which the sermon's form might have been improved. Many respondents checked "uncertain" for this question and wrote things like, "OK as is," in the blank marked "other." But respondents that did not check "uncertain" usually checked "more sermon points, clearly stated," especially for inductive sermons. This was true even when they had judged the inductive sermon form to be effective, which gives support to the conclusion that they preferred the deductive form in general. And of the nearly 150 questionnaires turned in, only a single questionnaire had a check mark indicating that "no sermon points" might have improved the sermon's form. Slightly more said that "less sermon points" would have improved the form, but this number was less than five.

The question that troubled me most before the series began was: Would the participants be able to sense such a thing as sermon form and be able to state a preference for one over another? The questionnaire was designed to demonstrate whether or not participants could, in fact, sense sermon form without hearing me mention the words "deductive" and "inductive." Questions 1-3 asked for an
indication of this by focusing on the sermon's central idea. The vast majority of the participants said they could sense a central idea and name it, and, for the most part, they could also say whether it came at the beginning or the end of the sermon. While this was true more often of the deductive sermons, the pattern was also discernible for the inductive sermons.

As to the question about overall impressions of the sermon (question 7), there was also a discernible pattern. In the case of the deductive sermons, participants generally likened them to a "lecture," or a "debate." For the inductive sermons they likened them to "a painting," or "a television drama." Sermon six ("The Agriculture of the Spirit") was an exception to this pattern for reasons I have suggested above (72, 73).

The strong responses to question 7 confirm for me that participants were able to tell the difference between sermon forms even though they had no idea from me that I was alternating forms week by week, or even that I was using different forms. Responses to question 7 also tend to confirm the Lewises' point (1983, 109) that the two sermon forms are different, the inductive form being "creative, expanding, and inviting participation" (e.g., like a painting), and the deductive form being "cognitive, contracting, and imposing principles" (e.g., like a lecture). On the strength of their answers to the above
questions, therefore, I conclude that participants did, in fact, sense a difference in the sermon forms used in the series and preferred the form that begins with a sermon's central idea at the beginning, and follows with several points that explain or expand upon the central idea (the deductive form).

One observation I made throughout the preceding analyses of individual sermons was that some participants answered one particular question (9) using the vocabulary of sermon content rather than form. This was the question that asked respondents to describe, in their own words, how the sermon in a particular instance helped them hear God's word in their own situation. Those who answered this question from the perspective of content tended to see the sermon as a whole, commenting on a particular theme, such as Christian freedom or grace. Such respondents often wrote of a connection between the sermon's emphasis and his or her Christian experience, with little or no regard for the way the sermon was designed. Others answered this question by commenting on form (as they were asked), usually mentioning the sermon's outline, or the points of the sermon.

My hunch was, as I looked at the questionnaires again, that those who wrote about sermon content on question 9, did so without any conscious attention to content as opposed to form. If they heard the word of God in a given sermon, they wrote about how this might influence their lives. In other
words, even if participants sensed a sermon's form as revealed in the early part of the questionnaire, it did not necessarily play a crucial role in their appreciation of the sermon's overall value, or if it did, it was of secondary importance.

The question about emotions being "stirred" during the sermons got a very strong response overall with most people writing one word responses. I do not know what these answers contribute to the discussion on sermon form, except to say that the inductive form, according to Ralph and Gregg Lewis (1983, 109) appeals more to the creative and intuitive aspects of the listeners and, presumably, the emotional as well, as opposed to the cognitive and intellectual aspects of listeners, to which a deductive sermon would appeal. From this we might expect more emotional responses to the inductive sermons. I did not, however, find this to be the case in my research. Responses to this question were similar throughout the series, regardless of sermon form. Perhaps this question had the function of ascertaining the presence of other criteria for sermon preference. Participants revealed what they felt about the sermons, and these responses went beyond any discussion of sermon form, simply proving that sermons are more complex (as are listeners) than one project can hope to determine.

The final two questions on the questionnaire had to do with sermon delivery and other aspects of the service
besides the sermons. As to delivery, responses were very positive, with one or two instances where respondents thought delivery was not adequate. These were found in the sermon in the first person (sermon two, "I, Paul").

Question 11 asked about any aspects of the services that contributed to or detracted from participants' understanding of the sermon. Without exception, the music used in the service was cited as contributing to an understanding of the sermon, but not by a majority of participants who left the item blank. Other aspects mentioned here were the communion services conducted after sermons one and five (two responses indicated they detracted from the sermons, and two indicated that they contributed to the sermons), and the reading of the biblical texts prior to the sermons. This latter aspect received a very strong response, underlying my own assumption that the biblical text is foundational to any sermon.

The Individual Interviews (By Representative Sermons)

Individual interviews began on the Monday evening following the conclusion of the sermon series, and continued throughout the succeeding two week period. Each interview was arranged through a phone call to the participants, and, for the sake of continuity, was held in my study. As mentioned on the consent form that each participant signed, all interviews were taped (audio), with each tape marked with an encoded identification number to safeguard privacy.
Before each interview began, I presented the participants with two sermon transcripts for review. These represented the two sermon forms used in the project. One sermon was "Protective Custody" (sermon three), which represented the deductive form. The other sermon was "Up Close and Personal" (sermon four) which represented the inductive form. The choice of these two sermons was arbitrary on my part. The reason I chose two representative sermons rather than have interviewees review all six of them, was simply due to the time factor. I did not want participants to have to review all six sermons and then be expected to answer questions pertaining to them based upon their recollections gathered in a brief review period. (I would do something like this in the group interview to follow, but using a somewhat different review method.)

The choice of the transcript medium itself, as opposed to an audio tape, was also made in the interest of time. A single sermon tape would have taken a minimum of twenty minutes to review, whereas two sermon transcripts could be "skimmed" in ten or fifteen minutes. While the tapes were available to participants, transcripts were acceptable to everyone, and, in the end, added a certain consistency to the interview process since we were not going back and forth between transcript and audio tape.

Of the twenty-five participants who agreed to take part in the project, twenty-three were interviewed. This
number reflects the two participants who missed more than one of the sermons in the series and were, therefore, excused. They were quite understanding about this and even apologetic that they had missed two of the sermons.

Each interviewee that came to our designated appointment was given approximately ten minutes alone to review the two representative sermons. Before leaving them alone I instructed them to pay particular attention to the way the sermons were designed (i.e., their form!), and to notice the introductions, conclusions, and anything else that seemed to stand out to them. After the review period, I came back and began the interview, using the individual interview guide included in Appendix B. The interviews lasted approximately one half-hour.

Representative sermon: "Protective Custody" (Deductive)

This sermon was chosen by a majority of the participants (thirteen, to be precise) as the more effective of the two representative sermons in the way it was put together. When asked to elaborate on their choice, interviewees gave similar responses. One person said it was a better "design" because it stated the preacher's intent at the beginning. Another participant said she liked the sermon points. Still another said she appreciated the "clear statement of the theme at the beginning." These comments were repeated by several others who chose this sermon as the more preferred sermon of the two.
As was the case with the questionnaires, some participants responded to the first question using the vocabulary of content rather than form. When asked, for example, to elaborate on his choice of this sermon, one man said that "salvation by works is still a problem many people have." Obviously he was thinking of the sermon's content. Later in the interview, however, the same man said that this sermon was the easier of the two to listen to because it was presented in a "yes/no, black/white style." This was, perhaps, another way of saying that it included propositional statements, which by the Lewises' definition, is generally characteristic of deductive sermons (1983, 32). It is likely, therefore, that this individual sensed a deductive form but simply answered the first question from the "content" perspective. This man also said, in answer to question 3, regarding sermon effectiveness, that generally he likes the sermon theme stated "early on."

At least two other interviewees who chose this sermon over the other, and then spoke of content rather than form, later in the interview mentioned the clarity of the central theme, stated early in the sermon. In other words, as the interview progressed, they began to point out the characteristics of the sermon's form that they had noticed and that added, in this perception, to the sermon's strength. Looking back at these individuals' questionnaires for this sermon confirms that they had a sense of its form. For
example, they indicated on the questionnaire that it most resembled a "lecture," or "a debate."

As to the question (1b) about other comparisons or contrasts between the representative sermons, there were varied responses. One woman said that "Up Close and Personal" (the inductive sermon) spoke more of "today’s situation," and "Protective Custody" laid out two "intended points." Another said she noticed that with "Up Close and Personal" the main theme came at the end, and with "Protective Custody" it came at the beginning. Another said that "Up Close and Personal" had more illustrations than did "Protective Custody," and that its conclusion was more "directive." Others simply said that the introductions were different, and did not elaborate. One man said that in "Up Close and Personal" the theme came too late. He thought it should have come much earlier in the sermon. And two of the interviewees were unable to answer the question about comparisons and contrasts.

Question 2 asked participants which of the two representative sermons appealed more to the imagination. Of those who chose the deductive sermon over the inductive sermon as having the better form, most chose "Up Close and Personal" (the inductive sermon) as appealing more to the imagination. When asked to elaborate on their answer, the common response was that it appealed to one’s personal experience. One woman said the "rhetorical questions"
appealed to her imagination, especially the question, "have you been there?" The noteworthy discovery with this interview question was that those who preferred "Protective Custody" (the deductive sermon) could still say that the other sermon appealed more to the imagination. They could even say why that was so, with descriptions very reminiscent of the Lewises' definition of inductive preaching (1983, 43). It appears that these participants could state a clear preference for one sermon over another (based on form), yet still see the different characteristics and strengths of the sermon they did not choose. In fact, while two of the interviewees preferred the deductive sermon, they qualified their choices by saying they were both effective sermons and that it was (almost) "too close to call."

When asked to point out the strengths of the sermon they did not choose as most effective (in most cases "Up Close and Personal"), interviewees cited its relevance to personal experiences and its illustrations. As to "ease of listening" (question 2c) participants stuck to their preference of "Protective Custody," based largely upon the sermon's design or "movement" as one person put it. When asked question 3, relating to sermon effectiveness in general, these participants cited characteristics relating to both form and content. In the case of the former, they mentioned a sermon's organization, its clearly stated theme, and the use of sermon points, exemplified by "Protective
Custody." In terms of content, they emphasised relevant illustrations, application of the message to today, and the use of the Bible in the sermon. In the case of the biblical material, several interviewees mentioned having a balance between ancient times (e.g., Paul's problems with the Galatians) and contemporary life in Canada. Both of the sermons were seen as having maintained that balance quite well, but "Protective Custody" was the clear choice in matters of form.

Finally, the last question in the personal interview was about the participants' lives outside the worship setting which led them to describe sermon effectiveness the way they did. This question seemed to surprise most participants, but after a few moments of reflection, they gave answers that, for the most part, related to their daily experiences as parents, workers, students, etc. Several people mentioned the influence of the media upon society and saw the sermon as a way of getting a biblical perspective of contemporary life. Several others saw their lives as very organized or structured, and they like their sermons to be the same, and thus the strong preference for "Protective Custody." And the words "teach" and "instruct" came into some of the answers to this question, indicating that because of the many difficulties life presents people today, there is a need for Christians to be taught from a biblical perspective.
To sum up this section, "Protective Custody," the representative deductive sermon, was deemed preferable by a majority of participants over the representative inductive sermon, "Up Close and Personal." Interviewees were able to state their reasons for their preference, which generally included a clearly stated sermon theme, sermon points, and adequate illustrations applying the sermon to everyday life. Those who preferred the deductive sermon were also able to cite the strengths as they saw them, in the inductive sermon. These included the questions asked in the introduction, the illustrations, and a directive conclusion.

**Representative Sermon: "Up Close and Personal" (Inductive)**

This sermon was chosen over the representative deductive sermon by less than half of the participants. When asked to elaborate on their choice, most interviewees in this group referred to the sermon's appeal to personal experiences with which they could identify. At first glance this would seem to have little to do with sermon form, but proponents of the inductive form (e.g., Craddock and the Lewises) use this appeal to experience as an important part of inductive preaching. Fred Craddock, for example, speaks of people "living inductively" (1974, 60). His implication is that preaching must begin "where people are, and where they live." And Ralph and Gregg Lewis often use the phrase "common ground" in their argument that the inductive form
begins where people "are" in their life experiences (1983, 83).

Comments about this sermon, "Up Close and Personal," seem to confirm such arguments. One interviewee said, because of the way the sermon begins, "it draws you in gradually with life examples." Another said that she appreciated the many questions used in the introduction because they "hit home with people's experiences." Several others used the phrase "personal experience" as well, and one person said simply, "I could relate with it."

When asked to cite comparisons or contrasts to the deductive sermon, this group mentioned a number of things. Several interviewees said that the other sermon, "Protective Custody," was more like "a lecture," or "a debate." Several other participants noticed the difference in introductions, and mentioned that "Protective Custody" began with a concise statement of the theme and "Up Close and Personal" began with personal experiences.

As to the question (2), "which of these two sermons appealed more to the imagination", all but two from this group that preferred the inductive sermon also felt that it had a greater appeal to the imagination. One other person said "both," and one said the deductive sermon because of a particular illustration. The others, however, chose "Up Close and Personal" for many of the same reasons they gave for question 1. The sermon made them think of personal
experiences; it had illustrative material to which they could relate, and the rhetorical questions piqued their interest.

When the interviewees in this group were asked to cite strengths of the deductive sermon they did not choose ("Protective Custody"), responses all had to do with the content of the sermon. No one mentioned form here, but spoke of how the sermon reinforced the concept of salvation by grace, or how legalism can be a problem even in our day, or how the foundation of our faith is our freedom in Christ. These participants showed earlier that they could sense differences in the two sermons according to their form, but they saw the strengths of the deductive sermon in what is said, now how it was said. It should be noted here that two people in this group could not cite any strength for "Protective Custody."

