

REDISCOVERING EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Richard L. Mayhue
Vice President and Dean
Professor of Pastoral Ministries
The Master's Seminary

Biblical preaching's authenticity is significantly tarnished by contemporary communicators' being more concerned with personal relevance than God's revelation. Scripture unmistakably requires a proclamation focused on God's will and mankind's obligation to obey. With men wholly committed to God's Word, the expository method commends itself as preaching that is true to the Bible. The method presupposes an exegetical process to extract the God-intended meaning of Scripture and an explanation of that meaning in a contemporary understandable way. The biblical essence and apostolic spirit of expository preaching needs to be recaptured in the training of men newly committed to "preaching the Word."

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The Master's Seminary joins with others¹ in accepting the urgent responsibility for transmitting the Pauline legacy to "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2). The current series of articles in *The Master's Seminary Journal* signal an effort to instill in twenty-first century preachers a pattern of biblical preaching inherited from their predecessors.²

Every generation shares the kind of dire circumstances that Amos prophesied for Israel: "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the

¹E.g. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Samuel T. Logan (ed.), *The Preacher and Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986); Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

²See the initial articles by John F. MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 1/1 (Spring 1990) 3-15 and Robert L. Thomas, "Bible Translations: The Link Between Inerrancy and Expository Preaching," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 1/1 (Spring 1990) 53-73. Subsequent issues of the *Journal* will carry additional essays.

Lord GOD, `When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the LORD'" (Amos 8:11). The last several centuries have proven this need again.

REVIEWING RECENT TRENDS

In an explanation of Heb 8:10, the Puritan commentator William Gouge (1575-1653) remarked,

Ministers are herein to imitate God, and, to their best endeavour, to instruct people in the mysteries of godliness, and to teach them what to believe and practice, and then to stir them up in act and deed, to do what they are instructed to do. Their labor otherwise is likely to be in vain. Neglect of this course is a main cause that men fall into as many errors as they do in these days.³

To this editorial by Gouge, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) adds a word about nineteenth-century England:

I may add that this last remark has gained more force in our times; it is among uninstructed flocks that the wolves of popery make havoc; sound teaching is the best protection from the heresies which ravage right and left among us.⁴

John Broadus (1827-1895) decried the death of good preaching in America, too.⁵ G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) noted,

The supreme work of the Christian minister is the work of preaching. This is a day in which one of our great perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching.⁶

The following typical laments evidence that little improvement had been made by the mid-twentieth century:

Except for the growing worldliness of its members, the pulpit is the church's

³William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980 rpt.) 577-78.

⁴C. H. Spurgeon, "Sermons `Their Matter," *Lectures to My Students* (Lecture 5, Book 1; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 rpt.) 72.

⁵John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (Grand Rapids: AP&A, n.d.) x.

⁶G. Campbell Morgan, *Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974 rpt.) 11.

weak spot.⁷

But the glory of the Christian pulpit is a borrowed glow. . . . To an alarming extent the glory is departing from the pulpit of the twentieth century. . . . The Word of God has been denied the throne and given a subordinate place.⁸

Yet it remains true that "whatever be the marks of the contemporary pulpit, the centrality of Biblical preaching is not one of them."⁹

In a tradition that focuses on the centrality of the written Word few subjects are more important than the interpretation and proclamation of that Word. Everyone stresses the necessity of a solid exegesis of the text, but few are adept at providing such an exegesis and preaching effectively from it.¹⁰

By the mid-1980's a national Congress on Biblical Exposition (COBE) convened to urge a return to true biblical exposition.¹¹ COBE's recurring theme demanded that the American church must return to true biblical preaching or else the western world would continue its descent toward a valueless culture. Commenting on the uniqueness of America in contemporary culture, Os Guinness noted with concern that ". . . in all my studies I have yet to see a Western society where the church pews are so full and the sermons so empty."¹²

John MacArthur's review of preaching patterns in the late 80's led him to observe,

Specifically, evangelical preaching ought to reflect our conviction that God's Word is infallible and inerrant. Too often it does not. In fact, there is a

⁷Jeff D. Ray, *Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940) 14.

