

EXPOSITORY PREACHING: THE LOGICAL RESPONSE TO A ROBUST BIBLIOLOGY

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With postmodernism as a contemporary backdrop, this essay first warns of eight current attacks on the authority of Scripture. Biblical authority is next discussed in the context of expository preaching by defining this kind of preaching and demonstrating its essential relationship to divine authority. Finally, the author asserts that a robust bibliology, especially the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility, is inseparably linked to authoritative exposition and always upholds preaching that is true to God's intent and authority in the biblical text.

The *scholar* in his *study* asks what the Bible *meant*. The *Christian* in the *pew* asks what the Bible *means*. The *preacher* in the *pulpit* is charged to ask and answer both.

Written over the course of a millennium-and-a-half and separated from our world by another two, the Holy Bible stands unchallenged as the most special book ever written. However, its ancient pedigree has provoked both the most ardent loyalty and the fiercest criticism. Why? Because "Bible-believing" Christians assert that as Scripture speaks, God speaks. This assertion has emboldened martyrs at the stake and infuriated kings on their thrones.

If theology is truly the Queen of the Sciences, then bibliology is her crown. Approaching the written text of Scripture is the most determinative endeavor of the Christian faith. Every dimension of Christianity is defined and regulated by the Word of God. Our confidence that "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" is predicated on "the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Pet 1:2-3). This sufficient knowledge of God is housed in the Bible, the written revelation of the living God.

The challenge of apprehending a written text stood center stage for me in a high school literature class. We had just read J.R.R. Tolkien's classic, *The Hobbit*. I loved the book, reading it in only a few sittings. Then the time came to discuss it in class. That was a lecture I will never forget. For an hour I was informed of three truths that were deeply disturbing. First, the text didn't

necessarily mean what it said. Second, the text meant much more than it said. Third, what it meant to me was more important than what Tolkien intended.

Ascribing the meaning of Bilbo Baggins' departure from his home as an allegory for childbirth and interpreting his adventures as representative chapters of my own life was not what I was expecting from the debrief. I felt embarrassed and naive at the revelation that I had simply taken the book at face value.

Little did I know that I had been rudely introduced to the principles of the infected arm of biblical criticism, a force that has shaped biblical studies since the Enlightenment. Not all these forces are impure. In fact, some are "indispensable to our understanding of Scripture; but all of them can become destructive if used without due care and attention."¹

That afternoon in English literature was more than a lesson in criticism. It was also illustrative of what has happened and can happen in the pulpit. Within the same time that a typical sermon takes, our teacher accomplished something remarkable. She convinced our class that what she thought about the book was the right view, even though it was not what the class had previously believed. But even more, *her* interpretation was authoritative.

Analogously, the same phenomenon happens weekly in the pulpit. This article will explore the issue of the preacher's real power and authority, and what sets the trajectory of this influence. I contend that it is the robustness of a preacher's bibliology. Homiletical power either comes from the Bible and its authority, or from the preacher and his ingenuity. Authority rests either in the handler of the text or in the text itself. My supposition is that a robust bibliology will logically lead to expository preaching as its homiletical expression.

THE POSTMODERN PEW

The exposition of Scripture has become increasingly more challenging to practice and justify in today's postmodern² culture. Where truth is relative, ethics are situational, and authority is ever-questioned, there is certainly no welcome mat out for the expository sermon that delineates truth, defines morality, and declares the authority of God.³ Not only does expository

¹ Brian H. Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 29. Scholarly criticism of the Bible involves Textual Criticism (lower criticism), Literary Criticism (higher criticism), Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism, Historical Criticism, and Canonical Criticism.

² For a succinct etymology and history of the word "postmodern," see R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 67-88. Mohler traces the origin of the term to Frederico de Oniz in 1934 and the first significant treatise by Arnold Toynbee in 1939.

³ Parts of this section have been adapted from this author's D.Min. Project Thesis, *The Exposition of Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 as a Means of Teaching the Collegians of Grace Community*

preaching go against the grain of postmodernism⁴ as a cultural phenomenon, it also goes against postmodern trends in hermeneutics and homiletics. Expository preaching is both the antithesis of and the antidote for postmodernity. Darrell W. Johnson writes that "...postmodernity has fundamentally lost faith in nearly everything."⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer summarizes the essence of postmodernism as "incredulity toward meaning."⁶ Yet, the essence of expository preaching is to summon *faith* in the gospel by explaining the *meaning* of the Bible.

The postmodern pew is made from the scrap yard of the Enlightenment's failures. The advances of the Enlightenment (e.g., transatlantic travel, scientific discoveries, the printing press) garnered confidence that rationalism could provide solutions to man's (and culture's) plights. However, the twentieth century exponentially showcased the results of rationalism. Technology proved to be rationalism's progeny, providing stunning scientific advancements on the macroscopic level (e.g., landing on the moon, antibiotics and vaccines, nuclear weaponry) and attainable conveniences on the common level (e.g., washing machines, air conditioning, automobiles). Yet, the twenty-first century has begun with widespread disillusion. Technology did not turn out to be the cultural messiah it was touted to be.⁷ Peace and happiness were not the outcome of the Enlightenment's latest century. As David Wells points out:

The Enlightenment promises have proved to be empty, and our world, once the stage for our freedom, now looks increasingly hostile and inhospitable to us. We are in the curious position of knowing ourselves

Church, Sun Valley, CA, to Find Their Satisfaction in God (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 49-82.