As to which of the sermons was "easier" to listen to, interviewees who preferred the inductive sermon for reasons of form, were divided on this question. Several said it was "too hard to call," and several others said "Protective Custody" was easier to listen to because of content (in one case), and its organized sermon points. Those who chose the inductive sermon as easiest to listen to, gave similar reasons as before: the sermon’s appeal to personal experience, and its illustrations from "real life."
The next question (3) asked interviewees about sermon effectiveness in general, and again, answers were fairly diverse. Two people in this group mentioned the role of the preacher and his sincerity. A number of participants mentioned the sermon's relevance to their lives, including up-to-date illustrations. At least three from this group mentioned the sermon's attention to biblical principles. One of these people said that a sermon is effective if it "sends you away to read the passage again." Responses to this question did include a few remarks about form. One person mentioned that the theme should be stated clearly. Another said the sermon should ask "a lot of questions." Another interviewee said the sermon should have "understandable points and illustrations, including quotes."

The final question (3a) in the interview was also answered with a diversity of responses. Asked about life outside of our worship services and how this related to their responses to the previous question, many spoke of their personal need for sermons that can help them in their lives. The words "teach" and "instruct" came out several times for this question. Participants saw a need to be taught during a sermon. Two interviewees mentioned media exposure in answer to this question. One made the remark, "I like to be entertained," and the other suggested that a sermon should counter the influences of the media.
To sum up this section, the representative inductive sermon, "Up Close and Personal," was the "minority" choice in regard to sermonic form. As was the case with those choosing the deductive sermon, "Protective Custody," these interviewees could see a clear difference in form after they compared the sermons in a ten minute review. They could also cite the strengths of the sermon they did not choose, but in the case of "Protective Custody," pointed exclusively to content rather than form. Those who preferred the inductive sermon over the deductive sermon were also able to state their reasons for their preference. These were mainly related to the sermon's initial appeal to personal experience and its rhetorical questions. In regard to sermon effectiveness in general, those who chose the inductive sermon gave similar criteria: the sermon should relate to personal experience, have adequate illustrations and understandable points, and explain the biblical text. Those who chose "Up Close and Personal" seemed particularly interested in how sermons can help them, instruct them, and encourage them.

Summary of Findings from the Individual Interviews

One of the most noteworthy findings emerging from the individual interviews was the participants' preference for the deductive form over the inductive. While this was not an overwhelming choice, the comments offered in the interview seemed clearly in favour of the deductive form. This
would confirm the results from the questionnaires, which also demonstrated a greater appreciation for the deductive form over the inductive, while suggesting that elements of inductive preaching are still very important to sermons.

Upon examining the questionnaires completed for the same two sermons used in the individual interviews, I discovered no significant differences that would raise questions of credibility. The risk I took, of course, in using two different evaluative processes, was that for the two sermons I might have received completely different evaluations, one on the questionnaire, and one in the individual interview. This did not happen. When I compared the comments from the interviews with the questionnaires for the two representative sermons, I discovered very similar responses which seemed to confirm participants' preference of one sermon form over another. I acknowledge readily that after six weeks of completing questionnaires, this may be due to the participants simply learning my direction of inquiry. On the other hand, questions asked during the interviews were not identical to those asked on the questionnaire, and yet participants still did not significantly change their preferences or comments from one setting to another.

As a data gathering procedure, then, the individual interviews served as a clarifying process where I could actually speak to the people, and discover that they did
prefer the deductive sermon form as presented in the sermon "Protective Custody." As was the case with the questionnaires, however, the inductive form received very positive comments, especially in the area of a sermon’s appeal to the imagination, and its focus on personal experience early in the sermon as a means of holding listener attention. And as was the case with the questionnaires, participants added their own criteria for sermon preference that went beyond a sermon’s form. These included the sincerity of the preacher as perceived by the listeners, and a strong need for biblical teaching that explains the historical context (in this case Paul and the Galatians), as well as applies God’s truth to life today.

The Group Interview

The third data gathering procedure in this project was the group interview. The advantage of this procedure was that it provided an opportunity for participants to be together and to hear the comments made by others in the group. Another advantage was that it could take place in one session, lasting about an hour.

Two weeks prior to the group interview, I announced from the pulpit, the date, time and place of the interview. It was held in a large meeting room at the church on a Tuesday evening early in June. Of the twenty-three participants in the individual interviews, eleven attended the group interview. This was a much lower turnout than I
expected, given the high participation rate for the questionnaires and individual interviews. The number may be explained, in part by a scheduling conflict with certain public and separate school graduation ceremonies, and, of course, the onset of summer. But perhaps a phone call to participants the day before the group interview may have improved the size of the group.

To begin the group interview I found it necessary to review the sermon series, since it had been more than a month since participants had heard the first sermon. I chose to distribute handouts on which were written the titles (in order) of the six sermons in the series. Then I placed the first page of each sermon (transcript) on an overhead projector and read aloud several paragraphs from each sermon, while participants read silently. Having thus "jogged" their memories, I began to ask the interview questions as found on the group interview guide included in Appendix C.

The first question I asked was essentially the same one asked during the individual interviews. This was designed so that interviewees could tell me their preferences for the sermons based on form. As expected, there were different answers given, but in one or two cases, participants answered by giving all of the inductive sermon titles, or all of the deductive sermon titles. When asked to elaborate on their answers, those people gave brief
responses, such as, "well organized" (deductive sermons), or "easy to follow" (inductive sermons).

As to a clear overall preference, this question received no definitive answer as a majority opinion, but reflected an even split. The question that asked for other comparisons or contrasts (1b) received almost no response. But the question following, about the sermon’s appeal to the imagination, received several strong responses in favour of "I, Paul" (sermon two) and "The Agriculture of the Spirit" (sermon six). Both of these were in the inductive form and were remembered with appreciation because, as one person put it, "I could see Paul" (in "I, Paul"), and the sermon "appealed to the senses" ("The Agriculture of the Spirit").

When asked about sermons they did not choose (in question 2), the strongest comments were made about the first sermon, "Variations on a Theme," and the third sermon, "Protective Custody." These were seen to be strong in their use of a clearly stated theme and sermon points. In terms of "ease of listening" (question 2c), comments again, were split. The inductive sermons had "relevant stories with a familiar theme," as was the case with "The Agriculture of the Spirit." The second sermon, "I, Paul," was said to have "a biographical appeal."

Those who spoke in favour of the deductive sermons said that they related personally to the subject matter. One man said, for example, "I could feel Paul’s frustration
in that first sermon" ("Variations on a Theme"). A woman commenting on the third sermon ("Protective Custody"), said that she grew up with the kind of legalism addressed by Paul in Galatians.

It was the third question in the group interview that received the largest response. This question asked, "In short, what makes an effective sermon?" One person answered, "It should be short, with sermon points." Another said it should include "relational helps." Similarly, another mentioned the sermon's "impact on everyday life." One participant mentioned the importance of biblical instruction in a sermon, especially as it related to the present, and one person said he "liked to laugh at least once during a sermon." These responses obviously refer to both sermon form and sermon content, and continue a pattern found in the questionnaire and individual interviews which links form and content. Participants tended to choose a particular sermon from a holistic perspective even though it was clear they could sense things like the sermon's theme, force of argument, points, and illustrations.

At this point in the group interview I paused long enough to explain to the group the basis of my research project. I defined "deductive" and "inductive" sermons for them, reading parts of my problem and purpose statements from Chapter One. Then I asked, "Offhand, which form, deductive or inductive, do you prefer?" Overwhelmingly,
they answered "the deductive form." In a few cases, the facial expressions were noteworthy, almost revealing an "Aha" experience, or as if to say, "So this is what you've been trying to find out!" Others simply seemed to feel satisfied that they could finally understand the background of the project.

The concluding discussion of the group was also instructive. One man made the remark that while the deductive form seemed to be the clear preference of the group, the discussion earlier did not bear that out, since many people had commented on their appreciation of practical illustrations, imaginative language, questions, and so on, more characteristic of inductive sermons. He then said, "Could it be we need a combination of the two forms?" Indeed, this is the question addressed in one of the chapters of Ralph and Gregg Lewis' book (1983, 103-120). They answer in the affirmative even though they are proponents of the inductive form.

Finally, another comment was made about the group's preference for deductive preaching. It was suggested that upbringing and experience may be factors in the "tilt" toward the deductive form. This would indeed be a possibility if the preponderance of sermons preached in the United Baptist Church were, historically, in the deductive form. My hunch is that they have been. Although no transcripts remain from former pastors, it has been
suggested that my immediate predecessor preached deductively, and he began in 1978. And my own preaching, until recently, has been deductive, for the most part. So it is fairly safe to say that the deductive form has been dominant in this church for at least eighteen years, and perhaps longer. At this point in the discussion, several people indicated that they had to leave, and I concluded the interview after thanking participants for their willingness to take part in the project.

Summary of Findings from the Group Interview

While responses during the group interview were more evenly divided than with the questionnaires and individual interviews, participants did, nonetheless, say that they preferred the deductive sermon form over the inductive form. That this came immediately after hearing a definition of deductive and inductive sermons gives added weight, I believe, to their responses. As the insightful participant pointed out, however, the large response in favour of deduction did not really come through the earlier discussion, where comments were more evenly divided. Perhaps, as he said, the church needs a combination of forms reflecting both the need for an organized sermon design, but with all of the elements that are generally suggested when one defines inductive preaching (this is further discussed in Chapter Five).
As to the integration of findings from the group interview with findings from the previous procedures of the questionnaires and the individual interviews, I conclude that there is a great degree of similarity. As I mentioned above, responses were more evenly divided during the group interview until I defined the two sermon forms and asked them to choose. They chose the deductive form with little dissent, confirming the results compiled from the two other data gathering procedures.

In all three procedures there was a strong indication that deductive sermons were preferred. But likewise, in all three procedures respondents made positive remarks about those sermons preached in the inductive form. The group interview, perhaps more than the previous two procedures, gave participants the opportunity to voice their opinions. While they could do so in the individual interviews as well, they lacked the group setting, where they could hear the opinions of others. The group interview, then, served to clarify the findings of the first two procedures, and, as I have suggested, served to confirm them as well.

The Significance of Age, Sex and Education

At the end of the questionnaire, there appeared a short section which asked for information on the age, sex, and education level of each participant. This information enabled me to understand something of the demographic
character of the research sample (which I described earlier in this chapter). The question to be addressed here is: Did this information shed any light on the way participants answered questions during the data gathering process?

My conclusion is that it had little significance, if any, on the responses given by the participants during the data gathering process. Going into the project I had the expectation that the younger participants (i.e., the teens) would prefer the inductive sermon form because of their exposure to inductive teaching experiences at school, and their youthful experiences in coping with everyday life. Two of the teens, however, were the strongest advocates of the deductive form. As one young man in his early teens expressed it: "I like a sermon to be organized...to show me where it is going."

On the other end of the age spectrum, there were octogenarians who preferred the inductive form because it begins a sermon by addressing common, everyday experiences, and problems. But other elderly participants chose the deductive form for reasons similar to the teens. They appreciated organization, logic, and order in a sermon. The age factor, therefore, did not appear to play any significant role that I could discern.

As to the participants' sex and education levels, I could not see any discernible patterns emerging from the data. One female with a graduate degree in education did
respond positively to the inductive sermons throughout the project. It is possible that she uses induction in her teaching profession, having learned such methods in university. In her case, education may have been a factor in the way she responded to sermons. But one person’s answers do not suggest a pattern, and I did not draw any generalizations from them. Whatever it was that led participants to respond to sermons the way they did, it appears that age, sex, and education had little significance in the process.

Summary of Overall Findings

The project findings, according to each of the three data gathering procedures, were presented throughout this chapter, with summaries and tentative conclusions at the end of each section. My conclusions, therefore, emerged as the reporting and summarizing took place. They also form a large part of Chapter Five.

My findings, after a careful examination of the data were: First, participants in this project clearly preferred the deductive sermon form as it was demonstrated in three of the six sermons in the project series. Early in the research period this preference emerged in the questionnaires, where participants indicated, in large numbers, their choice of sermons that begin with a clearly stated central idea that is then followed by sermon points. This was confirmed in the individual interviews, and the
group interview, after I explained the purpose of my research and defined the two sermon forms.

Second, participants were generally positive in their comments about the inductive sermons. While choosing the deductive sermons in greater numbers, they still indicated that the inductive sermons were effective. Aspects of the inductive form that were most cited were: the appeal to the imagination, the emphasis on personal experience (especially in the introductions), and the use of rhetorical questions, stories, and vivid illustration.

Third, when given the opportunity, participants added their own criteria for sermon effectiveness. These often included matters of form, but also emphasized other aspects of the sermon as well, such as its attention to the biblical text, the role of the preacher, the use of humour, and the extent to which the sermon instructed, motivated, and encouraged.

Fourth, demographic characteristics such as the age, sex and education of the participants appeared to have little or no relevance in this project. Other factors may better explain the responses of the participants in this project. These may include: the participants' history of church attendance and thus exposure to one sermon form over another, a greater left-brain or right-brain orientation, or personal learning style. These cannot all be examined in detail within the scope of this project nor were they ever
intended to be but will enter the "discussion" section of Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Following a brief introduction, this concluding chapter presents a summary of findings from the research project. It also includes a discussion of those findings, relating them to the material in Chapters One and Two. Following the discussion, there is a section on conclusions and implications, followed by a critique of the project, and, finally, recommendations for further research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate listener response, through qualitative inquiry, to two sermonic forms, deductive and inductive, and to ascertain listener preference for them in the United Baptist Church of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Through a triangulation of data gathering procedures the evaluation process took place during a period of approximately eight weeks. The procedures included questionnaires, individual interviews, and a group interview.

After an examination and analysis of the data, which was gathered from questionnaires, audio tapes of interviews,
and my research notes taken during the interview, I found that the project participants preferred the deductive sermon form which was demonstrated by three of the six sermons in the project series (i.e., sermon one, "Variations on a Theme;" sermon three, "Protective Custody;" and sermon five, "Limited Freedom/Limitless Love"). This preference for the deductive form began to appear early in the research period. During the first four weeks of the series, for example, questionnaires indicated a strong preference for the deductive sermon form and "strongly agreed" that the representative deductive sermons were effective. At this point in the research schedule, participants had no knowledge that I was asking them to compare sermons according to form, but they were clearly able to distinguish such differences as seen in their responses on the questionnaires.

