The Master's Seminary

JOURNAL

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN:

A FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOR OF JOHN F. MACARTHUR

VOLUME 34 – NUMBER 1

Spring 2023

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY
13248 Roscoe Boulevard, Los Angeles, California
9 1 3 5 2

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY JOURNAL
published by
THE MASTER'S SEMINARY

The Master's Seminary Journal (*TMSJ*) is published semiannually and distributed electronically. For information about articles, policy, or journal access, contact journal@tms.edu.

TMSJ is indexed in *Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus of Biblica*; *Christian Periodical Index*; and *Guide to Social Science & Religion in Periodical Literature*. Articles are abstracted in *New Testament Abstracts*; *Old Testament Abstracts*; and *Religious and Theological Abstracts*. This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database®*, (*ATLAS®*) collection. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association.

ISSN #1066-3959

Volume 34 Spring 2023 Number 1

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY JOURNAL

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EDITORIAL: THE WORD OF GOD AND THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

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The year 2023 marks an important anniversary in English church history. Five hundred years ago, in 1523, William Tyndale traveled to London to advocate for a new English translation of the Bible, one derived directly from the original Hebrew and Greek.[1] Tyndale was committed to getting God's Word into the hands and hearts of English-speaking Christians. His daring work, for which he was eventually martyred, laid the foundation for all subsequent English Bible translations—from the Great Bible of 1539 to the King James of 1611 to modern translations today. Like his fellow Reformers, Tyndale not only affirmed the primacy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture, but he was willing to die for that conviction.

Thirty-seven years ago, in 1986, The Master's Seminary was established on that same theological foundation—a steadfast commitment to the centrality of God's Word. When John MacArthur first came to Grace Community Church in 1969, he had two primary goals for his ministry. First, he purposed to preach the Word of God faithfully each week, accurately expounding the biblical text verse-by-verse (2 Tim 2:15). Second, he desired to train the next generation of spiritual leaders, entrusting the truth to faithful men who would teach others also (2 Tim 2:2). Those goals came together in the founding of a seminary on the Grace Community Church campus. The authority, power, and clarity of God's Word, exhibited each Sunday from the pulpit, laid the groundwork for seminary instruction and discipleship throughout the week. Today, The Master's Seminary remains unflinchingly committed to that same high view of Scripture. In training the next generation of pastor-theologians, the only sure

[1] Steven Lawson, "The Pastor-Theologian and the Bloodstained Word of God: History of the English Bible and the Death of the Martyrs," *TMSJ* 34, no. 1 (2023): 5–31.

foundation is the Word of God. The faithful pastor must shepherd God's flock with diligence; and the sound theologian must feed God's people with truth. Neither is possible unless the minister first exhibits the attitude of Isaiah 66:2, in which the Lord Himself declared, "To this one I will look, the one who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." For any pastor-theologian to meet with God's approval, he must approach his task with the kind of contrite humility that trembles before the supreme authority of Scripture.

Some today might view pastors and theologians as two distinct groups, the former consisting of practitioners and the latter of academics. But that represents a false dichotomy, as evidenced by even a cursory stroll down the halls of church history. Many of the greatest names from past generations—from Peter and Paul in the first century, to John Chrysostom and Augustine in the early fifth century, to Martin Luther and John Calvin in the sixteenth century—were both pastors and theologians. This is especially true in English-speaking church history, where the rich heritage of the Puritan movement is replete with men who were both faithful pastors and fastidious theologians. They shepherded the flock by preaching the Word, while also engaging in significant theological discourse and dialogue. Their legacy provides a compelling reminder that pastoral ministry and theological study are not, and indeed should not be, mutually exclusive.

In our own day, Dr. MacArthur has consistently modeled the dual role of pastor-theologian. As a pastor, he has shepherded Grace Community Church for 54 years, preaching thousands of sermons through the entire New Testament and significant portions of the Old. His books include such practical and pastoral titles as *Found: God's Will*, *The Fulfilled Family, Anxious for Nothing, Saved Without a Doubt,* and *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness.* As a pastor, he has also sought to encourage fellow ministers through avenues like the Shepherds' Conference and The Master's Fellowship, and through the publication of resources addressing church leadership, pastoral ministry, and expository preaching. Yet, Dr. MacArthur is also a theologian. As such, he has been an influential voice confronting issues like easy-believism, ecumenism, evolution, charismatic excess, pragmatism, psychology, worldliness, and wokeness. His theological works include *The Gospel According to Jesus*, *Charismatic Chaos*, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, *Strange Fire*, and *Biblical Doctrine*. These works, addressing pertinent issues in a timely manner, have helped countless believers think carefully and biblically about key doctrinal matters.

These dual aspects of Dr. MacArthur's ministry flow from a singular commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. That unwavering conviction has defined his ministry both as a pastor and as a theologian. Moreover, that conviction is itself rooted in an insatiable desire to know Christ more deeply (through the study of the Word) and to make Him known more widely (through the preaching of the Word). Being a pastor-theologian is not an end in itself. Rather, for Dr. MacArthur, and for any faithful minister, the end goal is always to know Christ and to make Him known.

Five centuries ago, William Tyndale and his fellow Reformers recognized the church's desperate need for biblical truth and for pastor-theologians who would boldly proclaim that truth. That remains the church's great need today. At The Master's Seminary, we thank the Lord for giving us a modern example of such biblical conviction and Christ-centered courage. In training the next generation of

pastor-theologians, Dr. MacArthur has modeled faithfulness in both pastoral ministry and theological engagement. The author of Hebrews reminded his readers, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7). It is therefore fitting for us to give glory to God by dedicating this issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal* to our seminary's Chancellor and founder, Dr. John F. MacArthur.

Soli Deo Gloria

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A HIGH VIEW OF SCRIPTURE: WHY WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD[1]

Charles Lee Feinberg
Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University
Dean of Talbot Theological Seminary (1952–1975)

* * * * *

Charles Lee Feinberg—who studied to become a Jewish rabbi prior to becoming a believer in Jesus—was the dean of Talbot Theological Seminary when John MacArthur began his studies there in 1961. One of the reasons MacArthur came to Talbot was to learn under Feinberg, who, next to MacArthur's father, became one of the men who influenced MacArthur most.[2] MacArthur said of Feinberg: "He read the Bible through four times every year. Needless to say, he was exceptional and intense. We were all rightfully in awe of him, and I loved him at the same time. He was a real model for me."[3] Feinberg would come to be MacArthur's mentor. When MacArthur graduated Talbot in 1964, he received the Charles Feinberg Award, "Given in Honour of the Outstanding Graduate."[4] MacArthur recounted that, along with his father, Feinberg instilled within him the fundamental principle of "the absolute authority of Scripture."[5]

* * * * *

Feinberg demonstrates in this article that the bedrock of the pastor-theologian is Scripture. The pastor-theologian must view and teach the Bible not as man's word, but as God's Word. God has revealed this foundational truth within Scripture itself—in the unity of its construction, the continuity of its existence, the scope of its subject matter, and the influence of its power. In order to be true

[1] This article has been edited and adapted from two sermons preached by Dr. Charles Feinberg and later published as Charles Lee Feinberg, "Is the Bible God's Word or Man's? Or, Why We Know the Bible Is the Word of God," *Biola Publications* 32 (1960), 2–15. It can be accessed at: https://digitalcommmons.biola.edu/biola-pubs/32. Used by permission of Biola University.

[2] Iain H. Murray, *John MacArthur: Servant of the Word and Flock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011), 57.

[3] Murray, *John MacArthur*, 18.

[4] Murray, 21.

[5] Murray, 32.

and faithful to the ministry of the Word of God, the pastor-theologian must hold to a high view of Scripture.

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Psalm 119:160[6]
The sum of thy Word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances *endureth* forever.

John 17:17
Sanctify them in the truth: thy Word is truth.

* * * * *

Introduction

It is of purpose that we have chosen the sub-title "Why We Know the Bible Is the Word of God," for we are not primarily concerned for the moment in what I think or you think, what I believe or he believes, what you surmise or conjecture or suppose or what they do. We are speaking here of certainties, and of such a certainty as is assured to the unified and united Church of the Living Christ. It is a matter of deep gratitude to the discerning believer that he finds the Christian faith one of certainties, not one of assumptions or guesses. Nowhere is this truer than with respect to the Bible itself. Fully forty times do we meet the word "know" in the First Epistle of John in one form or other and a large percentage is "we know." Certainty and assurance are written boldly across the face of our faith. But while this is true of our faith and is the heritage of us all, many have not laid hold of it in the measure that is their privilege. A modern writer has put it well when he says: "The need of the hour for twentieth century Christians is to come out of the mists and shadows of uncertainty and unbelief, into a faith in the Bible which is an absolutely dominating conviction of its authority and verity as the living Word of the Living God." From among the many reasons that form the basis of our united and common knowledge that the Bible is God's Word, we choose four.

The Unity of Its Construction

Believers are confident that the message in the Scriptures is God's because of the unity that pervades the structure of the Bible. The Bible is one book, but it is also sixty-six books, written not by one writer but by about forty different authors. These men were not of the same rank or station or culture or position or condition in life. Among the writers, David and Solomon were kings; Isaiah was a statesman and prophet; Peter, James, and John were so-called "ignorant" fishermen; Zechariah and Jeremiah were priests as well as prophets as is clear from their genealogies; Amos was a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees; Luke was a highly intelligent, cultured, and beloved physician; Matthew was a tax collector; and Paul was a colossal scholar, versed and

[6] The Biblical text is original to the article—American Standard Version.

steeped in all the wisdom of the Hebrew Old Testament, the accumulated traditions of the Rabbis, the current modes of Greek thought, and an avowed pensioner on the grace of God. These men obviously did not write in one year, or in one generation, or even all in one century. They wrote under God over a period of about 1500 years, from Moses to John, the Apostle. A similar period in European history would take us from St. Augustine with his "De Civitate Dei" (*Concerning the City of God*) to Tennyson's "In Memoriam." Nor did the human writers of the Scripture write in one locality or place. We have portions of the Word from the wilderness of Sinai, parts from Syria, books from Arabia, Greece, Italy, and Palestine.

But the greatest variety and diversity appear in the subjects discussed. If it is history that we want, there is not any that can equal that of the historical books of the Old Testament or that found in the Gospels and Acts. From the presses of our country and other lands, there come yearly an unnumbered multitude of new works of historical bearing. Why? Have the facts of history changed? There you have it! They must admit that they do not have all the facts; therefore, of necessity, their conclusions, based on partial information, cannot be final. How can they divine what mental processes were at work in the great minds and leaders of the centuries? Nor do mere men fathom the real philosophy of history, that is, the motive and purpose of it all. But listen to the succinct summation of it in the Word of God. Paul says in Romans 11:36: "For of Him [that is, of God, as Source, Origin, Fountainhead, First Cause], and through Him [as Medium, Channel, Sustainer, Governor], and unto Him [as End, Goal, Consummation], are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen."

Is it poetry that we want? All who know the Book of Psalms are in accord that therein one finds such depth of feeling, such heights of thought, such grandeur of expression as have been found nowhere else in any literature of the world. Poetry of the first order is this. And what shall we say of the Song of Solomon? To say it is superb beyond all comparison is merely to utter a platitude.

Some men occupy themselves with the field of religion, a subject much lauded and much ridiculed. "Religion" is from the Latin "religio" ("re"-back and "ligio"-bind), meaning, to bind or tie back. Where in all the religions of the world can one find such a tying back of the sinful, polluted, degraded heart of man to the transparently holy, loving, and merciful heart of God, such as we find in the Scriptures? "Pure religion and undefiled" do we find in the Bible, and it is without peer or comparison (Jas 1:27).

For the sake of brevity, we shall dwell on other subjects in the Bible less fully. Is it drama that interests you? Read that soul-searching drama found in the Book of Job, where the minds of erudite men grapple with the age-long problem of the sufferings of the righteous. A professor at Columbia University acclaimed it as the best discussion of the question in existence.

Philosophy?

Note the wise and sententious maxims of the Book of Proverbs. We are personally acquainted with a man who made it his duty to provide every high school graduate of his fairly large city with a copy of this book on graduation. Into its thirty-one chapters have been compacted wisdom for every relationship of life, and an outlook that commends itself as approved of God.

Psychology?

Read with insight the play of minds and feelings in the beautifully simple story of Joseph or take time to meditate on the steps whereby our blessed Lord Jesus led the Samaritan woman to faith in Himself (John 4). Volumes on psychology can add nothing here.

Medicine?

Quarantine was enjoined by Moses upon the children of Israel in case of certain diseases. The laws of Moses concerning regulations for leprosy, whether in a person, or a garment, or a house, are still the marvel of medical science.

Political Science?

This is the subject of government. Refresh your memory on the manner in which Moses under God's hand led a disunited band through the wilderness, how they were finally settled in the land, how and under what circumstances they were granted peace and order, and how God ruled them through forty-two kings in all. The Books of Kings in themselves form an incomparable treatise on what acceptable government is and what it is not.

Geography?

No place ever mentioned in the Bible has ever been proved erroneous. Dr. Melvin Grove Kyle, an internationally famous archaeologist and our teacher in the subject said on more than one occasion that no discovery of excavation in the last one hundred years has in any way invalidated one single statement in the Bible. It was because at least one general in the English Army during World War I believed the Bible and read the account in 1 Samuel 14 that he won a victory at Michmash. He found the account true to the geography of the land.

Physiology?

Take but one verse, Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life.” Bind a cord about your thumb so that no blood courses through it, and it will begin to decay immediately. Why? “The life of the flesh is in the blood.” Yet it was only in the 17th century that medical science discovered the truth that the blood circulates in the human body. Yet Moses knew it many centuries earlier. But how? Moses knew it by revelation and by that alone.

Law?

Every reputable law school in the world studies the Mosaic code of laws (Exodus 20ff). Every important code of laws since Moses’ time, from Justinian’s Code to the Code of Napoleon—all these codes are indebted in greater or lesser measure to the laws of Moses.

Biography?

The best known and most beloved biographies in the world are those of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Paul, Peter, John, and Christ. Need we remind you that the book that tells of these lives is the Bible?

Astronomy?

Although the Bible is not primarily a book of science, wherever it touches science, it is absolutely accurate. If one were to turn to the statements of the ancient Greeks and Romans concerning matters of the heavenly bodies, he would find such that are both ridiculous and absurd. But come to the Bible and you will see that no word has been found untrustworthy despite the advances of modern science. Has modern astronomy disproved Job's statement (Job 26:7): "He stretcheth out the north over empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing"? And what shall we say more? For time would fail us to speak of the manner in which the Bible speaks authoritatively of botany, zoology, ethics, biology, ethnology, philology, and geology.

Perhaps you have been wondering at the recital of these various subjects and it may be that you have begun to think the Bible a mere conglomeration of many discordant elements. There is the point! Despite all these many subjects, so faithfully presented and discussed, there is but one central theme throughout the entire Book—the redemption of sinful man by a holy and righteous God through the willing sacrifice of God's Son on the Cross of Calvary for all men. Such is the unending wonder of the unity of the construction of the Bible. Such unity and harmony demand the supervision of a wise God. Attempt to achieve such harmony today on but one subject—say, medicine—or in one specialized field of that subject—say, the study of the human heart in its function and diseases. You will soon find the impossible task that it is. To what shall we compare it? It is as though one man entered a cathedral and struck a note on the great organ and then left. Thirty-nine other men at different periods did the same. If we were to gather these notes together, we are supposing there was a means of preservation, and find they made up the great work, Handel's "Messiah," should we say it just happened that way? No! We should be justified in believing that some great mind had supervised it. Who then could oversee the writing of sixty-six books by about forty different authors of different ranks over a period of about fifteen hundred years on such a multiplicity of subjects? No one but God! The Bible is God's Word, we know, because of the unity of its construction.

The Continuity of Its Existence

It is the consensus of conservative and reverent Christian opinion that the Bible is God's Word because of its continued existence. True, the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Virgil, Ovid, and Browning are still with us. But who has ever sought to destroy them? Some books may survive without persecution; the Book has lived on in spite of persecution. Because it is from God, Satan has ever opposed it.

Century after century men burned it. Attempt after attempt was made to blot it out. Heathen philosophers like Celsus and Porphyry shot their most fiery darts at it. Julian, the Apostate, nephew and successor of Constantine the Great, tried more than

once to disprove the truths of the Bible, especially the prophecies, but utterly failed. Having ascertained that the Bible taught that Jerusalem would not be rebuilt until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled (Luke 21:24), he sent out a crew of men to rebuild Jerusalem, so determined was his opposition to the Word of God. A fire broke out of the ruins, the men were destroyed, and the venture was stopped.

Diocletian, the Roman Emperor, instituted in 303 A.D. the worst attack on the Bible ever known. Almost every Bible was destroyed; multitudes of Christians perished; a column of triumph was erected with the Latin words: "The name of the Christian has been extinguished." Yet in 325 A.D., less than a quarter of a century later, Constantine declared the Bible the supreme authority in all the deliberations of the First General Council, at Nicaea, which affirmed in opposition to Arius, that Christ was not the created Son of God, but the very God, the uncreated Son of the Father.

Think of the opposition to the Bible on the part of the ruling Church throughout the Middle Ages. Those who adhered to it and loved it were hounded and persecuted. It was withheld from the common people as it is in some parts of the world yet. Luther, the great German Reformer, was fully grown before he had seen a Bible. His colleague, Carlstadt, at the University of Wittenberg, had his degree of Doctor of Theology without having read it.

In the nineteenth century the attacks came from three entirely different quarters, but they had a common root. We refer to the German rationalism of men like Baur, Strauss, Eichhorn, Graf, Wellhausen, who denied the supernatural, the miraculous, and explained the whole history of Israel on an evolutionary basis. We think of the liberal thinkers of England like Bolingbroke, as well as the deists, who ruled God out of His created universe. We are reminded, finally, of French infidels like Voltaire who said that in one hundred years the Bible would not be found except as an antiquarian curiosity. Most interesting it is, then, to us to know (with his pronouncement in mind) that the British and Foreign Bible Society has a Bible depot on the very spot Voltaire made that statement, a station that sends out the Scriptures by the thousands annually.

The attack on the Scriptures most in favor today with the enemies of the Word is the so-called scientific. Many confidently assert that although the Bible has survived all past attacks, it is hardly a match for science. Since "science" means "knowledge" and God is the source of all true knowledge, how could science and the Bible, the revelation of the mind of God, be in disagreement? A manifesto was drawn up and signed by 617 scientific men, many of them being the most eminent in the world. This document, now in the world-famous Bodleian Library of Oxford, England, deplores "The unadvised manner in which some are placing science in opposition to Holy Writ," and predicts that "the time will come when the two records will be seen to agree in every particular."[7] Sir Isaac Newton, a Christian and close student of both science and the Scriptures, bore similar testimony long before. Let us note only one example of the harmony between science and the Bible. According to Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher and scientist, the five essential concepts of science are time, space, matter, force, and motion. These all are found in the first two

[7] W. H. Brock and R. M. Macleod, "The Scientists' Declaration: Reflexions on Science and Belief in the Wake of 'Essays and Reviews,' 1864–5," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 9, no. 1 (1976): 41.

verses of the Bible: "In the beginning"—time; "heavens"—space; "earth"—matter; "the Spirit of God"—force; "moved"—motion.

Today, the Bible, despite all opposition—human, demonic, or Satanic—is being sold by tens of millions yearly in almost every language of the globe. Our Lord had said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away" (Matt 24:35). The psalmist declared: "Forever, O Jehovah, Thy Word is settled in heaven" (Ps 119:89). Peter, centuries later, wrote concerning believers: "Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the Word of God, which liveth and abideth" (1 Pet 1:23). Isaiah unequivocally bore the same record: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of our God shall stand forever" (Isa 40:8).

An eloquent American bishop once said: "Think of it, the same word, brilliant with eternal youth, skin without scar, organ without disease, voice without weakness, step without failure, eye without dimness, the untouched, unharmed, scatheless Word of God."

The Scope of Its Subject Matter

We know that the Bible is the Word of God because of the remarkable range of its subject matter. Reflect for the moment on what the Scriptures reveal of a Supreme Being. If the philosophies of men are studied, it will be seen that however close they may come to the truth, yet they always fall short of it. The Bible reveals the only Supreme Being who is the true and the living God. The reality of His Being is revealed, not argued. The Bible speaks of Him as readily and as authoritatively as it does of other themes. Even the atheist is dependent upon the Bible for the knowledge of the kind of God in whom he does not believe. When men write of what is beyond them, they employ mitigating terms, "it seems to me," "it appears that," "it is safe to assume," "perhaps," "maybe," and a host of others to cover over lack of certainty. Read the Bible and note the definiteness and assurance and certainty in every book and line.

The same blessed Book that discloses the Person and Being of the triune God reveals the origin, preservation, and purpose of all the created universe. It brings before us man, his creation at the hand of God, his position in God's creation, his disobedience and sin, his refuge in salvation, and his intended destination. The Word of God speaks as freely of eternity and the unseen as it does of time and the seen. Its program stretches from eternity past to eternity future with all its untold blessedness for the redeemed.

The Bible is the only book that foretells the future as accurately as though it were history. So wondrously has this been done that unbelieving critics of the Word have for long contended that all of what is called prophecy was and is in reality history after the event took place. What a testimony this is to the way our God has given pre-written history! Let us take two examples only: our Lord Jesus Christ and the nation Israel. God in His Word foretold in Genesis 3:15 of the seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head; in Genesis 49:10 of Shiloh from the tribe of Judah to whom the gathering of the peoples should be; in Numbers 24:17 of the Star out of Jacob which the Magi saw centuries later; in Deuteronomy 18:15 of the prophet like unto Moses; in Isaiah 7:14 and 9:5 of the virgin born Immanuel and the Son given with all His blessed titles; in Isaiah 53:5 and 8 of the suffering Servant of Jehovah bearing

the sins of the world. Are not all these predictions completely fulfilled in that One whom Matthew designates at the very outset as "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham?" What sweep and scope to these prophecies!

We need not be surprised then when we read in the same blessed Book of a people who God said would become a great nation (Gen 12:1–3); who would be guilty of apostasy and disobedience (Deut 28); who would be scattered throughout the whole world yet not without identity (Amos 9:9); who would finally be regathered to their land, resettled in it, and redeemed therein (Isa 27:12, 13; Ezek 36; Zech 12:10; Rom 11:26). Are not all these things to the very last, minute detail true of the nation Israel? And concerning the regathering with its blessed results, are we not beginning to see the very inauguration of them?

Is there another such book in existence that has such scope as this one, that can speak as authoritatively as this one, that can foresee and foretell so trustworthily as this one? Nay, verily, there is none!

The Influence of Its Power

But even if the unbelieving were to deny all the foregoing truths presented to show why the united testimony of the believing Church holds and ever has held the Bible to be God's Word, yet they could not contravene our last proof. The Scriptures are without doubt God's Word because of the influence of their power and the power of their influence. What do we mean? Just this: no book has its power to change men from sinners to saints, from bestiality to blessedness; from vice to virtue, from greed to godliness, from the pit to His presence, from hell to heaven. Paul at the end of his ministry reminds his son Timothy that it is the Scriptures alone which are able to make "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). Many books can make wise unto mathematics, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the philosophies; but only one Book has ever been able to make wise unto salvation—the Bible! Our Lord in speaking to His disciples in the upper room discourse said: "Already ye are clean because of the Word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). How many books have we ever read that could make us clean because of them? Some may be enlightening, informative, even uplifting, but can they or do they cleanse the reader? No, only the Bible has such influence, such power. It transforms drunkards, revilers, thieves, liars, harlots, fornicators, and murderers into children and sons of the living God (Eph 2:1–10).

Darwin, the evolutionist, visited Tierra del Fuego in 1833 and found a people who he thought were incapable of being civilized. He wrote: "The Fuegians are in a more miserable state of barbarism than I ever expected to have seen any human being."[8] On his second visit, thirty-six years later, he found those whom he had regarded as below domestic animals transformed by the power of the Word of God into Christians, and in his astonishment wrote: "I certainly should have predicted that

[8] See A. C. Dixon, "Scripture Inspiration and Authority: The Bible a Revelation, not an Evolution," in *Theology at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century: Essays on the Present Status of Christianity and Its Doctrines*, ed. J. Vyrnwy Morgan (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1900), 113; Charles Darwin to J. S. Henslow, April 11, 1833, *Darwin Correspondence Project*, https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-204.xml.

not all the missionaries in the world could have done what has been done. It is wonderful and it shames me, as I have always prophesied a failure. It is a grand success."[9] He then wrote a letter to the London Missionary Society: "I shall feel proud if your committee shall think fit to elect me as an honorary member of your society."[10] In the letter he enclosed about $125 for Gospel missions. Darwin saw that the Word of God could do what neither science nor any other agency could accomplish. It has transforming power.

Spurgeon, the great English preacher, at one time told the story of a poor woman who was confronted by a modern agnostic, who asked her: "What are you reading?" She said: "I am reading the Word of God." "The Word of God? Who told you that?" "He told me so Himself," she said. "Told you so? Why, how can you prove that?" Looking skyward, the poor woman said: "Can you prove to me that there is a sun up in the sky?" "Why of course; the best proof is that it warms me, and I can see its light!" "That's it!" was her joyous reply. "The best proof that this Book is the Word of God is that it warms and lights my soul."

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we know the Bible is God's Word because of the unity of its construction, because of the continuity of its existence, because of the scope of its subject matter, and because of the influence of its power. In the words of Canon Hague: "Therefore, think not of it as a good book, or even as a better book, but lift it in heart and mind and faith and love far, far above all, and ever regard it, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God; nay, more, as the living Word of the Living God; supernatural in origin; eternal in duration; inexpressible in value; infinite in scope; divine in authorship; human in penmanship; regenerative in power; infallible in authority; universal in interest; personal in application and as St. Paul declares, 'inspired' in totality."

[9] See Dixon, "Scripture Inspiration and Authority," 113; and Francis Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1887), 3:128.

[10] Ibid.

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THE CALL TO MINISTRY AND THE PLATTERED HEAD

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The Master's Seminary

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The call to ministry must be received with all its ramifications, including the plattered head. John the Baptist is depicted in Mark 6 as a man of God who fulfilled his calling to the ultimate point of his death. With such an end in view, Mark describes Christ's commission of His disciples and instructs the pastor-theologian in six areas of his ministry: 1) the preaching of the commissioned, 2) the authority of the commissioned, 3) the dependency of the commissioned, 4) the rejection of the commissioned, 5) the courage of the commissioned, and 6) the invincibility of the commissioned. In the end, even if the ministry of the man of God leads to his death, the work to which he is called will endure because it is the work of God.

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Introduction

God used a cross-country road-trip from South Carolina to California, interrupted by a one-hundred-yard stretch of Alabama asphalt, to confirm John F. MacArthur's call to ministry. MacArthur has often cited that infamous automobile accident that threw him from the vehicle as a key moment in God's providence.[1] His life spared, MacArthur knew it was time to commit to the life of pastoral ministry he had been considering for some time. After that Alabama highway, MacArthur could not imagine pursuing a lesser calling with the rest of his days.

Having been raised in a pastor's home, MacArthur was already aware of the commitments, character, and qualifications God requires of ministers. But it was not until he lay face down for three months, slowly mending his back which was mangled by that Alabama highway, that he truly understood the brevity of life and the

[1] John MacArthur, "Personal Interview with John MacArthur," *Grace to You*, June 15, 1979, accessed January 9, 2023, https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1271/personal-interview-with-john-macarthur.

seriousness required of those called to serve the Lord. Here is MacArthur reflecting on how God changed him and his view of ministry during that long summer of healing:

> I was just 18 years old at the time, and I said, "Lord, I can see now that my life is in Your hands, and You have absolute control of not only my eternal destiny but my time here in this world…." And I could see God working, so I committed my life to Christ. I spent those three months drawing close to Him and reading His Word and reaffirming my commitment to do whatever He wanted me to do.[2]

No man is ready for ministry until he comes to this sobering realization: life is a vapor (Pss 90; 103:15–16; Jas 4:14). Man has no control over how short or long that vapor will be. Our days are in God's hands, and those who would serve as God's mouthpiece must see their lives as fully at the disposal of the One who made them.

Because life is short, and the call to ministry is a sobering act of self-sacrifice and service, no man should pursue the pastorate lightly. He ought to pursue other ends, any other end, if that is God's will for his life. Spurgeon understood this acutely, stating,

> And suppose if, after having preached for some time, I hear of none who have been brought to Christ, there is no rustling among the mulberry trees, I think the best thing I can do is, to let somebody else try; for suppose I have not been called to the ministry, it would have been a fearful thing for me to have occupied the watchman's place without having received the watchman's commission. He that should take upon himself to be a policeman, and go and do the work of arresting others, without having received a commission, must be in danger of being taken up himself, for being a deceiver.[3]

If a man truly is commissioned by God, then he will have a heartfelt desire to serve God's flock. He will understand the sobering reality of God's judgment on teachers, the need for careful assessment by leaders in a local church, and the requisite gifts for pastoral ministry. He will also prioritize character and make the pursuit of holiness the central pursuit of his life. The importance of character and personal holiness in a minister cannot be overstated (Heb 12:14).[4]

But there is another element of God's commissioning of His mouthpieces. You could make the case that this aspect of the call to ministry is what Jesus emphasized most with His disciples as He prepared them for a lifetime of ministry. I am talking about the fact that the ministry may cost a man his life. Jesus understood that. He made sure His disciples understood it. Any man who enters the ministry must see his calling as one that could end with his death. As we train the next generation of pastor-theologians, we do so with a realistic awareness that the world is not a safe place for

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[2] MacArthur, "Personal Interview."

[3] C. H. Spurgeon, "The Sound in the Mulberry Trees," May 31, 1857, accessed January 9, 2023, https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0147.htm.

[4] For a helpful overview of the essential elements of the call to ministry, see John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 67–91. For an important critique of the language and dangers of the concept of the call to ministry, see Bobby Jamieson, "The Double Presumption of Calling to Ministry," *9Marks*, August 26, 2014, accessed December 31, 2022, https://www.9marks.org/article/the-double-presumption-of-calling-to-ministry.

Jesus's ambassadors. Only when we understand that do we truly understand what is required of those who minister in Jesus's name.

A passage of Scripture that powerfully describes the commitment to Christ and the centrality of suffering, or even death, in the work of the ministry is Mark 6.[5] Inspired by the Spirit and included by Mark in his carefully arranged gospel, this narrative is intended for Christians and especially their leaders, pastors, and ministers. It helps us think rightly about the call to ministry, and the sobering work that awaits those who minister in Jesus's name.

In this passage, Jesus sends His disciples out to do His work as His representatives—His sent-out ones. As Mark describes Christ's commission of His disciples, he instructs the pastor-theologian in six areas of his ministry: 1) the preaching of the commissioned, 2) the authority of the commissioned, 3) the dependency of the commissioned, 4) the rejection of the commissioned, 5) the courage of the commissioned, and 6) the invincibility of the commissioned. In the end, even if the ministry of the man of God leads to his death, the work to which he is called will endure because it is the work of God. No one will stop the work of God because the One who commissioned the task is God Himself.

The Preaching of the Commissioned

As Mark describes Christ's commissioning of His disciples, he introduces this pericope by showing that Jesus Himself was a preacher and that the disciples went out preaching the message of Christ. In its full account, Mark 6:6b–13 reads:

> And He was going around the villages, teaching. And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and was giving them authority over the unclean spirits; and He instructed them that they were to take nothing for *their* journey, except a staff only—no bread, no bag, no money in their belt— but *to* wear sandals; and *He added*, "Do not put on two tunics." And He was saying to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." And they went out and preached that *men* should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

Jesus's commissioning of these disciples was part of His final public ministry in the region of Galilee. For some time, He had been practicing the ministry He was now passing on to His disciples. Thus, as Mark speaks to the task of the preaching of the commissioned, he depicts Jesus as a model teacher and preacher for the disciples to emulate.

Jesus's teaching has been Mark's focus through the first six chapters. Though Jesus's ministry was filled with supernatural signs, wonders, and acts of compassionate healings, Mark reminds us that Jesus, more than anything else, was a teacher and preacher. The crowds marveled at the authority with which He taught,

[5] The remainder of this article is taken from a sermon preached at Shepherds' Conference 2022, entitled "Calling." The full sermon is available online at: https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/18625.

and it was His teaching ministry that set Him apart (Matt 7:28–29; Luke 4:31–32). Christ's preaching defined His ministry.

One may ask, though: What kind of a preacher was Jesus?[6] He was biblical. He was prophetic. He was powerful. He was bold. He was vivid. He was practical, clear, Spirit-empowered, uncompromising, exclusive, and authoritative. He wasn't afraid to address a wide range of topics, many of which were dangerously controversial. He preached on murder, anger, love, hypocrisy, prayer, and worship. To help the people understand, he drew from real life experiences that his hearers knew and to which they could immediately and easily relate. He used illustrations of sheep, shepherds, flowers, birds, trees, and seeds. He talked about wars, cities, towers, families, and neighbors. But He always preached the Scriptures. His intent was for the people to hear, know, and understand the eternal Word of God. To emphasize the importance of knowing God's Word, time and again He would rebuke the people for their ignorance: "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God" (cf. Matt 22:29; Luke 24:25; John 5:38–40; 20:9).

Since God sent His Son to be a preacher, it makes sense that when His Son commissioned His associates as apostles and emissaries, He too placed teaching at the forefront of their responsibilities. That is exactly what we see in Mark 6. After the men see Jesus model teaching for them in verse six, they then go out on their mission, teaching the same message that Jesus taught (cf. v. 12). Jesus said the crowds were to listen to His emissaries, not because their message was unique or stimulating, but because their message was divine truth. The content of their teaching carried authority wherever they taught. In verse 12, Mark exclaims the essence of their message, saying: "They went out and preached that *men* should repent."

God gave the world His Son and made Him a preacher. And His Son makes those who follow Him in ministry preachers. This is a simple point, but it is important, especially when preaching is not in vogue, when other functions are prioritized by churches. If you are called to ministry, you are called to preach. If you are commissioned to the work of God, then Jesus would have you be a preacher of the Word of God, because Jesus Himself was a preacher.

The Authority of the Commissioned

Not only were Jesus's followers to emulate His role as a preacher of the truth, but they were also to serve with His authority. In verse seven, Jesus sends His disciples out two by two. No doubt, this highlights the importance of partnership and collaboration in ministry. But fundamentally, this corresponded with the Deuteronomic law that two witnesses were to attest to the truthfulness of a message. As Christ sent them out, therefore, He imparted to them His authority for the work they would do and the message they would preach.

Mark's explicit remark that Christ gave the disciples authority over evil spirits served to show that the entire mission of the disciples—message and action—carried Christ's authority in this world (cf. Matt 9:1–8). This demonstrated to the watching world the power of Christ over the evil in this world. As the disciples went and

[6] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, *Volume 1: The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 113–27.

preached, the truth and power of the message was confirmed by the authority they exercised over the fallen realm of this world. The Greek word *exousia* was the hallmark of Jesus's ministry, and it defined how He preached and interacted with others. He was filled with divine authority. And at the commission, Jesus gave this authority to those who represented Him so that everyone who would hear and host them would experience a foretaste of the world to come in which Jesus will reign in absolute supremacy. As the disciples cast out demons, they showed the world that this was a breakthrough into the messianic age.

We must not neglect the seemingly simple observation that the only reason that these disciples had authority was because Jesus imparted it to them. Unlike Jesus, the disciples did not have this authority because of anything inherent within them. Rather, they had authority solely because of their relationship with Jesus. This must serve as a forceful reminder to all the ministers today who are called to preach. You have authority; but not because you are anything special. The authority of the commissioned one is a derived authority; it comes only through a relationship with the King of kings. In effect, because their authority was not inherent to themselves, the disciples were not to go out and do anything novel. They were not to be innovative. An entrepreneurial spirit is not commended in the ministry of God. Instead, the disciples were to do only what the Lord had done. Their commission was to carry the work of their Master in the same way as the Master.

Perhaps one of the reasons there is so much burnout in ministry today is because too many in ministry are trying to perform. They are trying to be innovative—to come up with some new program, vision, or message. They want to be attractive, culturally sensitive, or relevant in a constantly changing world. Perhaps there would be less burnout if pastors simply followed Jesus's example and instructions. When He sent His disciples out, He told them to preach with His authority and to do nothing different than what He had commanded them. They were to present themselves merely as representatives of Christ. They were to be nothing more than the messengers of Christ sent out with His authority.

The Dependency of the Commissioned

Not only were the disciples to emulate Jesus as a preacher and exercise His authority, but they were also to carry out the mission in full dependence on God. In verses eight through eleven, Jesus describes a specific way-of-life that the disciples were to embrace as they represented Him. In verse eight, Jesus commands that they take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts. It is as if they were to set out everything they would need, but just take one jacket. From a human perspective, this seems to be an unwise way to travel. However, Jesus is insistent that they have only four items: a belt, sandals, one tunic, and a stick. At least they got to wear shoes!

Why did Jesus give these unexpected instructions? Some commentators suggest that Jesus was mirroring the peripatetic philosopher teachers—the wise, secular gurus of His day.[7] These philosophers traveled light during their campaigns because they

[7] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 72–88.

were anti-authoritarian and anti-civilization. However, that is not what Jesus's disciples were supposed to be as Jesus sent them out on the mission. The reason they were to have a staff, belt, sandals, and one tunic was so that they would depend only on God in their ministry. MacArthur explains that with such limitations, "[the disciples] were forced to be entirely dependent on the Lord to provide."[8] Jesus's stipulations for His disciples were intended to compel the disciples to depend on God while carrying out God's mission.

In addition to this, Jesus's instructions accentuated the redemptive significance of the disciples' mission because they paralleled the instructions that God had given the nation of Israel during their exodus from Egypt. MacArthur explains:

> When the Israelites left Egypt during the exodus, the Lord God commanded them to eat the Passover meal "with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the Lord's Passover" (Ex. 12:11). Jesus similarly instructed the apostles to take only one staff, along with the clothes and sandals they were already wearing. The parallel with the Passover may have been intended to demonstrate that a new era in redemptive history was about to begin, starting with an exodus of God's true people from apostasy.[9]

Thus, this parallel between the Israelites going out of Egypt and the disciples going out as ambassadors of Christ showed the seismic nature of their ministry. The implication is that there was something greater than the first exodus. As a whole, then, Jesus was simultaneously calling the disciples to trust only in God during their mission and He was showing that His disciples were part of a major event in God's plan of redemptive history.

The lessons for the pastor-theologian today are pointed. If Jesus is the One who sent you, God will provide for you. In and of themselves, the disciples were utterly inadequate; but in Christ, they were made adequate because they were operating on the authority of Christ. On their own, they were unequipped; but in Christ, they were equipped in the ways that mattered because Jesus had sent them. If you want to prevent burnout in ministry, remember who put you in ministry. The lack of worldly riches is a daily reminder that this is not an ideal career choice if you are looking to build a kingdom on this earth. Men in ministry persevere not because of the job perks. They keep preaching, shepherding, pouring out their souls to people, and evangelizing because Jesus sent them. The source of provision for the man of God is not the successes, comforts, or luxuries of this world, but the God of the universe. If God sends you, He will sustain you.

The apostle Paul understood this principle well and imparted this truth to the Corinthian church in the following words:

> For consider your calling, brothers, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of

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[8] John MacArthur, *Mark 1–8,* MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 290.

[9] MacArthur, *Mark 1–8,* 289.

> the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may abolish the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD" (1 Cor 1:26–31).

The Rejection of the Commissioned

As Christ sends us out to preach His Word, serve with His authority, and depend solely on God, we could ask: What kind of reception should we then expect from the world as we carry out the mission of Christ? If you were expecting a red carpet to be rolled out for you, you are going to be disappointed. Jesus warns His disciples that the reception may very well be hostile. In 6:10–11, Mark writes: "And He was saying to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. And any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.'" The preacher must be prepared for rejection.

To understand this passage, and Jesus's warning, we need to understand first the importance of hospitality in the world of the New Testament. When you read John's latter epistles, in which he talks about the importance of hospitality, and receiving teachers of the truth as opposed to the false teachers, you are encountering a very common motif of the day. Travel was long, dangerous, and exhausting (cf. Luke 10:25–37). There were no Hyatt Houses. Inns of any kind were few and far between (see Luke 2). Travelers depended on the goodwill of others, even strangers. To deny a traveler your hospitality was a significant insult. To refuse hospitality to God's commissioned messenger because you did not like his message was the ultimate insult. That is why Jesus commands His followers to "shake the dust off the soles of your feet" when they were turned away (Mark 6:11). This practice was common in Jesus's day. William L. Lane explains this custom in the following way:

> It was the custom of pious Jews who had travelled outside of Israel to remove carefully from their feet and clothing all dust of the alien lands in which they had travelled. By this action they dissociated themselves from the pollution of those lands and their ultimate judgment. An analogous action on the part of the disciples would declare that a village was pagan in character. It would provide warning that the disciples had fulfilled their responsibility and that those who had rejected the mission would have to answer to God.[10]

Jesus instructed His disciples to do this because of the urgency of the message that was being rejected. He wanted His commissioned ones to treat such rejection with a sober mind. He wanted His messengers to communicate just how consequential this message was. Though this action was only reserved for the highest

[10] William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 208–209.

insults in Jesus's day, He instructed His disciples to be ready to use it because He knew what manner of reception awaited them (John 15:18–27).

The same is true of anyone who speaks for God today. The reception is often hostile. A preacher ought not to begin ministry unless he has a proper expectation for how his message will be received. He must be ready to receive rejection.

The Courage of the Commissioned

After Mark delivers the sober reality that Christ's messengers will ultimately be rejected, he proceeds to urge the men of God nonetheless to demonstrate boldness and courage. In classic Markan style, he provides a story within a story, a device that scholars call an interpretative intercalation, better known as a Markan sandwich.[11] For example, in Mark 11 we read that the fig tree is cursed by Jesus, then Jesus cleanses the temple, and when Jesus and the disciples are returning, Mark records that the fig tree is withered. This is not mere chronology. Mark recounts the cursing of the fig tree and its ultimate withering on each side of chapter 11 (11:13–14 and 11:20–21) in order to place special emphasis on the center of the story—the cleansing of the temple (11:15–18).

Similarly, in using this careful and purposeful arrangement of these stories in Mark 6, Mark intends to teach us a lesson to be men of courage. While the beginning and end of our narrative in Mark 6 relate Christ's commissioning of His disciples (6:7–13 and 6:30–32), the narrative in the middle recalls the beheading of John the Baptist (6:14–29). The death of John the Baptist is a beautiful reminder of the best and most fruitful of all of God's messengers who demonstrated courage to the point of death. Of all who would ever point to Jesus, our Lord said, "there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist!" (Matt 11:11). Thus, the purpose of Mark's structure is clear: as Christ called His disciples to preach the Word, serve with Christ's authority, depend on God, and prepare to be rejected (6:7–13), so also Christ called His disciples to demonstrate courage in the face of rejection and even death (6:14–29).[12] The voice of truth is commanded to be bold and uncompromising.

To deliver his message on courage, Mark describes the account of King Herod hearing about the mighty work of Christ—the miraculous casting out of demons, the anointing of sick people with oil, the healing that attended their preaching of repentance. He heard some saying that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead and that is why miraculous powers were at work in him. Others were saying that Jesus was Elijah. Still others claimed that He was a prophet like one of the prophets of long ago (cf. Deut 18:15, 18). When Herod considered all this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" (Mark 6:16).

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[11] Dean Deppe, *The Theological Intentions of Mark's Literary Devices: Markan Intercalations, Frames, Allusionary Repetitions, Narrative Surprises, and Three Types of Mirroring* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 30–94; see also James R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *Novum Testamentum* 31, no. 3 (1989): 196; for Triads in Mark, see David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 54–55.

[12] Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 374, n. 57.

Fear had gripped Herod, for Mark recounted in verse 17 that Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested and put in prison. Herod did this because of his brother Phillip's wife, Herodias, whom Herod had married. John the Baptist had told Herod that it was unlawful for Herod to have his brother's wife. Because of this, Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted him killed, but she was not able to carry this out because Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.

Herod was certainly correct to have this perspective of John. John was committed to righteousness and holiness. He cared about people preparing themselves for Jesus because Jesus was present; all the while, in absolute humility, John deemed himself unworthy even to untie Jesus's sandals. John did not care if you were a fake king like Herod. He wanted everyone to know that God demands perfect righteousness. John fearlessly preached that the Son of Man, the One of whom the prophets had prophesied, had come in the flesh to walk among men. This Man Jesus was going to restore everything that God had promised. He was going to bring about a kingdom in which God will be exalted on a throne. This was John's preeminent concern—to point to Christ. John was not worried about reaching retirement age. John was not concerned if people thought his ministry was relevant or irrelevant to common cultural concerns. John had zero regard for being well liked.

John cared only about pointing to Jesus, and in this, John demonstrated his greatness. There are only two passages in Mark that are not about Jesus. The first is in chapter one, which is the description of John's ministry, and the second is here in the middle of Mark 6. These are significant passages that point to the boldness, the uncompromising nature, and the unflagging courage of John the Baptist. This graphic execution, this story within a story, is not intended to scare us, but to embolden us by giving us an example of a man who demonstrated courage that is to be emulated. John is not only the Lord's forerunner in life; he is also the Lord's forerunner in death. Mark depicts John as a model who is to be carried in front of the eyes of every man who would serve and represent Jesus.

The courage of John is unequivocal and emphatic, especially in the light of Mark's vivid description of John's death. Mark states that one day, Herod gave himself a birthday party.[13] He commanded the attendance of his high officials, military commanders, and leading men of Galilee. For purposes of sensual entertainment, they brought in a girl to dance in this male-dominated event. Identifying this girl, historians tell us it was Salome, the daughter of Herodias.[14] Meanwhile, Herodias was vexed that her marriage certificate in this incestuous and adulterous relationship with Herod would not be validated until it was validated by the blood of John the Baptist (v. 19). Thus, she was plotting against John from the start, sending her daughter into this foul crowd of men on "a strategic day" (v. 21).[15] The girl danced and the king responded: "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you" (v. 22). He was not merely saying empty words but made this promise with an oath: "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half my kingdom"

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[13] See William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 220.

