

Ways to Categorize

There are many ways to build your piles. You can have **root** categories based on words/phrases, people, actions, time periods/historical markers, statements, and many other types, including topics and concepts. In reality you'll usually have a mixture of these (and more) types of categories. Let me show you what I mean:

Words/phrases: Much of this work is somewhat automatic using some of the tools we discussed last week. Look for example, at the results of our TSK search on pg. 70. The TSK nicely divides John 1:1 into 4 words/phrases (the beginning, the Word, with, the Word was). Of-course, you don't want to rely solely upon this tool to derive all your key terms, but its a great place to start. Using words/phrases to make our piles, we can begin to collect information on each of these concepts.

Note, that we're at the root level of pile making. Using the folder analogy, these categories may become our "folder holders" — you know, when you open a filing cabinet, you've got folders, but these folders are categorized using those (usually) green folder holders. You can continue to make more divisions as you track down each one of the phrases. Let's give it shot. We're looking for information regarding the role and relationship of Jesus to the rest of the Trinity. We've arrived at John 1:1, and we're going to track down each of the phrases... (see pg. 70 for scripture references details)

1) Go to each of the verses under "the beginning":

1 John 1:2 He was in the beginning with God.

Prov 8:22-31: Wisdom was in the beginning

Eph 3:9 God created all things through Jesus

Eph. 3:11-12 the Father accomplished His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus in whom we now have boldness and access with confidence in Him

Col. 1:17 He is before (in front of) all things, and all things exist through Him

Col. 1:16: All things were created by Him

Heb 1:10 the Lord laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning

Heb 7:3 Melchizadek was like the son of God...with no (recorded) beginning or end of life

Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Rev 1:2 ?

Rev. 1:8, 11 I am the beginning, and the ending, the alpha and the omega

Rev. 21:6 beg./ending, alphas/omega, I will give the fountain of the water of life to him who thirsts.

Rev. 22:13 I am the alpha/omega, beginning/ending

Rev. 22:12 I'm coming quickly with a reward to give to everyone acc. to his work.

2) Make some sub-categories of "the beginning":

a) items/persons who were there, b) creation, c) authority/privilege related to having been since the beginning

Categorizing and Cataloging

Words/phrases (cont')

These newly created sub-categories are of a different type than the “words/phrases” type we started with. We’re dealing now with the category types of people (a), actions or topics (b), and concepts (c).

People: There’s a ton of ways to sub-categorize people. To name a few, think of genealogy, geographical origin, places visited, places mentioned by them, things they said, things they did, things done to them, things said to them, qualities, characteristics, quirks, errors/sins, etc...

In our example, we could try to determine **who** was in the beginning. (We also may want to see if there’s any other mention in the Bible of a thing being present in the beginning—in the way that wisdom, personified, is mentioned as being since the beginning). Then, we could trace down different qualities, or characteristics, or what have you of these. In this example, however, that would be too broad, since we’re dealing with the Godhead, there’s much we can find regarding each of these 3 persons.

So, we’d want to narrow this down to some specific area. Maybe specific ways the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were involved in creation, responsibilities regarding the created, etc... Commonly, you’ll find a need to narrow your topics down, for teaching sake. Sometimes, on the other extreme, you’ll find too little information. I’ll discuss this further when we discuss cataloging in detail, but here’s a general rule of thumb:

Deciding how much information is enough:

Any point (or category) , in order to have any sub-points (or sub-categories), should have a minimum of 2 sub-points. The example on the left is OK, the one on the right is not.

Good:

- I. Jesus is God
 - A. Jesus claimed to be God
 - B. Jesus did things only God could do
 - 1. Jesus created the world
 - 2. Jesus sustains the world
 - 3. Jesus forgave sin
 - C. Others attributed deity to Him

Not so good:

- I. Jesus is God
 - A. Jesus claimed to be God
 - B. Jesus did things only God could do
 - 1. Jesus created the world
 - C. Others attributed deity to Him

This principle works at the category/subcategory level, as well as at the material level. In other words, each of your subcategories (or non-subcategorized categories, like A and C above), should have a minimum of 2 passages to support it. Now, there are a great number of exceptions to this, because we don’t always “prove” everything by chapter and verse, some of our categories cross over into others, etc...,

Deciding how much information is too much:

Can you have too much information? No, but you can spend too much time developing one thought without leaving enough time for another. You’ve got to balance your time, based on the importance, and level of difficulty, of each category.

Actions and Topics: There's often a blurred distinction between these two types of categories with the only distinction being that *actions* are verbal topics, and *topics* are nouns. It's blurred because we often speak of completed actions as nouns: John baptizes/baptism; run/running; save/salvation. In effect, this works as one type of category, but you need to realize the distinction, because you'll look the words up differently. The noun forms you'll more often find in a topical search, whereas the verb forms you'll find more regularly in a word type search.

In our example of John 1:1, creation can be thought of as either a topic or an action. Again, the only difference is how you search for comparative passages.

Time periods and historical markers: What events happened when? What is the order of events? Where did these events take place and by whom? Who was ruling at the time (in Israel, in Rome, etc...)? Who was around when the event took place, when was it recorded and by whom?