⁴ Defining "postmodernism" is not a simple task. Craig Gay notes that postmodernity attempts to move beyond modernism, but does so unsuccessfully. He writes: "There is very little agreement as yet as to what "post-modernity" means. While the term occasionally simply denotes dissatisfaction with modernity, it is increasingly used to suggest that we have entered into an entirely new cultural situation in which none of the old "modern" rules and habits of mind need to be taken seriously anymore. All such suggestions are mistaken and misleading. . . . [T]he ideals of the modern project are still very firmly embedded in the central institutional realities of the contemporary society." Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 17.

⁵ Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 230.

⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 16.

⁷ Graham Johnston points out, "Technology and progress not only failed to solve all human dilemmas but in the course of events have actually contributed to human suffering as evidenced in such cases as: the threat of nuclear annihilation, the destruction of rainforests, cyber-pornography, global pollution, and the depletion of the ozone, to name just a few." Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 27.

to be the children of modernity, the recipients of its blessings and the psychology that goes with them, while at the same time wanting to move beyond the part of it that has betrayed us.⁸

Such disillusionment has birthed a cry for a new worldview that improves upon modernism. This is not the first time for such a cultural reflex. History is a repeating cycle of secular solutions for the soul's gnawing sickness of depravity. Still, no earthborn worldview has won the battle for authority over the minds of men. But like the turtle in the fabled race with the rabbit, the Bible has maintained a steady pace in its authority amid a hailstorm of attacks.

ATTACKS ON THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Word of God has been under attack since our first parents listened to the serpent in the Garden (Gen 3; 2 Cor 11:3). But the most sophisticated and erudite attacks were generated in the nineteenth-century.⁹ A.T.B McGowan observes:

At the heart of the Enlightenment were two key elements, an affirmation of human autonomy and an affirmation of the final authority of reason. Both of these factors militated against the orthodox Christian doctrine of revelation. After all, if reason is the final authority, then no appeal can be made to a Word purporting to have come from a divine being; and if human beings are autonomous, then they must decide for themselves what to believe without any interference from God, church, or Bible.¹⁰

These humanistic ideals gave biblical critics a red marker to write question marks on almost every page of the Bible.

Before discussing the Bible's authority, the challenges to affirming its authority will be outlined. These challenges, or attacks, find their roots in the nineteenth-century's elevation of man's reason over divine revelation.

⁸David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 63.

⁹For example, inerrancy was not seriously questioned until the nineteenth-century when Higher Criticism formalized doubts about textual veracity and authorial authenticity of the biblical text(s). See James Burthchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1820: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 1-2.

¹⁰A.T.B. McGowan, *Divine Authenticity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 51.

The Challenge of Authorial Authenticity

The higher critics were the first to attack Scripture's authority. The base from which the attacks were launched was René Descartes' motto, *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). With this mindset, God was excluded from the study of the Bible and human reason became the final arbiter of knowledge. Doubt became a key exegetical principle in the study of the Bible.¹¹ Authority shifted from God and the Bible to man's reason.¹² These critics proposed that the books of the Bible are composites of authors, editors, and redactors rather than divine revelation as mediated through human authors.¹³ The focus in biblical studies shifted from the text of Scripture to the critical issues behind the text,¹⁴ none of which can be answered with certainty. Consequently, according to the critics, one cannot be sure of the text's message because one cannot be sure of the human source of the message.

The Challenge of Textual Veracity

Closely related to the first challenge is higher criticism's questioning of the reliability of the extant biblical manuscripts. Higher criticism is made up of many tributaries that all lead to the conclusion that the texts we have cannot be taken at face value. Form criticism functions as a tool to discern fact from myth on the pages of Scripture. The Gospels are victimized by this methodology and are accused of providing a deceptive portrayal of Jesus, which leads to the scholars' bifurcation between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. The text cannot be trusted to convey historical fact and therefore must be evaluated through the grid of human reason, which is prejudiced against the supernatural and all inconsistencies with the scientific method.

The Challenge of Historical Accuracy

If the author and the text are not authoritative, then we should expect that the Bible contains historical errors (e.g., geographical errors, factual errors, dating errors). Scripture is put on trial by other ancient documents and by archaeology to determine its accuracy. The underlying premise is that the Bible

¹¹ Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 5.

¹² "At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Bible was the universal authority in all fields of knowledge, but by the end of the century that authority was eroded." See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 11.

¹³ "In the second half of the eighteenth century, in connection with the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment, within Protestant theology the insight began to prevail that the Bible is a book written by men, which, like any product of the human mind, can properly be made understandable only from the times in which it appeared and therefore only with the methods of historical science." Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1973), 14.