⁸Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955) 11-15.

⁹Nolan Howington, "Expository Preaching," *Review and Expositor* 56 (Jan 1959) 56.

¹⁰Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Exegesis and Preaching: The Principles and Practice of Exegesis," *Covenant Quarterly* 34 (Aug 1976) 3. For other comments on the decline of expository preaching in America, see Lloyd M. Perry *Biblical Preaching for Today's World* (Chicago: Moody, 1973) 9-12.

¹¹Brian Bird, "Biblical Exposition: Becoming a Lost Art?" *Christianity Today* 30/7 (Apr 18, 1986) 34.

¹²*Ibid.*

discernible trend in contemporary evangelicalism *away* from biblical preaching and a drift *toward* an experience-centered, pragmatic, topical approach in the pulpit.¹³

As the 90's dawn, an irresistible urge for a focus in the pulpit on the *relevant* seemingly exists, with a resultant inattention to God's *revelation*. Siegfried Meuer alerted the 1960's to the same "contemporary danger."¹⁴ He likened the direction of his day to the earlier trends of Harry Emerson Fosdick who wrote in the 20's, "The sermon is uninteresting because it has no connection with the real interests of the people. . . . The sermon must tackle a real problem."¹⁵ Meuer noted that Fosdick opened the floodgate for philosophy and psychology to inundate the modern pulpit with unbelief.

Fosdick's philosophy sounds alarmingly similar to the advice given in a recent publication on relevant contemporary preaching:

Unchurched people today are the ultimate consumers. We may not like it, but for every sermon we preach, they're asking, "Am I interested in that subject or not?" If they aren't, it doesn't matter how effective our delivery is; their minds will check out.¹⁶

The implied conclusion is that pastors must preach what people want to hear rather than what God wants proclaimed. Such counsel sounds the alarm of 2 Tim 4:3: "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."

¹³MacArthur, "The Mandate" 4.

¹⁴Siegfried Meuer, "What Is Biblical Preaching?" *Encounter* 24 (Spring 1963) 182.

¹⁵Harry Emerson Fosdick, "What Is the Matter with Preaching?" *Harper's Magazine* 47 (July 1928) 133-41.

¹⁶Bill Hybels, *et al.*, *Mastering Contemporary Preaching* (Portland: Multnomah, 1989) 27. A similar comment is, "The wise interpreter begins with a human need today, and chooses a passage that will enable him to meet this need" (Andrew W. Blackwood, *Expository Preaching for Today* [New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953] 13).

What is the necessary response? We assert that it is to rediscover and reaffirm expository preaching for the coming generation of preachers facing all the spiritual opportunities and Satanic obstacles of a new millennium. We agree with Walter Kaiser's appraisal:

Regardless of what new directives and emphases are periodically offered, that which is needed above everything else to make the Church more viable, authentic, and effective, is a new declaration of the Scriptures with a new purpose, passion, and power.¹⁷

REVISITING SCRIPTURE

When warnings about a drift away from biblical preaching sound, the only reasonable response is a return to the scriptural roots of preaching to reaffirm its essential nature. In a reexamination of the heritage of biblical proclamation, two elements emerge: the mandates to preach and the manner of preaching.

Mandates to Preach

The gospels, Acts, the epistles, and Revelation provide many examples and exhortations to preach the truth in fulfillment of God's will. As a reminder of the apostolic legacy and a reaffirmation of the scriptural authority for Bible-based preaching, five significant mandates are representative of the larger number of passages.

Matt 28:19-20 ` "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

1 Tim 4:13 ` "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching."

2 Tim 2:2 ` "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of

¹⁷Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology* 242.

many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

2 Tim 4:2 ` "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

Tit 2:1 ` "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine."

Manner of Preaching

In his discussion of *khrrsv* (*kryss*, "I preach," "I proclaim") Friedrich notes at least thirty-three different verbs employed by NT writers to portray the richness of biblical preaching.¹⁸ In the following discussion, the four most prominent of these are examined briefly.

