

WHAT MAKES PREACHING BIBLICAL?

The Myron J. Taylor Preaching lectures

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In 1521, the Elector Frederick of Saxony "wished to be enlightened as to the meaning of Scripture, and appointed a committee. But the committee could not agree" (Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, 203). That has been the problem with Scripture through the centuries. Most of us gathered here are part of a tradition, which has faced this problem in a populist fashion by saying "No Book but the Bible"—*Sola Scriptura*, or, "the Bible says." Many of us quote the Bible much like a magic incantation, such as holding up the cross before a vampire. You just quote it and it does its work.

The Church through the ages has known better. The distinguished English churchman of the sixteen century, Richard Hooker, writing about the source of authority in the church in the fifth book of his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, says, "What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto, is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude, by force of reason; after these the voice of the church succeedeth." That old language makes confusing to our ears an otherwise marvelously clear statement. First place is given to the clear statement of scripture. Hooker gives reason the second place after the authority of Scripture, in finding the meaning of Scripture. If the authority of Scripture is to be invoked and applied, Scripture must be interpreted reasonably. Reason by itself is an insufficient guide, but reason must not be decried: where reason is expelled through the door, fanaticism comes in by the window, and the church has suffered great harm through the irrational use of Scripture. Paul Says, "I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also" (1 Cor. 14:15). If the question had been asked of Paul, he might well have added: "I will read Scripture with the spirit and I will read with the understanding also." When the book of the law was read publicly in Jerusalem in Ezra's day, the readers "gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8).

Hooker gives third place after Scripture and reason to "the voice of the Church," this includes what is commonly called tradition. Tradition is the form which Christian doctrine has taken history. Doctrine is what is believed, taught, and confessed.

Here F. F. Bruce comments: "When appeal is made to the authority of Scripture, even the authority of Sola Scriptura (that is, Scripture apart from tradition), what is often meant is Scripture as traditionally interpreted—Scripture as understood in our tradition. I have known a new independent congregation to be founded on the avowed basis of eschewing all tradition and relying on the guidance of Scripture alone. But what the founders meant by 'Scripture alone' was 'Scripture as we have learned to look at it!' Very well, so long as all of them had learned to look at Scripture the same way; but

when they were joined by others who had been brought up to look at Scripture differently, their basis was severely tested and became subject to predictable strains and stresses....The possession of a common Bible is not enough if the common Bible is read through incompatible pairs of spectacles" (*A Mind for What Matters*, 271-272). We all have our traditions, and it is necessary that we take cognizance of them when we seek to interpret Scripture.

For the Christian, the nature of biblical authority is expressed with unsurpassed clarity in a passage in the fourth Gospel where Jesus says of the Hebrew Scriptures, "it is they that testify on my behalf (or "bear witness to me")" John 5:39. We take it for granted that the New Testament writings bear witness to Jesus. It could be that here is the essential principle of Canoncity: it is both testaments witness to Christ that brings the heterogeneous biblical documents together and gives them their unity for the life and faith of the church. The bible serves as witness and interpreter to that revelation as it finds its climax in Christ. In the fourth Gospel, the same Jesus who affirms that Scripture bears witness to himself makes a similar affirmation of the role of the Holy Spirit: "he will bear witness to me (or "testify on my behalf")" (NRSV),...he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 15:26; 16:14). It is distinctively in Scripture that the Spirit bears this interpretive witness to Jesus and any other form of witness the Spirit can bear can be recognized as his witness by its consistency with his witness in Scripture.

If the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture is to provide guidance in defining the faith, it is the church that must hear his voice. One person's faith is—one person's faith. But one Christian's faith cannot be simply one Christian's faith—it must be the faith of the church universal of which one is a member. This is an entirely different matter from supporting each article of faith by the citation of certain proof-texts. Unless we pay attention to Scripture in its various contexts—historical, literary, theological—we may end up quoting as "The Bible Says," that pessimistic observation of Ecclesiastes, "the dead know nothing," as though it said the last word about the state of the faithful departed. Professor John Knox once compared the church's confession to a family's memory: whatever an individual member of the family may experience in the way of doubt or forgetfulness, the corporate memory of the community continues unimpaired. The living community preserves the integrity of the faith.

