

VOL. 6, No. 2

FALL 2009

THE JOURNAL

FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY
& MINISTRY

THE PROCLAMATION OF
THE GOSPEL



A RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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NEW FROM B&H ACADEMIC

A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism

WHOSOEVER WILL

Edited by
DAVID L. ALLEN and STEVE LEMKE

REFLECTIONS FROM
THE JOHN 3:16 CONFERENCE

Whosoever Will presents a biblical-theological assessment of and response to five-point Calvinism. Baptist leaders offering an alternative to the doctrine's T.U.L.I.P. tenets include Paige Patterson (Total depravity), Richard Land (Unconditional election), David L. Allen (Limited atonement), Steve Lemke (Irresistible grace), and Kenneth Keathley (Perseverance of the saints). Other notable contributors such as Jerry Vines and Malcolm Yarnell write about crucial theological and ministerial issues impacting our understanding of Calvinism.

Coming April 1, 2010

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The Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary was a co-sponsor of the John 3:16 Conference.

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

DR. STEVE W. LEMKE

The priority of preaching is underscored throughout the New Testament. Citing Isa. 61:1-2, Jesus described His own ministry of proclamation in His hometown synagogue: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19, NASB). Jesus went throughout the country preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17, 23; 11:1; Luke 4:43-44), and instructed His disciples to do the same (Matt. 10:7-20).

The first public work of the church was Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). The office of deacons was established soon afterward so that the apostles could focus on a ministry of prayer and preaching (Acts 6:4). The preaching of the gospel flourished (Acts 6:7) through the consistent preaching of the *kerygma* (the gospel message of salvation through the cross of Christ) by early church leaders such as Peter, James, Stephen, and Philip (Acts 3:12-26; 4:8-20; 5:42; 6:8-7:60; 8:4-5, 35; 10:34-38; and 11:19-21).

Clearly, the Apostle Paul had a settled conviction about the centrality of preaching. He described preaching as the primary focus of his ministry (1 Cor. 1:17, 1 Tim. 2:7). In his missionary journeys, Paul and his team proclaimed the gospel throughout the Gentile world (Acts 13:43-49; 17:1-4, 10-13, 22-34; 20:18-21). Paul was able to preach without hindrance even during his Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:31).

Paul practiced gospel-focused kerygmatic preaching. He was told the Corinthian church that “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, HCSB). Although the Jews sought confirmation of the message by miraculous signs and Gentiles sought wisdom through philosophy, Paul asserted that “we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24, NASB). Paul recognized the supreme irony (even describing it as “foolishness”) of the earthen vessel of human preachers proclaiming the transcendent treasure of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:18-21, 2 Cor. 4:7), but nonetheless preaching was a key component of God's design for redemption. Paul expressed the crucial role of preaching in these words to the Roman church:

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How welcome are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things! (Rom. 10:13-15, HCSB).

The New Testament model for proclamation is not only kerygmatic preaching, but it is expositing the Word of God. In Jesus' parable of the sower and the seeds, the seed being

sown is the Word of God (Mark 4:14). Paul instructed the young minister Timothy to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2-5), and to read and exposit Scripture in teaching sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:11-16).

The theme of this issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* is “The Proclamation of the Gospel.” Preaching has always played a crucial role in the Christian church. The centrality of preaching was a hallmark of the Protestant Reformation, and has been characteristic in the Baptist tradition. However, some contemporary models of doing church seem to place a lower value on the role of preaching in the proclamation of the gospel. We hope in some small way to help refocus the attention of the church on the priority of preaching.

In an attempt to be consistent with the New Testament model, we will advocate *kerygmatic* preaching (gospel preaching focused on the cross of Christ) and *expository* preaching (preaching that is based upon and derived directly from Scripture). In the first section, we offer articles about different aspects of the art of preaching. In the second section, we are presenting a half dozen sermons as exemplars of the kind of kerygmatic and expository preaching that follows the New Testament pattern of proclamation.

The first section begins with four articles addressing the overall character of preaching. Dr. Dennis Phelps authors the first article, on “The Biblical Basis for Christian Preaching.” Dr. Phelps has served as an evangelist, a pastor of several churches, and as a faculty member of Bethel Theological Seminary. He currently serves as Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, occupying the J. D. Grey Chair of Preaching. Dr. David Allen contributes an article entitled “Expository Preaching and the Mission of the Church.” This article originated at a presentation Dr. Allen made at the February 2005 Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry Conference, focused on the theme “The Mission of Today’s Church.” Dr. Allen has long been a passionate advocate of expository preaching. Dr. Allen serves as Professor of Preaching, occupying the George W. Truett Chair of Ministry, as Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching, and as Dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Tony Merida’s article, “Preaching the Forest and the Trees: Integrating Biblical Theology and Expository Preaching” also makes the case for utilizing expository preaching to communicate sound doctrine. Dr. Merida serves as Pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, MS and Assistant Professor of Preaching (ministry-based) at NOBTS, where he formerly served as Dean of the Chapel. Dr. Jake Roudkovski, Assistant Professor of Evangelism, occupying the Max and Bonnie Thornhill Chair of Evangelism, and Director of Supervised Ministry at NOBTS, contributes a thoughtful article on “The Holy Spirit in Preaching.”

The next four articles focus on various important aspects of the proclamation of the gospel. Dr. Michael Miller, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Kenner, LA and an adjunct teacher at NOBTS, contributes an article on “Apologizing to Postmoderns: Developing an Effective Apologetic for Contemporary Gospel Preaching.” The article “Humor in Preaching: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Pulpit” is co-authored by Dr. Jerry Barlow and Dr. Bradley Rushing, based on a paper they presented to the 2006 annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Dr. Rushing serves as Pastor of First Baptist Church in Cleveland, MS, and Dr. Barlow serves as Professor of Preaching and Pastoral

Work and Dean of Graduate Studies at NOBTS. Dr. Argile Smith and Dr. Eddie Campbell contribute another jointly authored article, “Rethinking the Value of Metaphors in Listener Sensitive Homiletics.” Dr. Smith has served as pastor of several churches in Louisiana and Mississippi, in the administration of William Carey University, and as Professor of Preaching at NOBTS. He currently serves as Pastor of First Baptist Church of Biloxi, MS. Dr. Campbell, whose Ph.D. is in Preaching, serves as Associate Professor of English in Leavell College. In the last article in this section, Dr. Mark Tolbert addresses the biblical basis for issuing an invitation in “The Integrity of the Invitation.” Dr. Tolbert speaks out of over 30 years of experience as a pastor, church staff member, and collegiate minister in Texas, Arkansas, and Alabama. He serves as Associate Professor of Evangelism and Pastoral Ministry and as Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at NOBTS.

It seemed inappropriate, however, to offer an issue of the *Journal* on gospel proclamation without offering some actual sermons which are exemplars of good preaching. All of these sermons are by nationally known Baptist preachers who exemplify excellence in preaching. The first sermon, by Dr. Jerry Vines, is an exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 regarding the resurrection. This message was part of Dr. Vines’ Stanfield Lectures on Preaching delivered on the NOBTS campus in September 1997. Dr. Vines is a former President of the SBC who is best known for his long pastorate at First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL. Dr. Nelson Price contributes an exposition of Ephesians 1:4-6 entitled “What Happens to Persons Who Never Hear the Name of Jesus Christ?” Dr. Price served as pastor of Oak Park Baptist Church in New Orleans, but is most associated with his long pastorate at Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, GA. He played a key role in the creation of the Nelson Price Drug Rehabilitation Center in association with the Georgia Baptist Convention, as well as the Nelson Price Center for Urban Missions and the Nelson Price Chair of Leadership at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Stephen Rummage has taught preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Formerly Preaching Pastor at Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC, he recently became Senior Pastor of Bull Shoals Baptist Church in Brandon, FL. His sermon addresses the Great Commission in Matt. 28:18-20. Rev. Fred Luter, Pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, is always one of the campus favorite preachers in chapel at NOBTS. The Baptist Center hopes that someday he will be elected President of the SBC. (And there is no time better than when the SBC meets in New Orleans in 2012.) His sermon, “God’s Bailout Plan,” is based on John 3:16.

The last three sermons are by men who are beloved preachers on the NOBTS campus, each of whom has served as Dean of the Chapel and a Preaching professor at NOBTS. Dr. Jim Shaddix, currently pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Denver, CO, contributes a sermon on Jesus’ call for us to take His yoke upon us (Matt. 11:28-30). Dr. David Platt, Pastor of Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, AL, shares with us the sermon based on Acts 3:1-10 that he preached at the 2009 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Louisville, KY. Tony Merida, Pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, MS, addresses the issue “Paul vs. Athens: Engaging the Culture with the Gospel” (Acts 17:16-34).

We hope that this issue will encourage our pastors and churches toward faithful kerygmatic, expository preaching of the Word of God!

Steve W. Lemke, Acting Editor
Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry

Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum
February 26-27, 2010

The Message of **Jesus**



John Dominic Crossan

Professor Emeritus of Religion, DePaul University. He is the author of many books, including *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* and *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus*.



Ben Witherington, III

Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and on the doctoral faculty at St. Andrews University in Scotland. Included among his many books are *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom*, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, and *What Have They Done with Jesus?: Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History—Why We Can Trust the Bible*.

Other guest speakers:

Amy-Jill Levine

E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity

Alan Segal

Professor of Religion and Ingeborg Rennert Professor of Jewish Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University

Darrell Bock

Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary

Craig Evans

Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College of Acadia University

SECTION 1

THE CHARACTER OF PREACHING

“BUT HOW CAN THEY CALL ON HIM IN WHOM
THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED? AND HOW CAN
THEY BELIEVE WITHOUT HEARING ABOUT HIM?
AND HOW CAN THEY HEAR WITHOUT A
PREACHER? AND HOW CAN THEY PREACH
UNLESS THEY ARE SENT? AS IT IS WRITTEN:
HOW WELCOME ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO
ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL OF GOOD THINGS!”

ROMANS 10:13-15

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN PREACHING

DR. DENNIS PHELPS

Dr. Dennis Phelps is Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he occupies the J. D. Grey Chair of Preaching.

INTRODUCTION

What is the basis for preaching as one of the primary expressions of the Christian faith both inside and outside of the Church? Is preaching only a cultural aspect leftover from the earliest days of the struggling, persecuted Church, or is there a legitimate and biblical basis for the Church to continue to utilize preaching as an expression of her faith?

The thesis of this paper is that a biblical basis exists for Christian preaching. This thesis will be defended by utilizing a bifocal approach in examining the above questions. The first (and major) part will focus on the biblical basis of Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction. The second part will focus on the biblical basis of the content of Christian preaching.

Phillips Brooks's concept of preaching as the communication of divine truth through human personality to other persons will be the operative definition used throughout this paper.¹ The traditional Protestant canon will serve as the primary source. The method employed will be a survey of the biblical materials in the canon related to preaching. Use of both the Old Testament (O.T.) and New Testament (N.T.) reflects two of the three sources for the development of Christian preaching, Hebrew religion and the Christian gospel (the third source being ancient oratory).² The Bible's authority for guidance in matters of faith and practice is presupposed. A secondary purpose of this paper is to provide a biblical basis and introduction to a study of the history of Christian preaching across the centuries.

John R. W. Stott began the opening chapter of *Between Two Worlds* with the assertion, "Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its [Christianity's] authenticity has been lost."³ Assuming this intimacy does indeed exist, what

¹Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 5-8, 14-28.

²See Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), 1:14.

³John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 15.

is the foundation? This section explores four biblical bases for the intimacy between Christianity and preaching as a method of Christian communication and instruction.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS

O.T. Antecedents

In the Genesis record God is described as speaking creation into existence.⁴ Shortly after mankind's creation he is entrusted with the responsibility of using words to name the reality surrounding him, including all animal life.⁵ One does not progress very far into the Protestant canon before being confronted with the biblical writer's understanding of words communicating power, whether spoken by God or persons.

The office of the priest supplied another O.T. antecedent for Christian preaching. The priestly acts of Enoch, Noah, Isaac, and Jacob included speaking words of counsel from the Lord.⁶ By the time of Moses and Aaron the office of priest had become formally established.⁷ The nature of the office implied a divine choice⁸ and consecration.⁹ It was a religious order, not a political one. Priestism was denied through the action of the people in laying their hands on the heads of their sacrifices and freely confessing their sins to God alone. Their consciences were free and unhindered. The office of the priest represented life, not death. Its function implied representing all the people, offering sacrifices, and interceding on the people's behalf.¹⁰ However, the office of priest fell into suspicion, laziness, and immorality. The sense of a divine call began to be lost.¹¹ One only can speculate that if the priests had remained faithful to their tasks and retained a higher sense of divine calling the need may have diminished for as many prophets which later arose in Israel to proclaim God's message. However, the priest's responsibility to speak words of counsel from God contributed to the historical tradition inherited by the Church in using preaching as a means of instruction and communication.¹²

⁴Gen. 1:3-27.

⁵Gen. 2:19-20.

⁶Jude 14; 2 Pet. 2:5; Gen. 27:27-29; 49:3-27.

⁷Dt. 26:3; Lev. 9:22-24; Num. 6:22-27; 17:1-18:7.

⁸Heb. 5:1, 4.

⁹Exodus 29; Leviticus 8.

¹⁰Ex. 28:12, 19; Lev. 4:3; 9:22-24; Num. 6:22-27; Heb. 5:1; 8:3.

¹¹1 Sam. 3:12-14.

¹²For further discussion, see George Arthur Buttrick, gen. ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 3, s.v. "Priests and Levites," by R. Abba; suppl. vol., s.v. "Priests," by B. A. Levine; James Orr, gen. ed., *The International*

Hebrew prophecy provided another O.T. antecedent in the historical basis of Christian preaching as a means of instruction and communication. Although the premonarchy prophets (Abraham, Moses, and Joshua) were transitional figures and primarily administrators, they did engage in the communication of divine truth to other persons.¹³ By the time of the judges the early prophets began to emerge. This group included males and females.¹⁴ There also is an account of a “school of the prophets” taught by Samuel.¹⁵ During the period of the monarchy (both under the united and the divided kingdoms) prophets continued to exercise their ministries.¹⁶ The ninth century B.C. saw the rise of the writing prophets, beginning in the Southern kingdom and spreading to the Northern kingdom.¹⁷ The writing prophets continued through the postexilic period.¹⁸ This long history of Hebrew prophecy helped to prepare the way for Christian preaching.

The prophets’ ability to discern and to describe events was attributed to their belief that God had divinely called them and placed his words in their mouths.¹⁹ Each divine call was different. Nevertheless, each call was initiated by God, created tension in the individuals’ lives, and preserved the personhood of the ones involved. The prophet’s call influenced the direction and emphasis of his ministry and authenticated his message. The divine call enabled the prophet to stay with the intended task when circumstances became undesirable

Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1939), vol. 4, s.v. “Priests,” by William G. Moorehead.

¹³Gen. 20:7; Dt. 18:15; 34:10; Joshua 23-24.

¹⁴Ex. 15:20-21; Jg. 4:4; 6:8-10; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Chr. 35:18; Mic. 6:4.

¹⁵1 Sam. 10:5-10; 19:18-20.

¹⁶For the united kingdom see 2 Sam. 7:2; 12:25; 15:27; 24:11; 1 Chr. 25:5. For the Southern kingdom see 2 Chr. 9:29; 11:2-4; 12:5-15; 13:22; 15:1-8; 16:7, 10; 19:2; 20:14-17, 37; 24:17-22; 25:5-16; 1 Kg. 16:1-12; 2 Kg. 14:1-7. For the Northern kingdom see 2 Chr. 18:1-34; 1 Kg. 11:29; 13:1-32; 14:2-18; 17-19; 20:13-28, 35-43; 21; 22:1-39; 2 Kings 1; 2-9; 10; 13; Mal. 4:5.

¹⁷For the Southern kingdom see Obadiah; Joel; Is. 6:8-9; 61:1; Micah; Nahum; Zephaniah; Jer. 1:6-9; 7:28; 20:9; Habakkuk. For the Northern kingdom see Jonah, Amos, and Hosea.

¹⁸For exilic prophets see Daniel and Ezek. 2:1-7. For postexilic prophets see Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

¹⁹Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 3:1-4:17; 1 Samuel 3; 1 Kg. 19:16, 19-21; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezek. 1:1-3:15; Hos. 1:2; Jl. 1:1; Am. 7:14-15; Jon. 1:1-2; 3:1-2; Mic. 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1. See also Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964-76), vol. 2, s.v. “*evangelizōmai*, *evangelion*, *proevangelizōmai*, *evangelistas*,” by Gerhard Friedrich, 708-9.

and adverse. His task primarily was one of “forthtelling” the word of the Lord to the people of the day, although there were occasions of “foretelling” future events.²⁰ The aspects of a divine personal call and of the task of forthtelling the word of the Lord are O.T. antecedents, which contributed to the historical basis of Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

Although the precise origin is not known, at some point in the latter period of the prophets (the exile) the synagogue developed.²¹ This development influenced preaching greatly in the years to come.²² The Israelites may have developed the synagogue system while in exile in foreign lands and separated from the Temple in Jerusalem. When they returned to Palestine after the exile they established synagogues in most of their communities.²³ At first the people met only for the exposition of the Law.²⁴ Later, prayers and preaching were added. The elders were responsible for the management of the synagogue. The rulers (usually selected from the elders) controlled the services, decided who would read from the Law and the Prophets and who would preach.²⁵ One official, the servant, was responsible for the maintenance of the synagogue and served as an elementary teacher. Those who prayed and often read Scripture were known as delegates. Two almoners received the alms and three almoners distributed the alms. An interpreter translated the passages of the Law and

²⁰For further development in a popular style of the life and ministry of Hebrew prophets see F. B. Huey, Jr., *Yesterday's Prophets for Today's World* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980); see also Buttrick, vol. 3, “Prophets, Prophetism,” by B. D. Napier; “Prophets in the N.T.,” by M. H. Shepherd, Jr.; “Prophetess,” by B. D. Napier; suppl. vol., “Prophecy in Ancient Israel,” by M. J. Buss; “Prophecy in the Early Church,” by E. E. Ellis; “Prophecy, False,” by J. Crenshaw; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Orr, vol. 4, “Prophecy, Prophets,” by C. vonDrelli; R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953); Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

²¹It should be noted that most of the information concerning the synagogue comes from interpolations from later sources. Much of what is known is speculation at best. See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), 1:143; Azriel Eisenberg, *The Synagogue through the Ages* (New York: Bloch Publ. Co., 1974); Joseph Gutmann, ed., *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology, and Architecture* (New York: KTAV Publ. House, 1975); Kaufmann Kohler, *The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929).

²²Dargan, 1:20; H. C. Brown, Jr., H. Gordon Clinard, and Jesse J. Northcutt, *Steps to the Sermon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 21.

²³T. Harwood Pattison, *The History of Christian Preaching* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), 9.

²⁴See Neh. 8:1-8.

²⁵Cf. Lk. 13:14; Acts 13:15.

the Prophets, which were read in Hebrew, into Aramaic for the people.²⁶ Ten persons were required before worship could begin. The order of worship began with the recitation of the Shema (Dt. 6:4-9), preceded and followed with the congregational blessings. Prayers were the next element, selected from a cycle of eighteen prayers or eulogies. A pericope from the Law for that Sabbath was read, followed by a pericope from the Prophets.²⁷ When the sermon was added as a part of the worship service it was originally a method of dealing with matters of conscience and the resolution of right and wrong by exposition of the Law (the scribes). Later the sermon assumed a more devotional character. Anyone might be asked by the ruler to preach. A benediction pronounced by a priest followed the sermon; the congregation answered with “amen.”²⁸

The development of the synagogue provided the early Christian preachers with a people “trained in hearing the exposition of God’s Word in a special place set apart for sacred discourse.” It also provided them with a place in many towns in which to preach. “The general structure of the synagogue building, the type of service, the use of Scripture for divine instruction influenced Christian preaching for all time.”²⁹

New Testament Models

John the Baptist provided the biblical link between the preaching in the O.T. and the N.T. He used preaching as a tool to communicate the “immediate coming of the promised reign of God”³⁰ and to call the people to a response of repentance.³¹ Our Lord himself chose

²⁶Cf. 1 Cor. 14:28.

²⁷The Pentateuch was divided into 154 pericopes, so that it was read through every three years; the interpreter did not necessarily translate the readings from the Prophets verse by verse, but in paragraphs of three verses.

²⁸Orr, vol. 5, “Synagogue,” by Paul Levertoff, 2878; see also Buttrick, vol. 4, “Synagogue,” by I. Sonne.

²⁹Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 21-22. However, N.T. scholarship has shown that Dargan, as well as Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, may have overstated the influence of the synagogue on Christian preaching; instead, evidence leads to a case for the strong influence of the Cynic-Stoic street preachers. For a treatment of the Cynic-Stoic preaching see Ernst Weber, *De Dione Christostomo Cynicorum sectatore*, Leipziger Studien, vol. 9 (Leipzig: University Press, 1887); for a classic treatment of its influence on the N.T. preaching see Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die Kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1910); for a more recent and well-argued treatment see Stanley Kent Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, SBL Dissertation Series, vol. 57 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1981). For several other significant influences see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

³⁰Dargan, 1:21-22.

³¹Mt. 3:1-12; Mk. 1:4-8; Lk. 3:1-18; Jn. 1:6-8, 15-28.

to use preaching as a primary means for communication and instruction.³² He commissioned his disciples to preach and taught them to use preaching as an element in their ministries.³³ Preaching was a vital factor in the worship and expansion of the early Church.³⁴ The Book of Acts opens with Peter using preaching as a method for declaring the beginning of the new age.³⁵ Stephen employed preaching to proclaim the gospel.³⁶ Phillip used preaching in evangelism.³⁷ Preaching was basic to Paul's ministry of missions.³⁸ Each of these persons found preaching to be a legitimate and helpful element in the execution of service to God.

The O.T. antecedents of the priestly office, prophetic ministry, and synagogue worship, combined with the N.T. models of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the disciples, and Paul, provide a historical basis of examples and tradition relative to a biblical foundation for Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

THE BEHAVIORAL BASIS

In the O.T. commands to preach were directed primarily to individuals for the purpose of fulfilling a specific unique task.³⁹ However, the N.T. included commands to preach which were directed to the disciples of Jesus as a group, to the Church as a whole, and to all Christian preachers.⁴⁰ These commands to preach were connected directly with divine tasks to be accomplished. These tasks included world missions,⁴¹ personal evangelism,⁴² and building up the Church.⁴³ The command to preach often was related to

³²Mt. 4:17, 23; 5:1-7:28; 11:1, 5; Mk. 1:38-39; 2:2; Lk. 4:16-30, 42-44; 5:1; 20:1; Eph. 2:17. See also Kittel, vol. 3, s.v. "*karux* (*bierokarux*), *karusso*, *kerugma*, *prokarusso*," by Gerhard Friedrich, 706-9.

³³Mt. 10:5-7, 26-27; Mk. 3:14; 16:20.

³⁴Acts 5:42; 6:2; 8:4, 25.

³⁵Acts 2:14-26; see also 3:12-26; 10:42.

³⁶Acts 7:1-53.

³⁷Acts 8:12, 40.

³⁸Acts 9:19-20; 13:5; 14:7-18; 16:10; 17:2-3, 16-23; 20:7-9; 28:30-31; Rom. 1:15; 10:13-15; 1 Cor. 1:17, 23; 9:16; Gal. 1:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:7.

³⁹See Is. 6:8-9; 61:1-2; and Jon. 3:2.

⁴⁰See Mt. 10:26-27; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:2.

⁴¹Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:46-47.

⁴²Rom. 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:21.

⁴³Eph. 4:11-13.

faithfulness in testifying about God's work for man through Jesus.⁴⁴ The preaching event itself was a sign and reminder of the beginning of the last days.⁴⁵ In the N.T. preaching was a part of commands to obey, instructions to follow, and tasks to accomplish, providing a biblical behavioral basis for Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

THE LINGUISTIC BASIS

O.T. (Hebrew)

Approximately nineteen words occur in the O.T. which refer to preaching.⁴⁶ No formal definition is recorded in the O.T., but a study of several of the terms unveils some characteristics of that which was called preaching. Several terms included the concepts of preaching as a "cry from a herald," a "proclamation," and a "burden."⁴⁷ Other terms connoted "the ability to see," as in a vision (both in the spiritual and the temporal sense).⁴⁸ These concepts formed the idea of one who had the abilities "to see" for the Lord and "to speak" in his name in a bold but compassionate manner.⁴⁹

N.T. (Greek)

Approximately twenty-one words occur in the N.T. which refer to preaching.⁵⁰ As with the O.T., no formal definition of preaching is found in the N.T. However, again several of the terms included the concepts of preaching as a "cry from a herald," a "proclamation," an "announcement."⁵¹ Other connotations included "telling good news," "calling with

⁴⁴Acts 10:42.

⁴⁵Acts 2:4, 17-21.

⁴⁶See William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. E. Robinson, rev. C. Briggs, F. Brown, and S. Driver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22d ed. (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, n.d.).

⁴⁷See *kara*, *keraz*, *keriah*, *kobelet*, *massa*, *rinnah*.

⁴⁸See *chazab*, *chozeh*.

⁴⁹Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 21. See also Kittel, vol. 1, s.v. "*angelia*, *angelo*, *an-*, *ap-*, *di-*, *ex-*, *kat-*, *prokatangelo*, *katangelous*," by Julius Schneiwind, 71; vol. 2, s.v. "*evangelizomai*, *evangelion*, *proevangelizomai*, *evangelistas*," by Gerhard Friedrich, 707-9, 714; vol. 6, s.v. "*prophatas*, *prophatis*, *prophateuo*, *prophateia*, *prophatikos*, *pseudoprophatas*," by Helmut Kramer et al., 796-97, 810-12.

⁵⁰See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 2d rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Young.

⁵¹See *dialegomai*, *diangelo*, *katangelo*, *kerugma*, *kerusso*, *kerux*.

personal appeal,” “gossiping the gospel naturally,” “discoursing,” “teaching with authority,” and “expounding publicly.”⁵² Common to almost all of the N.T. terms was the aspect of “telling” or “declaring” or “proclaiming.”⁵³ These concepts reflected the idea of the preacher as one who boldly and freely heralded the gospel.

The ideas of preaching in both the O.T. and N.T. involved “heralding,” “announcing,” “proclaiming” in a bold fashion by the authority of God and for the intended welfare of response from the hearers. These concepts provided a biblical linguistic basis for Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Christian Biblical Doctrine of God

The understanding of God in the Bible as personal and immanent is important to a theological basis for preaching as a tool of communication. The Bible observed that just as it is the nature of light to shine, so too it is the nature of God to reveal himself.⁵⁴ The Bible also presented God as having acted in history and spoken to his people.⁵⁵ This enables one to believe that God desires to be known (self-revelation), has made himself known in the past (via his actions and words), and will continue to make himself known in the present. God created the universes and then spoke his blessing on it. God created a people for himself and then spoke to them through the prophets. God created the Church and then spoke to and through them via the early Christian preachers. “Once we are persuaded that God has spoken, however, then we too must speak. A compulsion rests upon us.”⁵⁶

Christian Biblical Doctrine of Christ

The portrayal of Christ as the Word of God substantiated the concept of God’s willingness to communicate to his creation through self-revelation.⁵⁷ The biblical understanding of Jesus Christ as fully divine and fully human provided a model for God’s

⁵²See *dialogomai, didasko, evangelizo, laleo, parakaleo, prophates, prophateuo, propheteia, prophetikos*.

⁵³Kittel, vol. 1, s.v. “*angelia, angello, an-, ex-, kat-, prokatangelo, katangeleus*,” by Julius Schneiwind, 56, 69; vol. 3, s.v. “*karux (hierokarux), karusso, kerugma, prokarusso*,” by Gerhard Friedrich, 703.

⁵⁴Mt. 5:14-16; 11:25-26; Jn. 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; 1 Jn. 1:5.

⁵⁵Ps. 115:5; Is. 40:5; 55:11; Am. 3:8; 2 Cor. 4:13.

⁵⁶Stott, 96.

⁵⁷Jn. 1:1-3, 14; Heb. 1:1-4.

continuing to speak to his creation through humans via preaching.⁵⁸ Christ's incarnation supplied a paradigm for preaching as both a human and a divine event.⁵⁹

Christian Biblical Doctrine of the Church

The biblical material presents the nature of the Church as being directly related to the present of God (or God's Spirit). This is true even to the point of the Church being referred to as the body of Christ.⁶⁰ In the Church's worship she speaks to God (prayer) and listens for his words (meditation). The biblical teaching regarding the Church's mission is to call the world to God in Christ and to speak the words of God to the world. The biblical method to accomplish this mission includes going, telling, proclaiming, explaining, and exhorting.⁶¹

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING

In examining the biblical basis for preaching as one of the primary expressions of the Christian faith, consideration must be given not only to its biblical basis as a method of communication and instruction, but also to the biblical basis of its message.

O.T. Contributions

Little has been written concerning the contribution of the office of the priest to the message of the Christian preacher.⁶² However, it seems reasonable to assert that the worship implications of the priestly functions offer some parallels for the message of the Christian preacher. His responsibility was two-directional: (1) service to God, and (2) service to the people. In representing God to the people and the people to God, the priest's functions involved an incarnational aspect. He communicated not only by what he

⁵⁸Heb. 2:3-4.

⁵⁹See also Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1961), 50-54.

⁶⁰Rom. 12:5.

⁶¹Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:45-47; Acts 10:42; Rom. 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 4:11-13; 2 Tim. 4:2. See also Stott, 109-16.

⁶²This may be due to the critical questions related to the origins, nature, and history of the priesthood. See Aelred Cody, *A History of the Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971 ed., s.v. "Priests and Priesthood"; Donald E. Gowan, *Bridge between the Testaments* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976); George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925); A. S. Herbert, *Worship in Ancient Israel* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959); J. Morgenstern, "A Chapter in the History of the High Priesthood," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 55 (1939): 1-24; Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1961).

said but also by how he lived. The priest was to demonstrate personal forgiveness of sin, as well as offer sacrifice publicly for its remission; he was to consecrate himself, as well as call the people to holy living; he was to experience worship of God, as well as lead the people in worship. The priest was to apply the admonitions of the holy writings to himself, as well as use them as a source for instruction and direction for others. When the latter aspect of “incarnating” the divine truth became deemphasized or forgotten, the priesthood fell into disrepute.

In contrast to the lack of works dealing with the contributions of the office of the priesthood, much has been written concerning the contributions of the prophets to the message of the Christian preacher.⁶³ An important element of the preaching of the O.T. prophet was the idea that he had received a “word” or message from God, which had to be faithfully passed on. The message did not have its source in the prophet himself but often was introduced with the authority of “thus saith the Lord.” The prophet was responsible for the correct delivery of the message he had received from God. The prophet did not just proclaim judgment but also warned and admonished so that judgment could be averted. The message was passed on in a relevant manner.⁶⁴ Application usually was made to national, ethical, and social issues.

The preaching which was a part of the experience of worship in the synagogue drew from the sacred writings of the Law and the prophets and was explanatory in nature.⁶⁵ The priesthood, prophets, and synagogue worship provided a background for Christian preaching which was concerned with people’s needs, incarnational in expression, divine in origin and authority, explanatory in nature, and ethical in application.

New Testament Models

“When we say that the main concern of the N.T. is with the act of proclamation, this does not mean that the content is subsidiary. . . . Regard must be had to the content.”⁶⁶ The content of John the Baptist’s preaching pointed to the “Lamb of God,” rather than to himself as the messenger. His message was the same for all people. He called for decision,

⁶³See Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Eighth Century Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Andrew W. Blackwood, Sr., *The Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1917); Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); F. B. Huey, Jr., *Yesterday’s Prophets for Today’s World* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980); J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962); R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953); Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

⁶⁴Kramer et al., “*prophetas, prophatis, prophateuo, prophateia, prophatikos, pseudoprophatas*,” 810-12.

⁶⁵See above., pp. 5-6.

⁶⁶Friedrich, “*karux (hierokarux), karusso, kerugma, prokarusso*,” 710.

choice, and fruitful repentance.⁶⁷ “His preaching was ethical, eschatological, and judgmental. He was fearless in his attacks on the sins of the people.”⁶⁸

When Herod placed John the Baptist in prison, Jesus assumed John’s ministry and preached as John did.⁶⁹ The declaration was concerned with the Kingdom of God, living the God-intended life, acceptance by God, and the price and sacrifice involved in following God. His themes were doctrinal and ethical, touching on the areas of domestic, social, and civil life.⁷⁰ However, Jesus did not speak of a prophet who was yet to come. He spoke as a prophet of the fulfillment of expectation and promise. Rather than announcing that something was going to take place, his announcement was the event itself. Unlike John, Jesus was the burden of his own message. He himself was the content of his preaching.⁷¹

The content of the apostles’ preaching was parallel to Christ’s, with the addition of the events concerning his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and promised return.⁷² The major sources for the content of their preaching were the O.T. as interpreted to them by Christ, the experiences they had had with Jesus, the historic events centering in Jesus, and the individual understandings each gave to the entire picture.⁷³ C. H. Dodd studied the individual understandings reflected in the sermonic material of the apostles and preserved in the N.T. He then sought to determine the common elements in each tradition in order to discover the core content of the preaching of the early Church. Depending mostly on the Petrine sermonic material, Dodd concluded that the kerygma of the early Church consisted of (1) the age of fulfillment has dawned; (2) this has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in accordance with the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” and in fulfillment of O.T. prophecy; (3) by virtue of the resurrection Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God, as Messianic head of the new Israel; (4) the Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ’s present power and glory; (5) the Messianic age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ; and (6) repent, receive the forgiveness of sin,

⁶⁷Mt. 3:1-14; Mk. 1:1-9; Lk. 3:1-20; Jn. 1:19-36; 3:22-36.

⁶⁸Lloyd M. Perry and Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 12. See also Friedrich, “*evangelizōmai, evangelion, proevangelizōmai, evangelistas*,” 719; Kramer et al., “*prophatas, prophatis, prophateno, prophateia, prophatikos, pseudoprophatas*,” 836-41.

⁶⁹See Mt. 4:17; cf. Mk. 1:14-15.

⁷⁰Perry Wiersbe, 12-13.

⁷¹Friedrich, “*evangelizōmai, evangelion, proevangelizōmai, evangelistas*,” 712; Friedrich, “*karux (hierokarux), karusso, kerugma, prokarusso*,” 706-8. See also Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 22; Dargan, 1:22-23.

⁷²Ibid., 1:24.

⁷³Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 22.

the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of salvation, which is the life of the age to come to those who enter the elect community.⁷⁴

The kerygma reflected in Pauline sermon material, according to Dodd, was expressed as (1) the prophecies are fulfilled, and the new age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ; (2) he was born of the seed of David; (3) he died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the present evil age; (4) he was buried; (5) he rose on the third day according to the Scriptures; (6) he is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of the quick and the dead; (7) he will come again as Judge and Savior of men.

Three major elements in the Pauline kerygma which were not in the Petrine kerygma were (1) Jesus is the Son of God; (2) Christ died for our sins; (3) the exalted Christ intercedes for us. The other points were common to both; there was little in the Petrine kerygma, which did not reappear substantially in the Pauline kerygma.⁷⁵

By isolating elements of the kerygma of the early Church according to different traditions, Dodd performed a great service for N.T. scholarship and Christian preaching. However, his assertion that there was a sharp separation between “kerygma” and “didache” in the preaching of the N.T. did not go unchallenged.⁷⁶ By its very nature, declaring the unique historical reality of Christ involves teaching and admonishing; however, “it is teaching which participates in the eschatological and dramatic character of the message.”⁷⁷ Although kerygma and didache are distinct from each other, they are not necessarily inseparable in the preaching of the early Church. Robert Mounce described the two preaching elements as connected through a vital dependent relationship. He visualized the N.T. materials as forming three concentric circles around the death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ.⁷⁸ The first circle was the kerygma, which interpreted the Christ events for an evangelistic purpose. The second circle was the theological expansion of the first circle. Its goal was to guide the new Christian into a fuller understanding of what God had done through Jesus Christ. The outside circle was the didache, the ethical expansion of the

⁷⁴C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1936), 21-24.

⁷⁵Ibid., 17, 25-27.

⁷⁶See Francis J. Handy, *Jesus the Preacher* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), 11-17; Michel Philibert, *Christ's Preaching—and Ours*, trans. David Lewis (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963); Robert C. Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

⁷⁷Schneiwind, “*angelia, angello, an-, di-, ex-, kat-, prokatangello, katangeleus*,” 72.

⁷⁸Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1960), 133.

inner two circles. It dealt with the new relationship of man to God and was concerned with focusing on practical daily living.⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

“No agency in religion is older than preaching,” Perry and Wiersbe continued the opening of their study by asserting, “If we would understand preaching today, we must examine its heritage.”⁸⁰ In examining the heritage of this ancient agency, this paper has been concerned with whether or not Christian preaching has a biblical basis for its concept and content.

An examination of the history, commands, instructions, behavior, language, and theology in the Bible provided evidence for the concept of Christian preaching. The evidence supplied by the office of the priest and the synagogue was the weakest evidence for the concept of Christian preaching. The evidence drawn from the prophets, disciples, early Church, and Jesus himself was the strongest element in support of the concept of Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

The biblical basis for the content of Christian preaching came to full maturity in the N.T. models of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. The content of the sermonic material of the N.T. was sometimes Christocentric, sometimes ethical, sometimes eschatological, sometimes kerygmatic, and sometimes existential. It was devoted to the person and work of Christ, the coming of the new age, mankind’s response to the initiative of God, and the implications of God’s work in Christ when applied to one’s relationship to fellow humans. Jesus, his apostles, and the sermonic material of the early Church generally shared a common kerygmatic content. These elements, combined with the preparatory contributions of the preaching content of the O.T., provided a strong biblical basis for the kerygmatic and didactic message of Christian preaching.⁸¹

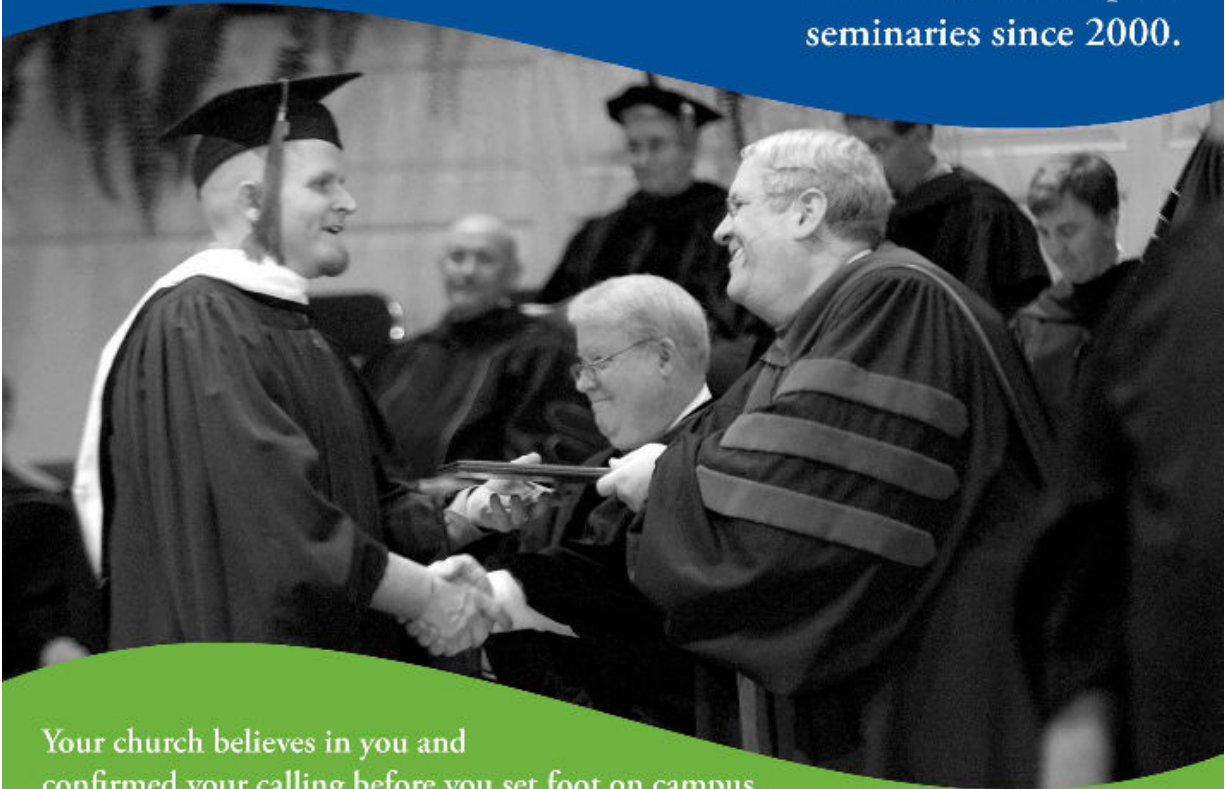
⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Perry and Wiersbe, 11.