Another way to use this type of category is in matching parallel passages. Take the 4 gospels, for example. How do you go about finding the related event of one gospel as recorded in the other three? The easiest is to use a harmony of the gospels...many of your study Bibles will have a section in the back that harmonizes the gospel accounts. There are also entire books written in table form, that take you through the 4 gospels with parallel passages listed side-by-side.

How about harmonizing 1 & 2 Kings with 1 & 2 Chron., and Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc...?

Statements: You can make your sub folders based on any number of statement-type criteria. Examples: In a conversation, make a table of who said what. Or in a monologue, divide out why things were said. Or, make a list of types of things stated following or preceding a specific introductory phrase (“_____ one another”, “immediately”, “knowing this”, “through Christ”, “the love of Christ”, etc....).

Concepts: This is the broadest type of category, and the hardest for people to properly divide. Some concepts lend themselves well to a topical search. Take the “love of God” for example. A search for “love” using *Nave's Topical*, will yield a number of subcategories, such as “Of children for parents”, and “of God.”

Other concepts, however, are less topical at the root level, but once broken down into subcategories of the main, are usually easier to research. Let's say, for example, someone wanted to teach on “The sufficiency of the believer in Christ,” meaning that we, as believers, are only sufficient in Him. You won't find “sufficiency” anywhere in a topical search (although you will find a couple of important passages that use the word itself). However, if you break this down into areas of sufficiency you'll see better results. Take the area of finances, our physical or emotional well being, relationships, trials, etc... and you begin to open up vast amounts of Scriptural support. Once you begin to chase some rabbit trails on these subtopics, you'll begin to build a number of useful piles.

Cataloging is the link between idea and presentation

OK, you've got tons of information. You've rightly divided in all sorts of ways, and now you've got piles and piles of stuff — folders inside folders. Now what?

Actually, if you've gotten to this point, and you have this information anywhere other than in your head, then you've already done some form of cataloging. Where *categorizing* is making piles, *cataloging* is simply making a cohesive recording of those piles. Or, where *categorizing* is the concept of dividing, *cataloging* is the action. You want to begin to take this information and organize it in such a way that someone else can benefit from it.

Every one of you knows of someone that has their own “filing system.” You may even be that someone, but who ever it is, you know one thing: don't touch it because, “they” say, “it works!” And that causes me to think that there are really two types of “working” filing systems: those systems that only one person will ever likely use — they file it, they retrieve it. It may look like a pile of junk, it may seem completely unorganized, but they can find what they need.

Then there's the system that multiple users need to access. One person may do the filing, and another the retrieving, but it works because there's some kind of common understanding as to how it works.

In studying the Word, and preparing to teach, you'll often naturally gravitate to the “personal filing system” model — the one only you use, the one that resides mainly in your head. That's OK, and even necessary at times. But, if you can begin to think in terms of the “shared filing system” model, you'll be better prepared to teach (that is, to facilitate learning).

The shared filing system model

How do we actually make those piles in such a way that we can share the information with others? Or, more specifically, so that when we do share that information with others, they can follow us and understand what it is we are attempting to teach.

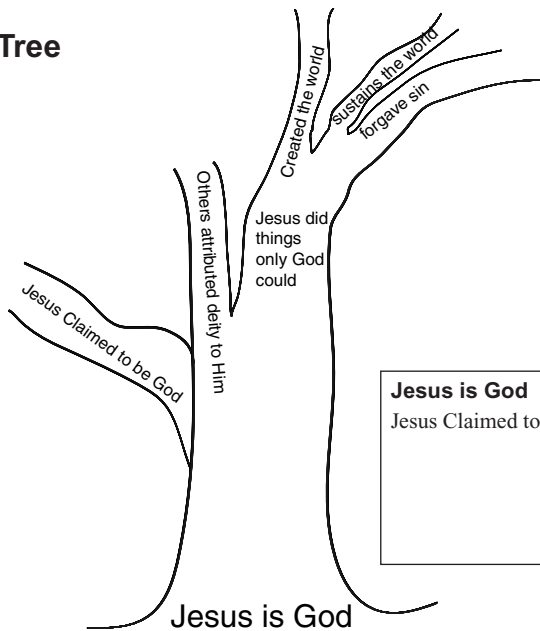
Most people don't like to think in terms of outlines. For whatever reason, we hated them when we were in school. So that you don't have to use outlines, I've devised another way of thinking about how to organize your piles: **the tree!**

Thanks to the proliferation of Microsoft Windows, many of you use a tree structure everyday (or every time you use the computer). Like a real tree, our tree has a trunk, with limbs, and branches off the limbs, with branches off those branches, and twigs off those. The tree we want to use, however, is up-side down.

