The Pastor - His Expository Preaching
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Father, that You would grant to us utterance of Your Word in a way worthy of You! Of all the things we do as pastors, this preaching regularly defines who we are in relationship to You. May our profiting in the Word be shared by our hearers. May You be glorified as we speak. For Your own glory we ask it. Amen.

We are continually overwhelmed by the responsibility and liability that possess the preacher of God's Word. We all look with indignation at the lawyer or judge who, for the motive of personal wealth, distorts the truth in attacking the reputation and personal possessions of people--while reducing them to poverty. We respond with similar indignation to the quack doctor who, by incompetence, hazards the health and life of someone for the purpose of financial gain. Such people deserve to be considered criminals; the pain and loss of their victims should rightly be laid to their account.

Offering oneself this way as the counselor or healer to care for someone in the time of crisis and then making havoc of their lives through negligence, lack of skill, or selfish greed is unconscionable. Medical and legal associations have set standards in an attempt to prevent such malpractice.

But what about us as the purveyors of God's truth, the physician of the soul? Shall we not be held responsible to God for any perversion of truth, however witless, and for our negligence and lack of skill? What earthly regulatory association validates us? Do not we, who preach God's Word, face a higher court than the legal bar or any medical tribunal? James said, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

No profession has as high a liability potential as that of the preacher of God's Word. God will judge every preacher on the truthfulness and accuracy of his preaching. Any failure as a spokesman for God brings not only shame (2 Timothy 2:15) but judgment. The Holy Spirit has written that all who pastor God's flock must "give an account" (Hebrews 13:17). There will be a day of reckoning for the preacher. Only a certain kind of man, then, has the right to be considered a lawyer, a judge, or a physician. The standard is significantly higher for the preacher.

What is it that equips a man to be qualified for preaching responsibility? Certainly we could argue for the following elements: reverence for God, respect for the dignity of pastoral duty, good sense, sound judgment, clear and deep thinking, love of reading, commitment to diligent study, and meditation. A good memory, graceful command of words, knowledge of the thinking of society--all these traits are also essential. Uncommon talent and effort are needed to explain obscure passages of Scripture, to resolve intricate applications of the Word to lives, and to defend the truth against opposers--all duties at the heart of the preacher's life and ministry.

A small amount of skill and ability will never enable a preacher to teach doctrine, expound on the deep things of God, convince the stubborn mind, capture the affections and will, or spread light on dark realities so as to eliminate the shadows of confusion, ignorance, objections, prejudice, temptation, and deceit.
But above all, over all, and through all, if the preacher is to detect the errors of his hearers and if he is to free men from their strongholds of ignorance, convince their consciences, stop their mouths, and fulfill his responsibility to proclaim all the counsel of God, he must be skilled in the Word. This is the preacher's only weapon—the most powerful, two-edged sword of the Word, which alone cuts to the depths of the soul and spirit.

Assuming God has designed a preacher with the mental skill, the personal discipline with diligence, and the gift of the Spirit for preaching, success still calls for a profound knowledge and faithful proclamation of the Word. The preacher must, above all, become like Ezra, who had "set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances..." (Ezra 7:10) or like Apollos, who was "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). They both preached with the conviction that they were mouthpieces for God and thus their message had divine authority, eternal sufficiency, and God-breathed accuracy.

THE REASON FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Yet it seems our commitment to inerrancy is somewhat lacking in the way it fleshes out in practical ministry. Specifically, evangelical preaching ought to reflect our conviction that God's Word is infallible and inerrant. Too often it does not. In fact, there is a discernible trend in contemporary evangelicalism away from biblical preaching and a drift toward an experience-centered, pragmatic, topical approach in the pulpit.

Should not our preaching be biblical exposition, reflecting our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? If we believe that "all Scripture is inspired by God" and inerrant, must we not be equally committed to the reality that it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)? Should not that magnificent truth determine how we preach?

Paul gave this mandate to Timothy: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:1-2, emphasis added). Any form of preaching that ignores that intended purpose and design of God falls short of the divine plan. J.I. Packer eloquently captured the pursuit of preaching:

"Preaching appears in the Bible as a relaying of what God has said about Himself and His doings, and about men in relation to Him, plus a pressing of His commands, promises, warnings, and assurances, with a view to winning the hearer or hearers...to a positive response."