⁸¹See Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 22-23.

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EXPOSITORY PREACHING AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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This chapter is an edited transcription from an oral presentation delivered at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary at the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry “Mission of Today’s Church” Conference in March, 2005.

INTRODUCTION

I do not believe it is over the top to say that there is a crisis in preaching not only in the Evangelical world but also in large swaths of the Southern Baptist world. In the SBC, we talk about expository preaching; often we do not practice it.

I received a phone call from a man in Texas. He asked me if I had a student who either was close to graduating or maybe graduated recently whom I could recommend to him who would consider planting a new church. His one condition was that the new pastor must be an expositional preacher. Though I suspected what his answer would be, I queried him further about his request. He had been to every Southern Baptist church within a three-county contiguous area, and had visited many churches more than once, looking for a church where the pastor preached expository sermons. He further stated that he had been to lots of evangelical churches, not just Baptist churches, and could not find a single one where the pastor preached expositionally. He went on to describe a litany of ridiculous “sermons” he had heard of the “five ways to be happy” and “three ways to love your mother” variety. He concluded: “My wife and I are 63 years old and recently retired. We are prepared financially to stand behind a new work if we can have a pastor who would preach expositionally.”

This situation is not atypical. I routinely hear it in varied permutations.

In many churches, pop culture, personal experience, packaged pragmatism, and pop psychology have displaced the Bible. Add to this the urge today to be “creative” in preaching. Now I am not opposed to creativity, and I hope you are not either. However, creativity is something of a code word today in some church circles for “anti-expository preaching,” or at the very least “creativity” is appealed to justify why some do not practice exposition regularly. I am all for creativity, but when creativity subverts or overrides the communication of biblical content, we have a real problem. *Preaching* magazine is one of the professional journals for preachers. In the January/February 2005 edition, there is a lead

article entitled “Preaching Creatively: An Interview with Ed Young Jr.” pastor of Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas. Young tells us we must be creative in preaching because God desires it. I do not want to be overly critical, but I am not at all sure God “desires” that we be creative. That seems to be *extra* biblical to me. That said, however, I do think we should be creative in our preaching. The interviewer asked Young this question: “Some critics might believe that with all the emphasis on creativity it would be possible to give less priority to the Bible and preaching. Tell me about your use of Scripture in your messages.” Young’s response was telling. He said that topical, expositional or character study preaching all comes from the Bible. “Everything we do comes from a Biblical worldview and according to the Bible, like a series I just did called ‘RPM’s, - Recognizing Potential Mates.’ Those are biblical, Scriptural principles. So even if it’s a topical series I’m always in the Bible.” Later he says: “We’re a biblically-driven church.”¹ Young mentions his expositional series through James that he preached several years ago. As far as I can tell from Young’s preaching over the past ten years, this is the only expositional series he has done. Notice how Young deflects the question and basically says all his preaching comes from the Bible. By this explanation, Joel Osteen pastors a biblically driven church.

PREACHING AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

If the mission of the Church is the evangelism of the lost and the equipping of the saved, then of all things the Church does, ought not preaching to be at its apex? Of all the things that are done in a church service, ought not preaching to be central? It is interesting to compare the account of the giving of the Great Commission in Matthew and Mark. Whereas Matthew 28:19 speaks of going into all the world and “making disciples,” Mark 16:15 says “Go into all the world and preach the gospel. . . .” Obviously preaching plays a paramount role in the Church’s mandate to fulfill the Great Commission. In recent years, a few lonely voices have been crying in the wilderness for a return to preaching as biblical exposition. But they are often drowned out by the din of voices that come from many places.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, I will suggest and comment briefly on three reasons why preaching is critical to the mission of the Church. Second, I will mention, if only in a cursory fashion, four movements that are impacting preaching. All of these movements, in one way or another, are problematic for preaching and have, in my opinion, hindered preaching in the overall mission of the Church.

THREE REASONS WHY PREACHING IS FOUNDATIONAL FOR THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

First is the theological reason: the nature of Scripture and the nature of the Church. God is its ultimate author of Scripture according to 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, correction, for training in

¹ “Preaching Creatively: Interview with Ed Young Jr.”, *Preaching* (Jan.- Feb. 2005), vol. 20, no. 4, at http://www.preaching.com/resources/past_issues/archive5/, accessed October 3, 2009.

righteousness.” When New Testament authors quote the Old Testament, we find that God and Scripture are used as interchangeable subjects. God is viewed as the author when he is not the speaker, as in Matthew 19: 4-5. Sometimes the phrase “Scripture says” is used when God is the direct speaker. Twice in Galatians and once in Romans Scripture is called God’s speech. What Scripture says is the word of God. The first theological foundation for preaching is that God has spoken. J. I. Packer said Scripture is God preaching.

The nature of the church requires that preaching be paramount in the fulfillment of her mission. The Great Commission as recorded in Mark 16:15 indicates how Jesus viewed preaching as the necessary means for the church to fulfill the Great Commission. The church was birthed in preaching according to Acts 2. Paul says in Romans 10 that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” Evangelistic preaching grows the church. Biblical preaching edifies the church. The book of Acts clearly shows this. Luke records summary statements of the results of the preaching of the Word in strategic places in Acts. Acts tells us the secret of church growth was preaching and prayer. Look at the New Testament vocabulary for preaching in Acts. For example, in Acts 17:2, Paul “opened” the Scripture and “explained” the meaning to the people. The Pauline epistles are essentially sermons to believers in local churches. The book of Hebrews is a written sermon. Notice how it takes Old Testament Scripture, explains, illustrates and applies its meaning to the New Testament church. The New Testament itself testifies to the foundational nature of preaching for the mission and purpose of the church. In his swan song, Paul tells young Timothy to “preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). You cannot have a church without preaching, and you cannot have church growth without preaching. Preaching is fundamental to New Testament ecclesiology. Preaching must be foundational in the mission of the church for theological reasons.

Second, the necessity of preaching for the mission of the church is illustrated in the history of the Church. Each of the confessions of faith that came out of the Reformation speak early on about the primacy of preaching for achieving the mission of the church. The church cannot be the church unless she is the preaching church. The Reformation engendered a revival of preaching, Biblical preaching, and of expository preaching. Luther was teaching Romans when Erasmus’ Greek New Testament was published. Some say one can actually see when Luther began to make use of the Greek New Testament in his study, preaching and teaching. It revolutionized his preaching and teaching. The first of Luther’s Ninety-five theses was on the subject of repentance taken right out of Erasmus’ Greek New Testament. Preaching was paramount for Ulrich Zwingli as well. Zwingli came to the pastorate of the Grossmuenster church in Zurich and on his first Sunday, which was also his birthday, January 1, 1519, he opened the Bible to Matthew 1:1 and began to preach expositionally through the Gospel of Matthew. From 1519 until his death in 1531 he preached through most of the Bible. Our Anabaptist forefathers were heavily influenced by Zwingli in their preaching.

Calvin’s exegesis and expositions of Scripture are well known. Calvin left Geneva after a big fuss with the council and went to Strasburg for three years. When he was finally persuaded by Farel to return to Zurich three years later, he walked into a packed church. The people expected him to rail on the city council that had given him so much grief three years earlier. Instead, Calvin instructed the people to open their Bibles to the verse he left off preaching from three years earlier and continued his preaching through that book of the

Bible. The post-Reformation preaching of the Puritans was essentially expositional in nature. The best preaching in England, America, and beyond from the eighteenth century to the present has been expositional preaching. The Reformers, by their own preaching and writing, show they considered preaching to be critical to the establishment and ongoing growth and health of the church.

The third reason why preaching is necessary for the mission of the church is the pastoral reason. Preaching was viewed as the primary method of pastoral care in the history of the church. The classical definitions of pastoral care throughout church history speak of preaching as the primary method of doing pastoral care. For example, Luther said:

If any man would preach let him suppress his own words. Let him make them count in family matters and secular affairs but here in the church he should speak nothing except the Word of the rich Head of the household otherwise it is not the true church. Therefore this must be the rule God is speaking that is why a preacher by virtue of this commission and office is administering the household of God and dare say nothing but what God says and commands. And although much talking is done which is outside the Word of God, yet the church is not established by such talk though men were to turn mad in their insistence upon it.²

Preaching within the church both equips and challenges the church to fulfill the Great Commission.

At this point we turn our attention to consider four movements, each of which has, in the opinion of this author, hindered the role of preaching in the Church.

PREACHING AND THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

First is the Charismatic movement. My specific concern here is the notion that God speaks today apart from the Bible with new revelation. According to some Charismatics, God guides people today by giving them words of direction through all of the same media as the Bible says God used in the past: visions, prophets, angels, and so forth. Here is the problem for preaching: it diverts attention from Scripture and ultimately Jesus as God's final revelation.

It is interesting to study the use the author of Hebrews makes of Old Testament quotations. The author quotes the Old Testament directly thirty-one times. The author's choice of quotation formulae is instructive of his high view of Scripture. He employs some form of the verb "to speak" or "to say" and never "it is written." Furthermore, note that in the catena of seven quotations in Heb 1:5–13, God is the subject and some form of the verb "to say" is used to introduce the quotations. Notice further in Heb 3:7–11, the author quotes a portion of Psalm 95, but here the quotation is introduced by "the Holy Spirit says." In Heb 2:12–13, Jesus is the subject of the verb "say" which introduces two Old Testament quotations from the Psalms and Isaiah. In this latter case, the two Old Testament quotations are said to be spoken by Jesus, even though in their original Old Testament context, that was

² *Luther's Works*, vol. XII, 1413.

not the case. These examples illustrate the fact that the author views all of Scripture as the very voice of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The author is here stressing two things: 1) the ongoing relevance of Scripture to speak to the current situation, and 2) Scripture for the author of Hebrews is God's direct speech. Scripture is an authoritative word from God in the present time. The author of Hebrews focuses on what God is saying now to us through the word of God written in the past. Not once does the author say: "God has given me a word of knowledge to give to you," as is common in some Charismatic circles today. The author may himself have been an apostle; certainly he was a leader in the apostolic church. Yet he addresses his people through Scripture, not extra-biblical revelation! Where does God speak today? There is a Charismatic answer to that question and a correct answer to it. When people are looking for a new word from God apart from Scripture, there is an inevitable loss of Scriptural authority and Scriptural sufficiency, and preaching is negatively affected. The result is that the church suffers.

PREACHING AND THE NEW HOMILETIC

The second movement is the New Homiletic, formally birthed in 1971 with the publication of Fred Craddock's *As One without Authority*. In that book Craddock argued for a revolution in preaching. For him, old style "discursive" (read "expository") preaching that has three points and a poem was no longer reaching anybody. That kind of expository preaching is passé. Preachers need to move in a new direction. Craddock's new direction is narrative. We need to think in terms of story. The goal of preaching according to the New Homiletic is to evoke an experience in the listeners. Building on Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication, Craddock argued that the frontal approach to preaching no longer worked. What we need to do is to come at people from the side door or the back door via indirect communication. Craddock's reasoning for this was his belief that people in the United States had become saturated with Biblical knowledge. Thus, to preach the Bible in a direct, expositional way, would merely bore people. I have no doubt that was not true in 1971 to the extent Craddock thought, but I also have absolutely no doubt it is not true today. The biblical illiteracy of our country generally, and people in churches particularly, is appalling. Now, almost forty years later, the New Homiletic has not been able to deliver what it promised and many of its former supporters have begun to doubt.³

³ See Thomas Long, "What Happened to Narrative Preaching?" *Journal for Preachers* 28.4 (Pentecost 2005): 9-14. Long admits that today many are beginning to have second thoughts about the effectiveness of the narrative approach to preaching. After noting the critique of narrative preaching "from the right, the middle, and the left," Long points out that the critics on the left have been the most severe, alleging that the new homiletics practitioners have been "not merely rhetorically mistaken, theologically misguided, or trendy, but they have committed far more serious offenses: potential oppression and abuse of power" (12). In the end, however, Long is not willing to give up narrative preaching and claims that it "grows out of a deep sense of the character, shape, and epistemology of the gospel" (13), though he offers little support for this claim.

Contrary to Eugene Lowry⁴ and the New Homiletic,⁵ you do not meet God dancing on the edge of mystery with sermons constructed in a narrative style in an attempt at indirect communication. We encounter God not apart from His Word but *through* His Word. Lowry appeals to the post-resurrection account in Luke 24 where Jesus is walking with the disciples to Emmaus. He makes the point that as soon as the two disciples recognized Jesus, He vanished. Lowry uses this scene to argue, through a twisted hermeneutic, that we never can quite get at the truth; when we get close, it vanishes. Lowry fails to note that before Jesus vanished, Scripture says He taught them the things concerning Himself. He opened the Scripture, opened their minds, and showed them everything in the Old Testament about Himself. Jesus' words in Luke 24 actually serve to promote the expositional preaching of Scripture.

PREACHING AND THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT

The third movement is the Church Growth movement. Ironically, according to McGavern, it began in the same year as the New Homiletic. The influence of this movement on America's evangelical and charismatic churches has been phenomenal. Myriads of books have been written on the subject of how to grow a church. Many of these books and the principles behind them are less theological and highly pragmatic in nature. In my opinion, the Church Growth movement has been a mixed bag. One of the downsides to it has been the general lack of focus on preaching. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the Church Growth movement has actually hindered expository preaching in the United States because it has, inadvertently, de-emphasized the importance of preaching in the local church. One of the most surprising things about the books produced by this movement is the lack of emphasis placed on the role of preaching in church growth. Many do not even mention preaching. David Eby wrote a book in 1996 entitled *Power Preaching for Church Growth: The Role of Preaching in Growing Churches*.⁶ As far as I know, this was the first book to treat the subject in book-length format and Eby is not even in the Church Growth movement. His two chapters critiquing the Church Growth movement are must reads.

Eby read every book in the church growth movement and charted where they talk about preaching. In the early years of the movement, only one of the first sixteen books even listed Biblical preaching as an aspect of church growth. Eby then ransacked the next forty-eight books that came out on church growth. In ten thousand pages of material, less than fifty even mentioned preaching as important in church growth. He then examined all of the DMin dissertations at Fuller Library and found that of the three hundred and seventy seven dissertations completed since 1971 (through 1996), *only one was written on preaching and church growth*. The Church Growth movement has emphasized marketing and de-emphasized

⁴ Eugene Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) 47.

⁵ See David Allen, *A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority*, JETS 43 (2000), 489–515.

⁶ David Eby, *Power Preaching for Church Growth: The Role of Preaching in Growing Churches* (Great Britain: Mentor, 1996).

preaching. Evangelicals are outdoing everyone else as the supreme compromisers in church work today. What difference is there today between a popular market driven philosophy of church growth and classical liberalism? Both have resulted in a compromised culture. Classical liberalism capitulated to culture and much of evangelicalism today in my judgment is compromising with culture. An undefined theology combined with a seeker sensitive philosophy undermines the ability of the church to speak prophetically to culture. The moment a church compromises with culture in ways contrary to Scripture, at that moment she forfeits her prophetic position in the culture. On the other hand, the moment a church defies the spirit of the age she forfeits her marketing appeal. The preaching of the Gospel will always defy the spirit of the age.

PREACHING AND THE EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT

The fourth movement is the Emergent Church (EC) movement.⁷ Most of the congregations within this movement have a very amorphous ecclesiology. They have several websites, chat rooms, their own network, their own conferences, and their own speakers. The controlling term in the writings of EC authors is postmodernism, with its concomitant epistemological perspective that people learn less by rationality and more by feeling and experience. In the November/December 2004 edition of *Preaching*, the lead article is entitled “Preaching in the Emerging Church: An Interview with Dan Kimball.” Kimball states that in the EC “there’s great diversity in what they look like, how they think, how they express their faith, and what they believe theologically.”⁸ The emerging church does not want to get hung up on theology. Theology is not unimportant, but there is a resistance to drawing lines theologically in this movement. I suspect there is some correlation between this diverse theological outlook and the diversity one finds in EC preaching.

Kimball’s comments on preaching are a mixed bag. For example, when asked are there some things you are learning about preaching and communication as you go through this process, Kimball responded: “I would say almost everything I was taught in Seminary I do not use.”⁹ This negative attitude toward how preaching was taught in seminaries is reflected among many in the EC movement. I have observed in the literature produced by EC authors a general denigration of preaching in an expositional fashion. However, even

⁷ For a balanced treatment of what the Emerging Church movement is all about from one of its key leaders, consult Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). For a valuable critique of the movement, see D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), and Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent by Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody, 2008).

⁸ “Preaching in the Emerging Church: An Interview with Dan Kimball,” *Preaching* (Nov. – Dec., 2004), vol. 20, no. 3, at http://www.preaching.com/resources/past_issues/11556856/archive5/, accessed on October 1, 2009.

⁹ Ibid.

here, the EC is not monolithic. Attitudes and practice range from the extreme of Doug Pagitt who champions a “dialogical” approach to preaching¹⁰ to a more text-based approach.

CONCLUSION

We have won the battle in the Southern Baptist Convention over the inerrancy of Scripture. We are in my judgment right now engaged in a battle that is almost as significant. It is the battle over the sufficiency of Scripture in preaching. Is the Bible, and the Bible alone, sufficient to change hearts, and to grow a church? Many are practicing a preaching style that in the final analysis fails to give the people in their churches the word of God. Many have compromised with the culture and have moved away from preaching in an expositional fashion. A few years ago an evangelical Romanian pastor had to leave his church because it was discovered that after the fall of Chauchescku and the demise of Communism in Romanian he had been one of those pastors who was a collaborator with the Communists. They asked him why did he do it? He said, “I hate communism; it is a great evil. I did it because I thought it was the best way my church could function in the culture. And I thought that I would be able to help my people and protect my people if I just fudged and collaborated with the Communists.” As a result, that pastor lost his church. The mission of the Church does not permit us to collaborate with the culture. The Gospel has always been counter-cultural.

The mission of the Church cannot be fulfilled without preaching. Preaching that does not communicate the Gospel clearly and that does not explain the meaning of the text of Scripture to Christians so as to equip them to fulfill the Church’s mission will result in a spiritually dwarfed Church and a truncated witness to the world.

¹⁰ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

PREACHING THE FOREST AND THE TREES: INTEGRATING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY WITH EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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INTRODUCTION

Evangelicals through the years have emphasized the need for Christian preachers to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. The sixteenth-century Puritan William Perkins summarized his theory saying, “Preach one Christ, by Christ, to the praise of Christ. To God alone be the glory.”¹ Likewise, John Broadus summarized his approach saying, “The subject of preaching is divine truth, centrally the gospel as revealed and offered in Jesus Christ.”²

While many would say “amen!” to these affirmations on the importance of the gospel, others would also want to emphasize the primacy of expository preaching. Essentially, expository preaching attempts to explain and apply the biblical text in its context. This poses an interesting dilemma for Christian preachers. Bryan Chapell, President of Covenant Theological Seminary and preaching professor, has raised the question precisely asking, “How do I preach the text that is present *and* preach Christ where he may not seem to be present?”³ In asking this question, two assumptions are being made: (1) expositors should be faithful to the context of a passage, and (2) Christian preachers should desire to proclaim the glories of Christ.

¹William Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy*, rev. Sinclair Ferguson, first published in Latin in 1592 and in English 1606, (reprint, Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 79.

²John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, new and rev. ed. Jesse Witherspoon, 6. C. H. Dodd provides a summary of several elements of Paul’s kerygma: (1) Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled and the new age was inaugurated by the coming of Christ, (2) he was born of the seed of David, (3) he died according to the Scriptures to deliver mankind out of this present evil age, (4) he was buried, (5) he rose on the third day according to the Scriptures, (6) he is now exalted at the right hand of God as the Son of God and Lord of the living and dead, and (7) he will come again as the Judge and Savior of humanity. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 17.

³Bryan Chapell, “Christ-Centered Heart,” William E. Conger Jr. Lectures on Biblical Preaching at Beeson Divinity School, February 26, 2002, cassette.

How does one deal with the text with integrity and preach Christ from a text like Nehemiah? After all, many Old Testament instructors declare that “you should not look for Jesus under every rock!” Students are taught to respect and consider the “original” hearers. Thus, the question remains as to whether the preacher can accomplish these two goals (exposition and Christ-centeredness) without arbitrarily inserting Jesus into the text or simply “leapfrogging to Jesus” at the end of the sermon.

Chapell argues that one of the solutions to this dilemma is for the expositor to see the Bible as a unified book of redemptive history, which culminates in the person and work of Christ. He states,

In a similar sense, preachers cannot properly explain a seed (or portion) of biblical revelation, even if they say many true things about it, unless they relate it to the redeeming work of God that all Scripture ultimately purposes to disclose. In this sense, the entire Bible is Christ-centered because his redemptive work in all of its incarnational, atoning, rising, interceding, and reigning dimensions is the capstone of all of God’s revelation of his dealings with his people. Thus, no aspect of revelation can be thoroughly understood or explained in isolation of Christ’s redeeming work.⁴

Therefore, the goal for Christ-centered expositors is not to “look for Jesus under every rock,” but rather to find out how a particular text fits into the whole redemptive story that culminates in Christ. Contextual analysis -- a topic emphasized in many expository preaching books -- may begin with the book context of the selected passage but it should not end there. Ultimately, the particular book is within the wider biblical context. In other words, it is a short story within the meta-narrative of Scripture.

Chapell provides a helpful analogy to describe this process. He says that preachers should use both a “microscope” and a “theological fish-eye lens”⁵ when examining a text, in order to see the forest (the larger redemptive story) and the trees (the immediate text and its details). It seems that expositional theory often focuses upon the trees to the neglect of the forest, missing an important dimension of the text and a degree of its glory and grace. Good exposition will expose the trees and the forest, giving respect for the original author and respect for the redemptive story and its hero: Jesus.

The discipline that deals with the unfolding of God’s redemptive work in history is often called biblical theology. The purpose of this article is discuss the need to integrate biblical theology with expository preaching in order for the preacher to be both faithful to the selected text and the task of proclaiming Christ as the hero of redemptive history. However, this brief report is but the tip of the iceberg. The goal here is mainly to expose various voices on this issue. The burden is to make a good thing (expository preaching) better.

⁴Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 276.

⁵*Ibid.*, 275.

To make a case for the marriage of these two disciplines, the centrality of the Bible in expository preaching will first be discussed. Next, the centrality of Christ in the Bible will be considered. Finally, the subsequent need for integrating biblical theology with exposition will be proposed. In the end, some concluding thoughts about the practical benefits of Christ-centered exposition will be offered.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE BIBLE IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING

While there are many nuances to one's definition of expository preaching, the common agreement seems to be that expository preaching is governed by the text of Scripture. John Broadus provided a general definition: "An expository discourse may be defined as one which is occupied mainly, or at any rate very largely, with the exposition of Scripture."⁶

Chapell simply maintains that expository preaching "attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific biblical passage."⁷ Similarly, John MacArthur Jr. argues that expository preaching involves "presenting a passage entirely and exactly as God intended."⁸ Sidney Greidanus states that exposition describes what is involved in biblical preaching, i.e., the exposition of a biblical passage (or passages).⁹ John Piper asserts, "All Christian preaching should be the exposition and application of biblical texts. Our authority as preachers sent by God rises and falls with our manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture."¹⁰ Thus, the explanation of a passage (or passages) of Scripture is central to each of these writers.

Moreover, F. B. Meyer, Harold Bryson, and Andrew Blackwood are representative homileticians who articulate expository preaching in terms of sermon *form*. For these

⁶John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, new and rev. ed. Jesse Witherspoon (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 144. For other definitions See also: Donald Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 26; Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 29; Merrill Unger, *Principles for Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1955; John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 125-126. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21.

⁷Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 30.

⁸John MacArthur Jr. and The Master's Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1982), 23-24.

⁹Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 11.

¹⁰John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 41; In this particular text, Piper adds that expositors should not only explain God's Word but also *exult* over the Word in order to bring pleasure to the hearer and glory to God; Ibid., 55.

authors, expository preaching deals with the *length of the passage* or the *origin of the sermon series*. Blackwood asserts, “Expository preaching means that the light for any sermon comes mainly from a Bible passage longer than two or three consecutive verses.”¹¹ F. B. Meyer offers his view saying, “We are able to define expository preaching as the consecutive treatment of some book or extended portion of Scripture.”¹² Similar to Meyer, Bryson states that expository preaching “involves the art of preaching a series of sermons either consecutively or selectively from a Bible book.”¹³

Therefore, some theorists argue that expository preaching simply involves presenting and applying the truths of a particular biblical passage. Other theorists add that expository preaching involves preaching a specific length of passage or a specific type of sermon series. Both perspectives, however, emphasize the centrality of the Bible in expository preaching. The sermon should be driven by the text of Scripture.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST IN THE BIBLE

Understanding the nature of Scripture seems to be an essential requirement for preachers who wish to expound what the biblical text says. Many homileticians assert that the primary emphasis of the Bible is upon redemptive history, which culminates in Christ’s person and work. For example, Arturo Azurdia argues that the Bible is “a record of the redemption of the people of God by His Son, Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ If the Bible focuses upon Christ’s redemptive work, then this should have practical implications for expositors who wish to proclaim the Bible accurately.

Those who wish to challenge the unity of the Bible and its Christocentric emphasis must give an answer to several biblical texts that seem to demonstrate this idea. For example, one should consider the following texts:

- [Jesus said,] “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about *me*” (John 5:39, emphasis added).
- [Jesus said,] “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of *me*” (John 5:46, emphasis added).
- “And beginning with Moses and *all* the Prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning *himself*” (Luke 24:27, emphasis added).

¹¹Andrew Blackwood, *Expository Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, Baker Original Paperback, 1975), 13.

¹²F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910; reprint, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 25.

¹³Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman), 39.

¹⁴Arturo Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Ross-Shire, England: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 52.

- “Then he [Jesus] said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was with you while I was still with you, that everything written about *me* in the *Law* of Moses and the *Prophets* and the *Psalms* must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...” (Luke 24:44-45, emphasis added).

While preachers should not assume unwarranted connections to Jesus, they also should not overlook or ignore what seemed to be very clear—that the Old Testament writers were pointing to the Messiah.

Of course, some authors have observed the centrality of Christ in the Bible. Norman Geisler states, “Christ is presented as the tie between the Testaments, the content of the whole cannon, and the unifying theme within each book of the Bible.”¹⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright says, “The Old Testament tells the story which Jesus completes.”¹⁶ Similarly, Donald Juel posits, “The beginnings of Christian reflection can be traced to the interpretations of Israel’s scriptures, and the major focus of that scriptural interpretation was Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah.”¹⁷ Each of these authors argue that the person and work of Christ is the main message of the Bible.

Recent homileticians have looked to Paul as a model for the necessity of preaching Christ.¹⁸ James Thompson reminds preachers, “Whether Paul refers to the subject of his preaching as *Jesus Christ* or *the gospel*, he is actually referring to the narrative of God’s actions in Jesus Christ.”¹⁹ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix referred to the early church saying, “Paul, too, centered on Jesus, claiming to the Corinthians that he had ‘determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2:2).”²⁰ These evangelicals argue that Christ was the main subject of Paul’s preaching, even though he did address other topics.

THE INTEGRATION OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY WITH EXPOSITION

Even though the need to preach Christ may be an obvious concern for evangelicals, there seems to be a missing element; namely, the need to preach Christ through careful

¹⁵Norman Geisler, *Christ: The Theme of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 7.

¹⁶Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 2. He adds that students must “look at Jesus in the light of the history of the Old Testament, but also that he sheds light backwards on it.”

¹⁷Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 1.

¹⁸See James Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul* (Louisville: Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 44.

²⁰Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 21.

exposition. According to some authors, such preaching is possible because the Bible is a unified book of redemptive history, and to treat one particular text means that one should consider how the selected text fits into the whole redemptive story. This idea comes from their understanding of biblical theology.

For example, Graeme Goldsworthy, D. A. Carson, and J. I. Packer argue the need for biblical theology in hermeneutics and its subsequent use in expository preaching. Packer defines biblical theology as “the umbrella-name for those disciplines that explore the unity of the Bible, delving into the contents of books, showing the links between them, and pointing up the ongoing flow of the revelatory and redemptive process that reached its climax in Jesus Christ.”²¹ So Packer emphasizes the uniqueness of particular texts but also wants to emphasize the unity of the canon as well.

Similarly, Goldsworthy claims that biblical theology helps understand the redemptive nature of Scripture because it “shows the relationship of all the parts of the Old Testament to the person and work of Jesus Christ and, therefore, to the Christian.”²² He adds, “The Bible is a book about Christ which is inspired by the Holy Spirit. . . . We begin with Jesus Christ, and we see every part of the Bible in relationship to him and his saving work. This is true of the Old Testament as it is of the New.”²³ Goldsworthy states his perspective on the purpose of preaching saying, “It ought to be the aim of every pastor to bring all members of his or her congregation to maturity in Christ. But they cannot mature if they do not know the Christ in the Bible, the Christ to whom the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, give a unified and inspired testimony.”²⁴ For Goldsworthy, by considering redemptive history, the preacher is able to explain the redemptive focus of each passage (or passages) of Scripture.²⁵

Carson emphasizes how biblical theology focuses on the unity of the Bible and redemptive history, without sacrificing the individual documents and each historical context. He says, “On the one hand, biblical theology will try to preserve one glorious diversity of all the biblical documents; on the other, it will try to uncover all that holds them together,

²¹J. I. Packer, “Forward” in *The Unfolding Mystery* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), 7-8.

²²Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to the Plan* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 27.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Graeme Goldsworthy, “Biblical Theology as the Heartbeat of Effective Ministry” in *Biblical Theology*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 286.

²⁵Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 30.

sacrificing neither historical particularity nor the unifying sweep of redemptive history.”²⁶ The implication for preaching, then, is for the expositor to look at the immediate context as well as the canonical context. Carson calls the process of explaining the whole Bible “inner-canonical preaching.” He states, “At its best, expository preaching is preaching which however dependent it may be for its content, upon text(s) at hand, draws attention to inner-canonical connections (connections within Scripture) that inexorably moves to Jesus Christ.”²⁷ For Carson, Christ-centered preaching happens by relating the biblical-theological connections within Scripture.

Others have also articulated the need for expounding the larger redemptive context of the Bible when doing exposition. Edmund Clowney argues that by integrating biblical theology, the preacher can always maintain the needed Christ-centered focus, even from the Old Testament. He claims that Christ illustrates this pattern in the Emmaus Road encounter.²⁸ Similarly, Merrill Unger urges preachers to pay attention to the unity of the Bible and its redemptive-historical place in the canon. He states, “Above all he [the preacher] must constantly remind himself that Scripture itself is the source of his theology and that the Bible as a doctrinal source-book is a unity.”²⁹

William D. Thompson argues that if one does not expose the redemptive nature of Scripture, one cannot preach biblically.³⁰ Walter Kaiser also urges preachers to stay true to the original context of the passage, but also to give consideration to the larger context of the Bible as well.³¹

Further, David L. Larsen posits that Christian preachers cannot preach a text in the Old Testament the way would a rabbi. He states that “preaching of any part of Scripture must stand within a clear sense of theological construct, and for the Christian proclaimer

²⁶D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 100-101.

²⁷D. A. Carson, “The Primacy of Expository Preaching,” Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, 1995, cassette.

²⁸Edmund Clowney, *Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 165.

²⁹Unger, 155.

³⁰William Thompson, *Preaching Biblically* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 74. Thompson posits, “The Bible is a witness to the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ, the meaning of whose life, death, and resurrection controls the meaning of *every* passage.”

³¹Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 140. He calls this process “theological exegesis.”

that construct is Christocentric.”³² Sidney Greidanus refers to the process of preaching God’s acts from the perspective of the New Testament “Christocentric preaching.”³³ He explains, “In other words, Christocentric preaching requires that a passage receive a theocentric interpretation not only in its own (Old Testament) horizon but also in the broader horizon of the whole canon. In this way one can do justice to two sets of biblical testimonies: on the one hand, Christ as the eternal Logos is present and active in Old Testament times, and on the other hand, Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.”³⁴

At this point, some conclude that these authors are *only* talking about evangelistic preaching, but that is not the case. Thomas Smith qualifies this approach stating that such an idea shows a limited understanding of the gospel, as well as a misunderstanding of ethics. He argues that New Testament writers deal with every ethical requirement, every matter of conduct, as it is rooted in the redemptive work of Christ.³⁵ Jay Adams also claims that ethical and evangelistic preaching must be Christ-centered. He states, “Jesus Christ must be at the heart of every sermon you preach. That is just as true of edificational preaching as it is of evangelistic preaching.”³⁶ For these representatives, the clear division between preaching the gospel to unbelievers and preaching ethics to believers is unwarranted. While it is true that unbelievers need to be confronted with the gospel, believers also need to be reminded of the gospel for perspective and pointed to the gospel for power.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

In light of this argument, the obvious question is about *how* the preacher should structure an expository sermon that integrates biblical theology thereby emphasizing God’s redeeming work in Christ. While few preaching theorists have provided practical help on this matter, Bryan Chapell has offered some useful ideas that can be implemented easily if the preacher will give attention to the text’s position in relation to Christ.

³²David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 163-164.

³³Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and The Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 119.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Thomas N. Smith, “Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing” in *Reforming Pastoral Ministry*, ed. John Armstrong (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 109. Smith states, “We [preachers] must see the indivisibility of theology and conduct and must see each in its vital relationship to Jesus Himself.” For a discussion on the distinction made between the *kerygma* and the *didache*, as presented by C. H. Dodd, in *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, see Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 70. Clowney opposes Dodd’s separation. He admits that a message may be presented differently in certain contexts, but the gospel must always be proclaimed both inside and outside the church -- evangelistically and ethically.

³⁶Jay Adams, *Preaching with Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 147.

Chapell states that every text will fall into one of three categories. First, a text may reveal “text disclosure.” This means that a particular text explicitly mentions the redeeming work of God in Christ. Second, a text may reveal “type disclosure.” He defines typology “as it relates to Christ’s person and work is the study of the correspondence between persons, events, and institutions that first appear in the Old Testament and preview, prepare, or more fully express New Testament salvation truths.”³⁷ Third, a text may also reveal “context disclosure.” In this category, Chapell has four sub-categories. He uses the phrase *context disclosure* to refer to the act of disclosing the redemptive focus by pointing out if a text is (1) predictive of the work of Christ, (2) preparatory for the work of Christ, (3) reflective of the work of Christ, and/or (4) resultant of the work of Christ.³⁸ In other words, the expositor may show how every passage is related to God’s redeeming work by identifying where it lies in relation to Christ’s person and work.

While one could list many benefits of integrating biblical theology with expository preaching, only three will be noted. First, by integrating biblical theology with expository preaching, the preacher will be able to faithfully preach the gospel every week, while also maturing the body of Christ. Obviously, the gospel needs to be proclaimed clearly to unbelievers. However, preachers should also remember that the gospel is more than a ticket to heaven. Tim Keller states, “The gospel is not just the “A-B-C’s of Christianity but is the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.”³⁹ This seems to be what Paul is saying in Gal. 2:14, when he reported that Peter’s “conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.” In Keller’s words, “The gospel needs to be applied to every area of one’s thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving.”⁴⁰

Second, and related to the first, by incorporating biblical theology with expository preaching, preachers also will avoid the pitfall of treating biblical stories simply as moral examples to follow. Many preachers look at the text, such as stories about David, and make the sermon a basic character study. While there are many examples to be learned from characters in the text, one should be careful about making that the totality of the sermon. A moral example is not wrong in and of itself, but it is problematic if it is done by itself. If Christianity is about grace-enabled, gospel-centered living, then our exhortations should be rooted in God’s grace that give the listeners hope because of the accomplishments of Christ. For it is by God’s grace that we are saved, set apart, and enabled to be people of moral excellence, who reflect and rejoice in God’s glory.

³⁷Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 281-282.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 282-288.

³⁹Tim Keller, “The Centrality of the Gospel” [article on-line]; available from <http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/index.cfm?fuseaction=tkeller>; Internet; accessed 5 March, 2007.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* See also Gal. 3:1-3.

Third, by integrating biblical theology with expository preaching, the preacher will be able to confront the postmodern culture that does not have knowledge of the biblical meta-narrative. The degree of biblical literacy today seems to be growing increasingly. Therefore, it seems to be a necessity that preachers give the hearers “the big picture” on a consistent basis. Indeed, Christ-centered exposition is needed in every generation, but this particular generation seems to even intensify the need for preachers to preach the forest and the trees.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PREACHING

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INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit is indispensable to the task of effective preaching. Charles Haddon Spurgeon is reported to have climbed the fifteen steps leading up to the pulpit in the Metropolitan Tabernacle while he muttered at each step, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.”¹ Spurgeon exhorted his students to depend on the Holy Spirit in preaching: “If there is to be a Divine result from God’s Word, the Holy Spirit must go forth with it.”² Stephen Olford contended, “Only the Holy Spirit can transform a manuscript into a message.”³ How can we preach messages that bring about divine results? The answer lies in “a fresh and continual dependence on the Holy Spirit.”⁴

Even though the intent of the article is not to provide an exhaustive treatment on the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, I will attempt to give a general overview to the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching by amplifying the preacher’s dependence on the Holy Spirit in four areas: (1) the preacher’s dependence on the Holy Spirit in his daily life, (2) the preacher’s dependence on the Holy Spirit in his preparation, (3) the preacher’s dependence on the Holy Spirit in the preaching event, and (4) the preacher’s dependence on the work of Holy Spirit among his audience.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PREACHER

The proclaimer of the Word must depend on the Holy Spirit in his daily life. The preacher’s dependence on the Holy Spirit occurs when he is aware of what the Holy Spirit has done in his life and then when he is eager to obey the commandments of the Word of God in regard to the Holy Spirit. When a person places his or her faith in Jesus as Savior

¹John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 334.

²Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1973), 339.

³Stephen Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 214.