¹⁴ Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 11.

is just like any other book. Spinoza promoted a historical-linguistic study of the Bible, approaching it like any other text and arguing that it should be understood without any aid to reason. Behind this approach are inductivism,¹⁵ anti-supernaturalism, and evolutionism. These three philosophical presuppositions attacked the supernatural character of the Bible, reducing it to mere myth and stories that demonstrate literary and social evolution.¹⁶ The historical facts of the Bible were undermined and the conclusion was that the Bible speaks truthfully on matters of faith but not history, geography, or science.

The Challenge of Supernatural/Scientific Plausibility

In the wake of scientific advances, the supernatural accounts in the Bible were judged by the scientific method. Darwin and evolutionary theory sharpened the sword of this challenge with a view of the origin of creation and creatures antithetical to the Genesis account. When Scripture and science were presumed to be at odds, the Bible was doubted. One theologian writes, "Science is no longer informed by Scripture, but Scripture is to be interpreted by means of the conclusions of science. Thus the Bible's authority was diminished."¹⁷ This approach has a critical impact on the picture of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels. Rudolf Bultmann attempts to discern fact from myth in his study of Jesus and concludes the following, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist."¹⁸ The removal of the supernatural led to a Jesus reinvented according to a purely scientific and rationalistic hermeneutic. This is what was behind Thomas Jefferson's revision of the Gospel accounts when he created the Jefferson Bible¹⁹ by physically cutting out with a razor the virgin birth, miracles, references to the deity and resurrection of Christ, and the Trinity.²⁰

¹⁵ Francis Bacon's inductivism spearheaded the divide between faith and reason. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 28-29.

¹⁶ Norman L. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars," *JETS* 42, no. 1 (March 1999): 7.

¹⁷ Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 25-26.

¹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L.P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 8, quoted in Donald A. Hagner, "The New Testament, History, and the Historical-Critical Method," in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, eds. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 78.

¹⁹ Also referred to as *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*.

²⁰ Dickinson W. Adams, *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels*, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 2nd series (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1983), 39-42.

The Challenge of Religious Pluralism

Technological advances made the world smaller through accessibility of books, paved roads, mechanized travel, and most recently, the internet. Along with shrinking the world, it exposed us to religious pluralism. John Caputo describes our pluralistic world when he writes, “We live in a world of instant global communication, linked by satellite communication systems to the most remote corners of the world, which exposes us at every turn to a plurality of voices and choices, races and places, cultures and religions, to the multiplicity of lifestyles and ways to be.”²¹ The multiplicity of religions in our world collides with the gospel’s claim of exclusivity. This claim is met with skepticism and suspicion, and Christianity is charged with religious arrogance and intolerance. Instead of turning to the authority of Scripture, most Christians chose the easier path—non-resistance—which only aggravated the problem of pluralism.²²

The Challenge of Social Relevance

Coming later to the battle, ideologies such as feminism dismissed the Bible as socially out of date. The Word was deemed chauvinistic, old-fashioned, out of vogue. Recently, a professor from a national university visited our church and published her opinion of our church’s teaching on man’s headship in the home and masculine leadership in the church in an online journal. The title of the article reveals her opinion of our church’s doctrine and praxis, “The Persistence of Patriarchy.” After disagreeing with complementarianism, she directed her attacks toward the doctrine of inerrancy and authority of Scripture by suggesting that to persist in patriarchy, one must ignore the evidence of scholarship in the dating of the Pastoral epistles to the second century. Instead of Paul, the Pastoral epistles are attributed to a pseudonymous author who is less authoritative on matters of social hierarchical traditions. She concludes her article by asking the question, “Is God permanently committed to the kinds of social hierarchy that existed in the first and second millennium B.C.E.?”²³ Appealing to higher criticism, she argues that in social matters, the Bible’s authority is irrelevant and outdated.

The Challenge of Moral Accountability

As men have continued to proceed “from bad to worse” (2 Tim 3:13), the stubbornness of depravity has organized itself in an all-out blitz on the

²¹ J.D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 42.

²² Todd L. Miles, *A God of Many Understandings?* (Nashville, TN: Baker, 2010), 7, 140-41.

²³ Anne Eggebroten. http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=_magazine.article&issue=soj1007&article=the-persistence-of-patriarchy. (Accessed 1/12/2011). For an evaluation of her article, refer to R. Albert Mohler’s critique at <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/07/14/hard-to-believe-biblical-authority-and-evangelical-feminism/> (Accessed 1/12/2011).

Bible's moral standards and mandates. The homosexual agenda is an example of this kind of challenge that stiff-arms the audacity of the Bible to be authoritative over moral choices. Not only is the homosexual movement resisting the biblical teaching, many Christian leaders are unwilling to articulate biblical teaching on this question. When asked what he thought about homosexuality, Brian McLaren answered,

Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. We've heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say 'it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us' . . . If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren't sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn.²⁴

McLaren is a well known postmodern pastor and, as evident in the above answer, the pressure of moral relativism shapes his interpretation of Scripture.

The Challenge of Condescending Presentism

Presentism is the patronizing slant against the past. Since the Bible is an ancient book, it draws the suspicion from the modern mind that considers itself too sophisticated to subscribe to such rudimental mythologies. Presentism is the zenith of the philosophical attacks on the Bible, boldly promoting man above God, Scripture, and history while remaining inseparable from rationalism's original claim, *Cogito ergo sum*.