[14] Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 485.

[15] See William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 220.

(v. 23). The diabolical scheme of Herodias advanced toward its climax as the daughter went to her mother, and her mother declared what she wanted—"The head of John the Baptist" (v. 24). So the girl returned with this gruesome demand: "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter" (v. 25).

With this, the debauched feast ended in a tragedy. The one voice who declared the truth—who did not care if you were a king—had his head cut off. Though Herod himself ordered this, yet he became terrified. J. C. Ryle says, "A friendless solitary preacher with no other weapon than God's truth disturbs and terrifies a king."[16] Nevertheless, Herod was more afraid of his friends than of killing a righteous man; and Herod was not afraid of God. Despite his hollow regret, Herod sent an executioner to bring John's severed head. The man of death went, beheaded the man of God, and brought his head on a platter. He presented John's head to the girl, and she delivered it to her mother. This story is ugly, murderous, and tragic. And it vividly demonstrates the reality, that those who love sin will do what it takes to silence the voice of the righteous.

Though John's life was snuffed out from him, in his death John proved bold, courageous, and uncompromising. He preferred favor with God that resulted in death over favor with man that would preserve his life. MacArthur has frequently said: "You can be faithful or you can be popular, but you can rarely be both." The plattered head of John is an image for us of unyielding courage. We are called to go and speak on behalf of our Lord. We are called to preach with His authority and His power. We are called to live out the courage and boldness of John, even if it costs us our life.

The only decency in this story is the burial of the body of John. In verse 29, Mark writes that John's disciples came to retrieve his body and then laid him in a tomb. With no further comment, verse 30 says, "And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught." With this return to the commission of the disciples of Jesus, Mark declared to Christ's messengers the manner with which they are to carry out Christ's mission—with the courage of John the Baptist.

The Invincibility of the Commissioned

As the commissioned pastor-theologian devotes himself to preaching the Word, serving with Christ's authority, depending on God, being ready for rejection, and demonstrating courage that may lead even to death—as the man of God commits to this ministry, he ought to be encouraged and driven by the reality that his work is invincible because it is the mission of God. Whatever we do for Jesus cannot be stopped. Mission and martyrdom are inseparable. Discipleship and death go hand in hand. But the death of a man of God preaches forth the marvelous work of Christ.

The persecution and death of the saints grows the true church of God. Tertullian is known for declaring that the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church. If we understand this, we will be bold for Christ because we will live in light of the fact that the work that Christ will do through us is ultimately invincible. God uses the death of the martyrs to build His church. While John's voice was silenced by death, his blood continues to cry out from the ground (cf. Gen 4:10; Heb 12:24). John declared that his purpose in life was that "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John

[16] J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 117.

3:30). Not only did John decrease; he died! But in his death, Jesus increased. The message of John—which was the message of Jesus—persevered even after John's death, because the work of the commissioned is invincible.

Conclusion

As we fulfill God's call to be pastor-theologians, many will need to carry out this calling unto death. That is why Jesus declared in Mark 8:34, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." The call to ministry needs to be seen in the light of the plattered head. But after the plattered head comes eternal life with Christ Jesus. John the Baptist, who is now in the presence of Christ, is more alive today than he ever had been before. While saints may spill their blood for the name of Christ, Christ shed His blood—a blood that is perfect and a blood that atones—for the salvation of His saints. Because of the saving blood of Christ, every believer who fulfills the commission of Christ will say in the end: It was worth it!

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TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 27–49

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

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The Master's University and Seminary

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For over 50 years, Dr. John MacArthur has engaged in faithful exposition of God's Word. What has attracted people to his preaching is neither creative theology nor homiletical theatrics, but that he unleashes God's truth one verse at a time. His hermeneutic simply endeavors to bring forth all that Scripture says with the confidence that it is absolutely authoritative and sufficient. In some ways, my life as an instructor of hermeneutics has been to reverse engineer Dr. MacArthur, to explain how he does what he does. And what makes his preaching work is that it is so in tune with how the Scripture works. His insistence on detailed exposition, going word by word, and comparing Scripture with Scripture, taps into how the biblical writers read God's Word and, under the inspiration of the Spirit, designed it to be read. Years of faithful study have not only conformed his heart and life in alignment with the Scriptures, but his hermeneutic as well. His ministry is a testament to the beauty and depth of championing the authorial intent of Scripture alone.

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Every pastor-theologian stands in the succession of the men of God who have gone before him. The hermeneutic of the pastor-theologian is not one of his own making. Rather, it is one handed down by those who not only wrote the Scriptures but who themselves also handled the Word of God throughout all redemptive history. To truly uphold biblical hermeneutics as a pastor-theologian, one must humbly study the Scripture in its literal, grammatical, and historical context, just as the biblical writers did. Only then can the pastor-theologian ensure that every single word of the inerrant, inspired Word of God is upheld with the author's true intent, as God intended it.

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Introduction

On the day he died, Moses finished writing the book of the law, and upon entrusting it into the care of the Levites, he gave them the following charge:

> At the end of *every* seven years, at the time of the year of the remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before Yahweh your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and little ones and the sojourner who is within your gates, so that they may hear and so that they may learn and fear Yahweh your God and be careful to do all the words of this law. (Deut 31:10–12)

From the very moment the Word was written, God commissioned His people to handle it well, a commission that continued throughout Israel's history. After Moses' death, God impressed this charge to the next generation, commanding Joshua to be courageous in living out God's Word and to meditate upon it day and night (Josh 1:7–8). Joshua in turn stressed to those who followed him that they too were accountable to every word of God's Word (23:14). David heeded this exhortation as he repeated it (Pss 27:14; 31:24; 63:6) and practiced it, meditating upon Scripture (Ps 119:148) and recounting precise details of the law (2 Sam 12:6; cf. Exod 22:1).[1] He charged his son Solomon to understand the Scripture with such precision (1 Kgs 2:3), which reaffirmed the standard for every Davidic king (Deut 17:18–20).

Those who wrote wisdom literature upheld the charge to rightly divide God's Word. They reiterated past revelation (Pss 78; 104–6; 114), urged Israel to muse deeply and meditate upon it (1:2; 63:6; 119:15, 23, 27), and demanded strict conformity to exactly what it said. Asaph condemned Israel's leaders for abusing God's Word (cf. 50:16). Picking up the words of Moses (cf. Deut 4:1–2), Agur emphasized that any interpretation that went outside of God's intent is false. He warned, "Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar" (Prov 30:6). The prophets maintained this mentality. They not only affirmed what God had spoken (cf. Isa 1:2; Jer 17:1–8), but constantly warred against false prophets who added words and meanings to what had been written (cf. Jer 23:16; 28:1–17; Hos 9:7). Ezekiel, like Agur, declared that any such activity was simply prophesying from one's own heart (Ezek 13:2) and walking in one's own spirit (13:3). All the way to exile (cf. 2 Kgs 17:13–14), the prophets condemned any attempt to twist God's Word.

After Israel's return from Babylon, men like Ezra and Nehemiah championed the charge for hermeneutical fidelity to God's Word. Ezra sought to study, live, and teach the law (Ezra 7:10), exemplifying a pattern for a life of studying the Word of God. Nehemiah recounted how the Levites, those charged by Moses long ago to uphold the law, resumed that task and were "explaining and giving insight" to God's Word (Neh 8:8). The Hebrew word "explaining" (מְפֹרָשׁ) denotes the idea of translation and describes articulating the meaning of words and phrases. Such explanation provides the

[1] In response to Nathan's parable, David declared that the man should pay fourfold, which is according to the law in Exodus 22:1. Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 370.

sense of what the text says.[2] The phrase "giving insight" (וְשׂוֹם שֶׂכֶל) deals with helping people see the implications of the text's meaning on thought and life.[3] In sum, the Levites in Nehemiah's day were conveying the meaning of the text and explaining its ramifications, the very framework of biblical exposition.[4]

In the New Testament, our Lord is the most profound biblical interpreter, proclaiming the true meaning of Scripture over and against the misconceptions of the day (cf. Matt 5:21–48). He was zealous for the integrity of God's Word, confronting the religious leaders for their incorrect, legalistic, and hypocritical understanding of Scripture (cf. Matt 15:1–14; 23:1–39; Luke 11:37–54). He declared what the prophets have spoken (Luke 24:25). In fact, one scholar keenly observed our Lord's impeccable hermeneutic:

> Contrary to some misguided modern interpreters, there is never any suggestion in the Gospels of Jesus opposing the Torah, the law of God, the OT. It is always a matter of Jesus' true exposition of scripture against the misunderstanding and/or misapplication of it by the dominant scripture-scholars of his day. This becomes apparent in Jesus' encounters with such rabbis in numerous debates, a number of which the Evangelists are careful to retain.[5]

Our Lord's fidelity to Scripture continued in His apostles.[6] They certainly upheld the hermeneutical integrity that their predecessors all had. In his final words to Timothy, Paul urged his son in the faith to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). In his final words to the church, Peter reminded his readers that Scripture is

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[2] *HALOT*, 2:976; M. Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 225; C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 217; H. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 290; D. Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 217. There is debate over whether this pertains to translation or interpretation or breaking down a text paragraph by paragraph in oral reading. The root fundamentally deals with breaking apart whereby one distinguishes or indicates one from another by separation. The three options debated are not mutually exclusive. Translation is a form of interpretation; it is the fundamental expression of meaning in a text. Breaking down that explanation paragraph by paragraph would be sensible in any translation or reading of Scripture. Most likely, all of them were involved and entailed by the term. That being said, the fundamental notion of a systematic explanation of the meaning is in view, one where every segment of the law was elucidated from the original in a way that the audience could understand.

[3] *HALOT*, 2:1329. Insight is not merely the same as the comprehension of meaning. For example, 1 Chronicles 22:12 discusses insight into perception of a situation. Proverbs 13:15 and 19:11 speak likewise. That is why the term is linked with success (Prov 3:4).

[4] John MacArthur, "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy? Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 30.

[5] E. Earle Ellis, "How Jesus Interpreted His Bible," *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 2 (1989): 350.

[6] In fact, they even interpreted the same passages the same way our Lord did. For example, Jesus asserted that "love your neighbor" is one of the greatest commandments (Matt 22:39) and they maintain that (cf. Rom 13:9–10; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8). Our Lord asserted that Psalm 110 was about Himself, and the apostles do so without exception (cf. Eph 1:20; Heb 1:13). For more examples and the significance of such consistency especially in light of the diversity of interpretation at the time, see Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning Interpretation from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 155–91.

not up to one's personal interpretation (2 Pet 1:20).[7] It is striking that the last words of the biblical writers—from Moses to Paul to Peter—are filled with exhortations to handle Scripture accurately. The biblical writers not only passed their ministry to the next generation but also, centrally within that, imparted a hermeneutical commission.

So there has always been a call for hermeneutical fidelity, from the very moment the Word was given. Hermeneutics is not merely an academic subject of the ivory tower, but part of the sacred trust of ministry. So every pastor-theologian, who joins the ranks of the men of God before them (1 Tim 6:11; cf. Deut 33:1; 1 Sam 9:7; 1 Kgs 17:18; Neh 12:24), upholds the sacred duty to "not shrink back from declaring the whole purpose of God" (cf. Acts 20:27).[8] It behooves those who serve in this office to comprehend fully and take up the hermeneutical mantle that their predecessors practiced as they read and declared their Bible.

Presuppositions

According to Scripture, the starting point of our hermeneutical responsibility is our view of God's Word. For example, Moses reminded Israel that because God's Word is what comes to pass, they must treat the Bible as truth and heed it carefully (Deut 18:19–22). Paul declared that because Scripture is the word of truth, one must handle it precisely (2 Tim 2:15). Various biblical writers assert that because Scripture is the pristine articulation of God's revelation, one can never add or subtract from God's Word or go beyond what is written (Deut 4:1–2; Prov 30:6; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 John 1:9). Peter wrote that since Scripture is inspired, the oracles of God are not up to one's own interpretation (2 Pet 1:20–21). In the logic of Scripture, bibliological indicatives set up for hermeneutical imperatives. To truly uphold biblical hermeneutics, one must embrace the Bible's depiction of itself.

So what are these bibliological presuppositions? Fundamentally, the biblical writers viewed the Scripture as divine revelation (cf. Deut 29:29; 2 Sam 7:27; Dan 7:28; Eph 3:3). From the very first book written, the prophets and apostles constantly recounted to God's people that while man may possess some intelligence, there are truths he does not know, truths that God must reveal (Job 28:28; cf. Deut 29:29; Prov 25:2; Acts 17:27–31; Eph 3:3–5). As Scripture elsewhere states, the secret things belong to the Lord (Deut 29:29), and God's glory is found in concealing a matter (Prov 25:2) as well as revealing mysteries (cf. Eph 3:3–5; Rev 1:1–2). The biblical writers recognized that their field of view is limited. They cannot discern

[7] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 322.

[8] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 392; John B. Polhill, *Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 426; Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 629; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 622. Bock rightly observes, "In referring to 'the whole counsel of God,' Paul appears to have in mind all that is a part of God's plan as it is tied to the preaching of the gospel (1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:4; Squires 1993)" (Bock, *Acts*, 629). Such a will or plan is tied with the Scripture that revealed such a plan (cf. Isa 55:7–11). Polhill rightly states, "Paul had preached the full gospel, the whole will of God. He had called people to repentance. Now the responsibility rested with them. Again, this remark is not to be seen so much as Paul's defense of himself as an example to the Ephesian leaders. They were to do what Paul had done before them, herald the gospel and call to repentance. This is the task of a Christian witness, to proclaim the full will of God. Witnesses can do no more" (Polhill, *Acts*, 426).

transcendent truth (Isa 45:15).[9] Only God, who "looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens" (Job 28:24), understands the fulness of reality (28:27). Thus, one cannot lean on his own understanding (Prov 3:5) but instead must fear God (1:7). That is the beginning of wisdom, for in fearing God, a person finally listens to the One who knows what He is talking about and becomes wise.[10] Thus, the entire point of divine revelation is to provide the truth that one desperately needs but cannot know on his own. And that means that the entire point of interpreting such revelation must be to learn and conform to the truth that one does not know. Man's reasoning is not equal to, nor a judge of, nor a partner with, nor the purpose of divine revelation. Interpretation is not about amplifying one's creativity but about submitting to the instruction of one's Creator. That is why God gave revelation in the first place (cf. Deut 29:29b). In that way, the doctrine of revelation establishes a hermeneutical mentality of *sola Scriptura*, that one must always tremble before God's Word (Isa 66:2).

The biblical writers believed that such divine and authoritative revelation is uniquely found in every word of Scripture. This moves the discussion from the doctrine of revelation to the doctrine of inspiration. The prophets and apostles testified that the words written down in the Bible were God's very own words. The Lord told Moses that He would put His words in Moses' mouth (Exod 4:15). The Lord confirmed that He speaks through the prophets and "mouth to mouth" with Moses (Num 12:8). David articulated this notion in his final words, "The Spirit of Yahweh spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Sam 23:2). The prophets likewise asserted that the Word of Yahweh came to them to reveal (Isa 38:4; Jer 1:2; Ezek 1:3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jon 1:1; Mic 1:1). Peter affirmed this truth, testifying that these men were moved by the Spirit such that while they themselves spoke, they spoke from God (2 Pet 1:21). Paul also upheld that the biblical writers were under the perfect superintendence of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10).[11] That apostle not only stated that the authors were inspired but that all that they wrote was inspired as well (2 Tim 3:16).[12] In essence, the human words written down in Scripture are God's words; they are all one and the same words. That is why, in introducing the Scripture, the New Testament writers can say that a book written by a certain prophet (Matt 3:3; cf. Isa 40:3) was also written by the Lord (Matt

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[9] In speaking of the reality that Yahweh hides Himself, Oswalt rightly comments, "Rom. 1 and Ps. 19:2–7 (Eng. 1–6) make plain that there is enough revelation in nature that all of us who do not seek God on his terms are without excuse. Nevertheless, it is evident that nature alone is never enough so that the unaided human intellect can attain to an understanding of God (Rom. 11:23; Prov. 25:2)." See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40–66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 216.

[10] That is the notion of fearing God in the context of Job, the original time when the fear of God is linked with wisdom (cf. Job 28:28). Francis puts it well, "Wisdom is observable in the universe because God embodied it in his creation when he 'saw', 'reckoned', 'organized' and 'fathomed'. Men can see this for themselves, but only when God himself shows it to them (Rom. 1:19)." See Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1976), 246.

[11] See discussion in Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 126–27.

[12] Note that 2 Timothy 3:16 does not speak of the authors but Scripture (γραφὴ) itself. The very writing and all of it (πᾶσα) is God-breathed.

1:22; cf. Isa 7:14). The human and divine authors are so harmonious that they can be interchanged without issue. Their writing and meaning are one. This is the nature of verbal plenary inspiration.[13]

With such a view of Scripture, the biblical writers always understood that the meaning of the text is what the author established. The entire point of their insistence of Scripture's inspiration was to demonstrate the divine authorship of Scripture. So any notion that meaning is what the reader desired or what a text could mean was absolutely foreign to them. Scripture is always the words from God (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16), what the inspired prophets have spoken (Luke 24:25), what came by the word of Yahweh (1 Kgs 13:26; Jer 28:12; Ezek 6:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1). Equally, the biblical writers' conviction about inspiration drove them to be bold and certain about the meaning of Scripture. Both the author (2 Pet 1:19–21) and his writing are inspired (2 Tim 3:16), so that there is no breakdown of communication from the author to the text. That God used man to write His words in human language (cf. 2 Pet 1:21) indicates that the meaning is accessible. God has not hidden His intent in veiled speech (Num 12:8; Isa 45:19) nor in any unbeknownst properties of language.[14] Divine revelation is conveyed in a way that people normally communicate. That is only further ensured by the Spirit's illuminating work in the believer's life (cf. 1 Cor 2:14–16; Eph 1:18). To be sure, all of this does not mean that everything in Scripture requires little effort to grasp. God can speak in riddles (Ezek 17:2; Ps 78:2) and parables (Matt 13) to hide truth from those in judgment. Peter wrote that some things of Paul are "hard to understand" (δυσνόητά).[15] Nevertheless, though by design some things may be hidden to the unbeliever or may require more work, by that same design, God declared that these very mysteries are given to believers to understand (Matt 13:11,

[13] See John F. MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 77–82; Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 39–53; Joel Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Revelation and God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 325–32. The concursive or confluent relationship between the human and divine authors argues against inspired sensus plenior types of notions that contend for a deeper divine sense than the human author communicated. Cf. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter*, 324. Schreiner comments, "We have strong biblical support here for what B. B. Warfield called concursus. Both human beings and God were fully involved in the process of inspiration. The personality and gifts of the human authors were not squelched or suppressed. We can detect their different literary styles even today. And yet the words they spoke do not cancel out the truth that they spoke the word of God. Concursus means that both God and human beings contributed to the prophetic word. Ultimately, however, and most significantly, these human words are God's words" (324). See also B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1948), 83–96; Peter Voorwinde, "Old Testament Quotations in Peter's Epistles," *Vox reformata* 49 (1987): 3–16. Interestingly enough, Voorwinde finds that Peter used Scripture contextually, grammatically, and in conjunction with redemptive history.

[14] See discussion in Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 218: "In vv. 18–19 verbs for speaking occur four times. This is of utmost importance. How do we know the ineffably transcendent God? In only one way: if he communicates himself to us in ways that are intelligible to us."

[15] See BDAG, 265. See also Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter*, 396; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 303; Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 331.The word δυσνόητά does not mean impossible to understand but that which is difficult or requires great effort. As Schreiner puts it, "The term *dysnoētos* is used of matters that are difficult to interpret. Misinterpretation, however, is inexcusable" (396).

16) and are clear enough to interpret (2 Pet 1:20–21; 3:16b).[16] The prophets and apostles boldly stood and declared "Thus says the Lord" because they knew with certainty who wrote the Scriptures and what He wrote. The doctrine of inspiration drove their conviction about the standard and certainty of hermeneutics.

The prophets and apostles understood their Bible not only as inspired, divine revelation, but also as inerrant revelation. They knew that God cannot lie (cf. Num 23:19; Titus 1:2), and so there are no lies in any of His words (Rev 22:6; cf. Isa 65:16).[17] They recognized that God's Word always took place whereas false prophecy never came to pass (cf. Deut 18:22). They were also able to distinguish between biblical narratives and stories from pagan myths around them (1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 4:4; Titus 1:14; 2 Pet 1:16). In saying that the Bible is the truth (John 17:17), the biblical authors believed that biblical assertions were not merely factual and historical, but that they also articulated the very categories and definitions of the world (cf. Prov 8:22–36). According to Scripture, truth is not merely an accurate idea, but that which encompasses the totality of reality about heaven and earth (Gen 1:1; Rev 22), natural and supernatural (Gen 1; Isa 27:1; Rev 12:1–17), temporal and eternal (2 Cor 4:16–18; 1 Pet 4:12–19). Truth can set one free (cf. John 8:32) because it is tied to the very person and divine work of God's Son, who, as the Truth, is Lord over all things, the Creator of both old and new creations (Col 1:15–20). Because Scripture is such truth, it can sanctify, for it has the power to transform people from the darkness of falsehood into the light of truth and reality (John 17:17).[18] Put simply, the Word that created light is the same Word that creates light in one's heart at salvation (2 Cor 4:6). God's Word is so true that it creates and grounds reality, and

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[16] See Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 331. Bauckham argues that "hard to understand" refers not to the impossibility of understanding but the complexity in understanding Paul's writings, especially in light of the whole. Bauckham further observes that misinterpretation does not occur because of difficult writing but because one is untaught and unstable. This illustrates that meaning is accessible in the text but that a reader can be perverted and pervert the meaning of the text. At the same time, the text can have intentional omissions. For example, Peter acknowledges that the timing of the fulfillment of prophecy is not given (1 Pet 1:11). See J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 41. Some also point to the end of Daniel 8, where the prophet stated that there was no one to make him understand his vision (וְאֵין מֵבִין), to argue that the prophets did not understand what they were writing or that the meaning was hidden. The role of מֵבִין in Daniel is similar to the interpreting angel in Zechariah (Zech 1:9, 13, 14; 2:3) or the individual in Ezekiel (Ezek 40:3). Such an individual explained further ramifications of the vision, but the substance of the vision was already understood by the prophet. After all, Daniel understood enough of the vision to be deeply disturbed (Dan 8:27) and later usage of "understanding" applied to the timing of events (Dan 9:2, 22–23). This coincides with what Peter discussed (cf. 1 Pet 1:11). One way to articulate is that relative to intent, the framing of what is said, why it is said, and the range of ramifications, divine and human authors are united. Of course, within the range of ramifications, God knows all the possible and right implications of the text (timing of a fulfilled prophecy, how different people will particularly apply the text in their lives) but nevertheless, the intent that sets the parameters of all of this is conscious to both the divine and human authors. Put differently, the biblical writers understood what the text actually answered as opposed to other issues that were not revealed.

[17] G. K. Beale, "Can the Bible Be Completely Inspired by God and yet Still Contain Errors? A Response to Some Recent 'Evangelical' Proposals," *Westminster Theological Journal* 73, no. 1 (March 2011): 1–22. Accordingly, there are also no contradictions within Scripture, which is part of the basis for systematic theology. Since the whole Scripture ultimately shares one divine Author and is consistent within itself, it is united and thereby has specific foci and speaks to them without contradiction but with perfect, consistent, and compounding unity.

[18] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 566.

the biblical authors believed every part of Scripture carries this divine truth. They appealed to events (Mark 2:25), single phrases (Rom 9:25–30), individual words (Heb 3–4), the syntax of a word (Gal 3:16), and even a verb tense (Matt 22:32) to establish theology. Thus, the biblical writers' belief in the inerrant Word instilled in them the conviction that each word and feature of Scripture authoritatively and powerfully articulated the very fabric of reality, knowledge, the world, and its history from beginning to end.

Finally, the biblical writers were well aware of what was inspired and that which was not. They understood canon. Joshua knew the sacredness of the law of Moses (Josh 1:8). Other Old Testament writers were familiar with and appealed to their predecessors (1 Kgs 2:1–3; Pss 78; 104–6; Isa 1:1–3; Jer 17:5–8; Mal 4:4). The New Testament also understood the corpus of inspired books calling it the Law and the Prophets (Luke 24:27; Acts 28:23; Rom 3:21) or the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). The apostles quoted or alluded to every book of the Old Testament affirming their awareness of the inspiration and authority of each of these books.[19] Even within the New Testament, Paul affirmed the writings of Luke (1 Tim 5:8; cf. Luke 10:7), and Peter affirmed what Paul wrote (2 Pet 3:15). The biblical writers could identify the standard of sound words (2 Tim 1:13),[20] and entrusted the faith once for all handed down to the saints (Jude 3) to subsequent generations to preach (cf. 2 Tim 2:2; 4:1) and defend (Jude 3). For them, the Bible was not merely one of many books or even a unique book, but *the* unique book. And they handed down this book to each generation to be rightly handled as the word of truth (cf. 2 Tim 2:15).

With that, the biblical authors have not only given us their Bible but along with it, their convictions about it. This Word is certain in its interpretation for it is God's inspired Word, every word of it is His divine communication. This Word is all-sufficient and rises above every thought or idea, for it is divine revelation, that which inherently transcends man's finite discernment. This Word is sophisticated, for it is God's inerrant Word, every detail of it communicating the most profound truth. The reason the prophets and apostles could powerfully and profoundly declare God's Word was because they understood what it is. The hermeneutic of the pastor-theologian who follows in the footsteps of the prophets and apostles must be determined by their high view and love for Scripture.

Literal

The biblical writers' presuppositions about Scripture drove their commitment to interpreting God's Word literally, that is, upholding authorial

[19] Even supposed exceptions like Song of Songs (Song 5:2; Rev 3:20) and Esther (Esth 5:3, 6; cf. Mark 6:23) are alluded to in the NT.

[20] George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 381. The standard of sound words most likely refers to apostolic teaching and implies the existence of a set faith, an established set of NT teaching. This indicates a canonical awareness about the NT early on. See also Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 42. Some argue that "the faith" (τῇ…πίστει) merely describes the gospel. See Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 32. However, even in its derivation in Paul, it refers to not merely gospel belief but one's entire life driven by biblical truth which involves the gospel (cf. 1 Tim 3:9; 4:6; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:7; Titus 1:13).

intent.[21] As mentioned, the doctrine of inspiration inextricably ties every word written in Scripture with the divine and human author. That means that one cannot pit or divide the human author against the divine author to argue for a deeper meaning of the text.[22] Because man spoke from God, their intention is unified[23] and according to Peter, such intent is the meaning of the text (2 Pet 1:19–21).[24] As a result, the reader does not have the right to redefine the text. As our Lord declared, the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35); it cannot be overridden by one's personal preferences. Furthermore, what a text could potentially mean is not legitimate either. After all, the religious leaders technically upheld the wording of the law, but Christ condemned them because they used Scripture contrary to what God desired (Matt 15:1–8). Likewise, Satan simply quoted Psalm 91, but our Lord rebuked him because the devil used the passage in a way that countered the psalmist's purpose (Matt 4:6–7). Just because the words of the text may agree with one's interpretation does not make it right. The hermeneutical standard of Scripture is above what a reader desires, what text can mean, or what appeals to divine deeper meaning. The meaning of Scripture is locked to what God conveyed through man in normal language, and anyone that perverts this intention twists the Scripture to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16).[25] Authorial intent is the goal and standard for interpretation.

That being said, how did scriptural authors exactly conceptualize authorial intent? A sound approach to this question is to examine how the prophets and apostles

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[21] The notion of literal can include the idea of historical or physical interpretation (as opposed to metaphorical or abstract). It can also include the notion of a reading that is "plain" as in accepting speech at face value. The term literal can even be used in the vernacular as an emphatic. In this discussion, literal refers to authorial intent. Such reading does not prohibit metaphorical language by any means as authors have the prerogative to utilize such figures of speech. However, it does emphasize that the author is the decider on such speech as opposed to the reader. See below.

[22] For more information on the view of *sensus plenior* see Raymond E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of Sensus Plenior," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953): 141–62; Rudolph Bierberg, "Does Sacred Scripture Have a Sensus Plenior?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 10 (1948): 182–95; Raymond Edward Brown, "Theory of a Sensus Plenior," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (April 1953): 141–162; Robert L. Thomas, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 241–70.

[23] Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter*, 324. That being said, one can differentiate between the knowledge of all possible implications or ramifications within that set range. For example, there may be many applications and particular actions of any biblical command. God in His omniscience knows all of them and how one text will rightly be applied by His people throughout the ages. However, the human author does not know that. Nevertheless, intent does not claim exhaustive knowledge of these ramifications but rather sets the parameters of them. In establishing the outline or framework of legitimate implications, the human and divine authors are united.

[24] See discussion in Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 231–33. Most likely, interpretation (ἐπίλυσις) does not merely have the notion of interpretation but is linked with origination. Specifically, certain Greek translations of Genesis 40:8 utilize the term and show how it connects origination and interpretation; namely, divine vision and revelation comes with its own interpretation. Therefore, because God's revelation is from Him and bound to His intent, it is not up to one's own understanding.

[25] Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter*, 323: "Peter likely was attacking the opponents, arguing that they interpreted prophecy to support their own views. In doing so they resisted the proper interpretation given by the apostles." Note also that in 2 Peter 3:16, Peter attributes the content and meaning of certain inspired texts to Paul's intent. He is the one who wrote about salvation in wisdom (λαλῶν ἐν αὐταῖς περὶ τούτων; cf. 2 Pet 3:15–16a) and that is found in his epistles (ἐν πάσαις ἐπιστολαῖς). By twisting the epistles, they were twisting Paul's intent which makes authorial intent the standard.

thought of their fellow authors as well as the nature of intent. Put differently, one can observe how the biblical authors read and how they wrote. Concerning the former, contrary to higher criticism which viewed the biblical writers as compilers of disparate political and cultic material, the biblical authors portrayed themselves as those immersed in Scripture. They valued meditating upon God's Word (Josh 1:8), and doing so day and night (Pss 1:2; 63:6; 119:148). The apostles commented that the prophets constantly searched the Scripture (1 Pet 1:10). And the prophets' engagement in Scripture was both extensive and exhaustive. Individuals like Moses (Deut 1–4), Joshua (Josh 24), David (2 Sam 7:23), Solomon (1 Kgs 8:12–21), Asaph (Ps 78), the psalmists (Pss 104–6; 114), the prophets (Ezek 16; 23; Dan 9:1–19; Hos 12;), and Nehemiah (Neh 8) were able to recount the breadth of the biblical storyline even while articulating precise phrasing and details found in earlier revelation.[26] Our Lord (Luke 11:51; 24:27) and the apostles (Rom 1–3; Eph 1–3; Gal 3–4; Heb 11; 1 Pet 2:6–12; Jude 5–7; Rev 12:1–6) followed suit.[27] The prophets and apostles were not consumed with political agendas or religious tradition; they were consumed with the glories of God in His Word. And the Bible they read was not a series of disconnected sources but one cohesive and interwoven revelation. That is what they claimed and how they read it.

The way the biblical writers read their Bible is also the way they wrote it. Just as they understood Scripture as an interconnected whole, so they connected their own writings into previous revelation. This is why scholars readily observe the heavily inter-textual nature of Scripture.[28] Some estimate that the apostles reference the Old Testament on average every one in ten verses.[29] Within the Old Testament, allusions are equally ubiquitous.[30] The prophets and apostles linguistically anchor their writings with their predecessors, even correlating multiple texts together (cf. Rom 9:25–33; 10:18–20; Gal 4:27–30; Heb 4:3–7; 1 Pet 2:5–8) just like their forerunners. In doing so, under the inspiration of the Spirit, they advanced the very theological themes and ideas that had been discussed in earlier revelation.[31] They were consciously writing theology. Peter asserted this

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[26] Paul R. House, "Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005): 229–45.

[27] Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 155–91.

[28] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, reprint ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017); Craig C. Broyles, "Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon," in *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*, ed. Craig C. Broyles (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 157–76; Klyne Snodgrass, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in *Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 29–54. Due to the controversy over the term intertextuality, the slightly revised spelling inter-textuality is used to differentiate the literary phenomenon of the interconnectivity of texts as opposed to the term which is tied with the agenda of deconstruction. See David I. Yoon, "The Ideological Inception of Intertextuality and Its Dissonance in Current Biblical Studies," *Currents in Biblical Research* 12, no. 1 (October 2013): 76.

[29] Snodgrass, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," 29–34.

[30] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 3–17.

[31] This is the basis for biblical and systematic theology. See Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 71–80. See also S. L. Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New: An Argument for Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980). The biblical writers by tying passages together developed biblical themes. The

about David. He claimed that David, being a prophet, knew the ramifications of the Davidic covenant and wrote Psalm 16 looking forward to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:30–31). The same apostle later commented that though the prophets may not have known the timing of the fulfillments of their prophecies, they did comprehend what the Spirit within them was revealing concerning the "sufferings of Christ and the glories thereafter" (1 Pet 1:11).[32] Our Lord affirmed that the Old Testament deliberately bore witness of Him (John 5:39). None of these statements describe the biblical authors as speaking better than they knew. To be sure, there was revelation that they did not know, mysteries that God hid from them (Eph 3:9), but what was revealed, the scriptural writers understood with the theological depth intended. That is how they read and how they wrote.

Hence, though the biblical writers penned narratives, prophecies, genealogies, laws, and poetry, they consciously did all of this with a theological purpose. That is why Paul declared that "these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Cor 10:11), "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction" (Rom 15:4), and that Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). On the surface, the biblical authors wrote in many parts and in many ways (Heb 1:1), but everything they wrote had a theological point. By the immediate context or connection with antecedent revelation, the prophets and apostles set up their history and prophecies to highlight the great works of God (Pss 105:1; 106:2; 111:2–4) as He advanced His plan and promises from beginning to end. Genealogies link with the agenda of Genesis 3:15 and trace the search for the birth of the Seed of the woman.[33] Poetry reflects upon the character of God and communicates deep meditations upon His promises. Epistles contemplate the person and work of God and apply those truths to life. The law is designed to use commands to point to theological truths; in fact, the very word "law" (תּוֹרָה) means "to point" for that reason.[34] Even building plans are

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intertwining of these biblical themes and the constants within them are the underpinnings of systematic theology. The interconnectivity of Scripture is also the literary grounds, theological basis, and hermeneutical control for phenomenon like typology. After all, typology as the connection between people, things, or events is a form of inter-textuality. True biblical typology can often identify a linguistic pattern between texts that set a forward trajectory that is picked up by the New Testament. See James Hamilton, "The Typology of David's Rise to Power: Messianic Patterns in the Book of Samuel," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, no. 16 (2012): 4–25; Aubrey Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2017): 11–34; Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Τυπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981); Richard Joseph Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Abner Chou, "'They Were Not Serving Themselves, but You': Reclaiming the Prophets' Messianic Intention," *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Fall 2022): 227–30.

[32] Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter*, 73; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 49:41.

[33] T. D. Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed, and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44 (1993): 255–70; T. D. Alexander, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 191–212.

[34] See usage of the root ירה in Exodus 15:25 (וַיּוֹרֵהוּ יְהוָה עֵץ). See Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), 560–61: "Yahweh begins to teach them that the marvels and power he employed in Egypt are available to them if they trust and act on their trust in him. The water problem became God's opportunity to teach his people. The author employs the

carefully organized in such a way that shows how buildings like the tabernacle or temple connect with Eden and the hope of paradise regained (cf. Exod 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22; 31:1; cf. 30:34; 31:12).[35] Though the biblical writers may have written in various genres, some of which may seem to the modern reader as uninspiring, all of these literary forms were carefully chosen to carry important theology. And this theology was always intended to be universal in its applicability. Although the prophets and apostle dealt with their immediate audience, they did so in such a way that intentionally addressed all the people of God. As the psalmist stated, "This will be written for the generation to come, and a people yet to be created will praise Yah" (Ps 102:18). This is why James demanded people not merely to be hearers but also doers of God's Word (Jas 1:23). The prophets and apostles intended to provide theological truths that not only apply to their immediate time but all time. With that, there is a range to the implications of a text, but that range is set by the author who, as Peter wrote, knew that "they were not serving themselves, but you" (1 Pet 1:12).[36]

In the end, the biblical writers knew that authorial intent is complex. Intent is far more than just information. It includes what is written but also why it is written and its desired effect. For example, when someone tells of how the Lord answered prayer, they are not looking for a cold response. Rather, they recount the story (what), with the purpose to praise God (why), so that others can rejoice with those who rejoice (cf. Rom 12:15) (so what).[37] The notion that intent includes what, why, and so what, is part of normal communication. And the biblical authors, who wrote under inspiration using normal communication, leveraged this well. All that they wrote (what) had a theological purpose (why) which was meant for the instruction and transformation of their hearers (so what). On the one hand, the nature of authorial intent is a reminder that every scriptural text has theological purpose and application because the author does not merely give information but *intent*. On the other hand, the nature of authorial intent is also a reminder that such theology and implication are not up to the creativity of the reader, because they are defined by the *author's* intent.

In their literal interpretation of Scripture, the prophets and apostles pursued what the author intended. And such intent is far from pedestrian. Rather, the biblical writers recognized that their predecessors were deep readers and writers of the oracles of God. And the biblical writers' endeavor as they searched the Scriptures (1 Pet 1:10) was to discover the *what*, *why*, and *so what*—the intent—of those who came before them. They wanted to know all the details of what their predecessors wrote,

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verb יָרָה ("throw, to cast; to instruct, point out") for the way Yahweh showed Moses how to throw the tree into the bitter water. This is the same root from which the word Torah comes; here is where Yahweh establishes his first ordinance for his people. There is a strong hint here of the Torah ("instruction," תּוֹרָה) to come. Since this stopping place was where Yahweh's first commands to his people were given, the author has a major reason for relating this incident at Marah. Yahweh's goodness and Israel's faith/unbelief are displayed. He presents them with an ordinance (חֹק) for the first time, a judgment (מִשְׁפָּט), and tests (נָסָה) them" (560–61).

[35] Meredith G. Kline, "Investiture with the Image of God," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 40, no. 1 (1977): 41; J. H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 298–99.

[36] In hermeneutical terms, this is often seen as *meaning* versus *significance*. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale Unviersity Press, 1967). Significance refers to the range of legitimate ramifications and it should be said that such a range is dictated by the author.

[37] Chou, "'They Were Not Serving Themselves,'" 221–23.

all the context and passages incorporated into their writings as it set the theological purposes of the text, and the full range of implications that ensued from all of this. That is the full intent which the prophets and apostles were looking for as they read their Bibles. That is then the way they wrote Scripture. And all of that establishes the hermeneutical standard by which the pastor-theologian ought to read them. That is the pursuit of literal interpretation.

Grammatical

The prophets' and apostles' view on Scripture also demanded a grammatical approach to Scripture. They believed that the text itself was inspired (cf. 2 Tim 3:16), the very conduit to understand what the human and divine author intended. The biblical writers also understood that this communication, while written in normal language, was written precisely. They recognized that the inerrancy of Scripture meant that every detail of the inspired text mattered and carried biblical truth. All of this drove the biblical writers to focus not upon one's feelings, reason, or speculation to determine authorial intent (cf. Prov 3:5–6; Isa 8:19–22; Col 2:8), but upon the sacred text, analyzing every one of its features in light of the conventions of human speech. Their hermeneutic was grammatical.

In speaking of grammar, one typically thinks about nouns, verbs, adjective, prepositions, conjunctions, the definite article, tense, person, gender, number, or even semantics. As will be seen, the biblical writers certainly thought of these factors with remarkable accuracy. However, since grammar covers the entire structure of human language, it is broader than those components. Grammar can deal with how an entire text coheres together, and the biblical authors read and wrote their Bible with that in mind. The prophets and apostles recounted past revelation in light of its overall organization (Pss 78; 104–106; Matt 4; Eph 4; Heb 11) and organized their own writings by using discourse markers or other linguistic indicators (Gen 1:5, 8, 13; Exod 8:20; 9:13; 2 Sam 8:1; 10:1; 1 Cor 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; Eph 4:1; Col 3:1).[38] Grammar can also deal with how one detects allusions or connections between passages. To trigger an association, an author must have written a word or phrase that uniquely links to one text (or set of texts) as opposed to another. This linguistic distinctiveness, the foundation of cross referencing and inter-textuality, is grammatical in nature.[39]

The rules of language even govern whether an expression is figurative or material. In studying Scripture, one deals with questions of whether something is symbolic or literal, metaphorical or plain.[40] This is particularly raised concerning prophetic literature but applies to other passages as well (cf. John 6:54–58). Some

[38] Genesis 1 is familiarly structured around the days of creation. In Exodus, every three plagues are bracketed off with the phrase "Raise up early in the morning..." (הַשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּקֶר). Second Samuel 8:1 and 10:1 contain the temporal marker וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי־כֵן (now it happened afterwards) to segment and organize the narrative. The first epistle to the Corinthians has the familiar discourse marker περὶ δὲ (now concerning) to designate new topics. Ephesians and Colossians illustrate the indicative versus imperative organization of Pauline letters. This is just a superficial sample of structure not counting chiastic structures (cf. Pss 63; 64), Markan sandwich, or other literary techniques of organization and parallelism.

[39] Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 39–40, 206–207.

[40] Robert Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 213–31.

use the possibility of metaphorical language to argue that certain texts portray merely spiritual truth without any historical referent.[41] Others counter with the adage, "If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense."[42] In discerning through these matters, it is important to remember that the determination of metaphor is not arbitrary; there are linguistic rules concerning figurative, symbolic, idiomatic, or metaphorical language. For instance, figurative language can be due to the unique way a culture used words or phrases. Indeed, the biblical writers frequently used such figures of speech from "long of nose" (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם; cf. Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Nah 1:3) to "lifting up [or receiving] the face" (נָשָׂא פָּנִים; cf. Deut 10:17 or προσωπολημψία, Jas 2:1). To prove this, one must look to comparative languages and literature. Thankfully, lexicographers have done this work, and translators have either rendered the idioms appropriately or left them in the text, having observed that the wording of the idiom is both significant and explained by the context.[43] In addition to culture, metaphorical language can be generated by context. The surrounding text may raise the question of figurative language by making a comparison or juxtaposing two ideas that do not necessarily go together.[44] The context then will define the symbol or metaphor explicitly (Dan 7:17) or by a break in metaphor (John 6:27, 47–51, 63).[45] The prophets (Isa 5; Ezek 37; Zech 1–8; Dan 2, 7, 8) and apostles (1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:4–6) certainly employed such language and technique.[46] Finally, figurative language can occur via cross reference as one text appeals to metaphorical or symbolic language that was explained in previous revelation. The book of Revelation does this often, incorporating symbolism from the book of Daniel and Zechariah and relying upon those books to explain it (Rev

[41] Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 223–27.

[42] Howard G. G. Hendricks, *Living By the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 265.

[43] One example would be "cut" (כרת) a covenant which is often translated as "made" a covenant (Gen 15:18; 21:27; Exod 34:10). The idiom does mean "make," but links historically with the covenant ceremony where animals were cut in pieces as a warning against breaking the covenant (cf. Gen 15:7–18; Jer 44:17–20) and even in word play. In 1 Samuel 20:15, Jonathan stated, "You shall not cut off (וְלֹא־תַכְרִת) your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when Yahweh cuts off (בְּהַכְרֹת) every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth," which parallels how "Jonathan cut (וַיִּכְרֹת) a *covenant* with the house of David" (2 Sam 20:16).

[44] Plummer, *Interpreting the Bible*, 220.

[45] In the case of John 6 and Jesus being the bread of life, the break of metaphor happens frequently in the chapter, climactically in v. 63. Carson rightly observes, "To take the words of the preceding discourse literally, without penetrating their symbolic meaning, is useless. It causes offence; it does not arrive at Jesus' meaning, for *the flesh counts for nothing*. Although this clause does not rule out all allusion in the preceding verses to the Lord's Supper, it is impossible not to see in 'flesh' a direct reference to the preceding discussion, and therefore a dismissal of all *primarily* sacramental interpretations. It is not as if the flesh is of no significance: after all, the Word became flesh (1:14). But when all the focus of attention is on the flesh, then the real significance of Jesus is missed, and the kinds of objections raised both by 'the Jews' and by ostensible disciples quickly surface." See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 301.

[46] In the case of 1 Timothy 3:15 (which includes not only contextual but also cultural metaphor), the pillar and grounds spoken of are most likely a reference to the structure in Ephesus. At the same time, the usage of the term "truth" that follows breaks the metaphor and shows that a physical building is not discussed. In like manner, 1 Peter 2:4–6 describes believers as living stones. The very word "living" breaks the metaphor of stones and shows that a physical rock is not intended. Furthermore, the later context defines the metaphor in terms of what was said in previous revelation (cf. Isa 28:16). This is both context and cross reference at work.

6:2; 13:1; cf. Zech 6:1–3; Dan 7:7). Metaphorical language is not subjective. The authors wrote in human language and so the principles of culture, context, or cross-reference apply to when language is concrete or abstract.[47] Literal-grammatical interpretation absolutely recognizes the full gamut of literary expression. But it reminds us that the reader does not determine what is metaphorical. Rather, metaphor is determined by the author according to the patterns of language by which he wrote. And based upon that rule, when the author's language is metaphorical, we should declare that. But based upon that same rule, when the author's language is not metaphorical, we also need to surrender to his intent. The biblical writers read and wrote grammatically and that goes far beyond just individual terms or syntax.