The Tree Structure in Cataloging

In order to show you how this works, we'll turn an outline into a tree, then I'll "leaf" some important points of the tree with you. **Let's borrow the outline from pg. 74:**

Tree



Outline

- I. Jesus is God
 - A. Jesus claimed to be God
 - B. Jesus did things only God could do
 1. Jesus created the world
 2. Jesus sustains the world
 3. Jesus forgave sin
 - C. Others attributed deity to Him

Jesus is God		
Jesus Claimed to be God	He did things only God could <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • created the world • sustains the world • forgave sin 	Others attributed deity to Him

Other than visual, there's really no difference between the tree and the outline, but some people find it easier to work with the "tree" form. It's also easier to define some parameters that you'll find helpful in working with your piles.

Tree Rules:

Most of these "rules" are specifically designed to help you stay on track when it comes more to teaching than studying. Also, please keep in mind, that these are rules that can be broken. There's nothing spiritual to them, but you'll find that in any good presentation, one which keeps your attention, these rules will be broken far less often than more. Also, the need to stick to the rules is more important the younger the age group you're teaching, **but** don't think for one minute that when you're teaching adults you can successfully abandon these rules altogether!

1) There's only one trunk in a given tree

Trees don't have more than one trunk, likewise, good lessons won't have more than one main idea. You can't teach three different topics with the same level of retention as you can one. There are times when you need to change topics midstream. But let those times be as few and far between as you can. People have a very hard time changing directions! If you need to change directions, make as deliberate a break as you can between the two concepts: stop and ask people to stand up, take a moment to pray, sing a song, tell a joke...anything that will clearly indicate you are changing directions.

Tree Rules (con't)

2) Trees are only made of one kind of wood

This rule is actually a corollary to rule #1 above in that you need to keep a consistent plan going, and you do this by applying this rule. In other words, you ask yourself: does this material relate to the main topic? Or, is this information going to help explain the main topic I'm studying/teaching? If not, then put it in its own pile, or limb, under another tree. You may want to teach that other tree someday, but not with this lesson.

In the tree we're looking at ("Jesus is God"), you would be violating this principle to teach the humanity of Christ. Does that mean that you shouldn't teach it? No. But if your emphasis is on the deity of Christ, then only seek to balance your teaching with a small amount of material related to the humanity of Christ. Take another lesson to really teach his humanity.

3) Trees only have so many limbs

Here's a difference between a tree and a weed: weeds have a bunch of shoots all over the place, trees have a base structure with a limited number of limbs—those limbs, in turn, have a limited set of branches, and those branches a limited set of twigs.

You may have great information, a bunch of it in fact, but, if you have 25 completely different limbs, you don't have a very well designed tree. Even if these pieces of information all relate to the main subject, you need to make fewer piles, with more sub-piles (or fewer limbs, with more branches). If you don't sub-divide your tree, then you've got something people (even yourself) will find very difficult to follow.

This is why most sermons are, indeed, made up of 3 points. You're hard-pressed to teach much with fewer points, or to retain your audience's attention with too many more.

4) Healthy trees have multiple limbs

On the opposite extreme, then, you want to make sure that your tree has more than one limb. You could show, for example, that Jesus is deity because He forgave sin, but if that's the only demonstration of this truth you have, then you probably haven't worked the concept hard enough. The same holds true at every level: you generally want more than one branch per limb, and more than one twig per branch.

5) Limbs are clearly limbs

When looking at a tree, it may be difficult to distinguish one branch from another, especially the fuller the tree, and the twistier the branches; however, limbs are pretty distinct. Likewise, one mistake often repeated in teaching is to make good points in your lesson, but with blurred distinctions. For example, "Jesus is God because He did miracles" is essentially the same as "Jesus is God because He healed people" —healing is really a classification of miracle. So in this example you may have miracles as a limb, with healing as one branch, supernatural occurrences as another, etc...

Tree Rules (con't)

6) Limbs of a tree are connected at the base

When you move from one limb to another you need to come back to the base. Likewise at every level: when you move from one branch to another, you must come back to its limb, etc... In other words, when teaching, you need to make it clear to your audience that you're switching limbs. Think of sermons or lessons you've heard where for several minutes you asked, "where is he going with this?" or, "how does this relate?" Eventually you may have figured out that you are now on a new point, but that time you spent in the dark is partly wasted time.

The clearer you can make it to your audience that you are changing limbs, the more likely they are to stay with you. **In terms of studying and organizing** your material, this means that you need to keep your piles as distinct as possible. It's very confusing to jump back and forth from one limb to another. **In terms of presentation**, this means that you have to announce, in some manner, that you're changing gears. Again, though, remember that you only want to use one kind of wood at a time--keep it all pointing back to the main subject.

Homework

Try your hand at tree making

Make 3-5 trees based on any 3-5 Biblical doctrines you can think of. Use the 6 rules above to govern the design of your tree. **For now** you don't have to look for Scriptural support (although you'll be doing that in the coming weeks with your trees). Also, for now, don't use any tools, other than your Bible—don't even use your in-Bible cross-reference. Just use your brain and whatever gray matter you have to think up 3-5 limbs and as many branches as you can. If you can come up with some references (twigs) then you get a bonus.

Here's some doctrines you may want to try:

- Salvation/Redemption
- Man
- The Bible
- God the Father
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit
- End Times
- Sin
- The Church
- Baptism
- Angels
- Satan and Demons

