

The *SBJT* Forum: Profiles of Expository Preaching

Editor's Note: Readers should be aware of the Forum's format. Scott Hafemann, Timothy George, Carl F. H. Henry, C. Ben Mitchell, and D. A. Carson have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. The journal's goal for the Forum is to provide significant thinkers' views on topics of interest without requiring lengthy articles from these heavily-committed individuals. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the Forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

SBJT: Is it genuinely important to use the biblical languages in preaching, especially since there are many excellent commentaries and pastors will never attain the expertise of scholars?

Scott Hafemann: In answering this question I am tempted to respond by outlining the cultural, theological, political, and educational reasons that have brought us to the place we are today. We find that first hand study of the Bible among evangelicals is relegated to a priestly class of experts, while the rest of the pastors are content to be second class citizens in the kingdom of preaching. Moreover, many pastors are liberals in their theology of religious experience (i.e., religious experience is the fountain of their faith, both in terms of its revelatory content and its personal relevancy). The reasons for this denial of our Reformation heritage are many and complex. Therefore, I am tempted to speak about our participation in the subjectivity of modernity, with its stepchild, postmodernity; our acceptance of the subjectivism of neo-orthodoxy when it comes to the authority of the Bible (even though we claim to reject neo-orthodoxy at a formal level); the loss of curricular nerve in our seminaries because of their desire to survive; the legitimiza-

tion of our resorting to religious experience by repeating the mantra that what really matters is not the function of an adverbial participle or construct state, but having a "personal relationship with Christ" (in which my life becomes the whole world, since, after all, salvation is not a matter of redemptive history, but of knowing Jesus, whoever he might be); and the ultimate collapse of God's self-revelation in time and space (i.e., a different time and space and language than ours!) into an evangelical mysticism of heart, baptized by the Spirit (the Spirit will lead us into all truth, not my grammar book!).

Instead, let me simply offer a practical response. It is precisely because there are so many excellent commentaries available today that the use of the biblical languages in preaching becomes more important, not less. The proliferation of commentaries and resource materials simply means a proliferation of opinions about the biblical text. The same reality confronts us with the expanding number of English translations, since every translation is the embodiment of thousands and thousands of interpretive decisions; a translation is a commentary on the Bible without footnotes. What this means is that the busy pastor will be confronted with an ever

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expanding mountain of secondary literature on the Bible, not to mention different renderings of the Bible itself. Thus, given the many commentaries and Bible resources available today, not to use the languages in our preaching will either cost us too much time and cause frustration in the end, redefine our role as pastors altogether, or deny the very Bible we are purporting to preach.

I say this because, faced with the avalanche of commentaries (and I am writing three more myself!), the busy pastor will have four basic choices. *First*, he can become an expert in taking notes and cataloging the opinions of others, and in the end decide which understanding of the text is best based on the opinion of others or the mood of the moment (i.e., which series the commentary is in, which commentary my seminary professor liked best, which commentary is the shortest, which one has a blue cover, which one is the most recent, or which one I happen to own because it was on sale in the bookstore). This approach is extremely time consuming; and in the end, since the pastor cannot really decide for himself, it is really just another way to look for someone else to tell us what the Bible means. Here the authority for preaching resides in our pope, wherever we find him. *Second*, faced with so many experts, the pastor can decide not to decide and present to his people a smorgasbord of opinions from the “experts,” showing that he is well read, but not well trained. This approach often gives the appearance of being scholarly, but in the end communicates to the people of God that the Bible is up for grabs when it comes to understanding what it really means. In taking this approach the pastor downsizes his role into that of a book reviewer. But what is worse, since

the pastor is still going to “preach” this passage, it communicates to our people that the real meaning of the Bible does not reside in what the biblical authors originally intended, but in what we make of it. And we can make many things of it. Here the authority for preaching resides in the preacher. *Third*, he can ignore the whole thing, reasoning that, since the experts cannot agree on everything, it does not really matter which one is right. After all, what really matters is the rhetorical “power” of preaching, not its content. So instead of wrestling with the text, the busy pastor invests his time in searching out illustrations for a basic, thematic, generalized, and pietistic sounding “message.” This approach makes popular, entertaining preachers, but loses the Bible altogether, even though the biblical text may be read aloud before the fun begins. Here the authority for preaching resides in the life-experiences of others (since a good speaker knows that only so many stories can come from one’s own life).