The Church's family memory includes also the corporate understanding of Scripture that has grown up over the centuries. The living tradition, the continuity of Christian existence and witness, is indispensable. On the other hand, the living tradition without the constant corrective of Scripture, without the possibility of "reformation according to the Word of God" (Christ), might have developed in such a way as to be distorted beyond recognition, if it had not slowly faded and died.

The fact is we have plenty of examples of what happens when the Bible is not interpreted in a responsible manner. The Bible can be misinterpreted, misquoted, twisted, misunderstood so that it "proves" almost anything the reader wants it to "prove."

In 1888, John Alexander Dowie came to the United States from Melbourne, Australia. Ignoring the adventure of Columbus and other navigators, Dowie held that the Bible

requires us to believe that the earth is flat—it speaks of the "four corners of the earth." His followers have offered \$5,000 to anyone who can prove to their satisfaction that the earth is round. Rocket photographs from the space program which clearly show the curvature of the earth are ignored.

One man was informed by the obstetrician that his wife could be delivered of their child only by Cesarean section. The husband refused to grant permission on the ground that the Bible said: "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). The result was that the wife died and the man was soon married again.

In one town, good citizens objected to street lights on the ground that people would stay out all night and catch cold, but also on the ground that God had divided the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:18) and to interfere in any way with that order would be blasphemous.

When the first oil wells were being drilled in Pennsylvania, a New York minister addressed a letter to the President of the United States, arguing that to extract oil from the earth would be to fly in the face of Divine Providence, that had no doubt stored the oil there for the predestined purpose of burning the world.

There are hundreds of such stories. What causes them? Taking the Bible literally. Taking the Bible out of context. Quoting the Bible without interpreting the Bible. The Bible has been used and abused in every way you can imagine: to justify slavery; to persecute Jews; to accuse and execute women as witches; to oppose the marriage of Priests; to regulate clothing and hairstyles; to assign guilt for disease; to argue for the inferiority of black people to oppose medical science; to deny women the right of leadership in the church; to predict the time for the end of the world; to prove that the earth is the center of the universe. Shakespeare said it all: "There is no error so gross but that some sober brow will bless it with a proper text."

It is primary obligation of the preacher to interpret Scripture. Fred Craddock says, "The sermon is an interpretation of Scripture in the sense that the preacher seeks to bring the text forward into the present in order to effect a new hearing of the Word (which is Christ). In This sense, the text has its future and its fulfillment in preaching" (Craddock, Hays, Holliday, Tucker, *Preaching Through The Christian Year*, 1). Preaching gives the Scripture a living voice in the midst of the congregation. In this lecture we want to say something about the relationship of the Bible to preaching. We especially want to ask, what makes preaching biblical?

Joseph Dampier, one of the significant founders of Emmanuel School of Religion, spoke to this issue in an article in *The Christian Standard*: "People tell me, 'All you have to do is be a Bible preacher.' The Greatest Bible preacher I ever heard of was Bernard of Clairvaux. In the Middle Ages at one of the monasteries, he preached 322 sermons from the Song of Solomon and only got as far as the third chapter! We cannot deny that he was Biblical. But notice there was a difference! It wasn't gospel."

“I hear our people saying, ‘We are a Bible people.’ I hear them saying of preachers, ‘He’s a Bible preacher.’ In the early literature of our movement the term ‘Bible preacher’ never showed up, as far as I know. They said ‘gospel preacher’. That was the emphasis. There is a difference in a man who can preach the Song of Solomon (which is Bible) and man who can preach the gospel (which is the purpose of the Bible). One must move from Bible to the specific theme that makes the Bible significant—gospel.” (*The Christian Standard*, February 6, 1983).

Biblical preaching does not spend all of its time talking about the Bible, but it talks about what the Bible talks about.

P. T. Forsyth stated it clearly in his Yale Lectures in 1907: “The Bible, the preacher, and the church are all made by the same thing—the Gospel. The Gospel was there before the Bible, and it created the Bible as it creates the true preacher and the true sermon everywhere. And it is for the sake and service of the Gospel that both the Bible and preacher exist” (*Positive Preaching and The Modern Mind*, 15).

Forsyth also said: “The Bible, therefore, is there as the medium of the Gospel. It was created by faith in the Gospel. And in turn it creates faith among men....Biblical preaching preaches the Gospel and uses the Bible, it does not preach the Bible and use the Gospel. (Ibid, 15, 16).