Kryss sees general use throughout the gospels, Acts, and the epistles. John the Baptist (Matt 3:1), Jesus (Matt 4:17), and Paul (Acts 28:31) all engaged in the action of preaching as indicated by this verb. To Timothy, Paul commended this same activity, telling him to preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2).

Eaggelzv (*Euaggeliz*, "I preach the gospel") is practically interchangeable with *kryss* (Luke 8:1; Acts 8:4-5). Paul and Barnabas preached the good news of the Word of the Lord (Acts 15:35).

Martyrv (*Martyre*, "I testify," "I bear witness") is a legal term picturing the communication of truth from one who has a first-hand knowledge. John the Baptist bore witness to the light (John 1:7-8) and John the Apostle testified to the Word of God (Rev 1:2).¹⁹

Didskv (*didask*, "I teach") focuses on the purpose and content of the message transmitted, without excluding elements of the three previous verbs. As part of the Great Commission, Jesus commanded His disciples to teach (Matt 28:20). Paul recommended teaching to Timothy (1 Tim 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2). Teaching is sometimes associated with

¹⁸Gerhard Friedrich, "khrrsein, et al.," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 3:703.

¹⁹See Klaas Runia, "What Is Preaching According to the New Testament," *TynBul* 29 (1978) 3-48, for further information on *khrrsv*, *eaggelzv*, and *martyrv*.

kryss (Matt 11:1) and *euaggeliz* (Acts 5:42). The content of what is taught focuses on the way of God (Matt 22:16) and the Word of God (Acts 18:11).²⁰

In addition to these four prominent words, there are many others that significantly enhance the biblical manner of communicating God's Word. For example, the Ethiopian eunuch invited Philip to "guide" (or "lead" (*dhgv* [*hodge*]) him through Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:31). Paul "explained" (or "laid out") (*ktuhmi* [*ektithmi*]) the kingdom of God (Acts 28:23; cf. 18:26). Paul told Timothy that he was to "entrust" (or "commit") (*paratuhmi* [*paratithmi*]) what he had heard from Paul to faithful men that they might teach others also (2 Tim 2:2).

Jesus's interaction with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus adds further dimensions to biblical preaching. He "explained" (or "interpreted") (*diermhnev* [*diermneu*]) the things about Himself in the OT, from Moses to the prophets (Luke 24:27). They in turn marveled at the way He had "opened" (or "explained") (*dianogv* [*dianoig*]) the Scriptures (Luke 24:32; cf. 24:45).

A study of additional words such as *naggllv* (*anaggell*, "I announce, declare") (Acts 20:27), *naginskv* (*anaginsk*, "I read") (1 Tim 4:13), *parakalv* (*parakale*, "I exhort, comfort") (1 Tim 4:13), *jhgomai* (*exgeomai*, "I declare") (Acts 15:12), *lalv* (*lale*, "I speak") (John 3:34), *dialgomai* (*dialegomai*, "I discuss, argue") (Acts 17:17), and *fuggomai* (*phtheggomai*, "I utter") would be profitable. Yet this brief survey is enough to conclude that the one common link in all the biblical terms in their contexts is a focus on the things of God and Scripture as exclusively central in the preacher's message. Without question, this feature alone marks the uniqueness of scriptural preaching. A biblical and theological content is the *sine qua non* of NT proclamation.

With this biblical foundation, an identification of the contemporary mode of NT preaching is possible.

²⁰For an expanded discussion of *didskv*, see Homer A. Kent, Jr., "A Time to Teach," *GTJ* 1/1 (Spring 1980) 7-17.

DEFINING EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Discussions about preaching divide it into three types: topical, textual, and expository. 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 a gateway into whatever subject the preacher chooses to address. Neither the topical nor the textual method represents a serious effort to interpret, understand, explain, or apply God's truth in the context of the Scripture(s) used.

By contrast, expository preaching focuses predominantly on the text(s) under consideration along with its(their) context(s).²¹ 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.