That being said, the biblical writers did not merely engage the breadth of grammar but its depth also. Their attention to exegetical detail is nothing short of extraordinary. One can begin by examining the usage of the word seed (זֶרַע; σπέρμα) throughout Scripture. Though in Hebrew the term זֶרַע has no plural form, grammarians have observed that when accompanying pronouns and verbs are singular, the word is singular and when they are plural, the word is plural.[48] Based upon this, there are times when the biblical writers focused upon not just the corporate seed of Israel but upon its chief offspring, the Messiah (Gen 22:17–18).[49] This is confirmed by later prophets (cf. Ps 72:17) and even the New Testament itself. Paul discussed in Galatians 3:16 that the Old Testament did not say "seeds" as of many but "seed" as of one. Some have been skeptical at such a claim.[50] However, as just noted, the Old Testament was able to distinguish the singular or plural referents of the term in a way to make Paul's very point. Paul knew his Bible so well that he grasped what was singular or plural. Grammatical precision does not merely apply to nouns but also to tense. Our Lord defended the resurrection by appealing to the tense of the expression, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Matt 22:32). God cannot be faithful to Abraham—the very God of Abraham—if Abraham is dead and gone.[51] The biblical writers also made careful observation about verbs. Genesis 15:6 contains the famous phrase about Abraham, "Then he believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him as righteousness." In Hebrew, Moses designed the phrase to have prominence by putting it in the *weqatal*, disrupting the chain of the narrative verbs (*wayyiqtol*).[52] It is no coincidence that Paul stressed this phrase, reminding Israel and all God's people of the primacy of salvation

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[47] See Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 663–68. See above examples. The reality of the third category of cross reference shows that the biblical authors intuitively understood these linguistic principles. The activity of cross reference demonstrates that they were able to detect what was symbolic and that which was not, to identify the interpretation of the symbol or metaphor, and then to appeal to it in their own writings.

[48] Jack Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 139–48. The term זֶרַע is singular in form with the exception of 1 Samuel 8:15 where it occurs in the plural with a pronominal suffix. Such an exception reinforces that the root in its absolute form has no distinct plural.

[49] T. D. Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 363–67.

[50] Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 136–38.

[51] See fuller discussion in Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 41–45.

[52] *IBHS*, §32.2.3e, 533.

by grace through faith (Rom 4:9; Gal 3:6). Paul understood the emphasis Moses intended; the apostle read the text with exacting grammatical precision.[53] On top of all this, the biblical writers paid astute attention to individual words of the text. For example, they could trace the word "rest" through its usage in key texts in the Old Testament (Heb 4:1–13) as well as the term "stone" (1 Pet 2:6–12). The prophets used the word "eagle" with astounding consistency, uniformly appealing to the metaphor in the context of the Exodus and second Exodus (Exod 19:4; Ps 103:5; Isa 40:31). As they searched the Scriptures (cf. 1 Pet 1:10), the biblical writers did not merely gloss over or survey through the text. They read it with exacting detail of each feature of every noun, verb, and term.

As they read, so they wrote. They wrote with a precision of verbs and tenses. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" (ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν, ἀλλὰ ὁ θεὸς ηὔξανεν). He juxtaposed two aorist verbs (ἐφύτευσα, ἐπότισεν) with an imperfect (ηὔξανεν) to emphasize that while he and Apollos just planted and watered, God was the One causing the growth this entire time and therefore He should receive all the credit.[54] The verb change makes a theological point. Similarly, in the parable of the Sower, though some seeds were eaten (κατέφαγεν, Matt 13:4), scorched (ἐκαυματίσθη, Matt 13:6), and choked (ἔπνιξαν, Matt 13:7), those that fell on the good ground not only yielded but were yielding a crop (ἐδίδου, Matt 13:8). The shift from aorist tense to imperfect brings out the continued process of fruitfulness of the one who properly received God's Word.[55]

Equal attention is given to individual terms. John repeated the term "finished" (τελ root) throughout His gospel (John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4, 23; 19:28, 30) and particularly at the death of our Lord to emphasize that Christ completed the work that the Father sent Him to do, the work that God alone could do. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 repeated the verb "brought to an end" (καταργέω) to contrast the Old and New Covenants. Through Moses' veil, the Old Covenant brought God's shining glory to an end lest Israel look upon it and be destroyed (2 Cor 3:7, 11, 12). But the New Covenant brings the sinful veil that covered the heart to an end so that the saints can behold God's glory (2 Cor 3:14). Such precision is not just found in the New Testament but in the Old. In Psalm 113, the psalmist repeated the word "sit" (ישב) to correlate how the once barren woman *sits* with her children (v. 8) and the once lowly individual *sits* (v. 9) with nobles all because God *sits* on high (v. 5). In Psalm 17, David said that because God beholds (חזה) what is upright (v. 2) so the upright will behold (חזה) God's face in resurrection (v. 15). The fruit of faith is not only a sanctified life but a resurrected one. The above examples are far from a comprehensive list.[56] All of it illustrates that the biblical writers read the Word of

[53] George J. Zemek, "Interpretive Challenges Relating to Habakkuk 2:4b," *Grace Theological Journal* 1 (1980): 43–69. Zemek even (rightly) argues that Romans 4 and Hebrews 10 are drawing on the sense of the *weqatal* form in Genesis 15:6.

[54] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 302.

[55] J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 528.

[56] See John MacArthur and the Translators of the Legacy Standard Bible, *Wonderful Things from Your Law* (Los Angeles: The Master's Seminary Press, forthcoming).

God with astonishing meticulousness and wrote it with equally impeccable precision. They were fully able to convey their full sophistication in what they wrote.

Joshua once said, "Not one word of all the good words which Yahweh your God spoke concerning you has failed" (Josh 23:14). Joshua impressed upon Israel that God's Word was exact to each word written. That is how the biblical writers read it and, in that way, to say that they had a grammatical hermeneutic is an understatement. The prophets and apostles loved God's Word and studied it with the utmost concentration and care (Ps 119:97). Their cognizance of every linguistic feature and detail of the text set a precedent for how those who follow them must handle the Word. It is a reminder of why the pastor-theologian must go back to the original languages, for that is what biblical writers read and wrote. To be sure, translations are justified. The Scripture itself has translation (Matt 1:23; 2:6, 18; Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; John 1:38). And while there are some New Testament translations that deliberately bring out certain theological emphases (Eph 4:8), the New Testament's translation of the Old is overall amazingly precise.[57] In fact, it is so precise that it faithfully carried over features of the Hebrew even when they do not read smoothly in Greek (cf. Matt 13:14). Scripture's translation of itself illustrates the point made in this discussion: every word of Scripture is inspired, every word must be studied, and every word preached.

Historical

The final pillar of the biblical writers' hermeneutic is historical interpretation and it is last for a reason. The listing order of literal-grammatical-historical (LGH) is a reminder that authorial intent as expressed through the text is what regulates historical backgrounds, not the other way around. For example, one cannot know the need to study the city of Corinth unless the epistle of 1 Corinthians made that clear (cf. 1 Cor 1:2). One would also not know to research the background of the Canaanites unless Moses had referenced them (cf. Gen 13:7). The author through the text invites one to study certain elements of background, which makes historical background a servant of the text. So while history can enhance and qualify what one learns in the text, it cannot override what the author asserts. After all, the Lord frequently called His people to be countercultural (Lev 18:1–30; Zech 2:7; 1 John 2:15). If historical background and culture was the absolute determiner of the text's meaning, these commands would be completely reversed. Instead, just as God called His people to be in but not of this world (John 15:19; 17:11), so is the Scripture's hermeneutical relationship with history. In light of attempts to use history to completely redefine text and doctrine, this functional structure within LGH is important to note.[58]

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[57] See Gleason Archer and Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 73.

[58] See James D. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *The Henton Davies Lecture Regents Park College* (1991): 1–22; N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 124–29. Part of what drives the New Pauline Perspective is a reconfiguration of the historical background of Judaism and reading that back into Pauline literature. See also E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A*

That being said, history plays an important role in interpretation because the Bible is a historical book. The Scripture recounts history from creation (Gen 1) to consummation (Rev 21–22), old creation (Gen 1–2) to new (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Isa 65:17). Its discussions intersect nations (Isa 13–27), individuals (Exod 5:1; Matt 2:1; Luke 3:1–2), places (Gen 12:6; Josh 13–19; Acts 27; 1 Cor 1:1; Col 1:1–2; Jas 1:1–2; 1 Pet 1:1–2), laws (Exod 20–23), customs (Lev 20:23; Matt 27:15), idioms (Exod 34:6; Jas 2:1), literary forms (Ps 78:1–2; Matt 13:3), dates (Dan 1:1–2; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1–2), and circumstances (Nah 3:8–10; Eph 6:21–22). The biblical writers' attention to historical details is not incidental. Because they wrote with intent, all this information has theological purpose. For instance, the date of Haggai ties his prophecy with the Feast of Booths and God's faithfulness (Hag 2:1; Lev 23:39), while the timing of Pentecost portrays the church as a first fruit of God's salvation (Acts 2:1; cf. Lev 23:15–21; Deut 16:10).[59] Comprehending ancient Near Eastern customs sharpens why God commanded certain laws and how these regulations exhibit His holiness (Lev 18:3).[60] Grasping why God condemned certain cultural practices enables one to identify even parallel practices in their own context and know with conviction why they are abominable.[61] Understanding people like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:1), Cyrus (Ezra 1:1), Herod (Matt 2:1), or Caiaphas (Luke 3:2) allows one to see the realism of the biblical narrative, the sovereignty of God, and the kingship of Christ all the more. Even topography contributes to theology. Knowing that Jerusalem, though on a high hill, was not the watershed makes it all the more significant that it will become the watershed when Christ returns (Ezek 47:8). This city will be the highest point of the region reflecting that Christ alone is exalted (Zech 14:8; Isa 2:2). Like everything in Scripture, historical details matter. By studying historical background, one grasps these particulars more fully and can see why the biblical writer included them in the first place.

Beyond just individual details, the biblical writers cared about history categorically. The prophets (Pss 78; 104–6; Ezek 16; 23; Hos 12:12–24) and apostles (Rom 4:1–6; Heb 11; 2 Pet 3:5–6) recount previous revelation as historical fact. They appeal to it as precedent and use it as the grounds of theology. The historicity of the resurrection is required for the theology of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:13–19). The

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Comparison of Patterns of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). A similar pattern can be seen in the issue of egalitarianism versus complementarianism. See Cynthia Westfall, "The Meaning of Αὐθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2.12," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, no. 10 (2014): 138–73. Such historical determinism can also occur in the debate on creation. See John Walton, "No Historical Adam: Response from the Archetypal View," in *Four Views on The Historical Adam*, ed. Ardel B. Caneday and Matthew Barrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 102; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 53–70; Denis O. Lamoureux, "No Historical Adam: Evolutionary Creation View," in *Four Views on The Historical Adam*, ed. Ardel B. Caneday and Matthew Barrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 58. For a broader discussion on how this relates to genre, see Robert L. Thomas, "Genre Override in the Gospels," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 271–322.

[59] Bock, *Acts*, 94.

[60] John Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 291–93.

[61] Meredith G. Kline, "Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 3 (1977): 193–201. See also Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 337–38. Kiuchi notes that the worship of Molech and child sacrifice was related to the context of sexual immorality. Some have used this to draw parallels with the modern obsession with sexual immorality and abortion.

global flood demonstrates the reality of God's judgment (2 Pet 3:5–6). Christ's death exhibits God's love (Rom 5:8). David taking the showbread illustrates that the Sabbath is made for man (Mark 2:25–28). The discussion of faith in Hebrews 11 presumes the historicity of the entire Old Testament. From Old Testament to New, history is the foundation for theology, and the logic of the prophets and apostles is that the reality of history is the reality of theology. Though history is subordinate to the text, it is a dominant reality of the text. This should encourage the interpreter all the more to appreciate and champion a historical hermeneutic.

Along that line, the biblical writers themselves demonstrate that biblical hermeneutics includes elucidating the text according to the facts of history. For example, the author of Samuel provided background on the office of seer (1 Sam 9:9). Mark offered up historical information about doctors (Mark 5:26) and Jewish customs (7:5). Matthew explained the way Pilate released a prisoner every year (Matt 27:15). In their own writings, the biblical authors illustrated that the provision of historical background was not out of place but useful for the explanation of their writings. That is part of their hermeneutic as they read and wrote, and so it is part of the hermeneutic of the pastor-theologian who takes on their mantle to handle rightly the Word of God.

The doctrine of inerrancy establishes that Scripture is not cleverly devised myths (2 Pet 1:16) but that it is history. The biblical writers asserted that scriptural truths are so real that they are entrenched in reality itself. For them, theology is not something separated from history but is part of it. History actualizes theology and the reality of history is the reality of theology. In that way, the biblical writers offered the most definitive worldview. In laying out creation, historical narrative, and prophecy, their worldview did not merely describe the world but determined it. So the historicity of Scripture is a constant reminder of its truthfulness, binding authority, and pertinence. As prophets and apostles anchored the truths of Scripture in history, so those who expound upon their writings must have a historical hermeneutic.

Postscript: Are There More Categories?

Most do not deny that one should interpret a text with a view to authorial intent, based upon the patterns of language, and according to the facts of history.[62] However, some contend that this is not sufficient. Others suggest adding on "contextual" to LGH hermeneutics. Certain scholars posit the need to append "theological" or "biblical theological" or "typological" to the formulation.[63] Yet

[62] Riddlebarger, *Case for Amillennialism*, 23–25; Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 20; Craig A Carter, "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Response to Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson and Vern Poythress," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2018): 138. Even note that Origen and those in the medieval period who argued for allegorical interpretation saw that the "literal" sense was fundamental. See David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 88.

[63] See full discussion in G. K. Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One More Time," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55 (2012): 697–701. Though Beale argues that a biblical theological approach should be appended to the framework, he acknowledges in the footnote that in fact, because such biblical theological realities and typologies are part of authorial intent, it should be part of the grammatical-historical approach.

some appeal to factor in tradition or metaphysics or philosophy into the discussion.[64] Though most agree that LGH is helpful, the debate is whether it is sufficient to encompass a biblical hermeneutic.

The formulation of literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics is sufficient for two reasons. First, the very categories of grammar and history respectively deal with everything written down in the text and all the contexts that are outside of the text. The two principles are merismatic, covering the entire gamut of possibilities. What else exists except that which is inside the text or outside of it? LGH hermeneutics covers the goal of interpretation (literal meaning, that is, authorial intent) and the comprehensive means by which one reaches the goal. Philosophically, it is complete and requires no addition. Second, along that line, the sophistication people are looking for by adding on top of LGH can actually be gained within LGH. LGH is inherently contextual, as both the author's intent and the rules of grammar demand careful attention to the surroundings of a statement. LGH inherently entails biblical theology since the author connected passages together and did so by language which even has rules for detecting allusions. LGH can most certainly encompass typology, as biblical writers themselves constructed and set up for typological connections.[65] LGH can produce theology and deal with philosophy, for its task is to discern authorial intent, and if the authors are theological and their truth has ramifications upon philosophy, then LGH will bring out those truths.

Put simply, LGH is designed to bring out whatever the author put in. So as long as the biblical writers were contextual, precise theologians, then LGH, when rightly done, will disclose that intent. No additional categories are needed for LGH, provided the authors of Scripture are who they say they are. And that brings out the real concern of this discussion. If an interpreter sees the need to add onto LGH, then this interpreter is ultimately saying not that the method is faulty but that the author was, for the method merely seeks to bring out what the author said. The danger of insisting on adding to LGH is that it belies that the authors of Scripture did not have certain categories or theological sophistication and that something or someone else must provide it apart from them. At that moment, whatever provides this new and necessary insight becomes a new author of the text, rising up to parallel the original author all the while siphoning away His authority. LGH hermeneutics does not at all preclude the theological depth and sophistication of Scripture. Contrary to the higher critical formulations, this entire article has argued that the biblical writers have theological depth and precision in how they read and wrote Scripture. That being said, LGH forces us to put such sophistication within the authority of the author and not in ourselves. LGH is a reminder that we are readers of Scripture and not its authors. We do not come up with our own imaginative insights about the text, we simply bring forth what the authors, brilliant under inspiration, wrote with amazing insight and precision. In that way, LGH is a hermeneutic of surrender, one that is determined to say only what God has said (Ezek 2:7; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 John 9) and not one's own words (Ezek 13:3). That is what distinguished the true prophet from the false (Deut 18:18–20) and distinguishes every true pastor-theologian from the counterfeit.

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[64] Carter, *Interpreting Scripture*, 20.

[65] See discussion in fn. 31.

Conclusion

The hermeneutic of the pastor-theologian is not one of his own making. Rather, it is one handed down by those who not only wrote the Scriptures but who themselves also handled the Word of God throughout all redemptive history. They understood previous revelation as historical. They scrutinized every detail of what was written. And they did all of this to discern the authorial intent of the oracles of God, abiding strictly within what the author conveyed in all his sophistication. That is LGH hermeneutics, the hermeneutic of the prophets and the apostles, and the hermeneutic of the pastor-theologian.

How does one practically execute these principles as he sits down to search the Scripture as those before him did? The following provides a practical outline for applying LGH hermeneutics to exegesis and theological method.

1. Preparation. Scripture demands that one come to it with the right attitude. Approaching it wrongly sets up for failure before one even begins.

a. Have the right view of God's Word—like those before him, the pastor-theologian must have the highest view of God's Word. He must comprehend that Scripture is divine revelation, inspired and inerrant. He must be convinced that God has communicated with perfect precision, profundity, and perspicuity, and that Scripture stands alone and over all. And he must be convicted to tremble before God's Word, being careful to listen to it (cf. Deut 6:5; Isa 1:10; Jer 31:10; Ezek 36:1) as opposed to speaking over it.

b. Have the right aim in studying God's Word—based upon the right view of Scripture, the pastor-theologian should never forget the goal of interpretation. It is not to justify one's position or display his creativity. Knowledge puffs up (cf. 1 Cor 8:1). The goal of interpretation is to say what God meant (cf. 2 Pet 1:20–21) in all the depth and precision of what He meant (cf. 2 Tim 2:15) and the breadth of ramifications He intended (cf. 2 Tim 2:3–7; Jas 1:22). It is to not go beyond what is written (1 Cor 4:6) but to know and to do all that is revealed (Deut 29:29). It is to study God's Word with great diligence and exactness (cf. 1 Tim 4:15), to live it with perseverance (2 Pet 1:6), and to teach it with conviction (Ezra 7:10).

c. Prayer—the pastor theologian should pray to tremble before God's Word (Isa 66:2), to put off sin (1 Pet 2:1), to depend upon the Spirit in studying His Word (Eph 1:17), to discern God's truth and not one's own understanding (Prov 3:5–6), to be disciplined in the study of His Word (1 Tim 4:15), to see wonderful things in God's Word (Ps 119:18), and to be convicted by the Scripture (2 Tim 3:15–16; 4:2). Sin suppresses the truth (cf. Rom 1:18), and so the more sanctified the interpreter is, the sharper of an interpreter he is.

2. Observation. With a view toward authorial intent (what, why, so what), gather the following information that derives from literal-grammatical-historical principles. Even begin to see ways the information can link with the passage studied in particular ways.

a. Historical Context—there are three levels of historical context for any passage. First, one can know the who, what, when, where, and why of the entire book. Among many possible benefits, this helps to establish the main purpose of the book, why it was written in the first place. Second, one can also investigate any historical information about any word, phrase, person, or practice of any part of the particular passage one is studying. This provides clarification of what a passage discusses (and does not discuss). Third, history is not merely a set of circumstances but "His story." God has a redemptive historical plan (cf. Deut 1–4; Josh 24; 1 Kgs 8; Pss 78; 104–106; Neh 9; Dan 9) and it is important to understand the role an author, book, or passage plays in advancing that plan.[66]

b. Genre—literary forms are technically part of historical background and thus cannot override authorial intent.[67] Nevertheless, there are reasons why an author chose a specific genre to communicate certain ideas. Knowing those emphases can help one detect the structure of the argument of the book (see below),[68] and to appreciate the kinds of claims and discussions made or not made by a passage.[69]

c. Literary Context—literary context includes not only the argument of the book leading up to the passage studied but also every passage alluded to by the author. The former is accomplished by tracing how the author develops the main idea of the book systematically through the book. The latter is accomplished by identifying linguistically distinctive phrases that link with other passages.[70] The more one is aware of all that the author pulls together around his text, the clearer the purpose, theology, and intended implications will be.

d. Textual Criticism—having established layers of context, the pastor-theologian approaches the text itself. In light of the desire for authorial intent, and because Scripture is so precise, textual criticism is necessary to ensure that every word of the text studied is original.

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[66] For example, it would be insufficient to merely study about the cultural practices and political situations in 1–2 Kings without understanding how that book and the history therein advances God's plan. See Miles V. Van Pelt, ed., "Introduction," in *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 23–25.

[67] Thomas, "Genre Override in the Gospels," 271–322.

[68] For example, many epistles have a formal greeting, the body of a letter, and concluding postscripts. Some are even arranged where the first half concentrates on indicatives and the final section contains imperatives based upon those indicatives.

[69] This may include how narratives are descriptive in nature as opposed to prescriptive or an awareness of how parallelism operates in poetry.

[70] See Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 206–207; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, reprint ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 7.

e. Syntax—having established the wording of the text, one should make sure he knows the grammar of every word (singular versus plural; tenses of verbs; etc.) as well as how every word relates to another. The grammatical analysis of how sections and even whole books cohere may be covered in literary context.
f. Word Study—because Scripture is precise to the word, while being sensitive to lexical fallacies, one can carefully study each word of the text, ensuring he understands what each term means as the author utilized it.[71]

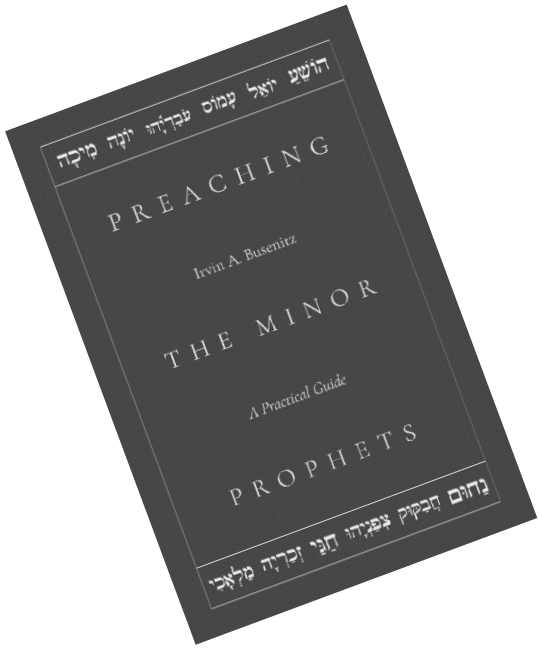
3. Interpretation. Gathering information is not the same as having the meaning of the text. The pastor-theologian must arrange all that has been observed around the *what*, *why*, and *so what*, which the author intended in what he wrote. Ultimately, the pastor-theologian aims to articulate the point of the passage and to understand how every word or phrase is organized and contributes to the whole. He is in a relentless pursuit to know what each word or phrase of the text means, why it is present and significant in context, and the implications (so what) that it has on theology and life.[72] By doing that, he has read the Scriptures as the scriptural authors have read and written them.

In 1 Tim 6:11, Paul called Timothy a "man of God." The title was used of Moses (Deut 33:1; 34:10), Samuel (1 Sam 9:7), David (Neh 12:24), Shemiah (1 Kgs 12:22), Elijah (1 Kgs 17:18), Elisha (2 Kgs 4:9), and numerous prophets (1 Sam 2:7; 9:6; 1 Kgs 13:1). The apostle reminded his son in the faith that he followed in the footsteps of so many who faithfully upheld the ministry of God's Word. And as Timothy was to train faithful men after him who would do the same (cf. 2 Tim 2:2), Paul counseled that the inspired Word made the man of God equipped, having been thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:17). The pastor-theologian is in the succession of the men of God who have gone before him. Their ministry of the Word is his. And their hermeneutic must be his own. May we uphold every word of the inspired, inerrant, Word of God as He intended it to be.

[71] D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 27–64.

[72] One should always check one's explanation and articulation with what is known from the whole of Scripture and its theology. If one does well at finding the author's intent, this should never be a problem. Even then, knowing the whole of Scripture and even systematic theology allows one to have their articulation sharp and to pastorally prevent from leading to misconceptions or misapplication.

GRASPING GOD'S DIVINE PURPOSES IN SCRIPTURE'S EARLIEST PAGES



Preaching prophetical texts of Scripture can be an especially daunting task for the expositor. But while prophetical texts may require greater diligence and effort, it is clear that they were expected to be understood.

Old Testament prophets and their messages were gifts from God (Deut 18:15, 18). Yet, for the most part, the Minor Prophets live in the shadow of the rest of Scripture, quietly waiting for someone to discover their latent treasures, plumb the depths of their riches, and drink heavily from their reservoir. The unique blend of history, theology, and instruction for daily living in these texts provides unique help for Christians in every era. This volume represents an effort to help New Testament Christians rediscover this collection of Old Testament prophets.

ISBN: 978-0996917674
RETAIL: $32.99

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 51–62

LIFTING THE VEIL: ORIGINAL LANGUAGES AND THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

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* * * * *

The task of studying the Word of God in its original languages is both a privilege and a responsibility for the pastor-theologian. God chose Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to reveal Himself to mankind, and this fact alone should compel every pastor-theologian to pursue these languages so he could effectively pass along an accurate interpretation of the Scriptures to those he teaches. As the student of the Word labors over grammar, syntax, morphology, and vocabulary of the biblical text, abundant blessings rise to the surface for himself and for his people. While no doubt a difficult task, the rigorous study of God's Word is the pastor-theologian's greatest treasure, gift, reward, and obligation.

* * * * *

Introduction

The Latin phrase, *sola Scriptura*, was born out of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation. In response to the Roman Catholic Church's teaching that ecclesiastical dogma and tradition were also infallible, this principle was adopted by the Reformers to emphasize that God's Word was the sole authority in matters of salvation and the Christian life. Convinced of the supremacy of the Word and endowed with a passion to know and understand it, the Reformers encouraged pastors and church leaders to wean themselves off the Roman Catholic Church dogma and to learn the original languages of the Scriptures. Martin Luther put it bluntly: "[I]t is also a stupid undertaking to attempt to gain an understanding of Scripture by laboring through the commentaries of the fathers and a multitude of books and glosses. Instead of this, men should have devoted themselves to the

languages."[1] The seeds of *sola Scriptura*, planted and watered by the Reformers, led to a growing commitment to include Hebrew and Greek when preparing for pastoral ministry.

In the past half century, however, there has been a movement away from this perspective—for a number of reasons. First, it is argued that seminaries need to be more practical. Graduates, they contend, "have not been making the journey very successfully from school to church, from fact to faith, from historical record to sermon text."[2] As a result, to make room for these more practical courses, seminaries have been expunging biblical languages from their core curricula altogether, replacing them with classes deemed more practical, such as counseling, management skills, and personal spiritual development.

Second, it is maintained that language classes take too much time. While some may concede that the use of the original languages in the ministry of the local church pastor would be beneficial, they contend it is not worth the inordinate expenditure of time to reap such minimal rewards. Expediency and ministry demands simply do not justify the addition of Hebrew and Greek into one's pastoral armor.

Third, the erosion of a commitment to the role of Scripture in matters of faith and practice has resulted in a diminishing return on investment. Robin Scroggs, Professor of New Testament at Union Seminary in New York, elaborates:

> I propose that we forthrightly give up any claim that the Bible is authoritative in guidance for contemporary faith and morals. This, I would argue, is the inevitable and *appropriate* final step in the long story of the erosion of biblical authority. In public discussions the Bible must be discussed as a human document from the past and our dialogue with it seen as a human process of the present period. The Bible has no "legal" authority to determine our "now."[3]

Fourth, an ever-expanding plethora of electronic research tools for studying the Scriptures has also negatively impacted the perceived need for and value of learning the biblical languages. Seminary students are wooed by a vast and growing array of sermonic tools that are "guaranteed" to provide the desired benefits without expending the time and effort to master the biblical languages.

Granted, the pastor's toolbox for studying the Scriptures may provide some compensation for the lack of knowing and utilizing the biblical languages. But these tools often leave the pastor-theologian vulnerable to the translation and interpretation of someone else. That's because every translation is an interpretation. Capturing this principle, an illustration attributed to Hayim Nahman Bialik, a Jewish poet, expresses it this way: "Reading the Bible in translation is like kissing your bride through a veil." No matter how excellent the translation may be, it is still an interpretation. Invariably, something gets lost in the translation. Regardless of the resources used to construct

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[1] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*: *The Christian in Society*, ed. W. Brandt and H. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 45:364.

[2] James Smart, *The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 974–95.

[3] Robin Scroggs, "The Bible as Foundational Document," *Interpretation* (January 1995), 23.

the theological foundation of his research, preaching, and teaching, the pastor-theologian will be dependent on the research and interpretations of others.

Furthermore, while some may think that the multiplicity of English translations makes the knowledge of the biblical languages unnecessary, in reality it proves just the opposite. Though they are numerous, none provide the interpreter with the desired certainty of translation. There are too many options! "Students must be taught not only the limitations of translations, but also how to look into the richness of God's Word for themselves. In the face of all these translations…the church urgently needs those who will commit to being competent in Greek, Hebrew, and the vernacular, whether that be English or a tribal language on the foreign mission field."[4]

To be clear, learning the languages in which the Scriptures were penned is not an absolute necessity for being a pastor. Martin Lloyd-Jones strenuously objects to such a mandate. Speaking at the inauguration of the London Theological Seminary in 1977, he asserts:

> So to say that a man cannot preach, and cannot even read his Bible if he does not know Greek and Hebrew, I am afraid, must be categorized as sheer nonsense. This is most serious, for it seems to me to show an ignorance of the spiritual character of the biblical message…. The key to an understanding of the Bible is not a knowledge of the original languages. You can have such knowledge and still be ignorant of the message, as so many are and have been, unfortunately. It is the man who has a spiritual understanding who understands the Word of God.[5]

While the concern expressed has its place, it undersells the enormous value a functional facility in the biblical languages provides. The quest is not to deny a man the opportunity to preach without knowing Hebrew and Greek; rather, the pursuit of the pastor-theologian is to preach and teach the Word accurately.

There is a price to be paid for going into battle prepared, fully equipped with the sharpest weapons. Learning the original languages is far more than merely doing word studies. Subtle nuances of understanding are easily missed if studying the Scriptures solely from vernacular sources. Having a working knowledge of the biblical languages opens the door to greater clarity, depth, and insight into the biblical text. There is no substitute. It is like lifting the veil.

The Pastor-Theologian's Greatest Treasure

There are a number of reasons the pastor-theologian should pursue a functional knowledge of the languages in which the Scriptures were written. Their pursuit is both necessary and practical; their value cannot be overstated!

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[4] Stephen J. Andrews, "Some Knowledge of Hebrew Possible to All: Old Testament Exposition and the *Hebraica Veritas*," *Faith and Mission* 13, no. 11 (Fall 1995), 103–104.

[5] D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, "A Protestant Evangelical College," *Knowing the Times* (Edinburgh; Louisville, KY: Banner of Truth, 1989), 369–70.

Divine Origination

The divine origin of the Scriptures makes them one of the greatest treasures—the most important words ever written! God's propositional disclosure of Himself is described as "God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue write, "The point that Paul is unmistakably making is that the whole and the parts of Scripture, without exception, are inspired of God."[6] The Scriptures come from God! They sum up the message He wanted communicated to mankind. Commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, B. B. Warfield rightfully argues: "In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product…. No term could have been chosen which would have more emphatically asserted the Divine production of Scripture than that which is here employed."[7]

Divine Attestation

Not only do the Scriptures come from God, but their accuracy is attested by Christ. At the opening of His earthly ministry, Jesus established this bedrock foundation: "For truly I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:18; Mark 13:31). Jesus affirmed it another way when He said, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Every word written is guaranteed to be fulfilled. Every jot and every tittle (Matt 5:18), even every verb tense (e.g. Matt 22:32), comes from the very heart of God and will achieve its intended purpose (Isa 55:11). They promise to equip the child of God for every good work (2 Tim 3:17). In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus confirmed that God's Word is truth (John 17:17). That the Lord takes His divinely breathed words seriously, from the smallest letter down to the most obscure stroke of a letter, is reaffirmed in Matthew 5:19. The rank or position of every citizen of the kingdom will depend on his respect for God's holy Word.[8]

Divine Verification

Remarkably, God's propositional revelation of Himself is revealed within the parameters of human history. No prophet or apostle spoke or penned the Scriptures in a historical vacuum. God's servants declared the divine message in the hearing of their contemporaries. Unlike the alleged revelations recorded in ancient mythology, God's self-disclosure was not heralded in a context devoid of human history. Rather, God's revelation occurs within the context of historical individuals, events, and nations, and

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[6] John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 80.

[7] Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Louisville, KY: SBTS, 2014), 133.

[8] William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 292. MacArthur adds: "Greatness is not determined by gifts, success, popularity, reputation, or size of ministry—but by a believer's view of Scripture as revealed in his life and teaching" (John MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7* [Chicago: Moody, 1985], 272).

thus it becomes verifiable. In this way, as J. A. Motyer states, "It ceases to belong to the departments of opinion and speculation and becomes objective and verified."[9]

God's divinely inspired, God-breathed Word was explicitly and personally attested by the incarnate Christ. Not the smallest letter or stroke was mistakenly placed or omitted; all will be fulfilled. As our greatest treasure, it would be expected that deciphering the meaning of God's Word at the deepest and most accurate level would be the desired pursuit of every Christian, especially the pastor-theologian. It is the one thing the pastor-theologian owes his church above all else. J. Gresham Machen writes:

> The Bible contains not merely a presentation of something that was always true, but also a record of something that happened—namely, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ…. [T]he Bible is unique; it is not merely one of the sources of the preacher's inspiration, but the very sum and substance of what he has to say. But, if so, then whatever else the preacher need not know, he must know the Bible; he must know it at firsthand, and be able to interpret and defend it.[10]

Not all pastors will have the opportunity to learn the original languages in which the Scriptures were written. But many will, and those who are given that opportunity must seize it. They owe it to their flock (Acts 20:28; Jas 3:1; Heb 13:17).

The Pastor-Theologian's Greatest Gift

Since the Word of God is the greatest treasure, plumbing its depth and breadth and accurately interpreting and expositing its riches become the greatest gift the pastor-theologian can give to his spiritual flock. But it will not be easy; it requires diligence and intensive labor (2 Tim 2:15). Alan M. Stibbs says:

> If I have not as yet grasped the true meaning of the Word of God, I cannot as yet either properly obey it or intelligently proclaim it. If I covet to stand before men, glorying in the Bible as the Book of God-given revelation, and professing to be its expositor, surely I ought first to take care to see that what I am going to say is a faithful and justifiable interpretation of Scripture and not merely some hanging of my own fancies on a Scripture peg.[11]

To achieve that commitment, the pastor-theologian must begin first and foremost with a passionate desire to know God intimately (Phil 3:8–10). J. I. Packer explains that, "There can be no spiritual health without doctrinal knowledge. … We must seek, in studying God, to be led to God. It was for this purpose that revelation was given, and it is to this use that we must put it."[12]

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[9] J. A. Motyer, "Old Testament History," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1:254.

[10] J. Gresham Machen, "The Minister and His Greek Testament," *Presbyformed*, https://presbyformed.com/2016/01/01/the-minister-and-his-greek-testament/.

[11] Alan M. Stibbs, *Understanding God's Word* (London: InterVarsity Fellowship, 1950), 9–10.

[12] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1977), 22–23.

A desire to know God's Word, borne out of a passion to know God, begs for having a facility in the biblical languages. There is no short-cut. Driven by the knowledge that every translation is to some extent an interpretation, the pastor-theologian must seek to learn the original languages of the Scriptures. A functional facility of the biblical languages will allow him to dig more deeply into the text, to decipher more accurately the meaning of the passage being studied, and to proclaim more fully the divine revelation.

The Interpretational Accuracy Is Fostered

While a functional facility in the biblical languages does not ensure hermeneutical accuracy, it does foster and encourage it. Without a knowledge of the original languages, the pastor is duly restricted to utilizing only English sources. As opposed to engaging the text in its original language, "The only other alternative for the pastor-teacher is to study and expound the Word at the mercy of the commentaries never certain of the veracity of his sources and never able to find a source that answers all the questions."[13] A functional knowledge is necessary because it opens up the only reliable interpretive window. An accurate understanding of God is derived from the Scriptures, an understanding opened by a knowledge of the biblical languages. Waltke illustrates this reality with his own experience: "I became motivated to comprehend the biblical languages when I realized that most of my knowledge of God was derived from Holy Scripture, and the accuracy of that knowledge was contingent upon the correctness with which I handled its languages. God incarnated himself in those languages, not only in the body of Jesus Christ to whom they point."[14]

James warns those who would proclaim God's revelation inaccurately: "Let few of you be teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur stricter judgment" (Jas 3:1). The context makes it clear that the writer is not seeking to discourage teaching *per se*, but cautioning against being unprepared. D. Edmond Hiebert comments that, "This is not an attack upon the office of the teacher or the teaching function, for James at once identifies himself as a teacher. Rather, he is seeking to restrain the rush to teach on the part of those not qualified."[15]

The apostle Paul's instructions to the Ephesian elders continues this warning: "From among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30), implying that some Ephesian leaders would be guilty of imprecision and carelessness. A sound theology of God or of Christ mandates an intimate, robust knowledge of God's written Word.[16] Such oversight implies a depth of knowledge anchored by the knowledge and use of the original languages.

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[13] Irvin A. Busenitz, "Training for Pastoral Ministry," in *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically,* ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 124.

[14] Bruce K. Waltke, "How I Changed My Mind about Teaching Hebrew (or Retained It)," *Crux* 29 (1993): 10–15.

[15] D. Edmond Hiebert, *James* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 185.

[16] Alexander Strauch, *Acts 20: Fierce Wolves Are Coming—Guard the Flock* (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis and Roth, 2021), 167. In the parable of the virgins (Matt 25:1–13), the foolish virgins were not faulted for falling asleep, but for being unprepared. Neglect makes one unfit (Luke 12:35ff).

The Gospel Is Preserved

A knowledge of the original languages can provide confirmation of the translation and interpretation of the Scriptures. On more than one occasion, the apostle Paul instructs Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to him (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14). As God's steward (1 Cor 4:2), he was given the responsibility to watch over the gospel. It was a sacred trust. The Word of God is the foundation and source of spiritual growth in the Body of Christ. Having functional facility in the original languages must be pursued with passion and purpose, because the final court of appeal in disputes over interpretation resides in the original languages of the Scripture. The preservation of the gospel depends on it. Thus, Dennis Johnson states, "These issues of interpretation go far beyond parsing verbs and analyzing syntax, of course; but pastors will need a solid command of the basics if they are to pilot their congregations through the confusion."[17]

Martin Luther was adamant regarding the importance of the biblical languages in preaching. He writes: "And let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which the sword of the Spirit is contained."[18] The original languages were crucial in their defense of *sola fide*. Nathan Busenitz remarks, "More than anything else, the Reformers wanted their teachings to be grounded in the Bible. Their theological conclusions were driven by an unwavering commitment to the authority of Christ and His Word above any other authority."[19] They knew that the original languages were the ultimate defense against false doctrine and theological error.

Since the final authority for faith and practice is the Word of God, it is incumbent upon the pastor-theologian, when possible, to grasp a working knowledge of the biblical languages. Stibbs is exactly right when he writes, "Because the minister has direct access to the original biblical text, he can check the opinions advocated by various scholars and expositors. This is true not only for critical commentaries, but devotional ones as well. With a knowledge of the primary text, the minister can more readily discern between objective fact and subjective opinion."[20]

Piper insightfully adds: "Weakness in Greek and Hebrew gives rise to exegetical imprecision and carelessness. And exegetical imprecision is the mother of liberal theology."[21] Kaiser illustrates just how crucial this is:

> The reason for this undertaking has little, if anything, to do with tradition or an outmoded scholasticism. It is, rather, that no translation is inerrant; the appeal to inerrancy can only be to the original texts as represented by the best Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Nor is this point a matter of minor importance; for, in an area where the souls of mortals hang on the exact form of the divine word disclosed from heaven, mere approximations are even less acceptable than are

[17] Dennis Johnson, "The Perils of Pastors without the Biblical Languages," *Presbyterian Journal* 10 (September 1986), 23.

[18] Luther, *Luther's Works*, 45:360.

[19] Nathan Busenitz, *Long Before Luther* (Chicago: Moody, 2017), 32.

[20] Stibbs, *Understanding God's Word*, 105.

[21] Nijay Gupta, "Why Learn NT Greek? A Pedagogical Matter," *Patheos*, September 25, 2008, www.patheos.com/blogs/cruxsola/2008/2009/why-learn-nt-greek-a-pedagogical-matter.

generalized approximations in the area of science that affects our bodily health for some three score and ten years.[22]

The Understanding Is Enhanced

Having a functional facility in the biblical languages provides a more confident ability to evaluate various translations and results in a fuller understanding of the text. Something as simple as word order helps to unveil the emphasis of the text. The biblical writer, under the Spirit's influence, constructs a sentence in such a way so as to emphasize the central element of the verse. For example, Romans 8:28 is literally rendered: "We know, moreover, that to those who love God all things work together for good" (οἴδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν, τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὖσιν). The word order exposes authorial intention and emphasis in a way that may otherwise be absent or obscured in the translation.

Without a knowledge of the original languages, one is forced to depend on the research of others, often making it difficult to preach with confidence. Facility in the biblical languages not only provides valuable assistance when interpreting difficult passages but also enhances one's understanding of familiar texts. For example, most translations render Genesis 12:3, "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." Yet, the Hebrew text literally reads, "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who treats you halfheartedly (or shamefully) I will curse" (וַאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר).

On occasion, the translation of a familiar text can be overlooked and thus lose an insightful rendition. In Psalm 23:6, for example, "will follow me" is a strong word and is more accurately translated "*will pursue me"* or *"chase after me*," thereby adding significant meaning to the text (אַךְ טוֹב וָחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּי וְשַׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים). God is a God who pursues (cf. Luke 15:1–7; Ps 139:7–10).

At other times, the choice of a word can accentuate the meaning of the text. In Psalm 34:8[9], for example, David says, "O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man [הַגֶּבֶר—'battle champion; hero'] who trusts in Him."[23]

The Message Is Empowered

Without the accurate interpretation of the Word, the Holy Spirit is silent (John 16:13). As MacArthur writes, "Only the message of God brings with it the power or God" (cf. 1 Cor 2:1–15).[24] The study of the Scriptures in the languages in which they were penned provides greater assurance that what is being taught is correct and thus brings with it the power of the Spirit of God. Kaiser elaborates: "We must have the Holy Spirit incite us to declare with boldness the truth we have discovered in the Word of God. From the beginning of the sermon to its

[22] Walter Kaiser, "The Future Role of the Bible in Seminary Education," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (October 1996): 253.

[23] William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 53–54. Cf. Jer 17:7; Ps 40:4 [5], et.al. The use of other names for man, such as Ps 8:4 [5] provide significant insight into the text.

[24] John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 57.

end, the all-engrossing force of the text and the God who speaks through that text must dominate our whole being."[25]

When the Word of God is misinterpreted, one's preaching becomes vulnerable to being little more than one's personal theology. The pastor-theologian cannot exceed what is written, correctly translated, and rightly interpreted. He has no authority beyond what the Scriptures say. Consider the words of E. D. Burns:

> A man of God leads spiritually insofar as he humbly teaches and wisely applies the Word of God from its intended context…. God honors the humble, but He opposes the arrogance of going beyond what is written as though the Bible were not sufficient. We do not preach *with* the Word, *by* the Word, *about* the Word; rather, we merely preach the Word—courageous to say everything it says, humble to say no more and no less.[26]

The Interpretive Process Is Modeled

People will study the Scriptures the way their pastor does. They will follow the example of their spiritual mentor. Jesus noted: "A pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). In the early weeks after Jesus' ascension, the impact of the disciples' training was evident to the Jewish leaders "who recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). The apostle Paul instructed Timothy to entrust the things he had taught him "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). The process was to be intentional.

Knowing the biblical languages draws both the pastor and his congregants into a deeper study of the text. Piper notes, "When pastors do not study the Bible in Greek and Hebrew…they (and their churches with them) tend to become second-handers. The harder it is for us to get at the original meaning of the Bible, the more we will revert to the secondary literature…. We may impress one another for a while by dropping the name of the latest book, but second-hand food will not sustain and deepen our people's faith and holiness."[27] Donald Whitney agrees: "Don't settle only for spiritual food that's been 'predigested' by others. Experience the joy of discovering biblical insights firsthand through your own Bible study."[28]

The Pastor-Theologian's Greatest Rewards

Embracing the most important words ever written and interpreting them accurately is one of the greatest rewards a pastor-theologian can have in his personal study. To plumb the depths of God's Word through the lens of the languages God used to reveal Himself and to declare their riches to his spiritual flock God has no equal. The apostle Paul highlights the blessing that such privilege accrues to the

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[25] Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 239.

[26] E. D. Burns, *The Missionary Theologian* (Great Britain: Geanies House, 2021), 172.

[27] Gupta, "Why Learn NT Greek?"

[28] Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 33.

faithful pastor-theologian: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things" (Rom 10:15; Isa 52:7).