The last option is for the busy pastor to use his precious time by hacking his way through the biblical text in its own language first, and in so doing come face to face with the glories and unresolved questions of the text for himself. The purpose of reading the Bible for ourselves is not, however, to out-commentary the commentaries (though you will be surprised what you can discover on your own). Nor is it to out-translate the translators (though you will be surprised to see what decisions they have sometimes made, and I say this having worked on two such translations). Rather, our own work in the text provides a window through which we can see for ourselves just what decisions have been made by others and why. Instead of being a second-hander, who can

only take someone else's word for it, a knowledge of the text allows us to *evaluate*, rather than simply regurgitate. This will not mean that we will be able to out-expert the experts. We all have different gifts and callings. It does mean, however, that we will be able to *explain* to ourselves and to others why people disagree, what the real issues are, and what are the strengths of our own considered conclusions. It will allow us to have reasons for what we believe and preach, without having to resort to the papacy of scholarship or the papacy of personal experience. It will even provide for us the humility that comes from knowing when we really do not know something, which in itself is a great boon to the ministry. After all, progressive sanctification applies to intellectual understanding just as much as it does to moral development.

So the primary practical reason to learn the languages is the confidence and humility it will bring to our ministries, while at the same time saving us countless hours of exertion and frustration. One hour with the text is worth ten in secondary literature. And at the more important theological level, learning the languages affirms the nature of biblical revelation, restores the proper authority of the pastor as teacher, and communicates to our people that the locus of meaning and authority of the Scriptures does not reside in us, but in the text, which we labor so hard to understand. We learn the languages because we are convinced of the inerrancy, sufficiency, and potency of the Word of God.

When polled, graduates in the ministry from a leading evangelical seminary ranked "proclamation of God's Word" as the number one spiritual gift and task of the pastor. This was a good sign. But when

asked to rank academic abilities needed in the ministry, the ability to do Greek and Hebrew exegesis ranked eleventh. The only skills deemed less important were knowing the major theories of adult life cycles and the major themes of Christian education! The number one academic skill thought to be needed was the ability to think, speak, and write coherently. But what are we thinking and speaking and writing about? Such a disconnection between what we think we are doing and how we go about it is certainly revealing.

But I have saved the best for last. Knowing the biblical languages enables us to do something very few commentaries ever do: trace the flow of the argument of the text. Commentaries save us time by providing the historical, linguistic, cultural, canonical, and literary insights that we simply do not have time to mine for ourselves week in and week out. For \$35.00 we can benefit from ten years of a scholar's life! But in the end, what we preach is the point and argument of the biblical text, as informed by this backdrop, but not replaced by it. Commentaries and translations do not excel in tracing the flow of an argument and mapping out the melodic line and theological heartbeat of a text. By definition, most commentaries are atomistic, while a translation often must obscure the density and complexity or ambiguity of the original for the sake of its target language. So when all is said and done, we do not learn Greek in order to do word studies, but in order to see where the conjunctions are and are not, where participles must be decoded, where clauses begin and end, where verb tenses really make a difference and where they do not, and, in the end, what the main point of a text actually is. I have never met anyone who, having learned Greek well,

said it was a waste of time or unproductive. The next time someone tells you that the languages are unimportant, ask them if they made this judgment after having learned them.

