THE JOURNAL OF THE

EVANGELICAL HOMILETICS SOCIETY

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Manuscripts: Though most articles and book reviews are assigned, submissions are welcome. They must by typed and double-spaced. All articles will be juried to determine suitability for publication. Please send articles to the General Editor, Scott M. Gibson, at sgibson@gcts.edu. Letters to the editor are also welcome. Those who have material of whatever kind accepted for publication must recognize it is always the editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

Publishers should send catalogs and review copies of their books to Abraham Kuruvilla, Dallas Theological Seminary, 3909 Swiss Avenue, Dallas, TX 75204.

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The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is the publication of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Organized in 1997, the Evangelical Homiletics Society is an academic society established for the exchange of ideas related to the instruction of biblical preaching. The purpose of the Society is to advance the cause of biblical preaching through the promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching; to increase competence for teachers of preaching; to integrate the fields of communication, biblical studies, and theology; to make scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics.

Statement of Faith: The Evangelical Homiletics Society affirms the Statement of Faith affirmed by the National Association of Evangelicals. It reads as follows:

- We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
- 2. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 3. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
- 4. We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
- 5. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.
- 6. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
- 7. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.



THE GOSPEL AND GOVERNMENT

SCOTT M. GIBSON General Editor

The theme for the 2016 annual gathering of the Evangelical Homiletics Society was "The Political Pulpit." A few years ago, when planning the 2016 meeting, the Evangelical Homiletics Society board selected the theme with the presidential election year in view. What are preachers to do with government? What are the responsibilities that ministers of God's Word living in this present age—government and all?

What are we to make of preaching and politics? Partisan preachers and partisan listeners, rural to urban congregations, isolated and involved in the political process Christians all have a responsibility to comprehend their role in what it means to be a citizen of this earth, while at the same time being a citizen of Christ's heavenly kingdom.

The Society gathered at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, for a stimulating occasion considering these questions and others associated with preaching and politics. The plenary speaker was Pastor James T. Meeks, of Salem Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois. Rev. Meeks served as a member of the Illinois state senate and brought to the meeting not only a pastoral and preaching perspective but also familiarity with the political process as an experienced legislator. One of Meeks' addresses is included in this edition. The printed address is from a recorded transcription. It has been edited for our readers but retains much of Pastor Meeks' oral style.

The insights that Pastor Meeks provides will remind preachers—and members of their churches—the privilege of engaging with government and being a valuable part of it.

The conference included papers on the topic of politics and preaching, in addition to other interests. David L. Allen's article provides a helpful argument for text-driven preaching. Readers will appreciate the example of the analysis of the structure of 1 John 2:15-17 as he demonstrates this important approach to preaching.

Randal E. Pelton and Jeffrey D. Arthurs are the awardees of the Keith Willhite Award. The Willhite Award is chosen by the membership and leadership of the society that reflects the best scholarship among the papers presented at the annual gathering. The Willhite Award is named in memory of co-founder and past-president, Keith Willhite. Pelton and Arthurs explore the hermeneutical and homiletical challenges of teaching Haddon Robinson's Big Idea philosophy of preaching. They raise some interesting questions and

observations in this beneficial paper.

The next article is written by Gregory K. Hollifield. In this important exploration of the topic of fear, Hollifield considers how the Bible addresses fear and the implications these discoveries have on what it means to preach. Readers will be stimulated by Hollifield's observations.

The sermon is by Dennis Phelps of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Upon completing his tenure as president of the society, Phelps delivered the sermon on Friday morning of the conference. His text is Jonah 4:1-11. Phelps provides listeners—and readers—with compassion and a reasoned confidence in the gospel that helps preachers hold onto what they believe and preach to everyone who needs to hear it.

The Book Review section presents readers with thoughtful reviews composed by our membership. Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla gives careful leadership in assigning and receiving the reviews. The books included in this section are supplied by various publishers, to whom we are grateful for their support.

The words spoken from the pulpit are words shaped by the Word of God. The Scriptures address our textured lives. We are to engage this Word in the lives of our listeners, even if it means addressing the ways of this world in the form of government. We want to pray for wisdom as we engage the gospel and government.

The Scott M. Gibson Emerging Scholars Grant

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From its founding in 1997, the Evangelical Homiletics
Society has been committed to cultivating rising scholars in the field of homiletics. This Grant honors Dr. Scott M. Gibson, cofounder and first president of the Society.

The Emerging Scholars Grant is a means for the Society to assist and encourage developing scholars to fund their education. Awardees of this grant represent the best in current graduate educational scholarship in homiletics.

SCHOLARSHIP DETAILS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- This scholarship is open to all Associate Members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society enrolled at the PhD level of graduate study
- The submission must focus on research regarding a relevant issue in homiletics
- The length of the research will be 15,000 20,000 words, follow the current JEHS style guide for articles
- The target readers are evangelical professors of homiletics
- The student must submit the research to ResearchScholarship@ehomiletics.com by the stated deadline of APRIL
- A jury of EHS members will evaluate the essay "blindly" based on relevance to the teaching of biblical preaching and the EHS confessional statement, and determine a recipient
- The Board will notify the students of the decisions at least 90 days prior to the EHS annual conference
- The awardee is expected to attend the EHS annual conference
- Recipient will be recognized at the annual Evangelical Homiletics Society conference, may be given an option of
 presenting the research during the Evangelical Homiletics Society annual conference and possibly published in a
 future issue of the The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

Cash scholarship of first place is \$2,000, plus registration fees and meals to attend the EHS conference. Travel assistance to the conference may be available.

E V A N G E L I C A L H O M I L E T I C S S O C I E T Y

The submission deadline is 30 April 2017.

http://ehomiletics.com/competitions/emerging-scholars/



WHY DO EVIL MEN GOVERN GOD'S PEOPLE?1

JAMES T. MEEKS

Senior Pastor, Salem Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois Former Member of the Illinois State Senate

Romans 13:1

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

INTRODUCTION

The theme for this address is, "Why do evil men govern good people?" Put another way, "Why is it that evil men govern God's people?"

In Romans chapter 13, after explaining for twelve chapters to believers in Rome how salvation occurs—and I am indebted to Paul, and I know that we all are, for the book of Romans—because he does a masterful job, at first telling us that all men are lost and destined to hell, and then he turns around and he tells us, however, we don't have to end up that way, because the gift of God is eternal life. He spent twelve chapters in the beginning of the book of Romans explaining to believers how salvation occurs. Paul, then in chapter 13 begins to tell believers one's responsibility to government. The church would do well to understand this chapter. This is almost a forgotten chapter in most churches or in most church teachings, especially the first seven verses, because in this chapter Paul lays out our responsibility toward government.

There are many people who feel that Christianity and politics don't mix. There're people who feel that Christians should never run for political office. There are people who feel that Christians shouldn't even participate in the political process. There are people who feel that somehow, we are tainted just because we desire to be involved in government—Romans chapter 1 tells me to obey those who rule over me, or those who have authority over me—if I obey the power, but I don't take the time to try to decide who becomes the

power. Because if I have a chance to decide who's going to be in a certain seat at least I should have a chance to make my mind up as to who I want to obey. If God says I am to obey them, then I should be able to make up my mind who I want to see in this seat.

I want to show you today with historical data, as well as some Biblical analysis, that if Christians do not participate in the political process, then that's exactly how evil men govern God's people. Because if God's people won't govern God's people, or if God's people won't be involved in the process of choosing good government, then the only thing that's left is for evil men to govern God's people.

THE POWERS THAT BE

In Romans chapter 13, Paul starts by telling us that government, or the "powers that be" as he called it, or "authority," is an idea, or a concept of God. I believe it's because God understands that you cannot live in a society without rules, without law, and without order. Therefore, we have this system called government. We've watched the shootings, and the police shootings and then we have riots. I share with the young men in our congregation that I believe that 80% of all police shootings could have been avoided if the driver would have just submitted to authority. You don't have to argue; you will have your day in court. You will have an opportunity to present your side of the story. I tell the young men in our church, "If you have on a new shirt, new tie, new shoes and new suit, and the police say, 'Lay on the ground,' it is better to lay on the ground than for us to bury you in the new suit, new shirt, and new tie." In society, we need authority. And that is why we have government.

Paul then goes on to say, "Whoever resisteth authority"—whoever resisteth the process, "resisteth God." The process is the electoral process. Whoever resisteth the ordinance, Paul said, will be under damnation.

In these verses Paul explains to us why believers should not fear government. Verse 3 says, "So rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." Government is nothing for us to fear. Government is nothing for us to be afraid of. I cannot understand it to save my life, wy some Christians have a disdain for government. I am amazed at many Christians' lack of love for government. I only dislike the government one day a year: April 15th.

I'm amazed at how we fail to understand government. We have classes in seminary, we have classes in the church for everything. We have a class on "Know your Bible." We have classes on how to study the Bible. We have classes on how to understand our faith. We have classes on how to pray. We have classes on how to share your faith, although that's the number one fear you know, among believers, is sharing our faith. That's amazing to me, that's amazing to me. My number one love in preaching, by the way, is to

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preach evangelistically. That's my number one love, the one thing that Jesus called us to do. The last words that He said before He was taken up is that we shall receive power and be witnesses of Him; the first thing He said when He was resurrected from the dead: "All power is given unto me on heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore." Yet, the number one fear among Christians is winning a soul. Sadly, the number one thing that most Christians never do in an entire year is to win a soul.

Yet we live in a civil society, under the dictates of elected officials: people who make laws that we must live by. You can resist being political if you want to, and you can say you don't want to have anything to do with politics, but you must obey whatever law the government makes. There is no way that one can say, "Oh you raise the taxes in our state 4%? I don't believe in government." You still will have to abide by the law and pay the taxes. I'm amazed that in a civil society, under the dictates of elected officials, we never have discussions in churches. We never have classes on how to influence the political process or how to be involved in the political process for good. We never teach Christians how to do that. Yet, we are to live by the very laws, or the very ordinances, or rules that are passed in every one of our cities.

Law and order. Isn't it good that while you are here in this conference, that no one can take your car? Aren't you happy about that? You anticipate having a car in the spot where you parked it when you go back out to the lot. Isn't it good that no one can take your spouse? I know some of you are praying, and wishing, and hoping. But isn't it good that some superior foe can't walk up to you and say, "You know, this spouse, this person looks good. She's mine. He's mine." Isn't it good that no one can walk up to us on the street and say, "Empty your pockets. Give me everything that you have." What keeps people from doing that, is something called Law. What keeps people from doing that, is something called Government. That means that the Law is—and Government—is good. I'm grateful for the fact that I can pick up the phone and call the police and report that my car was stolen, and report that I was just robbed, and say, "The man had on a blue shirt and a brown hat." I'm grateful for authority, for law and order.

TO FEAR OR NOT TO FEAR GOVERNMENT

James says in chapter 2, verse 17, that "Every good and perfect gift is from where?" Is from above. "Every good and every perfect gift is from above." If government is good, and every good and perfect gift is from above, then that means Government is from above. If Government is good, and from above, why is it that Christians cannot participate in something that's good? Paul said, "We're not to fear government." If you look back at the text, he says, "If you don't want to fear government, don't do evil. It is only those who do evil that should be afraid. As long as we are law-abiding citizens, we are not to be fearful of government."

Have you ever been speeding? You are going faster than you should be going, and all of a sudden, you look over to your right or to your left, and you notice the police. What caused you to slam on your brakes, throwing everybody in the car through the windshield? The fact that you were wrong is what made you afraid. Now, when you are driving, and you know that you're driving the speed-limit, and you see the police, it doesn't bother you. But as soon as you drive over the speed limit, it bothers you because government only bothers people who are doing wrong. You don't panic when you walk out of a store, and a clerk follows you to the sidewalk and says to you, "Excuse me. I must check your bag. Because we just had a robbery in our store, and, and we must check your bag." You know you didn't steal anything. You know you have a receipt. You aren't afraid. Because you've done nothing wrong.

I went to the Cubs game the other night, and I will be there again Sunday night—I'm not bragging. As I was sitting in my seat, my wife and I, another darling couple came up and said, "Excuse me. You are in our seats." I wasn't afraid. It didn't bother me, I didn't get all upset. I said, "Well, let's check our tickets." Because I had sat in those seats the night before, so I knew where my seats were. But it was obvious they had made a mistake. But then I told my wife, I had a flashback to when I was a kid and we used to go to the baseball game, and we used to just buy tickets to get in the door. Then we would find somebody's box seat, and we would sit in it. We would sit there as kids, and we would look around in fear because we knew, the whole time, that somebody was coming to claim that seat.

People who are doing right do not fear government. However, a person who's doing wrong, a person who's breaking the law, he has reason to fear. I was talking to some Border Patrol agents, and I asked them how they go about doing their job, and about their success or failure rate. They told me, "Pastor, the way we can tell that somebody is smuggling drugs is that they do not have a calm demeanor. Whoever is doing wrong is fidgety and nervous, with sweat popping out on the forehead. The person is nervously looking all around." But when you do right, you don't have to fear. When you're using somebody else's credit card, when you are writing a check on somebody else's checkbook, then you have reason to fear because the Law or Government is supposed to punish evil men.

ENFORCERS FOLLOWING THE LAW

If the law is supposed to punish evil, then the presupposition is that the law-enforcer himself, or the law-enforcer herself, must be or should be a person who follows the law. Because to punish evil, one cannot be evil. The enforcer of the law should be a decent individual, a good person. Ever since the inception of this country our Founding Fathers knew that only decent and honorable men and women should carry out decent law. When this country was founded by some great men, we knew at that time that only

good men would make good laws. I don't know where we came up with the idea that Christians should not be in politics. That's a mystery to me. Proverbs 29 and 2 says, "When the righteous rule, the people rejoice." All we have to do is turn that around to say that when the unrighteous rule, the people are in misery.

Hear the words during the founding of our original colonies, of the Delaware constitution as penned by Thomas McKean and George Reed. Listen to this:

Every person who shall be chosen, a member of either house or appointed to any office or place of trust, shall make and subscribe to the following declaration to whit: "I do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost. One God, blessed forever. And I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration."

No one could hold office who did not ascribe to this declaration. The emphasis was not on the law. The emphasis was on the person who would be making the law. Because it's understood that if the person who made the law was decent, or a good person, the person would make a good law. The Massachusetts constitution, authored by Samuel Adams, one of the fathers of the American Revolution stated, "All persons elected must make and subscribe to the following declaration: 'I do declare that I believe the Christian religion and have firm persuasion of its truth."

North Carolina's constitution required: "No person who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion or divine authority, either of the Old or New Testament, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the state shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust, or profit in the civil department within this state." To be an elected official, to run for public office, you couldn't even run unless you stood and declared, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe in the Holy Scriptures. I believe they're divinely inspired, and I am a child of God." How far have we gotten away from the original idea of our Founders? Which is why we find ourselves in the place that we are now in, because we are so far away from the idea of our Founders until people think that Christians should have nothing to do with the political process. I'm here to suggest to you that it's the exact opposite.

In 1892, the Supreme Court indicated out that of the forty-four states that were in the Union at that time, all forty-four had some type of Godcentered declaration in its constitution. Why? Because our Founding Fathers realized something that Christians today, we've not been taught and that is this: Government officials are the ministers of God. Government officials are the ministers of God and they are there, in government, to carry out good work in society.

 $The Scriptures \ underscore \ that \ government \ officials \ are \ the \ ministers$

of God. Verse 4, Romans 13 and 4: "For he is the minister of God to thee for good, but if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for He beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God." Do you see that? Twice! Twice, in one verse. Paul points out the same thing. He is the minister of God for you. He is the minister of God, the government official, to carry out good works. Here it is: if government officials are agents of God, if government officials are ministers of God, is it the case that somebody means to tell me that a minister of God in a society can't be a Christian? You mean to tell me that the person who was supposed to orchestrate good in a society, and make good law is not supposed to be a Christian? You mean to tell me that a person who's supposed to carry out the work of God in a society is not supposed to be a Christian? You mean to tell me that the person who's supposed to make laws, carry out fair judgment can't be a Christian? If Christianity and politics don't mix, and if Christians are not supposed to be in politics, who then is the Minster of God in society? Who is it? If it's not us, who is it? If Christians negate the political process, if we abhor the political process, if we turn our backs on the process, if we run away from the political process, then that means all the ministers of God in society aren't us. That means that all the ministers of God in society are unchurched and un-Christian, and that's why we have what we have today. No one makes laws today or rules and asks themselves, "What does the Bible say?" They don't even know what the Bible says! They don't even know what they're standing for or against.

CONCLUSION

When the gay rights vote came to the state of Illinois, I stood on the Senate floor and declared my allegiance to what my faith teaches, people looked at me like I was strange. They knew what I believe, but I think they didn't expect me to defend what I believe. Christian are not in society to acquiesce, to go along with the status quo; we are there to stand and to plant our flag in the sand, and to not budge any further than we stand on that principle. We should be ashamed to know that when God is ready to choose ministers in a society, that when God is ready to look for who is going to make fair, just, right laws, that God has no Christians to choose from to be His ministers.

God has enough ushers. God has enough choir members. Lord knows that God has enough deacons. God has enough Sunday school teachers; God has enough nursery workers. There are enough people in the bell choir; there are enough people doing sign language.

God wants some city councilmen. God wants some state representatives. God wants some senators, God wants some congressmen, God wants some governors, and God wants some presidents. The longer we stay out of the process, the longer evil men will govern God's people.

NOTES

1. Editor's Note: this address has been transcribed and edited. Much of the casual flavor of the address remains. Transcribed from the original address by Greta Myers.



TEXT-DRIVEN PREACHING: WHY AND WHAT?1

DAVID L. ALLEN

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ABSTRACT: Text-driven preaching is based on a theology of the nature of Biblical revelation: Scripture is inspired, inerrant, and sufficient for the life of the church. The most important thing preachers can do is preach the Bible and the best way to do that in a local church context is through text-driven sermons. Text-driven preaching seeks to account for all the types of meaning that occur in every text and context: referential, situational, structural, and semantic. Preaching should stay true to the substance, the structure, and the spirit of the text. An analysis of the structure of 1 John 2:15-17 is offered as a practical example of text-driven preaching outline structure.

INTRODUCTION

John Stott insightfully commented that the essential secret of preaching is not "mastering certain techniques, but being mastered by certain convictions."² All preaching rests upon certain convictions about the nature of God, the Scriptures, and the Gospel. James Barr said he doubted whether the Bible itself, regardless of one's view of inspiration, can furnish the preacher with a model for sermon form and content that could be conceived as normative.³ Contrast this with Haddon Robinson's statement: "Expository preaching, therefore, emerges not merely as a type of sermon – one among many – but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration. Expository preaching then originates as a philosophy rather than a method."⁴

The biblical and theological foundation for all preaching is the fact that God has revealed himself. God is a God who speaks. God is the ultimate author of all Scripture: (2 Timothy 3:16). The phrase "all scripture" in Greek connotes the very words of Scripture are the words of God. It is instructive to observe just how the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament. Often "God" and "Scripture" are used interchangeably as subjects with the verb "to speak." In Matthew 19:4-5, God is said to be the author of Scripture although he is not directly the speaker. In Romans 9:17, we read "Scripture says" even though God himself is the direct speaker of what is quoted. Two principles critical for homiletics emerge from this understanding of Biblical authority: the inerrancy of Scripture and the sufficiency of Scripture. In Paul's final charge to Timothy he said: "Preach the Word!" (2 Timothy 4:2).

We are all familiar with the traditional nomenclature of sermon types

as "topical," "textual," and "expository." Add to this list further delineators such as "Christ-centered," "doctrinal/theological," and "narrative." Where does "expository preaching" stand in today's homiletical market? What do we really mean by it? What should we mean by it?