It Elevates Confidence

A dependence on translations and commentaries can undercut the confidence of the pastor. Piper makes this point, saying, "You can't preach week in and week out over the whole range of God's revelation with depth and power if you are plagued with uncertainty when you venture beyond basic gospel generalities."[29] The power of the pastor's preaching is dependent on accurately dividing the Word. Without an accurate interpretation of the biblical text, there can be no power. The power and authority of the servant of God comes through the Word. It is founded in the pastor's faithfulness to the biblical text, which in turn is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The loss of accuracy in interpretation results in the loss of power in exposition. Chad Ashby explains it well:

> I think one of the greatest benefits of preparing sermons from the original languages is the boldness it gives you when you enter the pulpit. There are no lingering doubts that I am putting too much emphasis on something that seems important in the English translation but is actually not in the Greek or Hebrew. Because I have been there in the text myself, it gives me a great freedom to press hard into my own heart and into the lives of my hearers. With humility, I am able to preach Christ week by week in Spirit-inspired confidence drawn from the Spirit-inspired text.[30]

It Invigorates Communication

Plumbing the depths of a biblical text via the original language brings to the surface a variety of potential word studies, cross-references, and biblical illustrations. Since the Bible is a single book, it provides a plethora of illustrations and stimulates the relationship of multiple passages, bringing a freshness to the pastor's teaching. Johnson writes:

> A thorough grounding in the languages of Scriptures lays the foundation for continuing freshness in the pastor's lifelong ministry of preaching and teaching…. Having wrestled with the text for himself, he knows what God says in that text, not because commentaries X, Y, and Z have told him so, but because he's seen it there in the Word. He can benefit from the work of the scholars without becoming dependent on them. And there's a freshness about his preaching that derives from his direct contact with the Word.[31]

Martin Luther observed: "Faith and the Gospel may indeed be proclaimed by simple preachers without the languages…. But when the preacher is versed in the languages,

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[29] Gupta, "Why Learn NT Greek?"

[30] Chad Ashby, "Should a Pastor Use Greek and Hebrew in His Sermon?" *Southern Equip*, July 3, 2018, https://equip.sbts.edu/article/pastor-use-Greek-Hebrew-sermon.

[31] Johnson, "The Perils of Pastors," 24.

his discourse has freshness and force, the whole of Scripture is treated, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and works."[32] Elsewhere he adds: "Where the preacher is versed in the languages, there is a freshness and vigor in his preaching, Scripture is treated in its entirety, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and illustrations."[33]

It Brings Gratification

In a sense, laboring hard in the Word of God (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Thess 2; 3 John 4) results in a level of gratification. That is what seems to be on the mind of the apostle Paul in his final conversation with the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:25–38). He had declared the whole purpose of God. Later, when he wrote to Timothy, the pastor of the Ephesian Church, he reiterated his faithfulness to the end (2 Tim 4:7–8). He had finished the course that God had set for him.

The Pastor-Theologian's Greatest Obligation

Called by God and put into service, the pastor-theologian shares an obligation similar to that given the apostle Paul. He writes: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). He had a stewardship placed on Him by God (Col 1:25). Jeremiah attempted to resist the call of God, but could not hold it in; it became like "fire in his bones" (Jer 20:9). MacArthur explains: "It is not that God's calling cannot be ignored, neglected, or slighted, but that it cannot be changed. The man who resists God's call or tries to give it up will, like Jeremiah, experience a 'burning fire shut up in [his] bones;' until he obeys. He has no choice."[34]

The pastor-theologian must give purposeful effort to preaching the Word and training the flock God has entrusted to him (Acts 20:28). It requires the expenditure of maximum effort. Paul exclaims: "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:26–27). The obligation entrusted to the pastor-theologian ought to drive him to the most rigorous study of God's Word, which is achieved best by the study of the text in its original languages.

Conclusion

The Scriptures, God's self-disclosure of Himself, were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. God chose these languages to reveal Himself to mankind. That alone should drive every pastor-theologian to pursue a working knowledge of these languages so he can effectively pass along an accurate interpretation of the Scriptures to those he teaches. The writers of God's message were people of the book. Ezra, for

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[32] John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 99.

[33] Luther, *Luther's Works*, 45:365.

[34] John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 210.

example, made it his passion to study the law of the LORD, to practice it, and to teach it to others (Ezra 7:10). As with Ezra and Nehemiah, the book was and must continue to be the center of all that is done (Neh 8:1–8).[35]

Given the importance of utilizing the biblical languages, Martin Luther adds: "It is a sin and shame not to know our own book or to understand the speech and words of our God; it is a still greater sin and loss that we do not study languages, especially in these days when God is offering and giving us men and books and every facility and inducement to this study, and desires his Bible to be an open book."[36]

It does not mean that a ministry of the Word cannot be had without a knowledge of the biblical languages. But one must not forget that the Scriptures, written in the biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, are the foundation of our faith! They are the means God ordained to reveal Himself to mankind. In the words of Piper:

> An evangelical believes that God humbled Himself not only in the incarnation of the Son, but also in the inspiration of the Scriptures. The manger and the cross were not sensational. Neither is grammar and syntax. But that is how God has chosen to reveal Himself. A poor Jewish Peasant and a prepositional phrase have this in common, that they are both human and both ordinary. Therefore, if God humbled Himself to take on human flesh and to speak human language, woe to us if we arrogantly presume to ignore the humanity of Christ and the grammar of Scripture.[37]

It is hard to overstate the challenges someone would face trying to teach the Scriptures without having learned the biblical languages and translated its founding documents. Walter L. Michel exhorts, "Theological education is like a house and the knowledge of the biblical languages is like the foundation of that house…. How foolish and sinful any program of theological education which jeopardizes all of theological education by not providing a thorough foundation."[38]

Without a basic facility in the original text, the pastor may find himself ill-equipped to defend the faith against error (Titus 1:9). The pastoral ministry is all about rightly dividing the Word of God. The pastor-theologian must spend his entire life studying it, treasuring it, and teaching others to do the same. As Andrew Bartelt notes: "It is, after all, only logical that those who preach in a church body which so strongly affirms both *sola Scriptura* and verbal inspiration should have the ability to look at the very *verba* in *Scriptura*."[39]

Opportunities to learn the biblical languages abound. Technology has made it possible to access such training while living in almost any part of the world. It is an investment that promises rich dividends. When the opportunity presents itself, it must be one's highest priority to seize it. God wrote only one book; we must immerse ourselves into it and feed our flock from it! Like kissing *your bride through a veil, reading the Bible in translation is just not intimate enough*.

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[35] Motyer, "Old Testament History," 1:281.

[36] Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, 99–100.

[37] John Piper, "Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts," *Desiring God*, https://cdn.desiringgod.org/pdf/booklets/BTBX.pdf.

[38] Walter L. Michel, "How Should the Old Testament Be Read?" *Dialog* 31 (1992): 193. Cf. Johnson, "The Perils of Pastors," 23–24.

[39] Andrew Bartelt, "Hebrew, Greek, and 'Real-Life Ministry,'" *Concordia Journal* 11 (1985): 122.

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 63–75

EXEGESIS AND EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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In this article, Robert L. Thomas outlines the description of a diligent and faithful pastor-theologian, demonstrating that exegesis is the foundation of exposition. Thomas explains the importance of preparing the sermon from the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), the wisdom it takes to treat properly theological and interpretative challenges from the pulpit, and the value of bringing out insights from the text for the congregation. In all this, Thomas contends that exegesis is so foundational to preaching that "if there is a breakdown in exegesis, the whole structure, of which expository preaching is the climax, collapses" (p. 113).[1]

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The distinguishing mark of expository preaching, also called Bible exposition, is the biblical interpretation communicated through the sermon. The expositor must teach his audience the meaning of the text intended by its author and understood by its original recipients. Because the original languages of the Old and New Testaments are inaccessible to almost all congregations, precise and detailed interpretations of Scripture will be also. So a Bible expositor's central responsibility is to acquaint the hearers with these interpretations that were previously unknown to them. The final test of the effectiveness of Bible exposition is how well individuals who hear the sermon can read the passage with greater comprehension of its exact meaning than they could before they heard the message and demonstrate a willingness to obey what they have learned.

[1] The current article originally appeared as a chapter entitled "Exegesis and Expository Preaching" in Robert L. Thomas, *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, ed. John F. MacArthur and The Master's Seminary Faculty, The John MacArthur Pastor's Library (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 107–19 Taken from *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* by John MacArthur. Copyright © 2005 by John MacArthur. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson, https://www.thomasnelson.com.

The point that differentiates expository sermons from other types is not the cleverness of their outlines or their catchy clichés. Neither is it the relevance of the message to everyday life. These are helpful and necessary as communicative tools and devotional helps, but they do not distinguish expository preaching from other kinds of sermons. A sermon could still be expository without them, but if the explanation of what the author meant is missing, so is the heart of Bible exposition.

The unique contribution of Bible exposition is its substantial enhancement of the listeners' comprehension of Scripture's intent. Those who listen to expository preaching have opportunity to submit to the Holy Spirit who first inspired the text as He now illumines that text to them. This is the best avenue for building up the saints. The New Testament puts heavy emphasis on using the mind as the principal avenue to Christian growth (for example, Rom. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:13), so the preacher should do the same.[2]

Building Toward Bible Exposition

The Critical Role of Exegesis

The responsibility on the shoulders of one who preaches this kind of message is heavy. He must have a *thorough* understanding of the passage to be preached before devising the mechanics for conveying his understanding to the congregation. If at all possible, he must be a *trained* exegete with a working knowledge of the biblical languages and a systematic method for using them to analyze the text.[3]

A chapter such as this cannot provide a program of exegetical training. Theological seminaries exist for this purpose. It is also beyond the present scope to formulate a system of exegesis for the Greek New Testament (or the Hebrew Old Testament). A few suggestions regarding exegesis are in order, however, so as to identify what this foundational process entails.

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[2] Stott has written, "The great doctrines of creation, revelation, redemption and judgment all imply that man has an inescapable duty both to think and to act upon what he thinks and knows" (John R. W. Stott, *Your Mind Matters* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972], 14). Keiper concurs: "If we fully enter into the power of biblical thinking, we shall become a miracle people, having a healthy mind in Christ, being an example of our heavenly citizenship on earth, and continually and daily cleansed by His Word (see John 15:3)" (Ralph L. Keiper, *The Power of Biblical Thinking* [Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1977], 159). Hull is more specific: "Transformation comes through the commitment of the mind. Without the proper knowledge and thinking we have no basis for personal change or growth. The mind is the pivotal starting place for change" (Bill Hull, *Right Thinking* [Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1985], 8).

[3] "Cheater's Greek (or Hebrew)," an expression coined to describe alleged timesaving methods of learning and using the original languages, is not adequate for this purpose. Reputed shortcuts to learning a language have proven themselves time and again to be counterproductive in the study of Scripture. If the expositor has laid the right kind of foundation in his training and has maintained his familiarity with the languages through a disciplined program of a few minutes of review a day, several days a week, he will not need to rely constantly on "crutches" to translate his text in the original languages. Those who pretend to know the languages of Scripture but rely on such crutches are the ones to whom the well-known warning is appropriately applied, "A *little* knowledge of Greek (or Hebrew) is a dangerous thing." The combination of a solid foundation in Greek and Hebrew training and a consistent review program has proven itself to be sufficient for many expositors of the Word. Those for whom circumstances have made this combination an impossible goal to achieve should be *extremely* cautious in their use of the biblical languages and should avail themselves of every opportunity to check and double-check opinions about the text before sharing them with others.

Accurate exegesis is ultimately dependent on the leading of the Holy Spirit in the exegete's research. Apart from His guidance, not only does the meaning of the text evade him, but also valid applications of the text will prove elusive (1 Cor. 2:14). Since God is a God of order (14:33, 40) and rational creatures created in His image and regenerated by His Spirit are capable of grasping divine logic, the leading of the Spirit in exegetical study will be in accord with divine reason accessible to the exegete.

Exegesis deals with the original languages of Scripture: Greek in the New Testament and Hebrew and Aramaic in the Old Testament. It does not satisfy itself with the uncertainties of working from a translation or translations, when study in the original languages is possible. Translations can never cover all the nuances of the original text. This is the key area in which an expositor can add to his listeners' knowledge of the text because they usually will be limited to what they can glean from a translation in their native tongue.

Exegesis also builds upon sound hermeneutical principles. Probably the greatest breakdown in biblical studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century is in this field. Challenges galore have been launched against time-honored guidelines for interpreting the Bible. These challenges come from a wide variety of sources. The average pulpiteer may easily be ''blown away'' if he is not alert to detect the widespread aberrations that are in circulation. The importance of vigilance in this regard merits the inclusion of several illustrations of the contemporary problem among evangelicals.

Old Testament scholar William LaSor asserts that New Testament writers did not follow a grammatico-historical method in their use of the Old Testament, so Bible interpreters today should not be limited by that method.[4] What he fails to observe, however, is that New Testament writers received direct, divine revelation, whereas contemporary interpreters do not. Therefore, they cannot take the liberties with the text that the New Testament writers took with the Old Testament text.[5]

Theologian Paul Jewett understands Paul to be inconsistent with himself regarding the role of women in the church, concluding that Paul advocates sexual equality in one of his books (Gal. 3:28) and inequality in another (1 Cor. 11:3).[6] This opinion, in essence, dispenses with the well-known ''analogy of faith'' principle in the biblical interpretation. It sees the Bible as inconsistent with itself.

Philosopher Anthony Thiselton informs us that hermeneutics is a circular process and human prejudgments make objective interpretation impossible.[7] Such a pronouncement discourages attempts to learn the original meaning of the text and opens the floodgate for uncontrolled interpretive subjectivism. At best, it has the effect of destroying the goal of objectivity that traditional Protestant interpretation has always pursued and, at worst, it signals an end of rationality in studying the Bible.

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[4] William S. LaSor, "The Sensus Plenior and Biblical Interpretation," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. W. Gasque and W. S. LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 267–68.

[5] Larry D. Pettegrew, "Liberation Theology and Hermeneutical Preunderstandings," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148, no. 591 (July–September 1991): 283.

[6] Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 133–35, 142.

[7] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 105, 110; see also, "The New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 317.

Missiologist Krikor Haleblian advocates the principle of contextualization, whereby each culture is allowed to form its own system of hermeneutics based on the praxis of ministry in meeting its own peculiar needs.[8] Yet if each culture formulated its own principles of interpretation to make the Bible mean something conceived as necessary for its own isolated situation, objective control of what the Bible means is terminated. The connotations for the original recipients of the writings have become completely irrelevant. Redaction critic I. Howard Marshall cites as nonhistorical a number of sayings attributed to Christ in the Gospels, viewing them to be later additions added by the church for clarifying purposes.[9] Traditional interpretation, on the other hand, views the Gospels as containing accurate historical data about Jesus.[10]

The circulation of such subtle hermeneutical variations has contributed heavily to the interpretive confusion prevalent in evangelicalism in the last several decades.[11]

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[8] Krikor Haleblian, "The Problem of Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 9, no. 1 (January 1983): 97–99, 103.

[9] I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology*, updated ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 57, 62 (note 50), 78–79, 82 (note 49), 85, 108 (note 11). For other examples of evangelical scholars who question the accuracy of the Gospels, see Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, eds., *The Jesus Crisis; The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 13–34.

[10] The scope of this chapter does not permit a full portrayal of all the hermeneutical pitfalls that are current. A few more examples from other recent sources may help to show what to beware of and avoid:

1. Anthropologists Smalley and Kraft say that changes in culture necessitate alterations in the meaning of divine revelation to adapt it to a new cultural situation (William A. Smalley, "Culture and Superculture," *Practical Anthropology* 2 [1955]: 58–71; and Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979], 123). In other words, divine revelation is non-absolute. In contrast, the grammatical-historical method of interpretation assumes the absolute nature of divine revelation.

2. Missiologist Bonino contends that there is no truth in the Bible apart from its application in a present-day situation (J. M. Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 88–89). This position overemphasizes the role of application and makes it determinative of the historical interpretation. Application should follow interpretation and be based upon it, not vice versa.

3. Feminist writer Russell notes that the biblical text can only be considered as authoritative when it is nonsexist, that is, when it does not violate a feminist liberation perspective (Letty M. Russell, "Introduction: Liberating the Word," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985], 16). By her own admission this places her at odds with the grammatical-historical method of interpretation (in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, see also Russell's "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," 55–56, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's, "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," 132). To have some parts of Scripture as more authoritative than others flies in the face of a normal hermeneutical approach.

4. Philosopher Thiselton presupposes something in the interpreter's present experience—that is, assumptions made or questions asked by the interpreter—as interpretation's starting point (Thiselton, "New Hermeneutic," 316). The grammatical-historical approach says that the text must be the starting point. Thiselton's theory forces the text to deal with an issue that is probably irrelevant to the original intent of the writer.

5. Exegete Carson sides with secular modern linguistic theory in questioning the time-honored practice of distinguishing slight differences in meaning between synonyms used side-by-side in the text (D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 48–54). His position is fallacious because it does injustice to the precision of inspired Scripture. Grammatical-historical interpretation has upheld the validity of these distinctions between synonyms, but Carson disagrees.

[11] For extensive elaboration on the pervading presence of interpretive confusion within evangelicalism, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002).

These can become a serious hindrance to accurate exegesis and ultimately to expository preaching if they are not shunned.

Exegesis also presupposes a text that is determined through following valid text-critical principles. The canons of the Old Testament and New Testament are also in place and are the object of the expositor's interpretive efforts. Regarding each book under scrutiny, a thorough background knowledge of authorship, date of writing, destination, and the like, the field called biblical introduction, is also a necessary foundation for exegesis.

Exegesis itself incorporates a study of individual words, their backgrounds, their derivation, their usage, their synonyms, their antonyms, their figurative usages, and other lexical aspects. Elaboration on Greek and Hebrew words in pulpit exposition is by far the most frequently encountered homiletical use of exegesis, but it is only a small beginning. Of at least equal, and probably greater, importance is the way the words are joined in sentences, paragraphs, sections, etc. This area of syntax is too frequently overlooked. Yet only a full appreciation of syntactical relationships can provide a specific understanding of the flow of thought that the Spirit intended in His revelation through the human writers of the Scripture.

A thorough familiarity with the historical background of each book is also imperative. Without this, the meaning to readers in the original setting is beyond reach of the expositor and, hence, of his audience, too.

The church at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the beneficiary of a rich treasure of Bible teaching published throughout the centuries of the Christian era. Gifted teachers whom Christ has placed in the church have preserved their interpretations on the printed page. It behooves the exegete to take full advantage of these God-given sources of enrichment in acquiring a keener mastery of the meaning he must teach.

It is naive to assume that these gifted writers never disagree in their interpretations. It is the challenge of the Bible expositor under the guidance of the Spirit to evaluate each of the conflicting opinions in light of sound hermeneutical principles and exegetical procedures and to settle on the one that he feels to be correct. This is what he will preach to his congregation as the true interpretation.

After the tedious process of exegetical analysis, the expositor will have amassed an immense amount of data, much of it technical, but he should also have arrived at a detailed comprehension of the Scripture's interpretation.[12] He must now select from this massive accumulation of material the parts that are most significant to transmit to his listeners.

A major precaution to observe is not to preach exegetical data from the pulpit. Because the expositor has been enlightened so much by what he has discovered, his initial impulse may be to pass on to his people the excitement of his discovery in the

[12] As a service to expositors everywhere, an ongoing project of the New Testament faculty and students at The Master's Seminary is the production of "exegetical digests" of various New Testament books and portions of books. These digests consist of all the exegetically relevant material derived from the top eighty to one hundred sources pertaining to the book or section of Scripture covered. They provide instant access to the best of exegetical data that an expositor would spend many hours of preparation to discover. This type of resource has proven to be a great time-saver in sermon preparation for many. The lengthiness of the *Exegetical Digest of I John*, 508 pages, illustrates the magnitude of the exegetical task facing the expositor.

same terminology as he received it. This is a major mistake. Very few in the pew have a background sufficient to enable them to comprehend the kind of technical data derived from exegesis. So the minister of the Word must adapt his explanations to suit the vocabulary and interest level of those to whom he speaks. He must develop a technique of conveying in the language of a non-specialist what he has learned from his specialized analysis. How he does so may vary. It may be through paraphrase, description, analogy, illustration, or in a multitude of other ways. Yet, he must explain the text in a way that is interesting and understandable to his people. This lucid explanation is at the core of Bible exposition.

Auxiliary Fields of Study

Bible exposition includes much more than exegesis. In a logical development of theological and ministerial disciplines, it is built upon other fields of investigation as well. These other fields of study are based on exegesis, too, but they amplify exegesis by stipulating different ways of applying it. The other disciplines include the following.

1. *Biblical and Systematic Theology.* One cannot reach an accurate perception of God and His works without basing it on a correct interpretation of the Bible. It is vital that these theological perspectives be incorporated into expository preaching at appropriate times.
2. *Church History.* The doctrinal and ethical development of the Christian church from century to century can be evaluated properly only through the eyes of a correctly understood Bible. Lessons learned by earlier generations of believers, both good and bad, make excellent sermon illustrations. They also encourage imitation of exemplary behavior of saints of the past and guard Christians from repeating the mistakes of those who have gone before.
3. *Apologetics.* The New Testament is clear in its instruction to Christians about defending the faith against attack (Phil. 1:7; 1 Pet. 3:15, 16). Philosophies of religion vary widely because the nature of philosophy lends itself so readily to mere human reasoning. Logic is not necessarily purely secular, however. Under the control of conclusions reached in biblical exegesis, apologetic methodologies can apply sound logic in responding to those who attack the integrity of the Bible and the Christian faith. Well-rounded expository preaching will incorporate these biblically oriented answers whenever necessary.
4. *Applicational Ministries.* Also based on exegesis is a wide assortment of services in which the principles of Scripture rightly interpreted are applied to human experience. Practical uses of the Bible are multiple and varied, but they must be controlled. Correct interpretation is the *only* suitable control. If the meaning of the text in its original setting does not regulate application, applications become extremely subjective and essentially invalid. Applicational ministries include the following:
    a. *Homiletics.* The field of sermon preparation and delivery is broad, but the structure of the sermon and the motivation for its delivery must be rooted in the text. All too often secular methodologies and ideas that are only human have determined the shape of a sermon. If thorough exegesis is the foundation of a message, this will not happen.

b. *Counseling.* The counsel that the Bible prescribes is administered most effectively through members of Christ's body who possess the gift of exhortation. This gift, along with the gift of teaching, forms an effective combination that makes up what is called preaching (Rom. 12:7, 8). Exhortation (or ''encouragement,'' as the Greek term can also be rendered) includes rebuke to the wayward Christian and comfort to the one beset by grief. It covers the broad spectrum of advice on how to live the Christian life. Unfortunately, much of what passes itself off as Christian counseling is more secular than it is biblical.[13] This is because it is not on a solid exegetical footing. Expository preaching does well to include the right kinds of application to the assembled group, just as it should be done on an individual or small-group basis, that is, a counseling situation.

c. *Christian Education.* Education that is really Christian will derive from exegesis. What is true of secular educational methodologies will not necessarily apply in efforts to impart biblical truth. For example, the secular assumption that something must be experienced before it can be learned is the reverse sequence of what the Bible prescribes. Doctrine precedes and determines practical experience in the biblical pattern. Utilization of biblical principles of education in messages whose purpose is to teach the meaning of Scripture is another supporting element of Bible exposition.

d. *Administration.* Unfortunately, many have attempted to incorporate secular administrative philosophies into local-church operations. Pragmatism has often been given as a reason for this: ''If it works in the business world, use it.'' Such reasoning is ethically inferior, however. The biblical dimension in administration gives first attention to principle: ''Is it right according to Scripture?'' The Bible has much to say about how to rule or govern. In fact, it designates a special gift of the Spirit for carrying out this function (see Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28). Since, under normal circumstances, the Bible expositor will serve his church in an administrative capacity, it can be expected that exegetically based principles of leadership sometimes will be reflected in his preaching.

e. *Missions and Evangelism.* Missions and evangelism are proper goals in Christian service, but the means used to reach these goals are not always so proper. Even here man-made schemes have replaced scripturally prescribed methods of winning lost people to Christ. When missionary methods and evangelistic techniques are based on what the Bible teaches, however, both the means and the end are God-honoring. Hence, exegesis must also be the footing on which Christian outreach is built. Expository preaching will, in turn, build on missions and evangelism rightly construed in those aspects of the sermon devoted to bringing an offer of salvation.

f. *Social Issues.* How Christians should involve themselves in combating the ills of society and helping meet the multiplied needs of the world as a whole must stem from an accurate understanding of the Word too. Scripture clarifies certain causes that are very worthy and supplies outlines of how

[13] See John MacArthur and Wayne Mack, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005) for a thoroughly consistent Scriptural approach to counseling.

> God's people can help alleviate suffering and rectify injustice. Christians have responsibilities as citizens in the world. The preacher who features Bible exposition should amplify these responsibilities when they are appropriate to the passage he is developing.

The breadth of Bible exposition is enormous; yet its central core is always biblical exegesis. In review, the relationships of various disciplines and their climax in an exposition of the Word may be shown in Figure 8–1, which pictures the relationships between fields of theological study.

The diagram reflects the building blocks that lead eventually to Bible exposition, beginning at the first level and progressing to the fourth. It also shows the crucial role of biblical exegesis in the process. If there is a breakdown in exegesis, the whole structure, of which expository preaching is the climax, collapses. Based on thorough exegesis, Bible exposition can fruitfully draw upon the full spectrum of theological disciplines.

Practical Suggestions for Expository Preachers

The previous remarks reflect that exegesis and Bible exposition are not the same. Exegesis has been defined as ''the critical or technical application of hermeneutical principles to a biblical text in the original languages with a view to the exposition or declaration of its meaning.''[14] Since exegesis leads to exposition but is not identical with it, a few suggestions about how to make the transition from one to the other are in order.

As in the process of exegesis, it is also true of the transition from that point to sermon preparation and delivery that the leading of the Spirit of God is indispensable. This is the only way of accomplishing the work of God in the lives of people through preaching (see 1 Thess. 1:5). The preacher must be a man in whom the Spirit has been and is at work before he can be an instrument through whom the Spirit will work in the lives of others as he preaches.

A previously issued warning is worth repeating here: A transition from exegesis to Bible exposition is mandatory. Pulpiteers who are fluent enough to expound the technical data of exegesis and still hold the attention of an average congregation have been and are extremely rare. The information gleaned from exegesis must be put into a format that fits the understanding of the person in the pew and is applicable to his or her situation.

As Figure 8–1 directs, exegesis must also be expanded to embody other fields of doctrinal and ethical relevance. A preacher need not include every field in every sermon he preaches. These are areas that may be introduced as the nature of the passage and the occasion of the sermon require.

[14] Robert L. Thomas, *Introduction to Exegesis* (Sun Valley, CA: Robert L. Thomas, 1987), 15–16.

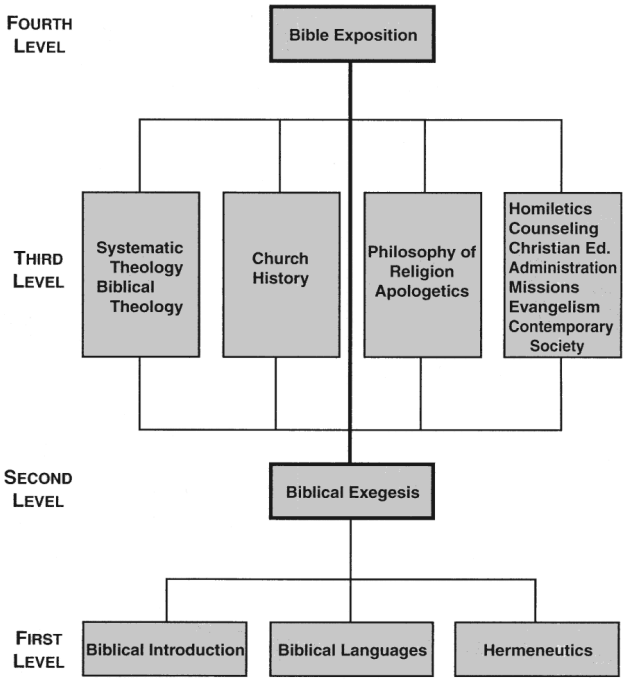

Figure 8–1
Relationships Between Fields of Theological Study

Beyond these general suggestions, some specific pointers may be beneficial. These miscellaneous guidelines are the ones that have seemed most apropos to this writer in personal preaching, listening to other preachers, and preparing would-be expositors during forty-five years of teaching biblical exegesis.

1. The preacher should review the results of the exegetical study and select parts that will most typically represent his detailed interpretation of the passage. Time will not allow him to include everything he has learned, so he must select what is most important for his congregation to hear. What is not used immediately can be filed and employed later in an appropriate message. Thus, all of one's labors have value sooner or later.

2. In his sparing use of technical terminology that may be unintelligible to his audience, the expositor should not shy away from referring occasionally to Greek words that lie behind the English translation. When doing so, he can help his cause by comparing the Greek term to an English word derived from it. For example, *duvnami~* (*dynamis*), the Greek word for ''power,'' could be compared to the English word *dynamic.*[15] This gives the listeners a point of reference to facilitate recollection

[15] Caution needs to be exercised in choosing English words that are analogous to Greek words, however. "Dynamite," for instance, conveys a markedly incorrect impression of what the Greek word *dynamis* connotes.

of the Greek term. To repeat another precaution, however, this type of sermon material must be used only *occasionally.* The expositor must be careful not to overuse Greek terminology.

3. The Bible expositor should describe as best he can the thoughts of the human writer of Scripture that resulted in his writing what he did. These subjective impressions were products of the Holy Spirit's inspiration and are key elements in a precise understanding of accurate interpretation. A writer's logical developments are best captured through close attention to features of syntactical exegesis referred to above. The use of conjunctions in the New Testament is particularly strategic in cultivating a sensitivity to movement of thought in the text. This type of information is most effectively passed on to the audience in the form of descriptions or paraphrases of the text.

4. Public presentation is not the proper forum to resolve in detail difficult interpretive problems, but an expositor's awareness of the problems should be reflected in his presentation. After surveying the possible viewpoints, he should include one or two good reasons why he has selected a solution as the correct one. If he were to skim past a problem in the text without noticing it, he would shake the confidence of those listeners who may be aware of the problem. Tough issues should not be left unsolved, no matter how hard they are. If the preacher is indecisive, his indecision will be multiplied into outright confusion among his hearers who have nowhere else to turn for an answer. They have nothing comparable to the tools of a trained exegete to grapple with obscure passages. With particularly difficult matters, the expositor does well to admit publicly his personal struggle in reaching a decision, but he should nevertheless not shy away from expressing his own preferred answer in each problem passage.

5. A careful personal translation of the passage to be preached based on thorough exegesis is a primary prerequisite in sermon preparation. In producing it, the preacher should read the text repeatedly in the original language and then turn to English translations for further enlightenment on how others have rendered the words. As opportunity arises, the expositor's personal translation may be made available to the congregation in a published form.

6. The sermon's proposition and outline should have an interpretational rather than an applicational orientation. This reinforces the central purpose of the sermon as a teaching device. It is primary that listeners should carry away an understanding of the text's *meaning.* Suggestions of practical effects on Christian living are quite appropriate in the message, but without being founded on the original intention of the author, they will be short-lived. Besides, long after the sermon is over, the Holy Spirit will add to these suggested practical lessons others of an individual nature as people reflect on what the text means. Preaching is first and foremost a service to the mind as groundwork for a service to the heart. The will and emotions are influenced in a lasting way only in proportion to the degree that the mind has learned correct biblical teaching and the level of behavior consonant with that teaching.

7. In an ideal situation, the sequence within the sermon structure should follow the sequence of the passage of Scripture being treated, but sometimes the nature of the passage and/or the occasion of the sermon may require a sermon outline that draws upon emphases within the passage in a nonsequential order. The latter approach may sometimes be the best pedagogical tool for helping the audience grasp the

fundamental thrust of the passage. Whenever the out-of-sequence outline is used, a tracing of the passage's sequential flow should be included in the introduction or elsewhere in the sermon. A combined emphasis from the sequential summary and the text's underlying principles tendered non-sequentially will greatly benefit the hearers when they are reviewing the passage privately after the sermon.

8. An expositor should make every effort not to preach preconceived notions of what a given text may say. His sacred trust is to let the text speak for itself and not impose on it what he thinks or wishes it said. Much too frequently, a preacher conceives of what his congregation's needs are and rushes naively to a text to support his conception. The interpretive results are tragic and, beyond this, the preacher's prime reason for standing before people has suffered abuse.

9. The proper choice of an English translation on which to base a sermon is the subject of chapter 17 in this book, but whatever version is chosen, the preacher will have to correct or clarify the translation during the message. During a message, he must be careful to limit these corrections, perhaps to only two or three, for fear of shaking the confidence of his listeners in the Bible they hold in their hands. After all, part of his goal is to cultivate a hunger among his people to study the Bible privately. Too many criticisms of that Bible will undermine their dependence on a given translation and fuel a ''what's-the-use?'' attitude on their side.

10. Contemporary preaching is best done by people who possess the spiritual gifts of teaching and exhortation (Rom. 12:7, 8; 1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11). It combines a ministry primarily to the human intellect with one addressed primarily to the will. Teaching provides instruction in doctrine, which is the basis for exhortations on how to live more consistently for Christ. No two people have these combined gifts in equal strengths, nor do they have the gifts in the same proportions. So each person is completely unique and should not try to produce an exact imitation of someone else's preaching. Among prospective preachers in particular, the tendency is to observe a preacher with a strong ''charisma''—an indescribable appeal and attractiveness with listeners—and to try to imitate him. This is a mistake because no two members of the body of Christ have identical functions or were meant to be clones of one another.

11. The speaker should have a general idea of the average level of comprehension of those addressed. He should gear most of his remarks just below that level, but periodically he should rise above that level a bit.[16] This will challenge his people and keep them from getting bored with hearing so much that they already know. If he stays above that level too much, they will become frustrated and lose interest because they are in the dark about what is being preached. Balance is the key.

12. Every expository message should teach something that the recipients did not already know before hearing the sermon.[17] To some congregations unaccustomed to

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[16] Wonderly refers to this level of what consumers may tolerate as either a "horizon of difficulty" or a "threshold of frustration" (William L. Wonderly, *Bible Translations for Popular Use*, in *Helps for Translators*, vol. 7 [London: United Bible Societies, 1968], 37–39); see Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 132–44.

[17] A preacher who prefaces his sermon with "I don't have anything new to give you today, but …," has, in essence, told his congregation, "We may as well pack up and go home right now." He is confessing that his training for sermon preparation has been inadequate or that he has not been disciplined enough in his schedule to prepare the way he should have.

an expository ministry this may be uncomfortable at first. They have not come to the church service to be instructed because sermons they have heard in the past have consisted of a series of personal experiences or a string of platitudes without a firm biblical basis and not of instruction about the meaning of the text. Their orientation has been reflected in the oft-repeated philosophy, ''Our problem isn't that we don't know enough, but that we don't put what we do know into practice.'' This ill-conceived philosophy assumes that knowing and doing are antithetical— that is, that they form an ''either/or'' pair—when in reality they are not. The real situation is better stated, ''Our problem is that we don't know enough *and* that we don't put what we do know into practice.'' Instruction must be the prime objective if long-lasting, spiritually improved behavior is to result. Meeting the challenge of Bible exposition to teach the previously unknown is facilitated by the expositor's familiarity with the original text. Usually, he will have more than he can teach in his allotted time. As the saying goes, ''His sermon barrel will never run dry.''

13. The preacher of God's Word should take care not to overload his congregation. The average Christian can digest only so much at one sitting, particularly when he is being taught unfamiliar material. The messenger must be very sensitive to the capacity of those who sit under his ministry and govern his teaching accordingly.

14. How much a Bible expositor can teach effectively in one sermon is the function of a wide variety of factors. It will depend upon his combination of giftedness in teaching and exhortation, the nature of the sermon text, his method of preparation, the attention-span of his hearers, and other factors. As a general rule, with most congregations in the American culture, the first fifteen to twenty minutes is the best time to emphasize teaching in a message.[18] After this, listeners tend to become mentally fatigued, so to speak, and added effort is necessary to hold their attention. More applications of the text and illustrations of its principles are good ways to spark attentiveness. This does not mean that the first half of the sermon must be devoid of applications and illustrations, nor that the last half must completely ignore teaching. It is rather a matter of the proportional emphasis to be given to each in successive parts of the sermon.

15. In expository preaching, teaching of the ''not already known'' should be mingled with what listeners do already know or what they can glean for themselves from reading an English translation. This familiar material furnishes them with a point of reference to which they can relate the new instruction received. Without this anchor, they have no way to assimilate the message with their already formulated Christian beliefs. With this reference point their broad comprehension of Christian doctrine as a whole can be expanded.

16. The expositor should avoid the pitfall of sensationalism. The temptation is strong to gear one's message for novelty. Forcing upon the original text a spectacular connotation that it was never intended to convey is all too common. A preacher may do this sort of thing for the shock-effect and the consequent popularity it produces. If he opts for this route to gain applause or acceptance by his listeners, he has abused

[18] The interest span of a given audience can be increased by patiently and gradually increasing the amount of instructional emphasis from message to message. Listeners will grow progressively in their ability to sustain concentration on a passage under discussion over longer and longer periods. Of course, in other cultures the attention span may vary considerably from what most Americans can tolerate.

his responsibility and privilege as a proclaimer of God's Word. The line separating the selfish motives of a sensation-seeker and the unselfish motives of a humble attempt to maintain audience attention is sometimes very fine. God's servant must be careful not to cross that line in the wrong direction.[19]

Our Challenge

In summary, the preacher's God-given responsibility is to deliver accurately and effectively to his listeners what the Holy Spirit meant when He inspired the writers to pen the Scriptures. Anything short of this is not expository preaching and falls short of fulfilling the divine mandate to ''preach the Word'' (2 Tim. 4:2). To communicate accurately and effectively through the power of the Holy Spirit what has been written in Scripture is the most fulfilling service that a person can render to others.

In any book about the ''how to's'' of preaching, goals so high that they are unattainable are usually upheld. This criticism is applicable to the above remarks. One offering this kind of advice lays himself open to the charge of being so idealistic that he is not realistic. Yet to lower the standards, just because human imperfections prohibit perfect achievement, is to sacrifice the high ideals that befit the calling to preach the whole counsel of God. The man of God engaged in preaching must continue his efforts to improve his role in this eternal service for the benefit of other human beings and the glory of God. When the final tally is in, he recognizes, of course, the Holy Spirit as ultimately responsible for giving the increase through the proclamation of the Word of God. In the process, however, he will have done his best to be a vessel fit for the Master's use (2 Tim. 2:21).

[19] Guarding against selfish motives and pride and at the same time trying to maintain the interest of listeners for *their* benefit is probably the greatest challenge for the preacher. It entails self-examination to determine whether his motivation is from his "crucified-with-Christ" self for the purpose of self-aggrandizement or his "raised-with-Christ" self for the purpose of edifying others (see Rom. 6:11). The Spirit-controlled expositor will defer only to the latter type of motivation in this decision, as well as in all decisions of his Christian life (see Robert L. Thomas, "Improving Evangelical Ethics: An Analysis of the Problem and a Proposed Solution," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 1 [March 1991]: 17–19).

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 77–88

THE PASTOR'S STUDY: A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN MACARTHUR

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This dialogue between John MacArthur, a seminarian of the 1960s, and his former seminary professor, Robert Thomas, emphasizes the crucial place of the pastor's study in the total pastoral ministry responsibility.

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In the previous article (pp. 91–103), Robert L. Thomas outlined a description of a faithful pastor-theologian. In the present dialogue, Thomas interviews Dr. John MacArthur as an example who models the qualities of a faithful pastor-theologian. Thomas asks MacArthur about the preeminence of the Sunday morning sermon, the importance of the original languages for exegesis, the necessity of diligence in the pastor's personal study, the value of seminary education, and other such essential questions. Towards the end of the interview, MacArthur exclaims that the pastor-theologian must focus on "the importance of diligence in study, discipline in establishing priorities, integrity in preaching the Scriptures, accuracy in interpreting the text, and the efficient use of the precious time given us to serve the Lord" (174–75).[1]

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We have had the privilege of a long relationship dating back to 1961 when John MacArthur initiated his seminary training at the institution where I, Robert Thomas, was chairman of the New Testament Department. It was our privilege to learn

[1] The current article originally appeared as a chapter entitled "The Pastor's Study" in John F. MacArthur and Robert L. Thomas, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*, ed. John F. MacArthur and The Master's Seminary Faculty, The John MacArthur Pastor's Library (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 162–75. Taken from *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* by John MacArthur. Copyright © 2005 by John MacArthur. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson, https://www.thomasnelson.com.

together, one as a student and the other as a relatively new seminary instructor. This chapter, in the form of a dialogue, will probe how well we filled our roles at that time, how beneficial the training for pastoral ministry in the study has proven to be, and what improvements experience has dictated in the current emphases of the program at The Master's Seminary.

As initiator of this dialogue, I will pose questions along with a few observations to which my former student, Dr. MacArthur, will respond with elaborations regarding the pastor and his study.

The Role of the Pastor's Study in Pastoral Ministry

THOMAS (hereafter **RT**): John, on one occasion years ago I remember a chapel speaker—a rather well-known evangelical pastor of a prominent church—who emphasized the importance of the Sunday morning sermon for the total life of a local church. His opinion was that this message delivered to the largest number of the church family was the major factor in establishing the atmosphere that pervades every phase of life and service by a body of believers. Would you concur with this assessment of the importance of that one weekly message?

MacARTHUR (hereafter **JM**): Absolutely! The Sunday morning sermon is the crucial point of contact for the whole church. It is the one place where everyone hears the same thing. It is the driving force for a local body of believers. It is also the place where you teach your people uniformly. The rest of the week, they are fragmented in Bible studies, discipleship groups, Sunday school classes, and other smaller settings, but the worship service on Sunday morning is the greatest common ground that you have with your people. I have said that very thing through the years, that the Sunday morning teaching and preaching that I do is the driving force and the strongest influencing factor in the life of our church. Sunday night comes a close second behind that because we have always had such a large response to our Sunday night services. That figures in the picture, too. But the Lord's Day morning service tends to be the number-one driving force.

RT: The pastor cited in the last question was one noted more for his attention to relational issues in Christian ministry. For that reason, his public acknowledgment of the importance of the Sunday morning message surprised me. Given the strategic importance of the Sunday message or messages in setting the tone for local church ministry, what responsibility does this put on a pastor's shoulders regarding his attention to study?

JM: The answer to your question is obvious. If the Sunday morning message is the driving force in the life of the church and right behind it the Sunday evening message, if this is where people are taught, if it is the time and place for teaching the great truths around which the church builds and grows, then it demands the most rigorous kind of study. It also demands Bible exposition because you must give people the Word of God. You can talk about relational issues and whatever else at other times in the church's schedule, but when it comes to that time on the Lord's Day when you build the foundation for living, it has to come from the Word of God. To do this demands the greatest amount of effort in preparation and study and the greatest attention and devotion to the Scriptures so that you are, on Sunday morning and evening, propounding the Word of God, that is, letting God speak through His Word.

Here you develop those principles that are absolutely foundational doctrines for the life of the church.

Through the years I have spent equal amounts of time on the Sunday morning and Sunday evening messages. I suppose that is because if you are going to deal with the Word at all, you must deal with it with the same level of intensity—an intensity that will yield the correct meaning of the truth. This has required the utmost in diligence.

The Influence of Seminary Training on the Pastor's Study

RT: John, in helping you choose a seminary to attend, your father had as his primary desire that you become a Bible expositor, did he not? I know you had him as an excellent example to follow in many ways, but I am sure that one of those ways was his diligence in study as he prepared his sermons. How much influence did his hard work in the study have on your habits? How did seminary training add to or change your method of study compared to what you learned from your father?

JM: Yes, my father's desire was for me to become a Bible expositor. His diligence in study has been a great influence on me. In fact, beyond his eightieth birthday he continues to read and read and read. He used to hammer into me, ''Don't ever go into a pulpit unprepared. Be prepared.'' And he has always been totally and comprehensively prepared whenever he has preached.

My study methods are generally the same as my father's. The major difference that my seminary training made lies more in the types of resources we use in our study. My father tended to study the more popular type of commentaries and to look at more of the apologetic task of defending the text against attack. My style is different in that I am concerned to explain what the Bible means—probably a result of my training—so I use commentaries and other tools that are of a more technical nature. In spite of this difference, however, I learned so much from him that I want to continue to follow the pattern of diligent study that he demonstrates even to this day.

RT: You have often spoken of your training in seminary as being one of the richest and most formative periods of your Christian life. Could you single out two or three areas in particular that you found to be particularly enriching?

JM: Obviously the intensity of biblical study in seminary enriched me. During college experience I had been involved in a myriad of extracurricular activities such as athletics, work, and student government. Those consumed a lot of time. Beyond this, many of my general education classes were not too appealing to me. My minors were in history and Greek, but my major was in religion; the courses in Bible and theology really grabbed my heart. I did well in these, much better than in the other courses.

When I entered seminary, however, everything taught in every class seemed crucial to me. I moved to a completely new level in terms of my commitment as a student. Even though I took between seventeen and twenty units per semester, I loved it because I was learning God's Word and being equipped for ministry. My whole motivation changed dramatically. The higher level of expectation in seminary stretched me. I was learning so much more than in my undergraduate biblical and theological courses. Even though I had had four years of Greek in college, I found the Greek exegesis classes more exciting since I knew I was gaining proficiency needed to do the work of ministry.

Another area of enrichment would have to be personal relationships I formed with the seminary faculty. I came to know these men personally and to love them. They made me a part of their lives. Many of them spent hours with me privately, challenging me, answering my questions, and building real friendships. The value of knowing them is beyond estimation when you see their lives, their integrity, their virtue, and the zeal they have for spiritual things and for biblical truth.

Another aspect of seminary I appreciated was the discipline of completing the program in three years. This caused everything to be interwoven and overlapping. The educational process was not a long strung-out process that seemed to last forever. It was all bunched up in a condensed amount of time, with everything interrelated and one kind of information interacting with another kind. For me it was the most dynamic learning format to take the program in as brief a period as I could.

A further value of seminary has been the friendships I made with fellow students. The sharpening that went on as we bantered about doctrine, theology, and ministry strategies and styles as well as the shaping that accompanied the interchange have been invaluable. My fellow students challenged me to read books that the faculty had not mentioned. All those relationships were part of the shaping process. All in all, I could not do what I do apart from my seminary experience.

RT: I can sense your deep appreciation for your seminary training in general, but more specifically our dialogue pertains to how your training has benefitted your ministry in the study. Your program of study devoted a major portion of its curriculum to what some have called the cognitive or substantive areas of study. These are areas of concentration on Bible content, the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, systematic theology, and church history. What has been the relative contribution of each of these to your ministry of study during your twenty-six years in the pastorate?