The individual interviews confirmed the data from the questionnaires, and during the interview process I had the advantage of being able to ask participants to elaborate on their answers, and, if necessary, clarify them as well. Just prior to the interviews, participants reviewed sermons representing both deductive and inductive forms. Over half of the interviewees preferred the deductive sermon and were able to articulate the reasons for their choice. Prominent among these reasons was the two-fold characteristic of a clearly stated theme early in the sermon, followed by
explanatory sermon points. This characteristic was also mentioned in the group interview, where participants were finally given definitions of the inductive and deductive sermon forms. After these definitions, they voiced their preference for the deductive form by a significant majority.

The data gathered during the three research procedures revealed a preference, by the participants, of the deductive sermon form. This did not, however, constitute a rejection of the inductive sermons. To the contrary, participants generally judged the inductive sermons (sermon two, "I, Paul;" sermon four, "Up Close and Personal;" and sermon six, "The Agriculture of the Spirit") to be effective. But it was evident from responses on the questionnaires that the respondents thought the inductive sermons could have been improved by the presence of "more sermon points, clearly stated." And the few participants, who expressed critical remarks about these sermons, mentioned that they failed to "get" the central idea of the sermon, either because it did not come during the introduction or it was perceived to not have come at all.

Participants who preferred the inductive sermons over the deductive sermons did so without significant comment on the location of the central idea within the sermon. Their remarks, especially during the individual and group interviews, focused on other aspects of the inductive form. They spoke, for example, about particular sermons relating to
personal experience, a sermon's illustrations, and, in some
cases, rhetorical questions. Even those participants who
preferred the deductive sermons indicated that a strength of
the inductive sermons was in their appeal to the
imagination. Several participants, for example, said they
could "feel Paul's anger," as he struggled against the false
teachers of Galatia (in sermon four, "Up Close and
Personal").

The inductive sermons, therefore, were evaluated in a
very positive light, and were said to be effective for
reasons other than the location, within the sermon, of the
central idea and the use of sermon points. Positive remarks
were almost exclusively about imaginative language, atten-
tion to the personal experiences of the listeners, and the
use of rhetorical questions. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (see
19 above) such characteristics are not exclusive to
inductive sermons but are consistently used in the broad
definition stated by Lewis and Lewis (43) along with the
primary characteristic of the sermon's argumentative force.
Overall, however, the deductive form was preferred, and in
the case of the deductive sermons, their effectiveness was
seen as the result of a central idea clearly stated in the
introduction, followed by sermon points. Each form, in
other words, had its particular strengths, but participants
preferred the strengths of the deductive form.
I found, furthermore, that responses given by participants during the research period had no apparent relationship to factors such as age, sex, and education. An examination of the data revealed no discernible patterns from which to draw conclusions based upon these demographic factors. This was somewhat surprising since I expected that the youngest participants might have preferred the inductive sermons over the deductive sermons, since the former pay greater attention to the listener's concrete experiences, narrative style, and vivid imagery. Most of the younger participants, however, preferred the deductive form because of its organizational quality. They appreciated the inductive characteristics mentioned above, but indicated that they should not be used at the expense of a strong central idea at the beginning of a sermon, followed by sermon points.

This discovery also seemed to diminish the possibility that a preference for the deductive form meant that the participants "knew it" from past experience, having grown up with it. These young teens in the project have had very little experience listening to sermons, and have no real history of being conditioned to prefer one sermon form over another. Neither did gender differences or education seem to have any real effect on the project findings. Noticeable patterns simply did not emerge when these factors were taken into consideration.
Participants were also given opportunities, in each data gathering procedure, to write or state the characteristics of an "effective" sermon. These questions were designed with the goal of discovering the participants' criteria of effectiveness and whether sermon form played a significant role in their responses. I found that sermon form was one of the criteria mentioned, but it was usually stated as simply one of several criteria. The use of sermon points, for example, was mentioned numerous times during the research period, as was the need for a clear, central idea that is expressed early in the sermon. But just as often, participants mentioned the importance of the biblical text in the sermon and the interpretation of the text in an understandable and applicable way.

Participants also characterized sermon effectiveness according to what a sermon accomplishes: Did a particular sermon include biblical instruction? Did it teach the listeners something or reinforce a foundational belief or principle? Did it motivate them to change? Did it encourage them or give them hope? These criteria seemed to be foremost in the minds of the participants.

The actual design of the sermon was important to the participants in much the same way as a frame is important to a landscape painting. They spoke (and wrote) of sermons, in other words, in a holistic fashion where form was one of several criteria of sermon effectiveness. When asked about
form, they responded. When asked about other criteria or to name their own they also responded, even to the point of mentioning hymns that complemented the point of a particular sermon. The noteworthy discovery about sermon form, however, was that participants did not look at it with indifference, nor did they have any real difficulties in sensing a sermon's form, even before I defined the research terms for them. But to repeat the observation made above, participants responded to the sermons in the series in a holistic way, seeing both what the sermon said and how it said it.

**Discussion**

At this point it is appropriate to address the question, "Why are these research findings significant?" The answer to this question, at the most basic level, would be to state that the findings are significant because they provided a satisfactory result to the initial inquiry regarding sermon form. The findings revealed that the project participants tended to prefer the deductive form.

The findings also show, however, that the preference for the deductive form was not unanimous, nor did it characterize a rejection of, or even an indifference to, the inductive form. It appeared that in each stage of the data gathering process (i.e., the questionnaires, the individual interviews, and the group interview) there was a "qualified" preference for the deductive sermons. This "qualification."
appeared in statements such as this one, heard during the individual interviews during which participants compared two sermons representing the two forms: "I thought both sermons were effective, but the one (deductive) was more so than the other because you told us at the beginning where the sermon was going." That participant echoed the comments of many others, who preferred the deductive sermons in the series but made their opinions known that the inductive sermons "ran a close second."

One finding that emerged early in the research was the participants' preference for a clear, central idea in the sermon, stated in the introduction, and then followed by points. This was a surprise to me, since my reading of the proponents of inductive preaching indicated that this form is not particularly helpful in contemporary congregations. Ralph and Gregg Lewis, for example, suggested that the lack of listener involvement in a sermon, which, they say, characterizes many churches, is due to a reliance on the deductive form (1983, 31, 32). Commenting on deduction they wrote:

...too often the preacher's thesis at the outset slaps the faces of the congregation, and the duel between pastor and people is set for the duration of the sermon (31).

They further suggested that deductive preaching, because it is propositional, tends to remove from the listeners any opportunity they might have of joining the preacher in reaching his or her conclusions (32). Deductive sermons
state their central idea at the beginning, thereby informing the listeners of truths they might have "joined" in discovering, had another form been used (32).

My research project, however, did not confirm such criticisms of the deductive form. During the individual interviews, for example, I had participants compare a deductive sermon ("Protective Custody") to an inductive sermon ("Up Close and Personal"). By a significant margin they preferred the form of "Protective Custody," largely because of its propositional nature. That sermon began by stating:

...this morning we will begin by looking at the two ways in which people commonly understand salvation; that is, a proper relationship with God leading to everlasting life.

Such a statement seemed almost too abstract to me as I prepared that sermon, but participants commented on it favourably because it gave them a sense of the sermon's direction. The inductive sermon that was used during these interviews ("Up Close and Personal") began with a quotation about "disillusionment," which was followed by two rhetorical questions and a series of "concrete" experiences which many people could understand. While responses to this sermon were generally favourable, a number of interviewees indicated that, for them, the central idea came too late. One man was very direct in his comment that the sermon's theme of perseverance should have come "much earlier."
In terms of this research project, therefore, some proponents of inductive preaching, such as Ralph and Gregg Lewis, appear to have overstated their case, particularly in their suggestion that propositional statements in a sermon's introduction diminish listener involvement. I did not find this to be the case. To be fair to the Lewises, they moderated their criticisms later in their book *Inductive Preaching* (1983) by suggesting that the two sermon forms may be effectively combined (103ff.). This was also suggested by a proponent of deductive preaching, Haddon Robinson (1980) who wrote that a sermon introduction might be developed inductively, leading up to a statement of the central theme. Then the rest of the sermon could be developed deductively "to explain, prove, or apply the idea" (127).

The research findings were also significant because of what they revealed about the inductive form. Insofar as the inductive sermons in the project series did not state the central idea of the sermon early, they were said to be less effective than the deductive sermons. This opinion was confirmed time and again in all three of the data gathering procedures and was noteworthy due to its frequency of expression.

But when other characteristics of the inductive form were considered, participants were positive and, at times, enthusiastic. The inductive sermons' appeal to the
imagination was positively received, as was their use of vivid, multi-sensory illustrations (as in the sermon, "The Agriculture of the Spirit"), rhetorical questions, and narrative. These are not the sole domain of inductive sermons, but advocates of inductive preaching define such sermons using these very terms (Craddock 1979, 58; Lewis and Lewis 1983, 43).

Perhaps the most significant feedback about inductive sermons, however, was that they included concrete, personal experiences to which participants could relate. This, according to Fred Craddock (1974, 60), is one of the distinctives of inductive preaching (along with the sermon's overall movement which is of primary importance). But while the participants in my research project greatly appreciated such emphases, they were less interested in where they were placed within the sermon. This suggests that the use of concrete, personal experiences does not mean, necessarily, that they must be placed in the sermon's introduction, but can be effective elsewhere in the sermon, even in the conclusion of a deductive sermon, or a sermon in which the introduction is inductive but the rest of the sermon is developed deductively. This would also suggest that the two sermon forms may be combined with good results (Robinson, 127).

Significant to this discussion is also the question of why so many participants in the project preferred, overall,
the deductive form. The findings appeared to rule out factors such as age, sex, and education, but could they be explained by other factors? One possibility was suggested toward the end of the group interview, when a participant wondered whether an extended background of worship attendance and sermons had an effect on the majority of the participants. His assumption, of course, was that in the United Baptist Church the deductive form has been dominant over the years. At first, this suggestion sounded plausible, but there are two main arguments against it.

First, some of the youngest participants also preferred the deductive sermons, but have no extended history of listening to sermons of any kind. Our congregation has a Sunday School program that removes children from the worship service before the sermon begins. At most, the young teens in the project have been listening to my sermons for a year or two, during which time I have used both sermon forms. So the notion of being "conditioned" toward the deductive form would have been irrelevant in their cases.

Second, there was a fairly strong minority group that preferred the inductive sermons. This group included several participants who were in their seventies, and at least two who were in their eighties. Furthermore, all of these participants have attended this church throughout its thirty-one year history. Even if it could be shown that the deductive sermon form has been dominant throughout this
period, then the question still remains, why were these elderly members not "conditioned" to favour the deductive form? Surely one’s background of church attendance may play some role in present day experience, including the appreciation of sermons. But in this research it did not go far enough in explaining the overall preference for the deductive form, especially with a significant minority having chosen the inductive form.

Perhaps the better explanation for the research findings lies in the more theoretical areas hinted at in Chapter Two (29-32), including cerebral duality and personal learning styles. In the case of the former, certain advocates of inductive preaching (Lewis and Lewis 1983, 30; Jensen 1993, 31) argue that the inductive sermon form may explore avenues to the listener’s brain (i.e., the right hemisphere) that are not utilized in deductive preaching. Applying this notion to the project findings, it follows that the overall choice of the deductive form may be due to the majority of the participants having a "left-brain" orientation, that is, they tended to favour propositional statements and ideas that could be developed analytically and in a linear fashion and thus the preference for sermon points. To the extent that the inductive sermons appealed to their "right-brain," these participants may have made favourable comments about a sermon’s illustrations or appeal
to the imagination, but in the end, still preferred the other form for its "organization."

Conversely, those participants who preferred the inductive sermons may be "right-brain" thinkers whose mental faculties deal not in abstractions, but concrete situations, stories, symbols, and creative impulses. These participants, in choosing the inductive sermons, often pointed to a particular sermon's use of personal experience, or illustrations as the deciding factor in their choices. They also judged the deductive sermons to be effective, but at times pointed out that they could have had more illustrations, and even relevance.

The difficulty in using the above theory as an explanation for my project results is that it was not measured in my research. It remains, therefore, just one possible explanation for the research findings. On the other hand, qualitative inquiry generates the kind of data that gives rise to hunches, possible explanations, and intuitive analyses (Patton 1990). From that perspective, "right-brain/left-brain" theories may be just as plausible, or more so, as other explanations already discussed, such as demographic factors and one's past experience in church attendance.

The other possible explanation that was mentioned in tandem with brain duality, was the area commonly known as "learning styles" (31). This field of study is
characterized by the suggestion that people do not all learn alike. They also learn in a cycle, as David Kolb maintains (1981, 4) which consists of concrete experience ("feeling"), reflective observation ("watching"), abstract conceptualization ("thinking"), and active experimentation ("doing"). It is possible that participants in my project preferred different sermon forms (even though one form was favoured more) because of their personal learning styles. The majority who preferred the deductive sermons, for example, may typically begin their learning cycles at the "abstract conceptualization" stage, and those who preferred the inductive sermons at the "concrete experience" stage. Such an explanation is certainly plausible, and could, in another project, be validated through the use of a testing instrument, such as Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (1981). For this project, however, "learning style" remains only one possible explanation. For this researcher, however, it appears to be the most plausible explanation of those considered in this discussion.

Another observation about the research findings was that many of the participants mentioned the use of the Bible in their comments regarding sermon effectiveness. These comments tended to focus on the application of biblical truths to today's world, but they also expressed participants' concerns that they understand the historical context of the Bible. My use of Paul's Letter to the
Galatians, then, was a challenging prospect because of several reasons: the pastoral problem that gave rise to the letter, the biographical material in the letter, the strong emotional flavour of the letter, and, finally, its doctrinal emphases.