The call to *sola scriptura* is a call back to the biblical languages, the fountain from which the Reformation itself came. As Melancton put it,

In theology, too, it is important how education is performed. If any field of studies, then theology requires especially talent, training, and conscientiousness. The aroma of God's salve supersedes all the aromas of human knowledge. Led by the Holy Spirit, but accompanied by humanistic studies, one should proceed to theology.... But since the Bible is written in part in Hebrew and in part in Greek ... we drink from the stream of both—we must learn these languages, unless we want to be "silent" persons as theologians. Once we understand the significance and the weight of the words, the true meaning of Scripture will light up for us as the midday sun. Only if we have clearly understood the language will we clearly understand the content ... if we put our minds to the [Greek and Hebrew] sources, we will begin to understand Christ rightly.¹

Or as the 17th century Puritan John Owen put it,

There is no other sense in (Scripture) than what is contained in the *words* whereof materially it doth consist.... In the interpretation of the mind of anyone, it is necessary that the words he speaks or writes be rightly understood; and this we cannot do immediately unless we understand the *language* wherein he speaks, as also the (idiom) of that language, with the common use of and intention of its *phraseology* and expressions.... And what perplexities, mistakes and errors, the ignorance of these *original languages* hath cast many expositors into ... especially

among those who pertinaciously adhere unto one *translation* ... might be manifested by instances ... without number.²

ENDNOTES

¹ Quoted from Melancton's inaugural address on "The Reform of the Education of Youth," on the occasion of his joining the faculty of the University of Wittenberg in 1518 (when he was twenty-one years old). Cited from Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 59-60.

² John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (1850-53; rpt., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967) 4:215.

SBJT: Does the knowledge of church history aid the pastor in his weekly task of sermon preparation?

Timothy George: Church history is much more than the history of the church. Anyone well trained in the study of the human past can become an expert in the history of Christianity, the history of Christian thought, or the development of institutional and denominational church life. But church history is a theological discipline rooted in the self-revelation of the biblical God, the God who makes and keeps covenant with his people. As such, it is enormously relevant to the task of proclamation, the primary job of every God-called minister of the gospel. I dare to say that, apart from the direct study of the Holy Scriptures themselves, no discipline in the theological curriculum is more important for the sermon preparation of the preacher. I shall discuss four important areas where church history contributes directly to the task of proclamation.

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History of Exegesis

We do not come to the study of the Bible alone but in the company of the whole people of God, the body of Christ scattered throughout time as well as space. It is not sufficient for the preacher to have the New Testament in one hand and the latest word from Bultmann, Käsemann, or Conzelmann, or even the current evangelical gurus, in the other. The Holy Spirit did not abandon the Church with the death of the apostles, and we have much to learn as we “read along side” the church fathers, schoolman reformers, and theologians of ages past. None of their interpretations is inerrant, and we must subject them all to the divine touchstone of God’s perfect revelation in the Bible—*sola scriptura*! The temptation to jump from the present context directly to the text plagues conservative biblicists as well as liberal revisionists. Faithful and astute proclaimers of God’s word will resist that temptation. In writing my commentary on Galatians for the New American Commentary Series, I gained much insight from Tertullian, Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, William Perkins, John Brown, and many others. In addition to studying commentaries and exegetical works, it is also good to see how a particular text has been preached in different historical moments. The sermons of Spurgeon, Wesley, and Knox are a rich treasury.

The Development of Doctrine.

The discipline of symbology, that is, the study of confessions, creeds, and catechisms, reveals the ebb and flow of doctrinal understanding throughout the history of the church. God has frequently used the occasion of heresy to bring orthodoxy to full clarity. How can anyone

preaching on the doctrine of the Trinity ignore the great struggle between Arius and Athanasius in the fourth century? Likewise, in studying the doctrines of grace, we are theologically bereft if we know nothing of the debate between Augustine and Pelagius, or between Luther and Erasmus. This does not mean that every sermon must be filled with historical allusions to these doctrinal developments. But every sermon should be informed by them as we seek in our own day to pass on the faith intact to the next generation.