One way to clarify expository preaching is to identify what it is not:²²

1. It is not a commentary running from word to word and verse to verse without unity, outline, and pervasive drive.
2. It is not rambling comments and offhand remarks about a passage without a background of thorough exegesis and logical order.
3. It is not a mass of disconnected suggestions and inferences based on the surface meaning of a passage, but not sustained by a depth-and-breadth study of the text.
4. It is not pure exegesis, no matter how scholarly, if it lacks a theme, thesis, outline and development.
5. It is not a mere structural outline of a passage with a few supporting comments, but without other rhetorical and sermonic

²¹Horton Davies, "Expository Preaching: Charles Hadden Spurgeon," *Foundations* 66 (Jan 1963) 14, calls exposition "contextual preaching" to distinguish it from the textual and topical types.

²²These ten suggestions are derived from Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963) vii-viii.

elements.

6. It is not a topical homily using scattered parts of the passage, but omitting discussion of other equally important parts.
7. It is not a chopped-up collection of grammatical findings and quotations from commentaries without a fusing of the same into a smooth, flowing, interesting, and compelling message.
8. It is not a Sunday School-lesson type of discussion that has an outline of the contents, informality, and fervency, but lacks sermonic structure and rhetorical ingredients.
9. It is not a Bible reading that links a number of scattered passages treating a common theme, but fails to handle any of them in a thorough, grammatical, and contextual manner.
10. It is not the ordinary devotional or prayer meeting talk that combines running commentary, rambling remarks, disconnected suggestions, and personal reactions into a semi-inspirational discussion, but lacks the benefit of the basic exegetical-contextual study and persuasive elements.

Before proceeding further, consider the English word group "expose, exposition, expositor, expository." According to Webster, an exposition is a discourse to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand.²³ Application of this to preaching requires that an expositor be one who explains Scripture by laying open the text to public view in order to set forth its meaning, explain what is difficult to understand, and make appropriate application.

John Calvin's centuries-old understanding of exposition is very similar:

First of all, Calvin understood preaching to be the explication of Scripture. The words of Scripture are the source and content of preaching. As an expositor, Calvin brought to the task of preaching all the skills of a humanist scholar. As an interpreter, Calvin explicated the text, seeking its natural, its true, its scriptural meaning. . . . Preaching is not only the explication of

²³ *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1988) 438.

Scripture, it is also the application of Scripture. Just as Calvin explicated Scripture word by word, so he applied the Scripture sentence by sentence to the life and experience of his congregation.²⁴

Exposition is not so much defined by the form of the message as it is by the source and process through which the message was formed. Unger poignantly captures this sense:

No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be said to be *expository preaching*. . . . It is emphatically not preaching about the Bible, but preaching the Bible. "What saith the Lord" is the alpha and the omega of expository preaching. It begins in the Bible and ends in the Bible and all that intervenes springs from the Bible. In other words, expository preaching is Bible-centered preaching.²⁵

Two other definitions of exposition help clarify what it is:

In preaching, exposition is the detailed interpretation, logical amplification, and practical application of a passage of Scripture.²⁶

At its best, expository preaching is "the presentation of biblical truth, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, Spirit-guided study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit applies first to the life of the preacher and then through him to his congregation."²⁷

²⁴John H. Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in the Light of Recent Research," *RevExp* 86 (1989) 32, 34.

²⁵Merrill F. Unger, *Principles* 33. See also William G. Houser, "Puritan Homiletics: A Caveat," *CTQ* 53/4 (Oct 1989) 255-70. Houser proposes that the power of the Puritan pulpit diminished as the mechanical form of the message took precedence over the process of forming the message. Coupled with boring deliveries and exceedingly long messages, Puritan preaching influence quickly declined when these factors became dominant.

²⁶Ray, *Expository* 71.

²⁷Hadden W. Robinson, "What is Expository Preaching?" *BibSac* 131 (Jan-Mar 1974) 57. For other definitions, see Broadus, *On the Preparation* 119-20 and J. Ellwood

In summary, the following minimal elements identify expository preaching:

1. The message finds its sole source in Scripture.²⁸
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.

The spirit of expository preaching is exemplified in two biblical texts:

And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading (Neh 8:8).

Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God (Acts 20:26-27).

A particular example is Jesus' expounding of Isa 61:1-2 in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-22). He later gave a thematic exposition of Himself to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-47).

Philip in Acts 8:27-35 expounded Isa 53:7-8 for the Ethiopian eunuch. Stephen preached a historical/biographical expository sermon to the Jews before they stoned him (Acts 7:2-53).

Greer Boyce has aptly summarized this definition of expository

Evans, "Expository Preaching," *BibSac* 111 (Jan-Mar 1954) 59.

²⁸R. B. Kuiper, "Scriptural Preaching," *The Infallible Word* (3rd rev. ed., ed. by Paul Wooley; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967) 253, asserts strongly,

Exposition of Scripture, exposition worthy of its name, is of the very essence of preaching. It follows that it is a serious error to recommend expository preaching as one of several legitimate methods. Nor is it at all satisfactory, after the manner of many conservatives, to extol the expository method as the best. All preaching must be expository. Only expository preaching can be Scriptural.

preaching:

In short, expository preaching demands that, by careful analysis of each text within its immediate context and the setting of the book to which it belongs, the full power of modern exegetical and theological scholarship be brought to bear upon our treatment of the Bible. The objective is not that the preacher may parade all this scholarship in the pulpit. Rather, it is that the preacher may speak faithfully out of solid knowledge of his text, and mount the pulpit steps as, at least, "a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."

The preacher's final step is the most crucial and most perilous of all. It is to relate the biblical message both faithfully and relevantly to modern life. At this point all his skill as a craftsman must come into play. We must be warned that faithful exposition of a text does not of itself produce an effective sermon. We need also to be warned, however, that faithfulness to the text is not to be sacrificed for the sake of what we presume to be relevancy. This sacrifice too many modern preachers seem willing to make, producing, as a result, sermons that are a compound of moralistic advice, their own unauthoritative and sometimes unwise opinions, and the latest psychology. Expository preaching, by insisting that the message of the sermon coincide with the theme of the text, calls the preacher back to his true task: the proclamation of the Word of God in and through the Bible.²⁹

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPOSITORY PROCESS

Discussing the biblical foundations and the definition of expository preaching, while essential, is relatively easy. The real challenge comes when one has to move from the classroom to the weekly pulpit. Unless the preacher understands clearly the expository process, he will never achieve his potential in the craft of expository preaching.

As a frame of reference for discussion, we propose that the expository process include four standard elements: preparing the expositor, processing and principlizing the biblical text(s), pulling the expository message together, and preaching the exposition. The four

²⁹Greer W. Boyce, "A Plea for Expository Preaching," *CJT* 8 (Jan 1962) 18-19.

phases need equal emphasis if the exposition is to be fully effective in the sight of both God and the congregation.

*Preparing the Expositor*³⁰

Since God should be the source of expository messages, one who delivers such a message should enjoy intimate communion with God. This is the only way the message can be given with greatest accuracy, clarity, and passion.

Seven areas of preparation qualify a man to stand in the pulpit and declare, "Thus saith the Lord!":

1. The preacher must be a truly regenerated believer in Jesus Christ. He must be a part of God's redeemed family (John 1:12-13). If a man is to deliver a personal message from the Heavenly Father effectively, he must be a legitimate spiritual son, or the message will inevitably be distorted.
2. The preacher must be appointed and gifted by God to the teaching/preaching ministry (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Tim 3:2). Unless a man is divinely enabled to proclaim, he will be inadequate, possessing only human ability.³¹
3. The preacher must be inclined and trained to be a student of God's Word. Otherwise, he cannot carry out the mandate of 2 Tim 2:15 to "cut straight" the Word of God's truth.
4. The preacher must be a mature believer who demonstrates a consistent godly character (1 Tim 3:2-3).³²
5. The preacher must be dependent upon God the Holy Spirit for divine insight and understanding of God's Word (1 Cor 2:12-13).