At another time, Forsyth wrote: “If you would preach a classical (biblical) Gospel, give your nights and days, your head and heart, to converse with the Bible” (*The Gospel and Authority*, 41, M. Anderson (ed.), 1971. A. M. Hunter says that to Forsythe “the Bible was not a document but a sacrament” (Hunter, *P. T. Forsythe*, 32). For Forsyth, revelation is in order to redemption, not the communication of divine information. In Christ, God did not merely show himself, but God came and acted, redeemingly and decisively. The essence of our religion lay not in knowledge or conduct, but in awe—in the sense of the utter holiness of God. Forsyth, long before Rudolf Otto, was saying, “The holiness of God is the real foundation of religion.” Remember that Jesus taught us to pray, “Hallowed by thy name.” God does not need to be propped up by our theories and presuppositions, but we cannot preach biblically without the reality of his presence. We don’t need to talk about the Bible, we need to talk about what the Bible talks about.

Some of us today have the same problem Jesus encountered. “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39, 40). Such persons earn for themselves the title “bibliolater” or “Bible-worshipper,” because they act as if scripture and not Christ is the center of their devotion. Alan Richardson states it clearly:

“God’s message to the world was spoken in its finished and final form through a Person rather than a book, and it is the Person (and not the book) who is Himself the Word of God. But the book is the only source of first hand witness concerning the Person through whom God revealed the saving knowledge of Himself to the world, and it is in the pages of the book that our encounter with the Person of Christ takes place....The

Bible is the place where God is encountered, where His message is spoken and His will is proclaimed" (*Preface To Bible-Study*, 11, 14).

We can think too little of the Bible (some preachers do not know the content of the Bible), or we think too highly of the Bible, but we can never think too highly of the Gospel because it centers in our Lord Jesus Christ. "We preach Christ," cried Paul, and so must we. "Begin from the wounds of Christ," said Luther. In his journal, Wesley recorded, "I came in to the town, and offered them Christ." If we preach biblically we will preach Christ—his incarnation, his forgiveness, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his return.

The times in which we live cry out for preaching that is genuinely biblical. The word "biblical" is the key. What makes preaching biblical? Barth said, "There is nothing to be said which is not already found in the Scriptures" (*The Preaching of The Gospel.*), I take it he did not mean to limit oneself to merely reading or quoting the biblical text. Many of us were reared in a tradition of building argumentative sermons by quoting large numbers of biblical texts, often out of context—generally referred to as "proof-texting." One person in the Saturday Church ad in the newspaper wrote: "If you attend this church you will hear at least 35 passages of Scripture quoted in the sermon." Does that guarantee that the sermon is biblical? I have often thought if I attended that church I would gently and kindly suggest to the preacher when I greeted him or her at the door (in a church that would say that, the preacher would surely be a "him") that I would like to know what at least one of those passages really means. Leander Keck states it succinctly: "It is no longer the amount of the Bible cited that makes preaching biblical" (*The Bible In The Pulpit*, 12). John A. T. Robinson was on target when he wrote: "The fallacy of biblicism is not its faithfulness to the Bible, but rather its retention of biblical language at the expense of biblical meaning, so that formulae are recited but God's word does not resound in the hearts of the hearers" (*Theology as Translation,* *Theology Today*, 20, 1963-64, 525).

Verse-by-verse preaching most nearly resembles what is normally called a "homily." Such preaching may suggest to some a sermon hurriedly thrown together with disjointed and careless comments upon a passage of Scripture. Donald MacLeod comments: "A homily presupposes (a) on the part of the congregation an intellectual and spiritual maturity much above the average and (b) on the part of the preacher an unusual breadth of scriptural comprehension, the ability to be interesting, and a pastoral sensitivity which aids relevance" ("The Homily and The sermon" *The New Pulpit Digest*, January-February, 1975, 14). The sermons of Karl Barth and Eduard Schweizer are notable examples of sermons of the homily genre. Eduard Schweizer's sermon, "God's Inescapable Nearness," on Philippians 4:4-7, is an excellent example (in James Cox, *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, Vol. I, 197ff.). Some today who seek to use this method of preaching must pretend a scriptural knowledge that they do not have, an ability to be interesting which is nonexistent (much such preaching is boring beyond measure), and a lack of relevance which they cannot remedy. Such attempts, except in the hands of an exceptional scholar, can hardly be called preaching. It seeks to claim a competence, which does not exist. It claims to represent what cannot be presented. Its one hope lies in this—"God can and does speak to men (us) through even the most ignorant of expositor's of his Word" (I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation*, 17).