Many today would consider expository preaching on an equal plane with virtually any other method of preaching, and perhaps just as many consider it less serviceable for preaching today than other methods such as topical or narrative. Witness Andy Stanley's recent criticism of expository preaching as "cheating."

All preaching, regardless of the form it takes, should be expositional in nature. The word "homiletics" itself etymologically derives from the Greek word *homo* meaning "same," and "*leg*, meaning "to speak." Homiletics is the art and science of sermon construction and delivery that says the same thing the text of Scripture says. 8

What is the role of the text in preaching? The word "text" comes from a Latin word meaning "to weave," and refers to the product of weaving, hence "composition." The word is used figuratively to express structured meaning in speech or writing. Stenger provided a good definition of "text: "a cohesive and structured expression of language that, while at least relatively self contained, intends a specific effect." Textual structure is a network of relations and the sum of those relations between the elements of the text.

In text-driven preaching, sermons should be not only based upon a text of Scripture, but should actually expound the meaning of that text. The biblical text is not merely a *resource* for the sermon; it is the *source* of the sermon. A sermon not only *uses* a text of Scripture, but should be *derived* from a text of Scripture, and should *develop* a text of Scripture.

TEXT-DRIVEN PREACHING: WHAT IS IT?

For the past twenty years, I have been using the term "text driven preaching" in my classes to describe what I mean by "expository preaching." In more recent years, the preaching faculty at SWBTS have further refined the concept of text-driven preaching. Basically, text-driven preaching attempts to stay true to the substance, the structure, and the spirit of the text. 11 The "substance" of the text is what the text is about (theme) and what is it saying about it. The "structure" of the text concerns the way in which the author develops the theme via syntax and semantics. A text has not only syntactical structure but also semantic structure, and the latter is what the preacher should be attempting to identify and represent in the sermon. The "spirit" of the text concerns the author-intended "feel" or "emotive tone" of the text which is influenced by the specific textual genre, such as narrative, expository, hortatory, poetic, etc. 12

"Expository preaching" and "text-driven preaching" are essentially synonymous terms. What form should a text-driven sermon take? Today sermon form is frequently dictated by one or more of the following considerations: tradition, the prevailing paradigm in homiletics, culture, literary form, etc. Not all sermon forms are created equal, and some are based on a faulty understanding of biblical revelation and/or the human sciences.¹³

Ultimately, sermon form should be dictated by theology. What one believes about the nature and sufficiency of Scripture will largely determine how sermons are structured. Text-driven preaching does not entail enslavement to a deductive sermonic form nor artificial outlining techniques such as a three-point structure, alliteration, etc. A good text-driven sermon that explains the meaning of the text can be couched in a variety of forms. Scripture employs various genres including narrative, poetry, prophecy and epistles, and good text-driven preaching will reflect this variety as well. There is a broad umbrella of sermon styles and structures that can rightfully be called "text-driven." 14

Given the nature and inspiration of Scripture, and what Scripture itself says about preaching, we are not just preaching sermons, we are preaching texts. Preaching should be "text-driven."

Many sermons fall under the rubric of "expository" and are thus text-centered, but not necessarily text-driven. What is the difference between a sermon that is "text-centered" and one that is "text-driven"? Perhaps the following chart will be helpful in drawing distinctions.

Text-Centered Sermons

Sermon based on a text and is about the text and explains the meaning of the text

Focus on textual theme

Sermon has a point or points *usually* drawn from the text

Textual secondary information may or may not be developed

Sermon structure may be imposed on the text

Application relates to or has some connection to the text, but may not be derived from the main point(s) of the text

<u>Text-Driven Sermons</u>

Sermon based on a text; is about the text; is derived from the text

Focus on textual theme as textually developed.

Sermon only has as many "points" as the text has and are *always* drawn from the text

Textual secondary information developed in relation to main point(s)

Sermon structure is borrowed from the structure of the text

Application flows directly & exclusively from the text

Creativity is generally unguided by text

Tendency to pick short preaching texts

May ignore or sideline the author's intended meaning

Context may be easily overlooked

May not adequately express the substance, structure & spirit of the text

Creativity is generally guided by the genre and textual clues of the text.

Demands a natural paragraph/ pericope/thought unit of text for preaching

Surrenders to the author's intended meaning.

Context is vital to sermon development.

Express the substance, structure & spirit of the text

TEXT-DRIVEN PREACHING AND LINGUISTICS

The painstaking work of exegesis is the foundation for text-driven preaching. Exegesis precedes theology and theology is derived from careful exegesis. To preach well, it is vital to understand certain basics about the nature of language and meaning. Enter linguistics.

Linguists now point out the fact that meaning is structured beyond the sentence level. When the preacher restricts the focus to the sentence level and to clauses and phrases in verses, there is much that is missed in the paragraph or larger discourse that contributes to the overall meaning and interpretation of the text. The paragraph unit is best used as the basic unit of meaning in expounding the text of Scripture. Text-driven preaching should at minimum deal with a paragraph (as in the epistles), while in the narrative portions of Scripture, several paragraphs which combine to form the story (pericope) should be treated in a single sermon since the meaning and purpose of the story itself cannot be discerned when it is broken up and presented piecemeal.

Text-driven preachers must strive to examine not only the form but also the meaning of all levels of a text with the goal of understanding the whole. Text-driven preaching looks beyond words and sentences to the whole text (paragraph level and beyond). Every biblical text is an aggregate of relations between the four elements of meaning which it conveys: structural, referential, situational, and semantic. The superior value to this approach to textual analysis in preparation for preaching is that it allows one to see the communication relations within a text in their full extent. Restricting

exegesis to a verse by verse process alone often results in the details of the text violating the overall message. It becomes hard to see the forest for the trees. Here the chapter and versification of the Bible can hinder as much as help.

The hierarchy of language is such that words are combined into larger units of meaning. Words combine to form phrases; phrases combine to form clauses; clauses combine to form sentences; sentences combine to form paragraphs and paragraphs combine to form discourses. When it comes to a text of scripture, however long or short, the whole is more than just the sum of its parts.

Language units of meaning cluster together to form other units of meaning. Language also makes use of the concept of "embedding," where a clause can embed several phrases or another clause and a sentence may embed with it several clauses or sentences. In 1 John 1:5, the dependent clause "that God is light and in him is no darkness at all" embeds two sentences: "God is light," and "In him is no darkness at all." The second sentence is connected to the first sentence with the coordinating conjunction "and," but semantically, the actual meaning conveyed could be construed in a cause-effect fashion: "because God is light there is no darkness in him at all." Finally, notice that this clause (introduced by the Greek conjunction hoti, "that"), serves to identify the content of the message which the apostles declared: "God is light. . . ."

Language makes use of content words and function words. Content words are such parts of speech as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Function words are articles, prepositions and conjunctions. Content words derive their basic meaning from the lexicon of the language. Function words derive their functional meaning from the grammar and syntax of the language. Of course lexicon, grammar, and syntax combine to give content words and function words their meaning in a given text. It is especially important in text-driven preaching to pay close attention to the function words in a text. For example, the Greek conjunction *gar* always introduces a sentence or a paragraph that is subordinate to the one preceding it,¹⁷ and usually signals that what follows will give the grounds or reason for that which precedes. This is immensely important in exegesis and sermon preparation.

Language employs a verbal structure. Verbs are the load-bearing walls of language. Understanding their function within the text is vital to identifying the correct meaning which the author wants to convey. Hence, I recommend the discipline of "verb charting" during the exegesis phase of sermon preparation. In Greek, for example, so much information is encoded in the verb (tense, voice, mood, person and number + lexical meaning). Identifying the main clauses and subordinate clauses in a text is crucial for identifying the semantic focus of the author.¹⁸

There are four basic types of meaning conveyed in every text and context: referential, situational, structural, and semantic. Referential meaning is that which is being talked about; the subject matter of a text. Situational

meaning is information pertaining to the participants in a communication act; matters of environment, social status, etc. Structural meaning has to do with the arrangement of the information of the text via grammar and syntax of a text. Semantics has to do with the structure of meaning and is in some sense the confluence of referential, situational and structural meaning.¹⁹

Most of us are trained to observe structural meaning; we are intuitively aware of referential meaning and situational meaning, but we often fail to observe the semantic structure of a text. The text-driven preacher will want to analyze carefully each one of these aspects of meaning for a given text.²⁰

This brings up another important aspect of textual analysis called "pragmatic analysis." Pragmatic analysis asks the questions "What is the author's purpose of a text?" and "What does an author desire to accomplish with his text." The text-driven preacher is always attempting to accomplish something with every sermon. All verbal or written communication has at least one of three purposes: (1) affect the ideas of people, (2) affect the emotions of people, and (3) affect the behavior of people. Preaching, like all verbal or written communication, should have all three of these purposes. We should be attempting to affect the mind with the truth of scripture (doctrine). We should be attempting to affect the emotions of people because emotions are often (some would say always) the gateway to the mind. Finally, we should be attempting to affect the behavior of people by moving their will to obey the Word of God.

From a linguistic perspective, text-driven preaching should correctly identify the genre of the text.²² Longacre identified four basic discourse genres which are language universal: narrative, procedural, hortatory and expository.²³ All four of these genres, along with sub-genres, occur in Scripture. Significant portions of the Old Testament are narrative. The Gospels and Acts are primarily narrative in genre. Procedural discourse can be found in Exodus 25-40 where God gives explicit instructions on how to build the tabernacle. Hortatory genre is found in the prophetic sections of the Old Testament as well as in the epistolary literature of the New Testament, though it is by no means confined to these alone in the Scriptures. Expository genre is clearly seen in the New Testament epistles, which are actually all combinations of expository and hortatory genre.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: THE SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF 1 JOHN 2:15-17

If one were to preach through 1 John paragraph by paragraph, 1 John 2:15-17 constitutes the seventh paragraph in the letter. It contains three sentences in Greek that are usually rendered into English by four sentences. Sentence one contains an imperative (the first one in the letter) and functions semantically as the most dominant information conveyed in the paragraph: "Don't love the world."

From a semantic standpoint, the structure of 1 John 2:15-17 can be diagrammed this way:

S^1 - EXHORTATION (v. 15a)

S² - grounds¹ for v. 15a - (it is impossible to love God and the world simultaneously) (vv. 15b-16)

The *hoti* clause in v. 16 gives the grounds (reason) for v. 15b

 S^3 - grounds^{2a} for v. 15a - (impermanence of the world) (but) grounds^{2b} for v. 15a - (permanence of those who do God's will) (v. 17)

Based on the structure of the text itself, how many main points does 1 John 2:15-17 have? It has one main point, expressed in the imperative in verse 15. How many sub-points does the text have? It has two; each one expressed by the grounds of sentence 2 and sentence 3 with sentence three divided into two halves, one negative and one positive, on the basis of the compound structure of the last sentence (v. 17).

From this semantic structure, a text-driven sermon would be outlined or structured accordingly:

- I. Don't love the world ... because
 - A. It is impossible to love God and the world simultaneously
 - B. The world is impermanent ... but
 The one doing the will of God (that is, who does not love
 the world) is eternally permanent.

The text contains one main point and two sub-points semantically. If you preach on this text omitting one or more of these sub-points, then you have not preached the text fully. If you preach this text adding additional main or sub-points beyond these, then you are adding to the meaning of the text. If you make one of the sub-points a main point parallel to v. 15a, then you have mis-preached the text in terms of its focus. If you major on the three parallel prepositional phrases in v. 16 and spend most of your time explaining and illustrating them, then you will mis-preach the focus of this text. To omit points, to add points, or to major in terms of focus on that which the text minors, is to fail to preach the text accurately. What you say may be biblical, but it will not be what this text says in the way the text says it.

CONCLUSION

If we believe in text-driven preaching, then somehow the main and subordinate information which John himself placed in his text must be reflected in the sermon. There may be many creative ways to do this in preaching, but these elements must be there or the sermon will be less than truly text-driven.

Exegesis must be the first language of the preacher. Biblical theology is his second language. Systematic theology is his third language. Most preachers, instead of expounding the text, skirmish cleverly on its outskirts. Much of today's preaching is pirouetting on trifles rather than expounding the text. Without a text to ground the sermon, the preacher becomes something of a magician who, with conjuring adroitness week after week, keeps producing fat rabbit after fat rabbit out of an obviously empty hat.

Text-driven preachers are not just preaching sermons; we are preaching texts in an effort to communicate accurately God's meaning to the people.

NOTES

- 1. This paper is a revised version of my chapter "Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon" in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, eds. D. Akin, D. Allen, and N. Matthews (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 101-34.
- 2. John Stott, Between Two Worlds (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 92.
- 3. James Barr, The Bible in the Modern World (London: SCM, 1973), 139.
- 4. Haddon Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible,* ed. Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 803.
- 5. For an excellent short treatment of a theology for expository preaching, consult Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 15-56.
- 6. For example, the New Homiletic with its disdain for "propositional, deductive" preaching, its elevation of the audience over the text, and its privileging of experience over knowledge, substitutes a narrative sermon form that oftentimes leaves the meaning of the text blurred or undeveloped. This is not to say that the New Homiletic has nothing to teach us about preaching, for indeed it does. However, due to the truncated view of biblical authority of many of its practitioners, it does not take seriously enough the text of Scripture itself as God's word to us.
- 7. For a definition and illustration of "topical exposition," see Timothy Warren, "Can Topical Preaching also be Expository?" in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. by H. Robinson and C. Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 418-421.
- 8. James Daane, Preaching with Confidence (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980),

49.

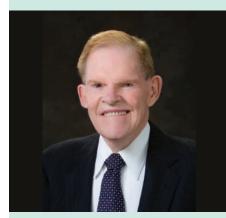
- 9. Werner Stenger, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 23.
- 10. Ibid. 23-24. From a semantic standpoint, there is a finite set of communication relations that exists for all languages which functions as something of a "natural metaphysic of the human mind" (see Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, Topics in Language and Linguistics (New York: Plenum, 1983), xix. These relations are catalogued, explained and illustrated by Longacre and in a more "pastor friendly" way by J. Beekman, J. Callow and M. Kopesec, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981), 77-113.
- 11. See Steven W. Smith, *Recapturing the Voice of God: Shaping Sermons Like Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), who first used these descriptors several years ago.
- 12. Ibid.
- 13. Narrative Preaching has come under significant critique in recent years, even by those who were once its ardent supporters. See, for example, Tom Long, "What Happened to Narrative Preaching?" Journal for Preachers 28.2 (2005): 9-14. In 1997, Charles Campbell's bombshell Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), and James Thompson's, 2001 Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today (Louisville/John Knox: Westminster, 2001), both leveled broadsides against the New Homiletic. See also David L. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 43:3 (September 2000): 508-13.
- 14. For a helpful discussion of this subject, see Dennis Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching: Theory and Practice in Sermon Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).
- 15. B. Olsson, "A Decade of Text-linguistic Analyses of Biblical Texts at Upsalla," *Studia Theologica* 39 (1985), 107, underlined the vital importance of discourse analysis for exegesis when he noted: "A text-linguistic analysis is a basic component of all exegesis. A main task, or the main task of all Biblical scholarship has always been to interpret individual texts or passages of the Bible. . . . To the *words* and to the *sentences* a textual exegesis now adds *texts*. The text is seen as the primary object of inquiry. To handle texts is as basic for our discipline as to handle words and sentences. Therefore, text-linguistic analyses belong to the fundamental part of Biblical scholarship." See also the excellent chapter by G. Guthrie, "Discourse Analysis," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, eds. D. Black and D. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 253-71.
- 16. See the discussion of this verse in Beekman, Callow and Kopesec, *Semantic Structure*, 18. See also J. Beekman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 365.

17. Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, *The Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 834.

- 18. If a New Testament text has a string of verbs in the aorist tense and then suddenly a perfect verb pops up, there usually is significance to this tense shift. See, for example, Romans 6:1-5 where this very point is illustrated by the use of the perfect tense "have been united" in v. 5. In the Abraham and Isaac narrative of Genesis 22, at the climax of the story, there is a sudden onslaught of verbs placed one after another in staccato fashion in the Hebrew text in Genesis 22:9-10. This has the effect of heightening the emotional tone of the story and causes the reader/listener to sit on the edge of their seat as it were, waiting to find out what happens. In the exegetical process, one should pay close attention to verbals as well (participles and infinitives), as these often play crucial modification roles.
- 19. See Beekman, Callow and Kopesec, Semantic Structure, 8-13.
- 20. John 1:1 furnishes an example of the importance of lexical meaning at the semantic level. Notice the threefold use of eimi, "was," in this verse. Here a single verb in its three occurrences actually conveys three different meanings. (1) "In the beginning was the Word," (where eimi, "was," means "to exist"). (2) "and the Word was with God," (where eimi followed by the preposition "with" conveys the meaning "to be in a place"). (3) "and the Word was God," (where eimi conveys the meaning "membership in a class: Godhood). See J. Waard and E. Nida, From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 72. Notice also in John 1:1 that logos, "word," occurs in the predicate position in the first clause but is in the subject position in the second clause. In the third clause there is again a reversal of the order creating a chiasmus: theos, "God," is placed before the verb creating emphasis on the deity of the "Word." (Ibid.) Lexical meaning is not only inherent in words themselves, but is determined by their relationship to other words in context. A knowledge of a text's situational meaning is vital for the preacher because meaning does not simply reside in the words of a text themselves and their structural relations, but in the total context in which an author uses them.
- 21. Abraham Kuruvilla has reminded us of the importance of this aspect of text analysis for preaching in his *Privilege the Text!: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013).
- 22. See David Allen, "Fundamentals of Genre: How Literary Form Affects the Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 264-67.
- 23. Longacre, *Grammar of Discourse*, 3. See also Beekman, Callow and Kopesec, *Semantic Structure*, 35-40.

The Haddon W. Robinson Preaching Award

SPONSORED BY THE EVANGELICAL HOMILETICS SOCIETY



The Haddon W. Robinson Preaching Award is an annual preaching scholarship established in honor of Dr. Haddon W. Robinson, one of the leading evangelical homiliticians of the later 20th and early 21st centuries. Robinson's teaching career in homiletics spanned decades, instructing students at three different seminaries. Dr. Robinson's classic textbook, *Biblical Preaching*, helped shape the place and force of evangelical homiletics. Robinson's legacy for preaching is captured in this significant award.

Sermons for this year's award are to be based on

NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES GENRE

Haddon Robinson wrote: "The future of our culture may depend on the stories that capture the imagination and mind of this generation and its children."

SCHOLARSHIP DETAILS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- This scholarship is open to all Associate Members of EHS
- · Sermons are to be 15-20 minutes in length
- Sermons are to focus on the theme and/or Bible text announced for the Haddon W. Robinson Preaching Award
- · The target listeners are members of a local evangelical church
- The sermons are to be videotaped, posted to the student's YouTube channel, and the YouTube link provided to RobinsonSermons@ehomiletics.com by the stated deadline
- A task force of EHS members will view the submission, evaluate it on the basis of adherence to basic principles of biblical preaching (as discussed in Robinson's Biblical Preaching) and the EHS confessional statement, and determine first, second and third prize awardees
- The Board will notify the students of the decisions at least 90 days prior to the EHS annual conference
- Recipients will be recognized at the annual EHS conference; the first place recipient may be an option of presenting the
 message during the EHS (e.g. one of the periods in which academic papers are presented) and a possible link to the message
 included on the EHS website

CASH AWARDS:

1) first place: \$500, plus registration fees and meals to attend the EHS conference

2) second place: \$400 3) third place: \$300

THE SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS 30 APRIL 2017.





THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ROBINSON'S BIG IDEA METHOD

RANDAL E. PELTON AND JEFFREY D. ARTHURS

ABSTRACT: The Big Idea (BI) method of biblical preaching yields many hermeneutical and homiletical benefits. They include the overarching attempt to proclaim authorial intention; unified communication which increases attention, comprehension, and retention in the listeners; and help for the preacher in remembering the flow of thought of the sermon. However, professors who teach the method encounter challenges. First, there is the challenge of teaching students where to start searching for the subject. This requires proficiency in exegesis, something that cannot be assumed of each student. Second, students' ability to grasp the method depends on the ability to think abstractly. Not all people are skilled at that. Third, is the perennial question of how the little ideas of the passage relate to the BI and how to handle those little ideas in the sermon. Finally, there is the challenge of teaching students how the BI contributes to the development of the sermon. This paper will highlight and expand upon the benefits and challenges of teaching the BI method and also suggest ways to meet those challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The Big Idea philosophy and method of biblical preaching yields many hermeneutical and homiletical benefits, as well as some challenges. This paper describes some of those benefits and challenges from the experience of two preachers and professors who use the method themselves and teach it to others. That is true of many members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, so we look forward to your dialogue as all of us seek to improve our preaching and pedagogy.

Before diving into the rewards of the method, clarification is needed on that word—"method." We realize that Robinson's approach is more of a philosophy of exposition than method,¹ but we use the word "method" throughout this paper because our concerns are mostly procedural and pedagogical. In other words, we are interested in the methodical aspects of the philosophy. That was Robinson's purpose in writing *Biblical Preaching* as well. To coach neophyte preachers, he divided his philosophy of expository preaching into ten "stages," thus accentuating the fact that his approach is a method as well as a vision.

SOME REWARDS OF TEACHING THE BIG IDEA METHOD

Pre-exegesis: A Way to Utilize the First Hour of Study

A few years ago, Evangelical Homiletics Society member, Lee Eclov, and Randal Pelton were talking about the different ways preachers utilize their first couple of hours in their studies. You might call this "pre-exegesis." Consider the benefits of starting sermon preparation with a search for the BI. Robinson helpfully reminds students to "remember that you're looking for the author's ideas. Begin by stating in rough fashion what you think the writer is talking about—that is, his *subject*. Then try to determine what major assertion(s) the biblical writer is making *about* the subject, that is, the *complement(s)*."²

This is not the time for background, word, syntactical, or theological studies. We're not trying to dissect the text, but rather to comprehend the primary thought of the thought unit. Searching for the BI helps preachers understand the relationships between the various ideas. Preachers begin to see dominant and subordinate ideas and how the Scripture might be functioning for the Church. Some approaches to sermon preparation build a brick wall between "meaning" and "significance," and although he is not explicit about this in *Biblical Preaching*, Robinson substitutes a screen door for the brick wall. In other words, by beginning our study with a quest for a provisional BI, the method starts the preacher on the road to application at the very beginning of the process.

Think about the difference between spending one's first hour in the study searching for the BI versus studying each key word, phrase, or dialogue (depending on the genre of the preaching portion). Preachers often lament that at the end of a week's worth of studying, they have lots of notes, but no sermon. That means they know all kinds of information about a preaching portion, but are not sure how it functions for the Church. Searching for the BI in the first hour of the study helps to reverse this experience. Preachers get a sense of the whole, not the parts. We have found it helpful for ourselves and our students to start the BI method with the "pre-exegesis" of an idea versus the exegesis of fragments. Preliminary identification of the BI helps preachers understand the entire preaching portion as opposed to understanding, what is at this point, disconnected data.

One caution should be sounded here: once a preacher steps onto a road, it is hard to get off. That is, once a preacher articulates a BI in the first hour of study, his or her mind desires to stay on that track, even if the ensuing exegesis shows the idea to be mistaken. The first articulation of the BI must be provisional. It's only Monday morning, for goodness sakes! Preachers must be willing to make course corrections, or even take a new road.

Discovery of the Interrelationship Between Ideas

It goes without saying that a BI implies the presence of little ideas. Except for the tiniest preaching portions, every passage selected for a Sunday sermon has more than one idea. Searching for the BI helps preachers think about the various ideas floating around in a preaching portion. Then, the method helps us begin to prioritize or size-up the ideas. Which ones are dominant? Which ones are subordinate? Not all ideas in a preaching portion are created equal.

And just as every text contains multiple ideas, so does every sermon. Haddon Robinson says that the number one complaint by our listeners is that our sermons contain too many ideas.³ That means preachers can do a better job keeping their ideas unified. When Andy Stanley says that sermons with three points are three different sermons, he's assuming that the three points are disconnected (either actually disconnected from each other due to being different concepts or experientially disconnected in the mind of the listener because of communicative breakdown).

Not all ideas require or warrant equal sermon time. Due to their preaching context, preachers might decide to major on a minor concept, but having identified the BI, they do so knowing full well the author's major concepts and minor. Later, we'll talk about how to preach little ideas in their context, but for now we simply assert that the process of finding the BI helps show how each of the various sized ideas interrelate to create meaning in a preaching portion.

Helps Preserve Authorial Intention

When preachers utilize the BI method they are helping to maintain expositional integrity. The method gives preachers the confidence that they are going to say in God's name what God has said to the Church. That confidence stems from the fact that the preacher allows Scripture to dictate the sermon's message. The preacher is not necessarily preaching what strikes him or her in the text. Instead, Scripture signals meaning and intention by its context, vocabulary, structure, and point of view. Without these signals communication would not be possible. The BI method prompts the preacher to let the passage to determine the sermon. Otherwise, preachers can do all kinds of things to the Bible to create a sermon. Like playdough being extruded through various molds, preachers shape the Bible to match their own agendas. Often someone will justify this by arguing for the presence of multiple meanings in a given passage, but they have failed to see how the various sized ideas interrelate to make the meaning signaled by the structure.

Helps Suggest the Sermon's Structure

There are many approaches to creating sermon outlines. As a preacher analyzes the subject of the BI with the six or seven narrowed subject questions, the structure of the sermon begins to take shape. The questions show what angles of the subject are being covered in the preaching portion. While this may not determine the outline of a passage, the questions covered most give preachers an initial look at the structure and flow of thought.

For example, the BI of Romans 6:1-11 could be worded as follows:

Broad Subject: Christians not continuing in sin (v. 1)

Narrowed Subject Questions: *Why* should Christians not continue in sin (answered numerous times in vv. 2-10) and also, *How* Christians can avoid continuing in sin (answered in v. 11 "...consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God...").

The preaching portion doesn't address the questions what, where, who, and when. Notice that the why question is the angle of the subject covered the most (it takes up all but two verses). This displays how the author is developing his thoughts. Expository preachers often want to follow that same pathway to meaning. Preachers who plan on taking their listeners on this journey will benefit from this analysis. The prominent questions can become major sermon points or the foundation for them. In this case the expository preacher will spend significant sermon time on two major concepts: why Christians should not continue in sin and how to accomplish that by the act of "considering yourselves dead to sin." The process of formulating the narrowed subjects shows the basic structure of the passage.

The Big Idea Contributes Other Sermon Elements

The BI produces big results for sermon preparation. First and foremost, if the preacher's exegesis is accurate, the sermon's theme is in hand. No more wondering what the sermon is about. Sermons should have one theme and early in our preparation we know what it is. The subject of Scripture becomes the subject of the sermon.

Second, because we know the subject of the sermon we also know what the introduction will point toward. While a preacher may choose to wait until later in the week to craft the sermon introduction, at least there is no question about what is going to be introduced.

Third, having the subject of the sermon in hand means having an initial understanding of how the sermon will conclude. If a preacher plans to conclude with a brief summary of the sermon, that summary may well focus on the subject of the sermon or the entire BI. If a preacher plans to

conclude with application, the application will stem from the BI. There is an organic connection between the subject of the sermon and the purpose of the sermon (what the sermon is intended to do to the congregation, often related to sermon application). Again, early in the work week the preacher gains an initial understanding of how the purpose of the sermon will be brought to a climax in the conclusion. In the case of Romans 6:1-11, the preacher is preparing to summarize and apply the subject of Christians not continuing to live in sin.

Enhances Listeners' Attention, Comprehension, and Retention

This benefit is assumed almost universally among homileticians and teachers of public speaking—unity is the soul of clarity. A handful of quotations is representative:

(Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*): "One nail driven home is better than twenty tacks loosely fixed to be pulled out in an hour."

(Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*): "How many things is a sermon about? One! . . . The major idea, or theme, glues the message together and makes its features stick in the listener's mind."

(Keller, "A Model for Preaching") "A sermon must be like an arrow, streamlined and clearly driving at a single point, a single message, the theme of the passage."

Note: this widespread agreement seems to be based primarily on authority and experience. That is, theorists since Plato have asserted the necessity of unity (the voice of authority), and preachers themselves have seen how having a BI enhances attention, comprehension, and retention (the voice of experience). Homileticians would benefit from more rigorous study of this issue—benefits to listeners—with social scientific research. We encourage such research from members of Evangelical Homiletics Society who have expertise in designing experiments and gathering data.

Benefits for the Preacher

When a preacher follows Robinson's method, starting with good exegesis and then progressing through audience analysis, he or she is inevitably left with more to say than can be said in 20 or 45 minutes. The BI helps fence the wide prairie. The biblical author did not say everything that can be said about his topic, and neither should we. Instead, the biblical author dealt with aspects of the topic, as revealed in stage four of the BI method: submit the exegetical idea to three developmental questions—what does this mean, is it true, what difference does it make? Thus, Robinson's method helps

the preacher choose supporting ideas and illustrations that truly support the central theme. Only guests who are on the list are allowed into the party.

Unity brings another benefit to the preacher—memory. Assuming that we are delivering the sermon without notes or from limited notes rather than reading from a manuscript, preachers need help in remembering what comes next and how parts relate to one other. When preaching without notes, a mandate Robinson is passionately committed to, preachers will inevitably forget things, but the BI keeps the lead actor on center stage in their minds and the listener's minds. Thus, leaving out a supporting thought or illustration does not cripple the sermon.

CHALLENGES TO TEACHING THE BIG IDEA METHOD

How Do I Identify The Subject?

Anyone who has tried to teach the BI method of interpreting Scripture for sermons knows that it's not easy to identify the BI. This is especially true in the genres of poetry and historical narrative. While epistles might easily yield their subject and complement, Old Testament narratives can be stubborn. Give a class a lengthy Old Testament narrative and ask everyone to identify the subject. Be prepared for answers to be all over the place. Robinson himself seemed to teach this stage of his method based more on intuition and general skill in reading comprehension, than on a communicable and reproducible technique. And little has been written since the publication of *Biblical Preaching* that helps students identify the subject of a passage.⁴

One challenge of teaching the method is giving students a starting point to discover the subject of a preaching portion. This is critical since formulating the BI begins with the foundation of locating the subject. Identify the wrong subject and it will be difficult to hope for success in locating the BI. Randal Pelton's extension of Robinson's approach focuses on an additional step called the *Broad Subject*. This precedes Robinson's discovery of the subject-in-question-form.

The location of the broad subject is determined by genre analysis—how the genre of the preaching portion displays dominant meaning. Working from genre clues, preachers can identify a broad subject phrase that begins the quest for finding the BI. In the case of Romans 6:1-11, the broad subject phrase might be worded: *Christians not continuing in sin*. From this starting point, preachers can move to the analysis of the *narrowed subject*, equal to Robinson's subject: Why should Christians not continue in sin?

Not All Brains Are Wired For This Method

Over the years we've noticed that not all students are wired for this kind of analysis. That doesn't mean the method can't be taught; it simply means that the method won't come easily to all students. This is not a matter

of IQ; it's a matter of whether a student has highly developed skills in reading comprehension and is able to abstract from details the overarching point the author intends to communicate.

This will require patience on the part of professors. Teaching the BI method, especially the early stages of formulating and analyzing the exegetical idea, cannot be rushed. The old saying, "Practice makes perfect," has some truth to it. We've found it helpful to encourage students that the method gets a little easier over time. It's also a reminder that the method, as helpful as it is, is not the savior of preaching. Throughout the centuries God has blessed all kinds of preaching and the hermeneutics that led to all those sermons. It's helpful to remind students to keep this all in perspective.

Be Prepared To Reteach Exegesis

Teaching the BI method inevitably means we will have to spend time re-teaching exegesis. As we noted earlier, this is partly due to the fact that the method requires the exegesis of ideas, not fragments. In simplistic terms, the method does not primarily involve a search for the meaning of individual words, but how words and phrases interrelate to create whole meanings for a selected preaching portion. When we hear subpar preaching, it's often the result of what we call "micro-exegesis"—painstaking examination of the trees while never lifting one's head to see the forest. Unfortunately, we have observed that seminary-level instruction on biblical interpretation privileges "micro-exegesis."

As correctives to this tendency, we offer three suggestions. The first is simply that teachers of homiletics devote a significant portion of their course syllabus to exegesis as they demonstrate and give students experience in naming the forest, not just the trees. A helpful question in that endeavor is Kuruvilla's oft repeated, "What is the author *doing* with what he's saying"?⁵

The second suggestion relates to cutting the text—determining where to begin and end the portion of Scripture to be handled in a given sermon. Cutting the text will determine whether a preaching portion has no BI or more than one. Think about what happens to one's search for the BI in Luke 15 if one's preaching portion begins at verse 3 where the parable begins: "So he told them this parable: 'What man of you having a hundred sheep...."

Verse one and two clearly set the three parables within the context of conflict with the Pharisees. The "tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near" to Jesus, and he was eating with them, so "the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled." The preamble is crucial to understanding Luke's intention—an explanation and defense of Jesus' "policy" of welcoming sinners. Without the lead-in statement, preachers often turn the parable(s) into an opportunity to call all the prodigals in attendance home instead of calling all the self-righteous to follow Jesus' example of seeking the lost.

The third suggestion asserts the value of reviewing the basics of genre studies. Finding the BI of a preaching portion is largely determined by

the ability to allow genre to signal meaning and intention. Different genres communicate meaning differently. For instance, in the Luke 15 example above, Luke creates a chapter by beginning with a brief narrative and then ends with a lengthy three-part parable. Paying attention to the plot is critical to understanding the broad and subject of the chapter. Understanding how parables communicate will be important, but only after the preacher realizes that the subject is found in the narrative, not the parable.

Teaching the BI method involves making sure students have the ability to apply their hermeneutics to homiletics. The process of finding the BI of a selected preaching portion is an exercise in hermeneutics. The results of the process become an integral part of all things homiletic. Benjamin Walton's new book, *Preaching Old Testament Narratives*, extends Robinson and Sunukjian by giving special instruction on how to cut the text.⁶

How to Preach the Little Ideas

Another challenge to teaching the BI method is teaching students how to handle the little ideas in preaching portions that are so preachable. We could argue, though, that this is as much a benefit as a challenge because passages and sermons *do* contain little ideas, so if students can be taught how to unify everything around one idea, they and the listeners will profit. Whichever way you see it, be prepared to show how little ideas within a passage can be preached within the context of the BI.

Sometimes this means announcing to a congregation how the preaching portion functions for the Church. While preaching Luke 15 a preacher might say, "This passage is designed to help all of us evaluate our relationship, or lack of relationship, with non-Christians." The preacher has taught parishioners what Luke 15 is designed to do to the Church. Then, the preacher can direct listeners to the concept that is being singled out for the sermon: "However, this morning we are going to focus on the spiritual turnaround of the prodigal and how that explains what God means by repentance." The preacher has declared that he or she knows what the passage means (relating to non-Christians) and how the pieces fit together to make meaning (the concept of repentance). The preacher has announced the parameters of meaning for the fragment they want to focus on. This averts the danger of taking verses or concepts out of context.

Be Prepared For Repetition

If you have attempted to preach through a book of the Bible or through large segments of a book, you will have encountered several preaching portions that share similar BIs. Think about sections like the Joseph narrative in Genesis 37-50. This lengthy section is truly *one* section with the dominating idea being x, yet individual scenes such as z, contribute to the same subject. The same can be true of lengthy Pauline paragraphs. Many

students will feel the urge to find new ideas within each scene.

To prepare students to preach long sections, we suggest using the analogy of a television mini-series. Individual scenes and episodes contribute to the theme by supplying multiple complements. For instance keys scenes might yield the following:

God is sovereign over man's evil intentions.

God is sovereign over nature.

God's sovereignty enables us to walk in hope and to forgive.

Another form of repetition is found in places like Psalms and Proverbs. These books repeat themselves often. Big ideas are repeated or restated often. It is important to prepare the preacher for this so they can create a preaching strategy that takes into account the repetition found in God's Word. For a defense of the necessity of repeating theological themes, and for methodology on how to do so without boring listeners, see Jeffrey Arthurs' forthcoming, *Preaching and Remembering*.

CONCLUSION

Rewards and challenges—both are present when we use the BI method. The authors of this paper look forward to dialoguing with the members of Evangelical Homiletics Society on their own experiences and suggestions on how to teach the method in ways that serve students and ultimately bless the Church.

NOTES

^{1.} Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 5.

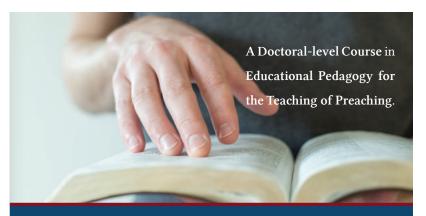
^{2.} Robinson, Biblical Preaching, 35.

^{3.} Robinson, Biblical Preaching, 16.

^{4.} Three sources which build on the Big Idea method are: Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, eds., *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007); and Randal E. Pelton, *Preaching with Accuracy: Finding Christ-Centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014).

^{5.} Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2103).

^{6.} Benjamin H. Walton, *Preaching Old Testament Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 45-81.



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PREACHING TO FEAR: A BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL RECONSIDERATION OF FEAR, FEAR OF GOD, AND THE RHETORIC OF FEAR IN PREACHING

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"Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger; anger leads to hate; hate leads to suffering." –Yoda, Star Wars: The Phantom Menace

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..." –Solomon, Proverbs 1:7

ABSTRACT: "This is the season of fear—for experiencing it, exploiting it and pooh-poohing it." So wrote Jeff Greenfield for *Politico Magazine*, describing the state of America and its political climate in the fall of 2015. His assessment applies just as well when describing what we find in today's church. Fear is common to the experience of those who occupy her pews, has been exploited historically by those who stand in her pulpits, and is now roundly pooh-poohed by a growing chorus of theologians and preachers as an inappropriate response to God. Whether "fear is the source of religion" or not, it's undeniably common enough to human and religious experience alike that it deserves serious consideration. What does the Bible say about fear? Does it clearly distinguish, as commonly believed, fear of God from other forms of fear? Should fear be used as a persuasive tool today when so many hearers are already deeply afraid? If so, how? The following addresses each of these questions in turn as part of a reconsideration of fear and its place in contemporary preaching.

INTRODUCTION

Which is it? Is fear the path to darkness or the beginning of wisdom? Is its end suffering or shalom?

Two storylines dominated the news headlines in the final weeks of 2015: the imminent release of Hollywood's blockbuster *Star Wars: The*

Force Awakens¹ and America's growing alarm over militant Islamic attacks at home (San Bernadino, California) and abroad (Paris, France), fed by a certain presidential candidate's fear-drenched rhetoric. In the *Star Wars* universe fear is a force to be, well..., feared, echoing Franklin D. Roosevelt. In today's political universe it's a reasonable response and force to be exploited for votes.

Musing on our recent past, Jeff Greenfield writing then for *Politico Magazine* opined, "This is the season of fear—for experiencing it, exploiting it and pooh-poohing it. Trump exploits our fears, while Obama underestimates them. Why can't someone just deal with them?" Why, indeed.