JM: The specific areas you mentioned are all vital. In fact, as I have already stated, there is no way I could do what I do without them. It is crucial to have a basic working knowledge of the Hebrew language. Even though we are ministers of the new covenant and I spend most of my time in the New Testament, it is still important to have enough of a grasp of Hebrew to be able to evaluate commentaries and to make critical judgments on what others say about a given text or doctrinal issue.

The same is true about Greek. It is impossible to be sure whether what you are reading is accurate unless you know the language. Without such knowledge you are stuck with what the commentators say and cannot go beyond that because you do not know the language. You cannot be certain whether or not they are accurate. So if you are going to be a serious student and an expositor of Scripture, the original languages are a tremendous enrichment. Furthermore, much of the literature written about Scripture refers to and builds on those original-language texts. To be able to deal with that material requires you to have facility with the Hebrew and Greek. Systematic theology is absolutely crucial as a framework. To think systematically and analytically, to see a framework on which you can hang various teachings and see them come together, and to grasp the uniformity of that framework from the perspective of each faculty member is most fulfilling. I cannot imagine what it would be like to attend a seminary where each instructor had a different theology. The seminary I attended had no such problem. The systematic theology taught was the conviction of the whole faculty, so each class reinforced the others. The framework

was there, a framework erected on a foundation of an exegetical understanding of the biblical text. I have always said a person has no right to be a theologian until he has been an exegete. As I have systematically exegeted Scripture through the years, I have found my exegesis has sharpened, enriched, modified, and clarified, but never violated the system of theology that I learned in seminary. That is because it arose from an exegetical understanding in the first place.

An understanding of church history is critical to seeing the flow of doctrinal development and the progress of dogma through the centuries. An awareness of the ecclesiastical battles over doctrine is beneficial in knowing how to respond to similar challenges in the present. Knowing how church-related issues resolved themselves in the past is a lesson that helps us keep from repeating the mistakes made earlier. I think the best part of church history is studying conflicts and conflict resolution—doctrinal discussions and debates and their settlement. It is helpful to view how various elements of the church deviated into this or that kind of error, how the rest addressed the problem and the deviators were brought back into the mainstream again. This kind of study of the past has continued to shape my ministry. I also love biographies of historical leaders in the church.

RT: Your study of Scripture in seminary was from two perspectives, one more of an overview approach and the other more a scrutiny of small details of the original languages. As you review your experience since seminary, has the bird's-eye or the worm's-eye emphasis proven more valuable, or does each have an equal contribution? Is either of the two dispensable in preparation for ministry?

JM: I would have to say that the worm's-eye view is more valuable to me, because it allows me to scrutinize the details, to get right down into the original text and really search it out and dig deeply. I do think the bird's-eye view is helpful. It is important to understand an overarching flow, including a bird's-eye view of a whole book, of the New Testament and of the Old Testament, and of general redemptive themes running throughout Scripture—in other words, theological themes. Those are important, but most important to me—since I have spent all the years of my ministry digging into the text—has been the ability to handle the details of the language and dissecting the text to discover what God intended. I think you need both, but if you had to choose between the two, you would want the ability to handle the details of the text. On that basis you can conclude what the bird's-eye view should be, but the opposite would not be true.

RT: My observation of your preaching and teaching ministry has convinced me that you have a proclivity toward systematic theology. Could you furnish a couple of examples of how you responded to this field of study while in seminary and what benefit it has brought to your study in pastoral service?

JM: It is true, my teaching and preaching does tend to be theological. I want to principlize the text so that it comes across as clear, theological truth. In other words, I believe that truth is simply a series of principles. The process of exegesis should yield those principles. Some of those principles you may find in a variety of texts. For instance, a given theological principle may appear in fifty different passages. It is our job in expositing a passage to find that principle and then to demonstrate how it fits into the larger context. If it is a principle about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the question is, how does that principle fit into the larger context of the Holy Spirit's ministry, and how does His ministry fit into the larger redemptive context? I always

try to trace categories of meaning as far back as possible and eventually fit a teaching into the big picture.

With this kind of inclination, it is easy to tell why, as a student in seminary, I did enjoy systematic theology. Yet I never want to say that I preach systematic theology. I prefer to say that I preach one aspect of biblical theology—theology that a study of the text yields. This theology does, however, fit into a sweeping understanding of all of Scripture. Understanding the categories of systematic theology provides a framework into which you can fit various teachings. This framework that I received in seminary has stood the test of years of study and proven to be, with minor adjustments from my own study, quite accurate.

RT: If I may return to the subject of church history once again, for me the benefit of this field of study was not apparent while I was pursuing seminary training, but since seminary days my appreciation for the value of the field has grown immensely each year I have been in a teaching ministry. How has it been for you? Did you appreciate it while in school, or has your appreciation for lessons from the history of the church been a late bloomer?

JM: My appreciation for church history has been slow in coming too. When I was in seminary studying church history, it just seemed like an endless string of dates and events that had some significance at the time but did not have much significance to my situation. However, as I have continued to preach and teach the Word of God, church history has become more and more of a great benefit. This is true because as I live out my ministry in this contemporary setting, I increasingly see that the battles and controversies that face the church today have historic precedent. So I continually refer back to church history to see how the controversy arose, what the components of that controversy were, and how it was ultimately resolved. Reading the literature about past generations and how they handled similar issues is important in providing guidance for my present ministry. These are days when issues facing the church seem to be escalating at a dramatic rate. This makes church history that much more valuable, because none of these controversies is new. They may wear new clothing, but they are basically the same old animal.

Specific Lessons from Seminary for the Pastor's Study

Diligence

RT: Your earlier comment about diligence leads me to note that you probably agree with me that study is *hard* work. Did you learn this lesson during your theological training or later?

JM: I do agree. Study is hard work. I have been doing it for over thirty-six years now, and it is still hard work. Did I learn this during my theological training? I began to learn it then, but I really see the relentlessness of it now. When I was in seminary, it was hard work, very hard work, but I always had the sense that it was going to end. After the first year I said, ''Oh, just two more years.'' After the second it was ''one more,'' and after the third, ''I'm done. All that hard work is behind me.'' As soon as I started in ministry, however, I realized the hard work was still there, only this time I was never going to graduate. Thirty-six years later, it is still hard work, and twenty-five from now, Lord willing, it will still be hard work.

RT: Your seminary program was a demanding one. Have you ever thought that an easier program would have prepared you for the study phase of pastoring just as well as the harder one did?

JM: No, because there are certain things you have to learn, and there is only one way to learn them—that is by diligent study. You cannot learn a language, you cannot learn theology, church history, apologetics, and all that goes along with them without the discipline of study. An easier program would not help at all because one would not learn the same amount of material. A student would not be forced to think deeply about issues and learn the very, very helpful rigid discipline that it is going to take to be effective when you get into the ministry. I mean, if a student is allowed to float his way through seminary, he is programming himself for doing the same thing in his ministry. I think doing hard work in seminary prepares you to do hard work when you get out.

Discipline

RT: Dr. Charles Feinberg was dean while you were a student in seminary. I know that as I served with him on the faculty, the disciplined character of his life had a strong impact on me. Did it rub off on you as a student?

JM: It certainly did. I think more than anyone else in my seminary experience, Dr. Feinberg influenced me in the matter of discipline. He pounded into me the necessity of being on time, of being prepared, of diligently dealing with Scripture and making sure I got the point that Scripture was trying to make consistent with what the writer intended. His disciplined reading schedule, his disciplined study schedule, his reading through the Bible four times a year, his tremendous commitment to putting the Word of God into his heart and being accurate—all of that rubbed off on me. Even his polemical nature made a great impression on me—he was a battler and a fighter for truth. Then, of course, I just loved him as a man because of his devotion. He had so much devotion. I mean, he was so one-dimensional— totally consumed by the Word of God. It was one great driving force of his whole life. I certainly loved and appreciated that level of devotion.

RT: You mentioned Dr. Feinberg's practice of reading through his English Bible four times a year. He did this by setting aside one hour each afternoon to do his reading. Have you followed any such practice in your reading and study of the Bible?

JM: Well, the truth of the matter is, off and on. In recent years, I just have not done that. I have not really taken the time to maintain such a consistent pattern of reading. I wish I could sustain that kind of ongoing reading pattern, and I did it for a time, after Dr. Feinberg's example. I also got into the habit of reading the New Testament over and over, one portion every day for thirty days. I did that for a number of years early in my ministry. I continue to do a tremendous amount of reading, but I read many books and many manuscripts that I am involved in writing. In the midst of all this, I do long to have time just to sit down and go repeatedly through the Scripture.

One of the things that challenges me, though, is that I have a hard time doing that because as soon as I hit something I do not understand, I stop and reach for a book or resources and tools to help me understand what I just read. So, it is not easy for me to sit down and read continuously. I need to grasp everything I am reading. I am driven to understand as I read and that bogs down the process a little bit.

RT: John, did the example of your professors have an impact on the way you approach your studies as a pastor? Were there any lessons you learned from their diligence, intellectual and academic integrity, honesty about areas of ignorance, and the like?

JM: No question about it! What shocks every first-year seminary student, of course, is the depth of knowledge possessed by his professors. They have read widely and are expert in the areas of their respective disciplines. They are conversant in areas the new student has not even thought about. So he is just overwhelmed by the intellectual and academic ability and the deep knowledge of these men. This makes them models of what a student needs to do, not for the sake of earning a doctorate necessarily, but for the sake of having a ministry of integrity. I think one of the most important lessons that seminary professors teach is this: to be profound, you must give your whole life to the discipline of study. You have to keep it up; you can never quit. That is obviously an important lesson.

Integrity

RT: Is there such a thing as pastoral intellectual integrity when standing before a congregation to preach? If a pastor has not had time to prepare Sunday's text, should he confess this to his audience, or should he pretend that he has put in the proper study time?

JM: You never pretend anything. Pastoral integrity is crucial. The issue here is not your sermon. God's Word is at stake here. If you have not had time to prepare, then preach something you have had time to prepare. Just tell the folks that next Sunday you will come back to the text you had planned to preach on, that you need more time to work it through. There is never any virtue in preaching for the sake of preaching. The only virtue is in proclaiming truth—truth that you cannot preach until you know what it is.

Obviously times will come when you will study and find it impossible to reach a dogmatic conclusion on an issue. At that point you must make a decision, the decision you believe is consistent with what you believe the Word of God teaches elsewhere. Teach it and then just move on. Maybe years down the road someone will write a journal article and give you more light on the passage. But right now, you need to do the best you can with the time you have. Make sure that what you say represents a true understanding of the text as reflected by the most careful study possible. Yet observe this caution once again: If you cannot come to an understanding of a text, do not preach it until you do. This is a good reason to start your preparation early in the week or even weeks before, so that you have time.

RT: Were there any cases of doctrinal stability or instability among your instructors that may have tended to influence you? Some of those men are present with the Lord now, but of the remaining ones, are there any who have changed their positions on any key issues?

JM: I do not think so. And that, again, is very encouraging. I think as I look back on my seminary professors, I do not know of any who have changed their views, though they may have refined them. I can't think of any who have deviated from what they taught me. That says so much for the integrity of their scholarship and their devotion to the Word of God. They were immovable. Even though the tide may have

changed and people may have written with the hope of changing them with their new ideas here and there, they have remained consistent. I believe that is because their foundation was so strong.

Accuracy

RT: We have touched on Hebrew and Greek and the importance of accuracy a couple of times already, but please permit me one other observation and question related to them. Individual Christians have differing abilities and differing spiritual gifts. I attest, however, that in thirty-five years of teaching, I have never encountered a student who could not learn the original languages of Scripture if he had a strong desire to do so. I have come to the conclusion that if God calls a man to preach His Word, He also provides him with the capability to learn the Hebrew and Greek languages in which that Word was inspired. Do you feel that a facility in these languages is important in study for a preaching ministry?

JM: I think they are essential. As I have already observed, obviously someone could preach without them. He can be mentored and can read good source material. But to have confidence and boldness and to really know what he is reading when he reads commentators and other reference tools, it is really indispensable to have a knowledge, particularly of the Greek language. It is good to know the Hebrew language, but the New Testament is where all the Old Testament doctrine finds its culmination and refinement. To be able to grip the text of the New Testament in its original language is really crucial for accuracy and boldness in preaching. Effective preaching does demand a high level of intelligence, an ability to think clearly, relate data, analyze, synthesize, and present logically. That kind of ability certainly equips one to learn biblical languages.

Efficient Use of Time

RT: You were very active in ministry as a staff member in a local church while you were in seminary. You had to scratch to find time for studies. Did this experience help you learn how to use your study time more efficiently once you finished school? Have you ever wished that you had more time for preparation while in school?

JM: Yes, it did help, and no, I would not change it. I am glad for the way circumstances worked out. I am glad I was involved in ministry because it expedited the learning time. By the time I graduated from seminary, I had already had three years of ministry in a local church, so I was just that much farther along. I had also begun to preach quite extensively during my seminary days. That gave me a running start. I felt like I was able to give to the study what it needed and at the same time be involved in using what I learned in ministry. I really recommend that as the way to do it.

RT: John, since your student days were very busy, I am sure you must have had many a night that you did not get much sleep. Did you ever doze off in class while you were in seminary? What would be your advice to students who periodically experience all-nighters because of an upcoming exam or a paper that is due?

JM: Well, I rarely dozed in class. One of the things I always did to avoid sleeping in class was to sit in the front of the room so that I would be conspicuous. This

motivated me to stay awake. Then, too, I have always been a quizzical kind of guy, and the teacher could pull me into a discussion easily. I could always think of questions to ask, so any time I could ask a question or engage in a dialogue and get stimulated that way, I would try to do it. And I always took careful notes.

I know there were times when I kind of blanked out. Mentally I might have been tired, having studied all night. My daily habit was to get up about 3:30 or 4:00 every morning, and sometimes if I did not get to bed until late, getting up that early to study before driving out to seminary would make me tired. But once I arrived at the classroom, I was able to make it through class.

My advice to students who periodically experience those all-nighters is to sit up in the front of the room where they are conspicuous. That makes it a little tougher to fall asleep. Also you could ask the guy next to you to keep you awake.

The Pastor's Study and Other Pastoral Duties

RT: If you have to work so long and hard on study—which seems to be the message coming through loud and clear—what does this do to the important responsibility of getting along with people and meeting their personal needs through social interaction? Must you fit your study around relational-type ministries, or must you fit relational matters around your study needs? Which comes first?

JM: Well, there's no question about it. Study comes first. What meaning is there to my relationship with people if I am not helping them understand the Word of God? As one who has been in the same pastorate for twenty-five years and lived my life with many of the same people throughout those years, I have not been able to be a part of every backyard barbecue and socialize with people by going here and there with them and doing this and that with them. But I know this: I have devoted myself to teaching them the life-changing truths of the Bible. This has built between them and me the deepest kind of relationship. It is a relationship in which their debt to me is great and my responsibility to them is great. I discharge my responsibility by giving the Word to them, and they repay their indebtedness to me with love, devotion, and faithfulness. That is the kind of relationship that I think really matters and satisfies.

RT: Would you say that your seminary training provided the proper balance between cognitive study and developing practical skills such as how to preach, how to counsel, how to administer, how to visit, how to perform marriages, etc.? If not, what received too much attention and what did not receive enough?

JM: I think my seminary training was pretty well balanced. Yet as I reflect, most of the practical courses that I took were relatively useless, to be honest, with the possible exception of the homiletics or preaching class. I took a course on counseling that was sort of meaningless. The same was true of some courses on administration, in which I received a little book on performing marriages and that kind of thing. All of that material is available without taking courses, so those were not too helpful. Most of these techniques are learned through practice, through the struggle of working with people's lives, and through being mentored by an older, experienced pastor. When I came to Grace Church, I was not very skilled in any of those administrative or practical processes. But through the years, experience has refined those skills. The world does not take a college graduate in business administration and make him the president of a corporation immediately. They bring him in on

the lowest level and he learns, even though he has had courses in management. He develops management skills through applying what he has learned and works his way up the ladder. The same is true in the ministry. The best use of the seminary years is to load them heavily on the cognitive side and learn from a mentoring pastor, then sprinkle in a few practical courses to give some direction. The practical courses can be helpful, but the process of ministry after seminary will develop these skills to the greatest degree. Through this developmental process, it is extremely advantageous to have someone available to serve as a model.

RT: You formed your biblical and theological study habits while attending classes on a traditional seminary campus. Does it matter one way or the other that students of The Master's Seminary are forming their habits of study in a local-church environment? Why?

JM: It matters tremendously! It matters because it centralizes the local church in the life of the student. Obviously one can learn on a seminary campus that is not a church campus. One can learn the truths and be involved in church ministry, and the two can dovetail wonderfully as has happened in my case. But when the seminary is right on the church campus, the focal point of life there is the church. I think this sends out great signals. It also allows the pastoral staff to interface with students so that what they are learning has application, not several years down the road, but now! It also gives students opportunity to have immediate involvement in the life of the church and to put into immediate practice the things they are learning.

RT: Of course, you have had opportunity as president of The Master's Seminary to implement some of the changes you would make in a preparatory program. Are there any differences in particular that distinguish this program of study from the one you experienced in your preparation?

JM: I think there is a group of differences. One would be that here we have fewer of the pragmatic kinds of courses. I do not think those had any lasting value. In those days we had emphasis on how to counsel alcoholics, how to speak correctly, educational administration, and various things like that. Our program at The Master's Seminary has replaced those with more profound and more theological courses that are very important and that have lasting value.

Second, I think that the approach to the preaching process here is more integrated than it was in my seminary program. Our current faculty places a great amount of stress on the whole exegetical process that lies behind expositional preaching. Throughout the curriculum the approach is uniform, with everything funneling right down to the preaching. I believe the way it is laid out produces a much more effective end product. The proclamation that results at the end of the training hooks up with all that goes before it. In my preparation there was a gap between the exegetical method, the theological study, and the homiletics that I learned. In sermon preparation the emphasis was on the sermon outline, preaching without notes, the big idea in the text, and such mechanics as these. Exegetical methodology received very little attention in those classes. The training was not anti-exegetical; it just was not emphasized nearly as much as it is in our seminary now. Our homiletics faculty has achieved the necessary emphasis on exegesis by making a close connection between sermon delivery and what is done in other classes preparatory for it. This kind of preparation results in expositors who are more concerned with accuracy than with the form, outline, and cleverness of the message they preach.

The Pastor's Study in Perspective

RT: In reflecting on our dialogue, John, I am more impressed than ever with the crucial function of the pastor's study in the life of a local church. This is where the generative force in church life originates. What happens in the study determines what happens in the lives of people as they attend the Sunday services, particularly the Sunday morning service, which is so strategic. A fruitful study will eventually become a fruitful body of believers as the Spirit uses the Word transmitted to mold people into the image of Christ.

In your experience, as in the experience of so many others, one cannot overestimate the importance of the right kind of training to make the pastor's study what it needs to be. This is the rationale for the existence of seminaries such as The Master's Seminary. Seminary training is a life-shaping experience. It was for me; it has been for you. Besides affecting our broad outlook on life and ministry, it teaches many specific lessons. Among these are the importance of diligence in study, discipline in establishing priorities, integrity in preaching the Scriptures, accuracy in interpreting the text, and the efficient use of the precious time given us to serve the Lord.

Contrary to what others may claim, adequate time spent in the pastor's study will enhance the performance of other responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of a local church leader. Through learning the meaning of the text so that he can communicate it to others, the Bible expositor will find his relationships to others greatly enhanced. His ability to help them understand the Word of God will deepen his personal relationships with those whom he serves, even though it may mean he does not have as much time to spend with them individually.

Thus, vigorous application in his study will play an indispensable role in the pastor's overall ministry, a role that cannot be filled by anyone else or by any other way he may choose to apply himself.

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 89–100

PREACHING AND THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

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Because the Bible is the revelation of God, every expository sermon is rightly a doctrinal sermon. Thus, the faithful preacher will be a doctrinal preacher, and in effect a pastor-theologian. The pastor-theologian's mandate, embedded in Scripture itself, will dictate his manner of preaching, such that his congregation will rightly grasp theological dictum along with practical application. This responsibility endued upon each minister of the Word is of utmost importance to the life of the church, as each member endeavors to know God and worship Him "in spirit and in truth."

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Introduction

The hallmark of The Master's Seminary is expository preaching, which is the method of preaching taught in the curriculum and modeled by its chancellor, Dr. John MacArthur. Dr. MacArthur defines expository preaching as "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."[1] Such a preacher must be well versed not only in the study of the Scriptures, but also in various disciplines that lead to the proper understanding of God's Word, including historical theology, biblical theology, and systematic theology.[2]

The expository preacher must be a theologian since he is expounding the whole of God's Word. Hence, the true pastor also needs to be a pastor-theologian. Every true sermon is an exposition of theology, the study of God as He is revealed in Scripture. Expository preaching finds its source for preaching in Scripture, and all Scripture is the revelation of God, His will, and His works. That is theology! Donald

[1] John MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, eds. John MacArthur Jr. and The Master's Seminary Faculty (Dallas: Word, 1992), 232–34.

[2] MacArthur, "Biblical Inerrancy," 29.

Macleod asserts, "Theology is essential to preaching. Without theology there is no preaching, at least not in the New Testament sense."[3]

What is theology? In order to identify the pastor-theologian it would be of help to define theology. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue define theology as "The study of the divine revelation in the Bible. It has God as its perpetual centerpiece, God's Word as its source, and godliness as its aim."[4] They also quote David Wells' notable definition: "Theology is the sustained effort to know the character, will, and acts of the triune God as he has disclosed and interpreted these for his people in Scripture…in order that we might know him, learn to think our thoughts after him, live our lives in his world on his terms, and by thought and action project his truth into our own time and culture."[5] In short, it is the study of God in His totality as He is revealed in Scripture.

Every sermon of a pastor-theologian must be at its core theological or have as its base a doctrinal element. Dr. Reu states so emphatically,

> I cannot really comfort anyone unless my comfort rests on what the Scriptures teach about God's saving work and His self-revelation. I cannot admonish and exhort to good works without first teaching what God wills us to be and to become. I cannot awaken anyone out of his sinful state without portraying the nature and wretchedness of sin, contrasting it with God's holiness and righteousness and characterizing it as black ingratitude toward God for His work of grace.[6]

In the great spectrum of preaching, we shall limit ourselves in the preaching of the pastor-theologian whereby he focuses on the revelation of doctrine in his exposition. This will be accomplished by looking at the Scriptural mandate of such preaching, and then at the manner of exposition which focuses on the doctrinal truths contained in the text.

The Mandate of Doctrinal Preaching

The pastor-theologian's mandate is clearly given in Holy Scripture, and that his preaching be theological in nature from start to finish is clearly stated. In examining the Scriptural mandate, certain character traits rise to the surface.

The Mandate in Scripture

Our Lord Himself establishes this mandate in His parting words to the disciples in Matthew 28:18–29: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I

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[3] Donald Macleod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," in *Preaching and the Preacher*, ed. Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 246.

[4] John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 34.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Johann Michael Reu, *Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 147.

commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age." Our Lord emphasized that once individuals are brought into the saving grace of Christ and are baptized, they are to be instructed in all the doctrines of Christ until He returns. The teachings of Christ are the basis for preaching, and foundational for the church. They are the measure for all teaching (cf. 1 Tim 6:3; cf. Deut 6:1–9).

The mandate to preach doctrinally is also found in the parting words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders when he reminds them of the example of his preaching, saying, "How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20–21). Furthermore, he adds that he has fully carried out his mandate as a faithful pastor-theologian by saying, "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" (20:26–27). "The whole purpose of God" is all of the systematic theology contained in the divine revelation. No doctrine is omitted or considered insignificant. His preaching contained no "hobby horses," no hesitation in preaching the "hard sayings of Christ," and no concern over offending people with "itching ears." Paul both knew the doctrines and sought to preach them faithfully.

The divine mandate is also found in Paul's closing letter to Timothy where he admonished him to "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2). In the preceding verses, Paul affirms the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, calling them "the sacred writings" (3:15) and stipulating that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (3:16). Furthermore, he asserts the sufficiency of Scripture to salvation (3:15) and to complete sanctification (3:16–17). The preaching of the totality of Scripture is sufficient for the salvation and sanctification of every sinner. Hence, to preach the Word refers to the preaching and teaching of all the doctrines found in Scripture. Timothy was to preach the totality of Scripture in spite of man's reluctance to spiritual matters (4:3) and in spite of man's rejection of sound doctrine (4:4).

The reference to "sound doctrine" in the exhortation to preach the Word reminds the reader of the other references in the epistles to sound theology (cf. 1 Tim 1:10; 4:6; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). All preaching is theological. It expounds a basic tenet of the Christian faith revealed in "the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim 3:16), which came about when the grace of God appeared bringing salvation to the world, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11–12). God has given us a body of truth in the Scriptures which is both the source and purpose of our preaching. This body of doctrine is the "treasure" that we are encouraged to guard (2 Tim 1:14) and "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" that we must defend (Jude 3). Patrick Fairbairn sums it up well when he states,

> As Christianity owes its primary distinction to the doctrinal truths which it unfolds, and by the belief of those truths seeks to accomplish all the present and eternal results it aims at, a very prominent and essential part of the calling of a minister of the gospel necessarily consists in what he has to do for the

> manifestation and defence of the same. The exposition in one aspect or another of saving truth must form the staple of his ministrations.[7]

The Traits of the Pastor-Theologian

The pastor-theologian must possess certain traits in fulfilling his mandate if he is to be more than a pastor merely seeking to be a caretaker of the ills and demands of the charge he keeps. There is the temptation to become a nurse-maid to the people, applying Band Aids to the daily afflictions instead of proving to be a true physician of the soul, seeking to apply the true cure provided by the Divine Physician. As the former, the pastor forgoes learning theology and developing theological acumen and as such ceases to be the pastor-theologian that Christ requires of His under-shepherds (1 Pet 5:1–4). "The preaching that omits doctrine," writes Lloyd Perry, "is preaching which is deficient in one of the most important constituents. Where the pulpit is weak in its doctrinal presentation, the congregation lacks spiritual strength."[8]

Knowledge of Theology

The pastor-theologian must be a man with the proper knowledge of theology, which includes biblical theology, systematic theology, and historical theology. Lloyd-Jones asserts, "It is not enough merely that a man should know the Scriptures, he must know the Scriptures in the sense that he has got out of them the essence of the biblical theology and can grasp it in a systematic manner. He must be so well versed in this that all his preaching is controlled by it."[9] Too often the pastor stops reading theology when he finishes his formal training, thinking that it will not be of great value in preaching and ministry. Again, Lloyd-Jones warns against this error:

> There is no greater mistake than to think that you finish with theology when you leave a seminary. The preacher should continue to read theology as long as he is alive. The more he reads the better, and there are many authors and different systems to be studied. I have known men in the ministry, and men in various other walks of life who stop reading when they finish their training. They think they have acquired all they need; they have their lecture notes, and nothing further is necessary. The result is that they vegetate and become quite useless.[10]

Value of Theology

The pastor-theologian must also value the importance of theology in the lives of his people as well as for his own personal life. He should see the value of doctrine in the faith and practice of the believer (cf. Titus 1:9; 2:1). Theology is at the heart of forming Christ in the lives of the people of God (Col 1:28–29). "Hence it follows that doctrinal instruction is as rudimental to all right actions as to right feeling… No

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[7] Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths, 1992), 251.
[8] Lloyd M. Perry, *Biblical Preaching for Today's World* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), 126.
[9] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 117.
[10] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 177.

people can be formed into stable, consistent and righteous Christians without much doctrinal instruction," claims Dabney.[11] The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders of the dangers of "savage wolves" who would arise to teach false doctrine and lead the disciples away from the truth, and that even "from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29–30). Paul exhorts Titus to appoint a man to the position of elder who holds "fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). In short, elders need to know theology, that is, sound doctrine. Both preacher and people must have a grasp of theology to ward off false doctrine. Reu speaks of the benefit to both preacher and people when he states,

> The thoughts of God which the doctrinal sermon presents are needed to counteract this influence and must continually supply fresh oil to the lamp of his understanding. By constant meditation on these truths the new man in him will be strengthened as with heavenly food; he will penetrate more deeply into the unity of the divine plan, and not only will God grow greater and more adorable to him, but he himself will grow to a larger and nobler stature.[12]

Use of Theology

We add another quality of the pastor-theologian, and that is that he must know how to use theology in his preaching. Theology in Scripture is not to be taught in the pulpit in the same way that it is taught in seminaries or in the classroom. In the pulpit, theology is to be taught with regard to the practical application of truth to the lives of God's people. Theology is designed to nourish the soul (1 Tim 4:8), to produce Christlikeness (1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 3:16–17), to correct error (1 Tim 1:10–11; Titus 1:9), to refute heresy (Jude 3), and to instruct in daily living (Titus 2:1). Our churches today are unsure as to what they believe about the cardinal truths of Scripture. The preaching today is focused on meeting the felt needs of people, instead of nourishing them on the sound words of doctrine (1 Tim 4:6–7). We dare not shy away from doctrinal preaching to focus on the more popular form of preaching, centering on topics that entertain or meet pressing needs. Doctrinal preaching has great advantages to the people of God. Perry says,

> There are many advantages to be gained through doctrinal preaching. Such preaching certainly gives honor to the gospel. It instructs and edifies the listener. It adds to the intellectual character of the ministry. It clears up difficulties which have gathered in the minds of the listeners in respect to important truths and facts of Christianity. Such preaching helps the listener discriminate between that which is primary and that which is secondary in Christian truth. It provides a firm foundation for effective ethical preaching.[13]

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[11] R. L. Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence* (Carlisle, PN: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 55.
[12] Reu, *Homiletics,* 148.
[13] Perry, *Biblical Preaching*, 127.

The Manner of Doctrinal Preaching

Having considered the mandate of a pastor-theologian, if we are truly to benefit our people, we shall consider the manner of preaching sermons steeped in theology. Expository preaching, which is at its core theological preaching, often suffers from a poor methodology and lack of passion in delivery. The pastor-theologian must overcome these challenges and see his primary calling to be the passionate and clear exposition of truth and doctrine. We offer the following suggestions to make our preaching of theology more effective and delightful both for the preacher and the people.

Purposeful Preaching

The pastor-theologian must be purposeful in his preaching. Some preachers confuse exegesis for exposition, thinking that the main task of the expositor is to explain the meaning of the text through a grammatical and lexical analysis of the paragraph and then provide a synopsis for the audience. Indeed, exegesis is the first step in the preparation of the expository sermon, but it is not the sermon. The same can be said of doctrinal preaching. Some suppose that it is the task of the preacher to identify the doctrine and explain its meaning here and elsewhere it is used in Scripture. They fail to realize that doctrinal preaching is preaching, not just teaching, and that it carries with it an application usually found in the text where the particular doctrine is found. The pastor-theologian preaches to impart doctrine to the heart. Fairbairn reminds us: "Hence the faithful pastor must aim at something more than mere speculative knowledge of the truth. He must seek to have the truth itself effectually lodged in the understandings and hearts of his audience."[14]

Particular Preaching

The pastor-theologian must be particular in his preaching. The expositor upon locating the particular doctrine in the text should restrain himself from the temptation to expound all there is about this doctrine in one sermon. Inexperienced preachers often make this grave error to the dismay of their audiences and their own personal frustration. John Broadus amplifies, "it is not often advisable, especially for a settled pastor, to embrace the whole of such a doctrine in a single sermon. This would contain the mere generalities of the subject, and be very difficult to the hearer, or, more frequently, quite commonplace."[15] Phelps concurs saying, "A standing grievance in the pulpit on this subject is that of attempting too much in one discourse. Rarely, if ever, should a standard doctrine of theology be presented entire in one sermon."[16]

Since the pastor-theologian is a preacher, not a lecturer, it is best for the preacher to identify the particular doctrine in the text, and with the knowledge of systematic

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[14] Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology*, 252.

[15] John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Sons, 1907), 78.

[16] Austin Phelps, *The Theory of Preaching* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), 314.

theology and the place of the doctrine in Scripture, he should seek to identify its particular use in the passage and develop the doctrine into the exposition. He might even expand in small measure on the doctrine from other texts, but never to be exhaustive in the treatment of the doctrine. He should not pull out his theological notes or use the summary pages in his systematic theology as the basis for the sermon.

Contextual Preaching

The pastor-theologian should be contextual in his preaching. There is a genre of preaching which is thematic, that is, it is built around a theme and not around a text. Such preaching can be biblical and thus valid in the pulpit. But such preaching usually becomes a lecture and thus ceases to be a sermon. There are places for lectures on theology, but not usually in the pulpit on Sunday. Lloyd-Jones helps us distinguish the two when he says,

> But the big difference, I would say, between a lecture and a sermon is that a sermon does not start with a subject; a sermon should always be expository. In a sermon the theme or the doctrine is something that arises out of the text and its context, it is something which is illustrated by that text and context. So a sermon should not start with the subject as such; it should start with the Scripture which has in it a doctrine or a theme. That doctrine should then be dealt with in terms of this particular setting.[17]

We should note that "theological instruction transpires continually within a verse-by-verse expository sermon in brief excurses, paragraphs, or sentences," as Irvin Busenitz explains.[18] The pastor-theologian will unfold doctrine as he unfolds the text. He will find that at times the doctrine will undergird the truth to be applied, and at other times the application of truth will adorn the doctrine.

Practical Preaching

The pastor-theologian must be practical in his preaching. His treatment of the text is not a theological lecture but a sermon, an oration. Hence, he is under obligation to show the practical side of the doctrine, how it applies to everyday life. It is safe to say that all of Scripture is written for moral action (cf. Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16–17). Hence the sermon based on a particular doctrine should result in moral action. The pastor-theologian will ask himself, "What is the doctrine under discussion here?" and "What is the implication of the doctrine for the life of the believer?" Consider Perry's insightful comments, "The preacher should not only study his passage, but he should also study his people. He should be certain that doctrinal preaching will meet human needs…. It was Spurgeon who said that the sermon begins where the application begins. The good doctrine preacher should be proficient in applying doctrinal truth

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[17] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 71–72.

[18] Irvin A. Busenitz, "Thematic, Theological, Historical, and Biographical Expository Messages," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. John MacArthur Jr. and The Master's Seminary Faculty (Dallas: Word, 1992), 266.

to daily living."[19] Dabney says, "It is the duty of the preacher so to establish the dogmas of the faith in the understandings of the people, that they shall not remain abstract dogmas, but shall reveal their close bearing upon the life. It was a golden maxim of the Protestant fathers, that 'doctrines must be preached practically and duties doctrinally.'"[20]

The question, in effect, is raised as to the manner of doctrinal preaching which is both biblical and practical. The Scriptures provide us with examples which are suitable to preaching in any age. The Book of Romans treats doctrine in the first eleven chapters and then concludes with the practical application of doctrine to the church. The same can be said of the Book of Ephesians. Another approach is followed by the Book of Hebrews where the respective treatments of doctrine are followed by the application of the particular doctrine. Hence, both approaches are biblical and useful. As to which is the best approach, Fairbairn makes this excellent observation:

> With such examples of these diverse methods from the pen of inspiration itself, we may certainly leave the question undecided, which is the better of the two. Rather, perhaps, we may say that both are in themselves good; and that it will be the part of wisdom in the preacher to vary his plan, and make his discourse assume now more of the one, and again more of the other method.[21]

Letting Scripture be our guide is the best method.

Priority in Preaching

The pastor-theologian must be careful in the priority of doctrines to be preached. The preacher can make several errors in the selection of doctrines he preaches. Some have particular doctrines which become their "hobby horses." They are constantly finding the same doctrine in every passage they preach. Care must be taken that the preacher is not importing his favorite doctrine into the text, but rather understanding that the text is revealing the doctrine to be considered in the exposition. The other error is to fail to understand that the pastor-theologian is under compulsion to preach the whole counsel of God. Busenitz gives us this caution, "The expositor must avoid making a single doctrine his hobby horse. The Word of God in its entirety is to be explained, not just one favorite portion of it. Nor should one avoid those doctrines which may be controversial with some audiences. They, too, must be taught."[22] The preacher-theologian "must not keep back any revealed truth. The Scriptures leave no room for question here."[23]

In determining what doctrines should be emphasized, we must follow the rule of Scripture and emphasize those doctrines the Scriptures emphasize. We know that "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching,…" (2 Tim 3:16). Murphy affirms this by saying,

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[19] Perry, *Biblical Preaching*, 140.
[20] Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence,* 52.
[21] Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology*, 257.
[22] Busenitz, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching,* 267.
[23] Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence*, 55.

> The doctrines of the gospel are valuable in themselves, for each contains some of the precious truth of God. They are all indispensable in their relation to one another as parts of the one glorious system of redemption. They are important in the estimation of God, who caused them to be put on the pages of his word, in the deeply-momentous instruction they convey to us, in the light which they shed over the path of duty, in the comfort they carry to the weary soul, and in the glory they are calculated to bring to our blessed God and Savior. Not one of them could be spared. If they were not needed they would not have been revealed.[24]

The pastor-theologian must also be aware of the doctrinal understanding of his congregation since every congregation is the product of its times. There is the tendency of every generation to emphasize certain doctrines at the expense of others. Since all doctrines are important, he must be willing to break with the fads of the day and instruct in the needed doctrines. Some churches have been brought up under teaching which emphasized some doctrines at the expense of others. This must be corrected and thus calls for doctrinal preaching in neglected areas. All this calls for doctrinal acumen as well as a thorough understanding of the doctrinal awareness of the congregation.

Passionate Preaching

The pastor-teacher must keep from being dull in his preaching, but rather be passionate. Doctrinal preaching has a bad reputation and starts on a negative footing, hence, both preachers and people shy away from it. There is a common perspective that doctrinal preaching is boring. Consider some of these testimonies. Reu states, "It is objected that the doctrinal sermon is dry and dull, and many avoid it for this reason. It cannot be denied that many doctrinal sermons are dry, but this is the fault not of the sermon but of the preacher."[25] Phelps says, "Doctrinal preaching and dull preaching are, in the popular estimate, synonymous."[26] Dabney concedes but counters the accusation by saying, "To the objection that didactic preaching is dry, I answer, that if it ever seems to be so, this is the fault of the preacher and not of the truth. If his attempted development of doctrine be confused, illogical, iterative, tedious; if the didactic unfolding of truth be perversely severed from the practical results, he may not be surprised to find that he (not his subject) is dull."[27] Broadus reasons, "Doctrinal preaching is not necessarily dry. In fact, properly presented doctrine, didactic instruction, may be the most interesting kind of preaching. Men wish to know, delight in knowing. All depends on the way in which it is done. The dry preacher will make all subjects dry."[28] Again, Murphy states, "There is in the minds of many persons a very unjust and unthinking prejudice against preaching the doctrines of religion. It is taken for granted that the sermon in which there is much doctrine must necessarily be dry, unspiritual, full of sectarianism and almost

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[24] Thomas Murphy, *Pastoral Theology* (Willow Street, PA: Old Paths, 2001), 177.
[25] Reu, *Homiletics,* 151.
[26] Phelps, *The Theory of Preaching,* 312.
[27] Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence,* 54.
[28] Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 77.

necessarily incomprehensible."[29] In demonstrating engaging, doctrinal preaching, the preacher should aim for clarity, interest, and passionate delivery.

Clarity

There is a remedy to the accusation of dullness in doctrinal preaching. To escape dullness, doctrinal preaching must possess clarity. The sheer nature of the subject demands clarity in its understanding and presentation. Doctrines are deep truths and not always easy to comprehend (cf. 2 Pet 3:16). Add to this that the subject, when taught in schools, is done so in specialized language not readily suitable to the popular mind. Heresy thrives when preachers fail to understand doctrine, or when they fail to explain it properly to the people of God. The preacher must strive for clarity of comprehension and clarity of delivery. Both are equally important. The pastor-theologian can never cease to be a student of theology, not only in its comprehension as truth, but also in the study of how to make it clear and understandable to the church at large. "We should strive for lucidity," says Macleod. He adds: "The alleged depth of our doctrine often proceeds from our own darkness…. We have no right to avoid biblical topics on the ground of their profundity. If we did so we would not open our mouths at all. Our calling is to explain and illuminate every theme in the church's prescribed syllabus, Holy Scripture."[30] To avoid dullness, seek clarity above all.

Interest

The other antidote to dullness in doctrinal preaching is to strive to make it interesting. Interest always gains the attention of the hearer. Interest is gained when the subject is important to the listener, hence comes the necessity of showing the practical importance of doctrine in the believer's life. Doctrine taught as a mere abstract truth absent from the daily lives of the people of God will result in loss of interest. The preacher will note in the study of doctrine as it is presented in Scripture that it is always done in the context of the people of God. Doctrine is never abstract; it is always the garb or guard of the believer. He must remember that all Scripture was given to aid in the perfecting of the saint and for the equipping of the saint for every good deed (Col 1:28–29; 2 Tim 3:16–17). Perry reminds us that New Testament preaching was doctrinal preaching and that it was "noted for simplicity, picturesqueness, versatility, practicality, optimism, the use of Scripture, and the tone of authority."[31] In other words, it was captivating. The pastor-theologian should keep Dr. Broadus' counsel in mind when he says, "The preacher who can make doctrinal truth interesting as well as intelligible to his congregation, and gradually bring them to a good acquaintance with the doctrines of the Bible, is rendering them an inestimable service."[32]

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[29] Murphy, *Pastoral Theology*, 175.
[30] Macleod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," 271.
[31] Perry, *Biblical Preaching*, 129.
[32] Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 77.

Delivery

The third antidote to dullness in doctrinal preaching is passionate delivery. The doctrinal sermon is not a lecture; it is a sermon delivered with all the oratorical skills the preacher can muster. "The prime cause of the popular distaste for theological discussion in the pulpit," says Phelps, "is its want of certain elements which are essential to vivacity. Study the experience of the pulpit candidly, and you will discover that audiences will listen attentively to any thing which seems to them to be alive."[33] This lack of passion may come from the preacher not sensing the importance of the doctrine in life. Fairbairn remarks on this want: "All this, so far as it exists, comes from the want of a realizing sense in the preacher of the vital importance of the truths about which he discourses. He must go through his task, but there is no living warmth and energy in his mode of executing it; and the impression produced, faint at the first, soon vanishes away."[34]

Delivery matters in all preaching, but it is especially important in doctrinal preaching. Abstract truth needs life-giving delivery. Reu's comments are helpful here: "…the doctrinal sermon becomes dry and uninteresting when the preacher forgets that he is to preach, that he has living hearers before him with whom he is to enter into personal and living contact, whom he is to address, to interest, and by entering into their thoughts, objections and doubts to win to participation in the development of the subject."[35] The doctrinal sermon is not an essay devoid of oratorical character, and "without the element of allocution the doctrinal sermon cannot but become lifeless and fail."[36] Hence, the exhortation "preach the word" in 2 Timothy 4:2 takes on a whole new meaning when applied to doctrinal preaching. Thomas Murphy's exhortation is a fitting summary for this article:

> We would say, then, emphatically to every pastor, Preach the doctrines. Preach them incidentally when they manifestly arise out of some other line of thought which is being pursued…. Sometimes preach them formally, but use as little of mere technicalities as possible. Preach them fully; there is no danger in following the Scriptures. Preach even the strong doctrines occasionally, but be sure to follow them out into the practical influences with which the Scriptures associate them. Preach them systematically, if possible, that they may be seen in their logical relations and influences upon each other. Preach them as the Bible does—not for controversy, but that all the grandeurs of redemption may be seen, that God may be glorified, and that believers may be helped onward in the process of becoming perfect men in Christ Jesus.[37]

Conclusion

Not all pastor-theologians excel in doctrinal preaching, but God has provided us with a model in Pastor John MacArthur of a pastor who preaches doctrine that is true,

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[33] Phelps, *The Theory of Preaching*, 313
[34] Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology*, 256.
[35] Reu, *Homiletics,* 153.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Murphy, *Pastoral Theology,* 179.

alive, clear and relevant. He combines all the gifts of preaching to faithfully preach the Word of God in the weekly exposition of Scripture, not shying away from the doctrines clearly taught in the passage under consideration. This faithful exposition of the Word of God has resulted in many volumes of doctrinal books and hundreds if not thousands of sermons explaining the doctrines of God. He is for all of us a model pastor-theologian. This preacher considers it a great privilege to have such a model for a pastor-theologian and joins the chorus of preachers thanking God for providing such a model for us.

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 101–118

THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN: GUIDING THE CHURCH TO GAZE UPON CHRIST

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The pastor-theologian's leadership exists on two planes: horizontal and vertical. As a pastor, the church leader shepherds horizontally, through what Paul calls "the daily cares of life." As theologian, the leader uses his understanding of God to draw people into a deeper relationship with their Creator. Skilled pastoral leadership is seen where these two planes intersect. For the leader to effectively navigate this intersection, he must be held captive by the truth of Psalm 27:4 and Luke 10:42—there is only one thing necessary, and that is a desire to behold the glories of God in Christ. This conviction forms a "theological" vision which should be particularly evident in the pastor's preaching. The pastor-theologian explains his theological vision, invites his congregation to join him in that vision, and then they return to the horizontal world to live out the implications of it. This kind of leadership is modeled by Paul in Philippians 1, and by Jesus in John 13–17. Finally, this approach to leadership has been modeled in the ministry of John MacArthur, specifically in how he has used John 13–17 to lead his own congregation.

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Introduction

Leadership is inherently challenging because its central task is to motivate and direct people, and people come with varying degrees of cooperation. A leader seeks to move people from one place to the next, but people do not always want to be moved, and often leaders themselves have difficulty seeing the destination. This observation provoked J. Oswald Sanders to note, "True leadership always exacts a heavy toll on the whole man, and the more effective the leadership is, the higher the price to be paid."[1]

[1] J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 169.