⁴Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 153.

and Lord, the Holy Spirit brings to pass several dynamics to the life of the believer. First, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer at the moment of conversion (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit does not come in and then move out when a believer sins like a person who checks in and out at the hotel. The Holy Spirit comes into the believer's life and finds a permanent residence there. When the preacher is aware that God in His grace saved him, he should be eternally grateful for the work of the Spirit in his life.

Second, when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit seals the believer (Ephesians 1:13). The sealing refers to an official mark of identification placed on a letter, contract, or other document. That document was officially under the authority of the person whose insignia was on the seal. When one becomes a believer in Jesus Christ, he or she is placed under the authority of Jesus Christ. When the preacher is aware that he has been sealed by the Holy Spirit, he should rejoice that he no longer is under the authority of Satan but under the authority of Christ!

Third, the Holy Spirit baptizes the believer at the moment of conversion (1 Corinthians 12: 13). Many sincere Christians seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit; however, nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to seek it. The baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place in one's life when the person gives his or her life to Jesus Christ. I believe that one does not receive the Holy Spirit in parts but in His entirety at the moment of conversion. When the proclaimer of God's Word is aware that he has been baptized by the Holy Spirit, it should motivate him to seek even greater intimacy with God through the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit provides discernment to the person in relation to his call to preach. God calls individuals to the ministry of proclamation (Jeremiah 1:4-5). When a man receives the call from God to ministry, the Holy Spirit provides discernment to the nature and the purpose of the call (Acts 9: 6-17). The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to individuals when they trust Jesus as Savior and Lord (Romans 12: 3-8; 1 Corinthians 12: 8-11, 27-31; Ephesians 4: 11-12; 1 Peter 4: 10-11). Just as a believer discerns by the Holy Spirit that he has been called to the ministry, he also discerns what his spiritual gifts may be—whether they are knowledge, wisdom, preaching, teaching, or encouragement, among others.

To depend on the Holy Spirit in preaching, one must be aware of what the Holy Spirit has done in his life. His awareness of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, sealing, baptism, and help with discerning the call to preach, should encourage him to be obedient to the commandments of the Word of God in regard to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible gives four specific commands for the believer in relation to the Holy Spirit. Two commandments are negative and two commandments are positive. The first negative command is for believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Believers grieve the Holy Spirit when they sin. When I tell my seven-year-old daughter not to do something and she disobeys, it grieves me deeply. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is grieved when believers lie, steal, harbor bitterness and unforgiving spirits. A single sin grieves the Holy Spirit. The moment the Holy Spirit convicts believers of a specific sin, they are to confess it and renounce it through the power of God (Proverbs 28:13).

Second, believers are not to quench the Holy Spirit of God (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The word "quench" means to put out the fire, stifle, smother, suppress. When believers

suppress what the Holy Spirit wants to do through them, the Holy Spirit is quenched. When believers say “yes” to sin, they grieve the Holy Spirit; when believers say “no” to what He wants to do through them, the Holy Spirit is quenched. One of the ways believers quench the Holy Spirit is when they are not willing to witness to unbelievers. Approximately ninety-five to ninety-seven percent of American Christians do not share their faith on a regular basis. According to one evangelism specialist, no more than five percent of ministerial staff leadership has ever led a lost person to Christ through a “one to one relationship.”⁵ When believers refuse to witness, they quench the Holy Spirit of God.

The way believers do not grieve or quench the Holy Spirit is when they obey two positive commands. First, we are told to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5: 17-21). Several ideas communicated from πληροῦσθε help us understand what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. One idea is that of direction, like a wind blowing into the sails of the ship provides direction to it. Another idea is one of permeation, like how salt penetrates meat in order to preserve it and flavor it. A third idea is one of total control, like a person who is drunk is not in control of his or her behavior. From these ideas, we can derive that to be filled with the Spirit means to be directed, permeated, and controlled by the Holy Spirit. When believers are tempted to quench and grieve the Holy Spirit, they need to ask God to fill them with His Spirit.

The second command in relation to the Holy Spirit is to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5: 16-26). Walking in the Spirit is a daily awareness and surrender to the Holy Spirit of God. As believers go through the day, they are to surrender their desires, attitudes, and passions to the total control of the Holy Spirit, who brings about the fruit of the Spirit to their lives (Galatians 5:22-23). When believers are walking in the Spirit, they are able not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. A delicate difference between filling and walking in the Spirit lies in how walking in the Spirit is a daily awareness of the control of the Holy Spirit while being filled with the Spirit is being empowered for certain tasks, which for preachers includes the preaching event.

When I prepare for the preaching event, I seek dependence on the Holy Spirit in my daily life. I thank God for what the Holy Spirit has done for me personally through His indwelling, His sealing, His baptism, His calling, and His spiritual gifts. Then I ask God to help me not grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit brings conviction in any of these areas I ask the Lord to bring cleansing, forgiveness, and transformation. I plead with the Lord to fill me with the Holy Spirit so that I may have power to preach. When I conclude my prayer, I ask the Lord to allow me to walk in the Spirit throughout the day so that I may not miss opportunities to share my faith with those He is going to put in my path that day.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PREPARATION

In addition to dependence on the Holy Spirit in his daily life, the preacher must be willing to depend on the Holy Spirit in his preparation for the task of preaching. The Holy

⁵Jay Strack and Robert Witty, *Do the Work of an Evangelist* (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 29.

Spirit has been abused by some preachers who wait to the last moment for God to give them a message using Mark 3:11 as a proof text. In the passage, Jesus stated, “But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that: for it not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”⁶ The problem with this rationale is that in the context of Mark 3:11 the audience is persecuted Christians not procrastinating preachers.

To use the Holy Spirit as a pretext for not spending adequate time in preparation is to ignore an exhortation from Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” The words “diligent” and “worker” convey ideas of hard work and demanding labor. Spurgeon noted aptly, “I cannot imagine the Spirit waiting at the door of a sluggard, and supplying the deficiencies created by indolence.”⁷ As the preacher does the hard work of exegesis, employing good hermeneutics and homiletics, he will be able to “to lay open the mind of the Holy Spirit in the biblical text.”⁸

Even though the techniques of sermon preparation are beyond the scope of this paper, I feel it is imperative to elucidate the role of the Holy Spirit’s illumination during sermon preparation. Illumination is neither revelation nor inspiration. The Holy Spirit was an agent in revelation of His Word (1 Corinthians 2:10). Inspiration is the process by which “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Timothy 1:21). The human writers of the Bible received revelation when God inspired Scripture. Illumination enables believers to comprehend “God’s truth in the final and complete revelation of it in Scripture.”⁹ Jesus instructed his disciples in John 16:13: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all the truth.” The Holy Spirit is the agent of illumination.

When the preacher exegetes a passage and toils with the tasks of hermeneutics and homiletics, he must ask throughout the process for illumination by the Holy Spirit. Whether it is reading the passage, examining commentaries, or doing word studies, the proclaimer of the Word must pray for the Holy Spirit’s enablement in comprehension of the passage. Whether it is looking for appropriate illustrations, crafting strategy for argumentation, or arriving to application points, the preacher must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as the agent who helps to make truth known not only to the preacher but also to the audience. Whether it is looking for an acute title, arranging the message around themes, movement, and points, or preparing a listening guide for the audience, the preacher must depend on the Holy Spirit to help him understand the passage and the best ways to communicate it to his audience.

⁶All quotations are from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

⁷Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Lectures to His Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945), 191.

⁸Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 28.

⁹John MacArthur, *Preaching* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 6.

In my experience as a pastor, who has had responsibility to prepare at least three messages weekly, I faced at least two major challenges in preparation. The first had to do with planning my messages. Earlier in my ministry, I planned on Monday what I felt God wanted me to preach on Sunday. Later, I realized the benefits of planning my messages three to six months in advance: “the Holy Spirit became a guide who could see further into the future than the pastor could anticipate.”¹⁰ In response to those who feel that planning one’s messages does not fully depend on the Holy Spirit because it does take into account congregational needs, the preacher can be assured that God is aware of “the congregational needs just as well three months in advance as He does three days ahead of time.”¹¹ If the Holy Spirit leads the preacher to other texts besides the ones planned, he should be obedient to the immediate prompting of the Holy Spirit. Over the years, even though the preaching plan became a beneficial tool, I attempted not to allow it to take precedence over the Holy Spirit’s immediate leadership.

The second challenge in preparation was learning to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit when facing major catastrophic events. When terrorist attacks on September 11th took place, I felt a departure from the preaching plan was necessary in order to address the attack and speak to the presence and nature of evil in the world. On August 28th, 2005, I was flying from a speaking engagement in Seattle to New Orleans. My plans were to arrive late Saturday in New Orleans so that I could speak at the church I pastored at that time on Sunday morning. Although my flight was delayed for several hours because of hurricane Katrina looming in the Gulf of Mexico, it was the last flight allowed to land in Louis Armstrong International Airport Sunday morning. Amazingly, the first series of messages planned for that dreadful Sunday was about how to respond to the storms of life as a family. Because the mandatory evacuation in New Orleans did not include suburb of my church, we went ahead with Sunday morning services. Even though the two services were abbreviated in order to encourage church members to evacuate, I felt that I needed to deliver the message. That message became a springboard for the five weeks following Katrina, challenging our church to lead in recovery efforts.

I learned from my ministry that facing the preparatory challenges of advanced planning and responding to catastrophic events are possible with continual dependence on the Holy Spirit. From September 11th, I learned that sometimes the pastor must deviate from his preaching schedule, led by the Holy Spirit, in order to address the current crisis. From my experience with Hurricane Katrina, I learned that the Holy Spirit could use the theme of the message planned in advance to address major catastrophes.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PROCLAMATION

When the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit in his daily life and then with preparation of the messages, he must be careful to depend on the Holy Spirit as he delivers the message. Spurgeon commented on the importance of depending on the Holy Spirit in delivery, “It were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost than to preach

¹⁰Joe Cothen, *The Pulpit Is Waiting* (Grenta: Pelican, 1998), 56.

¹¹Stephen Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 24.

seventy years worth of sermons without the Spirit.”¹² In the analysis of the delivery in which the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit, the following four salient features are noteworthy: the goal, the substance, the focus, the anointing, and challenges in delivery. The goal of the preacher in proclamation is articulated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:4: “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power.” As the preacher delivers his message, his goal is not to demonstrate his eloquence or erudition but to allow God to manifest His Spirit and power through the message.

The manifestation of Spirit and power through the message is possible when the substance of the message is the Word of God. Paul put forth the content of his message in 2 Corinthians 2: 1: “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.” The “testimony of God” refers to God’s revealed Scripture. Just as the preacher is confident in the inspiration of the Word and seeks the illumination of the Holy Spirit in preparation, he should not depart from God’s revealed Scripture in delivery. When the substance of the message is Scripture, the preacher must also be reminded that the focus of delivery is the person of Jesus Christ. Paul continued in 2 Corinthians 2:2: “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The ministry of the Holy Spirit includes testifying of Jesus (John 15:26) as well as bringing glory to Christ (John 16:12-14). When the focus in delivery is on Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit fulfills His role and demonstrates power in the process.

One way to describe the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power is in terms of the “anointing” of the message. A definition of anointed delivery may be elusive, but “when anointing is present, people know it; when it is absent, they also know it.”¹³ In a recent dissertation, Landon Dowden identified three characteristics of anointing in delivery: boldness, clarity of speech, and a sense of peace.¹⁴ Boldness was not the authority to share whatever the preacher desires, but the courage to declare what God commands. Clarity of speech is evident not only in the proclamation of the message but also in the liberty of utterance. A sense of peace is the work of the Spirit in delivery when panic and frustration are eliminated and substituted with an “aura of relaxed naturalness.”¹⁵

In my ministry, I faced two major challenges in relation to the dependence on the Holy Spirit in delivery. The first has been to adapt to the unpredictable factors surrounding the preaching event. One may plan, prepare, and pray and then during the service the testimony goes longer than anticipated. Does the preacher then preach everything or half of what he planned, or does he move straight to the invitation? What if the electricity goes off

¹²Spurgeon, *Twelve Sermons on the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 122.

¹³Bill Bennett, *Thirty Minutes to Raise the Dead* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 176.

¹⁴Landon Dowden, “An Examination of Pneumatological Content in Southern Baptist Homiletic Theory since 1870” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 131-2.

¹⁵Craig Skinner, *The Teaching Ministry of the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 198.

during the message (it actually happened two times in my ministry)? Does he go and finish the message or stop and give an invitation? What if during the delivery different things come to mind, such as a supporting passage of the Scripture, an appropriate illustration, or an additional thought? How should I proceed? When the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit in delivery, the Holy Spirit can help in adapting and adjusting to each unique occasion.

The second major challenge in delivery has been in relation to the public invitation. While the analysis of the differences of opinion in relation to the public invitation is beyond the scope of this article, my personal conviction is that a biblical message demands a call for action. Vines and Shaddix listed and discussed the following models of calling for a response to the message: verbal appeal, physical relocation, post-meeting ministry, written record, physical gesture, and a multiple approach.¹⁶ In my opinion, the preacher must prepare the invitation including the model of response beforehand. In my earlier ministry, I would use the same model that the Holy Spirit empowered me to prepare in advance. As I became more comfortable in multiple models of public invitation, even though I sought the leading of the Holy Spirit in regard to the model of the invitation in advance, I allowed Him to change the model if necessary at the moment of delivery. Only when the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit at the moment of delivery, can he overcome the challenge of whether or not to go ahead with a prepared model of public invitation at the moment of delivery.

Another challenge in delivery has been the nature of an appeal in the invitation. Personally, I contend that every message, regardless of the passage, should include an evangelistic appeal. Some messages that the Holy Spirit empowers the preacher to prepare may dictate an appeal slanted more toward discipleship, but other messages may have more of an evangelistic orientation. Regardless of the orientation of the appeal chosen for the message in advance, the preacher must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in delivery. I have experienced times when I prepared a message with a discipleship appeal in mind; however, the Holy Spirit led me toward a more evangelistic appeal during delivery. When the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit in preparation as well as delivery, He assists the preacher in the selection of the appeal during the public invitation.

When the substance of the message is the Word of God and the focus of the message is Jesus Christ, and when the anointing of the Holy Spirit is present, the message achieves its goal as a “demonstration of the Spirit and power.” When the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit, He will not only enable the preparation of the content, model, and appeal of the public invitation but God may lead the preacher to deviate from the previously prepared material through the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PEOPLE

When the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit in his daily life, preparation, and delivery of the message, he should be aware of the Holy Spirit’s role among the audience. Understanding how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers and unbelievers enhances

¹⁶Vines and Shaddix, 213-15.

our dependance on Him for His work among the audience. Anointed preaching is not possible without the work of the Holy Spirit among the audience.

When the preacher stands before the people to proclaim God's Word, he should pray that the lost who are present may receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord. The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of all lost people (John 16: 7-10). I have found comfort in knowing that before I speak to unbelievers about Jesus, the Holy Spirit has already been working in their lives. The Holy Spirit may have spoken to them through general revelation or Scripture. The Holy Spirit may have provided people who witnessed to them, or He may have allowed them to be more sensitive to spiritual realities. A helpful tool for illustrating this truth is the Spider Principle.¹⁷ The work of the Holy Spirit is to create a web that draws people to salvation. The Holy Spirit connects our message to that of other believers, circumstances, general revelation through nature, and specific revelation through the Word of God. When the preacher proclaims God's Word to unbelievers, he is adding another strand to the web that the Holy Spirit uses to draw the unbeliever to faith in Christ.

The Holy Spirit brings conviction (John 16: 8) and a new birth (John 3: 1-6) to the unbeliever. I did not realize until I was believer in Christ for several years that I could not bring about conviction in the lives of the lost. My role is not to bring conviction to the lost; that role is reserved for the Holy Spirit. Recently at my local church, several individuals professed Christ publically after the message. An individual came to me and said, "Pastor, thank you for saving those souls!" I had to explain to the person that I could not save anyone; God is the one who saves and brings conviction and a new birth through the Holy Spirit. Even with the greatest of persuasive presentations and the most flamboyant of personalities no one can be brought under true conviction and to an authentic new birth without the Holy Spirit. My responsibility as a preacher is not to convict an individual or even to bring him or her to a point of decision; that is the role of the Holy Spirit. My responsibility is to proclaim God's Word faithfully.

In addition, I must be aware that the unbeliever can resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7: 51). Preachers tend to get discouraged when unbelievers fail to receive Christ. The preacher must recognize that while God is willing to bring conviction and new birth through the Holy Spirit, the unbeliever can resist the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. We are not to take it personally. The unbeliever is not rejecting us but the message of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life.

When the preacher proclaims the Bible, the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of the unbelievers as well as believers. The Holy Spirit has been described in Romans 1:4 as "the Spirit of holiness" and in 1 John 1:20 as "the Holy One." His objective is to generate holiness, and His ultimate work is to make believers into "a holy people, holy as the children of God."¹⁸ The Holy Spirit brings about holiness to believers through the process of sanctification (1 Corinthians 6:11) using God's Word in the process (John 17:17). The

¹⁷Charles Kelley, *Adult Roman Road Witnessing Training Teacher's Guide* (Nashville: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1993), 8.

¹⁸D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 8.

preacher must pray that God will use the message to generate holiness in his audience through the process of sanctification.

Just as the preacher is aware of the Holy Spirit as an agent of illumination in his preparation, he must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as the agent of illumination of biblical truth among believers in the audience. Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the believers in the audience will not be able to fully comprehend the message and act upon it. In my preaching ministry, I have prayed for the illumination of the Holy Spirit among the people to whom I was attempting to communicate biblical truths.

Just as the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit in his daily life, his prayer should be that the message results the cultivation of a greater dependence on the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers. I have prayed that, as a result of the message, the believers will depend on the Holy Spirit for continual gratitude of what God had done for them at conversion and willful obedience to the four commandments in relation to the Holy Spirit: not to quench and not to grieve the Holy Spirit, and to be filled with and to walk with the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is essential to the task of preaching. When the preacher is aware of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, sealing, baptism, discernment with spiritual gifts, he should be motivated to obey the four commandments described in this article. As the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit in his life, he needs to rely on Him in preparation for proclamation. The preacher ought to remember that He serves as the agent of illumination of biblical truths, He provides direction to how the preacher can plan messages in advance, and He assists the preacher in responding to possible catastrophic events.

Powerful delivery is not possible without the anointing of the Holy Spirit which takes place in the context of the proper goal, substance, and focus of preaching. When the preacher depends on the Holy Spirit in delivery, he is able to adjust to unpredictable factors surrounding the preaching event, and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in invitation. Examination of the role of the Holy Spirit in proclamation is not complete without understanding that the Holy Spirit is at work among the audience at the moment of delivery bringing the lost to new birth and the believers to greater holiness through the process of sanctification.

Several years ago, I preached a series of messages on the Holy Spirit at the church where I served as pastor. In my preparation for the messages, I re-read Billy Graham's book on the Holy Spirit and came across a quote that is now prominently copied in my Bible: "Resist not His incoming; grieve not His indwelling; quench not His outgoing. Open to Him as the Incomer; please Him as the Indweller; obey Him as the Outgoer in His testimony of things concerning Christ."¹⁹ The reason I wrote this quote in my Bible was to remind me of the reality of the Holy Spirit in my daily life and the necessity of my continual reliance on Him for preparation and delivery of God's Word, and for the response among the people that He allows me to address.

¹⁹Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit* (Waco, TX: Word, 1978), 130.

SECTION 2

ASPECTS OF THE PROCLAMATION

“UNTIL I COME, DEVOTE YOURSELF TO THE
PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE, TO
PREACHING AND TO TEACHING..”

1 TIMOTHY 4:13

APOLOGIZING TO POSTMODERNS: DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE APOLOGETIC FOR CONTEMPORARY GOSPEL PREACHING

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INTRODUCTION

First Peter 3:15 admonishes believers always to be “prepared to make a defense” of the Gospel that gives hope. With that in mind, much has been written to equip Christians to defend our faith—to the point that the field of apologetics has developed into an independent discipline. A number of volumes have also been published concerning the preaching of the Gospel to unbelievers and skeptics. The question before us today, however, concerns the need to synthesize the two, and to do so in a way that will most effectively communicate and defend the Gospel to a contemporary audience. How are we as preachers faithfully to proclaim the life-changing message of Jesus Christ to the media-saturated, pluralistic, skeptical culture in which we find ourselves immersed today?

In order effectively to communicate the Gospel to people in any given culture, it is necessary to understand the philosophical and sociological undercurrents influencing the thought patterns of that culture. And it is necessary to speak their language. While no one could argue that the Judeo-Christian tradition has not had major effects on the West, the reality also exists that significant changes have taken place over the last century that have affected the way people think and perceive the world. The questions arise, then, as to how society has come to the place in which it now finds itself, and how the church is to respond to the changes that have taken place. Has culture changed to the point that the manner in which the faith is defended also needs to change? And if so, what changes are necessary?

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

A time once existed in which most cultures were dominated by what is now referred to as “premodernism.” A premodern culture was marked by little or no diversity or social change. People shared the same values, traditions, and beliefs, and while some such societies still exist in remote regions of the world, those conditions are, especially in the West, rare.¹ Today, pluralism, diversity, and constant change are the norm. Western society is now saturated in what is most commonly referred to as a “postmodern” culture, the diametrical

¹Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 32.

opposite of premodernism, but the shift in sociology and worldview was far from instantaneous (nor is it uniformly complete).

Until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Western culture was predominately a premodern enterprise dominated by the Roman church. However, when the leaders of the Protestant Reformation took their stand against the establishment, one inevitable result was a newfound willingness to question authority. While that in itself was not altogether negative, the reality was that Christianity (which was defined as the Roman church) as a whole had now been destabilized, and the voice of moral objectivity had been undermined.² In a society where the questioning of accepted norms was being discouraged, questioning now became the norm, as no person or institution had exclusive claims to the truth.

At the same time, the Renaissance was taking shape. It is hard now to see just how much one affected the other, but it is clear that they in many ways went hand-in-hand. The term “Renaissance” is French for “rebirth” or “revival,” and the period is so called because of the rebirth of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition as well as a renewed emphasis on learning following the Dark Ages.³ As the Reformation was calling for a biblically based church, Renaissance thinkers were striving to synthesize Greek and Christian thought. The newfound trend of questioning the over all status-quo of society accelerated the shift away from the blind acceptance of authority toward an emphasis on human values and autonomy. The authority of the church, and therefore of the Bible, had officially been undercut.⁴ The church was no longer the source of truth; the individual was. This is what is now referred to as the beginnings of “humanism.”

On the heels of the Renaissance, in the mid seventeenth century, came the “Enlightenment.” While the Renaissance undermined the authority of the church and opened the door for modernist thinking, the Enlightenment is seen as the actual “beachhead of modernism.”⁵ Also called the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment was characterized by a trend toward rationalism. With a de-emphasis and distrust of the concept of divine revelation, rationalists depended on logic, empirical evidence, and scientific discovery in their search for objective truth. Most believed that the natural world held the keys to ultimate reality, and that the essence of reality could only be unlocked through a thorough knowledge of the natural world.⁶ As one person described it, Enlightenment thinkers “presumed that

²Ibid., 34.

³Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 58.

⁴Baker, *Summary of Christian History*, 191, makes a good case that this shift actually aided the Reformation by opening people’s minds to the idea of questioning the authority of the Pope.

⁵Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 35. Grenz says, “The Renaissance laid the foundation for the modern mentality, but it did not erect the superstructure of modernity” (Grenz, *Primer*, 60).

⁶Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 36. Grenz, *Primer*, 61.

there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this was what scientific and mathematical endeavors were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment ends.”⁷ And what were those ends? Simply put, the truth.

This is basically the mindset, spurred on by an onslaught of new scientific discoveries and theories of the nineteenth century that characterizes modernism. The modernist believes that truth exists, that there are objective standards for reality and morality, and that those standards can be found in the natural world. Therefore, modernism rejects any concept of divine revelation; faith and reason are seen as diametrically opposed to one another. This was the predominate line of thinking, at least until the 1950's, that fueled the rise in evidentiary apologetics.⁸ After all, if enough objective, empirical evidence could be produced to substantiate the claims of Scripture, then the apologetic task would be complete.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Beginning in the 1950s a different philosophy started emerging—the philosophy of postmodernism. It is important to note, however, that some of its most important ideas were not entirely new to the twentieth century. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche declared “the death of God,” and he followed suit with a line of reasoning which would affect virtually every area of life. Nietzsche was critical of the modernist quest for universal truth and moral absolutes, arguing that, since those were basically religious concepts, and since religion had been debunked as a viable means of authority, the whole concepts of truth and meaning had no basis. Without God there was no absolute or foundational source of moral law because there was no objective point of reference. This gave birth to “existentialism”—the view that human existence, set within individual contexts, was all there was or could be to reality. Truth, along with God, was dead to the existentialist.⁹

Though Nietzsche's views did not gain a solid footing initially, the ideas he suggested began to take birth in the latter half of the twentieth century, when postmodernism began to take shape. The “new” philosophy rejected the most basic tenet of modernist thought—namely that objective truth could be known. While, as one anthropologist explains, the modernist “does not believe in the availability of a substantive, final, world-transcending

⁷David Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 27-28.

⁸The term “evidentiary apologetics” refers to any form of apologetics that depends on empirical evidences to prove, support, or give credibility to any of the truth-claims of the faith.

⁹Groothuis identifies Nietzsche as the most likely candidate to be named the “one philosopher who marks the transition from modernism to postmodernism” (Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 37).

Revelation,” he “does believe in the existence of knowledge which transcends culture.”¹⁰ The postmodernist rejects all claims to ultimate transcendent truth, claiming instead that one’s own personal experience is all anyone can ever really know.¹¹ Doug Groothuis states that to the postmodern, “the very idea of absolute, objective and universal truth is considered implausible, held in open contempt or not even seriously considered.”¹²

This new emphasis on subjectivism is a defining characteristic of postmodernism. In fact, the postmodernist would say that the only truth there is (not defined as objective truth) is whatever one determines to be truth, based on one’s own culture and perception.¹³ Indeed it would seem that the primary difference between modernism and postmodernism is the difference between absolutism and relativism.¹⁴ As J. I. Packer put it, the postmodernist says, “What I feel is all that counts because what I feel is all there is.”¹⁵

Many factors have led to the rise and acceptance of postmodernism, including but not limited to the following: (1) Modernism failed to provide all of life’s answers through knowledge and technological mastery. (2) Pluralism lends itself to the unacceptability of one true religion. (3) Diversity has blurred the lines, making all lifestyles and values equally valid. (4) Language is believed to be a human creation, thus not representing reality. (5) Verifiable evidence cannot objectively determine truth.¹⁶ These all represent a frustration among postmoderns, who have in essence given up on Truth itself. Therefore, how must preachers respond in order most effectively to communicate the truth claims of Christianity? Will the same methods used in a modern context work in a postmodern context? Or is a shift in apologetics in order?

PREACHING TO THE TIMES: A NEW RELIGION OR A NEW KIND OF LANGUAGE?

Postmodernism presents a significant shift in thinking in western culture. The modernist mindset, believing in the existence of objective truth which could be discovered

¹⁰Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 75-76.

¹¹Grenz, *Primer*, 83.

¹²Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 22.

¹³David L. Goetz, “The Riddle of Our Postmodern Culture: What Is Postmodernism? Should We Even Care?” *Leadership* 18 (1997): 54.

¹⁴F. LeRon Shults, “Structures of Rationality in Science and Theology: Overcoming the Postmodern Dilemma,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49 (1997): 228-36.

¹⁵J. I. Packer, as quoted in Goetz, “Riddle,” 56.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26-31. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Bible as Word of God: In a Postmodern Age* (Minneapolis: Westminster, 1998), 83-84.

through empirical evidences, is no longer prevalent. This is not to say that modernism has ceased to exist. Indeed, there are many factors that can determine a person's worldview. For example, elderly people and people raised in rural settings further removed from the influences of postmodern ideology will likely have a more modern worldview than those in their twenties raised in cities (particularly cities outside of the "Bible Belt"). Also, people with scientific backgrounds might be more influenced by empirical evidence than someone with a liberal arts degree, and those educated in liberal, secular universities might tend more toward relativism than those with only a high school education or those educated in more conservative private institutions. Nevertheless, that postmodernism has significantly transformed the contemporary worldview is undeniable.

In addition, while the contemporary pastor in a more traditional setting might think that his converted congregants are not in need of apologetics—or at the very least, that they still see the world through modernist lenses that filter out all the gray areas—nothing could be farther from the truth. Calvin Miller notes that "people who attend church have no forum for expressing their diverse views and none are given polygraph tests to be sure they agree with creeds. But many of them don't."¹⁷ Further, in his book *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, Graham Johnston contends that postmodernism is "shared by those folks who fill church sanctuaries each Sunday."¹⁸ To assume that contemporary pews are filled with committed believers who unquestionably accept our confessional statements and everything we preachers say would be to exhibit a naiveté that will leave our listeners wondering if we really even understand who they are.

The challenge, then, is for the preacher today to lean to understand his context. Who exactly are the members of his audience, and how do they think? Craig Loscalzo acknowledges the difficulty in trying concretely to define "postmodernism." After all, "one characteristic of postmodernism is its intentional willingness not to objectify anything."¹⁹ How can the church communicate effectively to those who reject modernism's rationalism and objectivity? The difficulty is in presenting the exclusive truth-claims and the call to the lordship of Christ to those who embrace relativism and embody suspicion. Yet, Loscalzo says, "Only a pulpit that identifies with the milieu of the time will be heard over the babble of other voices demanding people's attention."²⁰ Therefore, the effective preacher must learn to connect with his listeners, and to do so will require him to reclaim "the apologetic role of the pulpit for the cause of the Christian faith."²¹

¹⁷Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 44.

¹⁸Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 9.

¹⁹Craig Loscalzo, *Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 26.

²⁰Loscalzo, 20.

²¹*Ibid.*, 23.

In order to apologize in a postmodern climate, Loscalzo contends that certain elements need to be present in apologetic preaching. Stories, or image-rich narratives will help present the Gospel and make it clear.²² The preacher must also provide theological content. Not to do so “ranks paramount to ministerial malpractice and should not be tolerated.”²³ In addition, preachers must be willing to “take on rival systems,” particularly with respect to providing answers to questions of theodicy, sin, salvation, and other issues which can become obstacles to faith.²⁴ Loscalzo also contends that to reach the postmodern, as opposed to the modernist, preaching must contain an element of mystery and transcendence, not trying to provide all the answers with raw data and technology.²⁵ Preachers need to offer the hope of the Gospel²⁶ and the certainty of truth, even though postmoderns reject the notion of objective truth.²⁷ Ultimately, however, the greatest necessity in apologetic preaching is the preaching of Jesus Christ. The focus of preaching is not a church or a theological system, but the person of Jesus Christ Himself, so the apologetic preacher must explain to the world the “who” and the “why” of Jesus the Christ.

In *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, Johnston acknowledges that even within the church, many people hold to a postmodern worldview. Therefore, he encourages the biblical expositor to learn to communicate in such a way as to connect with his contemporary listeners.²⁸ Even in the pew on Sunday, he contends, there will be skeptics, so he issues a strong call for pulpit apologetics. He defines “apologetic preaching” as “biblical preaching that grapples with doubts, unpacks Christian assumptions, and contemplates the unbelief of the skeptic.”²⁹ The preacher who has still not grasped the most common differences between modernity and postmodernity will have a difficult time communicating with contemporary Christians, much less those who have yet to accept the basic claims of the faith.

²²Ibid., 22. Loscalzo is not necessarily advocating a narrative form of preaching as much as he is contending for the use of narratives during the course of preaching, regardless of the specific form or style of the sermon.

²³Loscalzo, 25. He states, “Whether by intentional design or by default we pastors have relegated our task of being a theologian to some unknown entity while we spend our energy on matters that someone else in the church could better handle,”

²⁴Loscalzo, 26-27.

²⁵Ibid., 29.

²⁶Ibid., 54.

²⁷Ibid., 84.

²⁸Johnston, 9.

²⁹Ibid., 82.

In a compilation work called *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, Zacharias sums up the problem faced in Gospel preaching today with the question, “How do we communicate the gospel to a generation that hears with its eyes and thinks with its feelings?”³⁰ Despite the overwhelming call to answer that challenge with purely technological and visual means, however, Zacharias displays a faith in the written Word of God, bemoaning the “loss of linguistic strength in our time,” urging the preacher not to abandon the preaching of that Word.³¹

In answer to the question of how truth is communicated today, Zacharias provides five points for the evangelistic preacher to consider. First, because of the lack of confidence in any kind of authority, postmodernism has “cleared the playing field.” Confidence has become so scarce that there is a deep spiritual hunger for something solid in which to believe.³² This provides an enormous opportunity for the claims of the Gospel.³³ Second, while “classical techniques don’t work anymore,” there is “just enough of the modern worldview left so that reason still has a point of entry.” Care should be taken not to engage in “an overdose of argumentation,” but rational discussion and truth assertions need not be cast aside.³⁴

Third, postmoderns long for community, and the “gospel message that culminates in worship . . . brings coherence within the community of believers.” The church provides something unique in that “a worshipping community binds [our] diversity . . . and brings us together into a corporate expression of worship,” which is “one of the most powerful appeals to the postmodern mind.”³⁵

“Fourth,” he says, “we must be observant of God’s sovereign intervention in history.” In other words, we need to seize upon local, national, or global events that will provide opportunity for the Gospel. Certain events cause people to question and search, and the effective evangelistic preacher will speak truth into those situations, providing answers for the longing soul. Finally, postmoderns are “exhausted [by] this indulgent culture.” Evangelistic preaching does not need to make promises of ease, but be honest

³⁰Ravi Zacharias, in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 26.

³¹*Ibid.*, 43.

³²See also, Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message* (Nashville: Word, 2000): “Philosophically, you can believe anything. . . . Morally, you can practice anything. . . . Religiously, you can hold to anything” (vii).

³³Zacharias, *Telling the Truth*, 26.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 27.

about the cost of following Christ.”³⁶ This concept contradicts the pragmatism employed by so many preachers and evangelists today, but Zacharias argues that this is the kind of preaching that will resonate with the postmodern.

In the same work, Colin Smith contends for the centrality of Jesus Christ in preaching to postmoderns, and not just “disconnected truths about peace or fulfillment or family life.”³⁷ Even though those things certainly will be spoken of, every application presented must be connected to the person and work of Jesus Christ. He sees Jesus as central to Scripture, to preaching, and to the Gospel, so any true Christian preaching ultimately must be focused on Him. In the current *zeitgeist*, pragmatism dominates many pulpits, but even for the contemporary unbeliever, the preacher must not forget that his task is to proclaim Jesus Christ to all who hear.³⁸

A song currently being played at your local Starbucks gives voice to the heart cry of contemporary culture:

*Give me some new religion;
Something that I can feel.
Give me some new tomorrow;
Bring it on and make it real.
Drown it in sweet forgiveness;
Come on, baby, to my life.*³⁹

The Gospel preacher, however, will recognize that a new religion is not what people are longing for. Instead, it is the very real offer of a new tomorrow and the sweet forgiveness that is only available in Jesus Christ. “Give me Jesus,” is their plea, but we must first learn how to understand and speak their language if we are to give them what they need.

CONCLUSION

The last sixty years have seen some dramatic shifts in culture. The contemporary audience is more skeptical today, pluralism is prevalent, and truth is seen as subjective. A significant number of our listeners, though perhaps still possessing some remnants of modernist thought, are steeped in a postmodern worldview. Because of that, preachers seeking to reach unbelievers with the Gospel must endeavor to understand the foundations

³⁶Ibid., 27-28.

³⁷Colin Smith, in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 112.

³⁸John R. W. Stott, in *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982: the church has lost its confidence in the Gospel, and that it must reclaim that confidence. Preachers do not need to find an adequate or attractive substitute, as there really is none (83-85).

³⁹“New Religion.” Words by Alex Dickson. Recorded by Alice Smith.

and ramifications of postmodern thought. That understanding should inform the proclamation of the Gospel—not the Gospel itself, but the substance of the argumentation used. There have always been skeptics, but the skepticism of today questions the veracity of the Bible and even the historical reality of Jesus. Therefore, when the truth claims of the Gospel are presented, we will need to develop an apologetic for defending those claims that arises from an understanding of how objective truth is viewed by a contemporary audience. As Loscalzo says, “In the current climate of pluralism and relativism—what one might call a neopagan culture—the ground for evangelism will have to be properly furrowed and prepared by effective apologetics.”⁴⁰

The shift in thinking demands a shift in apologetic method from the manner of that used in a modernist culture, however. Evidentiary apologetics will be ineffective with an audience that places no value in empirical data. Subjectivism rules the day. As Ravi Zacharias says, the contemporary generation “hears with its eyes and thinks with its feelings.”⁴¹ Therefore, we must learn to use stories, both contemporary and historical, that will connect with the listeners on an emotional level. This does not mean, however, that preachers of the Gospel should shrink from declaring the truth-claims of Scripture. Instead, there are certain elements that need to be present in the apologetic used in contemporary evangelistic preaching.

To begin with, Jesus Christ must be proclaimed as the Son of God and unique Savior of the World. He is not one god among many. He is the only God, and to fail to proclaim Him as such is to fail to proclaim the Gospel. Similarly, even though postmodern listeners are skeptical of absolute truth-claims, the Christian faith is based on them, and in an age when nothing is certain, the preacher of the Gospel has the opportunity to be the one person in the community to provide solid answers to a confused generation.

When developing an apologetic for preaching, however, preachers need not pretend to know all the answers or to be able to answer life’s most difficult questions with simple propositions. Postmoderns are not looking for pat answers, but they are comfortable with mystery. Therefore, when there is mystery—when the questions being raised are beyond knowing—an effective contemporary apologetic will embrace that mystery rather than try to dispel it.

In addition, though it is politically incorrect to criticize most belief systems and philosophies today, evangelistic preachers must confront the errors of the day. This is done by addressing the underlying assumptions—the foundational presuppositions—and showing, not only the inherent flaws, but also the superiority of the Christian faith. Preachers need to be able to explain to their listeners how Christianity is the only faith system that can meet their deepest needs and how all other systems consistently fail to do so. A word of caution, however, is that the preacher must never be seen as arrogant or uncaring, but he should

⁴⁰Loscalzo, 125.

⁴¹Zacharias, *Telling the Truth*, 82.

present his argument with gentleness and humility, because, as Zacharias says, “We are living in a time when sensitivities are at the surface.”⁴²

Finally, because the postmodern is typically wary of superficiality and materialism, and because he frequently sees Christianity as making shallow external promises, the Gospel should not be presented as a means to leisure or luxury. Honesty and transparency are important to the postmodern, so the preacher that connects is the one who is forthright in communicating the costs of following Christ and the struggles of discipleship. Since the Gospel itself makes no promises of ease, neither should the Gospel preacher. Contemporary apologetics need not “enhance” the Gospel to make it more pleasing, but should rather preach Jesus as the One who lays claim to the entire life of His follower and bids him “take up his cross.”

⁴²Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, vii.

HUMOR IN PREACHING: A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE PULPIT. . . .