The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it expositionally. By expositionally, we mean preaching in such a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented entirely and exactly as it was intended by God. Expository preaching is the proclamation of the truth of God as mediated through the preacher.

In his much-needed volume on exegetical theology, Walter Kaiser pointedly analyzes the current anemic state of the church due to flock-feeding that is rendered inadequate because of the absence of expository preaching:

"It is no secret that Christ's Church is not at all in good health in many places of the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, "junk food"; all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes have been served up to her. As a result, theological and biblical malnutrition has afflicted the very generation that has taken such giant steps to make sure its physical health is not damaged by using foods or products that are carcinogenic or otherwise harmful to their physical bodies. Simultaneously a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publication of the Word of God (Amos 8:11) continues to run wild and almost unabated in
most quarters of the Church. (5)

The mandate, then, is clear. Expository preaching is the declarative genre in which inerrancy finds its logical expression and the church has its life and power. Stated simply, inerrancy demands exposition as the only method of preaching that preserves the purity of Scripture and accomplishes the purpose for which God gave us His Word.

A THEOLOGY OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Now, let us substantiate this claim with answers to a series of theological questions. They will channel our thinking from the headwaters of God's revelation to its intended destination.

1. **Why preach?**
   Very simply, God so commanded (2 Timothy 4:2), and the apostles so responded (Acts 6:4).

2. **What should we preach?**
   The Word of God, i.e., *Scriptura sola* and *Scriptura tota* (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2).

3. **Who preaches?**
   Holy men of God (Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21; Ephesians 3:5; 2 Peter 1:21; Revelation 18:20 and 22:6). Only after God had purified Isaiah's lips was he ordained to preach (Isa. 6:6-13).

4. **What is the preacher's responsibility?**
   First, the preacher needs to realize that God's Word is not the preacher's word. But rather, He is a messenger, not an originator (*euaggelizw*). He is a sower, not the source (Matthew 13:3, 19). He is a herald, not the authority (*krussw*). He is a steward, not the owner (Colossians 1:25). He is the guide, not the author (Acts 8:31). He is the server of spiritual food, not the chef (John 21:15, 17).

   Second, the preacher needs to reckon that Scripture is *lo,gos tou/ qeou* ("the Word of God"). When he is committed to this awesome truth and responsibility,

   His aim, rather, will be to stand under Scripture, not over it, and to allow it, so to speak, to talk through him, delivering what is not so much his message as its. In our preaching, that is what should always be happening. In his obituary of the great German conductor, Otto Klemperer, Neville Cardus spoke of the way in which Klemperer "set the music in motion," maintaining throughout a deliberately anonymous, self-effacing style in order that the musical notes might articulate themselves in their own integrity through him. So it must be in preaching; Scripture itself must do all the talking, and the preacher's task is simply to "set the Bible in motion." (6)

A careful study of the phrase *lo,gos qeou* ("the Word of God") finds over forty uses in the New Testament. It is equated with the Old Testament (Mark 7:13). It is what Jesus preached (Luke 5:1). It was the message the apostles taught (Acts 4:31 and 6:2). It was the word the Samaritans received (Acts 8:14) as given by the apostles (Acts 8:25). It was the message the Gentiles received as preached by Peter (Acts 11:1). It was the word Paul preached on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:5, 7, 44, 48, 49; 15:35, 36). It was the message preached on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:32; 17:13; 18:11). It was the message Paul preached on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10). It was the focus of Luke in the Book of Acts in that it spread rapidly and widely (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Paul was careful to tell the Corinthians that he spoke the Word as it was given from God, that it had not been adulterated and that it was a manifestation of truth
(2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2). Paul acknowledged that it was the source of his preaching (Col. 1:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

As it was with Christ and the apostles, so Scripture is also to be delivered by preachers today in such a way that they can say, "Thus saith the Lord." Their responsibility is to deliver it as it was originally given and intended.