If all leadership is difficult, the pastor's leadership is doubly so for two basic reasons. First, the pastor leads with a different toolkit than the world's leaders. Worldly leaders often motivate by strength, force, and fear.[2] They can make people follow them…*or else*. They lead for their own gain, and by their own strength (Matt 20:25). They channel people's own wills for the leader's own ends, and the world generally rewards (at least in the short-term) those leaders who create submissive and fearful followers.[3]

In contrast, Christian leaders do not lead by fear but by faith. They do not lead by strength, but by service (Matt 20:28).[4] They especially do not lead by force, but rather they lead by winning the hearts of those whom they serve (2 Cor 2:4; 6:11).[5] Christian leaders recognize their personal insufficiency; they see their own dependence on God as their greatest virtue (2 Cor 13:4). In short, Christian leadership is difficult because it is paradoxical—the leader is strongest when he is at his weakest (2 Cor 11:29–30; 12:5, 9–10).

The second reason a pastor-theologian's leadership is doubly difficult is the focus of this article, and it is bound up in the compound noun "pastor-theologian." Pastoral leadership is complex because it exists on two separate planes. The pastor-theologian leads his people both horizontally and vertically. By *horizontally*, I mean the pastor leads person-to-person, helping them deal with the daily demands of life (2 Cor 11:28; cf. Acts 6:1). By *vertically*, I mean the theologian is trying to conform his flock more and more into the image of their Good Shepherd. He does this by trying to draw their eyes off of this world, and onto the next.

Often these two planes—the vertical and the horizontal—are in tension. The prospect of the new heavens and earth often feels distant compared to the urgency of the current earth.[6] If *faith* is confidence in the unseen (Heb 11:1, 7), and the *urgent* entails the immediate demands of life, then these two planes will collide in conflict. This rivalry demands that the pastor lead by helping his congregants appreciate that "everything in life must be recalibrated" in light of the realities of heaven.[7] It is there, at the juncture of the horizontal and the vertical, where true pastoral leadership is seen.

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[2] This contrast is described by John MacArthur well. See John F. MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership: The Power of a Godly Influence* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 101.

[3] For more on this dynamic, see Jey J. Kanagaraj, "Johannine Jesus, The Supreme Example of Leadership: An Inquiry into John 13:1–20," *Themelios* 29, no. 3 (2004): 15.

[4] George J. Zemek, "Modeling," in *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Faithfully*, MacArthur's Pastoral Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 229–31.

[5] Packer writes: "True leadership is not bludgeoning and browbeating, but persuading." J. I. Packer, "The Preacher as Theologian," in *When God's Voice Is Heard: The Power of Preaching*, ed. Christopher Green and David Jackman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2003), 101.

[6] This is the tension Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 7:28–34. See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 242–45.

[7] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity, 2018), 157.

The Pastor's Horizontal Vocation

Of all the descriptions of pastoral leadership in the New Testament—and there are many—none is more fitting than that of a shepherd.[8] A pastor's leadership is seen in tending the flock, which takes the practical form of counseling marriages, teaching on parenting, and helping navigate career options. Paul referred to these everyday concerns as "the matters pertaining to life" (1 Cor 6:3).[9] He expressly charged church leaders to help believers navigate the challenges of life with biblical wisdom.

Among the pastor's many New Testament titles, the image of a shepherd best captures the earthy and immediate work of spiritual leadership.[10] In fact, the word "pastor" means "shepherd."[11] The pastor himself is in a dual role: he is both a sheep and a shepherd. As a shepherd, he must lead the sheep. But as a sheep, he must lead from the ground floor, not from a tower. Pastors must lead like Moses led: from the middle of the camp—not from the mountain top where Balaam hid. Thus, pastoral leadership is not so much from on high as it is from within.[12]

For that reason, true church leadership is life-on-life. It is exercised in the context of trials, conflicts, and counseling. It is dirty, as all shepherding is. But it is also personal and necessary. There is no dodging it. Moreover, it is manifest with people the pastor knows. It is often his friends and his children's friends whom he is called to lead, and this is how God designed it. Kelly Kapic notes, "Because we are limited creatures, God made us to rely on others: other networks of people, outside authority structures, and wisdom from institutions and traditions."[13] Kapic is not implying that because those outside sources of wisdom are providential that they are infallible. On the contrary, the very fact that they are fallible is why godly leadership is an essential part of the Christian life. Our lives are spent in the context of each other, and as people bump against each other, that friction exposes problems that are inherent to living in a fallen world. Those problems are often spiritual, and they require spiritual principles to be applied to wisely navigate them. So, true pastoral leadership is immediate, earthy, and practical, even though it is also fallible. It helps people live worshipful lives together in harmony, despite having differing gifts and desires.[14]

Because pastors themselves are sheep, it is important to have a plurality of leadership invested in protecting the flock.[15] A shepherd can only look in one direction at a time, and sometimes the flock is bigger than he can keep in his

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[8] Alex Montoya, "Approaching Pastoral Ministry Scripturally," in *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Faithfully*, MacArthur's Pastoral Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 58; John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 15–16.

[9] The expression "matters pertaining to life" (ESV) is actually a single word in Greek—βιωτικά. Morris renders it as "the ordinary things of common life." Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1985), 94.

[10] John MacArthur, "What Is a Pastor to Be and Do?," in *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Faithfully*, MacArthur's Pastoral Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 22.

[11] *BDAG,* s. v. ποιμήν.

[12] MacArthur, "What Is a Pastor to Be and Do?," 23.

[13] Kelly M. Kapic, *Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design, and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2022), 15.

[14] Pennington takes this analogy further and helpfully compares pastoral leadership to that of an orchestra conductor getting people with differing gifts to live together harmoniously. Jonathan T. Pennington, *Small Preaching* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 21–25.

[15] MacArthur, *The Master's Plan*, 179, 195.

immediate view (e.g., Deut 1:9–19). It is possible that a single shepherd might be blind to a particular danger, or that he might overestimate his own ability to guard the sheep. Thus, Jesus appointed twelve disciples, and then seventy-two others (Luke 6:13; 10:1). Titus was to appoint "elders" (Titus 1:5), and this was the practice of the early church (Acts 6:3; 15:22; Jas 5:14). The pastor's leadership is both corporate (meaning within the church body) and plural.

Here it is worth repeating that this portion of pastoral leadership exists on a horizontal plane. Dangers to the flock do not come from heaven, but from earth and from each other. Conflict in the church may be God's providential design to keep the pastor humble, but the conflict itself plays out on the stage of the immediate—it involves people we know, love, and care for (2 Cor 12:9). The shepherd may have an eye to heaven while watching the weather, but the reality of shepherding is that it concerns sheep with whom the shepherd is familiar and takes place along the normal paths of life.

This is an important balance to remember for an article titled "The Leadership of the Pastor-Theologian." Pastors face the perennial danger of the ivory tower, of deigning to lead from a distance, viewing the "matters of this world" as beneath their involvement. But Peter wrote, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3). Both planes of that promise are important. God's Word directs us to eternal life in heaven, but also teaches us how to live godly lives in the here and now.[16] MacArthur notes that, rightly understood, Peter's use of "godliness" refers to "the living of the Christian life on earth."[17] In other words, this is a vertical promise with surprisingly horizontal implications. Because God's promises are both vertical and horizontal, pastoral leadership is (more often than we may like to think) seen in the horizontal realm.

Effective pastoral leadership on the horizontal plane has particular demands and dangers. It demands humility from the pastor. Because the pastor is a creature (and not the Creator), he must lead with limited knowledge. He does not have full information on any two sides of a conflict (Prov 18:17; Acts 15:37–39). A pastor himself is fallen, and he might see situations from his own biases—which, again, is an argument for a plurality of leaders.[18] Pastoral leadership must be humble and servant-oriented (Mark 9:35; 1 Cor 9:19). In fact, as Edmund P. Clowney states, humility "is the hallmark of Christian leadership; without it, the Lord's order for his church collapses in shambles."[19] Humility is required in Christian leaders not simply because those leaders are sinners (although they are), but because those leaders are not God. Kapic notes that in Christian leaders, "humility consists in a recognition of (and rejoicing in) the good limitations that God has given us."[20] Even if there had never been a fall into sin, humility would still be an essential component of both godliness and leadership, because people are neither omniscient nor omnipotent.

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[16] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 291–92.

[17] John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 27–28.

[18] MacArthur, "What Is a Pastor to Be and Do?," 311; MacArthur, *The Master's Plan*, 179–80.

[19] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, Contours of Christian Theology, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1995), 206.

[20] Kapic, *Only Human*, 103.

With humility comes the pastoral restraint "not to go beyond what is written" (1 Cor 4:6).[21] This is Paul's way of pleading with church leaders to not impose their preferences on the lives of their congregation. If church leaders elevate non-biblical convictions to the level of biblical commands, they harm the flock and usurp God's rule (cf. Mark 7:1–13). To combat such a tendency, Paul's admonition to "not go beyond what is written" is his way of telling leaders that "they should be duly humble and not be puffed up when contending about persons."[22] This passage (1 Cor 4:6) provoked Calvin's warning to leaders that "pride or haughtiness is the cause and commencement of all contentions, when everyone, assuming to himself more than he is entitled to do, is eager to have others in subjection to him."[23] The pastor's humility then acts as a vaccine—it helps the congregation develop an immunity to divisions that so often mark churches.[24]

While humility in horizontal relationships is critical for pastoral leadership, it should not excuse ambiguity regarding convictions. There is no doubt that some so-called leaders use "humility" as an excuse to justify their lack of clear leadership or persuasive direction. Paul himself modeled the importance of strongly articulated leadership to the same people whom he charged not to go beyond what was written.[25] In a study on how Paul modeled leadership for the Corinthians, MacArthur concludes: "The leader's compassion doesn't cancel out his willingness to fight. His courage is equal to his passion."[26] If that courage can be distilled to one concept, it is the ability to clearly express convictions in a way that compels others to follow.[27] It is a basic principle of any leadership—secular or Christian—that good leaders speak with authority.[28] When that authority is based upon "what is written" in Scripture, then the pastor defends it boldly and forcefully.[29]

Thus, at the horizontal level, the pastor's leadership is marked by both restraint and boldness. He is restrained in that he is humble and focused on serving others. He does not put himself forward, and he does not meddle or "over shepherd" by going beyond what is written. Yet, at the same time, when it comes to biblical convictions that define his ministry, the pastor is bold as a lion. He does put himself forward to

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[21] Garland works through the major different interpretive options for the phrase "τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ἃ γέγραπται." David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 133–37. He concludes with the understanding that "what is written" is an allusion to the OT, but that the principle is that leaders would not go beyond the statements of Scripture because in so doing they may cause pride to prosper, and ultimately this would exacerbate divisions in the church.

[22] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 175.

[23] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, trans. John Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2010), 158.

[24] For more on how humility in pastors helps the congregation "catch" humility for themselves, see Zemek, "Modeling," 214–27.

[25] MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership*, 135–41.

[26] MacArthur, 136.

[27] Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 25.

[28] MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership*, 32–33; Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 123–31.

[29] MacArthur, 134–36.

warn, teach, and shepherd.[30] He cannot speak on everything, of course. But the horizontal issues on which he does speak are what will end up defining him as a leader.

The Theologian's Vertical Vision

As challenging as horizontal leadership may be, it is only one component of the pastor-theologian's leadership. In the midst of the life-on-life conflict and interpersonal challenges inherent in a fallen world, the pastor must also lead vertically. He is called to shape people more and more into the image of Christ (Eph 4:20–24; Col 3:10; 1 Thess 4:1). What separates pastoral leadership from a life-coach is the vertical axis of that leadership. The pastor is calling people upwards and pleading with them to wrest their eyes off of this world and onto the next.

There is much that could be said about the vertical nature of pastoral leadership, but at minimum it requires that the pastor be a theologian. There is a contemplative element to pastoral leadership. Effectiveness in pastoral leadership requires the pastor to take time in his own life to think about the doctrine of God, and to formulate his own convictions about who God is, and how he personally is to grow in godliness. The pastor must devote personal and mental sweat to silence the world and set his eyes on the Lord. The truly effective Christian leader will wrestle himself away from urgent minutiae and get his attention on the eternally important, namely on the things of God.[31] John Piper exclaims that if "the goal of spiritual leadership is to muster people to join God in living for God's glory," then the pastor must be able to point people to the knowledge of God with which he himself is familiar.[32] He cannot lead people where he has not first been himself, and he cannot show others what he himself has not first seen.

Earlier I used Moses as an example of horizontal leadership—he led from within the camp. Yet Moses was only able to do this because he first had a mountaintop experience. For pastors to lead like Moses, they must first get the feet of their affections to march up the mountain, drawn by a desire to see God more clearly.[33] Moses was an effective leader because he had seen the living God, and he wanted to share that vision with the people.

I do not mean to imply that pastoral ministry requires some form of Gnosticism, or that the physical world of the shepherd is disconnected from heavenly realities. On the contrary, as one theologian notes, in Christian ministry "theology and ethics are inextricably mixed."[34] Yet one reason pastoral leadership can be so challenging is

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[30] For practical examples of what that looks like, see H. B. Charles, *On Pastoring: A Short Guide to Living, Leading, and Ministering as a Pastor* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 165–67.

[31] There is a word for this: *ascesis*. Ascesis can be defined as "the denial and disciplining of those impulses that would draw our attention away from Christ's glory." See R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 12, as well as Matthew 6:21.

[32] John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 11.

[33] Perkins is representative of the Puritan notion that a "vision of God" is the first (and most critical) component of the call to pastoral ministry. See William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 127–56.

[34] Gregory Goswell, "The Bookends of the Pauline Corpus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65, no. 1 (2022): 122.

because the horizontal is never fully resolved. To be a theologian requires devotion, thoughtfulness, time to read, and time to think. Mohler writes, "Before anything else, leadership is an intellectual activity."[35] This kind of contemplation takes substantive personal humility, and substantial personal time. Pastors are liable to feel like they do not have the time required to focus on the vertical nature of theology, and they use the infinite unresolved, unfulfilled, and urgent horizontal demands on their time to justify the neglect. People are "attention shaped creatures," which is to say, "where our attention goes, our affections and actions follow."[36] For that reason, it is of critical importance for pastors to diligently carve out time and mental capacity to put their attention on theology. To lead as a pastor-theologian requires one to at least make the time to be a theologian.

This is not a popular sentiment. While few have the courage to put their reservations in writing, it is common to hear of an artificial divide between pastors and theologians.[37] There are certainly differences between the two, and I have tried to capture those differences in the section headings in this article: pastors are vocational, and often focus on applying the vertical to the horizontal; theologians are more "vision" oriented, as they seek to cast the eyes of the heart to heaven. Those differences are real, but they cannot be allowed to become a divide, otherwise the pastor robs himself of the theology necessary for a life of fruitful ministry. As Owen Strachan has noted, "There can be no tension between truth and truth-telling."[38] It is nonsense to relegate the theologian to the seminary and the pastor to the church.[39] If, as R. C. Sproul often quipped, "every Christian is a theologian," then it is critical for pastors to lead theologically.[40]

Yet there is no denying that pastors can neglect theology. Our entire evangelical culture has a way of elevating method over substance.[41] Pastors are considered visionaries not for their theology or their ability to clearly communicate the things of God, but for their novel approach to "doing church."[42] As theology is minimized, church leadership is robbed of its vertical axis, and the church begins to wobble. In the place of theology, leadership focuses on methodology, and pastors become known as church-growth gurus. The trade-off is that they no longer have any theological prophetic vision, but instead are consumed by the horizontal.[43] A pastor

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[35] Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 59.

[36] Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 12.

[37] Packer disapprovingly writes, "It is widely imagined that one can fulfill the preacher's role without being a theologian." See Packer, "The Preacher as Theologian," 93.

[38] Owen Strachan, "Foreword," in *The Missionary Theologian: Sent into the World, Sanctified by the Word* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2020), 13.

[39] E. D. Burns, *The Missionary Theologian: Sent into the World, Sanctified by the Word* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2020), 92.

[40] R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 25.

[41] Washer says this trend is the "Achilles' heel" of modern evangelical missions, and this is also true more broadly of evangelicalism. See Paul Washer, "The Great Commission as a Theological Endeavor," in *The John MacArthur Handbook of Effective Biblical Leadership*, ed. John MacArthur (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2019), 460.

[42] Burns notes that for many churches their methodology is more significant than any statement of theology they may or may not even have on their website. Burns, *The Missionary Theologian*, 91–103.

[43] Peterson calls this "messianic pastoring," and he does not mean that as a compliment. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*, vol. 17, The Leadership Library (Dallas: Word, 1989), 52–53.

whose leadership is defined in terms of methodology becomes like the people of Dan—his ministry is just one big circular wandering, without so much as even an elevation change (Judg 1:34; 18:1).

This is exactly why the notion of vertical leadership is so critical in the church. As noted above, the essence of leadership is the desire to move people from one place to another. Piper writes that the pastor-theologian's leadership is seen in his "knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to get them there by *God's* means in reliance on *God's* power."[44] To lead in that manner, the pastor as theologian needs a theological vision of God, and then the theologian as pastor must invite and persuade people to join him in that vision.[45] This is the vertical element of theological leadership.[46] The call to church leadership is a vertical call because it comes from heaven down into a fallen world, and the one who receives it then leads others to join him in his gaze back up at the Lord.[47]

Thus, for someone to be a true theological leader, he must be captivated by the truth of Psalm 27:4: "There is one thing I have asked of Yahweh, the one thing I will seek: that I may dwell in Yahweh's house all my life, to gaze upon Yahweh's beauty."[48] In this passage, as Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzch remark, David declares that because "worship is the key which opens the door to an enriching life," it is uniquely all-important in the life of the king.[49] In particular, the one necessary thing David desires for worship is "to seek" (לְבַקֵּר), which "is meant to refer to contemplative meditation that loses itself in God."[50] James Montgomery Boice sees in this psalm the truth that the worshiper's "appetite for God was something to be satisfied almost physically" through mediation on the attributes of God.[51]

David certainly does locate his desire physically: he wants to be back in Jerusalem. Ironically, David never was able to gaze upon the beauty of Yahweh in an earthly house. In fact, this is precisely what Yahweh forbid him from doing (2 Sam 7:3–11). Instead, inasmuch as God's beauty will be viewed in a house, David's own offspring would *become* that house (7:11).[52] In the meantime, David as king yearned for Israel to follow him in the contemplation of God. Why, if there was no temple, did David want his people to singularly pursue gazing at Yahweh *in* a temple? C. S. Lewis proposes that by linking "going to the Temple" with "gazing at the Lord's beauty," David was linking horizontal life with the vertical experience of beholding

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[44] Piper, *We Are Not Professionals*, 11.

[45] Packer, "The Preacher as Theologian," 99.

[46] Paul calls this "godly ambition"—the desire to bring others up with the leader as he contemplates God. See Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 51–52.

[47] James D. Berkley, *Called into Crisis: The Nine Greatest Challenges of Pastoral Care*, vol. 18, The Leadership Library (Dallas: Word, 1989), 10.

[48] Author's own translation. It is likely that "seek" should be understood as parallel and synonymous with "gaze upon Yahweh." See Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 96–97.

[49] Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship*, 96.

[50] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 5:227.

[51] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 241.

[52] Craigie and Tate trace how over time, and with the construction of the temple, Psalm 24 took on a liturgical form. Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E Tate, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 230–31.

God.[53] This view is not unique to Lewis. John Calvin saw in this linkage an "implied anthesis, in which David, disregarding all other interests, displays his intense affection for the service of God."[54] Even the phrase "one thing" is used by David to sweep "away the tyranny of the urgent."[55] David is reminding himself that the intellectual contemplation of God's beauty (we might even say "God's attributes") is more significant than whatever urgent demands might be knocking on his door.

David's appeal for the "one thing" necessarily sets the tone for godly leadership. If the contemplation of God is the "one thing" a believer desires, then it falls to leaders to not only teach each other how to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, but to do so for themselves. This process of "gazing" upon Yahweh's beauty is often called contemplation—not the contemplation of self or of nature, but meditation on the written word of God.[56] David's model of leadership was that his own heart was drawn upward by the beauty of God, and he wrote Psalm 27 to express his desire that his readers would follow him there.

Psalm 27:4 is truly a paradigmatic expression of Christian leadership. By elevating the contemplation of God above all other spiritual activity, David demonstrates that sanctification has divine glory inextricably connected to our comprehension and appreciation of it.[57] In order for the pastor to lead people to a more mature spiritual life, the pastor shares his own vision of God's beauty with his congregants, the idea being that if the sheep see how the beauty of the Lord has captured the heart of the shepherd, they will follow him up the mountain.

For the church age, David's singular desire remains substantively unchanged, but it has relocated. Christian leaders are not longing for an annual pilgrimage to the temple in order to take in Yahweh's attributes. Like the Son of God Himself, the desire to "gaze upon Yahweh's beauty" takes on flesh in the New Testament as the beauty and wisdom of God is incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ (Heb 1:3). This transference is evident in the exchange between Martha and Jesus in Luke 10:41–42. Martha was busy serving while Mary was contemplating the teaching of Jesus (10:38–40). When Martha objects to Mary's singular devotion, Jesus gently chides her in Luke 10:42 (with words reminiscent of Psalm 27:4): "not a few things, but one thing" is necessary (ὀλίγων δέ ἐστιν χρεία ἢ ἑνός).[58] In so doing, Jesus affirmed that when Mary chose to set aside the urgent for the sake of listening to Jesus, she chose the one thing that was necessary (Luke 10:42). This serves a transference from David's primary desire to contemplate Yahweh's attributes, to the Son of David embodying those self-same attributes. Where David longed for the temple, Jesus

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[53] C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), 52–53.

[54] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2010), 1:405.

[55] James E. Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2008), 1709.

[56] Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 119–29.

[57] Samuel G. Parkison, *Irresistible Beauty: Beholding the Triune Glory in the Face of Jesus Christ*, Reformed, Exegetical, and Doctrinal Studies (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2022), 93–96. Parkison describes this as growing in "a delightful enjoyment of divine beauty" (p. 93).

[58] There are many textual variants in Luke 10:42, and Marshall summarizes them and the various arguments for and against each. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1978), 452–53.

directed his followers to Himself. Where the one thing David sought was to gaze at the beauty of Yahweh, Jesus told His followers to turn the eyes of their heart toward Him. He has become the subject of our contemplation.[59] The One whom David longed to see has now been manifest in the flesh (John 1:14; 1 Tim 3:16).

The context of Martha's exchange with Jesus is also significant. Luke places the account immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). This is not a coincidence, but rather it imparts meaning to the interpretation and has implications for leadership. The section of Luke's gospel begins with a lawyer asking Jesus what it would take to get to heaven (10:25). Jesus redirected the question back to the man, who answered with a reference to the two tables of the Law—to love both God and man (10:27). But it appears that the lawyer intentionally dodged the first table (love of God) to focus on the second.[60] So Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate that even if the lawyer was able to plead "no contest" in regard to the first table of the Law, he still would have been found guilty as to the second table. What is left unsaid in Luke 10:37 is that the second greatest commandment is still only that—the *second*! The greatest commandment finds its fulfilment in loving Jesus (10:27). Luke then moves to the Mary and Martha exchange to reinforce that same point: someone devoted to serving neighbors but who neglects gazing at Christ has in fact neglected the greater commandment.[61]

This hits at the heart of Christian leadership. Jesus and his entourage were in Martha's home, under the authority of Jesus. What was needed to be done to facilitate worship? While it may seem superficial, at least one layer to the Mary and Martha story is how the vertical intersects with the horizontal. The main reason it is challenging for pastors to be theologians (much less theological leaders) is exactly what is captured by the Mary and Martha dynamic. It is so easy for the business of ministry to crowd out the truth of Psalm 27:4 and Luke 10:42. The one thing that is necessary is to gaze upon the beauty of the Triune God. Again, it is not that the horizontal demands of life and leadership are insignificant—they are in fact very significant. But the pastor-theologian must be able to avoid "making much ado about the significant." Eugene H. Peterson is perceptive when he asks: "How can a pastor lead people beside the still waters if he himself is in perpetual motion?"[62] Thus, as MacArthur states, for the leader, "Faithfulness on the job, in the home, and in the church has a place, but must not be allowed to replace faithfulness to divine truth."[63] This is true for every Christian, but modeling it is the task of the Christian leader. The theologically minded pastor is convinced then that the church is healthiest when she gazes at Christ the most.

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[59] James R. Edwards notes, "Jesus did not direct Martha or readers to Torah, but to *himself*." James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2015), 329.

[60] Having been "backed into a corner from which there was no escape," the lawyer "refused to confess the reality of his sinful heart, but disdaining the conviction of sin that he surely felt rising internally, he adamantly reaffirmed his external self-righteousness and worthiness." John MacArthur, *Luke 6–10*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 354–56.

[61] Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 327–28.

[62] Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 28–29.

[63] MacArthur, *Luke 6–10*, 366.

A conviction like that has consequences. If the pastor-theologian is truly convinced that "the one thing" that matters most is gazing at the Lord, then he understands that such a gaze is not accidental. He must make decisions in his own life that prioritize contemplating the beauty of Christ. A pastor who has such priorities would throw himself into theology and then joyfully bring others with him. His preaching would be marked not by horizontal "application" but by vertical wonder. Is it any doubt that such pastoral and theological leadership is in such short supply? It is far easier to talk about communication strategies, parenting, and love languages than it is to silence the world, form theological convictions, and preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Peterson has a term for the pastor who does this well; he calls him the "apocalyptic pastor."[64] This is the leader who insists on the notion that the future kingdom is the real world, not the present business that awaits beyond the church doors. This kind of leadership is disruptive, and it is often resisted by people who are more horizontally inclined. Some churches tend to be indifferent to theology because they fail to see its relevance to life. Matthew Barrett asks, "What theologian can deny that the church is often indifferent, sometimes even hostile" to theology?[65] On top of that general indifference, there is also a normal disdain for contemplative theology in general. When elders ask a pastor for a strategic vision, they often have in mind something programmatic, like a building project, a new ministry, or a different style of music. But the effective pastoral leader is one who understands that the most practical thing he can give his congregation is an increasing delight in the beauty of God.

True church leadership is thus warm, theological, and devotional. If "one thing" matters, then there is nothing more practical than telling people how to see the Lord in His beauty. Such a leader will not fit in the world's matrix of leadership, but after all, "a pastor's goal is not to be popular with the world," but to give people an ever-increasing affection for Christ.[66] If leadership is seen as motivating and moving people from one place to the next, then spiritual leadership is seen in encouraging progressive sanctification. And, if David and Jesus are correct in defining the one thing necessary for that growth—namely, to gaze at the Lord in His beauty—then pastoral leadership is seen in leading people further in their contemplation of God. There is no more practical way to lead than to lead people in their gaze of the Lord.

Thus, the pastor-theologian's main task is to keep the church looking at her Bridegroom.[67] It is to wrest people away from anthropology and direct their eyes back to theology.

This kind of vertical pastoral leadership shares a key characteristic with horizontal leadership. Both are marked by humility. Steven Lawson notes that a

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[64] Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 47.

[65] Matthew Barrett, "Classical Theology: A Spiritual Exercise," *Journal of Classical Theology* 1 (2022): 6.

[66] MacArthur, "What Is a Pastor to Be and Do?," 17.

[67] Barrett writes, "The theologian bent on servicing the church with a *theological* theology will discover he is pressed with a pastoral responsibility to keep the church postured towards its bride." Barrett, "Classical Theology," 10.

compelling sermon requires the preacher's own submission to God.[68] If a pastor is spending time with the Lord, it should fan the flame of humility in his own heart. After all, the higher one's own thoughts of God, the lower his thoughts of himself. This is why H. B. Charles writes that the pastor-theologian should, "think himself empty, then pray himself full."[69]

Just as humility in horizontal leadership does not excuse cowardice or neglect, the same is true with vertical leadership. Humility in theology is not a license for ignorance or apathy. After all, as Barrett states, "Anti-intellectualism is a gross incongruity with a God whose knowledge is without measure."[70] Simply because we cannot know God fully does not mean that we should not try to know God more. A person should still visit the Grand Canyon, even though there is not a single vantage point that reveals more than a fraction of it.

This round-trip journey—emptying of self, contemplating God through His Word, and then returning to the daily cares of life—should be common for all Christians. We leave the urgent to focus on the important, and we leave the horizontal to go vertical, only to return again. But for the leader, this is a journey that is not merely individualistic; at some point, the preacher needs to bring others along with him. Mohler, again, says: "The great aim of leadership is to lead followers continually into a deeper and more comprehensive love for what is most real, most true, most right, and most important."[71]

For the pastor-theologian, there are many venues where leadership is displayed, but none as potent as preaching. The church leader can blog (or write journal articles), counsel, and lead elder meetings. But the preaching of God's word on the Lord's Day is the principle means God has chosen by which the pastor-theologian demonstrates leadership.[72] This is because preaching is the primary external tool God designed to move people from point A to point B.[73] This provoked Alec Motyer to describe preaching as the most evident way in which "the Lord exercises Lordship" in the church.[74] If preaching is how the Lord exercises Lordship over His church, certainly the sermon will end up being the most significant public example of the pastor's leadership. And for his preaching to be even close to effective, the pastor must have something to say. He must have been up the mountain that week to behold the beauty

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[68] "Nobody likes a preacher who struts into the pulpit like a prancing peacock." Steven J. Lawson, *Called to Preach: Fulfilling the High Calling of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2022), 118–19.

[69] H. B. Charles, *On Pastoring: A Short Guide to Living, Leading, and Ministering as a Pastor* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 39.

[70] Barrett, "Classical Theology," 15.

[71] Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 41.

[72] John Owen argues that preaching is uniquely helpful in facilitating meditation on God, because it provides "a special designed subject" to provoke contemplation. See John Owen, "Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded: Declared and Practically Improved," in *The Works of John Owen, Vol. 7*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1681), 393–94. Elsewhere Owen writes, "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by the diligent preaching of the Word." Idem, "The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government," in *The Works of John Owen, Vol. 16*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1682), 74–75.

[73] Derek W. H. Thomas, "Preaching as Transformation," in *Pulpit Aflame*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Dustin Benge (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 73.

[74] Alex Motyer, *Preaching? Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 16.

of God in Christ so that he may enter the pulpit, open God's Word, and invite his congregation to see what he has seen, and to go where he has gone.

It is not arrogant to lead like this. The fact is, declares Packer, "The preacher is the congregational leader, recognized as such, to whom people look as an embodiment of true Christianity, and whose preaching is heard as setting standards for himself and his hearers alike."[75] Earlier I described a trend in seeing pastors as leaders based on their methodology rather than their theology. But even for pastors who avoid the pitfalls of viewing leadership through the lens of how they "do church" rather than how they view God, there is still the potential to avoid theology in preaching. This avoidance is achieved by focusing on "application." Without a robust theology from the pulpit, the sermon—which should be the most heaven-focused moment of a congregant's week—tragically becomes yet another opportunity for pastors to focus on the horizontal.[76] Alex Montoya writes, "A sermon is not an exercise in exegesis, but a declaration of truth designed to move us."[77] The question remains: Does the pastor leverage his leadership to move people horizontally or vertically? Clearly a healthy church will be marked by both, but the two are in tension, and time is limited. While applicational preaching may superficially mask the pastor's lack of theological convictions, it can rob the congregation of their heavenly focus. If a pastor has the conviction that nothing is more practical and beneficial than gazing at the Lord, then his leadership will largely be theological and vertically oriented.

The Nexus of the Vertical and Horizontal

So far, this article has focused on the tension between vertical and horizontal leadership, and it has made the point that the term "pastor" can imply *horizontal* leadership, while the term "theologian" can imply *vertical* leadership. It has done so while maintaining that while these two planes are in tension, they ought not be separated, and that in order to be effective, pastoral leadership must be theological. If leadership is intended to move people, then the most effective way to move people forward in sanctification is to teach them how to think about God, which in turn produces holy affections.

But these holy affections manifest themselves back on the plane of the horizontal. These two planes of leadership do intersect, and when rightly ordered, the vertical understanding of God will create within human hearts right actions toward others. The leader who understands this dynamic will have the effect of leading the congregation heavenward, as his leadership will produce holy thinking, which in turn will lead to holy living. Mohler tells Christian leaders to "aim at the heart and the

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[75] Packer, "The Preacher as Theologian," 102.

[76] Kuhn has a helpful critique of this drift in preaching, and he perceptively ties it to the misguided notion that systematic theology dilutes the pure Word of God. See Chase R. Kuhn, "Theology for Preaching, Preaching for Theology," in *Theology Is for Preaching: Biblical Foundations, Method & Practice*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology, ed. Paul Grimmond (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 1–15.

[77] Alex Montoya, *Preaching with Passion* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 45–46.

head of your followers, confident that if they share the worldview and embrace it with conviction, the right actions will follow naturally."[78]

Obviously, this kind of vertically-oriented leadership should flow out of a sanctified leader. Just as a pastor cannot lead his congregants up a mountain that he himself has not climbed, neither can he expect his listeners to live in a way he himself does not live. A pastor can hardly be considered qualified to wade into horizontal relationships if he does not have experience in the vertical dynamic of godliness.[79] The leader's own love for the Lord gives his theological vision credibility in the eyes of his followers. That Godward love is manifest in the leader's attitude and is recycled back into his actions toward others. So, for pastoral leadership to be effective, it must be theological; but for a theological vision to be believable and compelling, it must produce fruit in keeping with godly conduct (Matt 3:8; 7:17–20; 12:33; Rom 7:4; Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9).

Ezra's own pattern of leadership is instructive here.[80] "Ezra had set his heart to study Yahweh's law, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). Notice that Ezra understood a distinction in these planes of leadership, but not a separation. His thoughts of God directly impacted how he lived, and that impact became almost formulaic in his leadership.

Paul models this leadership to the Philippians when he reveals his own prayer life to them: he prays for them to first love God more, then for them to have increased knowledge of God (Phil 1:9–11). His prayer culminates with the expectation that they will go into the world "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" (1:11). In v. 9, Paul uses the word αἴσθησις ("discernment") to describe that kind of life. While the ESV renders it as "discernment," in the context of Paul's instruction, it seems to indicate a sensitivity to how a vertical awareness of God intersects with the horizontal relationships in which a person finds himself.[81] One commentator notes that "the content of the petition was that the love of God within the readers might increase beyond all measure, and that as it increased it might penetrate more deeply into that personal relation with God through Christ as well as into all types of situations involving practical conduct."[82]

When Paul's prayer is viewed through the prism of leadership, a familiar pattern emerges. First, Paul himself has been overcome with the beauty of the Lord (cf. Phil 3:12–14). Second, he wants the Philippians to follow him in his love for God (1:3–9). That godly love will work itself out in their lives in a way that alters their horizontal relationships (Paul's thankfulness for those that preach Christ out of envy is illustrative of this, while his admonition to Euodia and Syntyche is emblematic of this leadership; 1:15–18; 4:2–3). By writing the Epistle to the Philippians, he is bringing them alongside himself, and showing them how his view of the Lord is motivating his prayers, so that they would share in that same

[78] Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 48.

[79] Archibald Alexander, "On the Importance of Aiming at Eminent Piety," in *The Pastor: His Call, Character, and Work* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2020), 63.

[80] Lawson calls Ezra's pattern of leadership "a pattern for all preachers." Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 78–101.

[81] So argues Rosscup. See Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible*, 271–73.

[82] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 77.

contemplation of God (1:7). Put simply, Paul leads the Philippians by studying God, applying that vision of Jesus Christ to his own life, and then teaching the church to do the same. That is essentially Ezra's pattern of leadership, with a Christological flourish.

The best example of this kind of leadership is, of course, Jesus. He stated time and time again that He came down to earth in order to reveal what the Father is like in heaven (e.g., John 1:14; 3:13, 31; 6:33, 38, 45; 8:42; 10:32; 16:27–28). His intent was to disclose God to his disciples so that they in turn could set their hearts on God (e.g., 16:15, 33). Jesus desired to shepherd His followers vertically—to bring them to heaven where He would be also (14:3). Perhaps the clearest example of this is found in Jesus' prayer in the upper room. In that prayer, He asks the Father to help His disciples see God through His own holiness (17:19), and He concludes by asking God to continue the Savior's work by bringing the disciples all the way to glory (17:24).

This vertical leadership was validated by Jesus' horizontal interactions. He was the epitome of the servant leader and He declared that He did not come to be served but to serve (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). The intersection of the vertical and horizontal was on full display at the final Passover meal. There He washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1–5) and shepherded their own personal interactions (14:27; 15:12; 16:33). He also directed them upward, compelling them to contemplate the beauty of the Lord (14:9; 15:20–21). This entire section of John's gospel overflows with profound theology, but it also is a picture of "the mysterious relationship between servanthood and leadership." Their Lord and their Teacher washed their feet.[83]

That same evening Jesus spoke to His disciples of His departure (John 14:1–6, 18–19, 28–29; 16:10; cf. Luke 9:30–31). Yet despite this impending separation, Jesus took great joy in the certainty of a future reunion in glory with His own (John 14:3, 18, 23, 28; 16:22; 17:24).[84] Does this longing not also pattern the pastor-theologian's longing? (2 Cor 1:14).[85] The leader pours out his life, inviting his congregants to join his gaze at the Lord, and often the invitation can seem unrequited. Nevertheless, there is the hope, modeled by Jesus, that the pastor-theologian will be reunited with his flock in heaven. Church leaders are not content to gaze alone; they desire that all Christians seek the "one thing." This desire culminates in the hope and expectation of corporate fellowship in glory.[86] This is the ultimate end of godly leadership—when the invitation given in every sermon will finally be realized, as "we all, with unveiled face" behold the glory of the Lord together (3:18).

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[83] Kanagaraj, "Johannine Jesus, the Supreme Example of Leadership," 19.

[84] The reunion implied throughout the evening does not refer to the time period between the resurrection and the ascension, but to the hope of future glory in heaven. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 569–70.

[85] Edwards looks at this reunion from the perspective of a Christian leader and pastor, and he explores its blessings as well as the potential difficulties of being reunited with those whom we possessed sharp disagreements with here on earth. See Jonathan Edwards, "A Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct in Northampton, after the People's Public Rejection of Their Minister…on June 22, 1750," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, vol. 25, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach and Harry S. Stout (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

[86] Barrett again: "There is a sense that for the pastor-theologian, there is a special joy in heaven: namely seeing fellow church members there." Matthew Barrett, "The Theologian as Pastor" (ETS Midwest Conference, Hannibal-LaGrange University, 2022).

Conclusion: The Vertical-Horizontal Leadership of John MacArthur

This journal commemorates the leadership of John MacArthur, and I would be remiss if I failed to note a particular element of his leadership. There are numerous ways MacArthur personifies the leadership described in this section, but for me this dynamic of leadership is most clearly seen in his sermons on John 13–17. It is a happy connection—above I argued that Jesus' leadership clearly models the nexus of the horizontal and the vertical, and that is most on display in John 13–17. So, it is not surprising that for a pastor, his own leadership would likewise be visible as he preaches through that section of Scripture, something MacArthur has done many times.[87] In those sermons, MacArthur has labored to bring out both the horizontal as well as the vertical elements of Jesus' leadership.

As for the horizontal, MacArthur has continually stressed that one reason Jesus concluded His earthly ministry with His disciples alone was to shepherd their troubled hearts. Approaching this text, MacArthur considers the question: Why did Jesus structure his ministry this way? The answer, says MacArthur, is that Jesus wanted to reach "beneath the surface of their immediate fears and confusion."[88] Jesus was concerned for them, and how they would respond to His death, so Jesus met them at the place of their hearts' troubles, where they were confused and blind. Yet Jesus did not leave them there, nor did Jesus fail to bring the vertical realities of God to them. In fact, MacArthur remarks, Jesus ministered to them in this way in order to "share the anticipation and the excitement of His coming exaltation…. He wanted them to be preoccupied with the thoughts of His glory."[89]

Note the dynamic MacArthur perceives in Jesus. Jesus came from heaven to reveal God. He brings that revelation to those whom He leads. He then interacts with them on a personal level, even washing their feet as a way to prepare their hearts and to model leadership for them. Then He directs their eyes up to heaven, to glory, and stimulates their hearts to long for the day when they will all be together again. MacArthur refers to this connection of the vertical and horizontal as "the crossroads of two eternities," and sees in it a pattern for our own leadership as well.[90] He writes that this approach to leadership is "a burning passion we inherit from our Lord Himself."[91]

Moreover, some of MacArthur's most complex and biblically nuanced theology is on display in his sermons on this section of Scripture. There are many examples to choose from, but one rises to the top: MacArthur's description of the program and plan of salvation as an exchange between the Father and the Son. He sees the doctrine of election to be profound not only in that God chooses whom He will save, but also in that the election of fallen sinners and their adoption in Christ is "a love gift" from the Father to the Son.[92]

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[87] He has preached over forty sermons on John 13–17, and he has preached specifically through John 17 at least three times. Some of the content from these sermons is available in: John MacArthur, *John 12–21*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2008); *The Upper Room: Jesus' Parting Promises for Troubled Hearts* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2014).

[88] MacArthur, *The Upper Room*, 53.

[89] Ibid.

[90] John MacArthur, "The Divine Prayer for Glory Displayed," *Grace to You*, April 14, 2006, https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-305/the-divine-prayer-for-glory-displayed#!.

[91] MacArthur, *The Upper Room*, 53.

[92] MacArthur, *John 12–21*, 298–99.

Further, MacArthur sees in this exchange of gifts a reciprocation. In glory, the Son will turn the Church back to the Father, and, as the Apostle Paul says, God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). MacArthur describes this exchange in a pastoral tone that elevates the worth and affections of Christians in a marvelous way. There is no shortage of preachers who speak about the image of God and the worth of mankind in anthropological terms. But when preaching through John 17, MacArthur does so in theological and Trinitarian terms. He explains that, "All of the blessings believers will one day experience in heaven flow from the reality that the Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world."[93] In effect, MacArthur sees the work of Jesus as Savior tied to the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. He brings this explanation to its climactic point, when he says that, "From all eternity the Father and Son enjoyed perfect fellowship (John 1:1), love, and shared glory (17:5)…. [And] based on that mutual love, the Father chose a people (Eph. 1:4), gave them to the Son, and prepared an eternal kingdom for them (Matt. 25:34) where they will behold His glory forever."[94]

MacArthur tends not to use technical theological terms in his preaching, but it is evident that he desires his congregation to see that the *ad intra* processions of the Persons of God are the basis for the *ad extra* missions of God.[95] The Father sends the Son and the Son reveals the Father (John 1:14, 18; 3:34–36; 4:34; 5:24, 30, 36–38).[96] Moreover, the Father sends the Spirit in Christ's name to further expose the disciples to the Trinitarian relations (14:25–26).[97] MacArthur writes, "The Father gave His truth to Christ, who gave it to the Holy Spirit, who revealed it through the apostles and preserved it in the Word of God (1 Peter 1:21)."[98] These Trinitarian relations reveal the Trinity's desire to save.[99] Believers are "adopted into" the love the Father has for the Son, and thus MacArthur states: "Reflecting this new relationship, the Lord's message to the disciples referred to 'My Father and your Father, and My God and your God'" (cf. John 20:17).[100] MacArthur does not use the word "perichoresis," but he makes clear that the mutual indwelling of Trinitarian Persons is the reality that breaks into the world through the love of Christ.[101]

In this section of Scripture, MacArthur sees the reason for which God created the world: to display His glory by electing a bride to give as a gift to the Son. All of creation then becomes an expression of the Father's love for the Son, but the Triune love does not terminate there. Rather, the Son redeems and sanctifies so that He can give His bride back to the Father, likewise as an expression of His own intra-Trinitarian love.[102] When MacArthur preaches on this, it is clear that he views these "gift exchanges" analogically. He does not give the impression that we are to view this scene playing out

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[93] MacArthur, *John 12–21*, 301.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Dogmatics, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 69–71.
[96] MacArthur, *The Upper Room*, 111–15.
[97] MacArthur, 115–16.
[98] MacArthur, 115–17.
[99] MacArthur, 149–50.
[100] MacArthur, *John 12–21*, 379.
[101] MacArthur, *The Upper Room*, 110–12.
[102] MacArthur, 149–50; MacArthur, "The Divine Prayer for Glory Displayed."

around a Christmas tree in heaven. Nevertheless, it is described so warmly and invitingly that believers have their desire to see God in His glory increased.

Moreover, MacArthur locates a motivation for holy living in this Trinitarian exchange. The Holy Spirit will come, MacArthur says, to ensure that Jesus' prayer for us to be united to Himself is answered. It is the sending of the Spirit, MacArthur writes, that makes believers recipients of God's glory—and by that he means "God's attributes and essence within them" (John 17:22).[103] This union with the Son is what is behind so much of our desire to gaze upon Christ. MacArthur explains that this speaks of the "visible manifestation of the fullness of His glory that believers will one day see in heaven," and this desire to see God "has always been the hope of the saints."[104]

In his sermons on John 13–17, MacArthur makes explicit the connection between horizontal living and vertical faith. He then uses that section of Scripture, and particularly John 17, to describe complex theological and Trinitarian categories, but he does so in an accessible manner for all people. It is the deepest theology but in the plainest and warmest terms. All of it is teleological, in that it points people to heaven, and increases their desire for eternity.

How does this relate to leadership? Many of the theological battles MacArthur has fought (such as lordship salvation, ecumenicalism, etc.) have centered on precisely these issues. For example, if a person could be adopted in Christ, and yet not have a heart that desires to submit to and see the Lord, is that not a threat to the theology of John 17? Or, if our adoption is contingent on works and sacraments, is that not a diminishing of the Father's gift to the Son? If our salvation depends on effort that flows from a fountain other than Christ, does that not pollute the Son's return of us as a gift to the Father?

MacArthur's theological vision serves as an example for others to follow. The pastor-theologian's leadership is seen in his cultivation of theological principles. And his communication of those truths invites the congregants to join the pastor in his gaze at the Lord. This is true leadership, and it is modeled by David, Ezra, Paul, and indeed perfectly by Jesus Himself.

[103] MacArthur, *John 12–21*, 300.
[104] MacArthur, 300.