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INTRODUCTION

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was known at times to entice great roars of laughter from his preaching. Some observers criticized such laughter and his use of humor in preaching as irreverent. However, Spurgeon stated, “If my critics only knew how much I held back, they would commend me.”¹

Is humor appropriate and useful in preaching? This paper presents selected perspectives on using humor in preaching, discusses three major theories about humor and how it functions to make people laugh, and offers suggestions on how preachers can use humor in sermons from a traditional homiletic.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON USING HUMOR IN PREACHING

One of the first homileticians to voice an opinion on the subject of humor in preaching was Alexandre Vinet. He dismissed the usefulness of humor in preaching saying, “The pretence [sic] of correcting morals by comedy is vain. If the use of ridicule may be admitted in familiar conversation or in a book, it is out of place in an assembly where grave subjects are treated.”² Austin Phelps agreed with this view fearing that the use of humor in a sermon would degrade the Bible.³ T. Harwood Pattison also rejected the idea of using

¹Thielicke, Helmut. *Encounter with Spurgeon*, trans. by John W. Doberstein. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 26.

²Alexandre Vinet, *Homiletics: Or the Theory of Preaching*, trans. and ed. by Thomas H. Skinner. (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1854), 214.

³Austin Phelps, *The Theory of Preaching* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1882), 198-99.

humor in the pulpit: “Religion is too severe a matter to be treated in a trivial or jesting spirit. Figures of speech may be in place in a platform speech which are not to be tolerated in a sermon.”⁴ In a more contemporary work, John Piper rejected any notion of humor in the pulpit contending that laughter promotes an atmosphere, which hinders revival.⁵

Phillips Brooks in *Lectures on Preaching* was one of the first homileticians to note the appropriateness of humor in preaching by responding to the critics who viewed humor as frivolous: “The smile that is stirred by the true humor and the smile that comes from mere tickling of the fancy are as different from one another as the tears that sorrow forces from the soul are from the tears that you compel a man to shed by pinching him.”⁶

James Burrell was one of the few homileticians to devote a chapter to humor in his homiletical textbook, *The Sermon: Its Construction and Delivery*.⁷ Burrell defended his position by noting the use of humor by great preachers such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Henry Ward Beecher, and Dwight L. Moody. Burrell noted that preachers should use humor with a purpose and not merely for entertainment: “The court jester has his place; but Christ’s fishermen have little use for cap and bells.”⁸ Alfred Garvie promoted the use of humor in the pulpit on the grounds that it is a good gift from God.⁹ He also remarked, “Worse things may be heard in a church than a laugh.”¹⁰

Charles Brown classified humor as one of the three “lighter elements” of a sermon. In his view, tasteful humor was effective in enabling the congregation to identify with the speaker’s humanity, holding attention, providing a refreshing mental break, and increasing the comprehension of a truth on the mind of the hearer.¹¹ John Broadus also favored the use of humor in preaching as long as it was so interconnected to the message of the preacher

⁴T. Harwood Pattison, *The Making of the Sermon: For the Classroom and the Study* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1900), 286.

⁵John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 56.

⁶Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1902), 57.

⁷David James Burrell, *The Sermon: Its Construction and Delivery* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), 233-38.

⁸*Ibid.*, 237-38.

⁹Alfred Garvie, *The Christian Preacher* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 416.

¹⁰Alfred Garvie, *A Guide to Preachers* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1907), 234.

¹¹Charles Reynolds Brown, *The Art of Preaching* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 135-42.

and his personality that the humor seemed natural and unforced.¹² Webb Garrison devoted an entire chapter to humor in his work, *The Preacher and His Audience*. He asserted that humor is a powerfully persuasive device: “It is an affront to the God whom we serve to neglect the skillful use of humor in our preaching.”¹³

A subsection of recent homileticians support the use of humor in preaching. Harold Bryson advocated humor based on its practical benefits: “If humor can help illumine and impact people, it can be valuable. But if humor is used to entertain or to display cleverness, it is entirely out of place.”¹⁴ John Stott conjectured, “So humour is legitimate. Nevertheless, we have to be sparing in our use of it and judicious in the topics we select for laughter.”¹⁵ Warren Wiersbe offered one guideline: “If humor is natural to the preacher, then it should be used in preaching; but one must never ‘import’ jokes just to make the congregation laugh.”¹⁶ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix described the purpose of humor in the pulpit as “not to get laughs but to drive home a point in an entertaining way.”¹⁷ Dave Stone identified “the engaging humorist” as a dominant style of communication. He noted concerning humor in preaching, “Appropriate humor, strategically placed, can be like a breath of fresh air to a person who’s been underwater for a minute.”¹⁸

A limited number of homiletical texts have been written that deal exclusively with homiletical humor. Doug Adams wrote *Humor in the American Pulpit*, which traced the use of humor and the motivation for its use from George Whitefield through Henry Ward Beecher. James Heflin’s 1974 dissertation offered a broad overview of humor and its role in the sermon derived from communication theory. In his work *Humor in Preaching*, John Drakeford lightly treated a number of issues concerning humor. James Barnette advanced the field with his 1992 dissertation *Humor in Preaching: The Contribution of Psychological and Sociological Research*. Joseph Webb digressed from classical homiletical theory to develop a philosophy of

¹²John Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 2d ed., revised by Edwin Charles Dargan (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1926), 26.

¹³Webb B. Garrison, *The Preacher and His Audience* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954), 192.

¹⁴Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 395-96.

¹⁵John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 288.

¹⁶Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 275.

¹⁷Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 246.

¹⁸Dave Stone, *Refining Your Style: Learning from Respected Communicators* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2004), 83.

preaching based on the philosophy of stand-up comedy in his work *Comedy and Preaching*. A significant work recently completed on the subject is Michael Butzberger's Doctor of Ministry project entitled *Humor as a Communication Tool in Preaching*. He provided a theological and theoretical rationale for using humor in preaching. Butzberger covered a wide range of topics related to humor in preaching, such as examples of humor in the Bible; benefits of humor in life and communication; and helpful suggestions on using humor in the pulpit. One of the authors of this paper recently completed a Ph.D. dissertation in this area entitled *Toward A Methodology Which Equips Pastors To Use Humor Intentionally In Preaching*.

MAJOR THEORIES ABOUT HUMOR

Three major theories have emerged from humor research to explain the existence of humor, why people laugh, and the motivation for using humor. These theories include the superiority theory, incongruity theory, and relief theory. While each theory seeks to account for all instances of humor, many humor theorists note that none of these three main theories is adequate to provide a general theory of laughter. Nevertheless, each theory provides a helpful framework for understanding the existence of humor and laughter.

Superiority Theory

The superiority theory states that laughter emerges as “an expression of a person's feelings of superiority over other people.”¹⁹ One may be seen as comical when he or she is viewed as “inadequate according to a set of agreed-upon group or societal criteria.”²⁰ Morrell called the superiority theory “the oldest, and probably still most widespread theory of humor.”²¹

Support for the superiority theory goes back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle, who both believed that laughter was a form of derision and may hurt the character of the person causing the laughter. Plato warned of the danger of comedies having a morally corrupting effect on a person.²² Aristotle did not completely condemn a sense of humor, but he promoted moderation. He wrote, “Those who carry humor to excess are thought to be vulgar buffoons. They try to be funny at any cost and aim more at raising a laugh than at saying what is proper and at avoiding pain to the butt of their jokes.”²³

¹⁹John Morrell, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 4.

²⁰O.H. Lynch, “Humorous Communication: Finding a Place for Humor in Communication Research.” *Communication Theory* 12 (November 2002): 426.

²¹Morrell, 4.

²²Ibid., 5.

²³Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vols. 4, 8. Quoted in John Morrell, 5.

The conception of the superiority theory is attributed to the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes who stated, "The passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own."²⁴ Charles Gruner expounded upon Hobbes's statement by noting that the two elements "sudden" and "glory" are the essentials for evoking laughter.²⁵

Anthony Ludovici expanded Hobbes' theory of "sudden glory" by explaining all laughter as a product of a person's feeling of "superior adaptation." He explained, "We laugh when we feel that our adaptation to life is superior. It may be a purely subjective state unprovoked by any external object, or it may be a state of mind excited by a comparison, as when we laugh at a schoolboy howler. Or it may be a bluff laugh, that is to say, pretended expression of superior adaptation when one is really feeling inferior."²⁶ Ludovici pointed to the natural laughter of children at others with physical, mental, and cultural maladaptations as an illustration of this phenomenon.²⁷

Albert Rapp also traced laughter back to hostile origins. Rapp suggested that laughter had its roots in the primitive self. He attributed the source of all modern forms of wit and humor to "the roar of triumph in the ancient jungle duel."²⁸

Humor theorists have identified benefits of superiority humor. Gruner argued that it actually lessens aggressive behavior by permitting "a great deal of emotional expression that would otherwise have to remain unexpressed and 'bottled up inside' us or else released in less socially accepted ways."²⁹ Feinberg agreed, noting that "humor provides a vicarious form of aggression to relieve some of the accumulated tensions of modern society."³⁰ Instances of superiority humor also serve as social correctives. Meyer observed that one of the functions of the royal fool was to teach discipline by laughter: "Foolish antics were laughed at to show that such behaviors or beliefs were unacceptable in serious society."³¹ Meyer noted also that

²⁴Thomas Hobbes, "Human Nature," *The English Works*, vol. 4. William Molesworth, ed. (London: Bohn, 1840), 46.

²⁵Charles Gruner, *Understanding Laughter: The Workings of Wit and Humor* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978), 30.

²⁶Anthony Ludovici, *The Secret of Laughter* (New York: Viking Press, 1933), 62.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 100-03.

²⁸Albert Rapp, *The Origins of Wit and Humor* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951), 21.

²⁹Gruner, 35.

³⁰Leonard Feinberg, *The Secret of Humor* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978), 25.

³¹John Meyer, "Humor as Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication." *Communication Theory* 10 (August 2000): 314.

superiority humor may build group unity: “Laughing at faulty behavior can also reinforce unity among group members, as a feeling of superiority over those being ridiculed can coexist with a feeling of belonging.”³²

Incongruity Theory

The incongruity theory provides the perspective that “people laugh at what surprises them, is unexpected, or is odd in a nonthreatening way.”³³ Laughter is placed in the realm of the cognitive domain and thought to depend on one’s ability “to recognize that something is inconsistent with the expected rational nature of the perceived environment.”³⁴ When people experience what does not fit into normal expected patterns, incongruence occurs, and they experience laughter. Morreall explained, “We live in an orderly world, where we have come to expect certain patterns among things, their properties, events, etc. We laugh when we experience something that does not fit these patterns. As Pascal put it, ‘Nothing produces laughter more than a surprising disproportion between that which one expects and that which one sees.’”³⁵ The origins of the incongruity theory can be traced back to the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant who wrote, “Whatever is to arouse lively, convulsive laughter must contain something absurd (hence something that the understanding cannot like for its own sake.) *Laughter is an affect that arises if a tense expectation is transformed into nothing.*”³⁶ Such an occurrence can be observed when a joke builds expectations and then addresses them with nonsense. People experiencing the joke “are left with little response but to laugh.”³⁷

In his essay entitled *Laughter*, Henri Bergson noted that incongruity depends on a duality of meaning within a common situation: “A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time.”³⁸ Lynch described Bergson’s essay as “a landmark for humor theory” and explained that Bergson understood incongruity humor as both “situationally and relationally driven.”³⁹ Helmuth Plessner built

³²Ibid., 315.

³³Ibid., 313.

³⁴Lynch, 428.

³⁵Morreall, 15-16.

³⁶Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* trans. by Werner S. Pluhar. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 203.

³⁷Lynch, 428.

³⁸Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), 123.

³⁹Lynch, 429.

on the notions of Bergson. He contended that laughter comes when the natural release of the tension and the bind created by situations are so incongruous that humor is found to be the only possible interpretation.⁴⁰

Relief Theory

The relief theory posits the notion that “people experience humor and laugh because they sense stress has been reduced in a certain way.”⁴¹ The physiological symptoms of humor, such as laughter, take a higher priority in the relief theory than in the previous two theories. Humor is believed to stem “from the relief experienced when tensions are engendered and removed from an individual.”⁴² Laughter is the act of venting nervous energy.⁴³ One may trace the beginnings of the relief theory to as early as 1707. In that year, Anthony Ashley Cooper—also known as The Earl of Shaftesbury—published the essay, *The Freedom of Wit and Humour*. He wrote, “And thus the natural free Spirits of ingenious Men, if imprison’d and controul’d, will find out other ways of Motion to relieve themselves in their *Constraint*: and whether it be in Burlesque, Mimickry or Buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be reveng’d on their *Constrainers*.”⁴⁴

In the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer furthered this notion by providing the first theory arguing that laughter was a physiological response to stored nervous energy created by irritable feelings.⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud was attracted to Spencer’s work because it included psychic energy as a component of the mechanics of laughter. Freud developed his theory of laughter in his work, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, which became the primary text for the relief theory in the modern era. Morreall provided a succinct summary of Freud’s theory: “In this book he distinguishes between three kinds of laughter situations, which he calls ‘jokes,’ ‘the comic,’ and ‘humor.’ The core of his theory is that in all laughter situations we save a certain quantity of psychic energy, energy that we have summoned for

⁴⁰Helmuth Plessner. *Laughing and Crying*, trans. by James Spencer Churchill and Marjorie Green, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 142.

⁴¹Meyer, 312.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Morreall, 20.

⁴⁴Anthony Ashley Cooper, The Earl of Shaftesbury, “*Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*,” *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 46, [on-line book]; available at http://olldownload.libertyfund.org/EBooks/Shaftesbury_0096.01.pdf; accessed 01 February 2007.

⁴⁵Herbert Spencer, “On the Physiology of Laughter,” *Macmillian’s Magazine* (March 1860): 286-311.

some psychic purpose but which turns out not to be needed, and this surplus energy is discharged in laughter.”⁴⁶

While scholars disagree on whether any one theory can account adequately for every instance of humor, many accounts of humor can be attributed to all three theories. Meyer used the following joke to illustrate this point. “One printed announcement in a church bulletin noted that ‘Weight Watchers will meet at 7:00 p.m. Please use the large double doors at the side entrance.’”⁴⁷ Meyer wrote that proponents of the relief theory may argue that “the humor stems from the tension released when receivers realize that the juxtaposition of the meeting announcement and reference to the large doors was not directed at the receiver personally.” Incongruity theorists may argue that “the humor results from the surprise at seeing such a recommendation for entry following a serious announcement for a group of people concerned about their weight. The reference to the large doors violates social norms of politeness and respect, among others; thus the incongruity can result in humor.” Superiority theory proponents may claim that “the humor originates simply from the implied put-down of overweight people by reference to their particular problems (i.e., needing larger doors).”⁴⁸ Even though many humor theorists defend the adequacy of only one of these theories, each theory of humor origin can provide an explanation for many instances of humor. For this reason, the debate continues over which theory is “superior” (no pun intended).

USING HUMOR WITHIN A TRADITIONAL HOMILETIC

Any method of using humor in preaching should not be separated from the preacher’s homiletical strategy. In this paper, the authors seek to show how humor can be used as a tool within the elements of traditional homiletics. In *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, John Broadus offered a rhetorical strategy for constructing sermons which included foundational, formal, and functional elements.⁴⁹ Humor may be used by preachers in various ways within each element of this strategy. The examples of humor employed in this paper were drawn from the preaching of Bob Russell, who is recognized for his skillful use of humor in sermons.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Morreall, 27.

⁴⁷Meyer, 315.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. 4th ed., revised by Vernon L. Stanfield (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 29-51, 77-197.

⁵⁰See also, James Barnette, “Using Humor in Preaching: An Interview with Bob Russell,” *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers* 10 (March-April 1995): 5-10.

Forms of Humor in the Sermon

Many forms of humor exist; however, some forms may be more conducive to preaching. Two forms which preachers may find especially helpful are anecdotes and witticisms. Anecdotes—brief accounts of any fact or happening—allow preachers to relay real-life stories about people and, thus, raise the level of human interest in their sermons. Preachers have ample places from which to draw anecdotal material: personal reading, other speakers, stories from friends, and events in their personal lives. Personal anecdotes are especially beneficial for two reasons. First, these anecdotes draw the congregation into the preacher's personal and family life. Second, personal anecdotes provide a vehicle for preachers to employ self-deprecating humor. Each of these benefits allows the preacher to break down barriers and build a connection with the audience by letting hearers see him or her as a normal person.⁵¹

Preachers may also find witticism—a clever or amusing phrase—useful for creating humor in their sermons. These original or third person quotes may stand alone, unconnected to other aspects of the sermon or be used to add humor in response to other aspects of the sermon such as an unhumorous anecdote. For example, Russell used the following third-person quote to describe the problem of hypocrisy: “Someone said, ‘You can keep one foot in two different canoes for awhile, but eventually you’re going to get real uncomfortable.’”⁵² Witticisms may also be used to add humor to readings, paraphrases, explanations, and applications, as well as unhumorous anecdotes, illustrations, and stories.

Satire—an indirect criticism with a moral purpose—is also useful to preachers because it allows them to criticize unbiblical lifestyles or beliefs without appearing overly insensitive. Russell criticized negative attitudes with satire: “The cure for a critical spirit is to replace criticism with a positive attitude. Refuse to become a grumpy old man or whiny old woman. You might get attention with all that criticism, but you don’t win any friends. You’ll never say, ‘Let’s go over to Hazel’s house—I love to hear her gripe and complain! Don’t you?’”⁵³ Many other humorous forms are available for use, which can be sprinkled throughout sermons to add variety, such as original humor, joke, satire, hyperbole, descriptive language, and irony.

Humor in the Foundational Elements

Humor usually plays a limited role in the foundational elements of sermons. However, humor may be used to present or support a sermon's subject, proposition, and objective. Humorous statements and humorous stories are especially helpful to the preacher for introducing or further developing each of these foundational elements. To introduce a

⁵¹Bradley M. Rushing, “Toward A Methodology Which Equips Pastors To Use Humor Intentionally In Preaching,” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 122-23.

⁵²Ibid., 76.

⁵³Ibid., 86.

sermon's subject concerning senior citizens, Russell began, "This past week I asked the preaching team if I should gather a focus group to discuss the temptations seniors face. . . . Someone asked, 'Why? Just look in the mirror and preach from experience!' I was going to fire the person who said that, but the next day I couldn't remember who it was!"⁵⁴ This method of introducing subjects may also help the preacher to diffuse subjects, which are difficult or sensitive.

Humor in the Formal Elements

When used in the introduction, humor provides many benefits such as gaining attention and arousing interest in the sermon's subject. Bert Bradley noted, "If you can cause listeners to laugh at the outset of your speech, it does much to develop rapport between you and the audience."⁵⁵ Some forms are more suited for the introduction than others. Preachers should be especially careful about beginning with a joke for three reasons. First, preachers may be tempted to tell a joke unrelated to the sermon's subject and thus need two introductions to the sermon. Second, if no one laughs at the opening joke, the preacher could have a difficult time recovering and presenting the message. Third, a joke may disrupt an appropriate worship mood leading into a sermon. The introduction is an excellent place for pastors to include self-deprecating personal anecdotes because anecdotes create empathy between preachers and their hearers. When using self-deprecating humor, preachers should always be truthful about the experience but never tell anything that might compromise their ministerial reputation.

Humor functions in the body of sermons primarily to enliven illustration. However, humor may also enliven explanation and application to a lesser extent. In the body, a preacher may use humor in varying degrees to clarify meaning, to impress truth, to provide mental relief, to provide emotional conditioning, and to emphasize sermon points.⁵⁶ Any particular humorous item may accomplish one or all of these benefits. Enlivening explanation with humor provides a mental break to hearers in long exegetical sections of the sermon and emotionally conditions them to receive the truth. A preacher has other options in enlivening explanation such as quoting humorous Scripture, paraphrasing the text, or responding to the text with a humorous quip. Russell provided an example of responding with a humorous quip by saying, "When you see the word 'therefore,' stop and think about what it is there for."⁵⁷

Preachers who use humor in the conclusion should do so with extreme caution as not to minimize the magnitude of the moment or hinder a possible decision in response to

⁵⁴Ibid., 88-89.

⁵⁵Bert Bradley, *Fundamentals of Speech Communication: The Credibility of Ideas* (Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown Publishers, 1991), 212.

⁵⁶James Heflin, "An Evaluation of the Use of Humor in the Sermon" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974), 125-129.

⁵⁷Rushing, 112.

the sermon. In rare and exceptional cases humor may be helpful in clarifying expectations during the altar call. Humor may also help clarify expectations and prepare the way for an altar call when the sermon's subject has been extremely difficult or controversial.

Preachers may also find on rare occasions that supplemental humor is appropriate in transitions. These opportunities may occur when a transition needs added strength to be successful. Also, at times, circumstances arise that cause the audience as a whole to think a common thought unrelated to the sermon subject—such as, “This sermon is especially long today.” Transitions provide opportunities for the preacher to address verbally such thought and redirect attention back to the sermon.

Humor in the Functional Elements

Intentional humor used in the body of the sermon can augment and enliven a functional element. Humor, which illustrates application, may be especially helpful by making practical demands more palatable to hearers. Such illustrations may also provide efficient ways for preachers to make and support arguments. Humor can be helpful to preachers arguing via testimony and analogy. Using testimony provides a way for preachers to draw from humorous life experiences, thus extending their arguments. A special benefit is added to a sermon when the analogy aids the impact of the argument. For example, Russell used the following analogy to argue against the philosophy that a young person should experience the world before settling down and following Christ: “Someone described that philosophy as ‘sowing wild oats now and praying for crop failure later.’”⁵⁸

Humor not only has the ability to illustrate explanation and application, but humor also has the potential to function in those capacities. Preachers may use humor to explain in sermons by quoting humorous texts, which pertain to the subject of the sermon, by highlighting humorous aspects of the text through paraphrase, and by responding with a humorous comment to the reading of an unhumorous text and to their teaching concerning that text. Russell provided an example of responding to a humorous Scripture with his own humorous comment: “The Bible records Job as saying: ‘The churning inside me never stops; days of suffering confront me’ (30:27), ‘my gnawing pains never rest’ (30:17), and, last but not least, ‘my breath is offensive to my wife’ (19:17). Why would that rank up there with the rest of his troubles? I think she probably complained about it every day!”⁵⁹

Humor can also help pastors apply biblical truth to hearers in various ways. Preachers can use humor to help listeners connect biblical truths to real-life situations, which they often experience. Russell provided the following example: “Pride refuses to admit mistakes and weaknesses and bristles at the idea of ever going to someone for help because that would be to admit inferiority to another. That’s why, ladies, it’s so hard for men to stop and ask for directions or even go to the doctor.”⁶⁰ Laughter helps the preacher confirm that

⁵⁸Ibid., 116.

⁵⁹Ibid., 108.

⁶⁰Ibid., 117.

the connection has been made. Preachers may also use humor to help relate to people while conveying practical instructions. Witty comments, which demonstrate to hearers that the preacher can relate to them help to add credibility to the instructions. An example can be seen as Russell gave instructions to parents: “Next week’s sermon is ‘I Wish My Children Would. . . .’ We’re going to dismiss elementary programs so children can worship with their parents. Mom and dad, teach them appropriate behavior in worship. Take them to the restroom five minutes before church starts. Then tell them not to ask to go out during the service. If they have to leave, tell them they are being immature, and they’ll have to go to bed an hour earlier that night. It will amaze you how spiritual they’ll become.”⁶¹

CONCLUSION

Humor can be an effective and beneficial tool for the preacher who can use it skillfully and appropriately. When using humor in sermons, a preacher should be intentional yet natural, i.e., should use humor with purpose yet in keeping with one’s personality (e.g., some preachers are naturally witty while others are not). And, most importantly, a preacher should utilize humor with integrity and care, just as in using illustrations and stories in sermons (especially in reference to one’s family and friends or church members).

Finally, when contemplating the use of humor in sermons, a preacher should ask, “Will the use of humor in my preaching make me a comedian or a communicator?” The distinction is important in preaching.

⁶¹Ibid., 119.

RETHINKING THE VALUE OF METAPHORS IN LISTENER-SENSITIVE HOMILETICS

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INTRODUCTION

Discourse in a religious setting like Christianity incorporates figurative as well as literal language. Figurative language includes tropes, one of which is metaphor. The research in metaphor has been extensive and vast in disciplines like communication, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, education, and theology. Because metaphor is a critical component in religious discourse and since the sermon is a vital component in the discourse about the relationship between God and the people in the pew, metaphor can be a beneficial study for preaching theorists.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the use of metaphors in listener-sensitive homiletics. A survey of metaphor theory research from the various social science perspectives and a description of the role of the trope in religious language will provide the context for a consideration of pertinent developments and an appraisal of recent research in the homiletical use of metaphor.

RESEARCH IN METAPHOR THEORY

Originally perceived as rhetorical ornaments, metaphors have come to be viewed by social science researchers as integral components in the process of cognition. In other words, metaphors are being viewed as figures of thought, not figures of speech. The formal study of metaphor dates back to Aristotle, who situated it in what came to be referred to as the rhetorical canon of style. Aristotle described metaphor as a borrowed term, a word substituted for another word, or a form of analogy that could be used to intensify the persuasive effect of an argument.¹

¹Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. R. Roberts, vol. 4, *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert M. Hutchins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

Aristotle's theory predominated until the early twentieth century when I. A. Richards introduced the notion that metaphor is not simply a stylistic device, but a critical component in generating meaning in human interaction. According to Richards, metaphor includes primary and secondary terms that interact in a coherent cognitive framework involving tension and resolution. Richards referred to the primary idea as the tenor and the secondary idea as the vehicle. For example, in the expression "life is a game," *life* is the tenor and *game* is the vehicle. Tension is the product of the interaction between tenor and vehicle. The greater the remoteness of the realities framed into tenor and vehicle, the greater the tension.²

Max Black reflected Richards's influence in his theory that metaphors involve two different realities that coalesce to form a new meaning. The metaphor is the frame that connects a variety of associated meanings to a focus, which is the principal term. Because of the somewhat dynamic interaction between frame and focus, some metaphors used by the speaker cannot be comprehended fully and completely by the listener.³

John Searle went further with his association of metaphor with the speech act theory, postulating that the meaning of a metaphor is always the utterance meaning of the speaker. Relating the literal sentence meaning to the metaphorical utterance meaning is challenging since meaning is conveyed by another semantic context. The listener, therefore, has to make cognitive semantic adjustment.⁴

Similarly, C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca dealt with the challenge meaning transferral with their appraisal of metaphoric proportionality. They suggested that the most important metaphors do not arise necessarily from expressions of analogy. Rather, they are presented intentionally to fuse superior terms with inferior terms through a kind of frame and focus relationship. The result is an expression reality that is complete in itself.⁵ On the other hand, speakers who lose sight of frame and focus in metaphoric formulations can make the realities they share with the listener sound more like fantasies or even fairy tale.⁶

Opinions about the value of metaphor continued to change with George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theory of metaphor, in which one kind of reality is not just understood, but

²I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 89-112.

³Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1962), 25-47.

⁴John Searle, *Speech Acts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 111.

⁵C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 400-1.

⁶*Ibid.*, 404.

is actually experienced in terms of another.⁷ Their theory maintains that the fundamental concepts of a group of people can be organized around conceptual metaphors that relate to one another according to a system of coherence. Within this system, metaphors operate through a process involving tenor and vehicle to highlight certain features of a reality that, in turn, have the potential for creating new social realities that guide the actions of the members of the group. As a result, people live by the conceptual metaphors that operate in the interactions within their relationships.

Of course, Lakoff and Johnson proposed an experimental perspective on truth that embraces the potential of metaphor to unite reason and imagination into an imaginative form of rationality that can account for knowing partially what cannot be comprehended completely. This experimental perspective appreciates interaction as a means of understanding, even though it assumes constant negotiation. Within the context of aesthetic experiences, conceptual metaphors generate new realities by involving all the available dimensions of experience, not just by incorporating only conventional ways of cognition.⁸

Social science researchers continue to extend and refine Lakoff and Johnson's theory. In most of the leading theories, a common assumption seems to be evident. Andrew Ortony explained that contemporary metaphor theories assume that cognition is the result of mental construction, not the product of logical positivism. Knowledge of reality, therefore, stems from the interaction with information shared within a particular context by people who have a specific frame of reference.⁹ In such an environment, metaphors are considered to be much more than simple figures of speech. Rather, they are dynamic figures of thought that have performative potential for the people involved in the interaction in which they are used. Rhetorically speaking, metaphors belong in the canon of invention instead of the canon of style.

METAPHOR IN RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Theory-based research has registered a significant shift in the appraisal of the value of metaphor in communication. Metaphor studies in faith-based settings have reflected a transition as well. These studies seem to share a common awareness that worshipping, thinking about, and talking about God require the use of human language. In order to mediate the distance between God's thoughts and the limitations of human language to convey them, speakers incorporate metaphors in the discourse. How metaphors are incorporated in religious language has been the focus of extensive analysis.

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas dealt with the mediating role of metaphor in his instruction about proportionality. For him, using metaphoric expressions to describe

⁷George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

⁸Ibid., 230-6.

⁹Andrew Ortony, "Metaphor, Language, and Thought," in *Metaphor and Thought*, 2d ed., ed. Andrew Ortony (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

the realities pertaining to God is beneficial, even though the descriptions are partial at best. Metaphors must be allowed, he contended, in order for uneducated parishioners to begin to understand the thought of God. A more complete understanding about God would come as they become more capable of grasping more abstract spiritual realities.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century, metaphors in religious language were still thought to play a mediating role. By the twentieth century, however, the perception began to change. For example, Virgil Aldrich argued that metaphoric language invokes a particular kind of activity that can be perceived as quite literal for the people engaged in worship. Metaphoric language serves as the basis for higher-order religious formulations that identify people with the concepts, perceptions, or realities associated with God. The metaphoric utterances do not simply generate grammatically ordered formulations. They become liturgically patterned acts of the congregation. Some of them may be acted out through singing and speaking, but they may be expressed in other ways as well.¹¹

F. W. Dillistone also attempted to relate the effect of metaphoric tension and energy in religious discourse. Borrowing from philosophies of language, he argued that metaphors “shatter in order to widen” the experiences people have with God, disturbing the intellectual equilibrium with words in order to create a new sense of reality.¹² What begins with a metaphor transcends and transforms symbolic activity so a person can worship God in an environment in which distance and togetherness as well as tension and communion can coexist.¹³

Claiming that religious language suffered from literalism and irrelevance, Sallie McFague stressed the value of metaphor in the use of models as organizing principles. A metaphor consists of two active thoughts that exist in permanent tension with each other. The tensive nature of the two thoughts changes them once they come in contact with each other in the metaphoric expression. As a result, the metaphor produces a matrix of thought that allows reality to be extended beyond the immediate connection, re-describing it in an open-ended but structured way.¹⁴ Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell referred to the cognitive

¹⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. T. Gilby, vol. 1, *Christian Theology* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 4.

¹¹Virgil Aldrich, “The Sense of Dogmatic Religious Expression,” in “Symposium: Are Cognitive Religious Dogmas Cognitive and Meaningful,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 5 (March 4, 1954): 147-8.

¹²F. W. Dillistone, *Christianity and Symbolism* (Philadelphia: Princeton University Press, 1955), 28.

¹³*Ibid.*, 29-33.

¹⁴Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 39-42.

production as an ontological flash, which is a sense of tension before and after new meaning is created by the metaphor.¹⁵

Aware that the formulation of meaning resides in the relational space between words and that metaphors prompt a change in the field of meaning, researchers have explored metaphors in various types of religious discourse. For example, Carmen Russell examined the rhetorical constructs of Jn. 4:1-42 and noted that the persuasive effect of the narrative resides largely in the use of food and water as metaphors that give shape to a social reality within the minds of the people who hear the story.¹⁶

The influence of a war metaphor to prompt action was also the focus of Michael Hostetler's research in Christian discourse. Opponents of a war metaphor based their argument of the problem of reconciling its use with other biblical metaphors like peace and love that are equally important. Proponents of the metaphor maintain that the war metaphor permeates biblical literature and reveals truths about God and his relationships with people that transcend time and culture to convey ideas of victory for Christians.¹⁷

Drawing largely from Black's metaphor theory, Hostetler asserted that a number of subordinated metaphors will be associated with a metaphoric expression. These metaphors give the primary metaphor depth and texture and allow it to be interpreted in a variety of ways. A war metaphor, then, can carry a number of connotations, one of which is to love the enemies of Christianity. In the literal world, war ideally ends in the death of the enemy. In the world of Christians discourse, however, the people who die in war are not the enemies but Christians themselves.¹⁸

In his analysis of interpersonal praxis in Christian relationships, Ronald Arnett connected narrative and historicity by way of metaphor. Defining praxis as action informed by theory instead of meaningless, repetitive action, he challenged Christians to know their biases as they engage in religious conversation. In his opinion, interpersonal dialogue is the exchange of biases. A particular Christian's narrative of his or her faith is

¹⁵Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell, *Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1984), 119-20.

¹⁶Carmen Russell, "Symbolic Form and the Rhetoric of Belief: An Epistemological Account of John 4:1-42," *The Journal of Communication and Religion* 18, no. 1 (March 1995): 17-8.

¹⁷Michael Hostetler, "Rethinking the War Metaphor in Religious Rhetoric: Burke, Blake, and Berrigan's 'Glimmer of Light,'" *The Journal of Communication and Religion* 20, no.1 (March 1999): 49-57.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

biased by the particular historical moment in which he or she lives. Metaphors link faith and historical moment.¹⁹

The linking role of metaphor can be diminished when it becomes time-bound. Once outdated, such metaphors cease to function as links and begin to serve only as tools for religious legalism. By necessity, therefore, metaphors must be changed to associate the constant faith narratives with the ever-changing historical moment.²⁰

METAPHOR IN HOMILETICAL LITERATURE

Generally speaking, homileticians have not kept pace with social science researchers in the study of metaphor. This lack of attention is evident in homiletical works concerning sermon illustration, which would seem to be logical sources for instruction regarding metaphors. James D. Robertson identified three books by Dawson Bryan, W. E. Sangster, and Ian Macpherson as key works on illustration.²¹ A reading of these books, however, gives little insight on metaphor. Although Bryan recognized that metaphors are powerful, he cautioned preachers not to overuse them.²² Sangster claimed that figures of speech, including metaphors, are minor forms of illustration.²³ Like Bryan, Macpherson believed the metaphor to be dynamic, more forceful than simile. He referred to both tropes as “condensed parables” and cautioned against using mixed metaphors.²⁴

Although the premise for *Design for Preaching* is a metaphor depicting the sermon as a tree, H. Grady Davis wrote little about metaphor. Concerning the power of metaphor, Davis claimed “the best words are metaphors, that is they contain sensory images—though we are so callous to life that we commonly ignore them.”²⁵ Although Davis referred to metaphors as “words,” he seemed to possess a homiletical appreciation for the contemporary theory that metaphor is a matter of thought and not language. Davis wrote

¹⁹Ronald Arnett, “Interpersonal Praxis: The Interplay of Religious Narrative, Historicity, and Metaphor,” *The Journal of Communication Religion* 21, no. 2 (September 1998): 161.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹James D. Robertson, “Sermon Illustrations and Use of Resources,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Practical Theology*, ed. Ralph G. Turnbull (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1967), 48.

²²Dawson Bryan, *The Art of Illustrating Sermons* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1938), 175.

²³W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of Sermon Illustration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1973), 26.

²⁴Ian Macpherson, *The Art of Illustrating Sermons* (New York: Abingdon, 1964), 48.

²⁵H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 272.

that good metaphors “are not images added, extrinsic; they are the fabric of the thought itself.”²⁶

David Buttrick adopted Lakoff’s theory of metaphor. Emphasizing the importance of metaphor in preaching, Buttrick explained that people live their lives in metaphor systems, which he termed as “models made from congruent metaphors.”²⁷ Buttrick’s metaphor systems correspond to Lakoff’s conceptual metaphors. Buttrick concluded: “The rather frightening fact is that social metaphor systems are not mere rhetorical ornamentation[;] they disclose the models that shape our minds, and set our behavioral patterns with terrifying power. . . . Preachers who wish to transform human lives will have to grasp the sheer power of metaphorical language. With metaphors, we can rename the world for faith.”²⁸ Much of Buttrick’s discussions of sermonic metaphors, however, concern types and models rather than metaphors.

In *Imaginative Shock* (1990), Eduard Riegert attempted to show that preaching is a metaphoric process. His work reflected the modern linguistic and interpretational theories that metaphor is a process involving not only words but also sentences and discourse. He believed that metaphor “redescribes reality, and in doing so discloses a world of new possibilities. Its effect is imaginative shock.”²⁹ Rather than encouraging the use of metaphor as literary device in preaching, Riegert emphasized that preachers should become seers and understand the root metaphors of Christianity in order to reclaim the imaginative potential of those metaphors. The preacher is to lay the Scripture text alongside the world of the congregation. Riegert explained: “Our preaching must concentrate on interpreting life theologically, rather than, as our traditional practice has been, drawing on life to illustrate theology.”³⁰

Warren Wiersbe, instead of encouraging preachers to develop their own metaphors, was more concerned with understanding and communicating the metaphors of the Bible. Wiersbe advised that preachers should use their imagination in discerning what the biblical metaphors meant to the original audience and what they mean to congregations today. He claimed that metaphors build bridges between the listener and the Bible, the listener’s past and present, and the listener’s mind and heart.³¹

²⁶Ibid., 254-5.

²⁷David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 122.

²⁸Ibid., 123.

²⁹Eduard Riegert, *Imaginative Shock: Preaching and Metaphor* (Burlington, ON: Trinity, 1990), 10.

³⁰Ibid., 128.

³¹Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Wheaton: Victor, 1994), 77-80.

Paul Scott Wilson also emphasized the importance of biblical metaphors, encouraging preachers to use biblical models of metaphor to create their own metaphors to communicate biblical themes. Wilson pointed out four main functions of metaphor in preaching: (1) a point of contact between the biblical world and listener's world, (2) the dominant image of the central idea, (3) stories as extended metaphor, and (4) theological categories of experience.³² He discussed metaphor within the context of linear and polar thought. Linear thought reflects progression and focuses upon a proposition. In contrast, polar thought reflects digression through comparison, contradiction, or metaphor, with metaphor being the principal form of digression. Wilson advocated a blend of polar and linear thought.³³

Claiming that metaphor is more than illustration, Richard Lischer encouraged homiletics to interact with contemporary metaphor theory. He believed that many metaphors in sermons today are dead metaphors, metaphors that have become so familiar that they no longer are considered metaphors. Lischer described a master's metaphor as being substitutionary and illustrative. A pupil's metaphor, however, is the only way to express certain theological themes such as forgiveness. Lischer emphasized the need to create new metaphors to communicate biblical truth, writing that "images drawn from the center of human life . . . not only illustrate the divine story but are capable of receiving light from the text."³⁴

RESEARCH IN THE USE OF METAPHORS IN PREACHING

The review of the study of metaphor in homiletical literature indicates that recent scholars have encouraged homiletics to interact with contemporary metaphor theory. One way to interact would be to investigate the use of metaphors in sermons in light of these contemporary theories. For instance, a recent analysis of selected sermons by Robert G. Lee extends contemporary metaphor theory to homiletics.³⁵ The focus of the analyses was Lee's intentional use of metaphors in representative judgment and encouragement sermons. Based upon linguist Gerard Steen's suggestions regarding the study of metaphors, the investigation of this nature should consist of a grammatical, conceptual, and

³²Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 246-52.

³³*Ibid.*, 220, 239-43.

³⁴Richard Lischer, "'What Language Shall I Borrow?' The Role of Metaphor in Proclamation," *Dialog* 26 (fall 1987): 287.