In preparing the six sermons in the series, I discovered the need for a "hermeneutical bridge," as Stuart Frayne describes it (1990, 54), whereby the chasm between Paul's pastoral context and our congregation's context could be closed. I found such a bridge in the procedural necessity of using two sermon forms and trying to "match" them with the material in Galatians. By having to examine the type of literature exemplified by Galatians, and the diverse material within the letter itself, I was able to choose the sermon form that best suited the text. The inductive sermon form seemed most suitable for the biographical sections and the practical material in chapter six. The deductive form seemed best for my introductory sermon, based upon the first chapter of Galatians, and the doctrinal propositional sections found in chapters three and five.

I also found myself in agreement with some of the scholars quoted in Chapter Two, who predicted the tendency toward a greater emphasis on "types" of literature in the Bible (Long 1990, 347; Greidanus 1988, xi), rather than the often fragmenting effect of historical criticism. To be
sure, some historical study was necessary to establish Paul’s context, but other historical-critical issues played little or no role in the project. Examples of these were the various North and South Galatia theories, the harmonization of Paul’s biographical material in Galatians with that in the Book of Acts, and arguments for the letter’s authenticity within the Pauline corpus. No doubt these issues are important, but for this preacher they were not a priority.

I did attempt, however, to treat the letter as first century correspondence from a pastor to his confused and errant flock, and convey this to the congregation in such a way that they could identify with Paul, and, to some degree, the Galatian Christians. Participants in the project seemed to respond to this. More than once I heard the comment, "I could sense Paul’s frustration," or "I could feel Paul’s anger toward the Judaizers." These responses generally came after the inductive sermons, but there is no reason why a deductive sermon could not elicit such responses if the biblical material was presented in a compelling and creative way. Sermon form, then, can be one of the components of the "hermeneutical bridge" whereby the chasm between the ancient and modern can be closed. More important, however, is allowing the text itself to be the determining factor in the preacher’s task of sermon development.
Conclusions and Implications

I conclude, from the findings that emerged from this research, that while the deductive sermon form was preferred by the majority of participants, each of the sermon forms evaluated were shown to possess unique strengths. In the case of the deductive form, the main strength was seen in its clear statement of intent and its use of sermon points throughout the body of the sermon. In the case of the inductive form, strengths were seen in its appeal to the imagination and personal experience, and its use of illustrative material, narrative, and rhetorical questions.

Project participants also cited criteria for sermon effectiveness that included form, but went beyond it to such things as the importance of biblical instruction within a sermon, along with the application of such instruction to today, and the related concern of relevance. Participants also emphasized that a sermon should have a motivational element in it, and should offer encouragement to those whose life seems filled with difficulty and disappointment. In short, participants responded to questions about sermon form, but also brought to the project their presuppositions regarding sermon effectiveness, just as I brought mine (as I acknowledged in Chapter One, pp. 10-16).

The implications of the research findings for my preaching ministry at the United Baptist Church are several: First, I discovered that deductive preaching was not as
outdated as some of my reading seemed to suggest. Nor was
inductive preaching the overwhelming favourite I expected it
to be. I will, therefore, devote considerable effort toward
finding ways in which the two forms may be effectively
combined (as Haddon Robinson suggested, 1980, 127).
Furthermore, I will probably strive toward making a clear
statement of a sermon’s theme early in the sermon, but not
necessarily in the first few sentences. Recently I have
begun some sermons with a quotation, or a story, followed by
a statement of the central theme. This seems to be quite
effective, since the listeners are still given an idea of
the sermon’s direction early, without my relying on a
prosaic introduction. This also allows the use of sermon
points, which had a widespread appeal among project
participants.

Second, the research findings clearly demonstrated
that not all listeners learn alike. While there was much
agreement on the preference for the deductive form, there
was also a wide diversity of opinion on other matters.
Sermon two ("I, Paul") for example, which was delivered in
the first person, was enthusiastically praised by some and
criticized by others. As a result, I will probably limit my
use of such a technique, but not eliminate it entirely. I
do not wish to rely on novelty in my preaching, but do
aspire to an imaginative approach that is, at the same time,
creative and faithful to the biblical text.
Third, with whatever sermon form I use, whether it be deductive or inductive (or a combination of the two), there must be adequate attention given to the biblical text, including the type of literature it represents. Sermons on the Genesis patriarchs, for example, might rely on strong narrative elements since the texts are, themselves, narratives (cf. Ch. 2, p. 34). A series on the first five chapters of Romans, however, may be more reliant on deductive elements, such as linear sermon points, with illustrative material playing a subservient role to the propositional truths penned by the Apostle.

Fourth, I discovered that there was great benefit in soliciting congregational feedback in a project such as this. Preachers normally hear standard compliments about their sermons while greeting people at the door following a service. But a well-intentioned "good sermon, pastor," does not say very much, however valuable such a remark may be to a preacher’s emotional well-being.

Perhaps an intentional forum for sermon discussion could periodically take place, which would accomplish goals similar to this research project without the necessity of formal procedures and control measures. Whatever form such a dialogue might take, it would be preferable to no dialogue at all, in which case a pastor’s preaching does not benefit from regular, intentional evaluation on the part of the listeners. These are exciting days in which to be a
preacher, and as this research demonstrated, homiletical proficiency is a complex endeavour for anyone to undertake, including this preacher. But with a careful treatment of the text, and an understanding of one's audience, the preaching event can be a significant means of communicating eternal truths.

**Critique of the Project**

First, it should be noted that certain steps were taken in this research which proved to be invaluable. The most significant of these, perhaps, was the triangulation of data gathering procedures. Without all three of these procedures (questionnaires, individual interviews, and group interview) my conclusions would have been tenuous, at best. But the procedures complemented one another, while being quite different in nature, and served to confirm and clarify findings.

The advantage of the questionnaires was in their provision for immediacy of response, coming right after each sermon. The weakness of the questionnaires, if there was any, was the lack of open-ended questions for which participants could provide their own responses in writing. I did provide a limited number of such questions, but would like to have had more, given the time to do so but fully recognizing the time after the service for filling out questionnaires is limited by waiting families and friends.
The advantage of the interviews, both individual and group, was that participants could give verbal responses and elaborate on or clarify them when necessary. The weakness of the interview stage was in having to remind participants of the sermons, due to the time lapse involved. This was acknowledged at the outset and rectified, to a point, by incorporating a review process.

Another valuable step taken in the project was the use of six sermons in the project series. Initially I had planned on four sermons, but the project would have been less credible with only two representative sermons of each form. Eight sermons might have been even better, but I sensed a certain weariness in the participants after six weeks of completing questionnaires. Two more weeks of sermons might actually have diminished the credibility of the research.

As to problems encountered during the research, two come immediately to mind. First, there was the distraction of having to complete a questionnaire immediately after the sermons. On two of the six Sundays, participants found a communion service right after the sermon (separated only by a hymn). It appeared that some participants completed their questionnaires during the hymn to avoid staying behind following the communion service. This seemed to rush things somewhat, though I am not sure whether it had any significant effect on those particular questionnaires. Upon examining
the questionnaires from those two Sundays and comparing them to other Sundays in the series, I could not detect any profound differences or erratic tendencies brought on by the hurried completion of the questionnaires. Still, this could have posed potential difficulties. I am not sure, however, how this could have been avoided, short of cancelling the communion services, or moving them to a different place in the worship service.

The other problem I encountered was the low turnout for the group interview. Some participants had unavoidable conflicts in scheduling. I did not expect this, since participation had been so high during the earlier stages of the project. My error was in not telephoning the participants before scheduling the group interview. A phone call may not have cleared up all conflicts in scheduling but I may have had a more sizeable turnout with the call. And a reminder call the evening before the group interview might have increased the attendance as well.

I must also acknowledge that participants in the project, by virtue of their willingness to participate, arrived on the Sundays in the preaching series ready to listen to the sermons. It is possible, therefore, that this readiness to listen was greater than that of the average listener not involved in the project. If this indeed was the case, then questions regarding a sermon’s effectiveness
in holding a listener's attention might have been answered differently by a more motivated participant than by someone who was not in the project. This is especially important in the case of inductive sermons, where getting listener attention and maintaining it is said to be one of their strengths.

The project might have benefitted by my surveying non-project congregants for the sermons along with the regular participants. On any given Sunday of the series I might have asked two or three people to fill out the questionnaire, without giving them prior warning that I would do so. Then I could have compared their responses to those of the participants to see if there were any differences. It may have been the case that such differences would have been negligible. On the other hand, they could have been significant enough to shed light on my conclusions, especially in regard to the analysis of the inductive sermons. In any case, such a control measure would have added credibility to the project and should be incorporated in any future research of a similar nature.

In addition, the project may have been improved by bringing in an outside party to critique the sermons before I delivered them and to conduct the interviews. In the case of the sermons, an impartial critic might have been able to assist me in honing the distinctions between the two sermon forms, making them more credible examples of each. While I
do believe that the sermons are credible examples of deductive and inductive preaching, they might have been improved by my submitting them to an impartial reader prior to the sermon series. Even though I continue to read widely on the subject and hope to continue in my own growth and understanding of sermonic forms, their distinguishing characteristics, and the implications of such characteristics in my preaching ministry, such an outside critic would have proven valuable to me in assessing where I was in both understanding and writing these sermon forms.

In regard to the conducting of the interviews, an outside interviewer would have allowed me to avoid any potential difficulties with participants answering questions with the thought of responding in ways they perceived I wanted them to respond or in ways that were less than candid because of our pastor-parishioner relationship (see my discussion of "the Hawthorne Effect," Ch. 3, p. 50). In this research project it appeared that participants were honest in their responses, but I acknowledge the potential for difficulties in such instances where a pastor conducts interviews which relate to his own preaching. Matters of confidentiality, for example, might have become an issue since there was no response given by any participant in the project that was not known to me. Because of this, there was the possibility that participants might have been less than forthcoming in their responses about my sermons.
An impartial interviewer might have lessened the above possibility. If the practical concern of convincing such an impartial individual to conduct a large number of interviews could be overcome, it would be a wise safeguard in future research projects. If such a safeguard is simply impractical, perhaps the outside party could at least conduct the group interview to balance the potential difficulties of the researcher conducting all of the interviews, including both the group and the individual interviews.

An additional criticism was the weekly repetition of question 4 on the questionnaire (see Appendix A). This question asked about the participants' general preference for the location of the central idea within a sermon. The potential problem of the weekly repetitive asking of such a general question is the tendency to force an entrenchment of opinion after the interviewees had committed themselves to a particular opinion on the first week. The question might have been utilized more adequately had it been asked the first week, after which it could have been dropped, or if it had been incorporated into one of the other questions that related specifically to the sermon of each particular Sunday.

In addition, the initial conception and development of the research project could have more adequately explained the concepts of "effectiveness" and "preference." When
initially conceived, I stated that the purpose of the research was to compare listeners' preferences for inductive or deductive sermons, yet used the term "effectiveness" both in describing the research and in the data gathering questions. The qualifications and definitions necessary to help the readers and research participants understand the connection between "effectiveness" and "preference" should have been incorporated earlier into my research. The final written report clarifies the use of the terms, stating that "effectiveness" is the strength or appeal of particular sermons as perceived by the listeners. Taken together, these strengths, including participants' own stated criteria drawn from the questionnaires and interviews, emerged as factors that contributed to the preference of one sermon form over another, and it was sermon preference that drove the research. I did not set out to discover any universal norm of sermon effectiveness, but wanted to ascertain the listeners' perceptions of effectiveness that would ultimately contribute to a preferred sermon form, either inductive or deductive.

Finally, I acknowledge that since inductive preaching is newer to me than deductive preaching, my inductive sermons may not have been as strong as my deductive sermons. This may account, in part, for the findings of the project that the deductive sermons were perceived as more effective. While I do not believe that one form was stronger, or of a
better quality than the other, based upon my preaching experience, I admit the possibility exists. To counter such a result, I was very thorough in my sermon preparation and was careful to devote comparable amounts of study time to both sermon forms. In addition, I rehearsed both types of sermons before I delivered them on a Sunday morning. Nevertheless, it is possible that my deductive sermons were of a better quality because of my familiarity with that form.

Recommendations for Further Research

An area of further research for those wishing to undertake a similar project in another church, would be an exploration of "learning styles." This could be done by employing a methodology similar to my own, but with the additional use of a testing instrument such as David Kolb's *Learning Style Inventory* (1981). Such a project may need to employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (because of the testing instrument) but would enable the researcher to correlate the evaluation of sermons with the results of the testing instrument.

Another possibility would be for someone in a denominational position, such as an area minister, bishop, or denominational leader, to survey pastors in his/her area to ascertain whether they have any intentional sermon evaluation procedures in place in their churches. This might not focus on sermon form, necessarily, but would,
perhaps, investigate other aspects of preaching ministries and stimulate dialogue among pastors and between pastors and their congregations. Finally, as to further research at the United Baptist Church, I can envision the informal development of sermon feedback groups, which would come together on an occasional basis and discuss the preaching ministry of the church. It is possible that the use of a testing instrument like David Kolb's (1981) may be both instructive and beneficial for pastor and parishioner alike.
APPENDIX A

PREACHING RESPONSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Key:  SA= Strongly Agree
      A= Agree
      U= Undecided
      D= Disagree
      SD= Strongly Disagree

1. This sermon had a clear central idea (main theme) that I could sense. (Circle one choice)
   SA  A  U  D  SD

2. The central idea as I understood it was:

3. The central idea of this sermon became apparent to me from the beginning. (Circle one)

4. For sermons in general: (Circle one)
   a. I prefer to arrive at the sermon's central idea at the end, having heard examples of problems the preacher intends to address.
   b. I prefer to arrive at the sermon's central idea at the beginning, after which it can be demonstrated by several points.