Playing on people's fears has long been a favorite ploy—for good and ill—of politicians, prophets, and preachers alike. Why then has more not been written on the subject, particularly in the fields of theology and homiletics? Is it the potential pitfalls of fear, including fear of God, that account for this relative silence? Or is it something more basic—our natural aversion to fear itself?

People today are increasingly afraid of many things but seemingly less so of God. H. R. Balz in the title of his 1969 article on the subject called fear of God "a forgotten motif in biblical theology." More recently, Pieter G. R. de Villiers after conducting a literary review concluded, "The present state of affairs in research [on the fear of God] is...not only dated, but relatively limited." So de Villiers followed Balz's lead in the title of his 2013 article by describing "fear as dread of a God who kills and abuses" as a "still forgotten" biblical motif. Meanwhile, fear in less theocentric forms continues to deepen and spread both outside and inside the church.

Fear has been an oft used rhetorical device by those who stand in the pulpit, suffered routinely by those who occupy the pew, and is now popularly pooh-poohed by a growing chorus of theologians and preachers as an inappropriate response to God. Whether "fear is the source of religion" or not, it's undeniably common enough to human and religious experience alike that it deserves serious consideration. What *does* the Bible say about fear generally and about fear of God particularly? How can preachers address their hearers' extant fears and rightly arouse their fear of God without harmfully exploiting those fears, on the one hand, or unwittingly dismissing them, on the other?

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF FEAR

Generally defined, fear is a psychological phenomenon with physiological, spiritual, and social effects. It's a natural reflex of the drive for self-preservation and a state of severe distress aroused by concern for impending pain, danger, evil, death, or the illusion of such possible experiences.⁵

Fear, and its startling absence when it was to be expected, are recurring themes in Scripture. Where it isn't mentioned specifically, its

presence is implied through such effects as trembling, shaking, cringing, shuddering, hair bristling, face blanching, knees knocking, and legs giving way (Job 4:14-15; Ps. 119:120; Isa. 19:16, 29:22; Jer. 51:27; Dan. 5:6; Joel 2:6; Nah. 2:10).

The word itself, in one form or another, appears over 500 times in the King James Version. "Afraid" occurs just shy of 200 times, and "terror" over 50.6

The word groups most often associated with fear in the Old Testament are derivatives of *yara'*, *mora'*, and *yir'ah*. All mean to fear. *Mora'* further suggests terror and awe, and *yir'ah* worship. The roots *chatat* and *pacad* supply supplemental word groups that relate to being terrified, disheartened, dismayed, in a state of dread, and trembling.

New Testament appearances of "fear" most often derive from the root *phob-*, meaning to fear, revere, respect, and feel terror. Synonyms include *tarasso* (to disturb or terrify) and derivatives of the root *deil-* (referring to cowardice, fearfulness, and timidity).

On the whole the Bible portrays fear as the:

natural emotional response to a perceived threat to one's security or general welfare. It ranges in degree of intensity from a sense of anxiety or worry to one of utter terror. It can be a useful emotion when it leads to appropriate caution or measures that would guard one's welfare. On the other hand, fear can be a hindrance to the enjoyment of life if it is induced by delusion or if it lingers and overpowers other more positive emotions such as love and joy, perhaps leading to an inability to engage in the normal activities of life.⁷

Timothy Jennings is a board-certified Christian psychiatrist, master psychopharmacologist, fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, and president of its Tennessee chapter. In his book *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* Jennings posits that the fear response first originated when Adam and Eve believed the serpent's lies about God's character, lies that denied His love and benevolence. Once believed, those lies broke the circle of trust and love that was the original operating design for all creation in harmony with its Creator. That brokenness not only prompted further fear and selfishness, it in turn led to sinful acts that damaged the first couple's minds, character, and bodies.⁸ Hence, for Jennings, fear always has been and will forever be the path to suffering and darkness.

Because of the Bible's repeated commands to fear God (most famously, Deut. 6:13-25) and our natural aversion to and studied suspicion of the emotion in its rawest form, attempts to differentiate fear in the "lower sense" of anxiety, terror, and dread, from fear in the "higher sense" of reverent regard have been common historically in biblical and theological studies. Rabbis since the time of Christ have sensed the tension created by the

TaNaKh's dual commands to love God and to fear Him. They have likewise observed that though both concepts appear often in the Hebrew Scriptures, fear of God appears far more frequently than love for Him.⁹

To explain how these two seemingly irreconcilable motives are not actually so and to clarify what it means to fear God, Bahya ibn Paquda (11th century), in his *Duties of the Heart* 10:6, sought to redefine what it means to fear God by distinguishing between two different types of it: a lower "fear of punishment" and a higher "fear of [divine] glory." Abraham Ibn Daud (early 12th century) followed suit in *The Exalted Faith* VI by differentiating between "fear of harm" (as in the fear of a snake bite or king's punishment) and "fear of greatness" (as in the sense of respect for an exalted person, such as a prophet, who would do no harm). Maimonides (late 12th century) characterized "service based on fear," grounded in a fear of punishment or hope for reward, as a religiously inferior type of behavior rendered by the ignorant, women, and children. In his *Guide of the Perplexed* (3:52) he appears to have tempered his earlier view somewhat when he conceived of fear as a sense of shame in God's presence, rightly resulting from an awareness of His entire system of commandments.

Evangelical Bible dictionaries widely follow this rabbinic tradition in their distinguishing between two types of fear relative to God. Witness *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* in its claim:

Scripture is clear that for the ungodly, or even for the disobedient believer, there is a fear in the sense of terror or panic as one contemplates the coming judgment of God (Heb. 10:27, 31). But the believer should have confidence in God's love and in the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, so that this kind of negative fear is out of place. For the believer, the fear of the Lord is a respectful, reverential awe of God's glory and majesty, leading inevitably to a changed life [emphasis added].¹⁰

Owing in no small part to such historical and popular (re)definitions, twenty-first century Christians take it for granted that fear in the lower sense is generally unhealthy and primarily an Old Testament response to God that has been supplanted in the New Testament by fear in the higher sense. But the biblical terms themselves fail to support such a view. In the estimation of Clendenen, the terminology "is the same, and God's [dreadful] character remains unchanged." Even if one were to place a healthy fear, or respect, of God on one end of a scale and a craven, servile, and selfish fear of pain, shame, or death on the other end, James Hastings writing a century ago concluded it would be "impossible to draw any sharp line between the two kinds of fear, for in the imperfection of human character one motive shades off into another." ¹³

Clendenen worries that attempts to confine:

the believer's attitude toward God to "reverence" or "awe" rather than "fear" may lose sight of those aspects of the divine character that compel obedience—His perfect holiness and righteousness and His unlimited knowledge and power. Knowing that God's wrath has been satisfied in Christ relieves the believer from the fear of condemnation but not from accountability to a holy God (2 Cor. 5:10-11; 7:1; 1 Tim. 5:20; 1 Pet. 1:17). 14

God's holiness (which exposes man's sinfulness [e.g., Isa. 6:5]) is but one attribute that makes Him fearsome or, better yet, dreadful. de Villiers identifies the other two as His omnipotence (providing Him the ability to destroy) and otherness (making Him difficult to fathom, beyond description, and dangerous to encounter). Fear before such a One is both natural and appropriate. It "points ultimately to the complete other, shocking nature of God which makes people aware who they really are and what the consequences of their human condition are." Commenting on Proverbs 1:7, Daniel J. Trier echoes de Villiers here by quoting from R. R. Reno on "Fear of the Lord:"

The created nature of the human person remains forever distinct from the divine nature of the Holy Trinity. This chasm is bridged by grace, but never eliminated.... An analogy might help. When we walk across bridges we may enjoy every confidence that the engineers have done a good job and the span will not collapse—and yet, who does not feel hints of terror when looking over the edge into the depths of the ocean below?¹⁶

Certain recent Jewish thinkers have avoided discussing fear of God altogether, out of concern that it places man in an abject and passive role. Instead, they've emphasized a loving, reciprocal relationship between man and his Maker. But as a growing number of their peers have witnessed the slow obliteration of the perceived distance between God and man precipitated by such an emphasis, they have begun to suggest that "a concern for the fear of God is not incompatible with the dignity of man and is required by the transcendence of God."¹⁷

Evangelical preachers should take heed. The fear of the Lord must be allowed its place in the contemporary pulpit as it remains the beginning of wisdom and pathway to life. But because fear in all its forms is a complex topic for theological discussion and a powerful emotion to boot, hearers' fears should be aroused and allayed with great care and only after prayerful consideration.

A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF FEAR

Accepting the premise that fear of God is not an altogether different

kind of fear but similar in many respects to a fear of other things that induce anxiety, dread, or terror, what role should fear in any form play in contemporary preaching? What do hearers fear? To what extent should preachers address those fears and how? What of those attempts to separate fear of God from fear of death, fear of sin's consequences, and fear of fear itself? The following will address each of these questions and offer a number of suggestions.

Preach to the fears that are: acknowledging and assuring.

Many things have changed since the days of colonial America when Jonathan Edwards preached his fearful sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," but fear persists. It may not be addressed or evoked as much by pulpits today as it was then, but fear continues to hound and abound in our world. Despite those bumper stickers that proclaim "No Fear," or the redneck equivalent "Ain't Skeered," we remain a frightened folk. Fear is universally and timelessly common to the human experience.

We fear a variety of things and to varying degrees. The Chapman University Survey of American Fears, Wave 2 (2015) provided an unprecedented look into the fears of average Americans. A random sample of 1,541 adults from across the U.S. were asked to identify their level of anxiety over 88 different fears spread across a variety of topics ranging from crime, the government, disasters, personal anxieties, technology, and more. The top ten fears for which the highest percentage of Americans reported being "afraid" or "very afraid" were: corruption of government officials (58%), cyber-terrorism (44.8%), corporate tracking of personal information (44.6%), terrorist attacks (44.4%), government tracking of personal information (41.4%), bio-warfare (40.9%), identity theft (39.6%), economic collapse (39.2%), running out of money in the future (37.4%), and credit card fraud (36.9%). Other fears making the list included: reptiles (33%), robots (23.9%), ghosts (9.7%), zombies (8.5%), and clowns (6.8%). Dying came in at 21.9%, but nowhere present on the list were fear of God, final judgment, or eternal damnation. Perhaps it was because those categories weren't included in the survey. But what if they had been? Setting that question aside, it's obvious that preaching that aspires to engage people living in today's world must address their fears.

Preaching should address hearers' fears by at least acknowledging them, and then by offering assurances when and to the degree Scripture allows. For while the Bible openly discusses those things that stirred its characters' fears, it doesn't always attempt to comfort its readers who are facing those same or similar fears. Unlike our parents when we were children, the Bible rarely tries to convince us that the things that terrify us really aren't all that terrible. It's not a book that's "all lambs and rainbows." The writers of Scripture mention all sorts of terrible and terrifying things simply because they're part of redemption's story. Life's painful experiences often have no

rhyme or reason. They befall all people alike. Their relief seldom comes immediately, if at all. Nevertheless, all these fearful things "were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

Chief among those fears to be addressed, preaching should speak to the fear of death. The fear of death is primal. God appealed to this fear in Adam prior to the latter's fall, after which that fear intensified. Up until Adam sinned there was only the *prospect* of death. But after he sinned, death became *reality*. "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin" (Rom. 5:12). Following his transgression Adam's fears multiplied. He came to fear the voice of God in the Garden. He even feared his own nakedness. It was fear that stitched the leaves around his loins. Fear drove Adam into hiding from life's only true source, leaving him no alternative but death.

Everyone knows that death is coming. But too many of us, particularly the young, live under a delusion of security and invincibility. Preaching fear-filled and fear-inducing passages provides the opportunity to shake hearers awake to the dangers that are and that lurk all around in this "valley of the shadow of death."

Preach to the fear that should be: naming and amplifying.

Attempts to separate fear of death and fear of sin's consequences from fear of God are shortsighted. They fail to appreciate that God Himself established death as the consequence of sin by His own word and according to His very character. Preachers of this bifurcation maintain that while hearers should dread sin and God's judgment of it they need not be anxious at the thought of Him personally. Not so. God's holiness is far more than His personal taste. It's His very nature, inseparable from His person. God takes sin personally as all sin is ultimately against Him (Ps. 51:4). It is to Him a personal offense, not a mere transgression of certain laws arbitrarily set. God speaks openly of hating Esau (at least comparatively speaking [Mal. 1:3]) and Israel because of her wickedness (Hos. 9:15) and for lifting her voice against Him (Jer. 12:8). Personal, indeed! To say that sin must be judged is to say that God Himself must judge it, whether directly (as in the Flood of Gen. 6) or indirectly (as when He "gave them up" to suffer the inherent consequences of their own choices [Rom. 1:24-32]), swiftly or gradually, in this life or the next.

People naturally fear many things but, sadly, too often show little concern for the person of God Himself. They routinely demonstrate a foolhardy willingness to charge in where angels fear to tread (see, Isa. 6:2). Like Martha who was encumbered with much serving, today's hearers are encumbered with so many fears that they, like Martha, have ignored the greater. This is a tendency that Jesus confronted through His own preaching.

In Luke 13 certain members of Jesus' audience told Him, likely with bated breath, about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their

sacrifices. An unbelievably atrocious act! Surely Jesus would rail against it. Instead, He reminded them of another tragedy in Siloam. "Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?" Jesus asked. Answering His own question, He continued: "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (v. 5). Then to drive home His point He told a parable about a barren fig tree (vv. 6-9), ending it with the threat that if the tree didn't bear good fruit in a reasonable period of time, "you can cut it down." Here is an important lesson for us not only as Jesus' hearers but as His messengers. Here Jesus demonstrates that appeals to fear should warn hearers about whom they should fear as much, if not more, than what they fear.

Hearers need to understand that fear in itself is not to be feared. Au contraire! The failure to fear God should be feared most of all. Some texts are clearly shudder-worthy. They remind us of where we stand relative to God—"a sovereign God who is radically different from me, whose mind I cannot read, whose decisions I cannot predict, whose actions I cannot control." 19

Perceiving the true nature of this God makes the prospect of punishment by Him all the more dreadful. For as long as one believes God to be holy, one has reason to fear. For as long as one's personal offenses go without expiation and God's holy wrath demands propitiation, there is great reason to be afraid.

The penal substitutionary view of Christ's atonement as historically understood presupposes a wronged deity whose righteous wrath requires appearement. Fear is the logical and rightful response of those who've perpetrated those wrongs and are held hostage by their own depravity.

If nothing else, the soteriological term "saved" implies a previously extant perilous situation, one we might reasonably assume should induce fear and from which rescue is required. The Bible shows sin to be more than bad (an aesthetic term); it is wrong (a juristic term).²⁰ That wrongness requires retribution if not salvation, not a fresh coat of paint.

Those, like Jennings, who reject conceptions of a vengeful God on the grounds they might prove harmful to body and mind are implying that God is more interested in the flourishing of humanity than His own glory, holiness, or righteousness—which effectively places man's interests before God's. Those who share this belief tend to define flourishing primarily as it relates to the present world. Such a view overlooks the temporal nature of this life and ignores those experiences of people like Paul whose thorn in the flesh God refused to remove. The Lord was clearly interested in more than His apostle's personal short-term flourishing.

"To the shame of much of today's church," writes John Burton:

there has been a firm and steadfast rejection of any truth that doesn't result in people feeling happy affection for God... That teaching when it stands alone apart from the full counsel of God's Word produces a people who don't understand the fear of the

Lord, the severity of their lifestyle decisions or the intensity and nearness of eternity. It results in an overly confident and casual church that presumes God's primary focus is our satisfaction as it forsakes the realities of holiness, standards, scriptural expectations, judgment and how those who are truly saved are hanging on to that position by a thread.

This Christian culture of positivity depicts a God who is so enamored by us that judgment is contrary to his nature. The deception is that God so values us individually that our enjoyment in life is primary to him.²¹

Within this now popular theological construct, God isn't angry as much as He is frustrated—frustrated that we the apex of His creation won't position ourselves to receive His blessings. While it's true that God's commandments, like His covenant with Levi, produce life and peace when obeyed, they are nonetheless rooted in fear (Mal. 2:5). The fearsome nature of God and the terrifying consequences of disobeying Him should therefore be amplified, not denigrated, if it is life and peace that we seek for ourselves and our hearers.

Preach the bad news: warning.

Preachers of the gospel have an abundance of good news to share, it's true; but it must be proclaimed against the backdrop of a great deal of bad news. We must beware of moving too quickly from the bad to the good when preaching. Judgment must be allowed its full say. Hearers can't appreciate how incredibly wonderful the good news is until they first understand how dreadfully awful the bad news is. Edwards realized that hearers need time to experience the tension of their perilous situation before they can begin to appreciate the release offered by the gospel. In "Sinners...," Edwards' first mention of "grace" comes one-third of the way through his sermon. God's "love" isn't mentioned until the sermon is two-thirds finished. Even then it's only mentioned alongside His wrath.²² Though Edwards' sermon wasn't entirely devoid of the good news of the gospel, the rhetoric of fear clearly dominated as it did throughout much of the preaching in his day.²³

Edwards would have agreed with Tim Keller that, "the gospel tells me that I am far worse, more flawed, and more sinful than I imagine, and yet, simultaneously, I am more loved and accepted by God than I ever dared hope." Hearers need to be made to feel the full weight of both sides of the gospel, and that takes time.

The call to preach is, among other things, a call to warn (Ezek. 3:17-21; 33:7-9; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:28; 1 Thess. 5:14). As Johnny Cash sang, there's coming a day when "God's Gonna Cut You Down." That's true for saints and sinners alike. One reason the use of threat or warning is rare

in contemporary preaching to the saints particularly, writes John Piper, is because it produces guilt and fear, which are considered to be unproductive. Edwards rejected this notion, says Piper, on the grounds that "when fear and guilt correspond with the true state of things it is reasonable and loving to stir them up."²⁵

Responsible preachers are those who love their hearers enough to warn them of both the secondary, indirect, or natural judgments; and primary, direct, or special judgments of God. Secondary judgments are those judgments that come indirectly from God and naturally attend or follow the commission of a sinful act. Contemporary examples include various diseases and disorders that accompany or follow from abuses of alcohol, drugs, sex, and so forth. Primary judgments are those that come directly, sometimes swiftly, from God and aren't necessarily a natural consequence of the act itself. Biblical examples include God's judgments of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:28-33) and Herod (Acts 12:20-23). Whether God's judgments come directly or indirectly, all are based upon His holy character and take place according to His sovereign system of justice.

The Book of Job plainly teaches that not all of life's misfortunes are caused by one's personal transgressions. That does not mean, however, that some of them can't be (Jas. 5:15). When they are, when misfortune follows folly, God's hand shouldn't be ignored or denied.

One need not look far in Scripture to find a fearsome text suitable for a basis of warning. Whatever one's views on the "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" (Mark 3:29) or the warnings of Hebrews, for example, the eternal repercussions for those guilty of such transgressions are as frightening as those texts are controversial. They should be preached accordingly.

But let those who would warn others be warned themselves that excitations of fear, like any emotion, are of little worth unless they excite to action. When fear is treated as an end, not as a means, or is "habitually allowed to subside without any effect upon the hearer's active habits...a steady diminution of the emotion itself [is] the inevitable outcome." So as we warn, we must constantly challenge our hearers to apply the Word, to alter their life's habits accordingly.

We must simultaneously guard ourselves against becoming overly familiar with the idea of God's holiness and its implications for our own lives. As God instructed Moses to cordon off the base of Mt. Sinai lest His people glibly touch it, we too need to exemplify for our hearers a healthy fear of God through our actions and choice of words when referring to Him. Passionately delivered warnings and vivid descriptions of divine wrath have their place, but their impact will steadily diminish if they aren't consistently acted upon by preacher and hearer alike.