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 119–129

GUARDING THE FLOCK AND DEFENDING THE FAITH

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A faithful pastor-theologian's duty is perfectly illustrated by the role of a shepherd. He is among other things a guardian, responsible to defend the faith and to protect his flock. But in recent years the shepherd model has been disregarded, defamed, and even declared obsolete by church leaders who suggest pastors should function like corporate CEOs rather than shepherds. In this article, Phil Johnson evaluates that trend in light of the key verses in Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28–30). He highlights the integral connection between shepherding and the pastor-theologian's duty to be set for the defense of the gospel and the protection of the flock against savage theological wolves and their influence.

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Introduction

Pastor is the perfect title for a teaching elder in the church, because shepherding is the ideal biblical metaphor illustrating the task to which every pastor-theologian is called.

Consider the work of a literal shepherd. He is of course a *leader.* In Jesus' words, "A shepherd of the sheep…calls his own sheep by name and leads them out…. He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:2–4). He is also a *guardian* to the sheep, and this aspect of his role is particularly vital. It is not a task for dilettantes. It requires authentic know-how and commitment. When an uncommitted or incompetent person takes the place of a shepherd, that puts the sheep in peril. "He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees—and the wolf snatches and scatters them—because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep" (vv. 12–13).

Those same twin duties—leadership and protection—are vital aspects of the pastor-theologian's care for his people. As a *theologian,* he is responsible not only to teach his people biblical truth, but also to defend the truth against error. Like that hired hand in the sheep-field who runs from predators, he is not qualified to serve as

a biblical theologian unless he is "able *both* to exhort in sound doctrine *and* to reprove those who contradict" (Titus 1:9; emphasis added). As a *pastor,* he has a duty not only to lead and feed the flock with truth that is biblically accurate and theologically sound—to "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1)—but also to guard the sheep in his care from spiritual wolves, false teachers, and corrupters of the truth.

Notice: theology done right is pastoral work, and true pastoral ministry requires theological skill. Those are inseparable categories of work in the church. Note also that both columns in the pastor-theologian's job description require some degree of polemical aptitude, plus a readiness to enter into conflict when necessary to defend either the faith or the flock. When error or danger arises, the pastor-theologian must "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). A faithful shepherd cannot avoid this duty. He is entrusted with the welfare of "lambs in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). Refusing to engage an enemy or a predator who threatens the flock would be the grossest dereliction of his duty.

We Are God's People and the Sheep of His Pasture

Pastoral imagery, as expressed in the above heading, is ubiquitous in Scripture. The people of God are frequently pictured as lambs who need to be shepherded (Num 27:16–17; 1 Kgs 22:17; Ezek 34:5; Zech 10:2; Matt 9:36). In fact, shepherding is the dominant paradigm for spiritual leadership in Scripture. The central figure employed throughout the Old Testament to illustrate God's own role as overseer and guardian of His people is the shepherd. It is a carefully chosen metaphor, stressing Yahweh's tender care and loving protection.

The same imagery is also applied to human overseers who are tasked with the leadership, instruction, nurture, and protection of God's people. God describes faithful leaders as "shepherds after My own heart" (Jer 3:15). Conversely, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel characterize false prophets and careless or corrupt leaders as unfaithful shepherds (Jer 10:21; 12:10; 23:1–4; Ezek 34:1–10).

So Yahweh Himself is the quintessential Shepherd, famously described as such in the twenty-third Psalm. In Psalm 100:3, the psalmist also writes: "*We are* His people and the sheep of His pasture." The repetition of similar imagery in reference to God runs throughout the Old Testament (cf. Gen 49:24; Ps 79:13; Isa 40:11; Jer 23:3–4; Ezek 34:11–12; Mic 5:4). Everyone in first-century Israel who had any familiarity with Scripture knew this metaphor well.

That explains why one of Jesus' most shocking and controversial claims was when He said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). He was making a claim only God could righteously make.

The Good Shepherd motif then runs through the New Testament all the way to the end. Peter declared to his fellow believers that Christ is "the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25). A few chapters later (5:4), he refers to Jesus as "the Chief Shepherd." Hebrews 13:20 calls Jesus "the great Shepherd of the sheep."[1] In Revelation

[1] The shepherding imagery was particularly meaningful to Peter. It recalls one of the most poignant and uplifting scenes in all the New Testament narratives, when Jesus restored Peter to service after his

7:17, Jesus is described as both Lamb and Shepherd: "The Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them and will guide them to springs of the water of life."

In light of Psalm 23 and all the other Old Testament references to God as the "Shepherd of Israel" (cf. Ps 80:1), it is clear that when such superlative pastoral titles are applied to Jesus ("the Good Shepherd," "the Great Shepherd," and "the Chief Shepherd"), these are emphatic claims about His deity.

But Peter also described church leaders (especially those who teach) as undershepherds and caretakers of God's flock (1 Pet 5:2–3). Individual Christians are commanded to follow those who follow Christ (1 Cor 1:11)—just as sheep follow their shepherds. It is therefore no insignificant or accidental matter that Christians have always referred to teaching elders in the church as "pastors"—*shepherds.* Ephesians 4:11 refers to them by that title and says they are gifts from Christ to His church.

To Serve, Not to Be Served

The Bible also clearly explains how the hierarchy of pastoral leadership is supposed to function in the church. The Good Shepherd (Christ) is the living example, proving that pastoral ministry is a role of service and sacrifice. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life" (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). During one of His disciples' disputes about who among them should have preeminence, "Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave'" (Matt 20:25–27).

Nevertheless, in recent years the prevailing evangelical idea of church leadership has morphed into something quite different from the biblical concept of shepherding. The chief models being hyped for church leaders to emulate today are businessmen, politicians, marketing specialists, entertainers, rock stars, and similar high-status roles—jobs that all have far more prestige and privilege than shepherding.

This is not a sudden or recent development. For decades, the leading gurus in the burgeoning church-growth industry have encouraged pastors to present themselves to their congregations as vision casters, entrepreneurs, commanders in chief, and chief executive officers—all roles involving leadership styles that are fundamentally different from that of a shepherd. Read or listen to any of today's most influential sources of advice on the subjects of church growth or ministry philosophy, and you are likely to hear counsel that flatly contradicts the instructions Christ gave His disciples. Pastors are relentlessly told that their churches will fail or fall into irrelevance if they follow the biblical model of shepherding, so they must instead learn and follow the same models of leadership that dominate the corporate world of big business and entertainment.

The idea that a business tycoon or corporate VIP is a better model for church leadership than a shepherd is now so pervasive that many churchgoers accept it without much critical thought. They look for churches that fit whatever franchise

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shameful failure on the night Christ was betrayed. Our Lord recommissioned Peter three times (the same number of times Peter had denied him). Each time He gave the apostle a mandate to be a faithful shepherd: "Tend My lambs…. Shepherd My sheep…. Tend My sheep" (John 21:15–17).

model is currently stylish, without even considering the biblical priorities listed in Acts 2:42: "the apostles' teaching…fellowship…breaking of bread and…prayers." In the words of one author,

> [They] view local churches like small businesses where the pastor is the CEO and the people are the customers. They think the church exists to give them and their children a menu of programs, activities, and events. Those who decide to serve are like employees of the business, making sure the programs are well-organized, the coffee is hot, the marketing is catchy, the activities are plentiful, and the bathrooms are squeaky clean.[2]

A brazen quest for celebrity status and all the perks that go with it is the obvious incentive for those who have aggressively championed the move away from servant leadership. Their thirst for honor and recognition is the polar opposite of any true shepherd's motivation. But it explains why, in the minds of so many church leaders today, success is measured by the size of the congregation rather than by the health and well-being of the flock.

More to the point, what *all* the new-model versions of church leadership have in common is that they are ways of being served rather than serving. The prototypes are moguls, not ministers. In their various ways they all illustrate precisely what Jesus condemned—namely, lording it over the people who are supposed to be in their care.

From Shepherds to CEOs

Again, this shift away from the biblical philosophy of ministry has been underway for decades, and the movement has been anything but subtle. Andy Stanley openly disparaged the idea of shepherding in a 2006 interview published in *Leadership Journal*.[3] Stanley said he thinks it is high time to retire the language and methodology of shepherding in church leadership and replace it with the figure of a corporate CEO. Because the culture has shifted, he said, leadership in the church must change with it. What seemed unimportant in the apostolic era is crucial today, and vice versa. In today's world, business savvy and corporate-style leadership are absolutely essential, Stanley said. He is convinced this has rendered the shepherding model utterly obsolete. "The church wasn't an organization in the first century," he says. "They weren't writing checks or buying property. The church has matured and developed over the years. But for some reason the last thing to change is the structure of leadership."

Stanley admits that he does not even regard church leadership as a spiritual task. The interviewer asks, "What is distinctly spiritual about the kind of leadership you do?" Stanley replies tersely and candidly: "There's nothing distinctly spiritual." He thinks it is "a big problem in the church" that so many Christians believe spiritual

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[2] Matthew Emadi, *How Can I Serve My Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 10.

[3] Marshall Shelley and Eric Reed, "State of the Art: Andy Stanley on God's Ways, Cultural Assumptions, and Leading," *Leadership Journal* 27 (Spring 2006): 26–35; the quotations attributed to Andy Stanley in this section all come from this interview. This piece received an award from the Evangelical Press Association as the best interview published that year.

and biblical values are incompatible with leadership styles borrowed from powerful people in the secular world. He decries this "dichotomy between spirituality and leadership" as an outmoded perspective that he thinks "hurts the church." But what he rejects is precisely the dichotomy Jesus Himself established in Matthew 20:25.

Stanley says critics often point out that the assembly he oversees functions like a business syndicate rather than a fellowship of saints. "Your church is so corporate," they say to Stanley. "The pastor's like a CEO." Stanley responds: "OK, you're right. Now, why is that a bad model?"

So the interviewer asks, "Should we stop talking about pastors as 'shepherds'?"

Stanley's reply is immediate and emphatic: "Absolutely. That word needs to go away. Jesus talked about shepherds because there was one over there in a pasture he could point to. But to bring in that imagery today and say, 'Pastor, you're the shepherd of the flock,' no. I've never seen a flock. I've never spent five minutes with a shepherd. It was culturally relevant in the time of Jesus, but it's not culturally relevant anymore."

The interviewer pointed out that the word *pastor* actually means "shepherd." Stanley dismissed the point. "It's the first-century word. If Jesus were here today, would he talk about shepherds? No. He would point to something that we all know, and we'd say, yeah, I know what that is."

So in Andy Stanley's view, shepherding was just an ad hoc illustration, as if it were chosen almost by accident when Christ spotted a flock of sheep while He was teaching one day. Stanley seems convinced the shepherd references were nothing more than an attempt at contextualization, and that the shepherding metaphor became irrelevant and inappropriate when the church outgrew its agrarian beginnings. He says, "By the time of the book of Acts, the shepherd model is gone. It's about establishing elders and deacons and their qualifications. Shepherding doesn't seem to be the emphasis."

Is the Wisdom of This World Foolishness, or Not?

Andy Stanley's preposterous assertion that the shepherd metaphor was an offhand attempt at contextualization by Jesus ("gone" from Scripture before the book of Acts) is easily disproved.[4] But the fact that he believes it and the interviewers didn't seriously challenge his claim reveals what underlies so many of the trends that dominate leadership philosophy in most of today's stylish megachurches. It is a low view of Scripture and a too-high view of worldly wisdom.

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matt 24:25). That means Scripture (which is forever settled and unchanging) is *never* made obsolete by shifting trends in this world's fashions. If today's evangelicals truly believed that, they would not be so easily swayed by all the hype and sophistry that has fueled wave after wave of evangelical fads. Andy Stanley's central argument in that interview is that the church *must* abandon the style of servant leadership and shepherding modeled by Jesus, because times have changed. There is simply no way to reconcile that belief with the historic evangelical commitment to the timeless authority of Scripture.

[4] See the Scriptures quoted in the paragraphs immediately following the first subheading in this article.

Still, the opinion Andy Stanley expresses in that *Leadership* interview is by no means unique to him. It is the same shabby foundation on which most stylish megachurches have built their philosophies of ministry. And the same point of view is shared by a host of influential thought leaders who write and teach in evangelical contexts. It is what motivates them to try so hard to eliminate the offense of the cross and do away with the hard parts of the gospel message. It is why so many evangelical pundits favor pious-sounding jargon instead of clear biblical terminology. (Thus no one is sinful or guilty anymore; they are "broken.") It is why there is so little protest from Christians when the world loads vital biblical terms with false meanings. (For example, the word *justice* is commonly used nowadays as shorthand for a socio-political value system that has no vital connection with the righteousness of God.) It is why so many people in the church think it is more important for their leaders to be fashionable than to be faithful. It is why innovation is a higher priority than orthodoxy in so many churches.

This pragmatic perspective views the church as a business peddling a malleable product that needs to be suited to public tastes. Many in the evangelical movement view ministry that way, and that explains why they play along so eagerly with practically anything that is trending in popular culture. They believe this philosophy represents the cutting edge of postmodern ministry. But it actually guarantees that churches following this approach will not bear abiding fruit. Indeed, what they are doing at the moment will be seen as foolish and irrelevant as soon as what's fashionable becomes yesterday's style.

Is Shepherding an Outmoded Trope for Ministerial Leadership?

But let us examine this claim that shepherding was merely a convenient, incidental metaphor for Jesus one day in Galilee. Is it true that the language of shepherding (and shepherding as a model of leadership) was already obsolete by the time of the book of Acts?

Of course not. As we have seen already, shepherding as a model of spiritual leadership is a theme that runs through Scripture from beginning to end. Moreover, it is the very idea Paul turns to in Acts 20 when he has what he believes will be his final meeting with the elders of the church in Ephesus. Shepherding is the theme that dominates his farewell message to them:

> Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be watchful… (Acts 20:28–31)

"Be on guard…be watchful" is the only imperative Luke records from Paul's farewell message. Paul starts the message by rehearsing his history with the Ephesian church, and he tells them what he believes lies ahead in his own future. "Bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that chains and

afflictions await me" (vv. 22–23). He closes his message with an extended farewell in which he reminds them of his own self-sacrifice in their midst (vv. 33–35). But the heart and key portion of his message is that urgent imperative that comes in the middle. It is an admonition to fulfill their duty to be faithful, watchful shepherds over the flock of God.

Paul is rushed for time as he delivers this message. He is on his way back to Jerusalem at the end of his third and final missionary journey. He had begun this phase of his ministry in Ephesus, helping establish the church there as demonstrated by his statements: "From the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time…. Night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears" (vv. 18, 31). So he knew these men well and had personally trained them for their role as elders. He wants to meet with them one more time on his way back to Jerusalem, but his ship makes port in Miletus, a seaport thirty miles overland from Ephesus. While at Miletus, he summons the Ephesian elders to meet him there when the ship docks (v. 17). He intends to give them one final apostolic charge. Pressed for time, he keeps it brief. The entire charge to the Ephesian elders is only 18 verses long. So that central imperative, sandwiched between words of reflection and remembrance, stands out as singularly important.

We have lots of pastoral advice from Paul in his epistles to Timothy and Titus. But this is the most compact, condensed set of pastoral marching orders from Paul. It is therefore a vital passage to consider when pondering the proper priorities of biblical leadership.

Ephesus was a city of commerce and business. The city was a major hub for several of the various trade routes that crisscrossed the Roman world. This was the most cosmopolitan city in the Mediterranean region. It was a sophisticated, urbane, cultured society. Shepherds did not mingle freely in Ephesian society. A shepherd would live on the far-out fringe of a culture like that.

If Paul had wanted to contextualize the leadership model, he might have compared church leaders to sea captains or trade merchants or Roman centurions—or something else that might be more personally familiar to them than a shepherd. But he speaks to them as shepherds, and he solemnly commands them to fulfill the role of faithful herdsmen—undershepherds who are accountable to the Great Shepherd for the care and feeding of His flock, "which He purchased with His own blood" (v. 28).

Compare the apostle's farewell message with the average church leadership conference today and notice, first of all, what is missing. Paul doesn't talk to them about management or marketing strategy. He is not concerned with whether they are sufficiently hip to impress young people or savvy enough to impress the secular intelligentsia. He doesn't address them as change agents tasked with reshaping Ephesian culture. He doesn't encourage them to be innovators and vision-casters, or devisers of novel programs for the next generation of the church. He is not concerned with *any* of the themes that dominate most of today's manuals on pastoral leadership. He certainly doesn't encourage them to see themselves as managers rather than ministers, or as CEOs rather than servants.

Instead, he reminds them that they are shepherds caring for a flock that does not even belong to them, and he urges them to be on guard against wolves in their own midst. The suggestion that the language of shepherding "needs to go away" and church leaders should act like CEOs would be repugnant to Paul. He was urging the

Ephesian elders to be diligent, watchful, protective shepherds—custodians and defenders of that which has been entrusted to them. He mentions two things shepherds need to guard carefully: themselves and the sheep.

"Be on Guard for Yourselves"

Paul puts this first in order: "Be on guard for yourselves." At first glance, that may seem surprising, because the shepherd's main job is caring for sheep. He cannot be absorbed in himself. Shepherding is a role of self-sacrifice, not self-aggrandizement. "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Pastoral ministry is about service to the sheep; it is not supposed to be about the shepherd's ego.

But Paul is not telling these men to look out for their own self-interests or become self-focused. What he has in mind here is something far different, and he makes clear what he means in verse 30, where he echoes and adds emphasis to the expression "yourselves": "From among *your own selves* men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30; emphasis added).

Notice that Paul has nothing to say to the Ephesian elders about the politics and persecution that made ministry in that cultural context so difficult. He knew that the worst attacks on the truth invariably come from within the community of professing believers. Even men who rise to positions of trust and prominence (like Judas Iscariot) are capable of defection, apostasy, heresy, and betrayal. We know from bitter experience that some men who seem like trustworthy, qualified spiritual leaders actually harbor secret sins that belie their profession of faith. Seemingly good and gifted men sometimes fall away and lead others astray. When that happens, it is almost always more destructive than any assault on the faith from a rank unbeliever.

The New Testament is full of warnings about infidels and heretics who surreptitiously attain positions of influence in the church and then wreak destruction. "Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:13–15). No purveyor of theological mischief ever lays out his agenda in plain and honest terms. Wolves *always* come in sheep's clothing, and that is why the faithful shepherd must stay on guard with focused vigilance.

The problem Paul addresses in his message to these elders is more common today than most Christians want to acknowledge. But if such a danger loomed over a church like Ephesus, where Paul had personally trained and worked for three years with the church's founding elders, the threat is undoubtedly even greater today, given the broad tolerance for doctrinal anomalies within the evangelical movement.

Church history is strewn with apostates who have "suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith" (1 Tim 1:19), but who nevertheless use influence they have gained as church leaders to abuse or mislead the flock. Paul calls such people "savage wolves" and instructs the elders at Ephesus to be on guard because he somehow knew the wolves would emerge from within their own fraternity. *How* he knew this we are not told. It seems clear, however, that he did not know precisely *who* would wield this wolfish influence. If he had known that, he surely would have called the miscreant out.

Paul's words ("Be on guard for yourselves") have a double thrust. The opening words of Acts 20:28 are a close parallel to his admonition to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching." There he was exhorting Timothy to engage in frequent and careful self-examination. Likewise, in Acts 20, the command to "be on guard for yourselves" meant not only that they needed to keep one another doctrinally sound, morally pure, and accountable, but also that each one of them needed to guard his own heart and mind. Paul is, after all, the apostle who wrote, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

That parallel text in 1 Timothy ("[Guard] yourself and…your teaching") establishes a careful balance that all church leaders need to maintain. It is of course vital for every church leader to guard his own teaching, taking extreme care to be doctrinally sound and biblically accurate. But if he does not also carefully guard the purity and holiness of his own heart, whatever interest he might have in doctrine is merely academic, and that will inevitably be manifest in his life. Furthermore, a pastor is not truly protecting the flock if he fails to guard his own heart. A lack of sanctification in a church leader basically repudiates whatever is truly sound in his teaching. In the long run, that is as detrimental to the spiritual health of the church as heresy.

The other side of this balance is equally vital. To think practical holiness can exist apart from a firm devotion to sound gospel doctrine is merely legalistic piety. The result is a mechanical religion that may appear whitewashed on the outside, but it is devoid of truth and genuine faith where it matters most. No matter how saintly it may seem, it is a particularly sinister brand of false religion. The pastor whose preaching is full of moral precepts but devoid of gospel and sound doctrine is not faithfully guarding his flock as he should.

The balance is absolutely essential: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching." Church leaders must devote themselves to holiness *and* sound doctrine with absolute commitment to both.

Meanwhile, they cannot neglect the duty to hold one another accountable. Remember, this charge to them is not only—and perhaps not even primarily—a call to self-examination. It is certainly a mandate for mutual accountability. The plural pronoun in Acts 20:28 is essential: "Be on guard for *yourselves*." He wants them to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24). They have a duty to keep one another faithful to the Word of God, while encouraging one another in holiness. Perhaps the best way to understand this imperative is that the apostle is urging *both* conscientious self-examination and careful accountability to one another.

Consider the urgency of the situation Paul describes. If men in leadership in the Ephesian church were about to start speaking perverse things and trying to draw disciples away from apostolic doctrine, the faithful shepherds among them needed to work together to prepare themselves and for spiritual warfare. Every true leader among them would need to be devoted to the task of protecting the rest of the flock from the savage wolves who were coming.

That is clearly what Paul hopes they will do.

"Be on Guard…for All the Flock"

The encroachment of wolves was clearly the main concern on Paul's mind and heart when he spoke to these elders in Acts 20. It is impossible to read this passage

without feeling a sense of his great urgency, especially when he tells them in verse 30, "From among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

And bear in mind also that the threat provoking Paul's concern was not a mere possibility. It is a certainty: "I *know* that after my departure savage wolves will come in" (20:29; emphasis added).

Absent from Paul's words to these elders is any hint that he regarded himself (much less one of these elders) as the CEO of the church. Paul frequently stressed that Christ alone is the head of the church (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). Pastors and elders are simply custodians, caretakers, and guardians—stewards of a flock that belongs to God. That is their chief duty, not vision-casting or personality-cult building. He stresses the fact that their oversight in the church is a delegated role. The fellowship of saints is, after all, "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). It is not Paul's church, or the Ephesian elders' church. And the believers in that fellowship are not there to serve their leaders, but vice versa.

Obviously, a very large aspect of any literal shepherd's duty is to keep a sharp eye out for wolves. That is also true for shepherds in the church. But the wolves are not easy to spot. Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt 7:15). Again, Satan and his minions *always* come in disguise. Wolves do not come as wolves—they come masquerading as sheep. False teachers never announce that they are heretics. They sign orthodox doctrinal statements. They forge alliances with people who have good reputations. They pretend as long as possible that they share the convictions of the people they intend to deceive. And many are quite good at keeping up the charade.

That explains how a few men gained positions of influence and leadership in Ephesus, even though they would soon be "speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). They did not come into the church speaking perverse things while Ephesus was under Paul's watchful eye. He guarded the assembly against such threats. But they would soon arise with a sinister agenda, and the rest of the Ephesian elders needed to be on guard against their influence in order to protect the flock.

Being on guard for wolves in sheep's clothing is not the most popular aspect of the pastor's duty, but it is a duty nonetheless. It is not optional. And never has it been more necessary than it is today. Wolves are *not* scarce in the church today. Religious television is overrun with them. It's not "loving" to ignore their influence or avoid warning the sheep about the danger they pose. In the face of such a threat, the most *unloving* thing a shepherd could do is fail to ward off the wolf or refuse to sound a warning for the flock.

Savage wolves will not spare the flock, and Paul notes that. The clear implication is that the wolves themselves should not be spared. A true shepherd does not go easy on wolves. Wolves are not to be bargained with or placated by compromise. A wolf will not be persuaded to become a vegetarian by collegial dialogue. The shepherd has just one right course of action: keep the wolves out of the fold and away from the sheep.

The apostle's prophecy about wolves in Ephesus did come true, and we see evidence of that in Paul's epistles to Timothy. The whole first chapter of 1 Timothy is devoted to the topic of wolves in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3–4): "I exhorted you [to] remain on at Ephesus so that you may command certain ones not to teach a different

doctrine, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the stewardship from God which is by faith."

Someone there evidently believed he could improve on apostolic teaching by supplementing Paul's doctrine with some kind of speculation based on genealogies. Experienced pastors know this character type—someone who thinks he has uncovered some valuable doctrine or secret code within the genealogies of the Old Testament or some other obscure part of Scripture. They typically sit on the periphery, and they don't talk about doctrine with the teaching elders; they pick out vulnerable and fragile people in the church (they have a nose for that) and fill people's minds with confusing speculation about arcane or fanciful doctrines. That turns people's attention away from the gospel. It is a dangerous threat to the health of the church.

In Ephesus, one of these scoundrels was Hymenaeus (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17). It is possible that he might have once been an elder or person of influence in the Ephesian assembly. Perhaps he was the very person Paul's prophecy referred to in Acts 20. His teaching seemed to have a very long reach, and it confused a lot of people, so it is clear that he was an influential person. In 2 Timothy 2:17, Paul said his teaching "spread like gangrene." Paul did not shrink from naming him and in effect excommunicating him from the fellowship.

There is an important lesson here. The gospel's most dangerous earthly adversaries are not raving atheists who stand outside the door shouting threats and insults. They are church leaders who cultivate a gentle, friendly, pious demeanor but hack away at the foundations of faith under the guise of keeping in step with a changing world.

Conclusion

What is the large lesson in all of this? The task of the pastor-theologian is not complex, but it is not effortless, either. Shepherding is hard and sometimes dirty work, and it calls for humble, faithful, devoted servants—not hirelings. It is practically the polar opposite kind of vocation from that of a CEO in the realm of business and commerce.

Instead, the pastor-theologian is called to lead the flock by example; feed and nourish the flock with a steady, rich diet of God's Word; recover the lambs who wander; bind up those who are hurt; and be on guard and ready to resist the ravenous wolves who *will* attack. And a faithful pastor will tend and defend the sheep lovingly. The flock belongs to Christ; He purchased it with His own blood. The pastor-theologian, at his very best, is merely a steward of Christ, and "it is required of stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor 4:2).

TAKING A BIBLICAL STAND WHEN CHRIST AND COMPLIANCE COLLIDE

How can we as Christians know how best to respond when the state encroaches upon the church? *God vs. Government* looks to the Bible for answers about remaining discerning and faithful to our heavenly Father's commands even when society tells us to do otherwise.

> "In view of recent events, three basic biblical truths must be emphasized. First, the church is essential. Second, the church must gather regularly and corporately. Third, the church is duty-bound to obey Christ even when doing so violates governmental regulations and restrictions. Given the fundamental nature of these New Testament priorities, it's hard to believe they would prove controversial, especially among evangelicals. But here we are. There has been a great deal of both controversy and compromise, which is why the message of this book is so necessary."
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ISBN: 978-0736986328
RETAIL: $17.99

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 131–144

THE COURAGE OF THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN

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* * * * *

This article defines the essence of biblical courage for the pastor-theologian. It does so by identifying four critical features of courage found in Joshua 1:6–9 (confidence, content, catalyst, and comfort). These features define what courage is, where courage comes from, and how courage is cultivated, establishing that biblical courage is the resolve to obey God's Word, regardless of the outcome or cost. The fourth feature of biblical courage finds a link in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 that bridges the historical and theological context of the Old Testament. From there, the features of courage identified in Joshua 1:6–9 are both reinforced and amplified in 2 Timothy 2:1–13, where the pastor is pictured as a soldier, and where the qualities of a good soldier are delineated. These qualities demand that the pastor-theologian be strong and courageous. Thus, this article is devoted to the courage of the pastor-theologian.

* * * * *

Introduction

Pastoral ministry is not for the faint of heart. It requires courage, the kind of courage that is resolved to faithfully discharge one's duties in the face of any and all opposition, regardless of the outcome or cost. This demands wholehearted faithfulness to God's Word, since it is God who defines what faithfulness is, for He Himself is faithful (1 Cor 1:9; 10:13). The pastor-theologian must both practice and preach the Word of God (Ezra 7:10). He must "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). He must ensure that God's Word is implemented in every aspect of the life of the church (1 Tim 3:14–15). He must censure sin (2 Tim 4:2), he must refute error (Titus 1:9), and he must do so with a view toward suffering hardship "as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2:3). Courage is an absolutely timeless and critical commodity for pastoral ministry.

Though courage has always been the need of the hour, the cost of faithfully discharging one's duties is clearly on the rise. Cultural hostility is increasing, governments are seeking to establish totalitarian rule over every other sphere of authority, and legislation is being written that effectively outlaws the gospel itself. This is nothing new for many parts of the world and is certainly consistent with what has taken place throughout church history. But this is also indicative of a massive cultural shift. The prospect of imprisonment for faithfulness to one's pastoral calling and duties has never been more real.

Beyond that, the speed and frequency with which error is able to infiltrate the church is unprecedented. Through the proliferation of bloggers, podcasters, and social media influencers, everyone is an authority. As such, men and women, who neither bear any responsibility for, nor accountability to the people they influence, are effectively discipling those for whom the pastor-theologian will give an account (Heb 13:17). Congregations are being inundated with content throughout the week, and the net effect is that the voice of the sanctioned under-shepherd is being drowned out. Even if he points out the error (1 Tim 4:6), he either faces an uphill battle or he will be attacked by the virtual mob, or both. Though the nature of pastoral ministry remains the same, the landscape on which it is taking place is ever evolving.

God's Word is entirely sufficient all on its own, but exemplary models of courage are tremendously helpful as they provide living illustrations of what it looks like. One would be hard-pressed to find a more excellent model than Pastor John MacArthur. He has proclaimed the Word of God unapologetically for more than five decades, he has stood tall against virtually every expression of theological and doctrinal error, he has fearlessly opposed the oppressive tyranny of government overreach, he has withstood a constant barrage of attacks on both his life and his ministry, and he has not only done so courageously, but he has also done so in a Christlike manner, bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). I consider it a distinct honor and privilege to recognize the man, who, in God's providence, has had the greatest impact on my own life. John MacArthur undeniably embodies the essence of biblical courage. He has consistently proven himself to be resolved to faithfully discharge his duties in the face of any and all opposition regardless of the outcome or cost.

The Quintessential Call to Courage

Predictably, questions that are being asked with greater frequency in this particular moment pertain to courage: questions such as, "What is courage?" and "Where does it come from?" and "How is it cultivated?" It should be no surprise that God's Word answers each of these questions. With that in view, we begin at ground zero for any discussion on courage, at what is the quintessential text on this subject: Joshua 1:6–9.

Historical and Theological Context

The historical and theological backdrop for the book of Joshua is the Abrahamic Covenant, and understanding this context reveals the inextricable link between godly leadership and courage. In that covenant, God promised to Abraham a particular land

(Gen 12:1, 7; 13:15–17; 15:7; 17:8) and prophesied to him that though he would die long before ever possessing it (Gen 15:15), the nation birthed from him would indeed do so (Gen 15:16). This would take place after they had been enslaved and oppressed in a foreign land for four hundred years (Gen 15:13), when God would judge that nation and deliver Abraham's descendants (Gen 15:14).

God made good on His promise and delivered Israel out of Egypt (Exod 14:30–31), led them to Mount Sinai (Exod 19), and there entered into a covenant with them (Exod 24:3–8). But, due to the disobedience and covenant unfaithfulness of that first generation, they were forbidden from inheriting the land (Num 14:22–23)—including Moses (Num 20:12; Deut 34:4)—so they died in the wilderness.

Prior to the death of Moses, Joshua was commissioned as his successor to lead the people (Deut 31:23). With Moses now dead, it was time for Israel to inherit the land promised to them (Josh 1:2). Joshua 1:1–9 records God's charge to Joshua, expressed in direct address, in preparation for the task, where even the geographical boundaries are stipulated: "From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory (Joshua 1:4)."[1]

This was a formidable task. Not only was Joshua the successor to a leader as distinguished as Moses, but he was also to lead Israel in a military effort against nations mightier than they. This was a matter of life and death. It is difficult to imagine the weight of responsibility that Joshua would have sensed as he surveyed the mission before him. If he was going to be successful, he would have to be "strong and very courageous" (Josh 1:7a). Therefore, God exhorts him to be fearless, and in the process defines the very essence of what courage is.

The Confidence of Courage

The promises of God provide the foundation on which the man of God can have the confidence to be courageous. This is evident in that the exhortation for Joshua to be "strong" and "courageous" is linked to a promise: "For you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them" (Josh 1:6). Success was promised before the mission had even begun. Though God would go on to stipulate the condition on which that success would hinge (cf. Josh 1:7–8), the prerequisites for meeting that condition were both strength and courage, qualities inextricably linked to promise.

The two verbs rendered "strong" and "courageous" are similar in meaning.[2] The basic meaning of both terms is to "be strong."[3] But the Hebrew word rendered "courageous" can also be rendered "stout."[4] Given the nature of the assignment and the way in which this term is used throughout the context of Joshua 1, it calls for both

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[1] Due to Israel's unfaithfulness in completing the conquest of the land, it is noteworthy that she has never possessed the entirety of the geographical location outlined in Joshua 1:4. Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words*, Focus on the Bible (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 17. This has implications for the Abrahamic Covenant and anticipates a future fulfillment of the land promise made to Abraham in accord with the promised restoration of a future elect expression of the nation of Israel (Jer 23:1–8).

[2] David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2002), 84.

[3] HALOT, 65, 302.

[4] BDB, 54.

courage in the face of one's fear (Josh 1:9) and resoluteness with respect to obedience to God's law (Josh 1:7–8).[5] Both were critical to Joshua's success. Not only would he encounter circumstances that could easily result in dread, but he also had to be resolute in obeying the Law of Moses to meet the condition for success. In either case, Joshua needed to stand firmly upon the foundation of God's promise.

Though the mission of the pastor-theologian is vastly different from that given to Joshua, and though success is not nearly as measurable in the context of pastoral ministry, the principle remains the same. To faithfully discharge his duties, the pastor-theologian must conduct his ministry on the firm foundation of the truth.[6] In fact, there are particular truths that are essential to his courage. Here are ten:

1. The Sovereignty of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that God is completely sovereign over everything. He must be convinced that God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11) and that His purpose cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2; Isa 46:10). This will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful regardless of the outcome.

2. The Glory of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that everything is working toward the end of the honor and glory of God. He must be convinced that nothing is without purpose and that every aspect of his ministry is an opportunity for God to glorify Himself. This will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful even when God's glory is not readily apparent in any given situation or circumstance.

3. The Worthiness of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that God is infinite in worth and value and that even if he should suffer the loss of all things, he would nevertheless be rich (Jer 9:23; 2 Cor 8:9). This will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful when obedience could cost him everything.

4. The Faithfulness of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that God is faithful (1 Cor 1:9; 10:13), that His faithfulness reaches to the skies (Ps 36:5), and that all of the promises of God are yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). This will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful, drawing strength from every applicable promise of God.

5. The Goodness of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that God is good (Ps 34:8), that He is the fountain of all goodness (Jas 1:17), and that He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love [Him]" (Rom 8:28; Gen 50:20). This will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful, even in the midst of the most intense seasons of affliction, knowing that God will use it all to conform him evermore into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29–30; Phil 3:10–14; Jas 1:2–4).

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[5] Howard, *Joshua*, 84.

[6] Promise and truth go hand in hand. The truths God reveals in His Word effectively become promises that He will always act in accord with the truth.

6. The Justice of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that God is just (Deut 32:4), that vengeance is His (Rom 12:19), and that justice will be served (Rom 3:26; Rev 20:11–15). This will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful in the face of grave injustice, following in the footsteps of Christ, who "kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet 2:21–23).

7. The Ownership of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that his life is not his own (1 Cor 6:19), that God is the rightful owner of all that he has (Ps 24:1), and that since he has been bought with a price, he is under obligation to glorify God in his body (1 Cor 6:20). This will cultivate a healthy detachment from the things of this world, resulting in the man of God holding all that he has with an opened hand. This too will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful when obedience could cost him everything.

8. The Inheritance of God. The pastor-theologian must be certain that he is an heir of God and fellow heir with Christ (Rom 8:17), that he has an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and reserved in heaven (1 Pet 1:4), and that this world is not his home (1 Pet 2:11). This will cause the pastor-theologian to set his affections on the things above (Col 3:1–4), and it will give him courage to be faithful even in circumstances where he must stare death in the face.

9. The Efficaciousness of the Word of God. The pastor-theologian must have a settled conviction that the Word of God is efficacious, always accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent (Isa 55:10–11). This will give the man of God the courage to faithfully preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2), even when the results are imperceptible.

10. The Judgment Seat of Christ. The pastor-theologian must conduct his life and ministry in anticipation of the judgment seat of Christ, when he will give an account of himself (Rom 14:10–12; 1 Cor 3:15; 4:5; 2 Cor 5:9–10). At that time, there will be only one judgment that matters, and the man of God should want to go into that moment with a clear conscience. This will give the pastor-theologian the courage to be faithful in the face of any and all opposition.

If the pastor-theologian is going to be strong and courageous in the discharge of his duties, in the face of any and all opposition, regardless of the outcome or cost, then he must have his feet firmly planted on the truth of Scripture.

The Content of Courage

In addition to the confidence or foundation of courage, it is necessary to consider what courage is. This gets to the content or essence of courage, how courage is to express itself. God repeats the same exhortation in the next verse (Josh 1:7), only this time it is intensified with two adverbial particles ("*only* be strong and *very* courageous"). Why does God reiterate and intensify this command? To emphasize

the vital role obedience will play in the success of Joshua's mission.[7] Joshua must "be careful to do according to all the law which Moses [God's servant] commanded [him]." He must not "turn from it to the right or to the left." If he does, then his success will be compromised, since the expressed purpose of this careful obedience is, "so that you may have success wherever you go." Thus, obedience is so vital that it is the very basis upon which the success of his mission is conditioned.

Consider the significance of this. Joshua is about to lead a military conquest of the land of Canaan. He is going to lead the people of God into war. With that daunting life or death mission before him, the emphasis is not placed on his military strategy or might. Instead, it is placed squarely on his obedience to God's law. The entirety of his mission depends on his obedience, the kind of obedience that warranted a repeated and intensified exhortation to be courageous.[8] This indicates that courage finds its expression in obedience to God's Word.[9] Wholehearted obedience is the essence or content of courage.

There are three features to note about the obedience demanded of Joshua. First, it called for diligent and conscientious obedience. Joshua was to be "careful" to discharge his duty in accord with God's law. This was a "divine injunction to act strictly" with respect to God's Word.[10] Second, its scope was all inclusive. Joshua needed to obey "*all* the law which Moses My servant commanded [him]." Thus, it was not merely calling for conscientious obedience, it was calling for comprehensive obedience. Third, there were no exception clauses. Joshua was not permitted to deviate from the law of Moses to any extent.[11] Therefore, he was to render careful, conscientious, and comprehensive obedience, and this necessitated courage.

The implications of this for pastoral ministry are massive.[12] Success in ministry does not depend on staying up to date on the latest church growth strategies, nor on the adoption of a particular style of ministry, nor on efforts to accommodate one's message to the culture, nor on the adaptation of the Bible's methodology. In fact, all of that severely jeopardizes one's success. Instead, the pastor-theologian simply needs to render careful, conscientious, and comprehensive obedience to God's Word. In the Scriptures, the man of God has been fully furnished with everything he needs to faithfully discharge his duties (cf. 2 Tim 3:16–17). Success in ministry is not measured by worldly metrics. It is measured by faithfulness to God's Word. The only question is whether or not the pastor-theologian has the courage to carry it out.

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[7] Howard, *Joshua*, 85.

[8] It also depended on the obedience of the people as witnessed in the sin of Achan in Israel's defeat at Ai (cf. Josh 6).

[9] The LSB more clearly captures this relationship by rendering the verse as a single independent clause: "Only be strong and very courageous *to* be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you" (emphasis added). The NASB renders it, "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you."

[10] Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 62.

[11] Howard, *Joshua*, 86.

[12] This will be touched upon again in connection with 2 Timothy 2:5.

The Catalyst of Courage

The catalyst for the courage that issues forth in obedience to God's word is biblical meditation.[13] God says to Joshua, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *mediate* on it day and night, *so that* you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it" (emphasis added; Josh 1:8). This indicates that obedience to God's Word is inseparable from continually meditating upon it.[14] Thus, if courage is to express itself in obedience to God's Word, then meditation is necessarily the means by which courage is cultivated.

There is a relationship between the mouth and meditation, since "to meditate" means "to mutter while meditating."[15] Thus, by meditating on "this book of the law," it would not depart from Joshua's mouth, "for the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt 12:34). Given the relationship between meditation and obedience, the meditation depicted here, explain C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, does not consist of "theoretical speculation about the law, such as the Pharisees indulged in, but a practical study of the law, for the purpose of observing it in thought and action, or carrying it out with the heart, the mouth, and the hand."[16] Therefore, the meditation being called for here inevitably results in actual and practical obedience.

Meditation produces the courage that issues forth in careful and conscientious obedience because of what it yields in the heart. First, meditation yields intense delight (Ps 1:2). This takes place on two levels. One, it takes place by means of nourishing the new man (1 Pet 2:2). Through regeneration a person receives a new nature, and the Word of God both nurtures and nourishes it. Two, it takes place by means of its effect on one's life. As a person meditates on God's Word and as that issues forth in obedience, it results in the richest blessing that can be experienced this side of heaven (Ps 1:1; 119:1–2; Jas 1:25), yielding the dividend of compounding delight.

Second, meditation sharpens one's understanding of God's Word. Through meditation the meaning of Scripture becomes fuller and clearer. This results in being able to identify its implications for life and serves to crystallize its demands. As this takes place, it results in the deepening of one's convictions. As a person's convictions deepen, the courage and resolve to carry them out is strengthened. Therefore, when opposition arises, it is the courage cultivated by means of meditation that will produce the resolve to remain faithful in the face of any and all opposition, even when obedience is costly.[17]

Given the important role that meditation serves in cultivating the kind of courage that produces obedience, the pastor-theologian must be "constantly nourished on the

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[13] Davis writes: "God does not withhold the formula that leads to such obedience: 'you shall meditate (mutter) over this torah day and night, so that you will be careful to do according to all that is written in it' (v. 8)." Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words*, 19.

[14] "Day and night" is a literary device called merism and means "all the time." Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 189.

[15] HALOT, 237.

[16] C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, "The Book of Joshua," in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 23.

[17] In fact, seasons of opposition often provide the occasion for the deepening of one's convictions as they meditate with greater focus and intensity on a particular doctrine.

words of the faith and of the sound doctrine" (1 Tim 4:6). This demands that he be unwaveringly committed to Bible exposition. It is through clear, precise, robust, and Spirit-empowered preaching that the pastor-theologian will be forced to meditate deeply on God's Word. Not only will this result in the laying of bricks of doctrinal conviction, but it will also build the muscle of courage for the inevitable day of battle.

The Comfort of Courage

Joshua 1:6–9 provides one final feature of biblical courage. Though the foundation of courage has been laid (i.e., the promises of God's Word), though the essence of courage has been defined (i.e., obedience to God's Word), and though the catalyst for courage has been identified (i.e., meditation on God's Word), one thing remains: God's enabling presence. As Richard Hess writes, "Joshua will not succeed because he obeys God's instruction; he will succeed because God is with him to enable him to obey his instruction."[18]

God exhorts Joshua to be "strong and courageous" for now the third time (Josh 1:9). Only this time, He introduces the exhortation with a rhetorical question: "Have I not commanded you?" This was intended to serve two purposes: (1) to solidify that Joshua had been divinely commissioned for the mission that had been set before him,[19] and (2) to call on Joshua to consider the source through whom it had come.[20] The One who had commissioned him is the One who is sovereign over everything. Joshua had witnessed God's sovereignty in a profound way in the Exodus. He had also witnessed all that God had done during Israel's years of wandering in the wilderness. Thus, Joshua had nothing to fear. So, God says, "Do not tremble or be dismayed" (Josh 1:9). To "tremble" is to "be terrified" or to "be in dread."[21] To "be dismayed" is to be discouraged or disheartened.[22] Joshua was to be neither of these things, leading to the proclamation anticipated by the rhetorical question: "For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9). God would be with Joshua to enable him to obey His Word and the mission would succeed.[23]

Given the distinct nature of Joshua's mission, a tension may be sensed at this point. The promise that God would be with Joshua was vital to his courage. God would be with him in any and every circumstance. But what about the pastor-

[18] Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, TOTC, vol. 6 (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 80.

[19] Ibid.

[20] John Calvin, "Commentaries on the Book of Joshua," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 34.

[21] HALOT, 888.

[22] HALOT, 365.

[23] Though the promise that God would be with Joshua was first expressed in verse 5, Richard Hess's commentary on this point is insightful: "The last line, *the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go*, ends the second part of the divine address in a way similar to the conclusion of the first part, with the promise of God's presence. However, in the first part (v. 5) this was one more promise among several that had been made. In the second part of the address, it forms the only promise to Joshua. Cast with the last three words, *wherever you go*, it parallels the last line of verse 7 and the promise of success that is given as a result of Joshua's obedience. Structured in this manner, the text affirms that Joshua will not be alone in striving for obedience to the law. Rather, the obedience and the success will be enjoyed in the presence of the LORD God who gave both the law and the promises. Joshua will not succeed because he obeys God's instruction; he will succeed because God is with him to enable him to obey his instruction" (emphasis original). Hess, *Joshua*, 80.

theologian? Can he too draw comfort and strength from this promise? He can. The Lord Jesus Christ makes the same promise in the quintessential text on The Great Commission, where the pastor-theologian's mission is outlined in broad strokes. The last line of that commission says, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). Thus, not only will the pastor-theologian's courage be bolstered by the truth, not only will it need to issue forth in obedience, and not only will meditation on God's Word be the fuel that cultivates it, but His Lord will also always be with him to enable him, until He returns or calls him home. The pastor-theologian has everything he needs to faithfully discharge his duties in the face of any and all opposition, regardless of the outcome or cost.