5. The way in which this sermon was "put together" (its form) was effective.

6. The way this sermon was "put together" (its form) might have been improved by having: (Check one in each group of four)
   more sermon points, clearly stated _____
   less sermon points _____
   no sermon points _____
   uncertain _____

   more illustrations and examples _____
   less illustrations and examples _____
   no illustrations and examples _____
   uncertain _____

   other ____________________________
7. This sermon was most like: (Check one)
   a. a lecture (for instruction) ____
   b. a painting (for visual impact) ____
   c. a debate (for proving a point) ____
   d. a television drama (for holding interest) ____

8. My involvement (participation) in arriving at the conclusion of this sermon was such that: (Check one)
   a. The conclusion was made for me ____
   b. I joined in arriving at the conclusion ____
   c. There was no conclusion offered - I made my own ____

9. The way this sermon was "put together" (its form) helped me hear God's word speak to me in my situation. (Circle one choice)

   (In a few words, please explain your answer to question #9)

   ________________________________

   Are there any emotions that seemed to be stirred as you heard the sermon? If so, which ones?

   ________________________________

10. The actual delivery of the sermon was adequate (speech, volume, diction, gestures, etc.)

11. Was there anything about the rest of the service that contributed or detracted from your understanding of the sermon?

   Please explain: ____________________________

I.D. Number (birthday) __/__/__
   sex: M ____
   day mo. yr.
Education: Check all appropriate items: F ____

   Grade 8 ____
   High School ____
   College ____
   University ____
   Post-Graduate ____
APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant I.D. Number ____________

1. Having just reviewed two sermons from the series, which one, for you, was the most effective in the way it was put together?

   1a. Could you elaborate on that a little?

   1b. What other comparisons or contrasts come to mind as you think of these two sermons?

2. Which of these two sermons appealed more to your imagination?

   2a. Can you describe why that is?

   2b. In the case of the sermon you did not choose just now, what was its main strength?

   2c. Which, then, of the two sermons, is it easier to listen to on a Sunday morning? Why is that?

3. From your experience as a "regular" in our Sunday morning services, what makes an effective sermon?

   3a. What is there about your life outside of our worship services that leads you to answer that way?
APPENDIX C

GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Having reviewed representative samples from the sermon series, which sermons, for you, are more effective in the way they are put together?

   1a. Could you elaborate on that a little?

   1b. What other comparisons or contrasts come to mind as you recall the sermons?

2. Which one (or more) of these sermons appeals more to your imagination?

   2a. Can you describe why that is?

   2b. In the cases of the sermons you did not choose just now, what are their main strengths?

   2c. Which, then, of these sermons, is easier to listen to? Why?

3. From your experience as a "regular" in our Sunday morning services, what makes an effective sermon?

   3a. What is there about your life outside of our worship services that leads you to answer that way?

4. In the preaching project I have been studying two different methods of sermon development. One is called "deductive," in which the central idea comes early in the sermon and the sermon develops that idea. The other is called "inductive," in which the central idea comes later, often at the end of the sermon (here I will also read from my first chapter, especially "definitions of terms," where I characterize both types of sermon forms). Offhand, which form do you prefer? Why?

Finally, I will disclose to the group my problem and purpose statements from Ch. 1, and ask for their responses, based upon their experiences as worshippers and members of modern society.
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

(Church Letterhead)

Dear ____________________

I’m writing to ask a special favour of you. As you may know, I’m completing my Project-Dissertation for the Doctor of Ministry Degree. This project includes a series of sermons that I will preach, and which will be evaluated by a randomly selected group of regular United Baptist Church worshippers.

Would you be willing to help me in this project by serving as one of those listener/evaluators? Each listener will hear six sermons, to be preached this spring, and will anonymously react to those sermons through a brief questionnaire I’ve prepared. Then at the end of the series I will meet with each participant for a brief interview regarding the overall series, and once with the entire group (about 20 people), for a group interview.

Would you be a part of this listening group? Here are the six Sundays of the sermon series: May 5, May 12, May 19, May 26, June 2, and June 9.

I hope you will be able to help. Your responses on the questionnaire will be made anonymously. To ensure that, you will select your own 6 digit ID number corresponding with your birthday (for example, mine would be 19-02-54). By using the same number each week, the questionnaires will be kept together for compilation at the end. These questionnaires will be available at the church office and with the ushers on the Sundays in the series. When completed, they will be returned to a collection box in the narthex. For the interviews, I will phone you for a convenient time.

I thank you for considering my request. If you will help, please send the postage-paid response to me this week, along with the signed contractual statement (required by the seminary).

As your pastor, I want to be an effective communicator of God’s good news. That is why I appreciate very much your kind assistance in this project to help me in this pursuit.

Yours sincerely,

Jeff Hoag, pastor
APPENDIX E

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

I, __________________________ agree to participate in the research on preaching at the United Baptist Church, Sault Ste. Marie. I understand that this participation is voluntary and that responses will be coded to ensure confidentiality; I can withdraw my consent at any time and have the results of my participation removed from the records and destroyed.

The research, to be conducted by Rev. Jeffrey Hoag (705) 942-4799, has been introduced to me in a letter of invitation. I understand the following points:

1) The reason for the research is to study the characteristics of the sermon in my church's preaching ministry and my perceptions of those characteristics.

2) My part in the study involves participation in questionnaires, a personal interview with the researcher, and a group interview.

3) There are no anticipated discomforts associated with this research.

4) Participation involves no physical, psychological, social, or legal risks.

5) The results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable way, unless required by law. Audio tapes are being made only to provide a verbatim record of the interviews without the interference that extensive note-taking would create. Names will not appear on the interview guide or audio tapes, but rather each interviewed person will use a pre-arranged identification number at the time of the interview. Upon completion of the study, audio tapes will be erased and the identification numbers will be removed from all records.

6) The researcher (Rev. Hoag) will answer any further questions about the research.

____________________________________  ______________________________________
signature of researcher                  signature of participant

Date: _______________  Date: _______________

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE RESEARCHER. (Pastor)
Research at Canadian Theological Seminary which involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Human Research Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to:

Chairman, Human Research Review Board
Canadian Theological Seminary
4400 Fourth Ave.
Regina, S4T 0H8 (306) 545-1515
Today we begin a six part series on Paul’s letter to the Galatian churches, and the title I’ve given today’s sermon is "Variations On A Theme." That’s really what the Book of Galatians is all about - variations on a theme. And the theme is this: our freedom in Christ. You are going to be hearing that many times during the course of six weeks - our freedom in Christ. That’s what this letter is about. Galatians has been called the Magna Carta of Christianity because from beginning to end it almost seems to shout, right from the pages, "you are free, Christian, you are free. Don’t settle for anything less." The world will try to sell you a bill of goods. Either it will try to get you enslaved to ritual and legalism, or it will try to get you enslaved to uncontrollable pleasure-seeking. Both of those things are bondage. But in Christ you are truly free. What I am going to do this morning is point out several things from chapter one, that not only set the tone for the succeeding chapters, but also reinforce Paul’s central message of the letter - our freedom in Christ.

So, the first thing we notice, the first point I must make, is that like most letters, we have Paul’s greeting. He identifies himself before he does anything else, and says that he’s an apostle sent by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. Paul’s apostleship was rather unique because, unlike the original disciples of Jesus, he did not know Jesus of Nazareth. At least not the One who walked along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the One who lived among us and taught, and healed, and preached. Paul didn’t know that earthly man, Jesus. Paul had met Jesus, to be sure, but it was the risen Christ that Paul met. It was the risen Christ who confronted Paul on the road to
Damascus in a blinding, traumatic, confidence-shaking encounter. And Paul’s apostleship was based upon that conversion experience on the road to Damascus. It was a traumatic experience. There was very little that was pastoral or peaceful about it. He was struck blind and he was revealed some very marvelous things, as well as some very bitter things about his own life.

So in a sense, Paul was different from Peter and Andrew, and James and John, and he mentioned this in his letters while still claiming to be an authentic apostle. Several times in his letters, not just this one, Paul defends his apostleship, because evidently there were people walking around saying “he’s not an apostle. He wasn’t with Jesus. He wasn’t with the twelve!” So this was a constant struggle. In addition to the identification as an apostle, he gives his characteristic salutation - "grace and peace." How many times have we read that in his letters - "Grace and peace be to you?" And then he gives a mini-presentation of the gospel, declaring that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age. So, the Galatian Christians needed, as we need today, to hear this. This salutation of grace and peace. For any talk of grace and peace, for the believer, has to be rooted in what Christ has done for us. Not what we have done for Him, what He has done for us. That’s the basis of grace and peace.

I’ve mentioned many times from this pulpit that grace, to put it simply, is God’s favour offered to us through no effort of our own. It’s not something you can buy, it’s a gift, a free lavish gift that we don’t deserve and can never repay. Our position is something like that of a man sitting in a fine restaurant before a $40.00 entree. It looks delicious as it sits there on the plate, and he is looking forward to eating it but he knows he’s only got $5.00 in his pocket. So what is he going to do? His assets just don’t cover his obligations. He knows the moment of judgement is going to come soon enough, and he’s worried about that as he eats the delicious meal. But grace is being told, just before being tossed in the street, that someone has "graciously" paid the bill. Now multiply that by untold hundreds, thousands of times and you begin to understand God’s grace; God’s favour offered to us through no effort of our own. Remember what the choir just sang a little while ago? “How marvelous that grace that bought my falling soul; He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.” Jesus saw our need, right through the fault, and he knew fully well that our assets are far less than our obligations. We could never pay what
Christ paid for us on the cross. Unfortunately the Galatian Christians failed to grasp the concept, they just didn’t get it.

And that brings us to the second point. Following the greeting, Paul reveals his purpose in writing this letter and it’s not pleasant, it’s not pretty. In fact, Paul is furious with these people. You can get a little flavour of this from verse six. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ." He was furious, and we only get as far as verse six before Paul begins to demonstrate his anger. He says "I am astonished, I am flabbergasted that you are trading in your freedom in Christ for legalistic ritual, and ceremony, and tradition. You are turning to a different gospel and it’s not really a gospel at all, because gospel means 'good news.' This that you’re believing in now is not good news at all, it’s slavery!" Evidently, and this is important to understand the letter, false teachers had come to visit these young Christians from Jerusalem, from Judea. They had come to visit them and they said "yes, you need Christ to inherit eternal life, but you also need to become Jews like us. You need to submit to Christ yes, but you need to submit to the law of Moses, to the words of the prophets, to circumcision, to the strict observance of the Sabbath," and all of these laws that they could tick off one by one by one, and they numbered perhaps in the hundreds. What was worse is, these new Christians began to believe it! These new believers began to accept this false gospel. That’s why Paul was so angry. Twice Paul says these false teachers or anyone who perverts the gospel like this should be condemned. Or to put it in plain English, "they can go to blazes." And that’s to put it mildly.

Why all this anger? Why was Paul so mad? Simply for this reason: If what we do as human beings can make us right with God, whether through a ritual, a ceremony, or a practice, then Jesus died for nothing and the cross is just a sham, it’s unnecessary. That’s what made Paul so furious. If what we can do by our own efforts can impress God enough to save us, then the cross is foolishness and Jesus came and died for nothing. Getting back to our man in the restaurant, after hearing that his bill has been paid he gets to thinking, "you know, I really don’t deserve to be let off so lightly," so he begs the manager to be understanding in his case. He says, "I’ll do dishes, I’ll set tables, I’ll vacuum the floor, I’ll take out the garbage, I’ll come back every week and pay you a little bit toward my bill, but please don’t think less of me for this and don’t think
poorly of me." But the manager just shakes his head in amazement and says "man, you just don't get it. Your bill's been paid in full. Your off the hook. Your free."

It is, I think, the nature of human beings to misunderstand lavish, no-strings-attached generosity. We want to pay for our blessings. When someone invites us to their home for a meal, what's the first thing we think about after we go home that night? We think "well, I wonder when I can have them over, because now I owe them one." When someone gives you a Christmas present and it's a surprise to you, and you did not get one for them, what's the first thing that comes into your mind? Guilt! You say "gee, I didn't get them anything." You don't feel gratitude, you feel guilt. And you wonder how you can make this up without looking like you've just scrambled around to make up for what you've been given. We like to pay for our blessings, don't we? We don't know how to take a free, lavish gift offered by someone who just says "I love you, and here is the gift of eternal life, follow me." That's why these false teachers were so successful, because they tapped into this human flaw, this tendency to want to buy our blessings or to earn our blessings. And the Galatians were buying it. They were accepting it hook, line and sinker.

But friends, like that man in the restaurant, our assets are just never enough to meet our obligations in the heavenly court. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture affirms this: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...All our righteousness is as filthy rags...There is none who is righteous before God, no not even one." And Paul tries to get the message across to his readers that it is absurd to trade their freedom in Christ for slavery. It is absurd to embrace the good news of Jesus Christ and then to embark on a campaign of trying to impress God through following the rules, trying to earn their way into heaven through good deeds. Paul would say to us, "God is a lot harder to impress than you think, believe me I've tried it."

And that brings us to our final point. Paul's conviction was born from personal experience, including profound failure. There's a touch of genius in these last thirteen verses. Remember that biographical section I read? There's a touch of genius here, for not only does Paul share his own testimony of how he failed to impress God through his compulsive zeal, but he silences his critics who said he wasn't really an apostle. There's nothing quite like the power of one's
personal story of meeting Christ. Paul could argue theology with the best minds in the world. He could show you his family tree and prove that he had a very wonderful pedigree. He could preach into the wee hours of the night. He was a very skilled, talented man, but here in these last few verses of the chapter he tells his own story of how the living Christ called him, saved him, and commissioned him. And we’ll be talking more about that calling and commissioning in the coming weeks.