³⁵Lee was a notable Southern Baptist preacher renowned for his use of figurative language, especially metaphor. He served as the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, for thirty-two years, beginning in 1927. He also served three terms as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. David Larsen claimed that "no one exemplifies the old-time Southern Baptist preacher better than Robert G. Lee." See David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 742-3.

communicative analysis of each metaphor.³⁶ These three types of analyses of each intentional metaphor in this study contributed to a better understanding of metaphor's function in preaching.

Based upon traditional grammatical terminology, the grammatical analysis revealed tendencies regarding the parts of speech and grammatical structures of Lee's metaphorical expressions. According to Lakoff and Johnson, each expression has a target domain and a source domain. For instance, in expressions of the conceptual metaphor *love as a journey*, *love* is the target domain and *journey* is the source domain. Each source domain has a set of properties that correspond to properties in the target domain. The target domain *love* consists of ideas people have about love, such as the lovers, their relationship, and their goals. The source domain *journey* includes concepts about the journey, such as travelers, the vehicle, and their destination.³⁷ An example of a metaphorical expression of the *love as a journey* is "Our relationship has hit a dead-end street."³⁸

First, the study showed that Lee used nouns as metaphors more than any other part of speech. He tended to use inanimate nouns as sources and abstract nouns as targets, a usage which contributed to the communicative function of energizing thought. Lee also used inanimate noun sources for people targets, resulting in metaphors called anti-personifications. When he used animate sources, the targets were usually people.

Second, the grammatical analysis showed that Lee frequently used verb forms metaphorically. Most of these verbs were in the active voice. They either prolonged noun metaphors or personified abstract targets. For instance, Lee proclaimed, "The wolves and hyenas of hell outside the house were howling against the heavenly visitors inside the house."³⁹ *Were howling* prolongs the metaphorical expression *wolves and hyenas of hell*, which depicts the mob outside Lot's home.

Third, the grammatical analysis revealed the prevalent structures of Lee's metaphors. Instead of relying upon the simple *A is B* formula, Lee wove various parts of speech into complex patterns of metaphorical expressions. The basic pattern was the *B + qualifier* metaphor, which contributed to the formation of numerous other patterns. The prevalent qualifier was a prepositional phrase whose object named the target. For example, Lee stated, "No Gutenberg, no printing press to widen the blind alley of ignorance into endless

³⁶Gerard Steen, "Metaphor and Discourse: Towards a Linguistic Checklist for Metaphor Analysis," in *Researching and Applying Metaphor*, ed. Lynne Cameron and Graham Low (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81-104.

³⁷George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, 2d ed., ed. Andrew Ortony (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 203.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 206-7.

³⁹Robert G. Lee, "Fire Consuming Sodom and Gomorrah," 35.

highways of wisdom.”⁴⁰ *Ignorance*, the object in a prepositional phrase, is the target of the word the phrase describes: *alley*. Likewise, *wisdom* is the target of *endless highways*. Less frequently, he used other qualifiers to name the target domain or to prolong a noun metaphor. The qualifiers in these metaphorical structures aided in the identification of target domains in the conceptual analysis.

The conceptual analysis of Lee’s metaphors was based upon a prominent linguistic theory of metaphor. Lakoff believed that a metaphor is the mapping of correspondences from one domain of thought onto another domain. Examples of these metaphors include *life is a container*, *love is war*, *understanding is seeing*, and *ideas are people*. He claimed that conventional conceptual metaphors, the basis for everyday language and thought, provide the structure for novel metaphorical expressions.⁴¹ Lakoff and Turner asserted that novel expressions also could derive from unconventional conceptual metaphors, metaphors whose domains are not paired in everyday language. For instance, they wrote: “We could probably all find some way or other to make sense of ‘Death is a banana,’ that is, to understand the concept of death in terms of what we know about bananas.”⁴² Death and bananas do not belong to domains whose correspondences have been conventionalized.

Lee developed novel metaphors from both unconventional and conventional conceptual metaphors. Although he used unconventional metaphors, he seemed to favor conventional ones. His more prevalent conceptual metaphors were *people are plants*, *people are animals*, *people are machines*, *events are transactions*, *adversity is weather*, and *life is a journey*.

The communicative analysis of the use of metaphors in Lee’s judgment and encouragement sermons revealed three main functions of metaphor in his preaching. First, Lee used metaphors to embellish, giving credence to the claim that homileticians traditionally have treated metaphor as mere ornament. Lee drew the ornamental metaphors from unconventional metaphors identified in the conceptual analysis, as in the following:

Wonderful are the realities of transformation made vivid before us by these words. But these word[s] are just a few trees from the forests of God’s truth; just a few gorgeous blossoms from the garden of his promises; just a few drops from the inexhaustible fountain of his wisdom; just a few melodies from his harp of a thousand strings vibrant with the consolations of his grace; just a few cups filled from the ocean of his prophecies; just a few gleams from the starry sky of his mercy; just a few cargoes from the ships anchored in the harbor his love.⁴³

⁴⁰Robert G. Lee, “Christ’s Constant Companionship,” in *Seven Splendors and Other Messages* (Orlando: Christ for the World, 1974), 101.

⁴¹Lakoff, “Contemporary Theory,” 210.

⁴²George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 50.

⁴³Robert G. Lee, “Worms and Threshing Instruments,” in *Pulpit Pleadings* (Nashville: Broadman, 1948), 115.

In this passage, Lee created seven ornate metaphorical expressions. Viewing words as trees or describing truth as forests does not give a better understanding of words or truth. The combination of these two metaphors communicates one idea: a small quantity. The other six metaphorical expressions have the same effect.

Second, Lee used metaphors to contribute to the aesthetics of the sermon. He achieved this function in a variety of ways. For instance, he used metaphors as motifs and leitmotifs in communicating themes. Lee drew these metaphors from conventional conceptual metaphors, a mapping of correspondences present in everyday language and thought. Unfortunately, his motifs and leitmotifs did not shed light upon theological concepts. Other methods of achieving aesthetics included restatement of ideas through series of metaphors. Lee also used various grammatical structures to contribute to clarity, an aesthetic quality.

Third, Lee energized thought with metaphors. He enlivened the new meaning with vivid metaphorical expressions consisting of concrete sources and active verbs. His concrete sources, especially animals, contributed to energy by prompting the audience to evaluate the target. For example, Lee painted an evaluative picture of Jezebel: “Most of which is bad in all evil women found expression through this painted viper of Israel. . . . She was the beautiful adder coiled upon the throne of the nation.”⁴⁴ He also described her as “the polluted reservoir from which the streams of his [Ahab’s] own iniquity found mighty increase.”⁴⁵ Lee pictured Abah as “the foul human toad who squatted befoulingly on the throne of the nation.”⁴⁶ In these metaphorical expressions, the numerous correspondences between two domains of thought involved in conceptual metaphors led to a richness of new meaning. Finally, Lee’s metaphors brought the audience’s emotions, their experiences, and the biblical text to bear upon their contemporary situation and thoughts.

The aforementioned summary of the analyses accounted for Lee’s tendencies in his use of metaphors. Taken together, the analyses extended the theory of metaphor in preaching. First, the analysis showed that a study of metaphors in sermons can contribute to linguistic metaphor theory. For instance, the conceptual analysis led to the recognition of a conceptual metaphor conventionalized by the Christian community: *events are transactions*. Lakoff’s theory held that some metaphors can be conventionalized in some sub-communities and not in the larger community. Lakoff, however, did not include *events are transactions* among his examples.

Although Lee formed intentional metaphors from this conceptual metaphor in only one of the sermons studied, he drew from it the controlling metaphor of his most famous sermon, *Pay-Day—Someday*. Throughout this sermon, Lee used the title as a transition device between the movements of the sermon. The metaphor called to mind numerous

⁴⁴Lee, *Pay-Day—Someday*, 3.

⁴⁵Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶Ibid., 4.

correspondences: God as controller of the funds, people as the recipients of the funds, death as wages, eternal life as a reward, and people's lives as financial books.

The study also extended metaphor theory with the analysis of a different genre of metaphors than linguists usually analyze. Everyday language and novel expressions in poetry usually are the focus of linguistic studies. In contrast, the loci of Lee's metaphors are sermons. They are rhetoric artifacts unlike transcripts of dialogue or selections from literature. Sermons reflect an interchange between a preacher and a particular congregation. The preacher initiates the interchange for persuasive effect. In persuading his audience to make life-changing decisions, Lee included in his sermons a variety of novel mappings his listeners would understand. For instance, the path of the *life as a journey* metaphor would correspond to a lifestyle of sin or righteousness, and the destination would be heaven or hell. The Christian community also can understand the mapping of the mind as Satan's incubator in the following expression perhaps using mappings from *people are machines* and *ideas are children*: "But we know enough to say that some of the foulest plots that have been hatched out of Satan's incubator were hatched out of eggs placed therein by women's hands."⁴⁷

Second, the analysis showed that the application of Lakoff's linguistic theory of metaphor to the analysis of sermons can place the traditional homiletical perspectives of metaphor in a different light. For instance, the analysis yielded a better understanding of the ornamental use of metaphor in relation to conceptual metaphors. Lee's ornamental metaphors tended to be based upon unconventional conceptual metaphors. When Lee used these unconventional metaphors that incorporate correspondences uncharacteristic in everyday language, the apparent result was poetic effect rather than persuasive effect. Lee, however, often used these unconventional metaphors in clusters or series, thereby contributing to persuasion through repetition.

The analysis also showed that Lee used conventional conceptual metaphors for communicative functions more significant than embellishment. The study, therefore, extended homiletics in the consideration of metaphor as more than ornament. Homileticians already had identified aspects of these communicative functions. The analysis, however, revealed the manner in which the conceptual nature of metaphors achieved these functions.

For example, homileticians spoke of ways in which metaphor can energize thought. The analysis of Lee's conventional metaphors not only confirmed this function but also demonstrated how the conceptual structuring of metaphors energizes thought. For instance, the mapping of correspondences inherent in conceptual metaphor prompts the audience to map the appropriate correspondences, in effect prompting or stirring the imagination. The analysis also demonstrated how the conceptual nature of metaphor contributes to the creation of new meaning. Conventional conceptual metaphors inspire the audience to interpret a term or situation of one domain by mapping onto it the appropriate correspondences of another domain of experience.

⁴⁷Ibid., 12.

In addition to extending metaphor theory in homiletics, the analysis revealed the need for future studies in metaphor and its relation to preaching. The methodology needs to be refined at the point of identifying dead and/or conceptual metaphors. The procedure for identifying dead metaphors should allow a metaphor's context in a sermon to be considered in determining the metaphor's status. For instance, the use of a dead metaphor with other metaphoric language enlivens an otherwise dead metaphor. Likewise, further investigation should lead to a clear method of identifying the domains of metaphor targets and sources in order to name the conceptual metaphor.

Finally, the content analysis revealed the need for future study regarding audience analysis and metaphor. Homiletics has been concerned with the effect of linguistic metaphor in rhetoric, not with the interaction of the person and metaphor as in contemporary metaphor theory. One objective of future research, therefore, would be to develop a method of identifying the conceptual metaphors of an audience, those metaphors by which they think and live. With knowledge of these conceptual metaphors, the preacher can work to give listeners new pictures of the great truths of Scripture.

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INVITATIONS WITH INTEGRITY

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I am concerned about a dear friend. God has greatly used this proven friend not only in my life but also in the lives of countless others. This seasoned ally has been an incredible blessing and vehicle for multitudes to experience comfort, freedom, forgiveness, and untold joy. Although once a very familiar mainstay in evangelical circles, over time this friend has become the victim of misunderstanding, abuse, neglect, ridicule, scorn, slander and now near abandonment. This familiar friend is at risk of being portrayed at the least as a marginalized relic or at the worst a dangerous charlatan. I am concerned about the current state of the public invitation.

One's integrity is crucial. To have your integrity questioned is far more serious than having one question your competency or skills. There is a serious challenge today concerning the very integrity of the public invitation. I would have to agree with those that would charge that the public invitation sometimes has been abused or mishandled. Most preachers would support a move to insure that invitations are better prepared and extended with more clarity and integrity. This article addresses a more serious issue – the very integrity the public invitation as well as the integrity of those that would extend such, in any form whatsoever is at stake. It is this issue which we need to examine.

I came to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in response to a public evangelistic invitation. At the age of sixteen, I attended a Billy Graham movie at a local theatre on a date with my girlfriend. For me it was just another Friday night at the movies. I did not realize we were attending a religious film or I probably would not have attended. That movie exposed me to the awareness that although I was a church member, I did not have a relationship with Christ. I was deeply moved and convicted of my sin and need for forgiveness. I understood that I needed Christ's forgiveness and salvation. Sitting in my seat, watching the final scenes of the film, I purposed that I would commit my life to Christ someday.

At the conclusion of that movie, a man gave an appeal for those who wished to make a commitment to Christ to come to the front of the theater and speak with a counselor. Prior to that night, I was unaware of a need to make such a commitment. I had not gone to the movie that night with any intention of coming to Christ. No Christians had been talking with me about my need for Christ. I had never been exposed to the message of the gospel. I had never been part of hearing a public evangelistic invitation. He quoted a scriptural invitation that night as he paraphrased an Old Testament reference that asked, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him" (1 Kings 18:21, NASB). As the challenge was given, I realized my need to respond to the invitation and to make a commitment to Christ. I went to the front of the theater and a

trained counselor assisted me in making my commitment to Christ. The gospel was made clear, I freely acknowledged my need for Christ, and God wondrously saved me. From personal experience, I bear witness of the legitimate place of extending public evangelistic invitations.

Tragically, the public invitation is in trouble. No longer is the invitation an almost universal part of evangelical worship. What once was a tool that was implemented for the evangelization of the masses is now a mere shadow of the past. Even churches that continue the practice of extending public invitations, often do so with little precision or purpose. How could the once mighty and respected practice have drifted so far?

Criticisms of the public invitation move along four levels. First, some charge that the public invitation is without scriptural warrant. Second, it is alleged that the public invitation is a modern invention. Third, some contend that the call for a public response adds man's efforts to salvation coming solely by the grace of God. Still others have eliminated the public proclamation of the gospel with a public invitation in favor of an exclusive support of relational evangelism.

In their current form, evangelistic invitations are of relatively recent origin, but the spirit and principle of the public evangelistic invitation is evident in the Bible. There are Old Testament examples. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he discovered the people giving themselves over to idolatry and worshipping the golden calf, and he confronted the people by asking "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me!" (Ex. 32:26, KJV). That was a clear call to his people to make a public declaration and to take a public stand for the Lord. After Moses' death, Joshua was commanded to lead the nation of Israel. The people lapsed into idolatry. Toward the end of Joshua's life he called all the tribes together and said, ". . . choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15, KJV). That, too, was a call for a public commitment of loyalty to God.

Centuries later idolatry again was the issue. This time Elijah was God's chosen instrument. Standing on Mount Carmel it is recorded: "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, 'How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him'" (1 Kings 18:21, KJV). This was a clear and powerful call to public commitment and identification as a follower of God. In Ezra 10:5, this great scribe called upon his contemporaries to swear publicly that they would carry out the principles of his reform. Nehemiah's book also indicates that the Jewish leaders were required to commit themselves to a covenant of loyalty to the Lord after their revival (Neh. 9:39). Hosea urged the people to return to the Lord and receive his forgiveness (Hos. 14:2). Throughout the Old Testament, one sees a clear picture of the man of God publicly calling people to make a public commitment to the Lord.

The New Testament records leaders of the early church offering an appeal to persons and urging them to decide publicly for Christ. The apostle Paul announced to the church at Corinth that Christians have been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). This ministry charges the believer with the task of seeking to join together sinful man and holy God. Further, this ministry compels the Christian to urge the hearer to decide for

Christ. The gospel is not to be presented in a casual, perfunctory manner, but with a sense of urgency, appeal, and persuasion (2 Cor. 5:11), even as Paul did when he reasoned and persuaded the people of Ephesus to whom he preached (Acts 19:8), and as Jesus charged his disciples to do (Lk. 14:23). This urging from the human instrument is to be done while relying on the Spirit of God. The evangelist must do his best to urge men and women to come to Christ, but there also must be a dependence upon the Holy Spirit to convict and draw them to Christ (Jn. 16:8).

Jesus made numerous appeals for people to decide publicly for Him. The launching of His ministry included public proclamation of the gospel and a public call to repentance (Mt. 4:17). When he called Andrew and John, his first disciples, He extended a public appeal to follow Him (Mt. 4:19), as He did with the woman of Sychar (Jn. 4:4-42), Philip (Jn. 1:43), Matthew (Lk. 5:27), the rich, young ruler (Lk. 18:18-34), and Zaccheus (Lk. 19:1-10). There are also general appeals that Jesus gave in group settings (Mt. 11:28, 29; Jn. 7:37, 38). The Lord Jesus Christ gave us a personal example in His extension of public invitations to people to follow Him as Lord and Savior.

There are other New Testament examples of preachers who called for a public decision. Aside from Jesus, the most outstanding example is John the Baptist. John came preaching a message of repentance (Lk. 3:23), but the chief characteristic of his ministry was baptizing the people who responded to his message (Jn. 1:28). His ministry, preaching, and appeal were public, and those who responded to his appeal did so publicly.

Other followers of Jesus also extended public invitations. Andrew sought out his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus (Jn. 1:42). After he went on to become a powerful spokesman for our Lord, Peter called for an immediate, public commitment to Christ in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:39-40), and in his preaching to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:28-48). Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch and those in his caravan as they traveled along a desert road (Acts 8:26-38). The public proclamation of the gospel was basic to the ministry of the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:1-11; 1 Thess. 1:5-11). His preaching and appeals for Christ were often in a public arena, usually in the setting of the Jewish synagogues. This was his practice in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-48), in Iconium (Acts 14:1-7), in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4), in Berea (Acts 17:10-12), in Corinth (Acts 18:1-4), and in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10). Paul and Silas challenged the jailer at Philippi to place his faith in Christ amid the public spectacle of a crowded jail cell (Acts 16:25-31). The Bible concludes with an invitation to come to Christ (Rev. 22:17). Throughout the New Testament we discover ample evidence for the practice of public proclamation of the gospel, with an appeal for a public declaration of faith in Christ.

From an examination of Scripture, one discovers the clear basis for public evangelistic invitations. When the preacher of the gospel makes an appeal for people to decide openly for Christ, he is on solid biblical ground. As the minister of the gospel applies biblical principles of public evangelistic invitations, he can do so with the blessing of heaven.

Critics of the public invitation make the claim that the practice started with Charles G. Finney (1792-1875). Although it is true that Finney's "new measures" popularized the

practice,¹ public evangelistic invitations can be traced back centuries before Finney. R. Alan Streett argues that the assertion that public invitations began with Finney are “historically incorrect,” because “the first-century preachers of the gospel called on sinners to present themselves publicly as candidates for repentance, faith and baptism.”² These public calls for commitment virtually ceased in the church when, through the efforts of the Emperor Constantine and later Theodosius, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. With the inception of the state church, all citizens of Rome, whether believers or not, were swept into the church and proclaimed to be Christians. Adults and infants alike were baptized as they became members of the church. As these infants grew, the need for adult baptism diminished, and the practice of the public invitation declined.³

The early Anabaptists helped bring a return to the use of the invitation. They opposed the Roman Catholic Church on several issues, including infant baptism. They were faithful in calling for repentance of sins, faith in Christ, and the outward sign of believer’s baptism.⁴

The Anabaptists were opposed by both Catholics and Protestants. This opposition came due to the fact that while the Reformers proclaimed the message of salvation by grace through faith and believed in the final authority of Scripture, they opposed believer’s baptism, believing it to be an addition to faith and, therefore, unbiblical.

The Separatists John Smyth and Thomas Helwys broke away from the Church of England and began practicing believer’s baptism by 1609. They believed that people must repent and believe on Christ in order to be saved. They invited people to confess Christ publicly through believer’s baptism. John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, was a Separatist and later a Baptist. He advocated a call for a public profession of faith in Christ. One Separatist congregation was the Pilgrims on board the Mayflower who came to America in 1620, seeking religious and political liberty.⁵

The eighteenth century saw unusually gifted and anointed preachers who employed a variety of public invitations to come to Christ. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield would conclude their sermons with an appeal for seekers to meet with them following the service to seek private spiritual guidance. This was the standard invitational model of the eighteenth century. Another of their contemporaries, John Wesley, would also invite seekers to come forward and sit at the “Anxious Seat” where they would receive spiritual counsel. This occurred some fifty years before Finney, whom critics of the invitation often

¹ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003 rep. ed.), 176.

² R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 81

³ Ibid., 81.

⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁵ Ibid., 89.

cite as the inventor of the modern altar call for the invitation.⁶ Noted historian Leon McBeth, citing Steve O’Kelly, observes that Separate Baptists in the southern United States are known to have extended invitations for people to come to the front of the service with the singing of a hymn to make immediate commitments to Christ as early as 1758.⁷ In 1799, at a Methodist camp meeting in Red River, Kentucky, an altar was erected in front of the pulpit where seekers might come for prayer and instruction. So popular were these altars that they became a permanent fixture in many Methodist churches.⁸

The nineteenth century saw the ministry of Charles G. Finney popularize the modern pattern of coming to the front of the service at the time of invitation to commit to Christ.⁹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon employed a type of invitation similar to the eighteenth century model, due in part to the physical limitations of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.¹⁰ Although Finney certainly is credited with the paradigm with which we are now familiar, the spirit and practice of public invitations is well documented in church history.

What about the charge that calling for a response in a public invitation is adding human means to the grace of God? In extending a public invitation, the preacher should make every effort to separate the need for an inner decision to the call for an external expression. A person is justified solely by the grace of God and apart from human effort (Rom. 4:1-5). The Apostle Paul argued to the Romans that we are right with God based on the inward condition of our heart (Rom. 4:29). And yet, the one who has a genuine inner relationship of the heart will validate it in an external expression. After Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, when the people asked, “What shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . .” (Acts 2:37-38, NASB). In the tenth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul describes the relationship between inner decision and external expression: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Rom. 10:9-10, NIV). Outward expression is to be evidence of inner grace. To claim inner grace without external expression is to cheapen the gospel of grace. The concept of cheap grace or “easy believism” is often made by those that are of the Reformed tradition. Truly, one is saved not by walking an aisle, raising a hand or praying a prayer. One is saved by committing oneself to Him as Savior and Lord.

⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁷ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage, Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 231.

⁸ Henry B. McLendon, “The Mourner’s Bench” (ThD dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1902), 10.

⁹ David L. Larsen, *The Evangelism Mandate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 64.

¹⁰ Streett, 97.

However, to question the integrity of the public invitation as a means of external expression is to eliminate a legitimate and biblical means of external expression.

Others have abandoned the practice of extending a public invitation in favor of relational evangelism. The preference for relational witness has become an exclusive preference: relational evangelism as the only means of proper witness. Adherents of this position do not merely prefer relational evangelism, they see it as the only legitimate way to evangelize. They do more than merely minimize the legitimacy of the public invitation; they question its very integrity. This view would disparage those that would extend the public invitation as well as those who would practice direct conversational evangelism with a casual acquaintance or a stranger. Although personal relationships can be a valid, perhaps even the preferred means of presenting the gospel, should it be the exclusive approach? It was not the exclusive approach of Jesus Christ, who witnessed to individuals after a brief introduction (John 3:1-21; 4:1-26), as well as to the masses (John 7:37-38).

I am passionate about the public invitation. God used it the night I came to faith in Christ. I am also passionate in my desire to see it implemented with clarity and integrity. It is shameful to extend the invitation in an attempt to manipulate or coerce. I resent coercion and manipulation in any context, particularly in the setting of a public invitation. At the other extreme is the practice of extending the invitation in a passionless and perfunctory manner. To extend an invitation in a casual, unprepared, and careless manner is another type of abusing the invitation. An invitation to Christ should be done with urgency, passion, and even persuasion. Paul told the Corinthians, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences ... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:11, 5:20, NASB).

The church needs a revitalized view and practice of the public evangelistic invitation. We do not need to implement a practice that is dishonoring to God. Nor do we need our implementation or methodology to dishonor the Lord. It is my contention that we need to recognize that the public evangelistic invitation is a tool of great integrity, biblically and historically. Further, when it is implemented properly, its integrity is maintained through the character and methodology of the minister.

May the critics refine our methods and our motives. May God revitalize our passion and our practice. May we stand to proclaim the gospel as God’s gracious gift of redemption and salvation, and may God entreat people through us, as we beg the multitudes to be reconciled to God.

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SECTION 3

EXCELLENCE IN PREACHING

“PREACH THE WORD; BE PREPARED IN SEASON
AND OUT OF SEASON; CORRECT, REBUKE AND
ENCOURAGE—WITH GREAT PATIENCE AND
CAREFUL INSTRUCTION.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:2

THE RESURRECTION

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8

DR. JERRY VINES

Dr. Vines is a former President of the SBC who is best known for his long pastorate at First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 15 in your Bible as I preach today on the subject of the gospel of Jesus. These are the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 beginning with verse one, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

In one sense of the word, you could say that Paul was a *full gospel* preacher. About the closest we find to that terminology is in Romans 15, verse 29 where he said, “I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” Also, he said earlier in that chapter in verse 19, “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Therefore, in a real sense Paul could be described as a *full gospel* preacher. I understand that there is some redundancy in that phrase because it if is the *gospel* it is *full*, and if it is not *full* it is not the *gospel*. In the sense that Paul gave the end time message of the total revelation of the truth, of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the Lord Jesus, Paul indeed was a *full gospel* preacher. I hope that is true of you who preach and all of you who witness as well, in the sense that you are faithful to give *fully* the message as God has revealed it to us in His Word. Preachers today encounter two opposite pressures when it comes to matters of the gospel. On the one hand there are those who indicate that the gospel is not full enough. They believe that you have to add to the gospel. They contend that you have to put something else with the gospel to give it enough power. As a result we have a signs and wonders and miracles movement today. Such a movement says that there must be demonstration of the miraculous in order to create the necessary atmosphere of power for the gospel. I would remind you that in the New Testament more is said about the end times and the antichrist in the realm of signs, wonders, and miracles than in terms of true believers.

But those who say the gospel is not full enough would give us a kind of an “enriched bread gospel.” “It’s all you ever wanted in a gospel and more!” Yet Paul said in Romans chapter one verse 16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it (that is, the gospel) is the power of God.” So on the one hand we have those who say the gospel is not full enough. On the other hand we have those today who say the gospel is too full. They espouse that modern congregations and the culture in which we live are not able to receive

the entire message of the gospel. Therefore, you have to leave out some of the sterner elements of the gospel lest you offend your listeners and drive them away. You don't give them the whole message. The gospel is too full so you withhold part of the gospel. This is what I would call today a "gospel lite." It is the gospel of the eight commandments and you get to pick them. It is the gospel of the eight percent tithe. It is the gospel of the 45 minute service and 15 minute sermon. It's all you've ever wanted in a gospel and less! It is "gospel lite." But I would remind you that Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it (the gospel) is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." From a pragmatic standpoint, what is the difference between the liberal who does not believe the essentials of the gospel and as a result does not preach them, and the conservative who says he does believe the essentials of the gospel but does not preach them, lest he causes offense? Paul and you and I should be *full gospel* preachers. We should be faithful to give to our culture today the entire revelation of the gospel as God has given it to us in the Bible. Someone said, "He who would always be relevant must speak on things eternal." Someone else said, "He who marries the spirit of the age is destined to be a widower in the next." And so, you see, we must not be unfaithful. We must give the *full gospel*. As revealed in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul was faithful to do that.

He said in verse three, "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received." And then with that little connecting conjunction *for* that appears in the King James Version he shared four simple statements that summarize the two basic provisions of God's Good News, God's gospel, that solve the two basic problems of mankind. The first is the problem of sin. God's provision for sin is the death and the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's God's provision for the sin problem. Christ died to pay for our sins. He was buried to put away our sins. The second problem is the problem of death. What is God's provision for the problem of death? Paul continued, "That He was buried and that He rose again the third day and that He was seen." God's provision for the death problem is the resurrection and the appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's look at this provision now for the death problem. Paul said in verse four, "Christ rose again." Christ rose again to conquer death. Christ rose again. This is the same Jesus Who was virgin born, Who lived a sinless life, Who died an atoning death, Who was buried in that tomb. The Bible says that this same Jesus rose again.

Now the resurrection of Jesus Christ does many things. One of the things that it does is vindicates the words of Jesus. Jesus specifically said that He would come back from the dead. It seems as if it just went over the heads of the disciples every time He told them. It seems as if they just totally missed it although several times Jesus specifically predicted that He would die and be buried and that He would be raised again from the dead. Jesus said some absolutely amazing things in His ministry. For instance, can you picture Jesus standing there in the garb of a Galilean peasant and saying that He always existed? This was an astounding statement. And could you imagine that here stands Jesus Christ and He claims that He has the power to forgive sin? Astounding! Or think about when Jesus said that one day He would judge the world. An astonishing statement! But the most astounding, astonishing of all the statements Jesus ever made is the statement that He would die, He would be buried, and three days later He would come back from the dead. Now ladies and gentlemen, either Jesus did or He did not. Either Jesus did what He said He would do or He

did not. Either Jesus is alive today or He is not. The gospel is the Good News that He died, He was buried and He rose again just exactly as He said He would.

Now think with me a moment about this picture. Jesus has been buried now in that tomb. He has been in there for three days and three nights. Then up there in heaven the Father looks at the earthquake angel and He says, "Earthquake angel, I want you to go down to the tomb of Jesus and I want you to roll away the stone." And about that time there was a commotion in the lower parts of the earth. As Jesus goes walking through hell and Jesus says, "Three days from now I'm coming out of here." And Death, the old grim reaper, stands at the entrance of the tomb and he says, "I've got the keys of death. Millions have come into my dungeon and none have returned." Yet on that third morning the Lord Jesus Christ comes to old Death and says, "Give Me the keys. I was alive, I died, and I am alive forevermore." And so heaven's earthquake angels came and that old tomb began to shake. And those soldiers began to rattle and that stone began to roll and rolled over against the tree and says, "He's alive!" And the branches of the tree waved at the birds and says, "He is alive!" And the birds flew up to the clouds and said, "He is alive!" And the clouds flowed through the gates of heaven and said, "He is alive!" And the angels shouted up and down the streets of gold and said, "He is alive!" "Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Savior waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!"

You see Jesus kept His word! Houdini was a great escape artist of another day. When Houdini died he said to his wife before his death that he would leave a sign, which was a secret word, that would let her know he was making contact with her from the other world. Every year on the occasion of his birthday, she burned the candle and she waited for the secret word. But the word never came because Houdini could not keep his word. Jesus said to his disciples, "They'll put Me to death. They'll bury Me. Three days later I'll come back from the dead." Jesus, ladies and gentlemen, kept His word!

Now the tense of the words changes in the passage. Up until this point the words have been in aorist tense. Christ died, *apethanen*, aorist tense; He was buried, aorist tense. But when it says He rose again, the tense changes to the perfect tense. This tense refers to something that took place in the past which has present, continuing, abiding results. Do you know what this means? This means three days after Jesus was buried, He rose again. Three days later He was alive. But it also means three months later Jesus Christ was alive. It means three years later Jesus Christ was alive. It means 3,000 years later Jesus Christ will still be alive. He rose again 2,000 years ago, and He continues to live today. You and I serve a living Savior. He's real to me. Is Jesus real to you? Jesus Christ is more real to me than any of you who are in this place this morning. He's real to me! He's real to me! My blessed Lord is real to me! He is a living, bright reality. Oh, yes, my living Lord is real to me! He's vindicated His word. He said he would come back from the dead.

But that's not all. **Jesus not only vindicated His word, but also He validated His work.** Because, you see, the work of the cross is validated by the resurrection. The resurrection is God's receipt that He has accepted the work of His Son on the cross of Calvary. The great question is, "Was the work of Christ on Calvary sufficient? Did He indeed pay the price of the sins of the world?" This is an important question. Since it can't be done hastily there is a three day examination period. The angels come and they observe

the sacrifice of Christ. They pronounce it sufficient and adequate. The saints of old come, examine the sacrifice of Christ, and they announce it to be adequate. The Father comes and examines the work of Christ on the cross and He pronounces it adequate. "Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph ov'r His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose!" He vindicates His word. He validates His work.

The resurrection is the central fact of human history. The resurrection is also the most astonishing fact of human history. The living Christ says to the tomb, "Prevent Me." He says to science, "Explain Me." He says to technology, "Duplicate me." He says to history, "Repeat me." He says to you and me, "Believe me, for whosoever shall believe that God raised Him from the dead has eternal life." Through resurrection, He conquers death. Now there's a big problem, isn't it? It is the problem of death. That is the problem that all of us face. Someone says that death is the subject that people spend an entire lifetime trying not to think about. Death, that final enemy, walks the corridors of our hospitals and lays its calling card at a baby's crib. And a mother's cry is heard. Death, the old grim reaper, points his scythe to a plane in the sky. It crashes and old death walks silently among the debris. Death is the old bully that taunts us. Max Lucado compares death to the old bully on the block of life. Death is that old bully, isn't it? Death is that old bully that taunts us on the playground, isn't it? Death is the one who accuses us and frightens us at every corner of life. Death is the one that shakes his fist at us and says, "I'm gonna get you. I'm gonna catch you sooner or later." And we do everything in our power to try to outrun old Death. We jog to keep us physically strong, to keep our cardiovascular system up to the proper levels. We eat proper food trying to prolong our lives. We go and take our physicals on a regular basis trying to outrun old Death. When you are a young man, you start in the race of life and you look way, way behind you and observe another runner is behind you. Yet you don't think a great deal about it because you are young, filled with energy, and running fast. But as you continue to run in life you begin to look back and notice that the runner is gaining on you. So you try to run a little bit faster, but every time you look back, you see that the runner is gaining on you. When you get older, you find that you can't run quite as fast as you used to run. You find yourself looking back more frequently. And you find that that runner, old Death, is gaining ground on you. The bully is catching up with you.

Have you ever had a bully come after you? I remember when I was younger, we had a bully at our school. He got mad at me for something one day. I don't remember what it was, but he shook his fist at me on the playground and said, "Vines, I'll get you down at the corner of the school when school is out." I dreaded it all day long. I knew that was the way I had to go home. I had to meet the bully on the corner beyond the school. After the final ring of the bell, I made my way home. As I was walking down the street, I looked down to the corner and there stood the old bully. My little heart began to leap up into my throat. I was so frightened. I was so afraid. As I got almost to the corner where the bully was, my good friend Donald, who was a mammoth of a boy, and later went on to play college football, came up beside me and said, "Vines, do you want somebody to walk down to the corner with you?" And I said, "Donald, I sure would like it if you would." Boy, I want you to know that we went down there where that old bully was and my friend Donald looked that bully in the eye and said, "You got anything you want to say to us?" I said, "Yeah, you

got anything you want to say to us?” And the old bully dropped his head and said, “Naw.” And my buddy Donald and I walked on home.

You see, ladies and gentlemen, death is the old bully of life and all of us have to face the bully sooner or later. But the Good News of the resurrection is that we have an Elder Brother named Jesus Who has already been that way. He has already stared down the old bully of death; therefore, you and I don’t have to be afraid of death anymore. “I won’t have to cross the Jordan alone. Jesus died all my sins to atone. When the darkness I see He’ll be waiting for me. I won’t have to cross the Jordan alone.” The gospel, the *full gospel*, is the Good News that He died, that He was buried and that He rose again the third day. He conquered death.

But then notice it also says, “And He was seen.” Just as the burial proves the crucifixion of Christ, the appearances prove the resurrection of Christ. There are approximately ten appearances of Christ as best I can tell in the New Testament. Paul gives six of them in this passage. There are several reasons for these appearances of our Lord after His resurrections. One is, of course, to validate the ministry of the apostles. That’s why in the first chapter of Acts, one of the specific requirements for being in the office of the apostle was that the person had been an eye witness of the resurrection of Jesus. That’s why in this restricted sense there are no apostles today, because there are no eye witnesses of the literal resurrection of Jesus. Not only does it validate the ministry of the apostles, but also it serves to authenticate for you and me the reality of the resurrection. Again in Acts, chapter one, it says, “He showed Himself alive by many infallible, unmistakable proofs.” These resurrection appearances proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ was indeed alive. They took place over a period of forty days. Sometimes He appeared in public settings. As you move down through these verses you read that He appeared publicly to the twelve on several occasions. You will also notice in this passage that he appeared to over 500 people at one time. Someone said, “Well, those people just had a hallucination. They just hallucinated and thought they saw Jesus.” Those who know anything about hallucinations know that people who have hallucinations are expecting to have them. They also know that hallucinations never occur to such large groups of people all at the same time. Yet over 500 people saw the living Lord Jesus Christ, and they become the nucleus of the early church. These were individuals who were literally set on fire by the news of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrection was the central part of the preaching of the early disciples. These men were willing to die for their testimony that Jesus Christ was really alive. You see, friends, the living Christ changes lives. People are never again the same after they meet the living Christ.

Another one of the greatest proofs of the resurrection of Jesus is the existence of the early church. The twelve saw Him publicly; over 500 saw Him publicly. He also appeared privately on several occasions. Paul mentioned some of those here. He mentioned in verse five that He was seen by Cephas, Simon Peter. Don’t you love Simon Peter? He’s one of my favorite characters in the Bible. You know, Simon Peter suffered from “hoof and mouth disease.” Every time he opened his mouth he exchanged feet. He was always putting his foot in his mouth. You know what I mean? He was the guy who got out there the night there was a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came walking on the water. And old Simon Peter said, “Lord, let me come and see You out there on the water.” And Jesus said,

“Come.” By the way, do you want to know how to walk on water? Get permission from Jesus. If He doesn’t give you permission you probably shouldn’t try it. But old Simon Peter went scrambling over the side of the boat and the disciples were thinking, “Can you believe that? This takes the cake. He’s done some dumb stuff, but this is the dumbest of them all.” After he takes off, he gets his eyes on the waves instead of on the Lord. He gets his eyes on the storm instead of on Jesus and he begins to sink. He then prays one of the shortest prayers in the Bible, “Lord, save me.” You notice that when you’re in trouble, you cut out those fancy church prayers. He didn’t have time for one of those, “Oh, Thou great God of heaven and earth...” He simply cried out, “Lord, save me!” Simon boasted, “Lord, I don’t know about this other crowd. I wouldn’t be surprised if they all deny you, but you can count on me, Lord. You can depend on me, Jesus.” But he got by the devil’s fire that night. While the devil’s little disputers began to nip at him, before you know it, it was over. Three times he denied he even knew the Lord. Oh, God, help us when we deny our Lord by lip or by life. And then the Bible says, “The Lord looked at Simon Peter (and it broke his heart) and Simon went out and wept bitterly.” We are told that in Jerusalem from then on, every time Peter walked the streets of Jerusalem, people would crow like a rooster and he would burst into tears. But now Jesus was alive. He said to those disciples, “Go tell my disciples and Peter.” The Lord had a private meeting with Simon Peter. The next thing you see is Simon Peter on the day of Pentecost. Now rather than facing one little hand maiden, he faces thousands to whom he courageously preaches the gospel. He boldly charges them with the death of the Son of God in the book of Acts, chapters two and three. What made the difference? These words, “And He was seen of Peter.” Seeing Jesus changes lives.