Church History as Resource for Illustration and Application.

Doctrinal preaching has both a propositional and incarnational dimension. It is the truth of God’s word distilled and applied to fallen and redeemed human beings, but it is also that truth lived out in the flesh and blood reality of the people of God. In an era when narrative preaching and personal autobiographical reminiscence has become the norm in many pulpits, I think we should extend the scope of our narrative reach to include those who are now, by God’s grace, in the Church Triumphant. Our lives and our stories are intertwined with theirs, and we have much to learn about living the Christian life today from a close acquaintance with their failures and faithfulness, their suffering and perseverance.

Worship and ministry.

Much of our debate in the current “worship wars” reflects a near-total ignorance of historical precedence and liturgical developments. One of the best ways to overcome this is to connect great hymns of the faith with sound biblical and theological exposition. Who could not preach

on the grace of God after singing Charles Wesley's "And Can It Be"? Or, on forgiveness after "Praise, My Soul, The King of Heaven"? Likewise, in celebrating the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the "visible words" of God in bread, cup, and water should always be accompanied by thorough instruction. In these and many other ways, church history is a wonderful resource for the preaching ministry of the Church.

SBJT: What role, if any, should systematic theology play in preaching?

Carl F. H. Henry: Christianity has a distinctive role both for the mental activity of systematic theology and for the vocal enterprise of preaching—and these, moreover, are not to be isolated from each other.

If Christian preaching is indifferent to the legitimacy of and the need for systematic theology, it will inevitably be penalized by disorderly exposition. And if theology is not preachable, one had better take a second look. To be sure, some observers may invert these concerns. They may ask what role, if any, preaching plays in systematic theology, and not solely what role, if any, systematic theology plays in preaching.

The most practical and yet intellectually demanding instruction in the coordination of preaching and theology that I have discovered was suggested by Harold John Ockenga, long the minister of the well-known Park Street Church of Boston, Massachusetts. Ockenga promoted the merging of preaching and theology by involving both Sunday services and the church's mid-week prayer meeting in its fulfillment. On Sunday morning, he would preach on the books of the Bible sequentially, and then at night on a main

character in that book, and at the mid-week meeting on a doctrine or key event in that book. Thus the congregation would be led through the Scriptures in an edifying way, and the preacher would gain a large store of sermonic illustrative material.

To possess such familiarity with the Bible is not an occasion for pride but rather a call to humility. To be learned in theological matters gives one no license to sport a sense of superiority. Scripture always remains normative even against its best and most devout interpreters. No preacher or theologian is infallible. All of us can stand a little humbling as well.

I experienced such humbling in Boston in the late 1940s when Dr. Ockenga invited me to give one of the messages for a series on the miracles in the Gospels. Having chosen the miracle for my sermon, I informed him of my choice. When I arrived, a large bulletin board greeted me with the message: "Carl F. H. Henry, the demon-possessed man." I exercised enough restraint not to mention the commentary from the pulpit.

To be sure, there is a difference between theology preached from the pulpit and theology taught in the classroom. In seminary one will unmask the non-biblical alternatives and challenge the unwelcome deviations to scriptural teaching. But in the pulpit one need not (and ought not) go behind the line of alternatives that pose an intellectual threat to congregational life and faith. In seminary it is necessary to deal with Hume, Kant, Hegel, and many others. In the pulpit, faithful biblical exposition may suffice. Yet a congregation well-schooled in theology may welcome (or need) in-depth doctrinal instruction occasionally.

Whether in preaching or in systematic theology, the centrality of the triune God

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and his offer of the gospel should be made crystal clear. The church's theology and its preaching must prize logical consistency. Both must be comprehensive and based on divine revelation. Only then will believers willingly and intelligently accept the risen Lord's claims on their lives.

SBJT: Is it important for preachers to be acquainted with the culture in which they live, or is it sufficient to preach the message of the biblical text?

