

LESSON TWO

Introduction to Research

Topics for Theses and Dissertations

- 1) Levels of writing.
 - a) In high school, students do a “paper” on “The Amazon Rain Forest.” Write on the flora (a systematic set of descriptions of all the plants of a particular place or time), fauna (the animal life of a particular region or period, considered as a whole), economy, and human population of the area.
 - b) Undergraduate paper: Concentrate on one of the above.
 - c) Graduate: “Global Effects of Deforestation of the Amazon Rain Forest.”
- 2) New Testament.
 - a) “The Divinity of Christ in the New Testament.”
 - b) “The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John.”
 - c) “Christ as the Bread from Heaven in John 6.”
- 3) Steps in choosing a topic:
 - a) Reading.
 - i) Textbooks.
 - ii) Encyclopedias (specialty)
 - iii) Dictionaries (specialty)
 - b) Asking questions.
 - i) Questions on content.
 - (1) Questions about history of the topic.
 - (a) What has been written on this topic?
 - (b) Is this a controversial topic?
 - (c) Are lines clearly drawn between two opposing sides over this topic?
 - (d) What can I add to this history?
 - (2) Questions on Feasibility.
 - (a) Do I have necessary sources to do research?
 - (b) Am I qualified to do this research?
 - (c) Do I have enough time to complete the research?
 - (d) Does this research demand unreasonable finances?
 - c) Narrowing the topic or scope.
 - i) Limitations.
 - (1) Reasons why something cannot be done properly or done at all.
 - (2) Circumstances.
 - ii) Delimitations.
 - (1) Parameters set by researcher (self-imposed limitations).
 - (a) Time period.
 - (i) Chronology of the kings of Judah?
 - (ii) Chronology of the reign of Josiah?
 - (iii) Date of the death of Josiah?

- (iv) Explanation as to why you didn't cover other kings.
- (b) Limitation of sources to be used.
 - (i) In paper on divorce, could limit yourself on comparing the divorce passages in Matthew 5 and Mark 10.
 - (ii) Protect yourself from accusations of not having taken into account the latest Christian book on divorce.
- (c) Limit to certain aspects of a topic.

Planning Research

1) Basic Steps.

a) Define the Problem.

- i) Problem should point to a gap in knowledge, an unclear situation, an unresolved question, a lack of information, an unknown, a specific question to be investigated and answered, or a problem to be researched and solved.
- ii) Statement of problem guides the research.
- iii) Problem must be clearly stated.
 - (1) What is the relationship between tithing and the receiving of God's blessings?
 - (2) Which kind of Christian mission has won the converts among the Muslims of Mindanao?
 - (3) What is the role of the Jewish family in the transmission of the religious heritage from one generation to the next.
- iv) A 1999 dissertation proposal listed the following problem: "Few terms in the Old Testament have caused as many differing opinions and misunderstanding which have been so disturbing and controversial as to lead scholars to fierce polemic, (a passionate, strongly worded, and often controversial argument against or, less often, in favor of somebody or something) as the Hebrew word *sheol*. In spite of valuable contributions by many scholars, there is no consensus in regard to the nature, function, and purpose of the term."

b) Determine the Purpose.

- i) Purpose has to do with "what to do with the problem."
 - (1) Are going to analyze? Compare? Reconstruct? Synthesize? Design a program?
 - (2) The purpose tells what you are going to do about the problem.
 - (a) If the problem is that there is no information, then the purpose will be to find that information.
 - (b) If the problem states that there seems to be disagreement between two of Jesus' sayings on peace, the purpose could be to try to bring harmony or understand the difference.
 - (3) Other examples of purposes:
 - (a) Reconstruct the events of a given historical period, to compare two theories, to organize certain information, to determine the relation between two events, to synthesize, to discover, or to formulate.
 - (b) The purpose of the *sheol* dissertation is "to examine the sixty-six occurrences of the Hebrew word *sheol* in the Old Testament in order to discover the nature, function, and purpose of this term."