But that’s not all. It says He was also seen of James, the half brother of Jesus. He was one of the family members that didn’t believe in Jesus. They were embarrassed by Jesus. They came to get Him one time because they thought He had gone crazy. They were so embarrassed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, when you thumb through the pages of the New Testament, you come to the book of James which was written by none other than the half brother of our Lord. James moved from unbelief to belief. He moved from embarrassment to the enthronement of Jesus Christ. What made the difference in James? These words, “He was seen of James.” You see, an experience with the living Jesus always changes your life. You are never the same after you meet Jesus.

Paul said that He was seen publicly. He was seen privately as well. Paul also said, “He was seen by me personally.” Look at verse eight. Paul said, “And last of all He was seen by me personally.” As one born out of due season, *ektroma*, a word that was used in those days for an abortion. Paul said, “I was an abortion.” He said, “I was like a dead fetus.” Paul was saying, “My religion left me a dead fetus on the Damascus Road.” That’s what he said religion did for him. It left him a dead man. Yet on that Damascus road the apostle Paul said that he saw a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun and when it struck him, it caused him to fall into the dust under conviction. Then he heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecute thou Me?” And he said, “Who art Thou, Lord?” He then got the shock of his life, because the voice said, “I am Jesus Whom thou persecute.” He thought Jesus was dead and gone. He made the astonishing discovery that Jesus Christ was eternally alive. And he said, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?” He was an absolutely changed man.

By the way, I think those two questions Saul asked on this occasion are the two great questions of every Christian: “Who art Thou Lord; that is, Who is Jesus, and what would You have me to do?” As a believer, those are the two big questions in life to ask the living Lord Jesus. You will spend the rest of your life finding the answers to those questions: Who are you, Jesus, and Jesus, what do You want me to do? When you find the answers to those two questions, you’ll find an effective and fruitful Christian life. Jesus found Paul dead and left him alive.

Several months ago you remember reading in the newspaper and seeing on television the tragic story of the mass suicide of the Heaven’s Gate cult. Thirty-nine people in California committed suicide. They dressed themselves in black and put on brand new Nike shoes. Their bodies, all except for the last two individuals who completed the process for everyone else, were covered with purple cloth. They were followers of a man named Marshall Applewhite. He had an interesting life. He had problems with homosexuality. He had been a professor at several schools. He had been in a psychiatric hospital for a period of time where he met the woman for whom he left his family. They established a cult, the Heaven’s Gate cult. It was founded upon a mixture of obscure passages in the Bible and New Age philosophy. Thirty-eight people followed him in suicide. He had a “gospel.” Applewhite had a “gospel.” He had an “answer” for the sin problem. His “answer” for the sin problem was castration. He had an “answer” for the death problem. His “answer” for the death problem was suicide. He had a “gospel of salvation.” His “gospel of salvation” was wrapped up in a theory about a spaceship hidden behind the Hale-Bopp comet. Now, what is a comet? A comet is just a ball of liquid gas and dirt. Applewhite had a “gospel of salvation” wrapped up in a dirty snowball. Applewhite found people alive and left them dead. Jesus finds people dead and He leaves them alive.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a resurrection gospel that brings us back to life from the deadness of our sin. We have a gospel that promises us eternal life beyond the reality of our death. Everybody who meets Jesus is changed for the better. I was a nine year old boy sitting on the second row in a church service on a Sunday night. Our preacher was preaching and I don’t remember a thing in the world he said. But I do remember that the lights from the building reflected off his glasses while tears rolled down his cheeks as he faithfully preached the gospel of Christ. That night while I was sitting there as a nine year old boy, Someone came walking in that building with a crown on His head and a cross on His back. He stopped right at my pew and said to me, “Young man, what can I do for you?” I said, “Oh, Sir, do for me that which I cannot do for myself.” Then I went forward and I gave my hand to the preacher and my heart to Jesus. I walked out of that building that night a changed little boy. When I walked out of that building the stars all lined up in celebration march. The branches of the trees were waving their hands as a welcome as I walked out. When I walked out I could have well been singing, “Because He lives I can face tomorrow. Because He lives all fear is gone because I know, I know He holds the future.” Ladies and gentlemen, that’s the Good News we have to preach. It is the Good News of the crucifixion, that Christ died and He was buried. It is the Good News of the resurrection. He arose again, and He was seen, and He will still be seen to this very day. What a gospel! I’m a *full gospel* preacher and I hope you are, too!

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MISSION?

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WHAT HAPPENS TO PERSONS WHO NEVER HEAR THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST? EPHESIANS 1:4-6

DR. NELSON PRICE

Dr. Nelson Price served as pastor of Oak Park Baptist Church in New Orleans, but is most associated with his long pastorate at Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, GA. He played a key role in the creation of the Nelson Price Drug Rehabilitation Center in association with the Georgia Baptist Convention, as well as the Nelson Price Center for Urban Missions and the Nelson Price Chair of Leadership at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Jesus Christ is living proof that God loves you and the whole world. Jesus, Himself said, “God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son.” God is depicted as taking the initiative in the act of redemption. Man is represented as “receiving” the act of God.

The motivating force behind the work of the Father on our behalf is love. It was the eternal love of God that drew salvation’s plan; and His beloved Son that brought it down to man. The text says, “He has chosen us . . . predestined us . . . made us acceptable in the Beloved.”

“He has chosen us.” “Chosen” translated the Greek word *exelaxato*, meaning “picked out for Himself,” it can be translated “elected.” A choice is an expression of the will. The act of election is likewise an act of the will. The doctrine of election speaks of God’s expressed will. God made His choice “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4) “according to the council of His will” (Eph 1:11).

“Foundation” translated the Greek word *kataboles*, meaning the departing of the world. Literally, “the flinging or casting down” of the world. The word for “world” is *kosmos*. It is said that God chose us before we came into the world because if He had waited He wouldn’t have wanted us. However, God loved us and had his heart set upon us long before there was a world or a universe. There has never been a time when we were not His choice. There has never been a time when we were not elected.

Before the dawn of creation the Tri-unity counseled together and made a decision. Before the foundation was laid for the Alps and Andes, before the North Star was placed in its orb, before the first flower bloomed in Eden, before the first lamb walked in the garden it was determined Jesus Christ was to be “the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.”

Election is not coercive, we may freely respond; but if God had not chosen us, we could not have chosen Him. He did not choose us because of our good, but so he through

us could do good. People are not lost because they are not elected. People are lost because Christ has been rejected by them. Basically, election means God has taken the initiative in His purpose to save man. Apart from that initiative no one can be saved. However, it does not imply fatalism. It does not indicate God's purpose to save as few but as many as possible, it must be understood in light of "whosoever believeth" (John 3:16), and the "whosoever will" (Romans 22:17). It always stems from God who is love and relates to man who is morally responsible.

This is in the Scriptures to show how we become Christians and enjoy the Christian blessings. It has reference to the sovereignty of God, and the majesty of God. It is of great importance from the standpoint of our understanding of the love of God. It is here we see the love of God at its highest.

"Predestined" translates the Greek word *proorizo*. It is a surveyor's term meaning to mark off the boundaries. Years ago surveyors marked off the boundaries of the state of Georgia. It was thus decided that persons living "in" that boundary would be Georgians. That was predetermined by them being "in" the boundary. Before the foundation of the universe the Trinity counseled together and marked off the boundary as being "in Jesus." It was predetermined that those who would freely receive Him as Savior would be "in Christ" and share His destiny—thus, a pre-determined destiny. God, in His sovereign will, decreed salvation is "in Christ." Human kind, in its free will, must decide to be "in Christ."

We have so much and know so much; but how about others in far away places like Zaire, Sri Lanka, and Guyana? What happens to those who never hear the name of Jesus: the Hottentot, Niue, and Laplander? What about those of previous generations who never heard the gospel?

There has always been and there is more evangelism than the world recognizes and reports. For example, after Christ's resurrection, a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit happened at the celebration of a feast called Pentecost. Acts 2:5-21 lists the languages of 18 different languages spoken there. Years before Alexander the Great laid siege to Jerusalem. The priest came out of the city to greet him with the Book of Daniel and convinced him Daniel wrote of him. Thereafter he carried a large contingency of Jews with him in his world conquest. They were scattered over most of the known world. They learned the languages of their adopted countries but returned to the land of their ancestors to celebrate Pentecost. Many of these were saved when they heard of the resurrection of Christ. Extra-Biblical sources tell of a great wave of evangelism that swept the world in the first century as these people carried the gospel back to their adopted lands.

A letter from Pliny the Elder to Emperor Trajan referred to the large number of believers throughout the area. Peter and Thaddaeus worked in Persia where King Agbar became a zealous follower of Christ and many people in his realm were converted. Pontius of Alexandria went to India in AD 190 where he found many Christians resulting from the work of Matthew in that region. In the sixth century the Nestorians went to China as evangelists. For years there were more believers than nonbelievers in China. This continued to be true until the emergence of the Khans. Globally our Lord has been at work throughout the ages. He is presently.

Traditional mission fields are experiencing marvelous growth. These are countries where there are between 15,000 and 100,000 converts a year with 75 to 200 new churches being started a year. Some of these are in Korea, the Philippines, India, Mexico, and Brazil. Some traditional mission fields in which there is great revival going on are Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Uganda. There are people groups being reached as never before in non-traditional mission areas. In Cambodia large numbers are being saved and churches started.

- In one people group in India amid great persecution 400 new churches were started last year.
- In China similar growth is being experienced among certain people groups.
- In North Africa there is a house church in every town and village.
- In Kazakhstan there is a bright movement of God in spite of efforts to stifle and disrupt the work.

In the Middle East, in Iran particularly, there is a great movement of the spirit currently. This is a sampling of what the Lord is doing all over the world which He loves.

Today as in those days more people are saved than the world cares to report. Still the question lingers: how about those who have never heard the gospel, those who live in areas where we have not exported the gospel? In the next few moments a biblical answer will be offered. Five points are needed to answer the questions.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ESSENCE

This point of beginning is the highest level possible. It is the character of God. One characteristic of God is absolute righteousness. That means God cannot sin. He never has an improper motive. Our human righteousness conduct is relative; that is, sometimes we are act righteously and sometimes we don't. God is consistently absolute righteous. That means He has never been nor can He ever be unfair or unjust to anyone. He is incapable of being unfair. All people of all ages are in the hands of a just and righteous loving God.

Any person who ultimately stands before Him guilty is without excuse.

Install it on the hard drive of your mental mainframe and store it in permanent memory.

God cannot be unfair, and God cannot be wrong. God wanted to get so intimately involved in opening the door to heaven that He manifested Himself on earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He is defined and described as "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). This answers the question as to who Jesus Christ was.

Romans 9:5 defines Jesus as "Christ . . . who is over all, the eternally blessed God."

In Christ "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9).

II. THE DOCTRINE OF UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

Atonement is not a word in the working vocabulary of most moderns. The word means reconciliation or to make peace between two parties. It refers to a sacrificial offering to remove the effect of sin. In the New Testament it refers to reconciliation between God and humanity achieved by the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of Christ coming to earth was “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

“When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10).

The manner in which the way of salvation was made possible is clearly spelled out. The body of believers is depicted as “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). This raises the question: when did God shed His own blood? Jesus Christ, God in flesh and blood, did it on Calvary.

Neither the father nor the mother provides the blood for an embryo’s development. It develops its own blood supply. When Jesus’s red blood dripped on the gray stones of Calvary that was the “blood of God” being shed for “the sin of the world.”

The biblical reference to the principle of atonement refers to what Christ did to satisfy the righteous demands of God the Father. After sin entered the world God saw all persons as the sinners they were. In love He devised a plan to solve this sin problem. It might well be called “Operation Grace.” The plan called for God the Son to come into the world and remove the sin barrier that existed between God and mankind. This barrier could not be removed by any human effort. The purpose of the virgin birth was to provide the sinless Son of God to die on the cross to do what no mere mortal man could do. That is, remove the sin barrier.

On Calvary He bore every sin of every person who has ever lived. This made forgiveness available to the “whosoever” of John 3:16. That does not mean every person is saved, it means every person can be saved.

The fact Christ died for all sin of all persons means God wants to save all persons. That does not imply all persons are saved. Observe these texts:

II Cor. 5:14, 15 “one died for all”

I Tim. 4:10 speaks of Christ “who gave Himself for all.”

I Tim. 4:10 also speaks of Christ “who is the Savior of all men.”

Again I say this does not mean all persons are saved. It means salvation is open to all. Each person must personally receive it by faith.

Hebrews 2:9 says, “He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”

I John 2:2, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”

In love God extended Himself on the cross on behalf of every person. God in love has exhausted His every effort to make salvation available to every person.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD OR GOD’S WILL

Through the prophet Ezekiel God spoke: “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? . . . says the Lord God, and not that he should turn from his ways and live.” (Ezekiel 18:23). The clear answer is that God desires all to turn and be saved.

Second Peter 3:9 states God’s will clearly. He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Thus, God has stated he wants everyone saved. For any person not to go to heaven they have to violate God’s will which is for them to be there. To accomplish this from His vantage point Christ died for all.

Again the will of God is noted in I Timothy 2:4. Therein He is described as the God “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth.” That is His will. What is yours?

The first three parts of the answer to what happens to the person who never hears the name of Christ have been from God’s perspective. The next two are from man’s standpoint.

IV. THE HUMAN MIND

The determining issue is what do people think.

In the life of every person there is time when they become God-conscious. That is, the Holy Spirit convicts them there is a loving God. No matter when or where a person lives, there is a point in their life when they are convinced by the Holy Spirit of their being a loving God.

Acts 2:17 God said, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”

I Cor. 7:17, “God hath called everyone...”

John 7:17, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know”

At a point in the life of every person they are made God-conscious by the Holy Spirit. That is, they become aware there is a loving God.

Romans 1 tells us of the reaction of many at the point of God-consciousness. At the point of God consciousness many send mental signals indicating they don’t want to know the true God but prefer to make their own gods.

This brings us to the fifth point.

V. THE HUMAN HEART

At the point of God-consciousness every person responds in one of two ways:

- A. I want to know more about this God, or
- B. I don't want to know more about this God.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glory Him as God, nor were they thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:20 - 23).

It is at the point of God-consciousness that most people reject Him. At the point of God-consciousness they respond negatively and in their ears say: “I don't want to know more about this God. I want to make my own god of wood, stone, or metal.”

This shouts this fact: The heathen is not a heathen because he is in spiritual darkness, but he is in spiritual darkness because he is a heathen. It is not the spiritual darkness that causes the heathenness, it is the heathen-ness that causes the spiritual darkness.

However, there are those who send up positive signals at the point of God-consciousness indicating they do want to know more about this loving God. Then God takes it upon Himself to get the gospel to them through His obedient people.

No matter who, when, or where any person who wants to know the gospel message, God gets it to that person through a human instrument.

God can tell who has said “no” and who has said “yes” at the point of God-consciousness. We can't. We must assume all have said, “Yes, I want to know more.” Therefore, we must evangelistically reach out to them. That means we are to export the gospel.

After preaching on this subject a member of our congregation approached with his face aglow. He, Dr. Ashas Gupta, is a brilliant scientist. He developed the Coke can first used by the astronauts to take a Coke into space. He said, “Pastor, I know what you mean. As a child I sat on the banks of the Ganges River in my native India praying: “God, if you are there please send someone to tell me of you.”

“Then,” he said, “one day a missionary came and told me of the love of Jesus Christ. My affirmative signals had been observed by God and He faithfully sent a messenger.”

What signals are you sending?

IS THERE A BEATING HEART?

MATTHEW 28:18-20

DR. STEPHEN RUMMAGE

Dr. Stephen Rummage is Senior Pastor of Bull Shoals Baptist Church in Brandon, FL. He has taught preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Michael Brady was a stuntman for Universal Studios. He specialized in skydiving. Michael was in Benson, Arizona, preparing for a stunt in which he'd parachute onto the top of a moving train. Climbing up the ladder on the side of the train to check some rigging, Michael accidentally fell, hitting his head and dying instantly. Michael's body was taken to the University Medical Center in Tucson. His heart was placed inside the body of another man – Bill Wohl, who had been kept alive for the previous 159 days by a temporary artificial heart.

The identities of organ donors used to be kept secret from the recipients. Now, after a waiting period, donor networks will facilitate contact between heart transplant patients and surviving family members. So, six months and one day after getting a new heart, Bill Wohl received a letter from Michael Brady's family with a picture of Michael enclosed. Bill was surprised to find that he had the heart of a 36-year-old Hollywood stuntman.

He said, "I looked at this picture – at this incredibly good-looking, super-fit, super athletic guy – and I thought, are you kidding me? That's whose heart I've got?" Before his heart transplant, Bill Wohl had been a Type-A, overweight, money-obsessed businessman pursuing a jet-setter lifestyle. Today, he works part time, spending most of his new-found energy winning speed and performance medals in swimming, cycling and track.

Recently interviewed by a reporter in his Scottsdale condo, Bill Wohl leaned forward in his chair, glanced up at the bronze, silver, and gold medals he has won, lowered his voice and wondered out loud what has changed him so much. Then Bill said: "Every day, all day, I thank God for Michael Brady. When I ride, when I work out . . . the biggest thing is to honor him."¹

A new heart changed him. I ask you: Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in you? When the heart of Jesus beats in your

¹Adapted from David Leibowitz, "Change of Heart," in *Phoenix Magazine*, phoenixmag.com/lifestyle/valley-news/200909/change-of-heart (accessed October 22, 2009).

chest, the biggest thing in your life will be to honor Him. When the heart of Jesus beats in your chest, you'll have the same passion for evangelism that He has.

In Matthew 28, we find the Lord Jesus and His disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Throughout Scripture, mountains were places where God revealed Himself to men and women. In Matthew's Gospel, we learn that Jesus conquered the Devil's third temptation up on a mountain, that Jesus preached the greatest sermon ever preached from up on a mountain, that the Lord lingered in prayer by Himself up on a mountain, that He revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John up on a mountain, that He unfolded the endtimes to His disciples up on a mountain.

It's no surprise, then, that – after His death upon the cross and His resurrection from the grave, and before His ascension back to the golden throne room of glory – the Lord Jesus issued the Great Commission from up on a mountain. We don't know the name of this mountain. But we might call it *Heartbeat Mountain*, since the Lord revealed His heart so clearly there. Listen to His Words:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus beating in your chest? If it is, then His Great Commission will be your great obsession. Did you notice that some form of the word "all" appears four times in the words of Jesus? First, "all authority." Next, "all nations." Third, "all things." And finally, "always." I invite you to consider with me what some have called the four universals of the Great Commission.

I. "ALL AUTHORITY" – THE POWER FOR OUR MISSION

Read the words of Jesus in verse 18 and the beginning of verse 19: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore . . ." The power for our mission is His authority. The word translated "authority" here is the Greek term *exousia*. It means to have permission. The word can also be translated "power" or "right." It means the right and the power to make something happen.

Throughout His ministry, the issue of the Lord's authority kept coming up. When the Lord taught, the people were astonished, because He taught as one having authority (Matthew 7:28-29). He had the right to teach new and original revelation from God directly to them, because He is God. When four men lowered their crippled friend through the roof into the presence of the Lord Jesus, He forgave the man's sin and healed the man's body because He has the authority to heal and forgive, and "when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power (or authority) to men" (Matthew 9:6-8).

When He sent His disciples out in His name, "He gave them power (or authority) over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease" (Matthew 10:1). He could delegate His authority, because it was *His* authority. One

day the religious leaders came to Jesus and asked Him, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave You this authority?” (Matthew 21:23). And Jesus basically said, “I’m not going to tell you.” Do you know why He didn’t have to tell them? Because He had authority!

When the time came for Jesus to go to the cross, He made it clear that He was still exercising His authority. He said: “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power (or authority) to lay it down, and I have the power (or authority) to take it again” (John 10:17-18). The Romans did not take His life. The Jews did not take His life. The Devil did not take His life. The Lord Jesus laid down His life willingly. His death was an act of authority.

One day, He will judge all of humanity and all of history by His authority. He said: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:25-27). Every person on planet earth has an appointment with Jesus. You can reject Him now. You can ignore Him now. You can curse Him now. You can ridicule Him now. But, one day, you will stand before Him, and He will judge you by His authority. He had and has and always will have authority as the only begotten Son of God.

Notice the extent of His authority. He says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” The word authority carries with it the idea of jurisdiction. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand how far His jurisdiction went. It went up to the highest heights of heaven – *all authority has been given to Me in Heaven*. His authority also reached across the oceans and continents and scaled mountains and plumbed the depths of every square inch of planet earth – *all authority has been given to Me . . . on earth*. In other words, Jesus was saying, there are no boundaries to His authority.

When I was about 10 or 11 years old, I had a standing appointment every week to watch Bo and Luke Duke on television. If you’re brave enough to admit you remember that show, you know that Bo and Luke were always being chased “in hot pursuit” by Sheriff Roscoe P. Coltrane. He’d come after them in his patrol car. They’d try to outrun him in their stock car. And Bo and Luke always had the same destination – the Hazzard County line. They’d drive hard, they’d go airborne a couple of times, and finally, they’d cross the county line, pull over, get out of their car, and Roscoe would ride up to the county line and get out of the patrol car and stop. And he’d be so frustrated that he couldn’t stand it. He couldn’t arrest them. He couldn’t keep chasing them. There was nothing he could do. Why? They were out of his jurisdiction.

No part of this universe exceeds the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus. His authority reaches across every line – every cultural line, every institutional line, every organizational line, every social line, every racial line, every ethnic line, every political line, every geographical line, every linguistic line, every attitudinal line, every religious line, every ancestral line, every financial line, every educational line, and every spiritual line. No one and no territory is beyond His reach. His authority extends beyond the ends of the earth.

And His authority is the power for our mission. No barrier and no boundary can thwart His authority – or ours when we go in His name. When we go in His name, we can say boldly, *Nothing can stand against me*. For nothing can stand against Him! His authority extends everywhere. His authority overcomes everything. And, church, we have His authority. Our challenge is to go and exercise that authority to win souls for Jesus Christ.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in you to go in His power?

This brings us to the next universal in the Great Commission: “all nations.”

II. “ALL NATIONS” – THE PEOPLE OF OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19 gets at the heart of the Great Commission. Based on the authority Jesus has given us, He commands: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). You may have heard before that this verse contains only one command in the original language of Scripture: “Make disciples of all the nations.” Every other part of the verse relates back to that command. It’s surprising. “Go” is not the main command. “Baptize” is not the main command. “Teach,” in verse 20, is not the main command. All of those words support the main command.

The main command is “make disciples of all the nations.” From all the nations, from every type of person on planet earth, go make disciples. A disciple is a follower. A disciple is someone who is instructed and trained by the master. The goal is to find people who are not following Jesus Christ, to tell them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and then to encourage them to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

Some preachers and teachers have made the mistake, however, of saying that, since the verb “go” is a participle in the original language, that what Jesus meant was “as you go,” or “while you are going,” or “since you are going,” make disciples. That’s not the way Jesus should be understood. “Go” carries the force of a strong command in this sentence.

If you’ll look in your Bible in Matthew 2:13, you’ll find that Matthew uses a similar construction in that verse. He writes: “Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt’” (Matthew 2:13). Here, the word “arise” is a participle. But it would be ridiculous to think that the angel was telling Joseph, “Joseph, since you’re getting up anyway, take the Child and flee to Egypt.” No, the angel spoke with urgency. There was danger. Action had to be taken.

In the same way, Jesus is speaking with urgency when He says: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” Jesus loves people so much that He died on the cross for them, and rose from the grave for them, and then He sent you and me to them with His gospel. Do you love people enough to go?

Imagine that you pulled up to your house to discover that your family is being attacked by home invaders. You see what’s happening from the driveway, grab the cell phone, and call 911. The police come to your house with sirens blazing, walk up to the house, and then stand and watch the harm being done. They polish their badges. They

make speeches about the need to help people being attacked. They sing songs about their authority. All the while, your loved ones are suffering, and they refuse to use their power to help. You may say, that scenario would never happen, but it would be an outrage and a crime if it did happen.

Friend, that scenario *does* happen, over and over again, in churches today. How much more outrageous and criminal is it for us as the church of Jesus Christ – empowered with His authority and entrusted with His gospel and indwelt by His Spirit – to sing songs about the power of the cross, and to preach sermons about winning the lost, and to hold meetings dedicated to reaching the world, and yet to allow thousands and even millions of people whom Jesus loves to die and go to Hell?

I thank God for people and churches that are willing to take the risk to go to the nations with the gospel. There are hundreds of creative and inventive ways to go. Home Bible studies, evangelistic dinners, singles meetings, radio and television ministries, short-term mission journeys, long-term mission assignments, prayer breakfasts, men's retreats, women's meetings, sportsmen's dinners, internet sites, athletic gatherings, camps, conferences, music ministries, drama, arts and crafts, free medical clinics, college campus discussion groups, children's ministries, special needs ministries, divorce recovery, substance abuse programs, neighborhood prayer walking, military ministry, hospital ministry, nursing home ministry, Christian movies, videos, publishing, ministry to different career groups, Christian schools ... the list could go on and on.

I am increasingly convinced that there is practically no *wrong* way to go and make disciples, and absolutely no *right* way *not* to go and make disciples. Let's get out there and reach people. Millions are plunging into eternity without Christ right now. If we are standing still, we are backing up.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in your chest? His heart beats for lost people, for unreached people, for people hastening each day toward Hell.

As we move from verse 19 into verse 20, we find a third universal in the Great Commission:

III. "ALL THINGS" – THE PROCESS OF OUR MISSION

What's the process of making disciples? Jesus says the process involves "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Notice the two load-bearing words here: "baptizing" and "teaching." These words show us that our mission is both an event and a process.

Baptism is an event. It is a picture of the spiritual reality that occurs the moment we trust Jesus as Savior. It signifies our entrance into a relationship with God. The triune Godhead works to save the sinner. God the Father calls believers to salvation. God the Son redeems believers with His own blood. God the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the believer

through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus commands us to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

As our bodies are lowered into the baptismal waters, we show that we have died to our old life. As our bodies are raised from the waters, we show that we have come alive to a resurrected life in Christ. Can a person be saved without being baptized? Yes. But should a genuinely born-again person refuse to follow Christ in baptism? Absolutely not. Believer's baptism is a big deal because it portrays the most significant event in our lives – salvation through faith in Jesus.

But Jesus goes beyond the event of baptizing disciples to talk about the process of growing disciples. The church is called to teach disciples "to observe all things that I have commanded you." The discipleship process involves ongoing instruction in the teachings of Jesus. And notice that the Lord Jesus does not give us the luxury of picking and choosing the truths that are most convenient for us to teach and obey. "All things" means that the whole of Scripture – all of which Jesus affirmed and commanded.

In so many areas of our lives, an event only has its fullest meaning if it's followed by a process. A wedding ceremony is an event. It's an event some young ladies dream of from the time they are small girls. More than one young man has proposed marriage to his sweetheart, only to discover that he is just the small, final piece in a puzzle that she's been putting together since she was eight years old. A wedding is an event! But no matter how ornate a wedding is, no matter how gorgeous the flowers and the wedding gowns are, no matter how wonderful the music is, no matter how moving the exchange of vows is, it's all for nothing if the husband and wife don't commit themselves to the process of marriage. Too many couples have beautiful weddings followed by ugly marriages.

Marriage is just one example. You can think of others. For instance, getting admitted to your dream college is an event. But unless you go through the process of going to class and studying, you'll never have an education. Going to the gym, paying a fee, and getting a membership card is an event. But the only way to get in shape is to go through the process of exercising. In the same way, in the Christian life, there's an event: leading people to salvation, as signified by baptism. And then there's a process: teaching believers to obey the commands of Christ. They go hand-in-hand.

In a chapel address at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in March 2009, President Chuck Kelley noted that the greatest growth years for baptisms in Southern Baptist churches occurred between the years 1945 and 1955. In 1945, Southern Baptist churches baptized approximately 257,000 people. In 1955, they baptized 417,000 people – almost doubling the number of baptisms.² Southern Baptists have never experienced that type of growth in baptisms since. In fact, though the United States population has grown

²Chuck Kelley, "The New Methodists: Reflections on the SBC Today" nobts.edu/resources/pdf/President/newmethodistpres.6.pdf (accessed October 21, 2009), 1.

from around 165 million in 1955 to around 308 million in 2009, Southern Baptists baptized only a little over 342,000 people in 2008, around 75,000 fewer than in 1955.³

What happened? Dr. Kelley gave this assessment: “In the era of our greatest evangelistic growth, typical SBC churches had more discipleship activities than evangelistic activities. Aggressive evangelism was matched by aggressive discipleship.”⁴ In other words, Baptists of yesteryear were blessed and anointed of God in their evangelism efforts because they were committed to teaching and learning and obeying “all things” that Jesus commanded. We studied His Word. We walked in His ways. Our hearts began to beat in time with His. As a result, we reached more people with His gospel. *Our current evangelism crisis is ultimately a discipleship failure.* We disobey the Lord Jesus and we dilute the effectiveness of our evangelism if we neglect the process of disciple-making through teaching God’s Word.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in your chest? His heart beats for us to follow Him in discipleship. His heart beats for us to teach our children and to teach new believers and to teach one another how to follow Him.

Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” He gives us His power – “all authority.” He sends us to lost people – “all the nations.” He calls us to a process – “teaching them to observe all things.” Now, I want to direct your attention to one more universal in the Great Commission.

IV. “ALWAYS” – THE PROMISE OF OUR MISSION

Matthew ends his Gospel with these words of Jesus: “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matthew 28:20). At the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew introduced the Lord Jesus as Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). Now, he concludes with the Lord’s promise that He would always be with His disciples. Then, Jesus speaks words that reach beyond that mountain in Galilee two thousand years ago, through space and time to where we are right now: “even to the end of the age.” Until the end of time and this world, Jesus promises His presence with us as we share His gospel.

As we go in His name, as we make disciples, as we baptize, as we teach His commandments – Jesus is always with us. “Always” literally means “all the days.” Every day between now and the end of time, Jesus is with us. And nothing can nullify that promise. Nothing can separate us from that promise. It’s not a conditional promise. It’s not a provisional promise. It’s simply a promise. An unbreakable, unshakeable, forever promise. He’s with us.

³Peter Smith, “Southern Baptists fret over decline as annual meeting begins,” *USA Today*, usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-06-10-southern-baptists_N.htm (accessed October 22, 2009).

⁴Chuck Kelley, “The New Methodists,” 9.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart?

Bill Wohl traveled to see Michael Brady's family, with the strong heart of that young man beating in his chest, invigorating his body, pumping blood to every cell. He met Michael's parents. He learned that their son was a man who loved God and cared about people. Then, he met Michael's brother, Chris.

At their first meeting, Chris brought a stethoscope. He held it in his hands and asked Bill Wohl, "Would you mind? I want to connect with my brother one more time." Bill said, "Of course. Yes." Chris pressed that stethoscope against Bill's chest, and he could hear his brother's beating heart.⁵

I pray that if God were to put His ear upon my chest or your chest, that He would hear the heartbeat of His Son. The heart of Jesus is beating to win the world to faith in Him.

⁵Adapted from Carla McClain, "Some heart recipients report strange changes," in *Arizona Daily Star*, azstarnet.com/sn/related/63240.php (accessed October 22, 2009).

GOD'S BAILOUT PLAN

JOHN 3:16

REV. FRED LUTER¹

Rev. Luther is the Pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, LA.

For the past several months our nation has been in a crisis.
For the past several months our nation has been in an economic crisis.
For the past several months our nation has been in a financial crisis.

We are in this financial crisis because of greed.
We are in this financial crisis because of bad decisions.
We are in this financial crisis because of bad choices.
We are in this financial crisis because of bad mortgage debt.
We are in this financial crisis because of the pride of many CEO's.

Consequently, because of the financial crisis Wall Street was in trouble. Now brothers and sisters whenever Wall Street is in trouble, it will eventually get to Main Street. And once it gets to Main Street you can rest assured it will not take much longer to get to "your street" and then "my street"! Our nation was facing the worst financial crisis since 1929 which led to the Great Depression.

Major insurance companies like AIG were in trouble!
Major investment banks like Lehman Brothers were in trouble!
Major mortgage lenders like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were in trouble! As a matter of fact they got divorced over this financial crisis (smile)!

The Dow Jones Industrial Average plummeted!

Wall Street cried out for HELP!
AIG cried out for HELP!
Lehman Brothers cried out for HELP!
Fannie Mae cried out for HELP!
Freddie Mac cried out for HELP!
The BIG THREE – Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors cried out for HELP!
Our former president George Bush warned Congress that our nation was on the brink of disaster.
Something had to be done.
We need a bill to be passed.
We need to be rescued from this disaster.

The alarm was sounding! Hearts were pounding! And after a week long debate Congress eventually passed a \$700 billion dollar bailout package to rescue, to redeem, to save our battered financial industry, thereby rescuing Wall Street, Main Street, Your Street, and My Street from a crisis.

Well, in like manner my brothers and my sisters, a little over 2,000 years ago our world was in another crisis. Our society was in another crisis.

Not necessarily an economic crisis, it was worse than that!

Not necessarily a financial crisis, it was worse than that!

Not necessarily a Wall Street crisis, it was worse than that!

IT WAS A SPIRITUAL CRISIS!

Man had sinned against God. Man had rebelled against God. Man had transgressed against God.

Therefore mankind was in spiritual debt because of greed.

Mankind was in spiritual debt because of bad choices.

Mankind was in spiritual debt because of bad decisions.

Mankind was in spiritual debt because of pride.

God's righteousness demanded that the debt had to be paid.

God's holiness demanded that the debt had to be paid.

God's standard demanded that the debt had to be paid.

God's Word demanded that the debt had to be paid.

Mankind needed a BAILOUT PLAN!!

Fannie Mae was not acceptable. Freddie Mac was not acceptable. Lehman Brother's was not acceptable. AIG was not acceptable. The Senate was not adequate. The House of Representatives was not adequate. Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors could not help.

Mankind was about to die eternally. Mankind was about to perish eternally. Mankind was about to spend eternity in hell. The sins of man had plummeted to an all time low! Mankind needed to be rescued. Mankind needed to be redeemed. Mankind needed to be saved. Mankind needed to be delivered. Something had to be done!

Therefore, because of Jehovah God's love for you and me, He developed His Bailout Plan for mankind! And His bailout starts out by stating. . . . For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Our rescue bill was signed with God's Word. It was sealed with Jesus blood. And it was delivered at the Cross!!

So what's all included in this rescue bill? What's all included in this bailout?

**I. THE PLAN OF GOD.
JOHN 3:16A
“For God so loved the world.”**

Oh brothers and sisters salvation was not just a haphazard event. God's salvation plan was not just a secondary scheme. Salvation was not just something that God thought of at the last moment. Salvation was not just an afterthought with God. No, the fact of the matter is long before Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis chapter three. Before Adam and Eve listened to Satan instead of the Savior. Before Adam and Eve listened to Lucifer instead of the Lord. Before Adam and Eve listened to the Devil instead of the Divine. God already had a Bailout Plan!!!

As a matter of fact:

Before you ever told your first lie, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever smoked your first joint, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever drank your first bottle of beer, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever gambled away your first dollar, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever cheated on your first exam, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever ran your first red light, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever got your first speeding ticket, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever disobeyed your parents, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever got high on drugs, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever said your first cuss words, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever committed fornication, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever committed adultery, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever saw your first R-rated movie, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever got hooked on pornography, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever ate 6 Krispy Kreme donuts by yourself, God had a Bailout Plan!

Before you ever ate ½ gallon of Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream by yourself, God had a Bailout Plan!

Before you ever struggled with low self-esteem, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever thought about attempting suicide, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever felt like nobody loved you, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever went to your first church business meeting, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before your in-laws became out-laws, God had a Bailout Plan!
Before you ever took your first Hebrew or Greek exam, God had a Bailout Plan!

All I am saying my friend is that before you or I ever messed up in life, God already had a Bailout Plan in mind!

And God's plan was to redeem mankind. Man had rebelled, man had transgressed, man had fallen short, had sinned against God. Therefore there was a debt that had to be paid. That's why Romans 3:10 says, “For there is none who are righteous, no not one.” Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death”. In other words, we deserved to go to hell. We

deserved to die. We deserved to burn. We deserved eternal damnation. BUT, because of God's love!

BUT, because of God's mercy!

BUT, because of God's grace!

BUT, because of God's forgiveness!

God had a Bailout Plan!! And His plan is that He gave us something that we did not deserve, and that is God gave us another chance! Notice, I did not say a second chance, because I blew my second chance a long time ago, but God gave us another chance. Oh my friend, I don't know about you but I thank God for another chance. I thank God for another opportunity.

Listen, because of some bad choices and mistakes in my past. In my BC days, my Before Christ days, I should not even be alive, but God gave me another chance! I should have lost my mind a long time ago, but God gave me another chance. I should have gotten aids over 30 years ago, but God gave me another chance. I should be living outdoors, but God gave me another chance. I should be sleeping in my grave, but God gave me another chance. I should not be a pastor. I should not be a preacher. I should not be standing in this pulpit, but God gave me another chance! Listen, my testimony is: "I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore. Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more. But the master of the sea, heard my despairing cry, and from the waters lifted me, now save am I. Love lifted me, love lifted me, when nothing else would help, love lifted me!! Oh yes, because of God's love, I have another chance.

Another chance to be a better man,
Another chance to be a better husband,
Another chance to be a better father,
Another chance to be a better son,
Another chance to be a better Christian.

But not only me ladies and gentlemen, because of the plan of God, "that He so loved the world", you also have another chance. Another chance to get it right. Another chance to make it right. Another chance to repent. Another chance to say I'm sorry. Another chance to ask God for forgiveness. Another chance to turn my mess into a miracle. Another chance to turn my test into a testimony. Another chance to turn my bitterness into a blessing. And it is all because God had a Bailout Plan, that He so loved the world that He gave us another chance! But not only do I want you see the Plan of God:

II. THE PROVISION OF GOD.

JOHN 3:16B

"That He gave His only begotten Son"

How many of you have at least one child? Would you give your only child to die for people who did not care anything about you? Well my friend that's what God did for you and me. When man sinned against God there was a debt that needed to be paid. There was a ransom that needed to be paid. And according to the Bible it had to be paid in blood.

Hebrews 9:22 says, “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. There is no pardon of sin. There is no forgiveness of sin. So the provision of God was that mankind could be redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ. Now that word “redeemed” means to “buy back”. It means to “recover”.

Do you remember S & H green stamps? When I was a kid growing up in the Lower ninth ward my mom would collect S & H green stamps. The way it worked was that whenever you went to buy something at the gas station or at the grocery store, depending on how much you buy, you would get so many pages of S & H green stamps. Me and my brothers and sisters would lick the back of the stamps (by the way this had to be the nastiest glue in the world) and put them in a book. The more books you collected, the more stuff you could get from the catalog that included drinking glasses, a toaster, a blender, etc. The more expensive the item, the more books of stamps you needed. Now once you filled out all your books of S & H green stamps you would bring your books to a place called “the redemption center” to “redeem” your books of stamps for your drinking glasses, toaster, blender, etc.