These categorical challenges have caused widespread doubt that the Bible has binding authority over men and the only hope of salvation. This is the fog through which the expositor is called to navigate.

RECOVERING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

In a culture that disdains authority, authority is exactly what is dispensed in the faithful exposition of the Word of God. Foundational to a commitment to expository preaching is a commitment to biblical authority. This allegiance to the authority of the Scriptures is the point of greatest friction between the evangelical church and postmodernity. One must remember that "The Bible is not authoritative because of what we make it, but because of what it *is* The Bible is our final authority because it is authoritative; it is not

²⁴ Brian McLaren, http://www.outofur.com/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o.html. (Accessed 1/12/2011).

authoritative because we consider it to be authority.”²⁵ However, recent trends in hermeneutics have inadvertently (or in some cases purposely) resulted in undermining the Bible’s authority and integrity. David Allen explains this erosion of authority in the following statement:

The issue of authority was the quintessential issue of modernity with its celebration of the autonomy of reason over the authority of revelation. Modernity distrusted authority. Postmodernity dismantles authority. Biblical authority particularly suffers under the weight of postmodernity.²⁶

Vanhoozer insightfully connects the question of authority to the discipline of hermeneutics. He writes, “Disputes about authority quickly turn into disputes about interpretation and who determines which interpretation is correct.”²⁷ This all leads to the question of ultimate authority.

The implications of biblical authority are extensive. John Frame stresses: “To say that Scripture is authoritative is not only to say that its propositions are true, it is also to say that its commands are binding, its questions demand answers of us . . . its exclamations should become the shouts of our hearts . . . its promises must be relied upon, and so forth.”²⁸ Scripture’s authority then is tantamount to God’s authority. Wayne Grudem concurs: “The authority of the Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”²⁹

This conviction about the authority of the Scripture is decidedly *presuppositional*. However, I would suggest that postmodernism’s radical relativity ascribes authority to individuals without credible criteria. It could be said that the authority ascribed to the individual by postmodernism is in itself presuppositional. The sovereignty of the individual, under the banner of tolerance, is protected as a supreme value. At the same time, the veracity of the Bible’s authenticity and authority has been the target of postmodernity’s attack.

²⁵ Scott Hafemann, “The SBJT Forum: Evangelical Responses to Postmodernism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 91-92.

²⁶David L. Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism: an Evangelical Comes to the Dance,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 73.

²⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 44.

²⁸John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 201.

²⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 73.

The Scriptures have withstood the attack unscathed.³⁰ The Bible is indeed self-authenticating.³¹

EXPOSITORY PREACHING AS THE EXPRESSION OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

In the mid-twentieth century Merrill F. Unger charged, "The authority and power, which the inspired oracles possess, become manifest in the pulpit ministry of the faithful expositor of the Bible."³² But this expository power is largely off the radar in postmodernism. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix relate this absence to the issue of authority:

A high view of biblical inspiration issues forth into a clear conviction regarding the Bible's *authority*. If the Bible is inspired by God and consequently void of error, then it can be trusted as the sole authority for matters of faith. The sparsity of good expository preachers at the close of the twentieth century is in part due to a lack of conviction in this area.³³

As authority continues to disintegrate in postmodernism (except in terms of self-authority), the need grows for people to be exposed to the authority and relevancy of God's self-revelation in the pages of the Bible.

When properly understood, expository preaching proves to be the only sure lighthouse to guide the church through postmodernism's turbulent waters. Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues that the condition of a society which disdains exposition is ultimately the fault of the pulpit's negligence of real, biblical preaching. He writes:

[I]n many ways it is the departure of the Church from preaching that is responsible in a large measure for the state of modern society. The Church has been trying to preach morality and ethics without the Gospel as a basis; it has been preaching morality without godliness; and it simply does not work. It never has, and it never will. And the result is

³⁰See Grudem's defenses of the Bible's authority. *Ibid.*, 73-89.

³¹Scott M. Gibson, "Biblical Preaching in an Anti-Authority Age," *Reformation and Revival* 9:1 (Winter 2000): 42.

³²Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 24.

³³Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 53-54.

that the Church, having abandoned her real task, has left humanity more or less to its own devices.³⁴

If Lloyd-Jones is right, some liability for the postmodern mindset can be laid at the feet of the church for failing to preach the Scriptures faithfully and accurately.

Perhaps the greatest impact of postmodern thinking on the church has been made in the pulpit, and in particular on expository preaching. “Numerous influential voices within evangelicalism suggest that the age of the expository sermon is now past.”³⁵ The tolerance and relativity of postmodernism have rendered the Bible as antiquated and irrelevant. That many have lost confidence in the Bible’s relevance is truly sad, but that many preachers have abandoned the Bible’s relevance is catastrophically tragic. The responsibility and liability of the preacher and his task must be rediscovered according to the biblical standard.