For now, it is enough to know that this man Paul cared deeply for these young Christians. I think that it's a measure of the man's character that he was so furious in this letter, because when you love certain people and then they are threatened, either through deceit or through some kind of threat to their person, or through some other way, the one who loves does get furious. And he will do anything to protect those who are loved. That's why we see such emotion in this letter. Paul saw that these people were throwing away their freedom in Christ and trading it all for a list of rules. He did care deeply for these Galatians, but no more than God cared for them, and no more than God cares for you and me today. We need to be reminded, as we look at the Lord's table at the front of the church, of the message that only in Christ are we truly free. As I said at the outset, we are being sold a bill of goods by the world and that takes the form of either: a) bondage to a kind of rigorous discipline in order to save ourselves, or b) bondage to unlimited egotism and pleasure-seeking. Either one is slavery. The gospel of Christ tells us, however, that in Christ you will truly be free. Great thoughts to ponder as we approach the Lord's table this morning.

Amen.
I have shared my story so many times now, that many think I should be growing weary in the telling of it. But how could I ever tire of telling the story of how Jesus changed my life? Yes the story is an old one, and I am old too now, but I am happy to tell it one more time.

It was a sunny, hot, day that found me travelling to Damascus. I suppose you could say that the heat of the day matched my temperament, for I was a hot-headed young champion of truth in those days; a Pharisee to be exact. What was a Pharisee, you ask? Well, a Pharisee was a kind of theologian and lawyer combined, with a few pastoral duties thrown in to keep us close to the people. Some Pharisees, like most of the ones encountered by Jesus, were ruthless, narrow-minded keepers of the law of Moses. Others, like Nicodemus, were kind, and sensitive to the opinions of others. Me, I was the first kind; narrow-minded, very dedicated...and deadly.

The purpose of my journey to Damascus was a simple one: I was to extradite any followers of Jesus to Jerusalem, in chains if necessary. The thought was, if we could round up these Nazarenes, as some called them, and bring them to trial, then we could snuff this movement out in a hurry. The sooner the better! But it seems God had other plans for these believers. And, to my utter shock and dismay, I learned He had other plans for me too.

Around noon of that day, there appeared a light, brighter even than the mid-day sun, and I, along with my fellow travellers, fell to the ground, trembling with fear. And then I heard a voice: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I stammered out a reply, 'Who are
you, sir?’ The voice that answered shook me to the core. I was terrified! It said, ‘I am Jesus - the one you are persecuting. Get on your feet, go into the city and await my instructions.’ Well I managed to get up, and I looked around for my travelling companions, but I couldn’t see them. In fact, I couldn’t see anything! I was completely blind. Then I felt someone take my hand, and slowly he led me into the city. In a matter of minutes, the brash young crusader that I was had become a helpless, trembling little boy who had to hold someone’s hand for security. And my eyes! What had happened to them? Those eyes that had poured over the law of Moses by the hour...those eyes that had witnessed the bloody stoning of Stephen (a follower of Jesus) just weeks before, had failed me for the first time in my life.

Have you ever felt that your life was being shattered like an old mirror, breaking into a thousand splintered pieces? That was me...broken, fearful, and blind. I didn’t eat or drink anything for three days, and to make matters worse (at least so I thought), I was being cared for by the very people I would have dragged away in chains just days before. Then a man named Ananias came to see me and told me Jesus had sent him. He placed his fingers on my eyelids and something like scales fell from my eyes...and I began to see again! And suddenly I felt a peace inside...a reassurance that these people were not going to hurt me, and that I would be alright. I stayed with these believers for a few days, and even began telling my story in the local synagogue, much like I am telling it to you today. Some were amazed at my change of heart. Some were furious...these, of course, were my old friends, and they tried to have me killed. But as you can plainly see, they failed.

I went away to lay low for awhile, and stayed out of sight for three years, praying and re-reading the scriptures with new eyes. Then, with no small amount of anxiety, but with my head held high, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter. I stayed with him for about two weeks, and what a great two weeks they were! I even met James, the Lord’s brother, and learned things about Jesus that I never would have known otherwise. I want to be clear on one thing: I didn’t need Peter’s approval, or anyone else’s, for that matter. Its just that the apostles who had been with Jesus could give me the details of his life that I could never know without speaking to them. Any fears I might have had were quite groundless, since they welcomed me as a brother. In fact, fourteen years later, I took Barnabas and Titus
with me and visited them again. By this time I was preaching to crowds of non-Jews, and God was touching many hearts, but I wanted to make it clear to the Jerusalem leaders that our ministries were complementary - their preaching being primarily to Jews, and mine to non-Jews. We were not in competition with each other at all.

Again, they received me as a brother. There were some hard-nosed characters who tried to spy on us to see if we were legitimate by their standards, but we didn’t give them the time of day. As it turned out I would run into these troublemakers for years to come. They followed me from town to town, trying to undermine my apostleship, my preaching, and my reputation. They did this in the Galatian villages in particular, and it made me furious, since the believers in Galatia were new to the faith, and willing to accept any teaching about Christ. Remember, we didn’t have the New Testament back then, like you do, so that teaching could be verified. All we had, in the beginning, was the integrity of the preacher to rely on, and these false teachers were threatening to destroy the faith of many Christians. So of course I got angry. When someone threatens people you love, how do you react? You get angry, don’t you, especially if your loved ones are young and vulnerable. I was like a mother bear protecting her cubs with the Galatians, and I wouldn’t dream of going back and changing a thing, even if I could.

There is another thing you need to know. Back in those early days we were far from perfect. We were just as human as Christians are today, and we struggled with trying to live consistent lives. Even Peter himself was acting hypocritical at one point, and I had to confront him on it. Its a long story, and I won’t get into the details, but the upshot of it was, that Peter was trying to please everyone and ended up being a people-pleaser instead of a leader of the church. That might have been acceptable if the issues had been small, like some of the things you face today, but Peter found himself treating the non-Jews in the church as second class Christians in order to impress the more established Jewish Christians. Is this why Christ died? To set up a pecking order in the church? Absolutely not!

Actually, I could identify with Peter (we’re great friends by the way), because I used to live on that treadmill of trying to impress people and ultimately God...that’s why I was going to Damascus in the first place. But I ended up destroying people in the process, and I almost destroyed myself as well. That blinding
experience on the road to Damascus was God's way of saying, in no uncertain terms, 'ENOUGH! You will be travelling in a new direction from now on.' And so, if I were to go back to my old way of life now, I would simply be rebuilding that old barn that Christ has torn down. As I told the Galatians years ago, it makes no sense at all to trade one's freedom in Christ for a kind of slavery to some rigid system that will get you nowhere.

In your day people talk about 'finding themselves,' especially young people. I was there once too, but what freedom there is for that person who finds his identity in Christ! Here is what I told the Galatians, and it sums up my whole story:

"...I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Identity crisis? You don't need one! Not as long as you have found Christ and have been found by him. I know, this is getting a bit long, and I have so much more I could tell you. But what really matters is this: Seek Christ with all your heart. He will make you free; He will give your life purpose; He will give you an identity all your own, based on His love, and stamped with His own eternal seal.

Amen.
This morning we will begin by looking at the two ways in which people commonly understand salvation; that is, a proper relationship with God leading to everlasting life. If we are to understand this letter to the Galatians, it is crucial that we understand these two ways that people commonly understand salvation, and the implications involved.

The first way that people have understood it, is that you have to work for it, you have to earn it. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that it is human nature that we prefer to earn our blessings. We prefer to work for what we have, including a proper moral standing before our Creator. Now it's all well and good to work for what we have. The work ethic comes from the New Testament. But the work ethic does not "work" with God, with salvation, because God's kingdom, God's presence, His eternal life, is something far beyond what we could earn by ourselves. And yet people have thought that they could work themselves into the very presence of God. This understanding of salvation, this salvation by works, was championed by the Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day. For a good example of this philosophy of working your way into heaven all you need to do is read the four Gospels. You will find example after example of the Pharisees, the Scribes, the people that gave Jesus the roughest time. These people seemed to have a rule for every possible situation. It wasn't just that they followed the Ten Commandments, its that they added hundreds of laws to the commandments. And so they had rules about how far you could walk on the Sabbath, about how much work you could do on the Sabbath. You couldn't bake bread on the Sabbath, but if your cow fell in a ditch you could get him out. They had dozens of rules about that kind of thing. Rules about what you could
eat, what you could not eat, the proper way to wash your hands before a meal, etc. etc. When you take it to an extreme this is known as legalism.

Just last week I heard of a case of legalism in the twentieth century. A fellow who has a radio program on Christian radio was telling about his childhood in a very strict church. I'm not sure if it was Baptist or whether it was Brethren or what, but it was a very, very strict church, and his parents and the deacons of the church demanded that the people in the church refrain from going to movies. This was taboo. There is nothing in scripture about it, of course, but they made it a point to preach "do not go to movies!" So this young boy, being the most righteous kid in his class, or so he thought, decided that he would obey that. And he would even run past the theatre on his way to school. He told his parents "I don't even stop to look. I run past the theatre so I'm not corrupted." But one day he let his guard down and he went by on a hot day and happened to pause just long enough to peer into the theatre. The doors were opened because it was hot, and he saw these flickering shapes on the screen. He just stopped for a minute, but then he ran home, burst into tears, confessed his "sin," and felt guilty for weeks about it. Friends, that's legalism! Of course nowadays people can rent video cassettes and watch in the privacy of their homes. But if you were raised like that boy you know what I'm talking about. Rules, and rules, and rules that are added upon the pages of scripture; rules that are cultivated into our lives so that they almost make us feel that we've got to follow them or we're not Christians. That's legalism, and that's that one way people have commonly understood salvation.

The other way people have understood salvation is that it is a gift from God. A free, lavish gift that can never be earned because what we have to offer God is far less than is required by Him. Our assets fall far short of our obligations. And someone has to do something for us if we are to be put right with God because we can't do it ourselves. And that someone is Jesus Christ, who died that we might live eternally with Him.

Now, the Galatians had heard both understandings of salvation. Salvation by works and salvation by grace. When Paul was with them he preached the good news of Christ. In the second part of verse one Paul speaks of Jesus as having been clearly portrayed as crucified. And that phrase "clearly portrayed," may be understood as a public notice, posted for all to see. Or you might understand this as a large placard mounted in a public
square so that people's attention might be drawn to it. Commentator Maxie Dunnam was writing about this very verse when he tells about his trip to communist China a few years ago. He tells the story that everywhere you look in Beijing, the capital city, there seem to be giant placards posted with pictures of Mao Tse Tung, and Karl Marx, and Vladimir Lenn, and Joseph Stalin, and all of the communist luminaries. Every public place, every school, every factory has these giant placards of communist heroes. And the effect of it all is that they are constant reminders to the Chinese people that they don't belong to themselves, they belong to the state, and they had better not forget it. They had better not get out of line.

In a much more joyful, liberating sense, Paul posted public notice, a giant placard if you will, through his preaching, of Jesus crucified for us. Our tremendous burden of debt has been paid if we would only believe in faith and embrace his marvelous gift of salvation. But after Paul left these villages in Galatia, others came in almost like scavengers might. These false teachers came in and they undermined his preaching, saying "well, its all well and good to accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour, but part of your forgiveness involves following these rules." And they had a bunch of rules. Circumcision was at the top of the list. "You’ve got to be Jews as well as Christians or you will never be right with God." The sad thing is the Galatians began to believe it, they began to accept this. And when Paul heard about it he fired off his most emotional letter, and that's the one we have here. It reaches a fever pitch in verse one of this chapter. "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" J.B. Phillips translates it this way: "O you dear idiots of Galatia. Who has cast a spell over you?" In the apostle’s mind these young Christians were committing treason, spiritual treason. They were betraying the grace of God. They were trading the grace of God for slavery to the law. Paul was astonished. He says, "after beginning with the Spirit are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Are you trying to work your way into heaven now?" And later on he mentions that not even Abraham tried to do that. Abraham, who is the father of all Jews, the father of these very false teachers...even he didn’t do that. He counted on God to save and bless him, not human effort.

So the question remains, and the question is pertinent to us. If a person is not saved through obeying the laws of God, then what good are the laws of God? If we're free from the law then what good is it?
Why does the law of God exist? Do the Ten Commandments mean anything anymore? And what does a Christian do about them? All very good questions. Paul anticipated these and he explained the law very carefully by using two figures of speech. First, a prison. He compared the law to a prison. Jumping to verse twenty-three, look what he says: "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed." The image is that of someone who has broken the law and is then held in protective custody by that same law, until the penalty can be paid. There's nothing quite like a prison to make a person think about what he or she has done. And that's the whole point of prison, isn't it? To bring someone to the end of himself (or herself) so that changes can be made. I know many people never do change in prison, but the point of it is that people need to be brought to the end of themselves, to the end of their tether. Paul says God's law is like that. It serves a wonderful function because it brings us to the end of ourselves. It judges us, it sears our conscience, it shines a spotlight on our moral bankruptcy, and shows us that we need help that we can't obtain by ourselves.

The second figure of speech is the guardian. Now this is not a particularly good translation of the word in the Greek. The original word is "paidagogos." That's your Greek lesson for today..."paidagogos," from which we get "pedagogy," which isn't a household word either. But pedagogy is the art of teaching and a pedagogue today is a teacher. Now this term in Galatians didn't mean teacher in the sense that we understand it today, but a kind of "child-custodian." In New Testament times, in Roman times, a child-custodian was usually a slave whose duty it was to protect the children of the household, to discipline them, sometimes to teach them too, but mainly to oversee them and protect them until such time as they reached the age of majority. Now Paul says this is what God's law has been for us. We have been in its protective custody until such time that we can claim our rightful inheritance as adults. That time has come, because Christ Jesus has come. He has welcomed us as His children, grown children, and we are His heirs...heirs of all the spiritual riches of heaven, as Ephesians puts it.