In like manner my brothers and my sisters, because of sin you and I were in the Devil’s catalog of death. In order to be freed from this death the price was pretty high. As a matter of fact someone’s blood was required. The blood of goats could not redeem us. The blood of cows could not redeem us. The blood of birds could not redeem us. But not only animals blood, Moses blood was not sufficient. David’s blood was not sufficient. Elijah’s blood was not sufficient. Joseph’s blood was not sufficient. Even Isaiah’s blood was not sufficient. The price was too high! The debt was too large! Oh, but because of the Plan of God, His love for you and I. And because of the Provision of God, that He gave His only begotten Son to shed His blood for the remission of sin. God took Jesus Christ and brought Him down to the “redemption center” at Calvary, where Jesus was nailed to the cross and paid the price for you and me!

Therefore mankind was redeemed, because of God’s Love! Redeemed, because of Jesus Blood! No strings attached. No hidden charges. Oh, let the redeemed of the Lord say so! Guilty, but redeemed. Lost, but redeemed. Caught, but redeemed. Redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ! Oh yes, there is a fountain filled with Blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins. Sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all his guilt and stain. I know it was the blood, I know it was the blood, I know it was the blood for me, one day when I was lost, He died upon the cross, I know it was the blood for me! Oh I thank God for His provision that He gave His only Son Jesus Christ who shed His blood for our sins.

But then God had another part of HIS Provision. Because of His love for you and me. And because of His desire that you and I would live a victorious life He added another part to His provision. And that is God included in His Provision, a “Stimulus Package”! This stimulus package is the Holy Spirit that will dwell inside you, that will live inside you. This stimuli will give you power to pull off the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. This stimulus will empower you to walk right, to talk right, to live right, to preach right, to teach right, to sing right, to witness right, and to let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

1. The Plan of God.
2. The Provision of God.

3. THE PROMISE OF GOD.

JOHN 3:16C

“That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”.

Oh my friend whoever you are, you can receive the Promise of God. No matter how dark your past, or how dim you think your future is, you can receive the Promise of God. And His promise is that whosoever can receive the Promise of God.

Black, white, red, or brown, you can receive the Promise of God!
Short, tall, skinny, or pleasingly plumb, you can receive the Promise of God!
Rich, poor, yuppie, or buppie, you can receive the Promise of God!
Bald head, afro, fade, comb over, weave, or wig, you can receive the Promise of God!
Cell phone, email, face book, match book, or twitter, you can receive the Promise of God!
Father, mother, sister, or brother, you can receive the Promise of God!
Democrat, Republican, or Independent, you can receive the Promise of God!
Oh my friend, no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, the Promise of God is yours for the asking!
God's Bailout Plan is available to you! If you believe, you can receive the Promises of God!

You see my friend, that's the difference between Man's Plan vs. God's Plan. For example, President Obama's plan is different from President Bush's plan. And that's the problem:

Man's plan can change from President to President.
Man's plan can change from administration to administration.
Man's plan can change from congress to congress.
Man's plan can change from democrats to republicans.
Man's plan can change from who's riding a donkey to who's riding an elephant.

However the great thing about God's plan is that it is eternal! It is everlasting! It does not change! If it was good enough for Paul and Silas. If it was good enough for the early church. If it was good enough for our forefathers. If it was good enough for our grandparents. It is good enough for you and me! God's Bailout Plan is eternal!
Because it's signed with God's Word.
Because it's sealed with Jesus Blood.
Because it was delivered at the Cross!
It's all a part of The Promise of God. He promised us everlasting life in a better place!

One of these days you will not have to worry about AIG.
One of these days you will not have to worry about Wells Fargo.
One of these days you will not have to worry about Lehmann Brothers.
One of these days you will not have to worry about Fannie Mae.
One of these days you will not have to worry about Freddie Mac.
One of these days you will not have to worry about Wall Street.
One of these days you will not have to worry about Chrysler.

One of these days you will not have to worry about Ford.

One of these days you will not have to worry about General Motors.

One of these days you will not have to worry about cash for clunkers!

Because one of these days “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thess 4:16-17).

Yes, God will activate another part of Bailout Plan, and that's the part where He is coming back for you and me!

We're going from Wall Street, we're going from Main Street, we're going from your street, we're going from my street, and we're going to another street, to a street that's paved with gold! No pot holes on this street! No speed bumps on this street! No traffic jams on this street! No speed traps on this street! It is all a part of God's Bailout Plan!

Oh did I tell you we're going to a gated community! Some of you have always wanted to live in a gated community. Well one of these days you will eventually live in a gated community! For the Bible says, there will be three gates to the East, three gates to the West, three gates to the North, and three gates to the South! (Rev 21:13). And finally, it will be a place of no more! No more sickness, no more suffering, no more pain, no more cancer, no more inflation, no more recession, no more depression, no more racism, no more murders, no more robbers, no more liars, no more hurricanes, no more flooding, no more tornados, no more earthquakes, it is all a part of God's Bailout Plan! Oh, some glad morning when this life is over, I'll fly away. To a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away. Oh, I'll fly away, oh glory I'll fly away, when I die hallelujah by and by I'll fly away!!

Yes it is all a part of God's Bailout Plan!

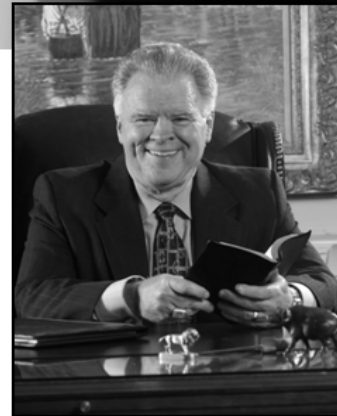


September 13-14, 2010
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MEN *after* GOD'S OWN *heart*

Fanning the Flame for a Passion for Christ

Keynote Speaker: Paige Patterson,
President,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, TX



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THE YOKE'S ON YOU

MATTHEW 11:28-30

DR. JIM SHADDIX

Dr. Shaddix is pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Denver, CO. He formerly served as Dean of the Chapel at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.



INTRODUCTION¹

Have you ever had someone play a practical joke on you? I have a pretty good sense of humor and I love a good joke, but I hate it when the joke's on me! Wednesday, March 15, 1995, was one of the biggest days of my life. I was voted on to the faculty of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary by the Board of Trustees. Being a seminary professor has been a dream of mine for many years. Finally, the realization of that dream came about. You can imagine the pressure I felt when, on Monday night of that week, I answered the phone at my house and the distinguished voice on the other end identified itself as belonging to one of the trustees. He said he wanted to ask me a few questions. I lost it! I asked him to hold while I changed phones. I dropped my little girl whom I had been holding. I screamed at my wife. My mouth went dry. Horrifying thoughts raced through my mind. What if I messed up? What if I answered incorrectly? What if I made a fool of myself? What if I didn't measure up to his standards? I really was feeling the pressure! You can imagine how relieved I was when I returned to the phone and heard one of my colleagues snickering on the other end. He was just having a little fun, and the joke was on me!

On a more serious note, the devil seems to be the cosmic comedian of our day and the joke is on many of us. He is telling people they have to meet a certain standard in order to be accepted by God. He is saying we have to keep a bunch of rules and regulations in order to get into heaven. And, we really feel the pressure. To the heavy hearts of people feeling that kind of pressure, Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 11:28-30:

¹This sermon originally was preached with the aid of an actual miniature yoke.

²⁸ “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (NKJV).

He’s making the same call today: he invites you to accept him as the only way to know God instead of being the object of Satan’s joke by trying to measure up.

The “yoke” was part of the harness used to pull a cart, plow, or mill beam. It was the means by which the animals’ master kept them under control and guided them in useful work. The term “yoke” came to be used widely in the ancient world as a metaphor for submission, usually to a teacher. But in this text, Jesus didn’t use that metaphor simply to tell people that they needed to let him be their teacher. Instead, he chose the metaphor as a way of calling people to come to him as the only way to be right with God as opposed to the way insisted upon by the religious leaders of the day.

These particular words of Jesus did not become clear to me until I was pastoring in Mississippi. One afternoon, as I sat on the front porch of a wise, old saw-mill operator in our community, I noticed this miniature yoke hanging on the wall. When I inquired about it, he began to explain how the yoke was used. His explanation fascinated me. It made me think of this passage of Scripture.

Since that day, every time I look at this yoke I am reminded of some important truths regarding what it means to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. I want to share those truths with you today, because some of you are really tired of trying to measure up, trying to meet somebody’s standard for getting into heaven, trying to figure out what it means to know God.

TRUTH #1: THE YOKE REMINDS US THAT WE CAN’T MEASURE UP.

The first thing I learned about the yoke was that it was designed for two animals. One animal usually was not sufficient to pull a load. The strength of two animals was necessary. That was the reason for the design of the yoke. Many jobs simply were too heavy and too laborious.

Jesus was calling to a group of people who were really tired of trying to carry the load of the religious standards of their day. It was all but impossible even to learn all the traditions imposed by the religious leaders, much less to keep them all. People simply could not measure up! In the language of the New Testament, the word “weary” carried the idea of working to the point of utter exhaustion. It refers figuratively to rigorous work in seeking to please God and know the way of salvation. “Heavy-laden” indicates that, at some time in the past, a great load was dumped on the person, causing him or her to become weary over time. Together, the two terms present the idea of a person who, at some time in the past, was taught that he or she had to measure up to a certain standard in order to earn God’s approval.

Some of you likely are carrying that same burden today. It often manifests itself in strained relationships, depression, stress, feelings of inadequacy, and other conditions that tell us that we don't measure up. We try to get rid of the burden by trying harder -- climbing the career ladder, impressing other people, taking on more jobs at church, adding new spiritual disciplines to our lives. The list goes on. Underlying all of it is an unrecognized drive to meet God's approval. And, we really feel the pressure, pressure that drives us to do things we really don't want to do.

Today, Jesus wants you to know that you can't measure up. There's no possible way. Just as it was impossible for any first century Jew always to obey every law and tradition taught by the religious leaders, it is impossible for you to make a grade high enough to get you into heaven. And, it is frustrating and exhausting to attempt such a feat.

TRUTH #2: THE YOKE REMINDS US THAT JESUS DOES MEASURE UP.

The second thing I learned about the yoke was that the two animals on which it was placed were different. One of the animals always was more experienced than the other. The second animal essentially was a learner. The experienced animal was schooled in the commands of the master. So, that animal provided the direction, leadership, help, and training for the unlearned member of the team. By itself, the younger, less experienced animal did not have the wisdom or skill to respond to the commands of the master.

That truth illuminates a striking contrast that runs throughout this passage. "Unto me" means "to me alone" and not to another. The contrast further is seen in the other pronouns: unto me—and I will give—my yoke—learn of me—I am gentle—my yoke—my burden. Jesus was contrasting himself with the religious leaders of his day! He not only claimed to know the only way to have a relationship with God, he claimed to be the only way to have a relationship with God.

Do you know God's standard for getting into heaven? Perfection! That's right -- perfection! Jesus said, "You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). I'm not sure about you, but that standard leaves me with a little problem: I can't do it! And, when you try to measure up to that standard by keeping a bunch of rules and regulations, by trying to be good enough, by trying to be religious enough, you make a futile attempt at trying to reach God on your own. You and I do not have the strength, ability, experience, wisdom, or skill to meet God's standard for getting into heaven. But, just like the experienced animal in the yoke, Jesus Christ does meet that standard!

The word "meek" and the phrase "humble in heart" appear to be synonymous, contrasting Jesus and the Pharisees. While Jesus demonstrated meekness and humility, they exhibited extraordinary pride, love for places of honor, special titles, and the exercise of authority over others (see 23:5-12). The point of the contrast is that Jesus' spirit is more conducive for reception of God's salvation. A proud man cannot know God (cf. Mt. 5:3-5; Ps. 138:6). Instead, God gives the grace of intimate knowledge of Himself to the person who realizes that he can't make it to God on his own.

TRUTH #3: THE YOKE REMINDS US THAT WE CAN MEASURE UP WITH HIM.

The final thing I learned about the yoke was that the two animals worked together to accomplish the task. While the more experienced animal provided the leadership and direction, both animals worked together to pull the load.

Jesus promised that this cooperative effort would be a refreshing experience for his tired followers. In verse 28, the “rest” that he offered was a “resting up” or “rejuvenation” from the weariness of carrying the burden of trying to measure up. In verse 29, the offering of “rest for your souls” is the promise of a realization of a deep existential peace, a shalom, or sense of ultimate well-being with regard to one’s relationship to God and his commandments (cf. Jer. 6:16; see also the “rest” of Heb. 4:3-10).

This truth simply means that you and I can stop doing things for Jesus and start doing things with Jesus. When we get in the yoke with him, we measure up to God’s standard because he measures up! When Jesus Christ was crucified, he took the punishment for our inadequacy, our inability to measure up to God’s standard. When he rose from the dead, he made it possible for us to have a relationship with God through his life. That reality, my friends, is both rejuvenating and refreshing compared to the heaviness of trying to be good enough on my own.

Jesus is God’s chosen way to have a relationship with him. In verse 27, Jesus had just acknowledged to God, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” Then, he broke into this awesome invitation to take on his yoke and get some rest! Jesus wasn’t trying to give people another load, another yoke, to carry. He simply was inviting people to get in his yoke! There, he would be the experienced, mature member of the team, and the person who responded to his call would be the rested and refreshed learner!

The word “easy” in verse 30 is better translated “kindly.” “Burden” here is contrasted with “heavy laden” in v. 28. These are kindred words which together present the idea of work that is lightened by Jesus’ help. To be sure, the yoke of Christ involves work, but it is the work of love and joy. While Jesus asks much, he provides the power for you and I to respond.

My friend Don Miller, a great prayer warrior of our day, helped me to understand how serving Christ diligently could be reconciled with this rest provided by Christ. He pointed out that once you’re in the yoke with Jesus, several things become a reality:

- ...you have one leader -- him;
- ...you have one load -- his;
- ...you go in one direction -- his;
- ...you never walk or work alone
- ...you can never fall or fail;

...you can never quit;
...you can't get out or look back;
...no task is too small or too large;
...the load is always behind you; and,
...the results are his problem.

These truths, my friends, are refreshing realities!

SUMMATION

All of us have heroes in our lives. One of mine is Dr. Roy Fish, retired professor of evangelism at Southwestern Seminary. Besides my father, Dr. Fish has impacted my life more than anyone on the planet. During my years at Southwestern I embraced him as a model to emulate. When I heard him teach I said, "I want to teach like that." When I heard him preach I said, "I want to preach like that." When I was with him witnessing I said, "I want to win souls like that." I wanted to be like Dr. Fish.

One weekend I was at the DFW airport waiting to board a flight to the Texas panhandle where I was to preach revival services. As I sat in the waiting area, lo and behold I looked up and there came my hero and mentor walking down the terminal! And my heart leaped and beat even faster when I saw him turn in to my gate and begin to check in on the same flight. After checking in he came over and sat next to me. Our conversation revealed that we were going to the same area for similar purposes.

After a moment Dr. Fish asked me what seat I was sitting in. After I told him, he paused a moment and then said, "Come with me." When your hero tells you to follow, you don't ask questions. So I began following him down the terminal and boarded an elevator. When the elevator stopped and the doors opened, I saw a big sign that read *Crown Room*. We stepped off of the elevator and immediately were greeted by a bell hop who said, "Hello Dr. Fish!" And then he glanced at me as if to say, "Are you lost?" or "Who are you?" But Dr. Fish responded with a greeting, pointed to me and said to the young man, "This is Jim, and he's with me."

We made our way to a nearby counter, behind which were a couple of airline employees. One of the girls immediately looked at Dr. Fish and said, "Hello, Dr. Fish!" I was beginning to get the impression that he had been here before. Immediately she glanced at me with the same questioning manner as the bell hop. Again Dr. Fish responded with his gracious greeting, pointed at me and said to the girl, "This is Jim, and he's with me. Could you see if you could get us seats together on the flight?" And in that moment—maybe for the first time in my life—I understood what it meant to be able to get access to someplace that you wouldn't be able to go unless you were with somebody with some clout!

I don't know all of what heaven is going to look like. But sometimes I picture arriving there and standing at the entrance to a 'Crown Room.' I see myself walking side-by-side with my Savior into the room and up to where the Father is sitting. I can almost see the God of the universe look at Jesus and say, "Hello, Son!" And then I imagine the momentary fear as He glances at me as if to say, "Who are you and why are you here?" But I'm flooded

with peace and joy when I hear my Savior say, “Father, this is Jim...and He’s with Me!” That’s what I picture when I think of being in the yoke with Jesus.

So, the cosmic killjoy known as the devil continues to play the ultimate practical joke on people today. He convinces them that they must measure up—make the grade, walk the line, play by all the rules—in order to meet God’s standard and get into heaven. Consequently, so many people are so very tired of trying to do just that. And, they are so frustrated because no amount of effort ever seems to be enough. That load is so heavy!

On the other hand, Jesus Christ has measured up by dying on the cross for our wrongdoing, our failure, our inadequacy. And he invites everyone who is tired of carrying the load to come get in the yoke with him. There, he provides the experience, wisdom, skill, and ability to know God and to live a life of faithful service to him.

The choice is yours. Either the joke’s on you...or the yoke’s on you!

REACHING THE CULTURE AND THE NATIONS FOR THE GLORY OF CHRIST

DR. DAVID PLATT

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This sermon was delivered at the Southern Baptist Convention in Louisville, KY in June, 2009.

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to Acts 3.

I want to encourage us this morning with a picture of the people of God in the New Testament that I pray will be a reality among the people of God today. Specifically, I want to encourage us with three prayers that we might pray together based on Acts 3:1-10.

One day, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at 3:00 in the afternoon. Now, a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. And when he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us." So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them, and Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Walk." And taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

First, I want to encourage us to pray that God would give us a radical concern for the needs of the world around us. I love the contrast between the end of Acts 2 and the beginning of Acts 3. At the end of Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost, over 3,000 people were saved. Talk about a good day for church growth! But what I find most interesting is that the next scene Luke chooses to give us in Acts is not a scene involving the masses. Instead, it's a scene involving one man that the masses were ignoring. There is a reality that is being illustrated here, brothers and sisters. Those who are most effective in reaching the many are those who are most passionate about reaching the one.

The disciples had learned this from Jesus. Peter and John had seen Jesus with the crowds gathering around Him. Like us, they thought the bigger the better; the more crowds, the better. But Jesus is so unlike us. In John 6, when the crowd started getting big, Jesus started talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. I can just imagine the look on the disciples' faces as they thought, "We'll never get on the list of fastest growing

movements if you keep telling people to eat you. 'This doesn't work!' And it didn't. All the people scattered. The disciples were shocked when Jesus stopped for the blind beggar, when He stopped for the woman with the flow of blood, when He stopped for the man with leprosy, and when He stopped for the boy with an evil spirit. This is what the disciples had seen modeled in Christ.

When you look at the language in verse 4, you realize that these are the same words that are used later in Acts 7 when Stephen looked up into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This is an intense look. There is a focus on need here in Acts 3 and all over the pages of the story of the early church. They cared for the poor, the lost, the needy.

If I could be honest with you, this is where I, in my own life and as a young pastor, have come to a bit of a crisis of belief. This crisis of belief revolves around whether or not I actually believe the Bible. Not, "Do I believe the Bible is true or accurate or in error?" But instead, "Do I believe this Book in a way that radically changes the way I live and pastor?" Because if this Book is true, then the implications are nothing short of staggering. There are 6.8 billion people in the world. Most liberal estimates put the world at one-third Christian, and that includes people who claim to be Christian socially or politically in many contexts. Likely not all of them are actually followers of Christ. But even if they were, that still leaves 4.5 billion people on the planet today who at this moment are on a road that leads to an eternity in hell, if the Bible is true.

On top of this massive spiritual need, we are surrounded by massive physical need. While we meet here, 16,000 children will die because they don't have food. If that is true, and if the Bible says that all throughout the history of God's people, He has chosen to measure the integrity of our faith by our concern for the poor, then there are radical implications here. We do not have time to play games with our lives and we do not have time to play games in the church when there are over 4.5 billion people going to hell and 16,000 kids that don't have a meal today. We need God to give us His concern for the needs around us. This is not something we can manufacture. It's something Christ alone can produce in us.

So let's run to Christ and let's ask Him to give us a radical concern for the needs of the world around us. Let's ask Him to keep us from turning a deaf ear to the poor. It frightens me when I consider the fact that I can pastor successfully in our church culture today in Birmingham, AL, and yet ignore those kids, pretending like they don't even exist. God give us a radical concern for the needs of those around us.

Second, let's pray that God would give us a radical confidence in the name of the one who has saved us." Who is the hero in Acts 3? Is it Peter? It takes a lot of courage to go up to a man who hasn't walked since birth (40 years!) and to tell him to get up and walk. Is Peter the hero? What about John? Maybe best actor in a supporting role? Is John the hero? Or is the lame man the hero as he jumps up and down, praising God? I do not believe Peter is the hero, and neither are John or the lame man. The hero in this story is the name of Jesus Christ. "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Luke wants to make sure we get this. Look down later in the chapter at verse 16. You might even circle it every time you see it. Verse 16 says, “My faith in the *name* of Jesus, this man whom you see and know is made strong. It is Jesus’ *name* and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you all can see.” Now look over in chapter 4 where Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin, and they were asked the question in verse 7, “In what power or what *name* did you do this?” The Sanhedrin knew there was a name behind this. In verse 10, Peter responded, “Know this, you and all the people of Israel. It is by the *name* of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, that this man stands before you healed.” In verse 12, he proclaimed, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other *name* under heaven whereby we can be saved.” In verse 17, the Sanhedrin concluded, “To stop this from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this *name*.” These folks at the Sanhedrin were afraid of the name, and they knew there was power in the name! In verse 18, they called in Peter and John and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

If we had time, we could trace through the entire Book of Acts and you could see this emphasis over and over again on the name of Jesus. It is the name of Jesus that is causing the most hardened hearts to repent. It is the name of Jesus that is causing demons to flee. It is the name of Jesus for which people are risking their lives all over the Book of Acts. The church had radical confidence in his name.

I was teaching in a seminary in Indonesia where students were planting churches all over that Muslim-dominated nation. One brother was sharing his story with us, telling us that before he came to Christ, he was a fighter. He said, “I know ninja, jujitsu.” He started naming a variety of different fighting techniques. He said, “I could take people down.” We said, “We’ll take your word for it.”

He said, “When Christ saved me, He turned my heart upside down.” Then he told us a story about a time when he was in a village completely unreached with the Gospel. He was in a home in that village sharing the Gospel when the witch doctor from the village came to confront him. Basically, the witch doctor stood outside the house and called him out to fight with him. This guy said, “I turned around and I was ready to take the witch doctor down.” But then he said, “As I was walking out, I sensed the Lord saying, ‘You don’t do the fighting anymore. I do the fighting for you.’”

So he walked out, pulled up a chair, sat down right in front of the witch doctor, and he said, “I don’t do the fighting anymore. My God does the fighting for me.” He said the witch doctor began to speak, and as he began to speak, the witch doctor began to gasp for air, choking on his own words, and within a matter of moments he had fallen over dead. Crowds came rushing to see what had happened. He said, “I didn’t know what to do, so I just preached the Gospel, and people in the village started coming to Christ!”

Now, I’m not sharing this story to recommend this particular method of evangelism. I don’t think that will sell at Lifeway. But I do share that story with you this morning to remind you that 2,000 years ago, there was a name that when it was proclaimed, it caused the blind to see and the lame to walk, it caused demons to flee and the dead to rise again, and 2,000 years later, the name is still good.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot control the culture and the world around us, but we can control our confidence in the name of Jesus Christ. His name is powerful. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He is the final Amen. He is the bread of life, Christ, our Creator, our Deliverer, our Everlasting Father. He is God. He is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Great High Priest, the Holy One, the hope of glory. He is the great I Am, the image of the invisible God. He is the Judge of the living and the dead, King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is majestic and mighty, and no one compares to Him, the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. He is the power of God, the resurrection and the life, the supreme sacrifice, the very Word of God made flesh.

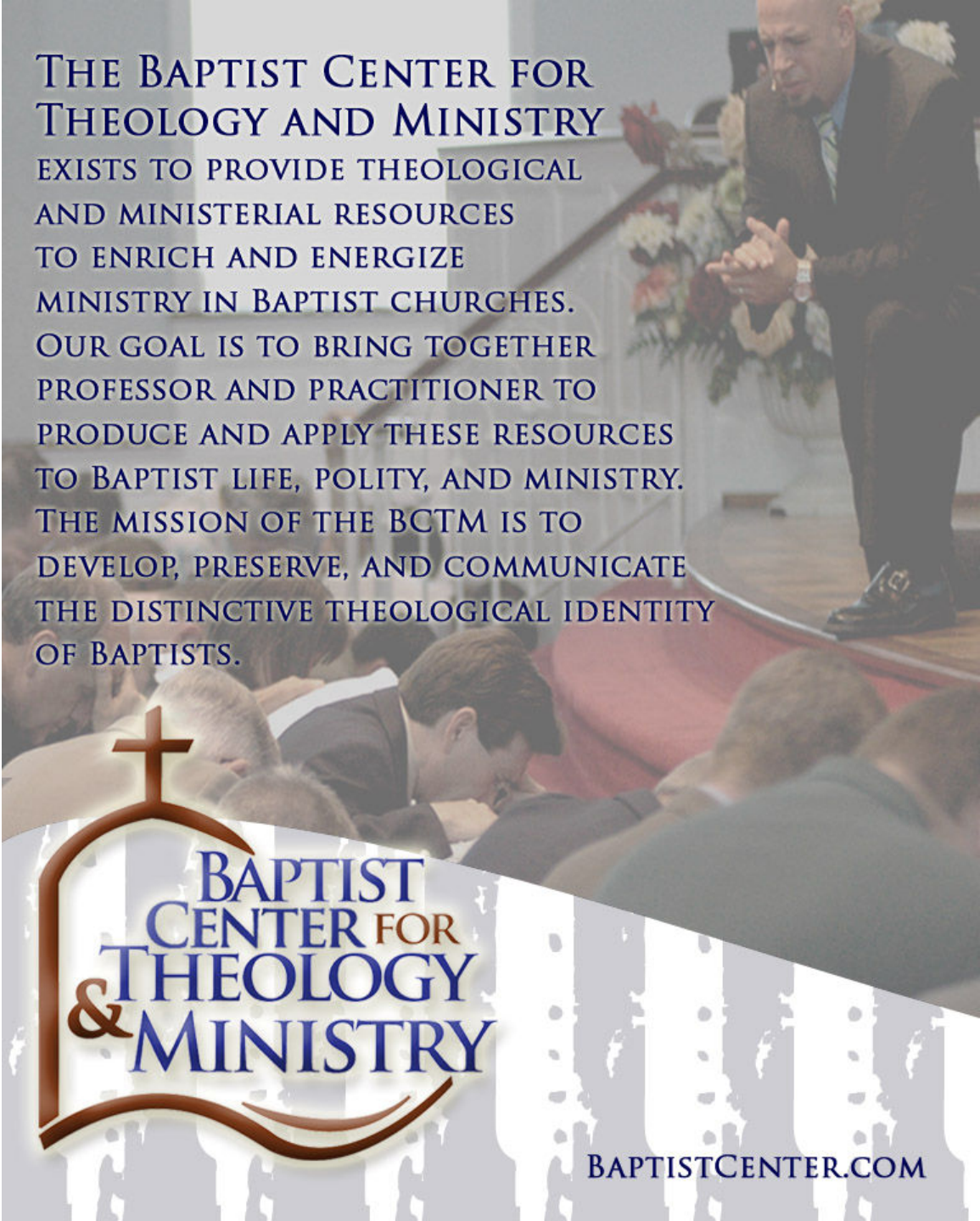
Jesus is all of these things. And brothers and sisters, in our evangelism we do not need to reduce Him to a poor, puny savior who is just begging for people to accept Him. As if Jesus needs our acceptance! He doesn't need our acceptance. He is infinitely worthy of all glory in all the universe, and He doesn't need us at all. We need Him. The name of Christ is powerful enough to bring any person in our communities, any person in our cities, and any person in the nations to Himself. God, give us radical confidence in the name of the one who has saved us.

And God, give us a radical commitment to telling the nations about His greatness. The rest of this story gives us the first glimpse into persecution in the early church. As Peter and John preached the Gospel to the crowd surrounding them, they were arrested, and by the end of chapter 4, we see the prayers of the persecuted church in Acts 4:23-30. By the end of Acts 5, they were rejoicing for being counted worthy to suffer for His name. By the end of Acts 7, we see first Christian martyr, and by Acts 8, they were scattering to Judea and Samaria preaching the Gospel wherever they went. By Acts 11, a base for ministry to the nations had been established in the city of Antioch. The rest of Acts is the story of a church that was radically committed to telling the nations about His greatness. Oh, I want my life to count, and I want the church I pastor to count for the nations.

I find it saddening that one of the most common questions in Christianity in our context today is, "What is God's will for my life? How do I find God's will for my life? What does God want me to do?" Meanwhile, there are 1.4 million Bedouins in Algeria. They are 100 percent Muslim. No Christians. No church. No missionary. No Gospel. No Jesus. And we are sitting over here saying, "What do you want me to do, God?" O God, raise up a church that is no longer content to wait for a tingly feeling to go down our spine to cause us to rise up and do what we have already been commanded to do. We don't have to ask questions about His will. He wants His Gospel and His glory in all nations. That is His will.

So what happens when not just missionaries, but also pastors, music ministers, and staff members, church members, accountants, engineers, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and stay-at-home moms all realize that we were all created for and commanded to accomplish a global mission? What happens when we begin to look at our houses and our cars and our stuff and our lifestyles in light of the radical needs around the world? What happens when we begin to trust boldly in the name of Christ and we commit our lives to telling the nations that He is great? When this happens, the lost will find a Savior, the poor will find a Helper,

and the church will discover a God who satisfies more deeply than anything and everything else this world has to offer us. God, may it be so.



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PAUL VS. ATHENS: ENGAGING THE CULTURE WITH THE GOSPEL ACTS 17:16-34

DR. TONY MERIDA

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Tom Rainer recently stated in a chapel sermon at NOBTS that in the past 6 months, less than 1/2 of the pastors in the SBC have shared the gospel one time! He added that less than 1 of 10 church members in the SBC will ever begin a conversation about the Gospel. What a sad commentary on all who are called to proclaim the excellencies of God (1 Peter 2:9).

Why do we find it so hard to share the best news in the world? In Mark Dever's *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, he provides a list of some common excuses:

- (1) "I don't know their language"
- (2) "It is illegal"
- (3) "It could cause problems at work"
- (4) "Other things seem more urgent"
- (5) "I don't know any non-Christians" (Dever, 19-23).

He also says that sometimes we make excuses concerning the hearers, such as "they don't want to hear," "they want be interested," or "they've probably heard it before" (ibid.).

We could make excuses for days, while the world waits to hear.

Recently, the popular comedian Penn Jillette, from Penn and Teller Show, was evangelized after one of his shows. Penn has been an outspoken atheist for some time. A humble gentleman gave Penn a Bible and talked with him. It had a great affect on Penn. Penn's response shocked me. He said that he has never respected anyone who does *not* share their faith. He believes that if you believe you have the truth, then you should share it. Penn asked, "How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"

Penn went on to say about this gracious evangelist: "This guy was a really good guy. He was polite and honest and sane, and *he cared* enough about me to proselytize and give me a Bible, which had written in it a little note to me . . . and then listed five phone numbers for him and an e-mail address if I wanted to get in touch." (Baptist Press, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=29863>; video also on You-Tube).

A pastor in Las Vegas, John Mark Simmons, commented: "That episode is a wonderful encouragement for all of us to be salt and light. If you know anything at all about

Penn or his shows, you know he pretty much represents the decayed and dark world we live in, yet someone's obedience got his attention."

Ladies and Gentlemen, let's stop making excuses. Can we do this? Let's plan to stop not evangelizing.

Prayerfully, intentionally, faithfully, fearfully, and with preparation – let's share the good news. Today we are going to look at Paul. *He functions as a great apologist and street evangelist in the heart of a cultural hot spot.*

He too could have made several excuses for not being faithful (Acts 17:16-34).

When you think of Paul, you probably shouldn't imagine a physically impressive individual. The Corinthians said that he was bold in his letters, but unimpressive in his appearance.

In the Apocrypha, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, we have the only physical description of Paul that I know of. Here, in this non-inspired text, Paul is described as "a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting . . . and a nose somewhat hooked; full of friendliness, who appeared like a man, and as an angel. "

If the account is close to true, then he was an ordinary little guy, more like George Castanza than Vin Diesel! But the little guy had a mighty message. In Acts 17, he goes up against the mighty city of Athens.

In Act 17:15, we read that the disciples took Paul in Athens and there he waited for them. Here is Paul vs. the great city of Athens. We see Paul, here, *not* on a mission trip but still functioning as an evangelist because evangelism was a way of life.

All cities in Greece had a "high city." The highest point of elevation was given over to the construction of a god or goddess, normally the patron god. In the Old Testament we read about pagans worshiping god in high places, like in the days of Jeroboam.

The Greeks had in every city an Acropolis, a high city. Athens was no different. It had an Acropolis. It was the most magnificent of all. The Parthenon was upon the high place. There were three statutes to Athena, the patron goddess of the city. Today, you can't miss the Parthenon. It is well lit and high up.

About 75 yards away was a high rock about fifty feet off the ground, about a 150 yards long, where a temple was built to the Greek god of war "Ares"—who corresponded to the Roman god of war, "Mars." So we have Areopagus (Pagos – hill), or "Mars Hill." The event takes place on that platform. Below the hill is the marketplace.

Further, Athens was the center of philosophy and was the foremost Greek city-state since the fifth century B.C. Surely, Paul had heard about Athens since he was a boy, but now he was there. It was here that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle once taught and influenced others.

Perhaps you've heard of Tertullian. He was a lawyer who was converted to Christianity sometime around the year A.D. 197. It was he who asked the famous questions, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" Athens was the home of pagan Greek philosophy, and Jerusalem was the central locale of divine revelation. But here, Paul takes divine truth to the center of ideas.

It is a model we should all follow. . . . We must engage the culture with the Gospel. I see at least three challenges gleaned from this narrative. . . . Let's look at

- (1) His Motivation;
- (2) His Methods;
- (3) His Message

3 CHALLENGES ON ENGAGING THE CULTURE WITH THE GOSPEL

1. *Paul's Motivation: A Passion for the Glory of God (17:16)*

A. What Paul Saw: "a city full of idols"

Paul's eyes. Paul sees the city if full of idols. In verse 22, he says "I *see* that you are very religious." They even had an idol to an unknown god. The famous quip was that it was "easier to find a god in Athens than a human being." Athens was also a tourist attraction. People would come and behold the city and see all of the temples. But that is not what gets Paul's attention first. *What gets his attention is the idols.*

The adjective Luke uses to describe the idols is found nowhere else in the New Testament nor is it found anywhere else in Greek literature in an outside source. Most English translations translate it as "full of" idols, but as some have pointed out a better rendering may be "under idols." They were under bondage. We might say that they were "smothered by idols." (Stott, 277). There were temples, shrines, statutes, and alters everywhere. Statues of Athena were gold, ivory, and wood, marble, all hand crafted by the greats.

Paul's teaching About Idols. This shows us something very true about humanity. Theologians have pointed out that the opposite of Christianity is not atheism; it is *idolatry*. Human beings are inherently religious; humanity is incurably religious; worshiping totem polls and other odd objects. No civilization in the world is not religious.

Paul writes in Romans 1 that every human being knows of God through nature and through conscious.

However, the great sin is that they exchange the glory of creator for the creation. Consequently, there is the worship to everything from cows, to rivers, to people.

Paul's earlier encounter. If you remember in Lystra (Acts 14), Paul was talking to Greeks there and they wanted to make him a god. He told them to turn away from idols to

the living god. The essence of sin is giving God half a peace sign and worshiping something that he created instead of God himself.

B. What Paul Felt: “provoked” “irritated” “distressed”

The text says that Paul was “provoked” which is a deep visceral term. It is the word “paroxyno” from which we get “paroxysm,” which means a fit, an outburst, or a spasm. It meant to have a gut reaction.

I would call what Paul felt as righteous indignation. He was bothered by the fact that God was not being worshiped.

I think this is the greatest motivator for missions. It goes beyond compassion for people who don’t know God (which is a great motivation). This motivation is a divine jealousy that God’s name is not being praised.

Does it bother you that people are worshipping dead idols today, when Jesus alone is worthy of worship?

To feel this way is to feel like God. This is exemplified in the OT when the Israelites made the golden calf, and worshiped Baal, engrossing in the sexual perversion that went with it. It is said often that they “provoked” the Lord to anger. (See also Isaiah 65:1-7; Deut 9:7; Ps 106:28-29).

Paul saw beyond the grandeur of the city. He sees the wickedness of mankind, and how God was not being worshiped.

We are told that God is a jealous God. In Isaiah 42:8, he says that he will not give his glory to another. *Instead, we must share his jealousy for the worship of his name.*

I don’t think we will ever be missional until we experience this emotion. Elsewhere, Paul says the love of Christ controls him—that’s one motivator; but here it is “the jealousy of God that controls him.” We need both. We want to see Jesus glorified.

We should feel inwardly wounded when Jesus is not praised.

May God give us the heart of Psalm 67 – “May the people’s praise you oh God, let all the people’s praise you.” That’s the cry of the missionary. That’s why we go. Not out of guilt. Not merely out of duty. But because we want to see the nations worship the living God.

Do you long to see idol worshipers turn into Christ worshipers? Then it will lead us to share the Gospel. Notice Paul’s Method.

2. Paul's Method: Three Approaches to Evangelism (17:17-21)

Paul did not only see idolatry and experience divine jealousy; but he did something about it! He shared with them the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Who did he share with? Three groups of people. Each group corresponds to different groups that we should share with. With each group, he used a particular method:

A. Evangelistic Preaching for the 'Religious' in the Synagogue (17:17a)

The first method involved preaching the Gospel to those in the synagogue. This followed Paul's normal practice of starting here.

Paul's preaching in the synagogue is outlined in Paul's encounter with the Thessalonians (17:1-4). In the synagogue, we see Paul...

- “Reasoning” (17:2). This word means to discuss or debate (used 10 times in Acts).
- “Explaining” (17:3). This word means to open (cf. , Luke 24:32)
- “Proving” (17:3). This term means to respond to objections; to demonstrate the validity of one's claims.
- “Proclaiming” (17:3b). This means to declare a clear message (about Jesus).
- “Persuading” (17:4). This means to act on the basis of what is recommended (7 times in Paul's preaching in Acts)

Consequently, many people were won over and “joined” Paul (17:4), becoming Christ-followers.

While the preaching today in the church is not the same as Paul's preaching in the synagogue, it is worth mentioning, and should not be overlooked, that the obvious place to start evangelizing is by preaching the Gospel every week to those attending corporate worship.

I recently preached on the new birth, and a gentleman, who handed out programs, was born again. He said he had never been converted. He was seventy-two years old. May God give us a generation of Paul's who preach the Gospel to the religious.

B. Conversational Evangelism for the 'Passerby' in the Marketplace (17:17b)

Not much is said about Paul's outreach in the marketplace, other than that he “reasoned” there also. It appears that Paul was using the Socratic method in Socrates city. In short, he presumably was dialoging, discussing, and posing questions about the Gospel.

Perhaps we could take from this account an example of the “question method” of evangelism. One of the best things to do in the marketplace is to simply raise questions. Questions do a lot of things. They demonstrate interest in the hearer; they reveal commonalities; they relieve tension; they create dialogue; and they open doors.