C. Ben Mitchell: Well, when the question is put this way, I would have to say it is sufficient for preachers to preach the biblical text. My understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture leads me to hold that God can use his word to accomplish his purpose quite apart from human ingenuity. But I think the question is ill-formed. It presents a false dichotomy between preaching the biblical text and being familiar with the culture. It seems to me that preachers ought to preach the biblical text *and* be acquainted with culture.

There are at least three reasons preachers should be culture watchers. First, they need to know the cultural context of their audience. Everyone who hears preaching lives in a particular socio-cultural context. They come to the sermon with a background and experiences that have shaped their worldview. They likely have been influenced by popular culture, so they are familiar with certain cultural icons, television shows, movies, music, literature, and other artifacts of their culture.

The Old Testament prophets were certainly men who gave attention to their cultural contexts. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Malachi preached in historically-rooted and culturally-sensitive ways. While their message transcends cultures,

it penetrated their own culture with surgical precision. Similarly, the apostle Paul was aware of the cultural context of his listeners. His sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17) is suffused with examples of his familiarity with the worldview of his hearers. He had surveyed the city of Athens. He knew their religiosity. He even quoted well-known poetry.

Jesus studied the context of his audience. He used vivid language to connect with the minds and experience of those to whom he preached. He spoke of fields and sowing seed, fishing and casting nets, and vines and branches. These were the familiar cultural artifacts of his listeners.

Charles Spurgeon used to talk about having the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Preaching without attention to culture may connect, but it may lack freshness and relevance. These qualities of freshness and relevance are not necessary and sufficient elements of gospel preaching, but they are important elements that help preachers communicate timeless truths to time-bound audiences.

Second, preachers should be aware of their culture so that they can draw application in their preaching. While the Holy Spirit may apply the message in ways a preacher never intended, that is not the only way he chooses to work. He also works through the preacher's preparation and delivery to apply the word to issues confronting the listener and her culture. As a preacher is expounding Genesis 9:1ff, for instance, he must make some important applications. The fact that God made human beings in his image and after his likeness has profound implications for Christians. Often, this passage is applied to issues like euthanasia and abortion. In it, God tells Noah that the unjust destruction of human life is a violation of the dig-

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nity and respect which belongs to imagers of God. In some cultures, however, abortion and euthanasia may not be particularly pressing issues. It may not be useful or necessary to address those issues when applying the sermon. Gang violence, however, might be a problem in that context. Genesis 9 also has important implications for violence. God tells Noah that whoever murders shall have his or her life taken as a just punishment. Knowing one's audience and the contours of the culture will enable the preacher to make appropriate and searching application of the text.

Third, preachers should be attentive to the culture so that they may lead churches to be proactive in ministry. By being aware of cultural trends, churches can anticipate ministry needs in a community and prepare to meet those needs before a crisis erupts. Sadly, this is not the usual *modus operandi*. Typically churches wait until a problem has reached near-tragic proportions before establishing effective ministry. For instance, by noting that welfare reform has cut the tax-dollars marked for jobless individuals, churches could (and some have) provide job counseling as ministry. Many of those out-of-work individuals have children who have medical and other needs. Churches may choose to begin health clinics or breakfast programs for the children of jobless families. Admittedly, this is not glamorous ministry, but it is being salt and light in one's community.

This ability to engage and understand the culture is important for all Christians, not just preachers. I would argue that believers should develop cultural *hermeneutics* as well as biblical hermeneutics. Through cultural hermeneutics Christians would develop principles for interpreting culture theologically. A fully-orbed cul-

tural hermeneutic would include an understanding of the creation mandate, a work and leisure ethic, and a world and life perspective. Furthermore, Christians should be *exegeting* the culture. We must analyze the ways pluralism and secularism are reshaping our culture. We must understand the ways technology, especially the Internet, has changed our small communities into a global marketplace of ideas. Finally, Christians should be prepared to *engage* the culture biblically and theologically. We must think carefully about appropriate means to accomplish spiritual ends. In my view, we cannot afford to be evangelical monastics (though I have great respect for some aspects of monasticism).