So those two things, the prison and the guardian illustrate the function of the law. Through faith in Christ, the prison walls have been torn down, and our guardian has been retired (with full benefits, of course, but retired nonetheless). So where does that
leave us? It leaves us as full members of God's household, as His heirs. It leaves us as members of His family. And it leaves us as members of one another as well. We are united in Christ and united to each other without distinction. As Paul says it in one of his most famous proclamations: "There is now neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." No distinction of race or ethnicity; no distinction of rank (there's no pecking order in heaven); no distinction of gender. In his Bible study guide on Galatians, Charles Swindoll provides a fitting conclusion to our thoughts today. With his thoughts we'll close. He says:

Praise God for the prison. The Law brought us to the end of ourselves, forcing us to face our condition squarely. Let's thank the Lord for providing this humanly inescapable penitentiary. For without it, we may never have realized how much we needed His grace.

Praise God for the guardian. Like the paidagogos of old, the Law helped keep us in line, restraining sin while it guided us toward our liberator - Christ the Lord. Let's express our appreciation to God for giving us this goad to salvation.

Praise God for the Savior. With His own blood, Christ made it possible for us to become united with the Father and all believers past, present, and future. Through faith we have been set free to serve and enjoy the living God. Let's not take our redemption for granted - rather, let's turn our eyes toward heaven and, with humble gratitude, praise Christ for what He has done for us.

(Swindoll 1981, 71)

Amen.
Its been said that disillusionment is the most bitter of all griefs. Would you agree with that statement? Have you ever been disillusioned in your life? Have you ever been so profoundly disappointed by people or by circumstances (or by yourself) that you were just tempted to throw in the towel? Disillusionment happens to most of us at some point in our life experience.

It happens in the lives of young people, children even, when they discover that Mom and Dad are not the heroes they made them out to be. Mom and Dad actually make mistakes. Mom and Dad lose their tempers. They worry about the future, about paying the bills, and they are very human.

It happens to people, sometimes in their youth, sometimes a little later on, when they've met the man or woman of their dreams. All signs point to this being the love of the century, the romance of all time. But just as suddenly as it begins to flower, the relationship withers. There is an aloofness, there is a coolness, a distancing, and finally there's a note in the mail that says "I hope we can still be friends." Have you been there?

Disillusionment happens to parents who pour eighteen or nineteen years of nurturing into a child, only to see him or her adopt a lifestyle that is not only harmful, but is against everything he's been taught at home and at church. It happens to middle-agers who realize one morning that they're not changing the world after all, like they thought they were going to back in university days. Neither have they hit that pinnacle of success that they dreamed about. Instead, their reality is a huge burden of debt, and hair that's turning gray.
or falling out (or both at the same time), and a monumental struggle with gravity.

Disillusionment happens to senior citizens who so looked forward to retirement, only to reach that golden moment and discover a whole new occupation, battling illness and chronic pain, and losing a spouse. And it happens to Christians when they try to help people discover a new, exciting way of life in Christ. At first the people respond, perhaps even taking the step of baptism and joining the church, but in time they show signs of walking away from the Gospel, even their own experience. And they show signs of walking away from the one who helped them from the beginning!

So, is disillusionment the bitterest of griefs? I am inclined to say yes it is, and there is good evidence in our passage today to suggest that the Apostle Paul would agree with me. Here in these twelve verses or so that we just read, we get as close as we’re going to get to anything approaching tenderness in the book of Galatians. But just for a fleeting moment in these few verses, Paul pulls back the curtain of his inner life and he reveals his disappointment. He reveals his own sense of limitation, his sense of failure, and his undying commitment to his readers. This is Paul "up close and personal," as they say. This is not the thundering theologian that we know from Romans. This is not the decisive disciplinarian of I Corinthians. This is, in this most emotional letter in the New Testament, a Paul that is closer to a wounded shepherd than anything else. Have you ever thought of the Apostle Paul that way before, as a wounded shepherd? Think back to the days of Sunday School when you learned about the Apostle Paul. What picture did you form of him in your mind? Was it not the hero of the New Testament period? Was it not of the one who preached to thousands of people, the one who survived shipwreck, and stoning and jail? But did it ever occur to you that this same Paul struggled against disillusionment? That he battled fear, real fear? That he felt like a failure sometimes? That he was human? It’s all true, and it’s right here in our text.

For example, in verse 11, Paul says he is afraid. He’s afraid for the Galatians. Why is that? He says he was afraid because they were turning back to what he calls "those weak and miserable principles." They were turning their back on Christ and going back to their old religion. Now these "weak and miserable principles" may refer to the observances of ritualistic Judaism brought in by the false teachers. But in addition, I think they
refer to the pagan practices common in that part of the world. Perhaps these pagan practices included astrology and the worship of minor gods and goddesses, and even the worship of animals. That's the kind of background these people came from. And to Paul this was astounding, that they could turn their backs on Christ and go back to these "weak," as he calls them, and "miserable principles." How could they?

Maybe you're feeling that you are pretty far removed from all of this. After all it's 1996. We live in a scientific age, the age of information, and of progress. But think again. Astrology is everywhere, with horoscopes on the radio, in the newspaper, on the internet, on the shopping channel - everywhere. One pastor asks: "how many people, even Christians, think they are more influenced by the sign under which they were born than the sign of the cross under which is our only salvation?"

Far more serious, I believe, is the rise of what's called neo-paganism, including the worship of various goddesses from ancient religions. There is a church in Toronto (I'll not name it) where there is a group of women who gather in the basement of the church to worship the goddesses from ancient Canaanite religions. This is in the basement of a Christian church! There's also the worship of nature, the acceptance of witchcraft as a legitimate religion by the government. There is the channelling of the spirits of the dead, and to some degree there is devil worship itself. What would the apostle say to us if he were here today? Would he not say, "Christian, you had better know the One in whom you believe and stay close to Him, because in the coming days you will be challenged at every turn." It starts out harmlessly enough. It starts out with maybe checking out your horoscope in the newspaper, and then you make this your daily habit. Or perhaps it continues with a call to the "Psychic Hotline" or one of those hotlines proliferating the airways late at night. Or maybe you are fooling around with a Ouija board. Or maybe your friends get together to try to have a seance. It starts out innocently, we think, but before long you're in bondage.

Not only is Paul fearful that the Galatians are turning away to that kind of bondage, he is perplexed that they've turned away from him. They've actually turned away from him too, the one that they treated "like an angel of God." Then Paul goes into a little biographical sketch for which it is rather hard to fill in the details. Paul says "I came to you with a
physical illness and you didn’t reject me, you didn’t heap scorn on me." The literal Greek translation of this is: "you didn’t spit at me." Ancient practices that people adopted regarding illness involved actually spitting to ward off evil spirits. So if you encountered a leper, let’s say twenty or thirty feet away, and if you were a superstitious person, you would spit to the left or to the right (like the matchmaker in Fiddler On The Roof). You would spit to ward off the evil spirits. Paul is saying in this passage, "I had a repulsive illness when I came to preach to you and you didn’t spit at me, but you treated me like an angel. You treated me like Christ himself and you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me." That’s why we think maybe he had some eye disease, some problem with his eyesight. "But now have I become your enemy?"

Paul was their Pastor. He was the one who preached the Gospel of Christ to them and now he was being rejected because of a few troublemakers who were coming in and undermining his ministry. I think it’s fair to say, from this little sketch that Paul’s heart was near to breaking. Talk about a disillusioning experience! Now, I’ve mentioned in earlier sermons that Paul was hounded by troublemakers for years. People said he wasn’t a real apostle. People said that he was a hypocrite, that he was a theological bully. The effect of it all is that people often had differing opinions about Paul. They didn’t know what to think about him. They had differing expectations of what he could do and they even questioned, from time to time, whether he was an authentic Christian or just a religious phony.

The residue of this kind of feeling towards church leaders is still around today. Not because of false teachers so much, but because of human nature. We have not really changed much in 2,000 years. This feeling is still around. It is most apparent in the vast diversity of expectations we have of today’s church leaders. Richard De Haan was speaking of pastors when he wrote this:

If the pastor is young, they say he lacks experience; if his hair is gray, then he’s too old for the young people.
If he has five or six children, he has too many; if he has no children, he’s setting a bad example.
If he preaches from his notes, he has canned sermons and is dry; if his messages are extemporaneous, he is not deep.
If he is attentive to the poor people in the church, they claim he is playing to the grandstand; if he pays attention to the wealthy, he is trying to be an aristocrat.

If he uses too many illustrations, he neglects the Bible; if he doesn’t use enough stories, he isn’t clear.

If he condemns wrong, he’s cranky; if he doesn’t preach against sin, they say he’s a compromiser.

If he preaches the truth, he’s offensive; if he doesn’t preach the truth, then he’s a hypocrite.

If he fails to please everybody, he’s hurting the church and ought to leave; if he does please everybody, he has no convictions.

(De Hann 1966, 5-6)

Somehow I think Paul would identify with those words because he felt that same frustration, as would many in the church today.

So how do we cope with disillusionment? Whether you are a church leader or not you face disillusioning experiences in your life. How do you cope? What do you do when disappointment comes? I’ve got some ideas. First, I think, you re-read the contract. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ you need to go back to see what he says about his disciples and to his disciples. If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ I commend Him to you, and I encourage you to find out all you can about Him and make a commitment to Him. But going back to what He told His disciples, He promised them abundant life. He promised them strength. He promised them joy, inner joy, and peace. And He promised two more things—trials and tribulations. Yes, Jesus told His disciples that they would always be in trouble, but that He would be with them, that He would be present in their lives by the Spirit. That makes all the difference. So the first thing is, re-read the contract. What is the contract? You can find it in the pages of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Second, we need to stay in the race. Yes, we are tempted to quit, all of us, at one point or another. We are tempted to say from time to time "I don’t need this!" But the alternative to pressing on is paralysis. And paralysis for the Christian (or for anybody) is a mind-numbing retreat into the self where there is a kind of false security, but it is a security based on the
notion that we are not accountable to anyone, not even God. And I can tell you where this road leads, this self-absorption. This road leads to increasing alienation from people you love. It leads to loneliness, cynicism, addiction (in some cases), and despair. I'd rather stay in the race, wouldn't you? Despite all the problems and all the disillusioning moments, it is much easier to stay in the race than to drop out and face the consequences, tempting though that may be.

Finally, I encourage you to imagine that you have a cheering section made up of people you loved that are departed, gone to be with God. Do you remember their faith? Do you remember their tenacity in the face of trouble? Maybe they were your grandparents, maybe they were your parents, maybe they were old, dear Christians from your days as a child in the church. Think about that. Remember their courage. Remember how they faced trials. Some of the trials they faced actually make ours look like a walk in the park by comparison. But they persevered. They knew that it is when we are at our wit's end that there comes into our lives new strength and new courage to go on. Because, at that point we have nowhere else to turn but to God. Strength comes from Him. The word is perseverance. Perseverance is the key to coping with disillusionment. Perseverance is the main thought I want to leave with you today. This sermon is not a lesson on disillusionment, but on perseverance, on hanging in there for the long haul. I can't say it much better than the old apostle. Paul himself wrote, in a different letter, to a different church, but under similar circumstances, these words:

We're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

(2 Corinthians 4:16-18
Peterson, 374)

Do you believe it? If so, then stay in the race and persevere.

Amen.
What I intend to do today in this sermon, is return to our theme of freedom in Christ. Do you remember the title of the very first sermon in this series a few weeks ago? It was called "Variations On A Theme," and it was taken from the world of classical music. As you may know, musical compositions in the classical style often have three movements in them, sometimes more, sometimes less, but very often there are three movements in a classical piece. The first movement provides an easily remembered theme and it stirs the emotions, it sets the pace. The second movement departs from the first and often slows things down a bit. And the third movement returns to the theme and builds to a memorable conclusion. The letter to Galatians is something like that. And today's passage takes us back to our theme with which we started, freedom in Christ. But as Paul gets closer to the end of the letter he begins spelling out the implications of our freedom, and that's what he does in chapter five and in chapter six, as we will see next week.

But the first thing I need to say this morning, and the first thing that Paul tells us about freedom, is its origin. Whence cometh this freedom? Where do we get this freedom? For those of us who are disciples, it comes from Christ. Simply put, it comes from Jesus Christ. Christian freedom is based on Christ and His work on the cross. Our freedom is rooted and grounded in Him. Verse one of our chapter says "it is for freedom that Christ has set us free." We are not free just because we say that it is so. We are not free just because freedom is better than slavery. We are not free because we think it's our birthright to be free. We are free because of Christ's work on the cross, where He
effectively tore down the barriers alienating us from
God, and others, and even ourselves. So any declaration
of freedom that anyone makes, whether it be in the
political realm, or social, or spiritual, falls short if
it deletes Jesus Christ. Our freedom is rooted in
eternity rather than expediency. It is all part of
God’s great design. Our freedom is in Christ and no one
else.

The second thing Paul tells us in this chapter is
that Christian freedom can be a very fragile thing. It
can be destroyed or swapped for cheap imitations. How
is freedom destroyed? Freedom is destroyed when we
voluntarily submit ourselves to bondage. Freedom is
destroyed when we base our spiritual well-being, not on
the work of Christ, but on some kind of moral do-
goodism, following a list of do’s and don’ts for our
salvation rather than depending upon the grace of God in
Christ. So, we destroy freedom when we submit ourselves
to bondage.

As a child, my favourite TV show was The Andy
Griffith Show which is still seen in never-ending
reruns. It is rerun heaven for many people. I’m sure
that everyone in this place has seen The Andy Griffith
Show either in the 60’s or the 90’s. But in that show
there was a character named Otis Campbell; a likeable
fellow, but a fellow with a big problem. Otis was the
town drunk. And whenever Otis had too much to drink,
which was fairly frequently, he went down to the
sheriff’s office and opened up a jail cell, by himself,
let himself in, and locked himself in where he could
sleep it off. Poor old Otis voluntarily put himself
into captivity. He voluntarily put himself into bondage
thinking that it was for his own good. But it never
occurred to him, at least I don’t recall, that the
Mayberry jail was the symbol for a bondage that was far
deeper in his own life, the bondage that kept him
enslaved to his addiction. Isn’t it odd how many faces
bondage has? So freedom can be destroyed when we
voluntarily submit ourselves to a kind of captivity to
something.