5. How did the preacher's message begin?
The message began as a true word from God and was given as truth because God's purpose was to transmit truth. It was ordered by God as truth and was delivered by God's Spirit in cooperation with holy men who received it with exactly the pure quality that God intended (2 Peter 1:20, 21). It was received as Scriptura inerrantis by the prophets and apostles, i.e., without wandering from Scripture's original formulation in the mind of God.

Inerrancy then expresses the quality with which the writers of our canon received the text we call Scripture.

6. How is God's message to continue in its original true state?
If God's message began as true and if it is to be delivered as received, what interpretive processes necessitated by changes of language, culture, and time will ensure its purity when currently preached? The answer is that only an exegetical approach is acceptable for accurate exposition.

Having established the essential need for exegesis, the next logical question is, "How is interpretation/exegesis linked with preaching?"

Packer answers best:
The Bible being what it is, all true interpretation of it must take the form of preaching. With this goes an equally important converse: that, preaching being what it is, all true preaching must take the form of biblical interpretation.

7. Now, pulling our thinking all together in a practical way, "What is the final step that links inerrancy to preaching?"

First, the true text must be used. We are indebted to those select scholars who labor tediously in the field of textual criticism. Their studies recover the original text of Scripture from the large volume of extant manuscript copies that are flawed by textual variants. This is the starting point. Without the text as God gave it, the preacher would be helpless to deliver it as God intended.

Second, having begun with a true text, we need to interpret the text accurately. The science of hermeneutics is in view.

As a theological discipline hermeneutics is the science of the correct interpretation of the Bible. It is a special application of the general science of linguistics and meaning. It seeks to formulate those particular rules which pertain to the special factors connected with the Bible... Hermeneutics is a science in that it can determine certain principles for discovering the meaning of a document, and in that these principles are not a mere list of rules but bear organic connection to each other. It is also an art as we previously indicated because principles or rules can never be applied mechanically but involve the skill (techn) of the interpreter.

Third our exegesis must flow from a proper hermeneutic. Of this relationship, Bernard Ramm observes that hermeneutics stands in the same relationship to exegesis that a rule-book stands to a game. The rule-book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. The rules are not the game, and the game is meaningless without the rules.
Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics. (9)

Exegesis can now be defined as the skillful application of sound hermeneutical principles to the biblical text in the original language with a view to understanding and declaring the author's intended meaning both to the immediate and subsequent audiences. In tandem, hermeneutics and exegesis focus on the biblical text to determine what it said and what it meant originally. (10) Thus, exegesis in its broadest sense will include the various disciplines of literary criticism, historical studies, grammatical exegesis, historical theology, biblical theology, and systematic theology. Proper exegesis will tell the student what the text says and what the text means, guiding him to make a proper personal application of it. Interpretation of Scripture is the cornerstone not only of the entire sermon preparation process, but also of the preacher's life. A faithful student of Scripture will seek to be as certain as possible that the interpretation is biblically accurate. (11)

Fourth, we are now ready for a true exposition. Based on the flow of thinking that we have just come through, we assert that expository preaching is really exegetical preaching and not so much the homiletical form of the message. Merrill Unger appropriately noted,

It is not the length of the portion treated, whether a single verse or a larger unit, but the manner of treatment. No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the light of the overall context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be said to be expository preaching. (12)

As a result of this exegetical process that began with a commitment to inerrancy, the expositor is equipped with a true message, with true intent, and with true application. It gives his preaching perspective historically, theologically, contextually, literarily, synoptically, and culturally. His message is God's intended message.