We have been given a charge to cast down everything that exalts itself against the Lord Jesus Christ. But how best to do that from a Christian worldview perspective is still an open question. The tasks of cultural hermeneutics, exegesis, and engagement are crucial to the church's life at the threshold of the Third Millennium.

SBJT: What do you consider to be the essential elements of an expository sermon?

D. A. Carson: The question is enormously important, and could easily call forth a book. I shall answer it in two parts.

First, before establishing the distinctives of *expository* preaching, we will do well to review the essential distinctives of preaching. Preaching is verbal communication of which at least the following things are true: (1) Its substance is the unfolding and application of what God has said in Scripture. (2) In the well-known phrase of Phillips Brooks, it is truth mediated through human personality.

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(3) It has an essential heraldic element; i.e., it is proclamation. (4) As in the past God disclosed himself so often in words, so, ideally, the sermon should in some measure be a “re-revelation”—not, of course, revelation in exactly the same sense that the word was revelatory when it first came, but in the sense that God mediates himself to us by that same word when, once again, it is announced. In other words, ideally the sermon is more than a communication of propositions and moral exhortation; it is the communication of God. (5) Its long-term goal is to glorify God, primarily by announcing God’s salvation and thus by the calling out of God’s people, and their edification so as to build up the church into the maturity and godliness that are its heritage and destiny. (6) Its immediate purpose is to instruct, inform, persuade, correct, appeal, condemn, invite response, encourage, edify, rebuke—in short, to convey God’s truth and God’s will in such a way as to elicit the appropriate response from God’s image-bearers.

All of these elements deserve prolonged reflection. Here I have space for only a few comments. (a) Preaching is oral communication. Derivatively, of course, we may create a metaphor by saying (for instance) that someone’s entire life is a sermon. Obviously we may *read* sermons. But neither is, strictly speaking, preaching. Essential to preaching is verbal/oral communication, with an inescapable heraldic element. (b) Preaching is far more than a merely intellectual exercise, for it is “truth mediated through human personality, “ and aims to communicate the very presence of God. By the same token, preaching is far more than a mere reading (usually unacknowledged) of someone else’s sermon—a practice far too common in this day of circulating com-

pact discs with their “best sermons.” This practice is of course morally despicable, since it is theft (and for that matter illegal, since such material is copyrighted and yet is being circulated on the tapes of the local church). I am not referring to the almost inevitable borrowings of a person who reads a great deal, still less to the acknowledged borrowings of an honest worker, but to the wholesale reproducing of another’s work as if it were your own. My concern here, however, is not so much with the immorality of such conduct as with the desperately tragic way in which it reduces preaching and the preacher, and finally robs the congregation. The substance of a stolen sermon is doubtless as true (and as false) as when the originating preacher first said it. But here there is no honest wrestling with the text, no unambiguous play of biblical truth on human personality, no burden from the Lord beyond mere play-acting, no honest interaction with and reflection on the words of God such that the preacher himself is increasingly conformed to the likeness of Christ. Any decent public reader could do as much: it would be necessary only to supply the manuscript. (c) If both the long-term goal and the immediate purpose of preaching are as described above, the preacher’s aims are nicely established—and this will work out in terms of sermons carefully crafted to bring God glory and to transform and edify men and women. The goals are not artistry or a reputation for being a “great preacher,” still less the manipulation of people or the routine drone of a voice attempting nothing more than getting through one more Sunday. The goals are the glory of God and the good of his people.

Granted, then, that preaching, properly understood, has these ingredients, what

are the essential elements of an *expository* sermon? I shall assume that expository preaching is never *less* than what I have described. But precisely how is it *more*?