³⁰D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones devotes a whole chapter to this subject (*Preaching and Preachers* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972] 100-20).

³¹James Stalker, *The Preacher and His Models* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891) 95-99; cf. also John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 37-46.

³²Louis Goldberg, "Preaching with Power the Word 'Correctly Handled' to Transform Man and His World," *JETS* 27/1 (Mar 1984) 4-5.

Without the Spirit's illumination and power, the message will be relatively impotent.³³

6. The preacher must be in constant prayerful communion with God to receive the full impact of the Word (Ps 119:18). The obvious one to consult for clarification is the original author.³⁴
7. The preacher must first let the developing message sift through his own thinking and life before he can preach it. Ezra provides the perfect model: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Processing and Principilizing the Biblical Text

A man in tune with God's Spirit and Word is ready to begin a process to discover not only what God originally meant by what He said, but also appropriate principles and applications for today.³⁵

1. Processing the biblical text³⁶ ` A man cannot hope to preach effectively without first having worked diligently and thoroughly through the biblical text. This is the only way the expositor can acquire God's message. Two preachers from different eras comment on this essential feature:

A man cannot hope to preach the Word of God accurately until he has first engaged in a careful, exhaustive exegesis of his text. Herein lies the problem,

³³Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology* 236.

³⁴Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, "If you do not understand a book by a departed writer you are unable to ask him his meaning, but the Spirit, who inspired Holy Scripture, lives forever, and He delights to open the Word to those who seek His instruction" (*Commenting and Commentaries* [New York: Sheldon and Company, 1876] 58-59).

³⁵Nicholas Kurtaneck, "Are Seminaries Preparing Prospective Pastors to Preach the Word of God?" *GTJ*6/2 (Fall 1985) 361-71.

³⁶Specifics of the exegetical process will be outlined in a forthcoming essay in *The Master's Seminary Journal*. See Snodgrass, "Exegesis" 5-19 for a basic nine-step approach.

for competent exegesis requires time, brain power, "blood, sweat, and tears," all saturated with enormous doses of prayer.³⁷

You will soon reveal your ignorance as an expositor if you do not study; therefore diligent reading will be forced upon you. Anything which compels the preacher to search the grand old Book is of immense service to him. If any are jealous lest the labor should injure their constitutions, let them remember that mental work up to a certain point is most refreshing, and where the Bible is the theme toil is delight. It is only when mental labor passes beyond the bounds of common sense that the mind becomes enfeebled by it, and this is not usually reached except by injudicious persons, or men engaged on topics which are unrefreshing and disagreeable; but our subject is a recreative one, and to young men like ourselves the vigorous use of our faculties is a most healthy exercise.³⁸

2. Principlizing the biblical text ` Preaching does not stop with understanding ancient languages, history, culture, and customs. Unless the centuries can be bridged with contemporary relevance in the message, then the preaching experience differs little from a classroom encounter. One must first process the text for original meaning and then principlize the text for current applicability.³⁹ One's study falls short of the goal if this step is omitted or slighted.

Pulling the Expository Message Together

At the third stage the expositor has finished his deep study and asks himself, "How can I blend my findings in such a way that my flock will understand the Bible and its requirements for their lives today?" In a sense, the art of exposition commences here.⁴⁰

³⁷John A. Sproule, "Biblical Exegesis and Expository Preaching" (unpublished lecture at Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1978) 1.

³⁸Spurgeon, *Commenting* 47.

³⁹H. Cunliffe-Jones wrote, "We must be able to say not only 'This is what this passage originally meant,' but also 'This passage is true in this particular way for us in the twentieth century.'" ("The Problems of Biblical Exposition," *ExpTim* 65 [Oct 1953] 5).

⁴⁰It is helpful to distinguish between a sermon, a homily, and an exposition.

Nolan Howington uses a graphic description to relate exegesis and exposition: "Thus an exegete is like a diver bringing up pearls from the ocean bed; an expositor is like the jeweler who arrays them in orderly fashion and in proper relation to each other."⁴¹

Titles, outlines, introductions, illustrations, and conclusions enter the process at this stage. The message moves from the raw materials mined by exegesis to the finished product of exposition, which the hearers hopefully will find interesting, convicting, and compelling. The key to this step is remembering what distinguishes exposition: explain-ing the text, especially parts that are hard to understand or apply. It is equally important to remember not only the text, but the audience as well.