One of the most godly preachers ever to live was Scotland's Robert Murray McCheyne. In the memoirs of McCheyne's life, Andrew Bonar writes,

It was his wish to arrive nearer at the primitive mode of expounding Scripture in his sermons. Hence when one asked him if he was ever afraid of running short of sermons some day, he replied, "No; I am just an interpreter of Scripture in my sermons; and when the Bible runs dry, then I shall." And in the same spirit he carefully avoided the too common mode of accommodating texts--fastening a doctrine on the words, not drawing it from the obvious connection of the passage. He endeavored at all times to preach the mind of the Spirit in a passage; for he feared that to do otherwise would be to grieve the Spirit who had written it. Interpretation was thus a solemn matter to him. And yet, adhering scrupulously to this sure principle, he felt himself in no way restrained from using, for every day's necessities, all parts of the Old Testament as much as the New. His manner was first to ascertain the primary sense and application, and so proceed to handle it for present use. (13)

THE RELEVANCY OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

In our day, an irresistible urge for a focus in the pulpit on the relevant seemingly exists, with a resultant inattention to God's revelation. Siegfried Meuer alerted Christians in the 1960s to the same "contemporary danger." (14) He likened the direction of his day to the earlier trends of Harry Emerson Fosdick, who wrote in the twenties, "The sermon is uninteresting because it has no connection with the real interests of the people...The sermon must tackle a real problem." (15) Meuer noted that Fosdick opened the floodgate for philosophy and psychology to inundate the modern pulpit with unbelief. Fosdick's philosophy sounds alarmingly similar to the advice given in a recent publication on relevant contemporary preaching:
Unchurched people today are the ultimate consumers. We may not like it, but for every sermon we preach, they're asking, "Am I interested in that subject or not?" If they aren't, it doesn't matter how effective our delivery is; their minds will check out. (16)

The implied conclusion is that pastors must preach what people want to hear rather than what God wants proclaimed. Such counsel sounds the alarm of 2 Timothy 4:3, which warns: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires."

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

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

When warnings about a drift away from biblical preaching sound, the only reasonable response is a return to the scriptural roots of preaching to reaffirm its essential nature. In a reexamination of the heritage of biblical proclamation, the mandate to preach emerges.

THE MANDATE OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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

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

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

2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

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

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

THE DEFINITION OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Discussions about preaching typically divide it into three types: topical, textual, and expository. Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that generally serves as a gateway into whatever subject the preacher chooses to address. Neither the topical nor the textual method represents a consistently serious effort to interpret, understand, explain, or apply God's truth in the context of the Scripture(s) used.

By contrast, expository preaching focuses predominantly on the text(s) under consideration along with its (their) context(s). (18) Exposition normally concentrates on a single text of Scripture, but it is sometimes possible for a thematic/theological message or a historical/biographical discourse to be expository in nature. An exposition may treat any length of passage.
Consider the English word group "expose, exposition, expositor, expository." According to Webster, an exposition is a discourse to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand. Applying this idea to preaching requires that an expositor be one who proclaims the Scripture by laying open the text to public view in order to set forth its meaning, explaining what is difficult to understand, and making appropriate application.

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

First of all, Calvin understood preaching to be the explication of Scripture. The words of Scripture are the source and content of preaching. As an expositor, Calvin brought to the task of preaching all the skills of a humanist scholar. As an interpreter, Calvin explicated the text, seeking its natural, its true, its scriptural meaning....Preaching is not only the explication of Scripture, it is also the application of Scripture. Just as Calvin explicated Scripture word by word, so he applied the Scripture sentence by sentence to the life and experience of his congregation.

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

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

Two other definitions of exposition help clarify what it is:

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

In the 1950's ML-J [D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones] was virtually alone in England in engaging in what he meant by "expository preaching". For preaching to qualify for that designation it was not enough, in his view, that its content be biblical; addresses which concentrated upon word-studies, or which gave running commentary an analyses of whole chapters, might be termed "biblical", but that is not the same as exposition. To expound is not simply to give the correct grammatical sense of a verse or passage, it is rather to set out principles or doctrines which the words are intended to convey. True expository preaching is, therefore, doctrinal preaching, it is preaching which addresses specific truths from God to man. The expository preacher is not one who "shares his studies" with others, he is an ambassador and a messenger, authoritatively delivering the Word of God to men. Such preaching presents a text, then, with that text in sight throughout, there is deduction, argument and appeal, the whole making up a message which bears the authority of Scripture itself. Given such a conception, a faithful discharge of the teaching office necessitates the preacher being able to say, with Paul, 'We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ' (2 Corinthians 2:17). If this involves a staggeringly high view of preaching, it was nothing more, Dr. Lloyd-Jones believed, than is required of the ministerial office.