Preach with imagination and a sense of immediacy: fearmongering.

For insight on how a speaker can arouse an audience's fear, one need

look no farther than Aristotle. In his treatise *On Rhetoric* he taught the key to arousing fear, or any emotional state, is: 1) to understand what causes a person to experience that emotion, then 2) to create for one's audience by use of imagination and description the sense that a sufficient cause for that emotional response is at-hand. Applying this insight to preaching particularly, Edmond Benard claimed that in order for a sermon to stir an audience's emotions it must present a good to be gained or evil to be avoided, must portray the good or evil as personally affecting the hearers, and must appeal to the imagination.²⁷

The warning in John 3:18 illustrates the Aristotelian technique. "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned *already...*" Here condemnation is not portrayed as a prospect on some distant horizon but as a settled and present reality. It's one thing to hear "you may be damned" or "you will be damned;" it's an altogether other thing to hear "you're damned already!" This is the very same idea put forth repeatedly and descriptively throughout Edwards' sermon.

Various fields of study outside of rhetoric and homiletics have come to recognize fearmongering as a necessary first step to challenging beliefs and promoting widespread change. Social psychologists working for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the 1950s developed their Health Belief Model based upon six main constructs. They argued that people will take action to prevent, screen for, and control illness only if they believe they are susceptible to the condition, believe the condition has serious consequences, believe taking action would reduce their susceptibility, believe costs of taking action are outweighed by the benefits, are cued to act, and believe that they can act successfully.²⁸ The Model is predicated upon the thesis that recognition of one's personal susceptibility to danger, or what one author termed "the magnitude of noxiousness of a depicted event,"²⁹ is the starting point to change. Fear is the emotion that naturally attends that recognition, and imagination is key to depiction.

Other studies on fear appeal theory have appeared recently in both *Research in Business and Economics Journal*³⁰ and the *Psychological Bulletin* of the American Psychological Association.³¹ Based upon her survey of fourteen theories of fear appeals, Kaylene C. Williams concluded, "[T]he bottom line of fear appeals is that they work; threatening information does motivate people to safer and recommended behavior. Based on over 50 years of fear appeal research, a fear appeal should contain threat and efficacy information sufficient to both evoke fear and inform about adaptive behavioral responses" [emphasis added].³² In other words, it's seldom enough to announce the good news. People must know (cognition) the bad news and feel it (emotion) before they will determine (volition) to change (action).

But the curvilinear model of fear appeal claims there is a delicate balance to be maintained when exciting fear. Writes Williams:

There is a curvilinear relationship between fear intensity and change

in the target audience. If the fear is too low, it may not be recognized. If it reaches a threshold that is too high, the individual may engage in denial and avoidance... A fear appeal should [therefore] contain threat and coping efficacy information sufficient to both evoke a manageable level of fear and inform about adaptive behavioral responses.³³

From Aristotle to Edwards to today, fearmongering has been recognized as key to provoking change. And imagination, with a sense of immediacy, as key to evoking fear. But preachers especially must be cautious. Too many descriptive details may weary the hearer's imagination, offend his taste, or betray a lack of right feeling on the preacher's part.³⁴ Referring specifically to the Day of Judgment and agonies of perdition, Broadus argued for moderation, concluding, "One who truly realized the scene, and tenderly loved his fellowmen, could hardly endure to dwell so long on the most harrowing of details, and the preacher who does this is apt to be for the time (though unconscious of it) mainly alive to the artistic interest in his picture."³⁵

In sum, a few vivid details, presented briefly but with genuine emotion, will make a far deeper impression with positive results than histrionics or overly graphic depictions. Where the latter predominate, where the preacher seeks to frighten hearers through drama rather than faithfully expounding those texts that are genuinely frightful, he runs the risk of alienating his hearers.

Fearmongering to build community: unifying.

Are there dangers to this sort of preaching? In their meta-analysis of fear appeal effectiveness and theory based on 127 articles yielding 248 independent samples from diverse populations, Tannenbaum and his colleagues concluded that "(a) fear appeals are effective at positively influencing attitude, intentions, and behaviors; (b) there are very few circumstances under which they are not effective; and (c) there are no identified circumstances under which they backfire and lead to undesirable outcomes" when compared to groups wherein fear appeals are not used to achieve the same measurable outcomes [emphasis added]. Thus, the meta-analysis calls into question the claims of the curvilinear model (referenced above), claiming that fear appeals are not counterproductive in themselves.

Still, one should be wary. Fear *can* be detrimental to a person's health. As God designed the human brain, fear is more powerful than reason. Fear activates the amygdala that in turn hobbles the brain's logic and reasoning circuits. One *can* reason himself out of fear ("That shadow in the living room is only a lamp, not an intruder."), but fear generally precedes reason and doesn't give way quickly. The brain can be too easily duped into fearing the wrong things and holding on to fear for too long. When that happens, it "triggers a cascade of caustic events." Stress hormones and inflammatory

factors are released resulting in increased illness, metabolic problems, pain, impediments to new learning and development, brain changes related to major depression, and contribute to one's eventual rejection of God.³⁷

Mark that final result carefully. Fear may cause a person to turn away from God. This was apparently what happened in the case of the late comedian Don Knotts, best known for his endearing portrayal of Mayberry's deputy sheriff Barney Fife. Don's brother-in-law Daniel de Vise recounts in his book *Andy & Don* that it was the preaching on Hell that Don heard in his youthful days in West Virginia and his inability to find assurance of divine forgiveness that turned him against God.³⁸ When church becomes nothing more than "a weekly spectacle of fire and brimstone,"³⁹ as it did for young Don, the rhetoric of fear has gone too far.

Historically, fear appeals have been common in religion. Islam warns about places of eternal torment that both resemble and differ markedly from the Christian doctrine of Hell. This commonality should give us preachers pause. Should we ever find ourselves making appeals to fear our primary or, worse, sole means of attempting to win and retain converts for Christ, our methods, if not our message, will differ little from those of the Muslim cleric. Then what of the outcome? What then is to prevent our preaching from devolving into hate speech and inspiring acts of violence in Christ's name? What is to prevent fear from causing hearers to turn away from one another and from those outside the camp?

The answer is love. Appeals to fear have their place, but it is love that distinguishes Christianity. It is fear connected with compassion and community that one finds in Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Luke 5:17-26, 7:11-17, Acts 2:41-43, and 9:31. de Villiers observes:

In its worst form... fear creates deep psychological anxiety, hopelessness and feelings of helplessness, not to mention distance and hostility between people. At its best, though, it makes people acutely aware of their creatureliness, of being awesomely, but intimately involved, together with others, in a relationship with a Creator who powerfully reaches out to creation and humanity with providential compassion and love.⁴⁰

Fear of God as promoted in Holy Scripture manifests itself primarily in two ways: loving obedience (i.e., drawing close to God—Exod. 20:20; Deut. 6:13-14; 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 16:6; Jn. 14:15, 21) and humble community (i.e., drawing close to others—Matt. 22:36-40; 28:18-20; Phil. 2:1-8). It's important to remember that neither the command to love nor to fear is given "to command an emotional state," worthy because of the feelings they arouse. Rather, "both are used as motivations for doing the will of God. They are means to observance." God created man to live in harmony with Himself, with his fellow man, and with all God's creation. To do God's will is to live in peace with all. With "fear and trembling" believers should manifest the

reality of God's working within (Phil. 2:12-13). Such fear-induced humility promotes community.

Romans 11:20 suggests that the opposite of fear is neither courage nor love but pride. Courage is doing one's duty in the face of fear. Love is selflessness (John 15:13), so logically its opposite must be selfishness. But in Romans 11:20 Paul commands his Gentile readers, "Do not become proud, but fear." Fear is a check against sinful pride. Fear promotes humility and begets God's blessing. "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). When Adam and Eve ceased to fear, they proudly sought personal equality with God. How arrogant it was for them to think that the only thing separating them from becoming like their Creator was a single piece of fruit!42 Their pride was their undoing. Fear, rightly directly and exercised, would have been their pathway to wisdom, life, and shalom.

CONCLUSION

What Piper wrote in summary of what today's preacher might learn from Edwards certainly applies when it comes to fear appeal. "We simply must signify, without melodrama or affectation, that the reality behind our message is breathtaking." And fearsome, too.

As terrible as some texts and life experiences are, they do us a service. As Taylor notes:

They pry our fingers away from our own ideas about who God should be and how God should act so that there are only two things left for us to do with our fear: use it to propel us toward the God who is or let it sink us like a stone.

Preaching texts of terror calls for the same kind of choice. We may try to protect ourselves and our congregations from them by tossing out inflatable bits of comfort and advice, or we may find the courage to forsake those twigs and swim for our lives toward the living God. As fearful as that may be, it is finally less fearful than the alternative. 44

Returning to Edwards, he summed up the preacher's situation perfectly when he preached in "Sinners...," "All that we can possibly say about it [i.e., "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God"], gives but a very feeble, faint representation of it; it is inexpressible and inconceivable: For 'who knows the power of God's anger?" And how can we who know of it fail to warn those who either don't or don't seem to care? It is fear of this angry, utterly holy, and omnipotent God that prepares our hearts to attend His Word, not only to hear and honor it but to heed it.

To adapt a passage from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica:* "The fear of God complements knowledge of the [Bible]. According to one opinion it is only through fear of heaven that one can arrive at a true knowledge of the [Bible]:

'He who possesses learning without the fear of heaven is like a treasurer who is entrusted with the inner keys but without the outer. How is he to enter?'"⁴⁵ In sum, a fearless hermeneutic goes hand-in-glove with a fearless homiletic, begetting folly. But "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

NOTES

- 1. Less than six months later, Hollywood's next blockbuster—*Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*—offered another troubling depiction of fear's tragic consequences. In that movie it was the Dark Knight of Gotham's fear of the incomprehensible and uncontrollable Superman that pitted him against Krypton's last son in a brutal death match. Given the film's messianic overtones, biblically literate viewers couldn't help but to recall how the Gerasenes similarly expelled Jesus, though less violently, from their own coasts out of fear (Luke 8:35, 37).
- 2. Jeff Greenfield, "Getting the Politics of Fear Right," *Politico Magazine* (Nov. 24, 2015): online. Accessed 25 January 2016.
- 3. H. R. Balz, "Furcht vor Gott? Uberlegungen zu einem vergessenen Motiv biblischer Theologie." *Evangelische Theologie*, 29 (1969): 626-44.
- 4. Pieter G. R. de Villiers, "Fear as dread of a God who kills and abuses? About a darker side of a key, but still forgotten biblical motif," HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 69(1), Art. #2018, 9 pages: online. Accessed 25 January 2016.
- 5. Ibid.
- 6. Contrary to popular belief, the phrase "fear not" appears far less than the 365 times often claimed. The phrase is used as an imperative just over 80 times, with only approximately 60 of those occurrences offering direct comfort to the contemporary reader in a theological context. See Claude F. Mariotinni, "Fear," in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, www.studylight.org (accessed Feb. 26, 2016): online. Accessed 26 January 2016.
- 7. E. Ray Clendenen, "Fear," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman, 2003), 562.
- 8. Timothy Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 2013), 35-36.
- 9. The following summary of rabbinic thought and select quotes are taken from Eugene B. Borowitz, Raphael Jospe, and Hannah Kasher, "Love and Fear of God," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, *Second Edition*, vol. 13 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007).
- 10. Tremper Longman III, gen. ed., "Fear," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 580.
- 11. See, for example, W. L. Walker, "Fear," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1960).
- 12. Clendenen, "Fear."
- 13. James Hastings, "Fear," in A Dictionary of the Bible: Dealing with Its Language, Literature, and Contents Including the Biblical Theology, vol. 1

- (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), 858.
- 14. Clendenen, "Fear."
- 15. de Villiers: online.
- 16. R. R. Reno, "Fear of the Lord," in *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 15-16, quoted by Daniel J. Trier, *Proverbs & Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 13.
- 17. Borowitz, Jospe, and Kasher, "Love and Fear of God."
- 18. Barbara Brown Taylor, "Preaching the Terrors: What do we say about the ghastly parts of the Bible?" *Leadership Journal*, Spring 1992, www.christianitytoday.com. Accessed 23 February 2016.
- 19. Ibid.
- Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 623.
- 21. John Burton, "Is It Time for Hell Fire Preaching Again?" *Charisma News* (July 21, 2015): online. Accessed 25 January 2016.
- 22. Said Edwards, "God hath had it on his heart to show to angels and men, both how excellent his love is, and also how terrible his wrath is."
- 23. Edwards' treatment of fear relative to God shows he viewed such fear to be good, right, and helpful. He thus shared his contemporaries' view as summed up in a verse from John Newton's hymn *Amazing Grace* (published 1779): "'Twas *grace* that taught my hear to fear, and grace my fears relieved."
- 24. Simon Vibert, Excellence in Preaching: Studying the Craft of Leading Preachers (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 35.
- 25. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 91.
- 26. John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012 [reprint]), 202.
- 27. Edmond D. Benard, *The Appeal to the Emotions in Preaching* (Westminster, MD: Newman Book Shop, 1944), 10-13.
- 28. National Cancer Institute (U. S.), "Theory at a Glance: A Guide for Health Promotion Practice" (Bethesda: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, 2005), 13.
- 29. Ronald W. Rogers, "A Protection Motivation Theory of Fear Appeals and Attitude Change," *The Journal of Psychology*, Sept. 1975: online. Accessed 17 February 2016.
- 30. Kaylene C. Williams, "Fear Appeal Theory," *Research in Business and Economics Journal*, March 2012: online. Accessed 17 February 2016.
- 31. Melanie B. Tannenbaum, Rick S. Zimmerman, Justin Helpler, Lindsey Saul, Samantha Jacobs, Kristina Wilson, and Dolores Albarracin, "Appealing to Fear: A Meta-Analysis of Fear Appeal Effectiveness and Theories," *Psychological Bulletin*, Nov. 2015: online. Accessed 17 February 2016.
- 32. Williams, 16.

- 33. Ibid., 14-15.
- 34. Broadus, 204.
- 35. Ibid., 205.
- 36. Tannenbaum: online.
- 37. Jennings, 55-56.
- 38. Daniel de Vise, *Andy & Don: The Making of a Friendship and a Classic American TV Show* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 105.
- 39. Ibid., 8.
- 40. de Villiers: online.
- 41. Borowitz, 230.
- 42. I owe this insight to a commentary that I ran across years ago while preparing a sermon from Genesis 3. Regrettably, I have since been unable to locate the exact source.
- 43. Piper, 104.
- 44. Taylor: online.
- 45. Hannah Kasher, "Fear of God," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, *Second Edition*, vol. 6 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 725.

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AN EVANGELICAL PREACHER WHO LOST HIS "EVANGELICALNESS"

DENNIS PHELPS

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Jonah 4:1-11

We are the Evangelical Homiletics Society. There are other homiletical academic guilds, but we each affirm a basic, orthodox, confession of faith that unites us and serves as the rock solid foundation of our task to teach preachers and to preach a biblical message. It is our "evangelicalness" which functions as an important identifier for us.

We are heralds of truth, but it is not just a truth, any truth. It is the kerygmatic truth. It is the truth of John 3:16. It is the truth of Rom 5:8. It is a living Voice, sounding into the world, a brilliant Light chasing the darkness, a whisper overwhelming hopeless and despair. It is truth that can be received, announced, shared, and witnessed. But it cannot be chained, fettered, outlawed, exterminated, rationalized, or obliterated. It is the anvil on which all hostile hammers shatter.

Now THAT is good news. That is GREAT news. It is a message of mind and heart, of truth and spirit, a message of law and gospel.

But what happens when an evangelical preacher loses their "evangelicalness"?

Look with me at Jonah 4, as we consider "An Evangelical Preacher Who Lost His Evangelicalness".

In Jonah 4, Jonah is angry with God about his successful ministry. He preached a simple, four-word message: "40 days. Game's over!" (That is how I know he and I are not related – it was a brief message, straight to the point). "40 days and that's it!" The capital city of Nineveh was reached for God through a simple, four-word message. There was an amazing evangelistic movement, but Jonah is outside the city walls, hoping and waiting for brimstone to fall and judgment to begin.

This was Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites' sin. This was Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites themselves. This has become his attitude now toward God.

So what does Jonah do? Look at Jonah 4:1-3. Rather than running from God (Jonah 1), Jonah takes his problem directly to God this time. But

rather than praying (as in Jonah 2) he burns with anger in God's presence. Jonah says, "I knew this would happen. I told you so! This is why I fled. You wimped out, God. I wish I were dead rather than witness this display of compassion. Just go ahead and kill me."

Why is Jonah angry? Why is he complaining to God? It is like Jonah is saying, "God, let me tell You what is wrong with You":

"You are a gracious God. You offer free, unmerited love toward undeserving creatures, like the Ninevites. You are just full of grace."

"God, You are also merciful. Your compassion is like a loving parent toward a child."

"And while I have your attention, God, ... You are slow to anger. You are the opposite of being short-fused. You are patient."

"You abound in steadfast love. You are just full of grace, mercy, loving kindness, favor, faithfulness, devotion, loyalty. You do not dispense these in tiny, thumbs full doses. You are just overflowing with them."

"There is one other complaint I have against You, God. You relent from disaster. You back off from the calamity and doom that You threatened for the Ninevites. You can be moved with compassion and pity toward ungodly, wicked, sinful, pagans."

Jonah's theology is accurate, even evangelical. This text is almost identical to Exodus 34:6-7. It is God's self-description to Moses and becomes a mantra for Hebrews to learn about God.

But remember the final question asked yesterday by Josh Peeler during the panel discussion? "Why are some people with solid theology often ugly in our behavior and attitude toward others?"

Isn't this the warning of Exodus 20:7 about bearing God's name in vain or emptily -- having His name stamped on our hand or forehead but exhibiting characteristics opposite of the One Whose name we bear? Claiming that we are identified with a God Who is patient but we demonstrate impatience toward someone who doesn't think exactly as we do. Being arrogant in our defense of truth. Not demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit. Forgetting that, except for the mercy of God, we are ALL targets of His wrath; we are ALL sinners.

Beginning in v. 4, God responds to Jonah's anger and frustration. He does not lecture Jonah on theology or scripture; Jonah knows these. God sends him to learn from nature (4:6). In Prov 6:6 God sends the stupid person, the sluggard, to learn from the ant. Here God sends Jonah (who thinks he is so smart) to learn from a stupid grub worm.

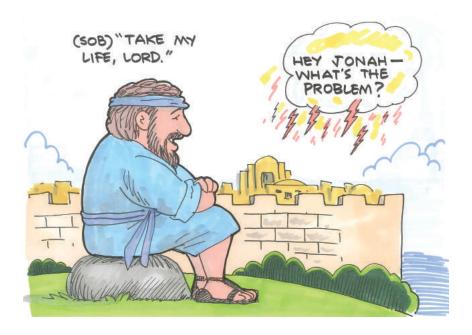
The narrative of Jonah climaxes with 5 pictures.

Picture one (3:5-9)



On the right side—all the people and animals of Nineveh, even the king, are wearing sackcloth, sitting on an ash heap, fasting and mourning in response to the prophet's message from God of "40 days! Game's over!" On the left side—Jonah is sitting down, waiting for fire and brimstone to fall in judgment.

Picture two (3:10-4:4)



On the left side—Jonah is hanging his head, depressed, crying out "O Lord, I can't stand this! Take my life!" On the right side—the Lord's voice from heaven responds, asking "Jonah, why are you so angry?"