F. B. Meyer offers this advice when thinking of the listeners and what sermonic form the message will take:

There are five considerations that must be met in every successful sermon. There should be an appeal to the Reason, to the Conscience, to the Imagination, to the Emotions, and to the Will; and for each of these there is no method so serviceable as systematic exposition.⁴²

Preaching the Exposition

The final decision to be made by the expositor relates to his preaching mode, whether from memory or from notes. This step is perhaps the most neglected in preparation by those committed to true exposition. Too often expositors assume that proper work done in the study will ensure that the pulpit will care for itself. It is true that there

"Homily" comes from the Greek *mōla* which, like the Latin *sermo*, means "conversation" or "talk." The Latin word is the basis of the English "sermon," so in a general sense, all three are the same. For the purpose of this article, however, we choose to use the phrase "expository message" or "exposition" so that its source, process, and purpose are unmistakably distinguishable from the other two terms.

⁴¹Howington, "Expository" 62.

⁴²F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching Plans and Methods* (New York: George H. Duran Company, 1912) 100.

is no substitute for hard work in the study, but equally hard work in the pulpit will reward both the preacher and the flock to a much greater degree. James Stalker effectively draws attention to this challenge:

Ministers do not get enough of result in the attention, satisfaction and delight of their hearers for the work they do; and the failure is in the vehicle of communication between the study and the congregation—that is to say, in the delivery of the sermon. What I am pleading for is, that there should be more work to show for the coal consumed.⁴³

At the point of delivery, it is essential for the expositor to be clear in his purpose. Otherwise, the message preached may be far afield from the message studied and the message of Scripture. J. I. Packer makes this point by contrasting what preaching is not with what it is:

The purpose of preaching is not to stir people to action while bypassing their minds, so that they never see what reason God gives them for doing what the preacher requires of them (that is manipulation); nor is the purpose to stock people's minds with truth, no matter how vital and clear, which then lies fallow and does not become the seed-bed and source of changed lives (that is academicism). . . . The purpose of preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth an appropriate response to the God whose message and instruction are being delivered.⁴⁴

Also of importance is the language used in communicating the message. It should be clear, understandable, picturesque, and most of all, biblical. The following strong warning issued over twenty years ago is still applicable:

I urge adherence to Biblical terminology. Much modern preaching has taken a psychological and sociological turn. It is mysterious and mystical. It sets forth

⁴³Stalker, *The Preacher* 121.

⁴⁴J. I. Packer, "Why Preach?" *The Preacher and Preaching* (Samuel T. Logan, ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986) 9.

psychiatric ideas, often using the terms of the psychiatrist rather than those of the Christian evangelist. It speaks of repression, fixations, traumas, neuroses, and syndromes, world without end. I claim that in the main these are not terms that the Holy Spirit can use effectively.⁴⁵

Another crucial matter is the dynamics of speech, i.e. audience relationship and communicative effectiveness. Vines and Allen outline three basic principles for every expositor:

In short, effective communication from the pulpit must be informed by Aristotle's rhetorical triad of logos, ethos, and pathos. This involves a thorough knowledge of the subject matter and here is where there is no substitute for thorough exegesis. It involves a thorough knowledge of the speaker-audience dynamic such that the preacher must speak from integrity and his audience must know of his sincerity and genuineness. Finally,⁴⁶ it involves a knowledge of people and how they respond to the spoken word.

Above all, the expositor must expound the Word like Paul did in Corinth (1 Cor 2:1-5). He did not come as a clever orator or scholarly genius; he did not arrive with his own message; he did not preach with personal confidence in his own strength. Rather, Paul preached the testimony of God and Christ's death, and this, with well-placed confidence in God's power to make the message life-changing. Unless this kind of wholesale dependence on God marks the modern expositor's preaching, his exposition will lack the divine dimension that only God can provide.