WHAT IS EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

Discussions about preaching typically distinguish expository preaching from topical and textual preaching.³⁶ Richard L. Mayhue defines expository preaching as preaching that,

... focuses predominantly on the text(s) under consideration along with its (their) context(s). Exposition normally concentrates on a single text of Scripture, but it is sometimes possible for a thematic/theological message or a historical/biographical discourse to be expository in nature. An exposition may treat any length of passage.³⁷

Mayhue continues to explain expository preaching by providing a helpful summary of the essential elements of expository preaching:

³⁴D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 35.

³⁵R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Urgency of Preaching,” *The Tie* 65 (July 1997): i.

³⁶“Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that generally serves as gateway into whatever the preacher chooses to address.” Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition*, ed. John MacArthur Jr. (Dallas: Word, 1992), 9. It should be noted, however, that some use the term “textual preaching” to describe expository preaching. Sidney Greidanus comments, “Textual preaching is preaching that is based on a biblical text and expounds the message of that text. This definition implies that all textual preaching requires not only a text but also exposition of that text. All textual preaching is therefore understood as expository preaching.” Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 123.

³⁷Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” 9.

1. The message finds its sole source in Scripture.
2. The message is extracted from Scripture through careful exegesis.
3. The message preparation correctly interprets Scripture in its normal sense and its context.
4. The message clearly explains the original God-intended meaning of Scripture.
5. The message applies the Scriptural meaning for today.³⁸

In other words, what God says in the Bible, what God meant/means by what He says, and how the Word connects by way of application unto the glory of God and the good of believers is the heart of expository preaching.

The motivations that compel the expositor are grounded in three areas: a commitment to the Bible as the Word of God, the mandates from the Word of God, and the legacy of preaching in biblical and church history. First, expository preaching is driven by a commitment that the Bible is the Word of God. The preacher's view of the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of Scripture will dictate his approach to sermon making. "Where the Bible is esteemed as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, preaching can flourish. But where the Bible is treated merely as a record of valuable religious insight, preaching dies."³⁹

If the preacher really recognizes the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, that "philosophy" will govern all decisions about sermon material. Obviously, given the options of delivering his thoughts on God's Word, the commitment to explaining God's Word is the highest priority and privilege. In reference to Paul's charge to Timothy to preach the authoritative word of God (2 Tim 4:1-2), Sidney Greidanus rightly suggests that the need for today's society to hear authoritative preaching is more urgent than in Timothy's day. He writes that,

...if preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must proclaim this message of the inspired Scriptures, for the Scriptures alone have divine authority. If preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must submit themselves and echo the Word of God. Preachers are literally to be ministers of the Word.⁴⁰

Submission to the Word of God and to the command to preach this Word only comes from a genuine commitment to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. John MacArthur asks:

Should not our preaching be biblical exposition, reflecting our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? If we

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁹ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 40.

⁴⁰ Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 12-13.

believe that “all Scripture is inspired by God” and inerrant, must we not be equally committed to the reality that it is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17)? Should not that magnificent truth determine how we preach? . . . The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it *expositionally*.⁴¹

Based on the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, the preacher’s mandate is the proclamation of that very Word. The most forceful words on this subject were written by the apostle Paul while he was awaiting his execution in a Roman prison in the final lap of his life. He instructs his protégé with the following words:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim 4:1-5).

Phil Newton says in reference to this passage, “The preacher must expound the Word of God or else he has failed in his calling. He may be a wonderful administrator, a winsome personal worker, and effective leader. But if he fails to expound the Word of God, he is a failure to his calling to ‘preach the Word.’”⁴² The preacher’s decision to preach expositionally is not an option; rather, it is an issue of pastoral obligation and obedience!

Why is expository preaching needed today? Scott Gibson answers, “Because [it] has authority and relevance for men and women to live in an anti-authority age.”⁴³ Communicating God’s authoritative and relevant Word is the

⁴¹ John MacArthur, Jr., “The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition*, ed. John MacArthur, Jr. (Dallas: Word, 1992), 23.

⁴²Phil Newton, “Biblical Preaching,” *Reformation and Revival* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 19. Other passages exhorting the preaching of the Word are Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:2; and Titus 2:1.

⁴³Scott M. Gibson, “Biblical Preaching in an Anti-Authority Age,” *Reformation and Revival* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 42.

chief concern of the preacher. Evaluating this communication in the postmodern context is the prudent concern of preaching in the twenty-first century.

EXPOSITORY PREACHING IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT

A convergence of postmodernism and expository preaching is not without complication. Gibson explains, "The receptivity of many people to the message we proclaim is a function of a set of assumptions that are themselves strongly influenced by postmodern thought."⁴⁴ Yet, postmodern complexities do not erase the universal issues of sin and salvation. They remain constant and require expository attention. The question then is how should a faithful expositor respond to (and in) the postmodern context? Not surprisingly, liberalism has responded by means of accommodation. Interestingly, Allen finds that:

The popularity of postmodernism in the last quarter of the twentieth century coincides somewhat with the rise and popularity of the New Homiletic. Fred Craddock's *As One Without Authority* was published in 1971 and is rightly looked upon as initiating a "new era" and a "Copernican revolution" in homiletics.⁴⁵

To provide a satisfying response to the New Homiletic is beyond the scope of this essay. But suffice it to say that postmodernism's dismissal of metanarratives has proven fertile ground for relative subjectivism fed by narrative (or inductive) preaching. This inductive approach to preaching is the approach favored by theologically liberal preachers. The idea is to use stories/narratives to raise questions inductively. Answering them is less important than raising them.