In summary, the following minimal elements identify expository preaching:

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

5. The message applies the Scriptural meaning for today.

Or put another way, biblical exposition intends to 1) expose the hearer to the biblical text, 2) explain what the biblical text means by what it says, and 3) exhort the hearers to habitual obedience in accord with the application of the historical text.

The spirit of expository preaching is exemplified in two biblical texts: And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading (Nehemiah 8:8).

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


Greer Boyce has aptly summarized this definition of expository preaching:

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

The preacher’s final step is the most crucial and most perilous of all. It is to relate the biblical message both faithfully and relevantly to modern life. At this point all his skill as a craftsman must come into play. We must be warned that faithful exposition of a text does not of itself produce an effective sermon. We need also to be warned, however, that faithfulness to the text is not to be sacrificed for the sake of what we presume to be relevancy. This sacrifice too many modern preachers seem willing to make, producing, as a result, sermons that are a compound of moralistic advice, their own unauthoritative and sometimes unwise opinions, and the latest psychology. Expository preaching, by insisting that the message of the sermon coincide with the theme of the text, calls the preacher back to his true task: the proclamation of the Word of God in and through the Bible. (25)

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPOSITORY PROCESS

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

As a frame of reference for this discussion, we propose that the expository process include four standard elements: 1) preparing the expositor, 2) processing and principlizing the biblical text, 3) pulling the expository message together, and 4) preaching the exposition. The four phases need equal emphasis if the exposition is to be fully effective in the sight of both God and the congregation.

Preparing the Expositor (26)

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

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

1. The preacher must be a truly regenerated believer in Jesus Christ. He must be a part of God's redeemed family (John 1:12-13). If a man is to deliver a personal message from the heavenly Father effectively, he must be a legitimate spiritual son or the message will inevitably be distorted.

2. The preacher must be appointed and gifted by God to the teaching/preaching ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Timothy 3:1-2). Unless a man is divinely enabled to proclaim, he will be inadequate, possessing only human ability. (27)

3. The preacher must be inclined and trained to be a student of God's Word. Otherwise, he cannot carry out the mandate of 2 Timothy 2:15 to "cut straight" the Word of God's truth.

4. The preacher must be a mature believer who demonstrates a consistent godly character (1 Timothy 3:2-3). (28)

5. The preacher must be dependent upon God the Holy Spirit for divine insight and understanding of God's Word (1 Corinthians 2:14-15). Without the Spirit's illumination and power, the message will be relatively impotent. (29)

6. The preacher must be in constant prayerful communion with God to receive the full impact of the Word (Ps. 119:18). The obvious one to consult for clarification is the original author. (30)

7. The preacher must first let the developing message sift through his own thinking and life before he can preach it. Ezra provides the perfect model: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Processing and Principlizing the Biblical Text

A man in tune with God's Spirit and Word is ready to begin a process to discover not only what God originally meant by what He said, but also appropriate principles and applications for today. (31)

1. Processing the biblical text (32)

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

A man cannot hope to preach the Word of God accurately until he has first engaged in a careful, exhaustive exegesis of his text. Herein lies the problem, for competent exegesis requires time, brain power, "blood, sweat, and tears," all saturated with enormous doses of prayer. (33)

You will soon reveal your ignorance as an expositor if you do not study; therefore diligent reading will be forced upon you. Anything which compels the preacher to search the grand old Book is of immense service to him. If any are jealous lest the labor should injure their constitutions, let them remember that mental work up to a certain point is most refreshing, and where the Bible is the theme toil is delight. It is only when mental labor passes beyond the bounds of common sense that the mind becomes enfeebled by it, and this is not usually reached except by injudicious persons, or men engaged on topics which are unrefreshing and disagreeable; but our subject is a recreative one, and to young men like ourselves the vigorous use of our faculties is a most healthy exercise. (34)
2. Principlizing the biblical text

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

Pulling the Expository Message Together

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

In a sense, the art of exposition commences here.