Luccock speaks of that old view of “Expository Preaching,” as uncritical and line-of-least-resistance. He comments: “Much of it died for very good reasons. It has paralysis and a weak heart and a clot on the brain and finally succumbed to senile decay. It failed to grasp the truth imbedded or pictured in a biblical passage and then to set it down in the soil of modern life” (*Minister’s workshop*, 150).

Robert McCracken says, “The weakness of much expository preaching is twofold: it inclines to be tedious and colorless, and it is often detached and remote from the activities and concerns of every day existence” (*The Making of The Sermon*, 36). It was Fosdick who asked, “Who comes to church desperately wanting to know what happened to the Jebusites?”

Another inadequate method of seeking to preach biblically is to merely explain the text, often by giving a running commentary on the text verse-by-verse. Some teach their congregation that this is the only valid way to preach, so that when their members move to another city they want to test the orthodoxy of other preachers by this method. A church paper I received announced—“John is going to preach through the Book of Acts verse-by-verse.” I nearly went to sleep just reading about it.

Often you hear a preacher justify this method of preaching by saying, “I simply say what the Bible says.” That really means, “I say what I think the passage means, or what I want it to mean, and I claim that what I want it to say is what it really says—what I say is the word of God.” The key word here is “simply.” We are a people who like to make everything clear and simple. We do want to make the biblical passage as clear and understandable as possible, but that doesn’t mean it is simple. What Alfred North Whitehead said of natural scientists should also be said of preachers: “The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher should be, seek simplicity and distrust it” (*Concept of Nature*, 163). God is not simple, grace is not simple, sin is not simple, salvation is not simple, Jesus is not simple, the Holy Spirit is not simple, and neither are a thousand other things in the Bible. In the name of simplicity, we often make the Bible say what we want it to say and then call it a message from God.

One other inadequate method of making preaching biblical is to make an impressionistic approach to the Bible. This approach would equate the message of the text with any thoughts that might enter the readers mind as the text is read. Some even go so far as to say, “The Lord gave me this message.” There can be no doubt this approach is open to grave objections. (1) It places the meaning of Scripture at the mercy of our feelings; it fails to submit to some objective control in recognition of the sense of the text placed in its historical context (such as the historical critical method of study or the consideration of the “common mind” of the church). (2) It overlooks the reality that Scripture comes to us in historical dress and requires that we respect its contextual setting in the day when it was first given. (3) It ignores the fact that the Bible is not an easy book to understand and its study demands our full attention and the mental discipline of concentrated effort to grasp the real meaning of the words before us.

There is nothing that I know of which indicates that we can expect the Holy Spirit to give us the meaning of Scripture without the hard rigor of careful and controlled study. God

addresses the biblical revelation to our minds. John Stott speaks of a conclusion which the Holy Spirit cannot justify: "...slipshod preparation....Trust in the Holy Spirit is not intended to save us the bother of preparation...he can clarify and guide our thinking in our study. Indeed experience suggests that he does a better job there than in the pulpit."

Daniel P. Fuller, in an excellent article of great depth and clarity, on "The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation," says, "The Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation does not consist in giving the interpreter cognition of what the Bible is saying, which would involve dispensing additional information, beyond the historical-grammatical data that are already there for everyone to work with. Rather the Holy Spirit's role is to change the heart of the interpreter, so that he loves the message that is conveyed by nothing more than the historical-grammatical data" (*Scripture, Tradition and Interpretation*, 192). Anthony C. Thiselton, who has written the most exhaustive study of biblical hermeneutics, says: "We may conclude, then, that the Holy Spirit may be said to work through human understanding, and not usually, if ever, through processes which bypass the considerations discussed under the heading of hermeneutics" (*The Two Horizons*, 92).

Dr. Paul Scherer told of a young minister who explained to a parishioner that, in order to leave a place for inspiration, he always wrote only the first half of his sermon, and left the last half for God. The man answered, "Sir, I congratulate you! Your half is invariably better than God's."