Freedom can also be traded for cheap imitations.
Like the pseudo-freedom that says "I can do whatever I
want. After all, I’m free, right? I can sing praises
to God on Sunday and I can live like the devil himself
on every other day of the week, if I want, because I’m
free." That’s absurd, of course, although many try it.
Freedom has its limits. Do you know that? Freedom has
its limits. We are not free, for example, to drive 130
kms per hour through a school zone. Actually, we’re not
free to drive 130 anywhere. We are not free to run naked through the local shopping mall. We are not free to steal people's money. We are not free to dig up people's lawns because we don't like their dandelions. Freedom has its limits even in the most liberated of all societies. Paul has his own list of things that you can't do. He calls these things "the acts of the sinful nature," and this is what he says in verses 19-21 (and I'm using a paraphrase now, Eugene Peterson's The Message). Paul says:

> It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. (Peterson 1993, 398)

Paul is trying to make it very clear to his readers, both first century and twentieth century, that people do all of these things in the name of freedom. Like Timothy Leary, that guru of the sixties who has been eulogized for the last three days. The man followed no one's rules and was proud of it. He lived a life of complete excess, and now that he is dead he's praised by all the TV networks and all the commentators for what a free-spirited man he was. He was not free at all! He was in bondage to himself. He submitted to his own kind of captivity in the name of freedom. And so do many others.

And finally, after learning that freedom can be destroyed and traded for cheap imitations, Paul says that the one criteria whereby freedom can truly operate and truly be defined in our lives, is love. Love is the criteria. Love sets the boundaries; love is the active living out of our faith; love energizes freedom and makes it a living thing. Freedom has its limits, love does not. Amazing isn't it how Paul rattled off these fruit of Spirit in verses 22 (and following) and at the end of that he says something startling. After that list of virtues he says: "Against such things there is no law." Paul even goes so far as to say that the freedom we long for is operational as we serve one
another; as we serve one another in love. Love is expressed in service. Do you suppose maybe that’s what Jesus meant when He said that the person who loses his life will find it? Remember, Jesus also said "love your neighbour as yourself." Paul quotes that in chapter five too. Both love and freedom are gifts that we need to share. They are community blessings more than they are private blessings. And the first community in which these things should show up is the church, but sadly this is not always the case. Paul hints at this in verse fifteen when he warns the Galatians to "stop biting and devouring each other." I’m not sure exactly what they were doing, but he says "stop biting and devouring one another." Apparently, they were picking on each other over petty non-essentials.

Churches today (as in the first century) are not as free as they think they are. Not as long as love takes a back seat to other things, like petty disagreements over things that have no eternal importance at all. Like an unhealthy anxiety over numbers, or even budgets. Make no mistake, these things need our attention, but not at the expense of kindness, and love for one another. A couple of weeks ago I read a comment by a pastor who was talking about worship styles in his church and in North America. I believe he was an American pastor. But this is what he said and I think it’s applicable to us. He said "I’ve been in churches recently where if a person lifted his hands up to God in praise he would be told he’s out of line because that sort of thing isn’t done here. Likewise I’ve been in churches that prided themselves on their spiritual vitality, but if I prayed a written prayer in one of those churches I would be criticized for being insensitive to the moving of the Spirit." His conclusion was, it seems pettiness is inter-denominational; narrowness knows no denomination. Perhaps we are not as free as we think we are, whether we’re Baptists, or Anglicans, or Methodists, or Pentecostals, or Lutherans or what have you.

The solution, of course, is to make sure that love is at the top of our list of priorities. And by love I don’t mean some kind of mushy sentiment. I don’t mean the kind of love that is plastered on bumper stickers, and valentine cards and even postage stamps; I’m talking about kindness...sincere, authentic kindness; sensitivity to the feelings of other people, a willingness to affirm others, and a willingness to listen, really listen. That’s what I mean by love. Love is the atmosphere in which God’s Spirit does his best work. Love is the one condition necessary for spiritual fruit
to appear in God's orchard. I mentioned that Paul lists a variety of such fruit in this passage. Listen to what he says (and again this is the paraphrase):

What happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard - things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

(Peterson, 1993, 398)

Great list there! If you still wonder what love is all about, if you still wonder how love is actually translated into active Christian living, perhaps you can consider these words as we prepare for the Lord's Supper. Jesus said:

Greater love has no man than this: That a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

As was usually the case, Jesus not only said things, but found He needed to live them as well. So He did - on the cross. Because of Jesus we have been set free; set free to serve; set free, not to do as we please, for freedom has its limits after all, but so that in some small way our lives might become like His. We praise Him, we express our love for Him, and truly desire that in some small way our lives might become like His.

Amen.
A few nights ago I was watching my oldest daughter digging up part of our front lawn so she could put in some flowers. We do have one gardener in the family and it's our oldest daughter. As she turned over the soil that had lain dormant under a veritable avalanche of winter snow, I detected that old familiar smell of freshly disturbed earth. You know the smell. It's kind of musty, it's quite strong, really, and the only word that came popping into my head is, its "earthy." That makes sense doesn't it? That earth should smell that way? The unique smell of cultivated earth took me back in time to my days in agriculture. Yes I was in agriculture for a while! I didn't exactly grow up on a farm, although we did have two horses, and from time to time we had a steer that also, from time to time, filled up a deep freeze. I did work on a farm though. I worked on a fruit and vegetable farm that was about a mile down the road. This is a large operation that is still there. We know the people well who own the farm and there's not a cow in sight, it's just fruit and vegetables. My work as a young teenager, along with my brothers and some of my friends, was to plant young cabbage sprouts and young strawberry plants into the freshly cultivated earth. And then later we had to weed the strawberry plants, using a hoe, pick strawberries at ten cents a quart (and tomatoes), and in the fall harvest the cabbage and bag it in fifty pound bags. That was essentially what we did over the summer. I started the job at 60 cents an hour, which was great money for a twelve year old. And my brothers and I worked from 8:00-5:00 as many days as we were needed.

I have to say it was a valuable experience. I wouldn't have said that at the time but now I say it was a valuable experience working on that farm. Because
from it I learned two very important lessons in life. The first lesson I learned was very personal. It was this: Don't ever become a farmer! I knew by the time I was twelve that I couldn't do this for a lifetime—no way. No matter how much I liked strawberries I just couldn't do this for a lifetime. By the way, those strawberries grown on that farm were the best in the United States. And if this sermon ever reaches the hands of the farmer that I worked for, keep doing your good work! The other lesson I learned on that farm was the more generalized truth, that the variety of things you plant in the spring is the same variety that you will harvest in the fall. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out. It's pretty basic stuff. If you plant cabbage, you don't get zucchini, you get cabbage. If you plant strawberries, you don't get kiwis, you get strawberries (although not in the fall). This is known as "the law of the harvest," and we read it, if you detected it, in our text in verse seven. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

Paul, the one who wrote this letter, understood the basics of farming, although I don't think Paul ever farmed. He was a Pharisee, he was a religious teacher and an expert in the law of Moses, an expert in the Jewish religion. He understood farming though, and he wasn't referring to strawberries and cabbages here in this text. He was referring to human behaviour. Now, the Apostle Paul often appears to think in black and white, doesn't he? He talks about law and grace, flesh and spirit. Its often been said there are two kinds of people in the world. Those who lump the people of the world into two kinds, and those who don't! Paul very often talked about two kinds of people in the world. He does that here. He was referring to human behaviour. It is either based in the sinful nature, or life in the Spirit, according to God's design. Those two ways. In either case, there are natural consequences which result, and this is the law of the harvest. Whatever you sow you reap. And that cannot be changed anymore than you can change a strawberry into a banana, or a cabbage into a turnip. If you live a life in which God has no place at all then the result will be painfully apparent to you soon enough. You will reap a harvest and it will be a bitter harvest. Or perhaps you give lip service to God and yet your life has no indication whatever that you belong to Him. If that is true you will reap a harvest one day and it will be a bitter harvest. If you live a life, on the other hand, which tries to honour God, if you order your life around His principles, then again, the result will become apparent.
Only this time the harvest will be one of joy, and, purpose and fulfillment.

Now, I’m not going to spend time defining for you the sinful nature. We did that last week. Paul defines the sinful nature very nicely in chapter five as we saw last week and we cannot improve on that here. But what we can do today is to look at a couple of positive things that we can try as believers. What good seed can we sow in God’s garden that will bear good fruit? Well, the apostle gives us some examples in chapter six. We can move to the very top of the chapter and see one of them.

Paul says that we can watch out for Christians who fail and gently restore them. "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." There are two cautions in this, two amber lights flashing for all who look at it. First of all, you must be spiritually alive yourselves and not simply out playing fruit inspector in somebody else’s garden. Restoring believers who have fallen is precarious business. It requires much prayer, much tact, much kindness, and even then you may be rejected. In fact you probably will be rejected. People these days have hair-triggered tempers when it comes to their personal lives. Anytime they fail or fall, and we say something to them, we had better watch out. The other flashing amber light is to watch out for yourselves lest you slip and fall. It almost seems that Paul is indicating here that life is very beautiful, but it is also a series of banana peels that you have to negotiate, and you’d better be careful lest you fall. The practice of restoring the fallen to repentance is a very difficult work to be about and it’s not for everyone, that much is clear from the text.

But here is something that is for everyone, found in verse two. “Carry each other’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” That we can all do. The picture is that of people on a journey; each person with a load for which he alone is responsible. All of us on our journey through life have a load that God has given us for which we are responsible. But at times, the baggage we accumulate along the way makes it hard for us to go on and our load becomes a burden. And Paul distinguishes in this text between a load and a burden. A burden is something that weighs you down, that you cannot bear by yourself. This burden may be physical ill-ness, it may be emotional struggles like fear, and doubt, and despair, and grief. It may be relational problems within your home and family. The burden may be financial difficulties and a great burden of debt, or
any number of things. We all know about heavy burdens, don’t we, because some of us carry them. We also know we are expected to help those who cannot help themselves. Those who are so burdened by their baggage that they cannot go on without assistance. This is the way shown to us by Jesus and this is the way we are expected to live as well. As difficult as it may be, we must find ways of helping to shoulder the burdens that others bear as they falter. This does not mean encouraging dependency upon us, it means lending a hand, it means encouraging, it means affirming, and strengthening. The law of the harvest says that if you sow seeds of kindness, and compassion, and understanding, and love, you will one day reap the same only multiplied in untold hundreds of ways. That’s part of the law of the harvest too, isn’t it? That the yield is greater than the seed planted. Generally that’s the case. The yield is greater than the seed planted. If you plant one kernel of corn the yield is hundreds of times that one kernel. And so it is in sowing spiritual seed. One act of kindness may be multiplied, in the hand of God, untold numbers of times. So living by the Spirit is what we are to be about. Sowing seeds of kindness and compassion and love.

The apostle doesn’t stop there. He also tells us that this all must be done in humility. Humility is the attitude that we carry with us as we sow our seed. In verses three and four Paul says "if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else." Humility is the air that Christians breathe. We must be about our work using a very sober judgement of ourselves because self-deception is so tempting.

I heard a good story last week about the great boxer Mohamad Ali. He had many strengths, but humility was not one of them. The story goes that Mohamad Ali was on an airplane, flying from one match to another I suppose, and it was an airplane full of people. During the flight the plane hit some moderate turbulence (which, I suppose, is a euphemism for deep trouble and you better start praying). When they hit this turbulence, the flight attendant walked back and told people that they had better fasten their seatbelts. Everyone dutifully clicked his seatbelt on except Mohamad Ali. When the flight attendant went up to him he said "Superman don’t need no seatbelt!" And without missing a beat she said "Superman don’t need no airplane either. So fasten your seatbelt!" Sober judgement is not one of his great gifts, but it should be one of
Humility must be present as we sow seeds of compassion and kindness.

Well, we’ve got to close out our series on Galatians sometime. It has been a very enriching experience for me to prepare these sermons, these six sermons, and I hope that you have been enriched by listening to them, even a little bit. We haven’t done justice to Paul’s letter. We’ve only touched on the high points really. Our freedom in Christ was one of them, salvation by grace, the purpose of the law, the frustrations and fears of the apostle, the acts of the sinful nature and of the spiritual Christian, and of course, the law of the harvest. There is much more to be said, but perhaps a fitting way to conclude this sermon (and this series) is to look at verse nine again. "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." There’s our old friend perseverance again. If we don’t give up, if we don’t grow tired of doing good. And what is this good that we are supposed to be doing? I think we know by this time, but let’s remind ourselves once again as we close, by listening to the way St. Francis puts it in his famous prayer. This is a great summation of the good that we are to do as we sow seeds to the Spirit in God’s garden.

Lord, make me an instrument
of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let
me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that
I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console;
Not so much to be understood as
To understand;
Not so much to be loved
As to love;
For it is in giving that we
receive;
It is in pardoning that we
are pardoned;
It is in dying that we awaken
to eternal life.

Amen.
REFERENCE LIST


SERMON REFERENCES


Jeffrey Paul Hoag was born on February 19, 1954 in Tomah, Wisconsin. He earned the B.A. degree in 1976 from Sioux Falls College, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, followed by the M.Div. degree (cum laude) from North American Baptist Seminary (Sioux Falls), and the M.A. degree from the University of Windsor (Ontario) in 1985. Jeff also pursued graduate studies at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, in 1978 and 1979. During his educational years, Jeff pastored several churches on an interim basis in Iowa and South Dakota, and since 1980, has pastored Nobles Memorial Baptist Church in Windsor, Ontario and the United Baptist Church in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Jeff currently resides in Sault Ste. Marie where he is in his eleventh year of ministry at the United Baptist Church. He is married to Jennifer, a geriatric social worker, and has two daughters, Laura and Sarah.