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

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

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

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

Preaching the Exposition

The final decision to be made by the expositor relates to his preaching mode, whether from memory or from notes. This step is perhaps the most neglected in preparation by those committed to true exposition. Too often expositors assume that proper work done in the study will ensure that the pulpit will care for itself. It is true that there is no substitute for hard work in the study, but equally hard work in the pulpit will reward both the preacher and the flock to a much greater degree. James Stalker effectively draws attention to this challenge:

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

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

The purpose of preaching is not to stir people to action while bypassing their minds, so that they never see what reason God gives them for doing what the preacher requires of them (that is manipulation); nor is the purpose to stock people's minds with truth, no matter how vital and clear, which then lies fallow and does not become the seedbed and source of changed lives (that is academicism).... The purpose of preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth an appropriate response to the God whose message and instruction are being delivered.
Above all, the expositor must expound the Word as Paul did in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). He did not come as a clever orator or scholarly genius; he did not arrive with his own message; he did not preach with personal confidence in his own strength. Rather, Paul preached the testimony of God and Christ's death, and this with well-placed confidence in God's power to make the message life-changing. Unless this kind of wholesale dependence on God marks the modern expositor's preaching, his exposition will lack the divine dimension that only God can provide.

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

THE CHALLENGE TO EXPOSITORY PREACHING

As the twentieth century sets and a new millennium dawns, we must reclaim the science and art of expository preaching for the coming generation. No one said it would be easy. It is quite the opposite. No other method of preaching requires so much work. At the same time, no other method rewards so richly. If the suggestions which have been offered are well founded, it will be obvious that expository preaching is a difficult task. It requires much close study of Scripture in general, and much special study of the particular passage to be treated. To make a discourse which shall be explanatory and yet truly oratorical, bearing a rich mass of details but not burdened with them, full of Scripture and abounding in practical applications, to bring even dull, uninformed, and unspiritual minds into interested and profitable contact with an extended portion of the Bible--of course, this must be difficult.

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

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

1. This essay has been adopted from John Mac-Arthur, Jr. Rediscovering Expository Preaching (Dallas: Word, 1992). Used with permission.
2. William H. Willimon, "Been there, preached that," in Leadership (Fall, 1996):75-76, 78 concludes that "today's conservatives sound like yesterday's liberals."
7. Ibid., 187.
9. Ibid. See also Jerry Vines and David Allen, "Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Proclamation," Criswell Theological Review 1, no. 2 (Spring 1987):309-34.
10. This definition has been adopted from John D. Grassmick, Principles and Practice of Greek Exegesis
11. Al Fasol, 

12. Merrill F. Unger, 

13. Andrew A. Bonar, 


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


21. Merrill F. Unger, Principles, 33. See also William G. Houser, "Puritan Homiletics: A Caveat," Concordia Theological Quarterly 53, no. 4 (October 1989): 255-70. Houser proposes that the power of the Puritan pulpit diminished as the mechanical form of the message took precedence over the process of forming the message. Coupled with boring deliveries and exceedingly long messages, the Puritan preaching influence quickly declined when these factors became dominant.


24. R.B. Kuiper, in "Scriptural Preaching," The Infallible Word, 3rd rev. ed., edit. by Paul Woolley (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 253, asserts strongly, Exposition of Scripture, exposition worthy of its name, is of the very essence of preaching. It follows that it is a serious error to recommend expository preaching as one of several legitimate methods. Nor is it at all satisfactory, after the manner of many conservatives, to extol the expository method as the best. All preaching must be expository. Only expository preaching can be scriptural.


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


29. Kaiser, Exegetical Theology, 236.

30. Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, "If you do not understand a book by a departed writer you are unable to ask him his meaning, but the Spirit, who inspired Holy Scripture, lives forever, and He delights to open the Word to those who seek His instruction" (Commenting and Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988], 33).


32. See Snodgrass, "Exegesis," 5-19 for a basic, nine-step approach.


34. Spurgeon, Commenting and Commentaries, 47.
35. H. Cunliffe-Jones wrote, "We must be able to say not only 'This is what this passage originally meant,' but also 'This passage is true in this particular way for us in the twentieth century;'" ("The Problems of Biblical Exposition," *Expository Times* 65 [October 1953]:5).

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