Inductive methodology in preaching certainly can contribute to genuine learning. However, if questions are raised by an inductive element in the sermon, exposition of the Scripture should be the source for answers. Furthermore, care should be taken not to assume too much of the listener's ability to be inductive. Rick Gosnell's confidence is suspect when he writes:

Inductive preaching lays out the evidence and the examples and postpones the conclusions until the listeners have a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications, then come to the conclusion with the preacher at the end of the sermon. In fact, the hearer is allowed to complete the sermon. The sermon becomes a part of the listener's experience.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Jon Hinkson and Greg Ganssle, "Epistemology at the Core of Postmodernism: Porty, Foucault, and the Gospel," in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 68.

⁴⁵Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," 63.

⁴⁶Rick Gosnell, "Proclamation and the Postmodernist," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 383.

Remarkably, inductive (or narrative) preaching places an unjustified credibility on the listener's reliability to "complete the sermon" rightly. Absent from radical inductive preaching is the foundational doctrine of total depravity. The fact seems to be ignored that the reasoning abilities of man are in a decimated state, entirely without ability to deduce divine truth by powers of induction. The New Homiletic ascribes authority in preaching to the listener rather than to the Scriptures.

Again, certain elements of inductive communication should be welcomed by the expositor. Raising questions that the Scriptures answer is an excellent way to ensure reception of the message. But often in inductive preaching, the prescriptive authority of the Bible is sacrificed on the altar of self-discovery. Narrative preaching is a case of accommodating postmodernism and compromising the biblical mandate of prescription (1 Tim 4:11; 5:7; Titus 2:1).

A more biblical approach would be to respond to a postmodern audience without ignoring the immediate context of their lives. Engaging listeners at the level of their worldview for the purpose of presenting the gospel and biblical truth is exactly what Paul did with the Athenians in Acts 17:22-31.⁴⁷ In *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, Graham Johnston makes the following noteworthy suggestions regarding this kind of contextualization:

Before one can begin to bring meaning and relevance to the listener, the preacher must gain entry into his or her sphere of understanding.⁴⁸

Biblical preaching needs to recognize the current needs and issues from the listeners' perspective in order to move them to God's perspective.⁴⁹

Preaching must demonstrate a working understanding of the issues, concerns, and the interaction of people's daily lives, helping the listeners to interpret their world from a biblical standpoint.⁵⁰

Your effectiveness will increase when you understand the concerns on the hearts and minds of your listeners and are able to recognize problems as they arise in the particular text.⁵¹

⁴⁷Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Perils of Ignoring Postmodernism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 3.

⁴⁸Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 68.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 79.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 150-51.

These comments indicate the need for an expositor to have a working knowledge of his world and his people. In pastoral nomenclature, the more an expositor understands the sheep and their environment, the better he will know how to shepherd. This is best illustrated in how differently a preacher might expoit the same text to a group of children, teens, collegians, young married couples, senior saints, or a tribal church in Africa. Same text, same message, but different sermons relative to the preaching context.

But Thomas Schreiner notes a tempting danger to avoid. He writes, "We could begin to think that our knowledge of our culture, our expertise in postmodernism, is the key to evangelism."⁵² However, the message is never contextualized. It is merely our applications and illustrations that adjust to the listener's context.

John the Baptist illustrates the kind of expertise a preacher should acquire. His preparation for engaging his culture with the truth did not include years of cultural study. Instead, his preparation involved retreating into the wilderness to focus on God and His message. And his preaching was anything but inductive. It was authoritative, penetrating, relevant, and confrontive. Should the faithful expositor be in touch with his culture and his people? It is impossible not to be. But this should never replace the indispensable requirement and privilege of knowing God and His Word well enough to wield it with accuracy and authority. This authority is available to the preacher because of the inherent quality of the Bible that is summarized in three historic Christian doctrines—inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility.

THE THREE PILLARS OF A ROBUST BIBLIOLOGY

Every preacher must, by definition, say something and say it publically. He proclaims his message to a group of people who have ascribed to him the right to address them. These congregants are volunteers in this preaching exercise. The challenge for every preacher is what to say to these people and why. Even deeper, what authority does the man in the pulpit have to say what he says?

The legitimate expositor who preaches the Bible in the contemporary fog of postmodern relativism and confusion must depend upon his bibliology to give him justification, motivation, and guidance to preach authoritatively. In order for his bibliology to withstand the challenges described above, it must be vigorous and full-bodied; it must be *robust*. The historical pillars for Scripture's authority are grounded in the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility.

⁵²Schreiner, "The Perils of Ignoring Postmodernism," 3.