In summary, of the four steps of the complete expository experience—preparing the expositor, processing and principlizing the biblical text, pulling the expository message together, and preaching the exposition—no phase can be omitted without seriously jeopardizing the truthfulness or usefulness of God's Word mediated through the expositor.

⁴⁵William W. Ayer, "The Art of Effective Preaching," *BibSac* 124 (Jan-Mar 1967) 41.

⁴⁶Jerry Vines and David Allen, "Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Proclamation," *Criswell Theological Review* 1/2 (Spring 1987) 333-34.

CONSIDERING EXPOSITIONAL ADVANTAGES⁴⁷

Expository preaching best emulates biblical preaching both in content and style. This is the chief benefit. Besides this, other advantages listed in random order include the following:

1. Expository preaching best achieves the biblical intent of preaching: delivering God's message.
2. Expository preaching promotes scripturally authoritative preaching.
3. Expository preaching magnifies God's Word.
4. Expository preaching provides a storehouse of preaching material.
5. Expository preaching develops the pastor as a man of God's Word.
6. Expository preaching ensures the highest level of Bible knowledge for the flock.
7. Expository preaching promotes thinking and living biblically.
8. Expository preaching encourages both depth and comprehensive-ness.
9. Expository preaching forces the treatment of hard-to-interpret texts.
10. Expository preaching allows for handling broad theological themes.
11. Expository preaching keeps preachers away from ruts and hobby horses.
12. Expository preaching prevents the insertion of human ideas.
13. Expository preaching guards against misinterpretation of the biblical text.
14. Expository preaching imitates the preaching of Christ and the apostles.
15. Expository preaching brings out the best in the expositor.

⁴⁷James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988 rpt.) 228-53, develops some of these advantages in more detail.

RECLAIMING EXPOSITORY PREACHING

As the twentieth century sets and a new millennium dawns, we must reclaim the method and art of expository preaching for the coming generation. No one said it would be easy. It is quite the opposite. No other method of preaching requires so much work. At the same time, no other method rewards so richly.

If the suggestions which have been offered are well founded, it will be obvious that expository preaching is a difficult task. It requires much close study of Scripture in general, and much special study of the particular passage to be treated. To make a discourse which shall be explanatory and yet truly oratorical, bearing a rich mass of details but not burdened with them, full of Scripture and abounding in practical applications, to bring even dull, uninformed, and unspiritual minds into interested and profitable contact with an extended portion of the Bible`of course, this must be difficult.⁴⁸

While the growing trend among today's preachers is toward consumer satisfaction and contemporary relevancy, we reaffirm that biblical preaching must be first directed toward divine satisfaction and kingdom relevance. Reflect carefully on Mark Steege's clarion call to expositional preaching and its note of biblical authority:

Through our preaching the Lord seeks to change men's lives. We are to be evangelists, to awaken men to their high calling in Christ. We are to be heralds, proclaiming the messages of God to men. We are to be ambassadors, calling men to be reconciled to God. We are to be shepherds, nourishing and caring for men day by day. We are to be stewards of the mysteries of God, giving men the proper Word for their every need. We are to be witnesses, telling men of all that God has done for them. We are to be overseers, urging men to live their lives to God. We are to be ministers, preparing men to minister with us to others. As we reflect on each of these phases of our work, what emphasis each gives to the importance of preaching! What a task the Lord has given us!⁴⁹

⁴⁸Broadus, *On the Preparation* 124.

⁴⁹Mark J. Steege, "Can Expository Preaching Still Be Relevant in These Days?" *The*

Although R. L. Dabney wrote over a century ago, we join him today in urging,

. . . that the expository method (understood as that which explains extended passages of Scripture in course) be restored to that equal place which it held in the primitive and Reformed Churches; for, first, this is obviously the only natural and efficient way to do that which is the sole legitimate end of preaching, convey the whole message of God to the people.⁵⁰

Springfielder 34 (Mar 1971) 261.

⁵⁰Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979 rpt.) 78-79.