Picture three (4:5-6)



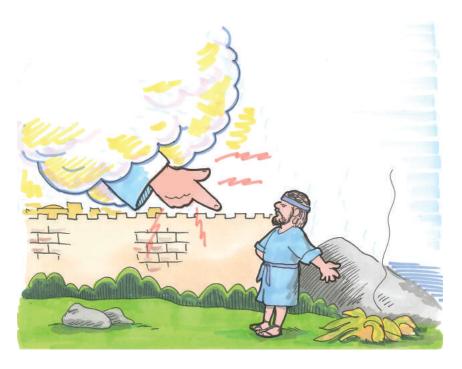
Jonah is sitting under a booth he built to provide shade. God affirms Jonah's impulse for shade and causes a huge gourd to grow up to provide even more shade; the booth was not enough. Jonah is sitting in the shade under the booth and gourd, with a smug grin, saying, "This is the life! This is wonderful. This is the way life should be."

Picture four (4:7-9)



There is a plant, shriveled and dried up by the east wind, with a satisfied worm relaxing at the base. There is Jonah sitting alone and depressed. Notice his mood swings. In the corner, there is the voice of God asking, "Jonah, why in the world are you so angry about the plant?" Jonah responds, "I have every reason to be angry, God!"

Picture five (4:10-11)



God teaches Jonah about how ridiculous and pitiful he looks, shedding tears for a stupid plant: "Jonah, you are weeping over a stupid plant in which you invested nothing. It simply came up overnight and then disappeared the next night. What is it to you?" But the plant excited Jonah because it satisfied his self-indulgent tastes. He values physical shade more than eternal shade from God's judgment on the Ninevites. He becomes suicidal again.

Jonah's anger about the plant has nothing to do about him feeling sorry for the plant or even that the plant has sacrificed its life in this divine experiment. Jonah is mad because he lost his shade. He could have gotten up and walked back into the city to find shade. But he was still hoping that the heat from heaven would fall on the Ninevites. All Jonah got was the heat from the sun on his head. So he longs for death.

Why these pictures? What is the purpose of the dialogue?

Jonah determines the value of something by how it fulfills his self-indulgent cravings. He weeps over the loss of shade but not over the helpless people and animals of Nineveh. He is childish, self-centered, concerned only about what brings him comfort, ease, and pleasure.

Nineveh reminds us of lost humanity and Jonah reminds us of

Israel, people whom God rescued not for their own sake but so that they might witness of His grace to all the nations.

Like Israel, Jonah may have been a theological giant but like Israel, he was a spiritual dwarf, an Old Testament Pharisee.

All creatures are precious and matter to God. God's compassion is not influenced by or dependent on the function or value of the object of mercy. God does not value us for what we can "do" for Him. God asks, "Is it right for you to be angry over the loss of a plant? You didn't plant it or water it. It simply showed up." Jonah responds, "You bet its right! I am perfectly justified in my depression." God says, "Think about it. You grieved over a plant, not because it was an extension of yourself or the fruit of your labor or because it depended on you. You grieved only because you have been robbed of your comfort. Poor, self-indulgent soul. If you feel sorry for a measly plant, what is so terrible about Me, God, feeling compassion over Nineveh, with its 120,000 people and all the animals?" Notice God had counted the 120,000. These are people created in God's image whose breath is from God Himself. For these people the promise was given to Abraham that "in you shall ALL the nations of the earth be blessed." Notice also the focus is on the individual people rather than just the king.

God loves us all, everyone of us. He shows compassion on the pagan sailors in response to their faith and repentance in Jonah 1. God shows compassion on Jonah when he prays at the bottom of sea in Jonah 2, about to drown at the Gates of Sheol. God shows compassion on the people of Nineveh in Jonah 3. God shows compassion even on the King of Nineveh. God showed compassion toward the gourd in Jonah 4. But Jonah thinks that is exactly what is wrong with God.

Notice v. 11. Something unusual happens. The book closes with a question. Nahum is the only other book that ends with a question, and it also deals with Nineveh.

We don't know if Jonah ever answered the question; the text is silent. But we do know this—WE must answer the question, whether Jonah did or not. Do WE get it? Do we have soft hearts toward the wicked, the ungodly, the sinful, the backslidden, the prodigal, the lost? Or are we another Jonah? Self-centered, self-indulgent, proud, orthodox, comfortable, relaxed while others rush headlong to eternal damnation?

We must apply God's concern and value for Nineveh to ALL peoples, even those we believe to be our enemies. God loves us ALL. He grieves over *every person*.

Though I speak with tongues of John Piper and Chuck Swindoll but have not compassion, I have become a noisy, heavy metal rock band or a rusty, bent cymbal. If I have the eloquence of H.B. Charles or Joel Gregory, and know all the mysteries of creation and science; and if have all faith to solve all the social problems, but do not have love, I am a zero (not a hero). If I follow David Platt and become radical, giving away all my possessions and surrender my body as a martyr in a middle-eastern or far Asian country

but do not have compassion for others, it has been a waste of effort. If I rally all evangelicals worldwide into a movement with rare religious fervor with spiritual focus, and train the next generation with the deepest homiletical and theological insights, but have not compassion, I become an evangelical without "Evangelicalness".

But I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in our Lord's great commission and great commandments. It is a vision born out of prayer and expressed in worship and witness and work – a vision of toil, of laboring together with God. It is a vision of reaching people for Christ and experiencing the oneness of His Holy Spirit.

I have a dream. I have a dream that the church united will rise up and live out the meaning of its creed, "Amazing grace. Jesus saves!" I have a dream that believers in Jesus will cross the great racial rift of our culture and the denominational divides of our society and learn to pray together, to praise God together, and perform acts of compassion together. I have a dream.

I have a dream that sons of colonial settlers and sons of recent immigrants will sit down together at the table of fellowship. I have a dream that daughters of the revolution and daughters of the boat people will read together at the desk of Bible study. I have a dream that baby boomers and busters and Xers will offer the olive branch of peace and mutual respect to our senior adults and cease the worship wars.

I have a dream, a dream that lay people will start prayer meetings in their homes and during their lunch hours – prayer meetings where Christians of all denominational stripes will know the healing of relationships, for by His stripes we are healed.

I still have a dream that every congregation will be known, not for the height of its building but for the depth of its faith; not for the size of its budget but for the expanse of its hope; and not for the number of its members but for the record of its love and compassion. I have a dream.

I have a dream of new churches, of growing churches, of churches being renewed, and of churches willing to give themselves in sacrifice for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom. And if the church of Jesus Christ is to become great, this thing must become true: we must declare the gospel as evangelicals.

So let the gospel ring. Let it ring from Vancouver to Victoria Falls. Let it ring from London to Sydney, from Israel to Islamabad, from Los Angeles to Boston. Let it ring in every apartment and townhouse and hut. Let it ring in every condominium and home. Let it ring in every business and market place. Let it ring down every four-lane pike and every cul-de-sac. Let it ring from this assembly to this world around us. Let God's gospel ring!

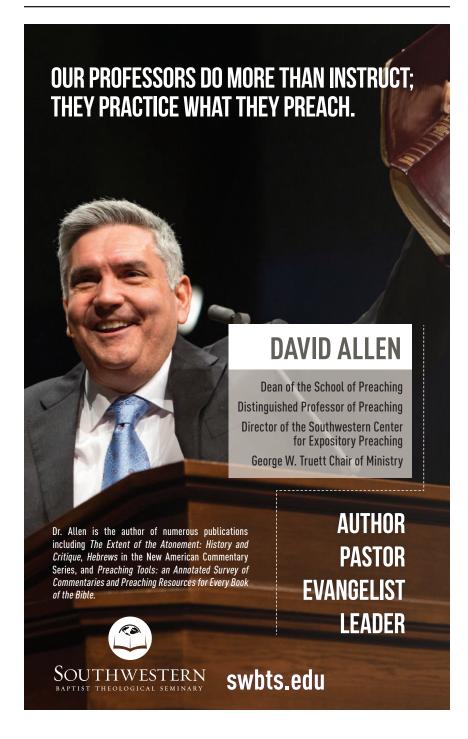
For when that happens, when we allow the gospel to ring, we fulfill our divine mandate and call. For Jesus Himself said, "The gospel of the Kingdom must first be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations ..."

And when that happens, then we will stand as one—all of us who know the Lord Jesus as Savior—white and black and brown, rich and poor, famous and unknown, great and small. Then we will join hands and sing that new song with the elders of the Revelation: "You are worthy, our Lord and our God. You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power for You created all things. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, for with Your blood You did purchase for God souls from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. To Him Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Our world is not impressed with those who have all the answers but with those who have hearts like God—hearts that are soft, tender, gracious, and compassionate. That is a heart that pleases, honors, and glorifies God. That is the heart of an evangelical messenger and an evangelical message.

May we unite together in prayer that God would deliver us from our pride, bigotry, hardness of heart, spiritual arrogance, and theological hypocrisy, and give us hearts like His—compassionate hearts, loving hearts, open to ALL with the amazing good news of what the true and living God has done for us through His only Son and Savior, even Jesus the Christ.

When we do that, we will indeed be the Evangelical Homiletics Society.





BOOK REVIEWS

Pulpit Aflame: Essays in Honor of Dr. Steven J. Lawson. Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Dustin W. Benge. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016. 978-1601784650, 188 pp., \$25.00.

Reviewer: Gregory K. Hollifield, Lancaster Bible College at Memphis Center for Urban Theological Studies, Memphis, TN

The contributors to this *Festschrift* honoring Steven J. Lawson's thirty-five years of pulpit ministry are, like their honoree, widely recognized for their "exegetical thoroughness, expositional clarity, applicatory incisiveness, and a passionate zeal for God's glory" (Foreword). John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, Al Mohler, and Sinclair Ferguson are among the authors of this thoughtful volume that explores the mandate, meaning, motivation, and method of expository preaching—defined by Lawson as "the man of God opening the Word of God and expounding its truths so that the voice of God may be heard, the glory of God seen, and the will of God obeyed" (11).

I was surprised by how much Lawson and I shared in common and how often our paths nearly crossed. He was reared in Memphis, Tennessee, where I have lived for the past twenty years, the high school where he starred in football being barely two miles from my house. In spring 1995, Lawson moved his family to Mobile, Alabama, where he accepted a senior pastor position, only six months after I left my first pastorate in that same city. His father once taught on the faculty of the university that my son currently attends. We even share the same love for Yankees baseball. Given all that, how could I not but appreciate this man and the book written in his honor, and that on a subject that is my life's vocation?

Part 1 of this *Festschrift* detects the *mandate* to preach as deriving from preaching's centrality to worship, the pastor's call, and church history—particularly in the Reformed tradition. Part 2 defines the *meaning* of preaching as an expositional, transformational, and worshipful act. Part 3 describes the *motivation* of preaching in Trinitarian terms—the glory of God, cross of Christ, and presence of the Holy Spirit. Part 4 dissects the *method* of preaching into three parts—preparation, building, and delivery.

As all the book's contributors hail from either Baptist or Presbyterian backgrounds, its Reformed bias is natural. The Westminster Larger Catechism, William Perkins, and John Calvin are all quoted freely and often. At the same time, the book's anti-Arminian bias is just as obvious. This will likely limit its attractiveness to preachers of that tradition.

Though well written and insightful, many of the essays could be taken to imply that the preacher must answer only two questions about

any biblical pericope: "What is this [saying]? What is this [saying] to us?" (to quote Matthew Henry [147]). This reductionist view of preaching could be misinterpreted to suggest sermon preparation is easy. Iain Campbell's chapter on "Preparing the Sermon" shows it to be anything but. Here Campbell does a wonderful job of relating the Bible's contextualized, covenantal, Christ-saturated revelatory nature to the task of preaching (151–54). His observations indicate there is more to preaching than surface-level exposition and application, and give substance to his assertion: "I am more concerned that preachers go deep into the Bible's meaning than that they go wide over its surface" (149).

Readers will find the first three-quarters of the book impressive for its depth of thought and respect for its subject matter. But it is the last quarter that they will be likely to remember, particularly Geoffrey Thomas's analogy of constructing a sermon as being like building a house (159–71).

Members of our guild will encounter little in *Pulpit Aflame* that they have not read elsewhere or written about themselves. Nevertheless, this book will likely reinforce the impression of the weight and wonder of the work to which God has called us. Beyond that, the editors of this volume have compiled a trove of insights from some of today's most respected expositors that any of us would be glad to endorse in a survey of our craft. It is a work Steve Lawson should feel proud to have been produced in his name.



How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth. By Christopher J. H. Wright. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. 978-0310524649, 288 pp., \$18.99.

Reviewer: Timothy S. Warren, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX

This reviewer has been hard pressed to determine for whom this text was written. For starters, there was no clear and consistent distinction between preaching and teaching. Evidently both are the same and the author's goal was to encompass every communication style employing the Old Testament Scriptures. However, the sample outlines scattered throughout the second part of the book exemplify a particular kind of verse-by-verse, exegetical, descriptive, New Testament-nuanced Bible study rather than homiletical development. In addition, while the author's introduction to the reasons for teaching the OT and the overview of the various genres of the OT may prove beneficial for the novice Bible student, the questions and extensive "check lists" he stipulates would exhaust, and perhaps discourage, all but the most experienced scholar, who would likely not need such a pedantic process in the first place. The content of *How to Preach and Teach* seems too deep for beginners and too shallow for veterans.

Another confusing aspect of this text concerns whether or not to preach/teach Christ from the *whole* Old Testament. If the author means that all

the major parts of the OT point to Christ, that is one thing. But when he hints that every, or nearly every OT text, could present Christ in an evangelistic sense, that is far different. On the one hand, the author exhorts the reader to find Christ and preach/teach him by making any number of links to him, "by the Story, the Promises, Similarities, Contrasts, the Response the Text Calls for, the Gospel of Grace." On the other hand, he warns the reader, "Don't just give me Jesus." He writes, "We need to study and to preach the Old Testament so that we understand these great foundational truths that God spent thousands of years teaching his people before he sent his Son into the world" (22), but then claims that, "The Old Testament, taken together as a whole story, makes sense only in the light of its destination—Jesus Christ" (27). That seems to imply that the OT could not have made sense or benefited OT saints or even the OT authors, who did not grasp the coming and crucifixion of Christ.

Being the evangelist he is, Wright promotes two interpretations at the same time. "When Amos wrote those words [5:24] he was *not* talking about Jesus. He was challenging the people of Israel to live as God wanted them to. It *would* be possible to preach on that text in a way that *both* explains and applies fully what Amos meant *and* makes a link to Jesus Christ and the gospel" (54–55). Although on the next page Wright quotes Dale Ralph Davis, "I do not honour Christ by forcing him into texts where he is not" (56), Wright's examples throughout the rest of the book consistently discover Christ and the gospel in every text.

Something more than a hermeneutic that privileges the text in its context is at work here in Wright's approach to the OT. One suspects that his overriding agenda is evangelistic. That agenda certainly represents a compassionate biblical and pastoral desire to see the lost come to faith in Christ, but it does not represent a hermeneutic that recognizes that the OT Scriptures had a message for God's people who sought to live in righteous relationship with him, and that before Christ's incarnation and atonement.

To sum up: I would not recommend this book for preachers or teachers. I would recommend it for those who are already committed to making any Old Testament text into an evangelistic talk, and who like Spurgeon, "will go over hedge and ditch but will get at Him."



Preaching the Whole Counsel of God: Design and Delivery of Gospel-Centered Sermons. By Julius J. Kim. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 978-0310519638, 239 pp., \$24.99.

Reviewer: Jeffrey Arthurs, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA

Julius Kim is professor of practical theology and dean of students at

Westminster Seminary, California. His book is a beginner/intermediate level homiletic embedded in christocentric hermeneutics. The phrase "gospelcentered" in the subtitle is synonymous with "Christ-centered" (48). Clearly organized, and illustrated with a few sample sermons, and with a basketful of alliterated lists, Kim takes students from exegesis through delivery. Here are two examples of the lists: the sermon proposition should be "covenantal, Christ-focused, cogent, and consequential" (152). The main points should be "textual, truthful, transferable, and traveling" (155–156).

Parts 1 and 2 present an evangelical and Christ-centered approach to hermeneutics/exegesis and Parts 3 and 4 deal with design and delivery. Two refreshing contributions of the book are its oft-repeated refrain that sermons should embody "truth, goodness, and beauty." That is, they should be based on rigorous exegesis to say what the human and divine authors have said (truth); they should serve and help the listeners (goodness); and they should delight them (beauty). This emphasis on beauty is rare in preaching textbooks. The second refreshing contribution is Chapter 8, "The Influence of Neuroscience on the Design and Delivery of the Sermon." Kim catches the growing wave which integrates brain science with preaching.

Because Kim is perfectly convinced of the rightness of Christ-centered hermeneutics, or perhaps because the target audience seems to be beginner/intermediate students, there is little critique of that hermeneutic. The result is a grammar of homiletics that does its job for preachers who ascribe strongly to Reformed theology, but more advanced students might benefit by coupling *Whole Counsel* with something like Abraham Kuruvilla's theological commentaries for preachers or the forthcoming *Kerux* series of commentaries published by Kregel.



Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul. By R. Kent Hughes. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015. 978-1433538421, 543 pp., \$36.99.

Reviewer: Aaron Kraft, Puebla Bible Seminary, Puebla, Mexico

This is another valuable contribution by R. Kent Hughes to the *Preaching the Word* series edited by the author, who has contributed twelve of its volumes. As the series title suggests, this work is written with the preacher in mind and is culled from his formidable experience as both pastor and professor. The present edition follows a two-volume version published in 1993 under the same title and series.

Hughes's enthusiasm for the book of Hebrews sets a grand tone for this work elevating it beyond devotional to worshipful from the outset. In his opening paragraphs the author establishes the Christological themes of Hebrews and creates the theological lens through which he will develop his exposition of the book.

This commentary is more than a simple collection of the author's weekly sermons as some pastoral commentaries appear to be. Although less technical, Hughes still addresses standard scholarly questions taking the time to establish the background assumed in his own conclusions. Though the work is deeply pastoral, it is well grounded in his training as both an exegete and an expositor.

An examination of the footnotes shows that Hughes engages a broad range of conversation partners including such historical figures as Spurgeon and Calvin and biblical scholars such as Westcott, Kistemaker, Brown, and Lane. By far his greatest influence comes from the work of F. F. Bruce and Leon Morris whose citations constitute a good twenty percent of the total references. To Hughes's credit, when he invokes a secondary source it supports his exposition using non-biblical illustrations effectively but also sparingly.

Any pastor who intends to handle the book of Hebrews must be prepared to address the thorny theological questions arising from its warning passages. Hughes follows Lane's identification of five passages: 2:1–4; 3:7–19; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:14–29; with the extension of 3:7–19 through 4:1–11. Giving these texts their sufficient due, Hughes dedicates 12 chapters to their treatment.

Wanting to be clear about his own theological presumptions, Hughes categorically states that he is "a convinced Calvinist" who believes that "true Christians persevere" (106). However, there are times when his exposition is not so clear. On 2:1–4 Hughes focuses on the pastoral implications of *believers* who drift, and provides the antidote of focusing on Christ and paying attention to the revelation of God's word, but Hughes quotes Calvin who says, "It is not only the rejecting of the Gospel, but even the neglecting of it that deserves the severest penalty" (52). While grappling with the warning in 3:7–19, Hughes provided exegetical support for perseverance, but also states that "perseverance is not a foregone conclusion" (106). There is no doubt where the author stands doctrinally, but sometimes the desire to be pastoral muddies the exposition, when greater clarity would benefit those pastors struggling to convey the implications of these texts to their congregations.

Since this is a commentary for pastors it is worth noting Hughes's effective use of illustrations that frequently come from within Scripture. Each new exposition begins with an image that is developed through a mixture of biblical theology and textual support that builds to his homiletical proposition. This is one of the great strengths of this commentary. While a good technical commentary can provide invaluable exegesis it often reads like a collection of disconnected pearls. Hughes's expositions take shape and build to a pointed conclusion. Following his example will improve many an expository sermon that is more like a seminary lecture than Christian preaching. It will also benefit sermons that have accurate conclusions but seem largely untethered from the text.