Inspiration

Inspiration answers the most fundamental question of bibliology: “Why should the Bible be trusted?”⁵³ It speaks to the origin and originator of Scripture. The doctrine of inspiration takes its name from the translation of the Greek word θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*) in 2 Timothy 3:16 which is translated “God-breathed.” This word is a *hapax legomenon* consisting of two words combined: θεός (*theos*; God) and πνέω (*pnēō*; to breathe).⁵⁴ In reference to Scripture being θεόπνευστος, “the main thought would be that the *graphē* is thoroughly permeated with the breath of God.”⁵⁵ B.B. Warfield published a seminal work on this term and concluded that it relates to production of the sacred Scripture.⁵⁶ God breathed does not mean that God breathed *into* the men as they wrote, rather that God breathed *out from* them as they wrote.⁵⁷ How much of the Bible is God-breathed? The predicative use of θεόπνευστος in relationship to γραφή indicates that all and every Scripture is God-breathed.⁵⁸ This is the central idea in Paul’s charge to Timothy, that every part of the sacred writings, even the smallest, which provide wisdom unto salvation is a product of God. This is the sense of verbal, plenary inspiration, where *every* part and *all* parts of Scripture are God-breathed.

⁵³ Ronald Satta highlights the importance of the doctrine of inspiration and its extent: “Throughout the history of Christianity the doctrine of biblical inspiration has been inextricably linked to, and in fact determined, the nature and extent of biblical authority—they have been two sides of the same coin. If God composed the Scripture, using human writers as his amanuensis, it logically followed that everything contained therein, whether pertaining to matters of faith or fact, must be without error—how could deity make a mistake? If, on the other hand, only some parts of Scripture possessed such divine markings or if only the thoughts of and not the words came forth from God, one might argue—as some did—that the Bible’s authority was limited, consisting only of those admonitions, precepts, or doctrines judged evident of divine composition.” Ronald F. Satta, *The Sacred Text: Biblical Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007), 1.

⁵⁴ Paul D. Feinberg, “Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 278.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁶ B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 281-83.

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth*, 122.

⁵⁸ There are two options for the grammatical relationship between θεόπνευστος and γραφή, predictively or attributively. The former means that “every Scripture is inspired” while the latter has the sense of “every inspired Scripture.” Feinberg lists five reasons in support of the former, (1) due to the absence of a verb, it is preferable to interpret both adjectives (θεόπνευστος and ὠφέλιμος) similarly, (2) 2 Tim 3:16 is parallel to 1 Tim 4:4 where the two adjectives are predicative, (3) if the construction was attributive, θεόπνευστος would precede γραφή, whereas in this case it follows it; (4) words linked with καὶ are understood to be in this conjunction; and (5) the attributive interpretations allow for the possibility of some uninspired γραφή. Refer to Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” 279.

While 2 Timothy describes the origin of Scripture, 2 Peter 1:20-21 discusses the means by which it was delivered to us. The biblical authors were not co-authors with God; they were instruments in God's hand. Peter, a professional angler, explained the dynamic relationship between God and the authors of Scripture in the moment of Scripture writing with the language of his fishing profession. He compares them to a ship at sea that is borne along by wind.⁵⁹ The writers were moved (φέρω; *pherō*) by the Holy Spirit as they wrote down the words of God in their own style and vocabulary, and within their culture and experiences. Brian Edwards provides a helpful explanation of this synergistic approach when he writes, "The inspiration of Scripture is a harmony of the active mind of the writer and the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit to produce God's inerrant and infallible word for the human race."⁶⁰

Inspiration's influence on what, how, and why we preach expositionally cannot be overstated. If we have a canon that was breathed out from writers by God, what could possibly rival it as sermonic subject matter?

Inerrancy

Inerrancy results from inspiration. While inspiration answers the question of *why* the Bible can be trusted, inerrancy answers the question of to what degree can the Bible be trusted. If Scripture is not qualitatively inerrant, how can we offer the world "a reliable gospel presented in unreliable Scripture?"⁶¹ Contemporary scholars' doubts of historical facts articulated in the Bible undermine the theological truth conveyed in its pages. When the teachings of "faith and practice" are enveloped inside history, these teachings are invalidated once the wrapping of history is confirmed to be erroneous. The doctrines of incarnation, redemption, and reconciliation are inseparably wedded to historical accounts of the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ. If the details of Jesus' life are with error, why should His claims of salvation from sin and resurrection be believed? Edwards says it well, "We cannot have a reliable Savior without a reliable Scripture."⁶² Inerrancy substantiates the accuracy of the theological claims made in the Bible by providing verifiable historical and scientific specifics surrounding those claims.

Four lines of reasoning uphold biblical inerrancy.⁶³ First, the biblical portrayal of the impeccable character of God strongly demands the doctrine of inerrancy. The Bible is bold to affirm that God cannot lie (Num 23:19; 1

⁵⁹ Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth*, 138.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶³ For a detailed presentation of these four principles refer to Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," 276-87.

Sam15:29; Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18), He cannot change (Mal 3:6), and His Word is true (John 17:17). The overwhelming evidence of Scripture in reference to itself points unmistakably to its believability in every part of the whole.