A good personal challenge is to ask at least one probing question to others every day related to the Gospel, and see what happens. Some examples include:

- Do you have any kind of spiritual beliefs?
- How are you celebrating Christmas (or Easter or other holidays)?
- Is there any way I can pray for you?
- Do you ever think about God?
- Do you think there is a heaven or hell?
- If you died, where do you think you would go?
- If what you are believing is not true, would you want to know?

I challenge you to be aware of those who pass by you everyday. Boldly and compassionately pose a question to them. Put something in their conscious. They may ask for more information and a longer conversation.

C. Apologetic Evangelism for the ‘Philosopher’ at the Areopagus (17:18-21)

The majority of this story focuses upon this group of individuals. Paul’s central message, the resurrection, never changed, but with this group, Paul gradually leads up to the message of the risen Christ. His use of language is strategic for this group of hearers.

I only know of these two philosophies explicitly mentioned in the Bible.

Epicureans. Today, we might say modern Epicureans are interested into sophisticated food and clothes . . . and pleasure, not pain. “Eat drink and be merry” summarizes their thought. It was not absolute hedonism; they wanted their “adultery in moderation.” But it was hedonistic. But we dare say that the hedonism in America is much worse.

Stoics. They believed that world is controlled by an impersonal force; similar to deism; but fatalistic. “Roll with the punches” “que sera sera,” “whatever will be will be” – these phrases, which may be observed by in more recent years by philosophers like Sartre and Nietzsche, characterized the Stoics.

Luke writes that they got together to discuss “something new” – everybody likes what’s new. But theology is not new. It is not physics or chemistry. Paul is about to declare timeless truth to these itching ears individuals.

Impressively, Paul was able to do battle with the top thinkers of the day. We still need people in the mainstream culture to take the Gospel to the center of ideas. John Stott states, “Christ calls human beings to humble, but not to stifle, their intellect.” (Stott, Acts)

This is why we must read books and stay up on culture. I don’t mean just watching movies, I mean staying up on modern worldviews. Know what’s blowing in the wind:

3. Paul's Message: Communicate the Redemptive Story (22-31)

Paul takes his hearers on a journey from creation to resurrection and judgment. The response is similar to the response we will get today when we take the Gospel to the culture.

We might outline's Paul's sermon with 8 affirmations about God (we could spend several sermons an on these verses)...

1. God is the Creator (24a)

This flew in the face of Epicurean thought of chance combination of atoms somehow bringing about creation. How can nothingness produce something? The Stoic was more pantheistic. God was creation. Paul says, no, God is creator.

I like to start here with the Gospel, because the Bible starts here: Creator, Image of God, then the fall and redemption.

Tim Keller, speaks about a "pre-evangelism" that has to happen sometime; meaning that some people don't even believe in creator God. From that there can be growth toward a fuller understanding of the Gospel.

2. God is All-Present (24b)

Paul tells the philosophers that God doesn't exist in shrines. "Our God is in the heavens; he does as he pleases" (Ps 115:3).

3. God is Self-Sufficient (25)

Paul reminds them that God sustains everything. God does not need us; but we do need him. Some live as though they are doing God a favor by coming to church or performing a religious duty; God doesn't need you. God is all-sufficient; you are insufficient without Him.

4. God is the Ruler of the Nations (26)

Paul sticks with this exclusive them. God is the Lord of the nations! God is Lord over where you live and all of life. You can feel the tension increasing in the hearers.

5. God is Knowable (27)

Paul says God is close. Therefore, seek the Lord while he may be found.

6. God is our Maker and Sustainer (28-29)

Paul quotes a sixth-century philosopher in Crete.

I am contingent. I don't have the power of being; but God does. Paul stresses this to his audience.

Life, motion, and being – all three are found in the self-existence of God. He is source and power behind.

7. God is the Judge (30a)

Paul reminds the philosophers that they should stop playing games, and come to grips with the judgment that is to come. God will judge everyone not partially or arbitrarily, but justly.

8. Jesus is God and Savior (30b-31)

Paul finally takes them to the Savior. All religions are not the same; that is evidenced in the fact that are God is alive and theirs is dead. "All Men" must repent because Jesus is the risen Lord.

"Raising Him from the Dead"—Paul always focuses on this doctrine. It is the ultimate apologetic in my opinion. What do you believe happened to the body of Jesus Christ? If he is risen from the dead, then that changes everything! If he is not risen, then our preaching is in vain; and you have listened to a long sermon for nothing!

It is important in our Gospel proclamation that we don't get sidetracked by matters that are not of eternal importance; who cares about dinosaurs or the age of the earth—make a big deal out of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and urge people to repent.

LEAVE THE RESULTS TO GOD (32-34)

Paul gets three responses to his resurrection message: (1) Mockery; (2) Belief, and (3) the request to hear more later. I believe we too will get the same responses.

Some think Paul had a bad day; I think he did quite well in Athens. We sow the seed; God makes it grow.

Mark Dever shares the following story about how God takes the seed of the Gospel and makes it grow in his sovereign time . . .

It took a long time for Mr. Short. He was a New England farmer who lived to be one hundred years old. Sometime in the middle of the 1700's he was sitting his fields reflecting on his long life. As he did, "he recalled a sermon he had heard in Dartmouth [England] as a boy before he sailed to America. The horror of dying under the curse of God was impressed upon him as he meditated on the words he had heard so long ago and he was converted to Christ! Eighty-five years after hearing [John] Flavel preach" (Dever, 13-17.)

The preacher, John Flavel, had been a faithful evangelist 85 years earlier. He did not see fruit immediately. But his faithful, excuse-denying, evangelism led to a worshiper of Jesus Christ.

We plant the seed. Sometimes it falls on good ground. The question is “Will you be faithful to share this Gospel that has set you free from sin and death with people who desperately need it?” In the church, in the marketplace, in the center of ideas . . . proclaim the risen Christ, for he is the hope of the whole world.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Green, Joel B. *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. Pp. 240. Paperback, \$19.99.

Firing another salvo in the on-going monism-dualism debate, Joel B. Green in his new book *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, presents his ontological monism, a rebuttal against anthropological dualism in general and against the holistic dualism in *Body, Soul, and Everlasting Life* by John W. Cooper in particular. Green's anthropological monism, which "coheres well with Nancey Murphy's argument . . . and with Charles Gutenson's perspective" (179), merges biblical evidence with advances in neuroscience and views personhood in terms of biography rather than substance.

In a telling way, the title, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, mimics Cooper's *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*. Over the years Green and Cooper have been arguing over the merits of monism and dualism. In their well documented¹ clashes they accuse each other of misinterpreting Scripture and of misrepresenting the other's position, claims which are not unfounded. Their main point of contention is over the issue of the intermediate state, something Green denies and Cooper affirms. Green's new book continues their academic exchange.

Following a survey of Christian anthropology, Green builds his case for science and against philosophy, claiming that we already use science as a hermeneutical filter (21). Through this filter he finds that since the substantive view of the soul is not supported by scientific data, it must be the result of eisegesis: "situating our exegetical work in relations to the neurosciences has the potential to liberate us from certain predilections that might guide our work unawares and to allow questions to surface that might otherwise have remained buried" (28). Green's low view of philosophy and high view of science has brought him to a dangerous concession. Although he goes to great lengths to assure us that he is not letting

¹John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Joel B. Green, "Eschatology and the Nature of Humans: A Reconsideration of the Pertinent Biblical Evidence," *Science and Christian Belief* 14 (2002): 33; Joel B. Green, "Body and Soul, Mind and Brain: Critical Issues," in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. Joel B. Green and Stuart Palmer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); John W. Cooper, Response to "In Search of the Soul: 'I Don't Think It's Lost,'" paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers (Philadelphia, November, 2005); and John W. Cooper, "The Bible and Dualism Once Again," *Philosophia Christi* 9 no.2 (2007): 459-469.

the science control the hermeneutical agenda, the latter parts of the book undermine his claim.

Green explores the central anthropological issue of human identity in the second chapter. He challenges the dualistic mainstay of 'parts' and builds a case for how the soul cannot be the seat of personhood. He dismisses the claim that the soul is a distinct entity because neuroscience can demonstrate physiological characteristics typically associated with the soul. He concludes, then, that "if the capacities traditionally allocated to the 'soul' . . . have a neural basis, then the concept of 'soul,' as traditionally understood in theology as a person's 'authentic self,' seems redundant" (45). Recognizing that the biblical evidence on this issue is somewhat ambiguous, Green correctly points out that the difficulty occurs because of the way we have to contend with different languages, different audiences, and different purposes of the Bible. He knows well that nowhere in Scripture does anyone set out a scientific description of the human constitution. Resting on this, he calls for academic integrity and warns against improper linguistics and dubious hermeneutic practices (59-60).

In chapter three Green argues against the typical challenges to neuroscience. He does this through an examination of neuroscientific findings in light of Peter's, James's, and Paul's views of the affects of sin on humanity. He concludes that these biblical writers described human freedom in terms of service to God rather than freedom from service to sin. He also discusses challenges to theology from neuroscience. Through examples of scientific experiments, Green draws daring conclusions that challenge some commonly held beliefs, such as genes play only a marginal role in the development of personality (76-77) and conscious free will is an illusion (80). According to his research, free will is a function of the brain, which is constantly developing: "from birth, we are in the process of becoming, and this 'becoming' is encoded in our brains" (85). Because our brains are constantly changing, we cannot reduce personhood to a physical characteristic (87); therefore, personhood should be based on biography and relationship. From this, the New Testament scholar is led to deny the "traditional" doctrine of human free will: "it appears that the distance between evolutionary psychology and biblical faith on the question of free will is less than traditional views might have allowed. . . . This is because theological use of biblical texts has sometimes exaggerated the perspectives on freedom proposed by those texts" (103). The correct way, he claims, to view human capacity for choice is by reforming ourselves as the people of God, by returning to the biblical example of a Christian faith community, something facilitated by neurobiology.

Chapter four brings Green to the climax of his book and where he is most explicit in his critique of Cartesian dualism. He shifts the conversation from questioning the existence of the soul to questioning the necessity of embodiment. To do this, Green presents 'embodied conversion' as he finds it in Luke-Acts. He finds that "if the neurobiological systems that shape how we think, feel, believe, and behave are forever being sculpted in the context of our social experiences, then in a profound sense we must speak of personal (trans)formation in relational terms. Our autobiographical selves are formed within a nest of relationships, a community" (116). Here, Green's view of biology informs his view of theology; therefore, he is led to challenge the orthodox understanding of conversion. Instead of an ontological change, Green proposes that conversion entails the rewriting of one's autobiography. Personhood is not found in a detachable soul but in one's relationships (129). When someone converts, his or her community changes, and the

relationship with the new community forms the basis of his or her conversion. Green reinforces our westernized soteriology of the individual with the Semitic emphasis on community. Seeing how personhood resides in the whole being and how conversion requires the whole community, Green concludes that conversion must necessitate embodiment (137).

Chapter five essentially is a rebuttal to Cooper's book and covers the difficult concepts of resurrection and continuity of personhood over time and across boundaries. The key premise in this chapter is how "personal identity with regard to both present life and life-after-death is narratively and relationally shaped and embodied" (144). Upon this he claims that life after death is not intrinsic to being human but is a gift from God, a belief which is consonant with traditional Christian teaching when read in terms of 'life' after death rather than 'existence' after death. At this point, Green directs our attention to Cooper's belief in an intermediate state. For Cooper, in order for personhood successfully to transcend this world, it must separate from the body at the point of death.² Green denies this claim because the biblical accounts of Sheol and *rephaim* do not allow for any speculation about the afterlife (157). When discussing the body, Green is careful not to equate 'materiality' with 'body.' He draws a clear distinction between Paul's concept of material body (dusty) and immaterial body (heavenly) (173-74) and thus is able to support his thesis of embodied personhood over time and from this realm to the next. In answering the question of how we maintain personal identity after death, Green concludes "that rationality and narrativity that constitute who I am are able to exist apart from neural correlates and embodiment only in so far as they are preserved in God's own being, in anticipation of new creation" (180). In this way, our relationship with God is what sustains us not only in this world and the next but through the transition from here to there.

The scope of Green's scholarly examination is uniformly commendable. His readers do not have to be experts in theology or the monism-dualism debate. His writing is clear and well documented, and he takes care to represent his research with academic integrity. At only one point does he misrepresent a position. A common misconception held among anthropological monists is the idea that dualism is based on the premise that we are made of parts and those parts are separable. While dualists ascribe to the idea that humans consist of parts, historically, many do not believe in the separability of those parts. An early example of this can be found in the writings of Irenaeus and Justin Martyr, who specifically state that their description of parts did not include separability.³ For these early thinkers, death occurs when the body and soul are rent asunder. The parts were not designed to come apart and survive. In more recent scholarship, Moreland and Rae provide an analogy of cutting off one's hand. The hand dies when it is severed, which does not indicate separability but breakability. The hand is no longer a hand after the amputation but merely a heap, which is obvious after necrosis has set in.⁴ Like so many monists, however, Green summarily

²Cooper, *Body and Soul*, 52-72 (71).

³Irenaeus, in *Adversus Haereses*, 5.12.2 affirms that the parts are always a part of the person. In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 6 he explains that the soul is separate from the body only at the point of death.

dismisses dualism on the grounds that it claims separability of parts, which is an inaccurate assessment of both dualism and dualists.

Green brings insight and scholarly expertise to his research. His use of biblical scholarship in the area of Christian anthropology includes pivotal findings, such as how the human “does not *have* a soul, but *is* a soul” (9).⁵ This Hebraic anthropological tenet is widely acknowledged by monists⁶ and advocates of dualist and unity views⁷ to equal effect. The emphasis is on how the soul is indistinguishable from the body, which seems to directly challenges dualism’s claim of distinguishable parts. Green also notes the difference between the material body and the immaterial body in Pauline literature (173-74), especially recognizable in 1 Cor. 15:44. In his parsing of the passage, he carefully differentiates the temporal, physical body from the eschatological, spiritual body: “whereas the *soma psychikon* is a body provided by God and well-suited for this age, the *soma pneumatikon*, also provided by God, is well-suited for the age to come” (173). Taking these two theological claims together, Green uses them to support his monism, but the argument is not conclusive. Claude Tresmontant, from the same information, concludes in favor of partition. We are not a body that contains a soul but a soul that expresses itself bodily: “This soul is visible to me because it is within the world, fed on the world’s elements which in turn cause it to be flesh.”⁸ In other words, he claims that the body is the manifestation of the soul in the world in which it finds itself. To use Paul’s language, we have a dusty body in this life and a heavenly body in the next. For Tresmontant, the soul and body are one, but this unity has no bearing on the other parts of the human constitution. The evidence that Green uses as supporting monism has been used against monism.

Green’s grasp of neuroscience and how it relates to the theological landscape is impressive. One of the values of this book grows out of his use of neuroscience to inform his arguments; however, this also may be one of its weaknesses. He seems to place too much value on the scientific findings, so runs the risk of falling into the trap of changing one biased perspective, philosophic, for another, scientific. By concluding that the traditional

⁴J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 68, 82.

⁵Green cites Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 199.

⁶See James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 134-35; Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, I-II (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 171; Doug McIntosh, *Deuteronomy*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2002), 91.

⁷See Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans. Michael Francis Gibson (New York: Desclee, 1960), 94; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986; paperback edition, 1994), 206-07.

⁸Tresmontant, 94.

understanding of the soul is redundant because some of its capacities can be measured scientifically (45), he assumes an epiphenomenological model, which claims that physical events cause mental events, but mental events do not cause physical events. Therefore, by presupposing epiphenomenalism, he assumes that any measurable activity must originate exclusively in the brain because mind activity cannot have an impact on the brain activity. Therefore, any capacity that was traditionally held as mental activity but is scientifically measurable cannot be mental activity but must be exclusively physical activity. Measurable activity means brain function. Thus, he concludes, a need for a distinct soul becomes redundant (45). This serves as his neurological evidence for the denial of the dualistic view of parts. The problem with this is that when he assumes a monist model, epiphenomenalism, to prove his monist model, physicalism, he fallaciously begs the question.

According to his introduction, Green is trying to show how neuroscience is useful for theological investigation (28-29). He posits that the soul is not a distinct entity because neuroscience has not been able to measure its existence (45). According to the science, all functions attributed to the soul can be measured as functions of the brain through scientific experimentation (76-87). Therefore, he concludes that the biblical depiction of the soul is synecdoche (151) and not an indication of a partition view of the human constitution. On this point, however, he undermines his own presupposition. The failure of his filter (neuroscience) to recognize the soul reflects negatively on the filter rather than on the biblical precept. Just because we can scientifically measure brain activity that was thought to be soul activity does not mean the soul does not exist. It could just mean that science is inadequate to measure the soul. Outside of epiphenomenalism, Green's conclusions are untenable.

A central issue in the monism-dualism debate is the location of personhood. Green centers personhood not in the soul or body. To do so would suggest that we consist of parts, something he rigorously denies. For Green personhood is biographical and relational. The standard problems with defining personhood as biography have to do with beginning- and end-of-life boundaries. When does a fetus begin having his or her own biography? This is an important consideration in the abortion battle. Are comatose patients, the brain damaged, or the very, very senior adults nonpersons? This is important in the debate over euthanasia. Another issue of concern is the distinction between human and non-humans. Green reduces the gulf between us and them to the point where only biography separates. Some animals, however, seem to be able to communicate through highly intricate means, such as the pings and squeaks of a dolphin or the sign language of some trained primates.⁹ Some people believe their pets are people. Are they accorded personhood because they have narratives? I was surprised to find that Green does not speak to any of these traditional

⁹Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, et al, "Ape Consciousness-Human Consciousness: A Perspective Informed by Language and Culture," *American Zoologist* 40 no. 6 (Dec 2000): 913-17; cf. Mark Caldwell, "Polly Wanna PhD?" *Discover* 21, no. 1 (Jan 2000), 70-75; Candace Savage, "Reasoning Ravens," *Canadian Geographic* 120 no. 2 (Jan/Feb 2000): 22-24; Michael D. Lemonick, "Honor Among Beasts," *Time* 166 no. 2 (July 11, 2005), 54-56; Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge Our Moral Universe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 99-117.

concerns. By adding a discussion of these issues, he would improve the book and alleviate some of the concerns over his anthropology.

While Green's warning against dubious hermeneutical practices is an important consideration, the New Testament professor fails to recognize some questionable theological practices. An example of this is when Green unmistakably defines conversion as an ongoing process: "Conversion is a journey, not an instantaneous metamorphosis; even though points of decision-making can be traced in the Lukan narrative, these provide points of beginning and milestones along the way, rather than conclusion" (137). When read in terms of justification and sanctification, Green's depiction of conversion seems to support Catholic doctrine, which merges the two. Protestant theology, on the other hand, separates the two stating that we are justified instantly and sanctified over time. To understand them as the same drawn out process, we risk endorsing the Catholic dogma and re-crucifying Christ each time we sin, as the crucifix reflects.

Furthermore, Green's concluding claim that our personal identity is maintained by God as we cross the boundary from life to afterlife (180) is highly problematic. What Green is claiming is that our personhood resides in our life-stories that God remembers when we die, and in the eschaton he implants those stories in our eschatological bodies. First, for this to work, Green must divide the human being into parts, separating out the body from the rest. His conclusion forces him to admit that certain aspects "exist apart from" (180) other aspects at the point of crossover. Thus, he undermines much of his earlier and repeated insistence that we are not made of separable parts. Second, the claim that we are "preserved in God's own being" (180) sounds dangerously similar to pluralist eschatology, especially that of John Hick. Is Green suggesting that in salvation we merge with the Real?¹⁰ Third, what happens to those who pass away outside of the saving relationship with God through Christ? Only those who are saved will be given an eschatological body (175), but what happens to those who are not saved? Green gives these non-persons no explanation. Apparently, the lost do not merit an embodied eternity. According to Green the human is a unity, which must—by definition—include a body. So, if we die in a lost state and do not merit a spiritual body, do we cease to exist? Is Green siding with Clark Pinnock and suggesting that the lost are annihilated?¹¹ Like most claims of anthropological monism, Green's theory fails to present a convincing argument for the continuity of personal identity from this realm to the next.

For monists, especially ontological monists, non-reductive physicalists, and constitutionists, this book is a useful resource that sheds light on the recent developments in neuroscience that can be used to support the claim to anthropological monism. Green's presentation of the functioning of the brain challenges many assumptions about the

¹⁰John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life: What Happens After We Die?* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), throughout the book.

¹¹Clark Pinnock, "Fire, then Nothing." *Christianity Today*, 20 March 1987, 440; "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent." *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1990):246-53.

significance of the brain on personhood. These challenges will help drive the conversation forward.

For anthropological dualists, from radical dualists to holistic dualists, this book does little to address the traditional challenges to monism: where is the seat of personhood, and how do we maintain continuity of personhood over time and from this realm to the next. Despite this shortcoming, dualists will find Green's work worth reading. He presents a clear case for his ontological monism, merges science and theology well, and applies reliable hermeneutical practices to Scripture. Anyone interested in understanding more about the monism-dualism debate will find the book helpful. For this reason, its use in the classroom would work well alongside books espousing antithetical positions, particularly Cooper's *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*.

***The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith.* By Mark A. Noll. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. Pp. 212. Hardcover, \$25.00.**

In his latest book, Mark Noll, the Francis McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, defends American mission efforts, especially but not exclusively evangelical mission efforts. In some circles American presence in the Majority World is looked upon with suspicion. Noll wants to dispel the myths and investigate the facts surrounding the supposed American model of Christianity that is exploding throughout the Majority World.

When Noll lays out his thesis, I had to take a day to think about the ramifications of what he was saying. At first glance, his argument was jarring: "American form rather than American influence has been the most important American contribution to the recent world history of Christianity" (15). Are not 'form' and 'influence' mutually inclusive? To use someone's methodological form suggests that the user is being influenced by that form, and to influence someone implies that the person has adopted or adapted that methodological form. Noll is careful to make a clear distinction between the two.

In the history of American Christianity, we can see a certain pattern in the way it develops. Europeans fled to America in order to worship freely. Therefore, the desire and the ability to develop unique expressions of Christianity were present in America. The way American Christianity developed, Noll argues, is the natural way that Christianity works when Christians have the freedom to worship as they choose. The pattern in which this expression develops is Christian, not American.

Since the nineteenth century, the Majority World has been experiencing the same pattern of development because they also are seeking to worship freely: "Social circumstances in many places of the world are being transformed in patterns that resemble in crucial ways what North American believers had earlier experienced in the history of the United States" (109). These peoples are not following an American form but are following a Christian pattern. The cadre of American missionaries is helping the Majority World as they progress along the path that historically the Americans have already traveled: "The way that

Christianity developed in the American environment helps explain the way Christianity is developed in many parts of the world. But correlation is not causation It means, instead, that understanding American patterns provides insight for what has been happening elsewhere in the world” (189).

Noll’s book builds a good case for his argument. I began reading with skepticism but once I understood what he was claiming, I could easily accept his point. One criticism, however, stems from the way he omits some helpful and, I dare suggest, essential background. Since he is arguing against equating American Missions to American Imperialism, he is obliged to survey these hegemonic practices present in the early missions movement. If he had done this, he would be in a much stronger position to explain how the mission practices have changed since the nineteenth century, when they moved away from colonialistic practices. The text of the book is a meager 200 pages, so he has the room for a more extensive treatment of the history of American missions. As the book stands, readers with limited expertise in this area might not fully grasp Noll’s point. Therefore, this book is best left for readers who already are familiar with the subject. Noll’s work falls in line with the works of Lamin Sanneh, Ogbu Kalu, and Philip Jenkins. Readers familiar with any of these authors will have the background necessary to fully grapple with the ideas expertly expressed in this book.

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D’Souza, Dinesh. *What’s So Great About Christianity*. Washington, D.C: Regnery Publishing, 2007. 348 pp.. Hardcover, \$27.95.

Dinesh D’Souza, a policy advisor during the Reagan Administration and former Robert and Karen Rishwain Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, is a leading conservative figure who has written eleven books, many articles, and has appeared on a variety of talk shows to discuss economic, religious, and public policy issues. His latest book, *What’s So Great About Christianity*, surveys various historical, philosophical, and moral themes from which a forceful case is made for the superiority of Christianity, and the reasonableness, individually and communally, of it as an ideological stance.

D’Souza begins by contending that the religious population, Christianity specifically, is growing and will continue to grow in number despite the globalization and modernization that many thought would lead to the end of belief in God. He believes that this is the case since religion is the primary means to securing a sense of purpose and contented disposition, and because both of these are significant impetuses for survival, atheism inevitably leads to extinction. Since the West, containing the largest concentration of atheists, is decreasing in population, religious people from third world and eastern countries are repopulating it, thus proportionally increasing the overall religiosity of the population.

D’Souza also attempts to prove that Christianity is the architect of Western civilization and is the founder of the values and institutions that make it great. Some of those that he mentions are the equality of human beings, the idea of limited government, and the

separation of church and state. He also notes how it was Christianity that was the means to the advent of modern science, with its emphasis on reason and an intelligibly ordered universe. He spends another section of the book arguing that the design in the universe is strong support for the veracity of Christianity. He emphasizes that the Big Bang is troubling to atheistic scientists because it implies a creation of the universe out of nothing. After spending a chapter explaining the anthropic principle, he insightfully notes how many scientific theories share a quality with religious doctrines that the subscribers to the former attribute to the latter, namely that they inhabit the realm of unverifiable metaphysical speculation. D'Souza points out that many scientists are promoting an anti-religious agenda, which is an acceptable abuse of metaphysical assumptions passed off as scientific fact.

Unfortunately, he makes the following comment regarding the intelligent design verses evolution debate, "it seems improbable that the small group of intelligent design advocates is right and the entire community of biologists is wrong" (146). He goes on by quoting who he names as Christian biologists who irrefutably acknowledge the veracity of evolution, and that man descended from other creatures. He believes that God must have designed the initial cells and created consciousness, since these are a mystery to the scientific community, but that man evolved from a single cell is a fact. I find it ironic that he is well known for vehemently chastising Catholic bishops in America for opposing military action in the 1980's when they had little to no knowledge of the multivariageted elements involved, and yet he is endorsing the anti-intelligent design movement with little evidence that he has more than a cursory understanding of the science involved.

D'Souza offers helpful insights into other topics. For one, he spends a section on the relationship between Christianity and philosophy, wisely explicating the distinction between methods of appropriating knowledge, and also the limited applicability of human reason to reality. Science and reason have limited spheres of accessibility and thus only illuminate a portion of the totality of ontology. He gives a brief summary of Hume's contribution to the problems of empirical verification and Popper's notion that scientific theories must be falsifiable and can never be proven absolutely.

D'Souza contends against those who say that religion, Christianity specifically, is an ideology of hate and violence, because their assertion is not only a gross misrepresentation, but also conceals the atrocities enacted by those who are nonreligious. Oddly, he believes that the solution to immorality is "not to embrace Christ and become a born-again believer. Rather it is to follow...conscience" (258-9). This is a surprising quote that not only seems a bit too politically correct and overly conciliatory toward a relativistic culture, but moreover a disingenuous solution – without regeneration is it even possible for the majority of the population to follow their conscience? The last section of the book, which aims to show how Christianity can save someone's life, is equally mollifying in that it exclusively highlights the intellectual and psychological desirability of becoming a Christian while neglecting to mention the reality and necessity of the corresponding cruciform living.

While D'Souza offers a helpful, concise book that summarizes lengthy, tortuous issues in simplified form, he perhaps tries to cover too much. Each section, which is roughly 3-5 short chapters, attempts to tackle significant and complicated issues. Each chapter could easily be turned into a 300-page book. However, D'Souza is not writing to contribute to scholarship, thus he offers little new insight into the issues, but he does submit the material

in consolidated form from a Christian perspective that the average reader could use as a helpful reference. The notable areas that Southern Baptists may take issue with is his belief that intelligent design is wrong, that to become a Christian is easy (hiding the fact that it is difficult to *be* one), that the solution for a fallen society is to follow the dictates of conscience, and that he tends to focus solely upon emphasizing the greatness of the religion of Christianity, as an institution and intellectual ideology, as opposed to that of Christ.

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Slatton, James H. *W. H. Whitsitt: The Man and the Controversy*. The Jim N. Griffith Series in Baptist Studies, ed. Walter B. Shurden. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009. pp. 348. \$40.00.

James Slatton wrote *W. H. Whitsitt* because of a member of the congregation where he served as pastor. In the preface, Slatton described how he visited an elderly lady in Richmond, Virginia who planned to join his church. Slatton learned that this individual was the granddaughter of William Heth Whitsitt, third president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and namesake of the late nineteenth-century controversy that resulted in his departure as seminary president. *W. H. Whitsitt* is a detailed biography of the man who, as Slatton wrote, “had a knack for landing in the middle of important events” (Preface). Whitsitt’s life story was covered in nineteen chapters.

The book begins in 1862 with Whitsitt as a twenty-year old during the Civil War. He volunteered as a private soldier and a chaplain with the Confederate Army two months after having been ordained and elected to the pastorate of Mill Creek Baptist Church in Tennessee. He served in a cavalry unit that was under the command of legendary general, Nathan Bedford Forrest. Whitsitt was eventually captured and held as a prisoner of war until he was released near the war’s end.

When the war ended, Whitsitt decided to further his education. He enrolled at the University of Virginia in order to supplement the Master of Arts degree that he earned prior to the Civil War from Union University, which was then located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. After a while, he met and was greatly influenced by John A. Broadus, formerly the pastor of Charlottesville Baptist Church and then a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. Broadus convinced Whitsitt to pursue a theological education at Southern. Before completing his studies, he traveled to Germany where he advanced his education in Leipzig and Berlin. In 1872, he was elected to the faculty of Southern Seminary at an annual salary of \$1,500. He was the sixth professor to be hired in the brief history of the institution.

Whitsitt’s professorship proved to be hectic, yet interesting. He taught New Testament Greek, polemic theology, church history, and German while at Southern. He became close friends with Crawford Toy, the professor who eventually became the subject of his own controversy that resulted in his removal from Southern. During the summer of 1880 while conducting research at the British Museum, Whitsitt discovered the information

that would eventually lead to the tumultuous controversy bearing his name: documentary evidence that English Baptists first began practicing baptism by immersion in 1641. His findings would not be published under his name for another thirteen years.

In May 1895, William Whitsitt was unanimously elected as the third president of Southern Seminary. About a year later, the controversy began that would lead to his 1899 resignation. The Whitsitt controversy centered around Landmarkism's belief in Baptist successionism and the disagreement with Whitsitt's discovery concerning baptism by immersion. Landmarkism was strong during the nineteenth century and found some of its strongest supporters in the middle of the Old South. Baptists in the states along the Atlantic seaboard generally supported Whitsitt. Newspapers of the various Southern Baptist state conventions published details of the controversy as it raged. The controversy seemed to end upon his resignation. Whitsitt found employment as the chair of philosophy at Richmond College in Virginia where he remained for nine years.

The book is unique in several ways. First, one of the greatest aspects is a rich primary source of information that Slatton was able to consult. Whitsitt faithfully kept a diary and his granddaughter had possession of his personal writings that spanned a fourteen-year period, including the years of the controversy and his resignation as seminary president. Slatton's qualifications are another unique feature. Although he held pastorates in Texas and Virginia for over fifty years, Slatton earned a Th.D. in church history from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He indicated that he was "somewhat familiar" with the Whitsitt controversy prior to meeting Whitsitt's granddaughter. As a historian, he quickly became excited to have the opportunity to study the diaries and other information that would eventually be made available to him.

Slatton is involved with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. In concluding remarks on the passion for uniformity of opinion within the church, he made an interesting comment, "For those who experienced the moderate-fundamentalist controversy among twentieth-century Southern Baptists, the story of the Whitsitt controversy, told in detail, evokes a haunting sense of *déjà vu*" (323).

The book's advantages far outweigh any disadvantages. The author seems to give fair treatment to the story of Whitsitt's life. The text is written in a clear and concise manner. The accuracy of the index is of concern as some topics seem to be a few pages away from where their location is indicated. This book will be helpful for historians, pastors, theologians, and others who may wish to broaden their knowledge of the events surrounding the Whitsitt controversy.

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Oakman, Douglas E. *Jesus and the Peasants. Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008. Pp. 336. Paperback, \$38.00.

Douglas Oakman offers a collection of essays applying various social-scientific or “cross-culturally informed” models to the question of Jesus’ economic situation, beliefs, and praxis in *Jesus and the Peasants*. As a collection from a lifetime of scholarship, these essays feature no central thesis—and even developing and changing perspectives—but do feature a shared intention of introducing readers to Jesus’ own political-economic milieu. Through the development of his understanding of the Gospels, Oakman has come to the conclusion that Jesus was primarily an agrarian peasant who reflected the political, economic, and social interests of this group but yet spoke hopefully about the ever-present kingdom of God that transformed these dire situations.

The book is divided into three sections: 1) “political economy and the peasant values of Jesus”; 2) “the Jesus traditions within peasant realities”; and 3) “the peasant aims of Jesus.” In chapters one and two, Oakman explores the social dynamics of debt in early Roman Palestine with the hopes of addressing the question “whether the ministry of Jesus formulated a response to widespread indebtedness in that environment” (11). Ideally debts were “horizontal” or reciprocal, but they were more often than not “vertical” in their orientation. One could hold debts to parents, family members, patrons, friends, and political powers that be. Debts in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman world were primarily agrarian problems, but the “biblical view of debt was the equality, with various qualifications, of each member of Israel before Yahweh” (15). In building a model for debt and social stratification in early Roman Palestine, Oakman concludes that when the model is applied to Jesus traditions (including parables and the Lord’s Prayer), “Jesus’ ministry takes an explicitly revolutionary aspect according to the canons of antiquity” in a way that it would have been perceived by those in power as an insurrectionist movement—even without weapons and war (32, cf. 39).

Oakman evaluates the value of the two *denarii* in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:35) in chapter three. He concludes that the two *denarii* was a substantial amount of money that would feed and shelter a wounded man for nearly a month. The Samaritan is also extremely generous in making additional provisions. What might have been most offensive for Jewish hearers was the idea that the Samaritan practiced “general reciprocity” while the Levite and the priest practiced “negative reciprocity,” which would have been perceived as a rather odious role reversal to the parable’s original hearers. In chapter four, Oakman evaluates Palestinian population density, the size of the crowd, and its implications for debts in Mark 6:34.

Chapter 5 is a survey of ancient economy studies in the New Testament, starting with Bruce Barton in the 1930s. Most important to this survey, however, is the work of Karl Polanyi, who noted that the economy was no separate institution in the ancient world as it was related to kinship and political associations (56). Industries as they are conceived of in modernity are no part of the ancient agrarian world, nor did money play the same role or have the same significance. Oakman argues that knowing these differences are of the utmost important for reading biblical texts in a different economic setting. In chapter 6, Oakman surveys the relationship between ancient economy and Revelation. He concludes that the

text takes profoundly negative approaches to the economic institutions of Rome, and that John envisions a renewed, domestic economy to take its place—a vision Oakman argues was difficult to accept in a post-Constantinian Christianity during the canonization process.

The parable of the mustard seed is the subject of chapter nine. Here Oakman argues that Jesus primarily identifies himself with the agrarian society and its concerns, not the urban context with its very different concerns. He suggests that the point of the parable is not about the growth of something great but rather the destructive power that small seed can have. The small seed of God's kingdom has a destructive, uprooting effect on the political, economic, and social institutions of Jesus' day—an effect lost in urban and theological readings. In chapter 10, Oakman makes a similar case for the Beelzebub pericope (Luke 11:14-26). He contends that the text is really about political exorcism and the usurpation of the Herodian dynasty and its replacement with the kingdom of God.

In chapter 11, Oakman employs a conflict approach to assessing the political situation of those living in the countryside in Luke-Acts. He makes a contrast between the competing interests of the elite in the city aiming to expand land holdings, gain political security, and ultimately control with the interests of peasantry aiming to achieve political independence through debt forgiveness and redistribution of the land.

Oakman argues in chapter 12 that Jesus was peasant with peasant values but nonetheless was hopeful that the Kingdom of God would bring transformation even to the often vilified government. He repeats here what he perceives as the hermeneutical uncertainty of reading parables in order to gain such data (180). Oakman turns to the Jesus' cursing fig trees narrative in chapter 13, and he suggests that these texts demand closer analysis in social-systemic approaches. The curses, he argues, apply primarily to the Palestinian social situation under Herod, and they indicate Jesus' critique of these structures. Again here Jesus offers the kingdom of God as an alternative to these institutions. The Lord's Prayer, according to Oakman's discussion in chapter 14, also has a primarily immediate concern—but not completely unrelated to eschatological hope—addressing very real and immediate social concerns for peasants and agrarians in his context. Dividing the passage in two tables, Oakman suggests that the first table reflects more basic theological beliefs about God's concern for the welfare of people, whereas the second table deals more specifically with the values and concerns of the Galilean Jesus movement.

The author outlines an integration of model of social interpretation to the social world of Jesus in chapter 15. He aims to implement abductive procedures with both theoretical models of social consciousness and historical data, because he believes that a “more sophisticated sociological imagination thus can inform social inquiry centered on the historical Jesus or Roman Galilee” (246). The model Oakman proposes combines macrocultural, macrosociological, and social-systems approaches in order to produce “an augmented understanding of politics as a key institutional and cultural variable and of struggles in the environment of Jesus” (253). The interdisciplinary engagement from this model and archeology results in understanding the Judean quality of Jesus' Galilean context. The Jesus seen at the end of this enterprise is not the philosopher or cynic decontextualized by Crossan and Mack but rather a Jewish Jesus in line with the tradition of Israel and who proclaimed a non-elitist message against the political institutions of his setting that would cost him his life.

Oakman paints the historical Jesus found in earlier Jesus traditions as symbol of tax subversion in the name of God's kingdom in chapter 16. In the final chapter, "Jesus, Q, and Ancient Literacy in Social Perspective," Oakman aims to distinguish between the Jesus of a predominantly oral culture (buried in the Q tradition) and the Jesus recorded in scribal traditions with respect to Jesus' own social and political interests. Contingent upon an understanding of a largely illiterate culture in Herodian Galilee, Oakman contends that passages demonstrating literary competency reflect scribal addendum, not the native Aramaic oral traditions. He concludes that Jesus attracted negative attention from the powerful and wealthy in his subversive messages about politics and economy with his idea that God's kingdom came with "tax shelters" of sorts—and it was this political-economic message that cost Jesus his life and perhaps even was the reason for the first scribes writing Jesus' sayings down. Oakman suggests that the message preserved in the Gospels more or less reflects the political and religious ideals of rabbinic Judaism and the Jesus movement, not those of the illiterate, Galilean peasant (308).

Oakman provides exemplar work in the application of social matrices to the biblical text in social-scientific exegesis, but evangelicals will often have serious disagreement with his conclusions. He argues that Jesus was conservative with regard to the tradition of Israel but revolutionary in regard to political and economic structures. Oakman concludes that "Jesus' historical activity was essentially about politics, and the restructuring of society, and not about religion or theology" (296). In his hermeneutic, Oakman rejects what he perceives as traditional "Jesus-idolatry" and "biblical tyranny" (6) as well as the purely reductionistic approaches to religion by the social sciences—but he can't find the happy medium he's looking for here.

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