R. Kent Hughes has produced a valuable contribution to the

preacher's library, striking a solid balance between many purely scholarly or purely pastoral commentaries. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* will be quite useful for those looking to understand how to exposit Hebrews and particularly for those preaching in the pulpit, the group for whom Hughes has committed so much of his life's work.



The Witness of Preaching. 3rd ed. By Thomas G. Long. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016. 978-0664261429, xii + 348 pp., \$30.00.

Reviewer: Ben Walton, Arizona Christian University, Phoenix, AZ

The third edition of this now-classic work is a deep, yet accessible, read for preachers with the courage to reflect critically upon their preaching. This edition has a warmer aesthetic, mild revisions, and a new chapter on pulpit plagiarism, and appendices with four sermons, one each by Edmund Steimle, Barbara Brown Taylor, Cleophus LaRue, and Ginger Gaines-Cirelli.

Through the fourth chapter, Long develops a foundation for preaching as theological practice. In the book's introduction, he calls us to consider the place from which the preacher emerges into the pulpit and the disposition of the preacher: from the pew and with a sense of humor and humility. In chapter 1, he examines four ingredients of preaching the listeners (congregation), the preacher, the speaking itself (sermon), and the presence of Christ. He offers, as the best theorizers do, a paradigmatic metaphor, in this case, preaching as witness. This image improves upon, or at least supplements, that of herald, pastor, and poet/storyteller; he is incisive here from the standpoints of both the Bible and communication theory. Chapter 2 is a rich reflection on the centrality of Scripture for preaching, as he brings to awareness the discomforting and necessary interconnectedness of the ancient, modern, and congregational contexts that shape the messages we preach. Chapter 3 is a helpful exegetical method for preaching, which begins with careful delimitation of the preaching text. He posits in chapter 4 that good sermons proclaim the claim of their preaching texts. This onesentence claim consists of two elements, the focus (theological message; what the text is saying) and function (desired listener outcome; what the text is doing). For Long, the "focus" is the text's message, not a summary of its words (exegetical idea), a distinction worth noting to avoid reading the language or terminology of other homileticians (e.g., Robinson) into Long's.

Chapters 5 through 8 address sermon construction. Long interacts directly in chapters 5 and 6 with the ideal sermon forms of Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, and Paul Scott Wilson, and argues that preachers should use a variety of forms. By ideal form, Long means a (fairly) fixed order of stages, or moves, through which sermons, regardless of genre, should progress (e.g., Lowry's "plot" or Wilson's "pages"). Thus, David Buttrick's concept of

"moves" is not a form, as he posits no order of moves, only guidelines that every move should implement. Long then briefly mentions eleven sermon forms. A key reason, he argues, for using different sermon forms is that listeners have different listening styles. A better argument, based on recent research, might be that listeners need multiple sermon forms because growth requires that a concept (e.g., the gospel) be processed through multiple modes. Chapters 7 and 8 contain advice on introductions, conclusions, and transitions (connections) and also illustrations, their role, types, and sources.

The remaining chapters discuss a variety of contemporary preaching issues. Chapter 9 tackles pulpit plagiarism—a trust-breaking act of fraud. Chapter 10 speaks to the oral nature of preaching and its implications for the sermon. Chapter 11 handles some remaining practical and existential questions about the preaching task.

In sum, *The Witness of Preaching* remains a must-read book for evangelical preachers. Long's depth, delivered in an irenic tone, offers evangelicals many opportunities to think through their preaching from a fresh angle. I recommend that, at minimum, chapter 2 be assigned in the first preaching course and that Th.M. and D.Min. preaching programs assign chapter 5, especially if they provide minimal exposure to Craddock, Wilson, and Buttrick.



Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in an Age of Despair. By Otis Moss III. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. 978-0664261603, 136 pp., \$18.00.

Reviewer: Benjamin D. Espinoza, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

Every day, we are confronted with bad news. Racism, shootings, terrorism, hate crimes, and prejudice all populate the airwaves and cause our hearts great concern. How are preachers to proclaim the gospel of hope amidst such rampant suffering? Otis Moss III, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, offers one solution: preachers need to serve as prophets who proclaim the gospel to the darkness of our world. We need prophets who will adopt the practice of "Blue Note preaching" that he defines as "preaching about tragedy, but refusing to fall into despair" (6). According to Moss, "the call of the preacher is to stare in the darkness and speak the Blues with authority and witness the work of God in darkness and even in the abyss" (9). Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World is based on Moss's Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale Divinity School, and reflects the style in which he presented the lectures.

Rooted in the Black tradition of Blues music, Blue Note preaching is characterized by a "blues moan" and a "gospel shout." "The Blues dares us to celebrate all life and find beauty in the midst of the magnificent mosaic of

human contradiction" (7). Blue Note preaching delves deep into personal and social pain while avoiding despair and offering hope for the future. For Moss, Christ embodies this: "Before you get to your resurrection shout you must pass by the challenge and pain called Calvary" (2). In Blue Note preaching, "Jesus ceases to be a past historical figure, a mere theological idea or textural object for examination. Quite the contrary—Jesus is real. Jesus knows all about my troubles" (18–19). Another facet of Blue Note preaching, according to Moss, is reading Scripture with the oppressed and the hurting. "The preacher uses all the tools at her disposal, working to understand context in light of the limited freedom and agency of ancient people and communicating grand theological ideas of the gospel" (27). An example of this is preaching through the story of Tamar, and relating her experience to those in the congregation who have been hurt in unspeakably devastating ways.

In chapter 3, Moss uses musical categories to describe the societal shift to a "post-soul" world. From Moss's perspective, the post-soul (secular) era began with the advent of hip hop in the late 1970's. According to Moss, hip hop is the "first cultural creation that does not explicitly come out of the Church" (55). In order to reach a new generation with the gospel, we must engage the four pillars of hip hop: graffiti (spatial considerations), the aesthetic (movement and embodiment), the DJ (technology in worship and preaching), and rap (dexterity and fluidity with words). Blue Note preaching demands what Moss calls a "360 liturgy" that accounts for each of these elements, thereby engaging the learning styles of congregants. This 360 liturgy is improvisational in nature, just like jazz. For Moss, Jesus embodied the improvisational nature of Blue Note preaching in the case of the woman who touched his garment, and his encounter with the man plagued by demons.

Moss repeatedly cites examples from literature, music, Black history, theology, and communication in order to construct a fresh rendition of preaching form. He uses multiple illustrations and analogies in order to communicate the meaning of Blue Note preaching, helping readers understand its intricacies and priorities. Moss exemplifies Blue Note preaching in the four sermons he includes in the book. These sermons are relevant, engaging, faithful to the text, improvisational, emotional, deep, humorous, and resonant with listeners. They navigate through the spectrum of human emotion while offering fresh, practical insights into the text.

Moss's work will challenge many expositors to craft sermons that take into account the current problems facing our society. While I wish Moss had spent more time illustrating the process of crafting Blue Note sermons, his goal was to describe a style rather than prescribe an approach. The book is very real and gritty, but that was certainly Moss's intention. We as expositors must move beyond sanitized treatments of Scripture and instead plunge into the depths of the pain and suffering illustrated in Scripture and in our world, while offering the hope of the gospel. I highly recommend *Blue Note Preaching*

to students, scholars, and pastors seeking guidance in preaching amidst the brokenness of this present age, as they proclaim the hope of Christ.



Preaching with Spiritual Power. By Ralph Cunnington. Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2015. 978-1781916018, 126 pp., \$15.99.

Reviewer: Alex Kato, Ph.D. Candidate, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

When the word of God is preached, does the Spirit of God always work? If he does, then a good exegete can command God, but that is not right. If he does not, then why preach the word? In *Preaching with Spiritual Power*, Ralph Cunnington hints that he might propose a middle way, but his explicit aim is to *rediscover* a middle way in John Calvin's sacramental theology. Thus, while the book could be an important resource for anyone seeking to enter this historical theological debate, it also uses more pages per homiletical insight than most readers of this *Journal* will want, for guidance on preaching with spiritual power.

In chapter 1, Cunnington sets up three contemporary approaches. He addresses the first, Moore theology, indirectly. Scholars from Moore Theological College apparently emphasize the inseparability of Spirit and word. The second approach, Cunnington's more extended focus, is the pushback against Moore theology. Worrying that Moore theology conflates Spirit and word, this rebuttal emphasizes the Spirit's freedom and vitality instead. The end of the chapter suggests a third approach, Cunnington's own, which unfolds throughout the rest of the book. While he adopts the criticisms against Moore theology (the first approach), he also believes that the critics (the second approach) fail to "consider the possibility that Word and Spirit might be distinct yet inseparable in preaching" (26).

In the next chapter, Cunnington turns to the Reformation, examining the "radical Reformers," Luther, and the Swiss. He takes some time to defend Luther's approach, but he ultimately dismisses other Reformers in favor of Calvin.

The third chapter considers Calvin's sacramental theology, because the Spirit relates to the word much like he relates to the sacraments: "The sacraments are not efficacious without the work of the Spirit...the sacraments retain their essential nature as a means of grace regardless of whether they are of benefit to those who receive them...[and] the reality is *always* available with the sign if it is received with Spirit-wrought faith" (79).

Finally, chapter 4 examines what Calvin actually wrote about the relationship between Spirit and word—the two are neither conflated nor divorced. He believed that the Spirit gives faith and that with faith the word never fails. He also believed that the word always accomplishes its purpose,

but that its purpose may be blessing to those with faith and judgment on those without it, both of which only happen in accordance with the Spirit's work. Cunnington concludes, "Calvin insisted that Word and Spirit are distinct but inseparable" (117).

This book is full of truth, but it finishes flat, never quite returning from the sixteenth century. Each logical step seems to come directly from a primary or secondary source, which makes the book commendably thorough, but at the cost of a truly novel proposal. This may be why Cunnington's third way strongly resembles one of the initial two. "Distinction without separation" broke new ground at Chalcedon, with major Christological ramifications. However, no one in this debate is arguing against distinction. No one says the Spirit *is* the word; no one means to conflate the two. Thus, "distinction without separation" ultimately emphasizes "without separation," a fine conclusion as far as it goes, an appropriate and well-argued one within the debate, but neither a third way nor a panacea.

Preaching with Spiritual Power does unearth some essential reminders. Drawing on Calvin, Cunnington helpfully describes how the Spirit works with the word: by engendering faith that enables the always-effective word to effect blessing rather than judgment. However, the book stays in the descriptive mode more than the prescriptive, and in the past more than in the present. All this makes for a fine historical theology thesis, but pastors and homileticians should look to other resources to help them preach with spiritual power today.



Take Up and Preach: A Primer for Interpreting Preaching Texts. By Blayne A. Banting. Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 978-1498239530, 173, pp., \$24.

Reviewer: Ryan Landis, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX

Despite the plethora of titles covering sermon preparation, preaching theology, and delivery methods, Blayne Banting believes a crucial piece of the conversation is still being missed. As a lead pastor and seminary professor, his experience within the church and academia provides him with helpful insight to speak into this particular niche. He is careful and quick to set expectations for the reader. He explains his particular purpose: "this book is primarily concerned with only a segment of the whole preaching process—the interrelationship between the text and the sermon" (x). Take Up and Preach intends to present a theology of preaching and help the reader better grasp the relation between the biblical text and the sermon. Banting consistently remains within those parameters and defers to a number of other sources for treatments pertaining to areas such as sermon development and delivery. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 provide the theology, argument, and framework for Banting's approach; the final three chapters provide examples of his approach

worked out within three different types of texts.

Chapter 1 provides a theology of preaching. Here, Banting depicts preaching in the form a sphere where the triune God encompasses the conversation taking place between three partners: the passage, the people, and the preacher. The conversations between these partners are related to exposition, communication, and application. Banting wants the preacher to be careful to not place too much emphasis on any one of these conversations or partners to the neglect of the others, and warns of the dangers involved in an imbalance towards any one of them. Trying to serve as a mediator between a christocentric hermeneutic and a christiconic hermeneutic, Banting argues that a sermon can be christocentric without actually adopting a christocentric hermeneutic (16–17). Rather than trying to find Christ in every passage, he would rather the preacher place each sermon in the story of redemption as part of their preaching process.

Chapter 2 is devoted to author's method of moving from exegesis to sermon and he provides a Homiletical Bridge to do so. The metaphor of a bridge has been used countless times to explain the spanning the gap between the ancient context of the original recipients and that of the contemporary audience. Banting, however, takes the bridge metaphor further, using it as a tool to develop a sermon from the text. His bridge is made up of cables representing the redemption story, pylons of Divine Division Disclosed and Deep Need Addressed, a bridge deck representing the redeemed community, that has the five lanes of Form, Flow, Focus, Function, and Feel running along it. Utilizing this bridge as a tool and focusing on all of these facets will, according to the author, help translate the purpose of the original writing into a message that is relevant and purposeful to an audience today.

The bulk of this text, chapters 3 through 6, provides instructions and models to demonstrate the use of the bridge. In chapter 3, Banting offers suggestions on how to select and read the text, and how to identify its form, structure, and focus. Each of the following three chapters then provide examples of how the author's Homiletical Bridge is to be used in relation to discursive, poetic, and narrative texts.

Take Up and Preach devotes the majority of its attention to the final three chapters as examples and less on the actual development of a theology of preaching. I fear that for some readers Banting's quickness to defer to other sources may leave them with more questions than answers. One example of this is seen in his brief synopsis of the christocentric verse christiconic debate, to which he only allocates a little more than three pages. Banting would provide a great service to his readers if he were to further elaborate chapter 1 and work out this preaching theology in greater detail. Additionally, though he purposefully avoids example sermons, these would greatly help the reader by depicting how his Homiletical Bridge is fleshed out to its final form.

Take Up and Preach deserves a spot on the shelves of students of preaching for its contribution to understanding the exegetical to homiletical

process and for its treatment of genres and textual forms. This "buy" recommendation comes with the reminder that the main focus of this work is on how to interpret texts for the purpose of preaching; it is not an exhaustive guide to preaching.



Proverbs and the Formation of Character. By Dave Bland. Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2015. 978-0718894405, 187 pp., \$25.00.

Reviewer: Jeffrey Arthurs, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA

As a preacher, homiletician, exegete, and educator, Dave Bland has spent much of his professional career on Proverbs. This book puts Bland the exegete and educator in the spotlight. Arguing against a vitiated perspective that sees Proverbs as moral finger-wagging with an emaciated theology, the author contends that "the reader who earnestly wrestles with these aphorisms, not releasing them until they divulge at least some of their rhetorical power and theological insight will not leave disappointed" (8). Proverbs are indispensable in forming character and are less a "How To" manual and more a "How To Be" resource (173).

Proverbs and the Formation of Character demonstrates how the sentence literature of Proverbs (chapters 10–29) helps those who hear this briefest of all biblical genres "Be" in regard to communication, wealth, and relationship to God. Emphasizing the role that community and dialogue play in character formation, Bland himself dialogues with numerous disciplines including biblical studies, learning theory, rhetoric, ethics, and paremiology (the study of proverbs).

Readers of this *Journal* will be particularly interested in knowing how this book contributes to homiletics. Bland answers that he hopes it will "generate ideas along the way for those who preach" (xiv). In other words, *Proverbs and Character Formation* is not directly about preaching, but a preacher doing a series on Proverbs will find this volume helpful as an introduction to the literature. Indeed, it is more than an introduction. It is the fruit of Bland's long study of the genre. Demonstrating his own sapience, Bland borrows from the disciplines noted above even as he critiques them. Chapter 2, for example, has an insightful critique of Kohlberg's learning theory, and chapter 3, a critique of the approach to ethics called "values clarification."

While appreciating Bland's scholarship and wisdom, I found myself wondering about the audience he was addressing—preachers, rabbis, parents, educators, and biblical scholars: any reader who participates in the journey of character formation (7). That is a rather wide net, and I feel that it tries to haul in too many sea creatures. Follow-up volumes might target particular species of creatures: parents who need down-to-earth advice on

how to use proverbs, preachers seeking homiletical advice on how to preach them, and biblical scholars who will want to consider his interpretation of passages such as Prov 22:6 ("Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.")

Bland deserves our gratitude. I hope he keeps the dialogue going!



Preaching Points: 55 *Tips for Improving Your Pulpit Ministry*. Edited by Scott M. Gibson. Wooster, Ohio: Weaver, 2016. 978-1941337547, 128 pp., \$9.99.

Reviewer: John Koessler, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL

The work of preaching is demanding. Most of it is carried out in relative isolation. We immerse ourselves in the text and then spend hours reflecting on the passage, organizing our material, and writing the sermon. The work itself can be so consuming that we forget to step aside and think about what we are doing. But suppose you were asked to have coffee with your favorite homiletician and spend a few minutes talking about your craft? Would you be interested?

This little book has the feel of a casual conversation in an intimate setting. Edited by Scott M. Gibson, its fifty-five short chapters are drawn from the *Preaching Points Podcast* at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and they reflect the wisdom of one of the most skilled preaching faculties teaching today. The concise nature of *Preaching Points* may be its most appealing feature. The individual chapters are disarming in their brevity. Reading one is a little like eating your favorite snack food: "They're small," you say to yourself, "I think I'll have another." Before you know it, you've read through several chapters. Maybe the entire book. None of this feels like work.

The brevity of its chapters allows *Preaching Points* to be wide ranging in its subject matter. Technique, ethos, audience analysis, and care of the preacher's soul are just some of the topics touched on by the contributors. The chapters by Haddon Robinson reminded me how much his pulpit wisdom has contributed to the evangelical cause of preaching. Patricia Batten warns us of the difference between studying a text to find something to preach and studying the text in order to hear from God. Matthew Kim offers some hints that will help us to diversify our illustrations. Jeffrey Arthurs helps us to see preaching as a form of cross-cultural communication. Scott Gibson reminds preachers of their pastoral role.

If there is a weakness to this book, it is only that each brief encounter leaves the reader wishing for more. But this is not a real weakness. It is what every good conversational encounter does. *Preaching Points* is not intended to provide exhaustive treatments of its subjects. For this reason, it makes an excellent ancillary text for homiletics courses, small enough to add to the

reading list without placing undue burden on the student. *Preaching Points* is also an excellent resource for the busy pastor who already has too much to read. Each chapter can be read in a matter of minutes. They are helpful, thought provoking, and may just inspire a deeper dive.

Preaching is hard, and thinking about preaching can be even harder (or so said Robinson). *Preaching Points* is an invitation to an interesting conversation with good friends who like to talk about the ministry task that is closest to your heart. Pull up a chair.



Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis. By Allen P. Ross. Wooster, Ohio: Weaver, 2016. 978-1941337288, 202 pp., \$9.99.

Reviewer: Bernie A. Cueto, Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, FL

I first learned of the work of Allen Ross (now at Beeson Divinity School) during my second semester preaching class now almost two decades ago. His commentary on Genesis (*Creation and Blessing*) served as a helpful instrument for effective exposition grounded in solid exegesis. I appreciated his approach, his sensitivity to the preacher engaged in pastoral ministry; his writing was never unnecessarily technical. Since then I have added several of the Ross's works to my library, all worthy additions.

His most recent book, *Malachi Then and Now*, continues on the same path of excellent exegetical insights with expositional emphases as his previous works. Ross states that his purpose is twofold. It is a commentary on the Book of Malachi, and it serves as an example and guide in the process of developing exposition from the text. It is upon this second point that I will focus the majority of my review. Ross's goal is ambitious and needed. He recognizes the importance of time in the word. He writes, "There is no place in ministry for ignorant ministers, for ministers who do not have biblical theological knowledge, for ministers who will not study or do not use the word of God much in their messages Ministers must not neglect this primary responsibility. Why? Because it is the word of God that redeems and guides believers into truth and righteousness" (p 88).