- (4) Problem: The Christian Church is not growing in the Czech Republic as it did in the first years after the fall of the Communist regime.
 - (a) The purpose might be to describe the growth patterns of the church.
 - (b) To consider the factors affecting church growth.
 - (c) To compare the growth of the church in the Czech Republic with the growth of the church in another post-Communist country.
 - (d) Recent dissertation: “to explore the contextual and institutional factors of the current Czech situation in order to develop a strategy for revitalization of local congregations , rooted in Czech culture.”
- ii) Problem: What is the issue?
- iii) Purpose: What is being done about it.
- c) Design a Methodology.
 - i) How am I going to go about achieving the purpose already stated?
 - ii) Any good research will have a clear and logical method.
 - (1) Where do you start and what do you do next?
 - (2) Will you trace the history first, or do the exegesis first?
 - (3) Will they be outlined, compared, analyzed?
 - iii) If the research is anything other than bibliographical, the methodology of the survey or experiment must be even more clearly spelled out.
 - (1) The instrument you use to gather the data needs to be described or prepared.
 - (2) All steps of the research must be clearly enunciated.
 - (3) In some cases, the section on methodology may become an entire chapter.
 - iv) Example.
 - (1) Method of a dissertation on the presentation of the gospel:
 - (a) The study will begin by surveying crucial terms and central concepts in the typical gospel presentation.
 - (b) Two basic questions will be asked:
 - (i) Does the evangelical response employ sound communication principles?
 - (ii) Does the evangelical response present a balanced New testament teaching on how one can be saved?
 - (c) To answer the first question, the principles of receptor-based communications will be studied.
 - (d) The second question will be answered on the basis of an analysis of New Testament responses to the question, “What must I do to be saved?”
 - (e) The last step is to “summarize the results of the study and suggest biblical modifications to the traditional evangelical salvation formula that may communicate with more clarity and impact in North America at the turn of the millennium.”
 - (2) Church growth study of an inner-city church:
 - (a) Review current literature on inner-city church growth, including theory and practical examples.
 - (b) Analyze the community in which the church functions.
 - (c) Study the church, its growth history, its activities, its climate, its membership.
 - (d) Design a suggested church growth strategy for this church based on the three previous points.
 - (3) Steps: What will you do first? Second? Third?

- 2) The Proposal
 - a) The proposal not only provides a clear guide for the research process, it also becomes the basis for the introduction to the paper.
 - b) General speaking, the research proposal needs to include the following items.
 - i) An introduction giving the background for the problem; it may also show the scope or extension of the problem.
 - ii) Statement of the problem.
 - iii) Purpose of the research.
 - iv) Significance of the research..
 - (1) Who will benefit from having this problem solved?
 - (2) How will they benefit?
 - (3) How important is it to answer this question?
 - (4) What is the value of this research to a given discipline?
 - (5) Why is doing this research important?
 - v) Definition of terms.
 - (1) When a paper is to be read by those not familiar with denominational or local terms, it is imperative for these to be clearly defined.
 - (2) A precise definition of theological terms characteristic of one's own tradition may be needed for non-initiated readers.
 - vi) Limitations of the study.
 - vii) Delimitations of the study.
 - viii) Methodology.
 - ix) Presuppositions or assumptions.
 - (1) One assumption may be that the readers are familiar with the history of the period under study.
 - (2) Familiar with the general outline of theological development in a given denomination.
 - (3) What may be considered as common knowledge not needing further elaboration.
 - (4) (To be covered more thoroughly in chapter 6, "Research Thinking.")
- 3) Tentative Outline.
 - a) The outline is the backbone of the paper.
 - i) It provides the basic organization for the research report.
 - ii) The basis for the table of contents.
 - iii) Can be written either in complete sentences or only phrases.
 - iv) Parallelism in form is important.
 - v) Each item must have at least two subdivisions.
 - vi) All subdivisions of a topic must clearly relate to the overall heading.
 - b) Before completing the outline, you will have completed a great deal of preliminary reading.

Although the formulation of a research plan—including the writing of a proposal and the preparation of an outline—follows on the heels of choosing a viable topic, this activity takes place at the same time as the initial bibliographic search.

Chapter 5 addresses the issue of keeping record of the books, articles, and other sources that form the bibliography.