F. F. Bruce says of the New Testament writings: "In these writings we have the foundation documents, the title deeds, the charter of our faith...but this is far from imprisoning the free Spirit within a closed collection of books. Repeatedly, new liberating movements of the Spirit have been launched by a rediscovery of the living power that resides in these writings. They are not the prison-house but the power-house of the Spirit" (*A Mind For What Matters*, 279).

WHAT IS EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

Part of our problem here is semantic. Many of us have been taught that the most biblical method of preaching is the expository method. When we consult the older experts—F. B. Meyer, Henry Burgess, John Broadus, Andrew W. Blackwood, SR.—they differ. Nearly all agree on the length of the passage handled—"A longer passage." Some stress verse-by-verse clause-by-clause treatment. Others stress the didactic style and explanatory method as though the purpose of preaching is to explain a passage of Scripture. Blackwood says, the "message...based on a fairly long (in another place, he says longer than 2 or 3 verses) passage is an expository sermon."

We need a new definition of expository preaching. IT is really too good a term to give up. We can describe the word in terms of substance rather than form. Biblical exposition needs to be limited only by the broad principle that the substance, the essence, the core, the basic concept of one's preaching be drawn from the Bible. That means every sermon to be a sermon must be soundly rooted in Scripture. All real preaching, then, is expository preaching. Such a sermon may be based on the whole Bible, a book of the Bible, a chapter, a paragraph, a sentence, a phrase, a word, a

character, a doctrine, or even a topic. The one requirement is that the sermon be soundly rooted in the reality of scripture. We find the substance of the sermon in Scripture, and we find variety and interest in the many forms now open to the development and delivery of the sermon. No methodology can guarantee that a sermon is really biblical. That will be determined by the content.

Donald G. Miller develops this workable definition of expository preaching:

“Expository preaching is an act wherein the living truth of some portion of Holy Scripture, understood in the light of solid exegetical and historical study and made a living reality to the preacher by the Holy Spirit, comes alive to the hearer as he is confronted by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in judgment and redemption” (*The Way To Biblical Preaching*, 26).

There are three elements in this definition worthy of our attention: (1) Preaching is not merely a person speaking to other persons; it is an act. Preaching accomplishes something. As P. T. Forsyth said, “The Gospel is an act of God. It’s preaching must therefore be an act, a ‘function’ of the great act. A true sermon is a real deed.” A person is either made better or worse by the preaching of the gospel. Preaching never leaves a person where it finds one. Preaching must be based on the Bible. A message not based on Scripture may be called something, but it is not a sermon. (2) The substance of preaching drawn from the scriptures, is to be found by careful study in the light of the best methods of historical and exegetical research (God did address his revelation to our intelligence), but this process must be made alive by the Holy Spirit who desires to speak now through the ancient witnesses. (3) The end of preaching is that the sermon should be transformed from a human conversation between preacher and people into a divine encounter between God and both preacher and people. Such a concept of expository preaching is according to substance (rooted in scripture and applied to human needs) rather than form. We are free to use a variety of forms but we may never violate the substance of preaching.

Leander Keck put it another way: “Preaching is biblical when (a) the Bible governs the content of the sermon and when (b) the function of the sermon is analogous to that of the text,” (*The Bible in The Pulpit*, 106). Fred Craddock writes: “I think biblical preaching is that form of preaching which gets the content and the purpose of the message from the text itself. This comes through a process of understanding the text. What is the text trying to do? Is it what I am trying to do? What does the text say? Is that what I am saying? Those questions expose the meaning and purpose of the text and lead to biblical preaching, whatever the form of the sermon” (*Interview in Preaching*, March-April 1988,5) John Knox has written a powerful little book on *The Integrity of Preaching*. In the first chapter he asks this question—“How then can we define biblical preaching?”

First, we may say that biblical preaching is preaching which remains close to the characteristic and essential biblical ideas; the transcendence, the holiness, the power and sovereignty, the love of God; God’s demand of ethical righteousness; God’s judgment upon sin; our creaturehood, our plight as a sinner; our need of forgiveness and release; the meaning of Christ as the actual coming of God into our history with the

help we need; the availability of reconciliation and redemption, of life, joy, and peace in the new community of the Spirit which God created through Christ and into which we can enter upon the sole condition of penitence and faith. And in biblical preaching, such ideas will appear not as mere ideas—not as broad general conceptions only—but rather in the concrete context of the church’s tradition and life. Biblical preaching is not concerned with abstractions. It was “existentialist” long before the philosophers began to use that word. Indeed, it is not an accident that Kierkegaard, the father of modern existentialism, was a biblical preacher.