Ross's layout follows a clear approach that student and preacher alike will appreciate. After the usual introductory chapter, he begins each section with a pericope title followed by his translation that is accompanied with textual notes. The notes are helpful and by his own admission not exhaustive. This is a welcome sight for the exegete wanting to focus on what is essential. Make no mistake, Ross deals with every textual difficulty with careful argumentation.

Then, one finds his section on exegetical observations. He covers, as one would expect, grammar, and syntax, but only those elements he feels are necessary in order to arrive at the meaning of the text. His forty-plus-

year tenure in the classroom makes his work stand out. It is sage advice from an author who is not simply dispensing knowledge but serving as a guide to help the reader grow as an exegete and an expositor. The exegetical outline and summary allows the reader to begin to see the exegetical work in structural form highlighting the development of the passage and tying it all together. Having built an excellent exegetical case, Ross now moves to the expository outline bringing the expositor one step closer to his goal. His section on the theological meaning covers the big idea or timeless truth found in the passage. Unlike many commentaries geared towards preaching, Ross's volume does not find Jesus around every corner. Lastly, he provides the reader with a few applications and avenues to consider.

This work has an overwhelming number of positive elements that makes it a worthy addition to any library. But there are a few areas that would have made Ross's work even more helpful. The subsections of his exegetical comments did not include the entire passage but only specific phrases. If one were using the work to find help in one portion of a single passage, this could make it a challenge to locate. His application section is a step in the right direction, but I would have preferred to see him go further. His expository outlines are more theological outlines since they do not take the context of the audience into consideration (Example: "The Essence of the Covenant: It is a Ministry of Life and Peace," or "The Means of the Covenant: It is a Ministry of the Word."). These are substantive theological points, yet for the average audience member who is unemployed or depressed, or dealing with doubt or overwhelming debt, it is lacking. Providing the reader with suggestions as to the impact of those truths on the lives of the hearers would have been helpful. Nevertheless, I am grateful for Ross's work. The student of God's word who has the privilege and the glorious honor of proclaiming it week in and week out will find Ross to be incredibly insightful in both its content and its approach.



Walking with Jesus Through His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures. By Dennis E. Johnson. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2015. 978-1596382206, 298 pp., \$16.99.

Reviewer: S. Jonathan Murphy, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX.

In Walking with Jesus Through His Word, pastor, author, and professor Dennis Johnson presents a christocentric understanding of the Scriptures with the purpose of teaching would-be readers how to interpret the Bible like Jesus did. Johnson frames his "how-to" instruction on Bible reading as a journey; it is a walk from confusion about Christ to conformation to Christ, all in the company of Jesus himself as guide, and launched from Jesus's interaction with two downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. The book

unfolds in six parts, with some parts made up of multiple chapters. Each chapter, moreover, follows a helpful structure in which Johnson explains the point at hand, illustrates it from a text of Scripture ("Putting It into Practice"), and ends with a section for contemplation ("Questions for Reflection and Discussion").

In the first (*Beginning the Journey*) and second (*You are Here*) parts of the book, Johnson establishes the foundation for his christocentric hermeneutic and presents a crash course on Bible study methods. As the section headings suggest, Johnson is orienting his readers to the basics of the landscape of biblical interpretation. He anchors his proposed hermeneutic in that modelled by Jesus in Luke 24. Johnson also spotlights the importance of paying attention to aspects of the language and circumstances of the original audience, as well as to the canonical context, and God's purposes in a particular text.

The third (*Reading the Road Signs*), fourth (*Getting the Lay of the Land*), and fifth (*Recognizing the Landmarks*) parts are the heart of the book. Within these, Johnson instructs readers on typology, covenant theology, and Jesus's mediatorial roles respectively. And so, it is here that the author displays his method of biblical interpretation, but in doing so also presents his framework for understanding the story of Scripture: covenant theology.

The sixth and final part of Johnson's work, "Are We There Yet?", focuses on the response of those who see Jesus in the Scriptures for who he is, just as the downcast disciples did on the road to Emmaus. Johnson argues that walking with Jesus *in this way* through the Scriptures will move the reader to marvel and worship, to hope and trust, and ultimately, to become more like Christ.

Overall, this is a well-written book. It is clear in its message, engaging in its discussion, and focused on accomplishing its intention. The organization of the book as a whole, the consistent order within each chapter, the multiple analogies and illustrations, the numerous biblical examples, and the journey motif all testify to Johnson's skill as a communicator: this is an easy and informative read.

It is, however, another work on classic covenant theology framed as a "how to" manual on biblical interpretation. What Johnson presents is not new. It is simply one more articulation of covenant theology and a redemptive-historical hermeneutic launched from Luke 24. Many, like this reviewer, will politely object to Johnson's interpretation of Luke 24—the basis upon which this christocentric hermeneutic is built and applied to "all" the Scriptures! But this is not the place for a response to the redemptive-historical hermeneutic; that is a path already well-trodden elsewhere.

In conclusion, this book is recommended for those interested in a refresher course on a christocentric hermeneutic and on covenant theology. While other works accomplish this too, Johnson does provide a useful presentation of both. Whether you agree with this tradition or not, it will help you understand how other brothers and sisters in Christ read the Scriptures.



Preaching Christ from Psalms. By Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 978-0802873668, 595pp., \$40.00.

Reviewer: Ken Langley, Christ Community Church, Zion, IL

With this book, distinguished homiletician Sidney Greidanus adds to a series that began with *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* and that includes volumes on Christ-centered preaching of Genesis, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel. Anyone who preaches from the Psalter will find this resource helpful, especially those who share the author's commitment to christocentric hermeneutics.

An opening chapter, "Issues in Preaching from Psalms," affirms that these prayers and songs *should* be preached, advocates theocentric/christocentric interpretation, and treats historical and literary issues in preaching psalms. Unlike standard commentaries, Greidanus's work goes the additional step of unpacking the homiletical implications of scholarly work on these biblical poems.

The main section of the book treats Psalm 1 and twenty other psalms assigned by the *Revised Common Lectionary* for Year A. For each text, Greidanus provides historical and literary contexts, examines poetic features, discusses theocentric emphases, and suggests one or more possible strategies for getting from the passage to Christ. Each chapter includes ideas for an oral reading of the psalm and enhancing its impact by prayers, music, and other elements of corporate worship.

Many books help preachers understand parallelism, chiasm, imagery, and other dimensions of biblical poetry, but *Preaching Christ from Psalms* goes farther than most in showing how these features of the text might carry over into the pulpit: how key words can give sermons unity, how stanza divisions can structure sermons, how images can be used to help listeners picture truth, how main idea and sermon theme can be derived from close attention to poetics. Greidanus also notes which literary features, however interesting they may be to scholars, have little homiletical "cash value."

Greidanus is so thorough in his historical/cultural/grammatical exegesis and in tracing links to the New Testament, he does not have the space to do more than hint at how the message of these psalms looks in the lives of contemporary listeners. Real-life examples are needed (to be fair, there are some here). For example, about a third of his exposition of Psalm 23 is devoted to Jesus as shepherd and host, while there are no contemporary illustrations of what life is like, under the care of either Jesus or the LORD of the psalm. Several other chapters also spend time on links to Christ which could have been better invested in application.

Some of Greidanus's moves toward Christ—in his exposition of Psalm 95, for example—are much briefer, but not really necessary: God, and not just the Second Person of the Godhead, is still our rock of salvation under the new covenant. It may be more important to demonstrate how that hopeful truth makes a difference in the way we live, than to cross reference the psalm to the New Testament. Greidanus's exposition of Psalm 8 talks about Christ, but not the environmental responsibility of Christ's followers, an unfortunate oversight, given the importance of that issue and given this text's vision of humans as God's coregents over the animal world.

Greidanus is arguably the most influential advocate of christocentric preaching—and one of the most sophisticated. He urges preachers to not be in such a hurry to get to Christ that they overlook the meaning of the psalm in its original setting (94), and warns against letting the church calendar dictate interpretation of the text (296). Whether Greidanus heeds his own cautions in his expositions is debatable. His insistence that *every* text points to Christ inevitably leads to some strained readings: his sermon on Psalm 104 for example. This creation psalm celebrates the recreating providence of God's spirit in the material, animal, and human world. Greidanus does a fine job echoing the tone of this hymn, but then begins to talk about the Spirit (capital "S" now) by whom Mary conceived Jesus, and how Jesus taught people like Nicodemus about the Spirit who gives life. To an already long sermon on a long passage, Greidanus adds what is in effect a second sermon that feels tacked on to Psalm 104 and which could have waited until the congregation got to John 3.

But preachers do not have to follow Greidanus down his christocentric paths to profit from this book. Its insights into the contexts and literary dimensions of the psalms are rich. I know when I preach any of these texts I will be consulting *Preaching Christ from Psalms* again.



A Little Handbook for Preachers: Ten Practical Ways to a Better Sermon by Sunday. By Mary S. Hulst. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016. 978-0830841288, 208 pp., \$16.00.

Reviewer: Justin L. McLendon, Grand Canyon Theological Seminary, Phoenix, AZ

Mary Hulst is college chaplain at Calvin College, and a former professor of preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. In her introduction, Hulst acknowledges what every preacher knows all too well: there is always room for improvement. So I was intrigued by the book's subtitle that reveals her goal to help improve a sermon in short time. I have a natural tendency to be skeptical of books that provide what seem to be quick fixes (the subtitle says *by Sunday*) to complex issues, but make no mistake, this book is not gimmicky or trite. Hulst winsomely provides students and professors a

helpful volume with instruction that can be implemented immediately in the life of a preacher.

Hulst claims her book "is a practical guide to improving our preaching. Among other things, we'll talk about how to engage the Bible, how to focus on God, how to preach grace, how to deliver messages well, and how to talk with your listeners about your preaching" (12). These goals are addressed in ten chapters where Hulst proposes practical steps that she supports with biblical and experiential examples. Perhaps one of the great strengths of this book is its approachability. Hulst masterfully engages her audience, and each chapter succinctly encourages, instructs, and applies the ten steps she offers. And Hulst approaches the subject matter as an encouraging co-laborer.

Throughout the ten chapters, she addresses biblical, God-centered, grace-full, compelling, imaginative, contextual, relevant, embodied, and selfless preaching, and finally, she provides a chapter on obtaining feedback about one's preaching. Each of these chapters is strong, but three are notable for their helpfulness. In chapter 1, Hulst tackles the subject of biblical preaching. Readers will detect that the author maintains a high view of Scripture, and she acknowledges that biblical preaching requires time, commitment, and meditation. Hulst helpfully distinguishes biblical preaching from "Christian speech," because one must recognize that biblical preaching is rooted in Scripture's grand narrative. This kind of preaching requires time, devotion, and depth.

In chapter 4, Hulst deals with compelling preaching. While this book is not one that touches on all the nuances of sermon building and structural analysis, this chapter presents helpful tips any preacher can use to construct a compelling message. Interacting with Haddon Robinson and others in this chapter, Hulst proposes that sermons should have one main idea, and preachers must know how to articulate the meaning of their message in one sentence. While one could critique ancillary issues in this chapter, Hulst successfully shows that a sermon's structure lends clarity to the sermon, and speaking clearly is the only way to deliver compelling messages.

In chapter 10, Hulst raises the need for preachers to receive feedback on their sermons. This is not only helpful for their improvement, but it also provides an equal benefit for the audience. Christians want to know God's word, so they know they need to hear it clearly and effectively from their pastors. Often, however, preachers are not prepared to hear feedback, and audiences are ignorant of their role to provide it. First, Hulst says, preachers must prepare themselves spiritually to receive correction, instruction, criticism, and praise. She helpfully acknowledges that one must be secure in one's calling to receive feedback and to foster a willingness to implement changes when necessary. Additionally, the author offers sound counsel on the crucial role of preachers in teaching audiences how to listen to sermons and give feedback is healthy and redemptive. Few homiletics textbooks address the subject of audience feedback in this manner.

Finally, the book concludes with a succinct summary of the overall argument of the book's content. Hulst provides a brief but helpful appendix which provides readers with additional resources. First-year preaching students to seasoned veterans will find Hulst's book, in conjunction with other homiletics resources, a helpful guide to improving their preaching quickly.



He Will Be the Preacher: The Story of God's Providence in My Life. By Erwin Lutzer. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015. 978-0802413062, 213 pp., \$14.99. Reviewer: Jason D. Hilliard, The Village Church, Dowling Park, FL

Best known for his faithful tenure as Senior Pastor of The Moody Church in Chicago for over twenty-five years, Erwin Lutzer has flourished in ministry for more than four decades, serving thousands through his preaching, pastoral care, publications, and radio ministries.

In He Will Be the Preacher, entitled after a prophetic word spoken over his infant bed, Lutzer demonstrates his distinction as a storyteller, recounting what he calls "destiny decisions," that navigated his life from a meager childhood to an unexpected education, an improbable marriage, and an unpredictable encounter that introduced him to Moody Church, where he subsequently served to face perilous ministerial challenges and unfathomable ministerial joys. He Will Be the Preacher is an intriguing and transparent autobiography, aptly subtitled, The Story of God's Providence in My Life.

Lutzer paints the story of his life in picturesque vignettes, that transport the reader right into a one-horse-open sleigh, a one-room schoolhouse, and a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to pastor America's historic church through historic American times. In this fascinating account, Lutzer gives equal treatment to the joys and challenges of pastoral ministry, while transparently inviting the reader into his marriage, ministry, lawsuits, death threats, and more. Lutzer highlights God's lovingkindness and his faithfulness to guide his servants through both green pastures and dark valleys.

Easy to read, the book is inspiring, challenging, and encouraging in its content. The fact this could be just about anyone's story makes it compelling and relatable. Like his preaching, Lutzer's approach here is clear and persuasive. I read the book in just a few hours and will probably read it again.

Readers may stumble over some of the chronological disorganization in it, but *He Will Be the Preacher* is, nonetheless, informational and devotional. In sixteen short chapters, Lutzer devotes a third of these to his childhood and preparation for ministry, a third to his tenure as Senior Pastor of the Moody Church, and another helpful third to practical and visionary insights

for pastoral ministry that will equally strike fear, hope and confidence into the hearts of pastors and preachers.

This book is for all who have ever led, attended, or even wondered about church. Experienced pastors will empathize with Lutzer's challenges and grow by his wisdom. New pastors and Christian workers will be encouraged by Lutzer's testimony of God's faithful presence, and Lutzer's hope. But everyone will be struck by the compelling story of a common man, drawn to the high call of preaching God's word through turbulent times, being tenderly carried by the God who called him.

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

History:

The Evangelical Homiletics Society (EHS) convened its inaugural meeting in October of 1997, at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, at the initiative of Drs. Scott M. Gibson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Keith Willhite of Dallas Theological Seminary. Professors Gibson and Willhite desired an academic society for the exchange of ideas related to instruction of biblical preaching.

Specifically, the EHS was formed to advance the cause of Biblical Preaching through:

promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching increased competence for teachers of preaching integration of the fields of communication, biblical studies, and theology scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics

The EHS membership consists primarily of homiletics professors from North American seminaries and Bible Colleges who hold to evangelical theology, and thus treat preaching as the preaching of God's inspired Word. The EHS doctrinal statement is that of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Purpose:

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is designed to engage readers with articles dealing with the best research and expertise in preaching. Readers will be introduced to literature in the field of homiletics or related fields with book reviews. Since the target audience of the journal is scholars/practitioners, a sermon will appear in each edition which underscores the commitment of the journal to the practice of preaching.

Vision:

The vision of the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is to provide academics and practitioners with a journal that informs and equips readers to become competent teachers of preaching and excellent preachers.

General Editor:

The General Editor has oversight of the journal. The General Editor selects suitable articles for publication and may solicit article suggestions from the Editorial Board for consideration for publication. The General Editor works cooperatively with the Book Review Editor and the Managing Editor to ensure the timely publication of the journal.

Book Review Editor:

The Book Review Editor is responsible for the Book Review section of the journal. The Book Review Editor contacts publishers for books to review and receives the books from publishers. The Book Review Editor sends books to members of the Society who serve as book reviewers. The reviewers then forward their written reviews to the Book Review Editor in a timely manner. The Book Review Editor works in coordination with the General Editor for the prompt publication of the journal.

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The Managing Editor has oversight of the business matters of the journal. The Managing Editor solicits advertising, coordinates the subscription list and mailing of the journal, and works with the General Editor and Book Review Editor to ensure a timely publication of the journal.

Editorial Board:

The Editorial Board serves in advising the General Editor in the publication of articles for the journal. The Editorial Board serves as a jury for articles considered for publication. The Editorial Board consists of no more than five members. Board members are approved at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and hold a two-year appointment.

Frequency of Publication:

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is published twice a year: March and September.

Jury Policy:

Articles submitted to the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society are blind juried by members of the Editorial Board. In addition, the General Editor may ask a scholar who is a specialist to jury particular articles.

The General Editor may seek articles for publication from qualified scholars. The General Editor makes the final publication decisions. It is always the General Editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

Submission Guidelines

- 1. Manuscripts should be submitted in electronic form. All four margins should be at least one inch, and each should be consistent throughout. Please indicate the program in which the article is formatted, preferably, Microsoft Word (IBM or MAC).
- 2. Manuscripts should be double-spaced. This includes the text, indented (block) quotations, notes, and bibliography. This form makes for easier editing.
- 3. Neither the text, nor selected sentences, nor subheads should be typed all-caps.
- 4. Notes should be placed at the end of the manuscript, not at the foot of the page. Notes should be reasonably close to the style advocated in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* 3rd edition (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988) by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert. That style is basically as follows for research papers:
 - **a.** From a book:

note: 23. John Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus* (Ann Arbor, 1894), 104.

b. From a periodical:

note: 5. Frederick Barthelme, "Architecture," *Kansas Quarterly* 13:3 (September 1981): 77-78.

- **c.** Avoid the use of op. cit. Dewey 111.
- 5. Those who have material of whatever kind accepted for publication must recognize it is always the editor's prerogative

to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

6. Manuscripts will be between 1,500 and 3,000 words, unless otherwise determined by the editor.

Abbreviations

Please do not use abbreviations in the text. Only use them for parenthetical references. This includes the names of books of the Bible and common abbreviations such as "e.g." (the full reference, "for example" is preferred in the text). Citations of books, articles, websites are expected. Please do not use "p./pp." for "page(s)," or "f./ff." for "following." Precise page numbers or verse numbers are expected, not "f./ff."

Captalization

Capitalize personal, possessive, objective, and reflexive pronouns (but not relative pronouns) when referring to God: "My, Me, Mine, You, He, His, Him, Himself," but "who, whose, whom."

Direct Quotes

Quotations three or more lines long should be in an indented block. Shorter quotes will be part of the paragraph and placed in quotation marks.

Scripture quotations should be taken from the NIV. If the quotation is from a different version, abbreviate the name in capital letters following the reference. Place the abbreviation in parentheses: (Luke 1:1-5, NASB).

Headings

First-level Heading

These indicate large sections. They are to be flush left in upper case, and separate from the paragraph that follows.

Second-level Heading

These headings are within the First-level section and are to be flush left, in italic in upper and lower case, and also separate from the paragraph that follows.

Notes

All notes should be endnotes, the same size as the main text with a hard return between each one.

Submission and Correspondence

Manuscripts should be sent to the attention of the General Editor. Send as an email attachment to the General. Send to: sgibson@gcts.edu

Address correspondence to Scott M. Gibson, General Editor, Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, 130 Essex Street, South Hamilton, MA 01982.

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