(1) Above all, it is preaching whose subject matter emerges directly and demonstrably from a passage or from some passages of Scripture. In other words, its content and structure demonstrably reflect what Scripture says, and honestly seek to elucidate it. The organizing principles of, say, topical sermons, may or may not reflect what the Bible says, for the sermon's organizing genius is less tied to Scripture.

This essential element of expository preaching does not assume that the passages of Scripture must all be contiguous, or that only systematic preaching through a book can properly be called "expository preaching." One might have a series on temptation, for instance, and preach serially on the temptation of Adam and Eve, the temptation of Joseph, the temptation of Hezekiah, the temptation of Jesus, and so on—and in each case the sermon might be genuinely expository. In this instance the organizing principle for the selection of texts is topical, but the expositions themselves are expository. Nor does this definition say anything explicit about the length of the passage. One preacher may work through Romans 1-8 in eight years; another may work through the same chapters in seven or eight sermons. I have heard it done both ways, both very effectively. Different times call for different styles; moreover, different literary genres in the Bible call for different lengths of text. Narrative must be covered at a faster clip than tightly-woven discourse or apocalyptic. For instance, Revelation will not be handled the same way as Leviticus. But one non-negotiable characteristic of expository preaching is that its subject

matter emerges directly and demonstrably from Scripture.

(2) Yet despite this emphasis on the content of Scripture, an expository sermon is no mere running commentary—in the style, perhaps, of what used to be called (and still is, in a few circles in Britain) a "Bible reading." The expository sermon distinguishes itself from a Bible reading in three particulars: (a) It has structure. (b) It coheres—i.e., it carries a unified burden, a sense of direction, a coherent message. It does not simply pick up the text from the previous meeting and wander through the next chunk of text. (c) It diligently aims to apply the Word of God. That point is sometimes forgotten by young expositors fresh from seminary. They have learned how to do exegesis, of course (if their seminary education has been any good), but now they devote, say, 85% of their sermon preparation time to careful exegesis. The remaining 15% is all that is left for developing structure, for creating thoughtful and telling application, for writing up. The result sounds more like a learned if unstructured lecture than a sermon. The best expository preachers will devote perhaps 50% or more of their (considerable) sermon preparation time to thoughtful and prayerful reflection on how to make the message of the text wound and heal, sing and sting.

(3) Ideally, expository preaching is preaching which, however dependent it may be for its content on the text or texts at hand, draws attention to inner-canonical connections that inexorably move toward Jesus Christ and the gospel. In other words, one of the dangers of expository preaching that ignores this last point is that it may so focus on one particular text at a time that the larger picture may be lost to view. The advantage of an older

style preaching in which the text served as a springboard for an entire systematic theology was that the big picture was constantly maintained—but the cost was distance from the text, and it was only rarely shown how this larger theological structure could be derived from Scripture itself. Inevitably, more and more of the authority for the structure depended on the preacher’s reputation, not on what Scripture demonstrably says. But the inverse danger in expository preaching is that Christians will pick up a great deal about various texts long and short, but somehow lose the coherence of the big picture. Expositors may go through weeks or months of Psalms or Jeremiah and never mention Jesus or the gospel, except incidentally.

The solution is not uncontrolled topical connections (though on occasion topical parallels may be justified). The solution is to learn the inner-canonical connections, the biblical-theological connections, so well that you can show how this passage rightly understood in its own setting, fits into the canonical setting, and is part of a massive mosaic that drives you to Jesus Christ. Not every expository sermon should attempt such a demonstration, of course. So perhaps I am pushing things to call this “an *essential* element” of the expository sermon. But though it may not be an essential element of *every* expository sermon, it is certainly an essential element of expository preaching, i.e., of the pattern of expository sermons. Otherwise biblical exposition will drift toward the atomistic, and lose sight of the Bible’s story line, which drives us toward Jesus and the gospel. That is too high a price to pay.