Secondly, biblical preaching is preaching which is centrally concerned with the central biblical event, the event of Christ. The mere treating of incidents in the biblical narrative, of scraps of teaching, even when done faithfully and in an edifying manner, does not qualify preaching as biblical unless the incidents and teachings are seen and presented in their relation to God’s total act of redemption which culminated in the life and death of Jesus, the Resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and the creation of the church.

In the third place, biblical preaching is preaching which answers to and nourishes the essential life of the church. For the event that it proclaims is more than an ancient happening known to us only through the documentary accounts of it which happened to be written and have happened to survive. It issued in, and its true meaning is perpetuated in, the new community of the Spirit. Here is the reality of the Resurrection. The preacher is not repeating, over and over again, an ancient chronicle; one is bearing witness to the quality and significance of a new communal life in which God is making available to us a new health and salvation

Finally, biblical preaching will be preaching in which the event in a real sense is recurring. The God who acted in the events out of which the church arose acts afresh in the preacher’s word. The preaching of the gospel is itself a part of the gospel. The true biblical preacher is not merely discussing events of the past (like a history professor), nor is one merely drawing edifying lessons out of its life (like a moral guide or philosopher). In his inspired words the past event is happening again. True preaching is itself an event—and an event of a particular kind. In it the revelation of God in Christ is actually recurring. The eschatological event, which began in the coming of Christ and will end with the final judgment on, and fulfillment of, history, is taking place recurrently or, if you prefer, continuously, in the sacraments and preaching of the church. If that is not true, neither the sacraments nor the preaching matters much. Indeed, if that is not true, sacraments and preaching, in any authentic sense, do not exist at all.

Biblical preaching is more than repeating the words of the bible. The Bible must be interpreted. Elizabeth Achtemeier writes: “The goal of creative preaching is to tell God’s words and deeds from the Bible in such a manner that the sermon becomes the medium through which those continue into the present, and we experience them, and they exert their saving influence on our lives” (*Creative Preaching*, 47). We always face the two main problems in biblical preaching— (1) How to make preaching biblical—how to handle our presuppositions so as to allow the Bible to speak its own message, and (2) How to make preaching relevant to life today. Barth spoke of the preacher with a

Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. That is no solution—that is our problem. We need to know the gospel; we need to know the age in which we live; and above all, we need to know how to bring the two together. Much preaching is not biblical enough and most preaching is not relevant enough. We always face the two horizons of biblical study—the horizon of the culture out of which the Bible came, and the horizon of the culture to which we preach. That is the problem of biblical preaching.

HOW DO WE INTERPRET THE TEXT?

How do we get into the Bible to understand its essential message that by the Power of the Holy Spirit God might confront us in the situation in which we live? How do we study the Bible in order to preach biblically?

Select the passage. Distance yourself from the text. Fred Craddock speaks to the issue of distancing ourselves from the text.

“The endeavor to understand a text in its historical, literary, and theological contexts does create, to be sure, a sense of distance between the Bible and the congregation. The preacher may grow impatient during this period of feeling a long way from a sermon. But this time of study can be most fruitful. By holding text and parishioners apart for a while, the preacher can hear each more clearly and exegete each more honestly. Then, when the two intersect in the sermon, neither the text nor the congregation is consumed by the other. Because the Bible is an ancient book, it invites the preacher back into its world in order to understand; because the Bible is the church’s Scripture, it moves forward into our world and addresses us here and now.” (Craddock, Hayes, Holladay, Tucker, *Preaching Through the Christian Year*, 2).

Determine the parameters of the text. Check for textual issues. Make your own translation. Place the text in its several contexts: historical, literary, theological, and cultural. (See a book such as Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis*). Ask what the text says and what the text does. Listen to the text. It is necessary to know the content of the text, but we must also know the intent of the content of the text. This is the process Craddock calls having something to say.