Second, the Bible's attestation to its own authority and truth upholds inerrancy. Jesus personally affirmed that *every* jot and tittle will be fulfilled (Matt 5:17-20) and God's Word cannot be broken (John 10:35). The Psalmist attested to the truthfulness of God's revelation with statements such as "The sum of Your word is truth" (Ps 119:160) and "I have seen a limit to all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (Ps 119:96). These inspired writers speak to the quality and extent of the accuracy of Scripture.

Third, the precise manner in which Scripture is used by Scripture presupposes inerrancy. Jesus and Paul constructed arguments that were based on single words (Matt 22:43-45; Ps 110:1; John 10:34-35; Ps 82:6), on the tense of a verb (Matt 22:32), and on the singular form of a word, in contrast to the plural (Gal 3:16; Gen 3:15). If the intention was not to indicate the precision and accuracy of the Scripture, then these arguments are unnecessarily specific.

Fourth, the biblical expectation and accreditation of the authors of Scripture confirms inerrancy. In Deuteronomy, Moses establishes a threefold criteria for the content communicated by the true messenger of God. The prophet must (1) only speak in the name of God (Deut 13:1-2, 18:20), (2) not speak what is not true (Deut 13:1-5, 18:22), and (3) speak only that which will come to pass (Deut 18:22). This restriction to speak only total truth implies God's governance over Scripture to maintain its truthfulness.

What then is the claim of inerrancy? Paul Feinberg defines it as "...the claim that when all facts are known, the scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be without error in all that they affirm to the degree of precision intended, whether that affirmation relates to doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, etc."⁶⁴ To put it simply, John Frame says, "When we say that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the Bible makes good on its claims."⁶⁵ This doctrine is not merely for scholastic conversation; rather it provides authority and integrity to our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ that is contained and constrained by Scripture.

Infallibility

Of the three I(s), infallibility has been most misrepresented. Some have restricted the meaning to statements in Scripture without extending this truthfulness to their factual and historical accuracy.⁶⁶ Others have merely

⁶⁴ Paul D. Feinberg, "Infallibility and Inerrancy," *Trinity Journal* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 120.

⁶⁵ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 174.

⁶⁶ Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth*, 25.

approached infallibility as interchangeable with inerrancy.⁶⁷ The thrust of infallibility is that in reference to God's Word, it cannot deceive since it is the revelation of God. When evaluated in the light of inspiration, infallibility is a necessary deduction from the doctrine of inspiration. In other words, the Bible cannot deceive because its Author is not able to deceive and is always without exception trustworthy.

These three I(s) converge in expository preaching which has as its premise the inerrancy and the infallibility of the biblical text which stand or fall on the divine inspiration of the text. "Infallibility and inerrancy are correlative to inspiration. In other words, if Scripture is God-authored, then what is authored is naturally and necessarily free from error (*inerrant*) and incapable of failing in its divinely-ordained purpose (*infallible*)."⁶⁸

The sermon, then, should serve as a bridge from the historical to the contemporary, the particular to the universal, and the past to the present. As John Stott puts it, "... a true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both."⁶⁹ This is only a priority for the preacher whose bibliology guides and regulates his preaching. God froze His Word to humanity in time and space, in ancient Near Eastern culture and context, and in literature and text. God is a verbal God. He left us a book, not a video. Why? The most clearly understood and interpretable communication to the senses is words. Therefore, interpreting and explaining the authorial intent of Scripture is the highest goal for a faithful expositional preacher.

ACKNOWLEDGING A DEBT

This essay has been written in honor of my friend and mentor, John MacArthur. Most of what I believe about expository preaching finds its genesis in that watershed statement he penned in 1992, "The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it *expositionally*."⁷⁰ Countless expositors owe John a debt of thanks for how this conviction has manifested itself in his model of expository preaching. I am confident that when our chapter in the history of the church is reviewed, the expository preaching of John MacArthur will stand out as a beacon of fidelity to God's Word. His preaching has been the scriptural and logical response to his robust bibliology.

⁶⁷ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary Press, 2009), 1:88.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10.

⁷⁰ John MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," 23.

In 2009, Grace Community Church honored John for his fortieth anniversary as its pastor. During the commemoration, the words of Alfred Gibbs from almost a century ago were shared with him. They still ring true. Gibbs wrote:

A preacher occupies a far more prominent place in the public eye than those who take no part in public preaching, therefore the need for a correspondingly circumspect walk before men. A pocket watch and a public clock both serve the same purpose—to tell time. If a watch gets out of order, only the owner is affected; but if a public clock goes wrong, [many] are misled. Thus a prominent position carries with it a greater responsibility for a consistent life. This will involve merciless self-judgment, separation from all known sin and, sometimes, even the denying of the legitimate things in life, that the testimony of Christ and the ‘ministry be not blamed.’⁷¹

John MacArthur’s life and ministry have served as that reliable public clock at Grace Community Church for over four decades and now The Master’s Seminary for twenty-five years. The worldwide impact of his relentless faithfulness and commitment to God and His Word knows few parallels. He has remained above reproach in his character, unwavering in his hermeneutic, and dependable in his exposition.

⁷¹ Alfred Gibbs, *The Preacher and His Preaching* (Fort Dodge, IA: Walterick, 1939), 46.