If preaching is to be biblical, preachers must see the value of and learn to do sound exegesis. Exegesis is a systematic plan for understanding a biblical text. Its intention is to approach the text in such a way that it can give to us the original meaning of the writer. Exegesis is not an option, it is a necessity. Halford Luccock said the world can only be saved by grace and honest exegesis.

Karl Barth was teaching at the University of Bonn in Germany from 1930-1935, When Hitler required all professors to take a loyalty oath, Barth refused. From that hour, he was a marked man. His lectures were all suspended. On February 10, 1935, he met with his students for the last time. He gave an interpretation of Psalm 119:67 and James 4:6 and ended with these words: “We have been studying cheerfully and seriously. As far as I was concerned it could have continued in that way, and I had already resigned myself to having my grave here by the Rhine! I had plans for the future with other colleagues who are either no longer here or have been away for a long

time—but there has been a frost on our spring night! And now the end has come. So listen to my last piece of advice: exegesis, exegesis and yet more exegesis! Keep to the Word, to the Scripture that has been given to us” (Busch, *Karl Barth*, 259).

PREACH TO THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE.

Biblical interpretation is never complete when it lays bare the meaning of the text for its original readers but reaches its goal only when it examines the meaning of the text for today and allows the text to speak its own message to affect our own attitudes and understanding and actions.

We preach to meet the needs of our people. The pastoral concern should never be far from our minds and hearts. Paul wrote his letters out of concern for the people to whom he wrote. Peter wrote his letters out of a pastoral concern. The gospels were written out of a pastoral concern for the various communities addressed.

An English artist was sketching outdoors in the Barbizon District in France. He was at work at his easel set up along a stream, when a group of four children appeared in front of him and watched every stroke of his pencil. Finally one of them said, “Mister, please get us in your picture!” That is exactly what the congregation is saying to the preacher when he/she stands up to preach—“Get us in your sermon.

The sooner we get the congregation in the sermon and the more profoundly we get them in the sermon, the better. The aim of preaching is not the elucidation of a subject, but the transformation of a person. Through the centuries a most effective instrument in the transformation of a person has been the elucidation of a subject. The first Christian sermon at Pentecost was an elucidation of the subjects of Hebrew history and prophecy. It resulted in the transformation of a lot of people. “Two sets of horizons must be brought together, those of the text and those of the modern interpreter; and this must be done at a more than merely conceptual level....The Gospel must not merely be spoken and repeated; it must be communicated” (Anthony Thiselton “The New Hermeneutic” in *New Testament Interpretation*, I. Howard Marshall, ed., pp. 329, 328.). Few questions can be more important than how the text of the New Testament, written in the ancient world, can come alive in such a way as to strike home in the present.

Fant and Pinson begin the Preface to their *20 Centuries of Great Preaching* with this statement: “Great preaching is relevant preaching. That is not a presupposition with which this work was begun, but a conclusion to which it came. After studying the lives of hundreds of preachers and reading countless sermons, we have concluded that the preachers who made the greatest impact upon the world were men (persons) who spoke to the issues and needs of their day....Not a one of them was lost in abstract theology, aimless piety, or ranting exhortation” (p. V, VII). When I say “preach to the needs of people,” I include personal needs, but also information and direction on ethical issues, and problems of peace and justice in the world. We interpret a passage of Scripture for the sake of its effect in the lives and actions of those who hear. C. K. Barrett makes the point that in itself exposition is not preaching. “You may have a perfectly correct exposition of a passage of Scripture which nevertheless is not

preaching; that is, it is not an immediate, powerful, personal self-communication of the eternal Word to men" (*Biblical Preaching and Biblical Scholarship*, 30).

THE PREACHER AS SCHOLAR—AS STUDENT.

If we are to preach biblically, there are some requirements. We must have well educated ministers (the idea would be at least a Master of Divinity, a Doctor of Ministry, a Ph.D, or Th.D.). In a free church, the greatest enemy of an educated ministry is the local church. We need to be persuaded that an educated ministry will make a difference. The church in our time badly needs reform and renewal. "The Protestant Reformation began in a scholar's insight into the meaning of Scripture. It was to a large extent a learned movement, a thing of *professors and students, a scholar's revolution...*" (E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation*, VI).

"Like every other religion, Christianity has been periodically plagued by its lunatic fringe of fanatics, obscurantists, and purveyors of superstition and fear. There never has been any really effective remedy against these people except the power of the mind, the patient efforts of an educated ministry. And one might argue that an educated ministry in any age is never any stronger than its few real scholars and seminal minds. It is they who carry out the top-level intellectual jobs that in the long run have much to do with determining the quality of the thinking and writing, the preaching and teaching, of any Christian generation. They study to purify the religious tradition itself, to relate it to the surrounding culture, and to take account of scientific discovery. They cultivate the soil, prune away dead branches, and engraft fresh stock. God grants the growth. Scholarship, then, is a legitimate calling of high significance among Christians." (Harbison, op. cit, 169). Harbison continues to discuss the danger of separating our universities and seminaries: "The danger is that our seminaries will become mere ministerial 'trade-schools,' cut off from all fruitful contact with higher learning in other fields, and that our universities will become purely secular centers of research and vocational training, divorced from all contact with religious scholarship....The danger of final separation between sacred and secular learning can only be avoided if more men and women in both seminaries and universities acquire the vision of scholarship as a calling worthy of a Christian, and of Christianity as a commitment worthy of a scholar" (Ibid, 172).

Some years ago, the fine English scholar C. K. Barrett delivered a paper on "Biblical Preaching and Biblical Scholarship." In that paper he said:

"Scholarship waits upon preaching as its handmaid. Preaching is a vital and indispensable activity of the church, and scholarship must assist it, not dominate it...It is the church's business to preach and it is the scholar's business not to get in the way of the preaching, but rather to assist it as far as he can....Biblical preaching and biblical scholarship are not two things, but one. The biblical scholar is a preacher or he is no true scholar—he has not understood his own subject. The Bible demands to be preached. The scholar may not, of course, be good at the technique of preaching—that is quite another matter; God shares out his gifts as he wills. But preacher he must be. Again, the biblical preacher is a scholar (or at the very least, a student, MJT), or he is

unworthy of his office. He (or she) may not be a good scholar; he (or she) may have no head for Greek. But when he comes to the sacred office of expounding the Word of God he dare not less than his honest best, with all the tools at his disposal, to find out what God wills to communicate out of Scripture, through him (or her) to the congregation. Preacher and scholar are one, and share one holy task” (op. cit. 48-49).

Scholars are those who help us know what is there. They help to save us from ourselves—our presuppositions, our subjectivism. Scholars are necessary to the work of the preacher and the life of the church. If we are to preach biblically, there must be a bridging of the gulf between scholars and preachers. Two things would help: First, for scholars to do their work with the church and the gospel and the preacher in mind. That is being done. More scholarly help is being made available to the preacher today than at any time in my lifetime. Excellent scholarly helps are available for preaching and teaching. Second, preachers must come to understand that if we are to be competent and honest we must gird ourselves for a lifetime of study. The times demand that we love God with all our minds. We have a big job, and we need to prepare ourselves and dedicate ourselves to do the best we can. Fred Craddock says: “It is public knowledge that ministers’ studies (not offices) all have a common address: at the intersection of the normative tradition, which the minister is obligated to interpret; the congregation, which the minister is obligated to lead and nourish; and the world which the minister is obligated to serve and return to the renewing grace of God. Whether situated over garages, in basements, off foyers, or behind furnaces, the address is the same. Other professionals in town have studies but none at so busy an intersection; not a physician, not a lawyer.” (*Preaching*, 70).

Time spent in study is part of the preacher’s work. Take time to study. Show the results of it on Sunday morning, and the church will accept it. People want to hear biblical, relevant, interesting preaching. Many are tired and bored with the kind of preaching they hear.

Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University reviews Mark Noll’s volume, *The Scandal of The Evangelical Mind*, and makes this pertinent comment: “Mark Noll has written a major indictment of American evangelicalism. Reading this book, one wonders if the evangelical movement has pandered so much to American culture, tried so hard to be popular, and perpetuated such a do-it-yourself, feel-good faith that it has lost not only its mind but its soul as well. Clergy, seminary faculty, and lay people need to take the message of this book to heart. The pews may be packed, but the churches are in deep trouble. Unless they retrieve the intellectual rigor of historic Christianity, their role in the future will only diminish.” (From the cover of the book).

A medical authority has written that, “Without continuous study a physician is stale in five years and in ten years he is a fraud.” For the sake of our integrity and competence, we must study.