The New Testament Pastoral Parallel

The New Testament pastoral parallel to Joshua 1:6–9 is 2 Timothy 2:1–13. This can be shown in a variety of ways. One of them pertains to the term that it employs to depict the role and function of the pastor-theologian. He is a soldier (2 Tim 2:3). Though the Bible uses multiple terms to depict the nature of pastoral ministry,[24] it is the imagery of the pastor as a soldier that is often overlooked. Coincidentally, it is the imagery of the pastor as soldier that is critically lacking in this historical moment. The imagery of a soldier depicts a man on a mission, under authority, who has been given strict orders that must be executed. A soldier is not at liberty to modify his mission, tweak his orders, or adjust his course. Instead, he must discharge his duty in accord with the orders he has been given, even when those orders are met with opposition or lead him into conflict or indeed even death. Anything less is insubordination. It is with this in view that the instruction on courage is applied more acutely to pastoral ministry.

The Historical Context

Despite the differences, there are parallels between 2 Timothy 2:1–13 and Joshua 1:6–9 in connection with its historical context as well. This epistle finds the apostle Paul in prison with his death both certain and imminent (2 Tim 2:9; 4:6). As such, 2 Timothy is an epistle that captures Paul's efforts to pass the baton of ministerial responsibility to his younger protégé. This moment is akin to the transfer of leadership that took place from Moses to Joshua. The instruction of what would become Paul's last epistle furnishes Timothy with his final marching orders for his pastoral mission. In 2 Timothy 2:1–13, Paul stipulates what it means to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

The Strength of a Good Soldier

The apostle Paul begins this section with an exhortation that effectively reiterates the repeated refrain given to Joshua when he was commissioned for his mission. Paul exhorts Timothy to be strong. A good soldier must be strong. But given the passive

[24] For example, he is an overseer (1 Tim 3:1), elder (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1), shepherd (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:4), leader (Heb 13:17), preacher (2 Tim 4:2), and teacher (Eph 4:11).

voice of this command, as John Kitchen explains, the needed strength would only come to him "as he is acted upon by another."[25] This is due to the fact that the source of this strength is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. For, Paul writes, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace *that is in Christ Jesus*" (emphasis added; 2 Tim 2:1). Thus, Christ is the source of this strength, and "grace" is the means by which it would be administered.[26] George W. Knight III notes that this expression of God's grace refers to His "gracious enabling power,"[27] and Kitchen states that Timothy had access to this power through his union with Christ.[28] Kitchen then further comments that the exhortation to be strong in this grace called on Timothy "to live in such dynamic union with Christ that the flow of this grace is unrestricted."[29]

The call to be strong in the grace of Christ should have engendered a number of responses in Timothy to ensure that nothing was impeding the flow of divine enablement. Here are five:

1. Spiritual Inventory. In light of the broader context of this epistle, it is possible that Timothy had either developed "a spirit of timidity" or that he was to be vigilant in guarding against it (2 Tim 1:7). Either way, Timothy needed to take spiritual inventory of his life in order to discern any expressions of the fear of man. The fear of man was a massive liability to the effectiveness of his ministry and would impede the much-needed flow of enabling grace.

2. Humility. Since, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE" (1 Pet 5:5), Timothy needed to humble himself under God's mighty hand (1 Pet 5:6). The presence of pride in his life would short-circuit the current of divine enablement. Thus, he needed to detect any expressions of self-reliance, self-preservation, selfish ambition, an overestimated view of himself, or the pursuit of vain glory. Humility is critical to being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

3. Boasting in Weakness. Like his mentor, Timothy also needed to embrace the truth about his weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9–10). Weakness is not only an asset in serving Christ, but it is also absolutely essential. In fact, the power of Christ is perfected in it (2 Cor 12:9a). Timothy needed to follow in the footsteps of the apostle Paul by making his weakness the occasion for boasting (2 Cor 12:9b).

4. The Mortification of Sin. Timothy needed to renew his resolve to mortify sin. Sin is that which quenches the enabling grace of Christ. This was calling for Timothy to bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt 3:8).

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[25] John Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian, 2009), 339.
[26] George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 389.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors*, 340.
[29] Ibid.

5. Ministerial Commitment. Timothy needed to renew his commitment to fulfill his ministry (2 Tim 4:5). This was the very purpose for which Timothy had life and breath. Anything vying for supremacy over that needed to be laid aside. If Timothy was going to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," he needed to renew his commitment to fulfill his pastoral calling.

If the flow of God's gracious enablement was to be unimpeded, then Timothy needed to respond accordingly. Being strengthened by the grace of Christ was critical to having the courage to faithfully discharge his duties in the face of any and all opposition, regardless of the outcome or cost.

The Succession of a Good Soldier

Timothy had an enormous responsibility before him. Paul had faithfully tutored him in the work of the ministry but was on the cusp of entering his heavenly dwelling. It now fell to Timothy to ensure the deposit of apostolic truth was passed on to others. Therefore, Paul writes, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). Paul had already exhorted Timothy to guard what had been entrusted to him: "Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you" (2 Tim 1:14). An important aspect of guarding that deposit was entrusting it "to faithful men." These faithful men would then have the responsibility of teaching others. Given the broader context of the pastoral epistles, these faithful men likely indicate elders.[30] Timothy had the responsibility to train up other biblically qualified overseers.

The primary way God builds His church is through preaching.[31] As such, the primary way that elders are produced is through preaching. Though every ministry of the Word is important, it is the preaching of God's Word that is preeminent. In fact, it is the preaching of God's Word that feeds and fuels every other ministry of God's Word. The consequences are linked: a weak pulpit begets weak men, begetting weak elders, resulting in a weak church. Therefore, Timothy was exhorted to take pains in devoting himself to the task of preaching (1 Tim 4:15; 2 Tim 2:15; 4:1–2). Strong preaching will not only attract men, but it will also produce faithful men.

There are two noteworthy ingredients that are linked to preaching that if not in place will undermine its fruitfulness. First, the pastor-theologian must ensure that the Word of God is applied and implemented in every aspect of the life of the church (e.g. its worship, its ministries, its fellowship, etc.). A failure at this point would undercut the credibility of a strong pulpit ministry. The implementation and application of God's Word to the life of the church should be accomplished in a Christlike manner. There should be a strong correlation between the pulpit and the life of the church.

Second, the pastor-theologian must practice what he preaches. It must be evident that God's Word has shaped his life. Nothing is more harmful to an effective pulpit

[30] William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 504.

[31] This principle and its effects are so evidently apparent in the ministry of John MacArthur that his pulpit ministry is the proof text for this claim.

ministry than hypocrisy. The pastor-theologian will always preach a standard to which he himself is still yet striving to attain, but there ought to be a strong correlation between his life and his preaching. His life ought to provide an example that the congregation can imitate (1 Tim 4:12). Preaching is primary, but the pastor-theologian must ensure that both his life and the life of the church do not undercut its credibility. Given the inevitability of opposition, this will require that he be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2:1).

The Suffering of a Good Soldier

The pastor-theologian must be willing to suffer hardship in his effort to faithfully discharge his duty. This is because his mission will unavoidably lead him directly into hardship. Adversity is inescapable. It can come from any and every angle and can do so simultaneously. It can come from within the church itself, from false teachers, from the unbelieving world, and from the governing authorities (e.g. Paul's imprisonment). When hardship arises, the natural tendency is to find a way to bypass it, and to do so by either modifying the message or the method. But this a soldier cannot do. He is a man under authority with strict orders that must be carried out. Thus, Paul exhorts Timothy to "suffer hardship with [him], as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2:3). In 2 Timothy 1:8, he writes, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, *but join with me in suffering for the gospel* according to the power of God" (emphasis added).

The lists of Paul's sufferings for the sake of the gospel are numerous (cf. 1 Cor 4:8–13; 15:30; 2 Cor 1:8–9; 4:7–10; 11:23–29; 2 Tim 3:10–11). Paul understood what it meant to suffer for the ministry of the gospel. This is what a good soldier does. The road of the faithful minister is marked by suffering. Paul himself declared: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).[32] It is not a question of whether the pastor-theologian will suffer, but to what degree.

Paul not only exhorts Timothy, as his beloved child, but he also employs three metaphors to illustrate the kind of service that is required of him. The first calls for singlemindedness.[33] If Timothy was to be a good soldier, then he was not to entangle himself "in the affairs of everyday life" (2 Tim 2:4). To do so would be to allow civilian affairs to stand in the way of faithful service.[34] He was not to allow the concerns of this temporal life to overshadow the "supreme concern" of his divinely authorized mission.[35] He needed to be willing to sacrifice it all on the altar of wholehearted devotion to Christ.

The second metaphor calls for submissiveness. If Timothy was going to be a good soldier, then like an athlete, he would have to "compete according to the rules" (2 Tim 2:5). Timothy was not permitted to re-write the rulebook. The rulebook had already been written and it came with divine authority. As such,

[32] To "persecute" means "to harass someone, esp. because of beliefs." BDAG, 254. It should be noted that beliefs always result in practice (cf. 1 Tim 6:3).

[33] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 508.

[34] Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 393.

[35] Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors*, 345–46.

Timothy needed to refuse every inclination arising within himself to adjust course in the face of opposition, even when the rulebook was calling him to enter into the hardship of suffering. A good soldier must be submissive to the orders of his commanding officer.

The third metaphor calls for strenuous effort.[36] If Timothy was going to be a good soldier, then his work ethic needed to be patterned after "the hard-working farmer" (2 Tim 2:6). The word rendered "hard-working" means "to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually," and can also be rendered "toil," "strive," or "struggle."[37] Timothy was to labor to the point of exhaustion (cf. 1 Tim 5:17).[38] He was to do so in anticipation of the future eschatological reward,[39] which Paul later describes as "the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to [him] on that [future eschatological] day" (2 Tim 4:7–8).[40]

Timothy needed to ponder these metaphors (2 Tim 4:7). He was "to think over [them] with care."[41] Each one shed illuminating light on the nature of his mission and called on him to enter into his share of suffering. Faithfulness to the instruction of each metaphor would guarantee it. Suffering was not to be seen as something alien to faithful ministry. Instead, it was par for the course. Therefore, Timothy needed to hold everything he held dear with open hands, to submit himself to God's will for both his message and his method for ministry, and to labor to the point of exhaustion and weariness, with one eye on the coming eschatological day.

The Solace of a Good Soldier

It would be difficult to put oneself in Timothy's shoes. His beloved mentor and friend was currently in prison and was facing certain death. Timothy may have sensed that he too would suffer a similar fate (cf. Heb 13:23), and Paul was calling on him to join him in his sufferings. Timothy may have sensed the weight of the world on his shoulders. It is no wonder, then, that Paul endeavors to comfort his beloved child in the faith, writing, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel" (2 Tim 2:8). The forerunner who had already blazed the trail marked by suffering had conquered the grave. Timothy's eternity was secure. Though Paul was currently suffering hardship even to the point of imprisonment as a criminal, he reminded Timothy that "the word of God is not imprisoned" (2 Tim 2:9), and expressed his commitment to "endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10). There was no reason for Timothy to retreat from his calling. Everything he needed had already been provided for. All he needed to do was be faithful to endure (2 Tim 4:5). If he did, not only would he live with Christ (2 Tim 2:11), but he would also reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12). Therefore, he had every reason to faithfully discharge his duties as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

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[36] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 510.

[37] BDAG, 558.

[38] John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 220.

[39] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 507–508.

[40] The note of eschatological reward is also struck in the imagery of the athlete, who by competing according to the rules, "wins the prize" (2 Tim 2:5). Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 510.

[41] BDAG, 675.

Conclusion

Courage is essential to pastoral ministry. It is impossible for the pastor-theologian to be faithful to his calling without it. He is under obligation to obey the orders of his commanding officer, and his commanding officer is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. These orders will inevitably lead him into conflict and suffering. When they do, he is not permitted to choose the path of least resistance. Instead, he must seize these moments as God-ordained occasions for the honor and glory of Christ. As he does, the gospel will go forth with power and the church will continue to advance in its mission. All efforts to compromise or retreat forfeit these providential occasions. Cultural hostility is likely to only increase. Therefore, the church desperately needs pastor-theologians who are resolved to faithfully discharge their duties in the face of any and all opposition regardless of the outcome or the cost. This will mean detaching himself from the things of this world, it will mean being willing to kiss this world goodbye, and it could even come at the cost of his own life, but nothing compares to the infinite worth of Christ (cf. Heb 11:26). The judgment seat of Christ is on the horizon. Nothing will be more important heading into that moment than a clear conscience and the inner sense that he has met the conditions of what it is to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 145–165

THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN AND TRUE WORSHIP

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The pastor-theologian is the worship leader of the church to which he is called as shepherd. This calling necessitates the proper understanding of the act of true worship. True worship is scriptural, simple, spiritual, and God-centered, focusing on the proper response to the revelation that God has given to His people. Resultingly, true worship will prioritize reading the Bible, preaching the Bible, praying the Bible, singing the Bible, and "seeing" the Bible, each element being carried out to bring glory to God.

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Introduction

It is entirely appropriate in a volume dedicated to the theme "Training Pastor-Theologians" that attention be given to the subject of the pastor-theologian and True Worship, because the historic Protestant and Reformed tradition views the minister not only as the preacher, but also as the one who leads the congregation in the whole of public worship.[1] The famous *Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, for instance, says, "Reading of the word in the congregation, being part of the publick worship of God…and one mean sanctified by him for the edifying of his people, is

[1] It is a privilege to contribute to an edition of this journal honoring the ministry and legacy of John MacArthur, who is a treasured friend and example, and a faithful and brave shepherd. As I travel the world, his impact is apparent to me in the scores of Christians on every continent I encounter who have learned the Scriptures and come to faith in Christ through his extended preaching ministry, Grace to You. Some of the contents of this article were presented by the author in Reformed Theological Seminary's John Reed Miller Lectures at RTS Jackson in 2020 on the topic of "The Pastoral Ministry of Public Worship: Leading the Congregation in Reading, Hearing, Praying, Singing and Seeing the Word" (available in audio at rts.edu) and also in a pamphlet the author wrote entitled *Worshiping God Together: Congregational Worship at First Presbyterian Church* (2005).

to be performed by the pastors and teachers."[2] More importantly, the Bible expects the minister to lead the gathered service of the people of God. Paul, for example, gives Timothy instruction on what he is to do in the public worship service of the congregation in 1 Timothy 4:13, writing, "Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading *of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."

Candidates for the pastoral ministry, and pastors, should be well-acquainted with the biblical theology of public worship, and they should take care to edify the congregation by explaining the biblical basis of what we are doing and why we are doing it, in gathered worship. This starts with being able to explain clearly what worship is.

What Is (and Isn't) Worship

What is worship? Well, the Psalmist tells us succinctly. It is giving unto the Lord the glory due His name (Ps 29:1–2). Jerry Bridges, noted author of *The Pursuit of Holiness* and *Transforming Grace*, recently asked this very question and answered as follows:

> In Scripture the word worship is used to denote both an overall way of life and a specific activity. When the prophet Jonah said, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" (Jonah 1:9), he was speaking about his whole manner of life. In contrast to Jonah's words, Psalm 100:2 says, "Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs." The psalmist there speaks of a specific activity of praising God. This is the sense in which we normally use the word worship today. These two concepts of worship—a broad one and a more narrow, specific one—correspond to the two ways by which we glorify God. We glorify God by ascribing to Him the honor and adoration due to Him because of His excellence—the narrow concept of worship. We also glorify God by reflecting His glory to others—the broader, way-of-life manner of worship.[3]

To say it a little differently, worship is declaring, with our lips and lives, that God is more important than anything else to us, that He is our deepest desire, that His inherent worth is beyond everything else we hold dear. Worship is rooted in our deepest desires, and reflects those deep desires outwardly. This is important to note because of misconceptions of what constitutes "worship." It is not uncommon to hear someone distinguish, for instance, between "worship" and the sermon (as if the sermon is not a part of worship). "We had a great time of worship this morning, and then the pastor gave a really faithful, biblical, practical message," someone might say, with utter innocence of spirit, not realizing that the statement reveals that he doesn't know what worship is. In that sentence, "worship" may stand for "experience" and probably with reference to music. And the sermon is not included

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[2] "Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures," in "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God," *The Subordinate Standards and Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1851), 365.

[3] Jerry Bridges, *I Exalt You, O God: Encountering His Greatness in Your Private Worship* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 3.

in the person's mind with worship, but something that follows it. The songs and singing leading up to the morning message were moving and made him "feel closer to God," thus, that portion of the service is associated in the heart and mind with "worship." But this is to confuse the meaning and action of worship with the effects or byproducts of worship. We do not come to a congregational service of worship in order to "experience worship" or to be deeply moved by the time of singing or to have some kind of an emotional catharsis. We come to meet with God, to give to Him the glory due His name, and to receive His blessing.

If one has any other goal in worship than engaging with God, coming into the presence of God, to glorify and enjoy Him, any other aim than to ascribe His worth, commune with Him, and receive His favor, then one has yet to worship. For in biblical worship, we focus upon God Himself and acknowledge His inherent and unique worthiness.

Why do we worship? There is more than one right biblical answer. Surely, at the top of the list is "for His own glory" (1 Cor 10:31; Ps 29:1–2). There is no higher answer to "Why do we worship?" than because the glory of God is more important than anything else in all creation. The chief end of the church is to glorify and enjoy God together forever, because the chief thing in all the world is God's glory (Phil 2:9–11). There are other answers as well: because God said to, because God created us to worship, because God saved us to worship, because it is our natural duty as creatures and joyful duty as Christians to worship, because our worship is a response of gratitude for saving grace, because those with new hearts long to hear His Word and express their devotion, because God wants to bless us with Himself, and because God has chosen us for His own inheritance and seeks to commune with us in His ordinances, and more.

In considering this fundamental question for the life of every individual, Hughes Old points us to the Psalms and to Paul for the answer:

> We worship God because God created us to worship Him. Worship is at the center of our existence, at the heart of our reason for being. God created us to be His image—an image that would reflect His glory. In fact, the whole creation was brought into existence to reflect the divine glory. The psalmist tells us that "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The apostle Paul in the prayer with which he begins the epistle to the Ephesians makes it clear that God created us to praise Him. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace . . ." (Eph 1:3–6). This prayer says much about the worship of the earliest Christians. It shows the consciousness that the first Christians had of the ultimate significance of their worship. They understood themselves to have been destined and appointed to live to the praise of God's glory (Eph 1:12).[4]

[4] Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002), 1.

The Goal and Meaning of Public Worship

Our aim, as the congregation gathers to meet with God in public worship on the Lord's Day, is to glorify and enjoy God, in accordance with His written Word. That is, the very purpose of assembling together as the people of God in congregational worship is to give to the Lord the glory due His name and to enjoy the blessing of His promised special presence with His own people, in obedience to His instructions set forth in the Bible.

Corporate worship (so-called because the body or *corpus* of Christ, that is, the people of God, the Church, is collectively involved in this encounter with God) is sometimes referred to as "gathered," "assembled," "public," or "congregational" worship. All of these names are helpful and bring out different dimensions of this important aspect of biblical worship. Though the Bible indicates that there are, in addition to public worship, other distinct and significant facets of Christian worship (like family worship, private worship, and all-of-life worship), the importance of public worship is featured in both the Old and New Testaments. When Psalm 100:2 and Hebrews 10:25 speak of "coming before the Lord" and "assembling together" they are both addressing public or gathered worship.

The great distinctive of our whole approach to public worship ought to be that we aim for the form and substance of our corporate worship to be suffused with Scripture and scriptural theology. An apt motto for this approach is: "Read the Bible, Preach the Bible, Pray the Bible, Sing the Bible, See the Bible."

What Our Worship Looks Like: Five Key Elements

This is why reading the Scriptures, preaching the Scriptures, praying scriptural prayers, singing scriptural songs, and observing the scriptural sacraments or ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are at the core of what we do in public worship. Those preparing for pastoral ministry need to master their understanding and leadership of these five aspects of public worship, and pastors need to teach their people about these things so that they more fully appreciate the blessings that God intends them to enjoy in their participations in the public means of grace. The Bible makes it clear that the following elements are to provide structure and content for our worship services.

Read the Bible

There is nothing more important in Christian public worship than the reading of the Scriptures, God's holy, inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul says to Timothy: "Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading *of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching." So, for Paul, reading the Word aloud when the congregation gathers is just as important as the sermon. And this idea does not originate with Paul. It is rooted in the whole history of the people of God, beginning in the days of Moses.

When the children of Israel gathered at Mt. Sinai for worship after the Exodus from Egypt, Moses read God's Word aloud to them. Exodus 24:7 says, "He took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people." When Israel finally

arrived in the Promised Land, Joshua read the Scriptures aloud to them again. Joshua 8:35 tells us, "There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel."

When the long-lost book of the law was discovered by Hilkiah in the Temple in the days of good King Josiah (2 Chr 34:14), we learn that the King himself "read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD" (2 Chr 34:30). After the people of Israel returned from exile in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, Ezra read the book of the law of Moses to the assembled people from early morning until midday (Neh 8:1–8), with all the people standing out of reverence for God's Word.

At the outset of His public ministry, Jesus went to His home synagogue in Nazareth and read the Scriptures, from the prophet of Isaiah (Luke 4:14–21). So, for thousands of years, from Moses' time to Jesus' day, the public reading of Scripture was central to the gathering of the people of God. And no wonder, since "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17).

Hughes Old has established beyond the shadow of a doubt the central importance of the reading of the Word of God as an essential component of Christian worship in the total history of the church.[5] And the church's practice was squarely based on Scripture. As we have already seen, the public reading of the Bible has been at the heart of the worship of God since Old Testament times. What we need today is ministers who take this directive seriously, for rare is the evangelical church whose service can be characterized as *full of Scripture*.

In the reading of God's Word, God speaks most directly to His people. And so, this act of worship, in which the verbal self-revelation of God is addressed unedited to the hearts of His gathered people, ought not to be ignored, skipped, or squeezed out. It is irritating enough to have to endure preachers who say, "I don't have time to read my text today" (as if to say, "we need to hurry on past God's Word to get to mine"), but to have whole worship services in which the formal reading of God's Word is absent is a self-imposed famine of the Word.

Dr. John Reed Miller (renowned pastor and conservative leader in the old P.C.U.S.) used to say, "The reading of the Word of God ought to be an event."[6] It ought to be arresting to the congregation. It ought to grab their attention. It ought sometimes to make them tremble and other times rejoice. It ought to be elevated to the same status and gravity as the other biblical elements of worship, and seen, in combination with pastoral preaching and prayer, as part of the essential *triplex munus* of the Gospel minister in public worship. Thus, it needs to be prepared for just as one prepares public prayer, for the sermon, for the totality of the worship service. The minister of the Word can convey the supreme importance of the reading of the Word simply in the way he does it.

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[5] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This multi-volume series constitutes Old's *magnum opus* and should be the starting point for any intelligent discussion of this matter.

[6] See Ligon Duncan, "Helping the Congregation to Hear the Word Read," *Reformed Faith & Practice*, https://journal.rts.edu/article/helping-the-congregation-to-hear-the-word-read/ (accessed on January 7, 2023).

So how does one do it? How ought we to approach this in our corporate worship? The prescription of the *Westminster Directory for Public Worship* is just what the doctor ordered:

> Reading of the Word in the congregation, being part of the publick worship of God, (wherein we acknowledge our dependence upon Him, and subjection to Him,) and one mean sanctified by Him for the edifying of His people, is to be performed by the pastors and teachers.
>
> Howbeit, such as intend the ministry, may occasionally both read the Word, and exercise their gift in preaching in the congregation, if allowed by the presbytery thereunto.
>
> All the canonical books of the Old and New Testament (but none of those which are commonly called *Apocrypha*) shall be publickly read in the vulgar tongue, out of the best allowed translation, distinctly, that all may hear and understand.
>
> How large a portion shall be read at once, is left to the wisdom of the minister; but it is convenient, that ordinarily one chapter of each Testament be read at every meeting; and sometimes more, where the chapters be short, or the coherence of matter requireth it.
>
> It is requisite that all the canonical books be read over in order, that the people may be better acquainted with the whole body of the Scriptures; and ordinarily, where the reading in either Testament endeth on one Lord's day, it is to begin the next.
>
> We commend also the more frequent reading of such Scriptures as he that readeth shall think best for edification of his hearers, as the book of Psalms, and such like.
>
> When the minister who readeth shall judge it necessary to expound any part of what is read, let it not be done until the whole chapter or psalm be ended; and regard is always to be had unto the time, that neither preaching, nor other ordinances be straitened, or rendered tedious. Which rule is to be observed in all other publick performances.
>
> Beside publick reading of the Holy Scriptures, every person that can read, is to be exhorted to read the Scriptures privately, (and all others that cannot read, if not disabled by age, or otherwise, are likewise to be exhorted to learn to read,) and to have a Bible.[7]

There are eleven pieces of exceedingly wise biblical and pastoral counsel here.

1. The public reading of Scripture is a part, an element to be exact, of corporate worship. It is not an option. When it is neglected, an essential aspect of Christian worship is lost irreparably. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* notes: "The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the

[7] "Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures," 365.

ordinary religious worship of God."[8] Not reading the Scriptures is on the same order as not having a sermon or omitting congregational singing.

2. The public reading of Scripture is a means of grace. It not only serves as an opportunity whereby we openly and corporately sit under His Word—acknowledging His authority, acknowledging our dependence upon the initiative of His self-revelation, acknowledging our glad surrender to the Lordship of His Word—but it is also a God-appointed means whereby we are strengthened by and receive His favor. The Lord has deigned to bless and edify His people by it.

3. The public reading of Scripture ought to be done by those responsible for the preaching of the Word. It is not uncommon to see congregation members invited to lead the church in the reading of Scripture in various ecclesiastical traditions. Sometimes this is done with the desire to make the church service more congregational and participatory. Sometimes it is done to stress a positive form of anti-clericalism or the priesthood of all believers. I'll not take up that discussion here. The point I want to press home is that pastors should not abandon and totally delegate the reading of the Scriptures to others. The Westminster Directory argued for the minister reading the Scriptures on simple, biblical grounds: Since the preaching of God's Word is to be the unique responsibility of the ministry, so also is the reading of that same Word. It is all about the coordination of the read and proclaimed Word. The read Word is not on some lower order of significance than the proclaimed Word, but that is the inevitable message sent if preaching in a church is restricted to ministers and elders and the reading of the Word is not. The PCA *Book of Church Order*, Directory of Worship picks up on this same theme and says:

> The public reading of the Holy Scriptures is performed by the minister as God's servant. Through it God speaks most directly to the congregation, even more directly than through the sermon. The reading of the Scriptures by the minister is to be distinguished from the responsive reading of certain portions of Scripture by the minister and the congregation. In the former God addresses His people; in the latter God's people give expression in the words of Scripture to their contrition, adoration, gratitude and other holy sentiments.[9]

4. Aim to read all of Scripture to his people. The whole canon is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16), and so the people of God need to hear from that whole body of God's Word: not only the well-known parts and the encouraging passages or the New Testament and the Psalms, but also the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Wisdom Literature, the historical books, the Gospels and the Epistles, Acts and Revelation. The Reformers not only believed in *sola Scriptura* (scripture is the sole, final authority for faith and practice), they believed in *tota Scriptura* (*all* scripture is inspired). The Puritans often criticized the court divines of their day for failing to read consecutively through the balance of Scripture. This doesn't mean that we have to start at Genesis and end at Revelation, but it does mean

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[8] *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 23.5.

[9] *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 6th ed. (Atlanta, GA: Committee for Christian Education and Publication, 2001), 50–51.

we ought to be following a method of reading and we ought to be reading through whole books, chapter by chapter, or significant portion by significant portion.

5. Read from the best available translation. Now, of course, we could strike up a quick debate about which translation is the best available. But don't miss a good point here. The minister ought to read from a sound version to which the people have access—a translation. Read from the best available faithful translation in the language of your congregation as a deliberate act of pastoral care. This will promote what the Assembly desired when it said, "Every person that can read, is to be exhorted to read the scriptures privately…and to have a Bible."[10]

6. Exercise common sense in deciding how much Scripture to read at once. If a congregation has never had a large portion of Scripture reading in its service, I can't think of a better way to kill the reading of the Word than to start plowing through Numbers, or Leviticus, or Chronicles, or Job, a chapter at a time. Use discretion. Start with something easy and well-known. Be committed to getting to the point of reading a substantial portion, but take smaller bits at first. Break up overly long chapters. Mark out natural pericopes. Ease the people of God into the habit. Let them drink from the water fountain first, not the fire hydrant. Start with a Gospel first—say Mark. Divide up the chapters. Give them a feel for the total story of Jesus' ministry and work. You can read through it in less than half a year, even at a less aggressive pace, and then move on to more challenging portions.

7. Keep a balance of reading between the two Testaments. If you are preaching through a New Testament book in your service, then read from the Old Testament. If you are preaching through an Old Testament book, read from a New Testament one. The Westminster directory contemplated a chapter from the Old Testament and a chapter from the New Testament at every service, in addition to the sermon text and message. That is probably a little aggressive for today and for our typical service lengths, but the principle of paying attention to the balance of Old and New in your reading is as wise as when they first said it. Depending upon the duration of your service, it may eventually become possible to have more than one reading.

8. Develop an orderly plan for reading through the Scripture. The Directory says that "it is requisite that all the canonical books be read over in order, that the people may be better acquainted with the whole body of the scriptures."[11] As we mentioned under point number 4, develop and follow a practical and rational plan for working through the Scriptures. Move chronologically, or through alternate types of biblical literature, or for a time in canonical order. But whatever the case may be, there needs to be some method to what you plan to read.

9. Pick up where you leave off. Following on the last point, the Directory advises that "ordinarily, where the reading in either Testament endeth on one Lord's Day, it is to begin the next."[12] The Puritans often poked fun at the Anglican court divines for the endless skipping around in their brief readings. Their path resembled rabbit trails, the Puritans said. Remind the people what they read last, show them the connections with today's reading, give them a feel for the big picture, and remember—sad to say—many in your hearing will not have picked up a Bible at any point during the

[10] "Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures," 365.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

week. This may be the only time they hear the Word read or will read it for themselves all week. This reading, then, is important.

10. Make regular use of exceptionally edifying portions of Scripture like the Psalms. There are some parts of Scripture that lend themselves to greater profit in being read aloud. It is not that they are more inspired, but who can doubt that Psalm 51 is capable of yielding an immediate and obvious benefit that would escape most hearers of the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 6? The reading and hearing of the Psalms, for instance, provides resources for a profound spirituality, a piety that equals the exigencies of our experience. The Psalms deal with the realities of life and reveal a soul poured out to the living God—the complaints, the heartaches, the emptiness—and yet alongside these, acknowledge a God who is incomparably great, whose plans and purposes are far above our agendas and understandings, but who also loves us with an everlasting covenant love. Thus, we see in the Psalms, conjoined, a perfect biblical balance of objective and subjective in spiritual experience. In the Psalms, God and His Word are clearly dominant in the believer's experience without any diminution whatsoever of the wounds and quandaries and questions of life in a fallen world. No wonder the Reformers thought we ought to sing the Psalms and read the Psalms in worship—they saw them as the very core of a well-rounded Christian experience. So, it is natural that the Psalms might be featured with a prominence in our cycle of public readings that, say, 2 Samuel would not share.

11. Offer brief explanatory remarks about the reading (but those remarks ought not to be overly long nor overshadow the event of the reading of the Word). In other words, very quickly provide some well-thought-out sentences of background and introduction. What is the context of the passage? What is its main point? What should the hearer listen for in particular? The design of these comments should not be to preach a brief sermon, but to help hearers understand better what is about to be read.

If Bible-believing churches started reading a significant amount of Scripture in every service (not just the minister's sermon text), it would greatly enrich the people of God, who need the Word of God more than they need food. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

Preach the Bible

Preaching is God's prime appointed instrument to build up his church. As Paul said, "Faith comes by hearing" (Rom 10:14, 17). Faithful biblical preaching is to explain and apply Scripture to the gathered company, believers and unbelievers alike. James Durham put it this way: "This is the great design of all preaching, to bring them within the covenant who are without, and to make those who are within the covenant to walk suitably to it. And as these are never separated on the Lord's side, so should they never be separated on our side."[13] This means expository and evangelistic preaching, squarely based in the text of the Word of God.

People who appreciate the Bible's teaching on worship will have a high view of preaching, and little time for the personality driven, theologically void, superficially practical, monologues that pass for preaching today. "From the very beginning the

[13] James Durham, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 273–74, 283.

sermon was supposed to be an explanation of the Scripture reading," says Hughes Old; it "is not just a lecture on some religious subject, it is rather an explanation of a passage of Scripture."[14] "Preach the word," Paul tells Timothy (2 Tim 4:2). "Expository, sequential, verse by verse, book by book, preaching through the whole Bible, the 'whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27), was the practice of many of the church fathers (e.g., Chrysostom, Augustine), all the Reformers and the best of their heirs ever since. The preached Word is the central feature of Reformed worship."[15] I will not elaborate much more on this central element in public worship, since attention is given to it elsewhere in this journal, but I will say that pastors should not only labor to be faithful expositors, they should labor to help their people listen to sermons better.[16]

The *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 159, addresses the pastor's responsibility in preaching:

> How is the Word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?
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> A. They that are called to labour in the ministry of the Word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.[17]

But then, in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question 160 addresses the specific issue of helping the congregation listen to the preaching of the Word:

> What is required of those that hear the Word preached?
>
> A. It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts; and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.[18]

Puritan Richard Baxter also gives extensive directions on listening to sermons in his *Christian Directory*, especially in his section on "Directions for Profitable Hearing the Word Preached" which he outlines like this:

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[14] Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 61.

[15] Terry Johnson, *Reformed Worship* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 35.

[16] Good examples of this are: Jay E. Adams, *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out of a Sermon* (Port St. Lucie, FL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007); Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening: A Practical Handbook for Hearing and Doing God's Word* (Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2010); and Joel Beeke, *The Family at Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).

[17] This WLC answer is beautifully elaborated in "Of the Preaching of the Word," in "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God," *The Subordinate Standards and Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1851), 250–51.

[18] Thomas Ridgeley expounds this in his *A Body of Divinity* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 2:480–81.

1. That you hear with understanding.
2. That you remember what you hear.
3. That you be duly affected with it.
4. And that you sincerely practise it, I shall more particularly direct you in order to all these ends and duties.[19]

In short, I would encourage those preparing for the ministry of the Word to spend time thinking about how to encourage the people of God in their listening to the preached Word, and I would encourage pastors to give their people direct instruction to aid their hearing of God's Word preached. In particular, first, teach them what a sermon is, and what it is for. They need to appreciate that the sermon is a means of grace appointed by God himself to facilitate a Word-mediated, congregational encounter with the Living God. I love J. I. Packer's description of a sermon as "an applicatory declaration, spoken in God's name and for his praise, in which some part of the written word of God delivers through the preacher some part of its message about God and godliness in relation to those whom the preacher addresses."[20] Notice especially here that, when faithful biblical proclamation happens, the preacher isn't using the Word, the Word is using the preacher. Second, persuade them as to why it is important for them to listen. Help them understand that they should listen as if their life depended on it, because it does! Third, help them understand that when you are faithfully preaching the Word, it is God Himself who is speaking to them. Fourth, remind them what the Bible is all about and what life is all about: glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. Thus, teach them to look for everything the Bible is teaching them about God Himself and His purpose for their life: to pursue His glory and their joy in Him. Fifth, remind them that (if they are Christians) they are simultaneously redeemed sinners and children of God (this is what Luther's *simul justus et peccator* is about), and thus they need constantly the ministry of the means of grace to show them God's remedy for sin, to know His grace, and to hear His assurance.

Pray the Bible

The Father's house "is a house of prayer," said Jesus (Matt 21:13). Our prayers ought to be permeated with the language and thought of Scripture. Terry Johnson makes the case thusly: "The pulpit prayers of Reformed churches should be rich in biblical and theological content. Do we not learn the language of Christian devotion from the Bible? Do we not learn the language of confession and penitence from the Bible? Do we not learn the promises of God to believe and claim in prayer from the Bible? Don't we learn the will of God, the commands of God, and the desires of God for His people, for which we are to plead in prayer, from the Bible? Since these things are so, public prayers should repeat and echo the language of the Bible throughout."[21]

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[19] Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, A Christian Directory (London: James Duncan, 1830), 4:251. This chapter is solid gold and could be the basis of a sermon series, or a series of letters to one's congregation.

[20] This superb definition is found in the chapter "The Mouthpiece of God," in J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999). Read the whole chapter. Packer interacts with Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory* on preaching here too.

[21] Johnson, *Reformed Worship*, 37–38.

The call here is not for written and read prayer, but studied free prayer. Ministers should spend time plundering the language of Scripture in preparation for leading in public worship.

Those who regularly bear the solemn responsibility of leading the congregation in public prayer are here again encouraged to study and reflect on this important matter. The consistent devotional use of such helps as Matthew Henry's *Method for Prayer*, Arthur Bennett's *The Valley of Vision*, Don Carson's *Praying with Paul*, Isaac Watts' *A Guide to Prayer*, and Samuel Miller's *Thoughts on Public Prayer*[22] will aid the pastor in improving his leadership of the congregation in public prayer. We ought to put as much effort into preparing for public prayer as we do into preparing for the sermon.

Particularly helpful for the pastor's reflection on and self-evaluation of his leading in public prayer are Samuel Miller's principles and admonitions. Miller detected the following common faults in the public praying of the church in his day, and they remain applicable to the church of our own day.[23]

1. Overuse of certain favorite words and set forms of expression. This can become monotonous if one leads in pastoral prayer week after week. Too much repetition of God's name ("Lord," "Father," "Heavenly Father," etc.) should also be diligently avoided. This is often simply a matter of habit and lack of forethought.

2. Hesitation and apparent embarrassment in articulation. Long, awkward pauses and grasping for words detract from the power of public prayer.

3. Ungrammatical expressions in prayer. Rules of grammar and syntax should be studiously observed lest our poor form of speech become a stumbling block to those congregated for worship.

4. A lack of order and certain important elements of prayer. Disorderliness is a distraction for people who are trying to pray along with the one leading in prayer. During our public worship every Biblical element of prayer (such as adoration, confession, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession) should be employed. If there is only one comprehensive prayer in the service, it should exhibit each part of prayer. If the various parts of prayer are divided into multiple prayers, then each element should be given due prominence within the service. Corporate prayer which ignores or neglects any one of these elements is essentially defective.

5. Too much detail in particular elements of prayer. We should aim for proportion between the various parts of the prayer.

6. Praying too long. Excessive length in public prayer should be avoided. "Long prayers are for the closet." In Miller's day, when attention spans were much longer

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[22] My edition of Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer* is available from Christian Focus Publications, and also online for free at matthewhenry.org (there is also an updated edition by O. Palmer Robertson called *A Way to Pray*, published by Banner of Truth). Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975). D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015). Isaac Watts, *A Guide to Prayer* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001). Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2022). The new Banner edition of Miller is superb.

[23] This summarization and commentary on Miller's thoughts and exhortations on public prayer comes from Matthew Henry, *Method for Prayer*, rev. ed., ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), Appendix 2.

than our own, Miller recommended 12–15 minutes at the most. The reader may judge what is appropriate for his own situation.

7. The employment of allegorical style in prayer. Overuse of highly figurative language is to be discouraged and simplicity of form commended.

8. Introduction of allusions to party politics and personalities in prayer. These are serious faults in public prayer. On the matter of prayer and politics, the wise and learned Dr. Miller, toward the end of his earthly course said, "I resolved, more than thirty years ago, never to allow myself, either in public prayer or preaching, to utter a syllable, in periods of great political excitement and party strife, that would enable any human being so much as to conjecture to which side in the political conflict I leaned." With regard to alluding to specific personalities in prayer, it may be noted in passing that it is never appropriate to pray "at" someone in public worship.

9. Usage of unsuitably affectionate or intimate language in prayer. The inappropriate use of amatory language (particularly when directed toward the persons of the Trinity) ought to be avoided in public devotions. This language, no matter how well-intentioned, often has the appearance of being artificial or quaint.

10. The injection of comedy into prayer. The practice of indulging in wit, humor, or sarcasm in public prayer is absolutely inexcusable and should not be tolerated.

11. Use of prayer to expound on a point of teaching. Miller says, "The excellence of a public prayer may be marred by introducing into it a large portion of didactic statement." The purpose of prayer is not to provide an outline of the text, the sermon, or some topic in Christian doctrine, but to lead sinners to the throne of grace.

12. Careless over-emphasis of doctrines which are particularly repugnant to unbelievers. Those who are prone to discoursing on doctrine in their praying may also tend to be "studious of introducing, with much point, those doctrines which are most offensive to the carnal heart and which seldom fail to be revolting to our impenitent hearers." While no Scriptural doctrine should be deemed unsuitable for and excluded altogether from public prayer (even difficult and offensive teachings: the atonement, original sin, predestination, etc.), we should not become disproportionate in our emphasis or thoughtless in our language.

13. Casualness or over-familiarity in our speech with the Almighty. The High and Holy One is often addressed with too much familiarity (and sometimes almost flippancy). This is both distracting and disturbing to devout persons and ought to be studiously avoided.

14. Inappropriate display of pastoral "humility." Many ministers, before they preach, are wont to confess their unworthiness to proclaim the gospel and abase themselves before God. Miller warns, "There is such a thing as expressing unseasonably and also as carrying to an extreme the profession of humility." Public avowal of our ministerial humility (even in the form of prayer) carries with it certain spiritual dangers for which we all must be on guard.

15. Flattery in prayer. Anything even approaching flattery in public prayer is a serious matter. As Miller said, "Flattery in any man and on any occasion is criminal." Yet, particularly when there are visiting dignitaries present in the congregation or preaching in the pulpit, this is a temptation to which ministers often succumb. We pray to God, not to men. The Lord Almighty is our audience. Let us seek our approval of Him.

16. Lack of a sense of occasion. Some prayers so disregard the circumstances of the service, that they are virtually generic and would be as suitable for one occasion as well as another. Public prayer ought to be fitted for and appropriate to the circumstances of the service in which it is rendered.

17. Lack of reverence in the conclusion of a prayer. Often the sentences or words of a prayer are spoken in such a way which gives the impression that the one praying is more concerned about what he must do following the prayer than he is with reverently addressing the Almighty. Our conclusions to prayer should be as worshipful as our beginnings.

18. Excessive volume and rapidity in prayer. Sometimes, as an expression of deep and ardent feeling, a person will pray very loudly and/or rapidly. Not only is this distracting in and of itself, but it also makes it difficult for the congregation to follow along.

But Miller also reflects on the characteristics of a good public prayer. If we are praying scripturally, then our prayer should bear the following fruit.

1. It should abound in the language of Scripture. This is "one of the most essential excellencies in public prayer," said Miller. The language of the Word of God is always right, safe, and edifying. Furthermore, in God's Word there is a simplicity and tenderness which is very powerful and particularly suited to captivate the heart. Finally, it enables the listener to follow the prayer more easily.

2. It should be well-ordered. Regular order is helpful to the memory of the one who is leading in prayer and assists the worshippers who are joining in it. Furthermore, it helps keep the prayer at a proper length. Of course, this does not mean that the same order must be used every time.

3. It should be general and comprehensive. Miller observes that "a suitable prayer in the public assembly is dignified and general in its plan, and comprehensive in its requests, without descending to too much detail." This will better suit the prayer to the general petitions that need to be rendered up by the congregation as a whole.

4. It should not be too wordy or lengthy. This will involve care not to attempt to pray on too many topics, or in too much detail.

5. It should contain a good dose of gospel truth. Without turning into a sermon, Miller suggests that, "It is an important excellence in a public prayer that it include the recognition of so much gospel truth as to be richly instructive to all who join in it, as well as who listen to it."

6. It should manifest variety. There is so much that is suitable for inclusion in the petitions of corporate prayer in the Lord's church, that only laziness can lead us to pray over the same content, in the same pattern, week after week. A desirable degree of variety in prayer can be a great help to holding the attention of those worshippers who are seriously attempting to join in offering prayer to God.

7. It should contain petition for the advancement of the gospel. Miller says, "A good public prayer ought always to include a strongly marked reference to the spread of the gospel, and earnest petitions for the success of the means employed by the Church for that purpose."

8. It should employ the names of the Lord in the various parts of prayer. Instead of simply employing one title of God throughout a prayer, it is appropriate to change this title from one segment of prayer to another.

9. It should be marked by the spirit and language of hope and confidence. "Our gracious covenant God loves to be taken at his word; to be firmly and affectionately trusted; to have his exceeding great and precious promises importunately pleaded; and to be approached as a willing, tender Father, not only 'mighty to save,' but ready and willing to save; more ready to bestow the gifts of his grace than earthly parents to give good things to their children," said Miller.

In conclusion, we may note Miller's pithy description of an acceptable public prayer: "Words 'few,' 'well considered,' and 'well ordered,' are the inspired characteristics of a good prayer."

Sing the Bible

The command or exhortation to sing is one of the most frequent in the Bible, and you find it in the Old Testament and New (e.g., Ps 98:1; Rev 5:9; Matt 26:30; Neh 12:27, 46; Acts 16:25; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). When we say, "Sing the Bible," we aren't advocating only singing Scripture verses, or exclusive psalmody (as venerable a tradition as that is). We don't mean that we can only sing Psalms or only sing quotations of Scripture, though the tremendous doxological resource of the biblical psalms and scriptural songs should not be overlooked by the church (and it certainly has been in our day).

What we mean by "sing the Bible" is that our singing ought to be biblical. It ought to be shot through with the language, categories, and theology of the Bible. It ought to reflect the themes and proportion of the Bible, as well as its substance and weightiness. Terry Johnson, again, provides this counsel:

> Our songs should be rich with Biblical and theological content. The current divisions over music are at the heart of our worship wars. Yet some principles should be easy enough to identify. First, what does a Christian worship song look like? Answer, it looks like a Psalm. The Psalms provide the model for Christian hymnody. If the songs we sing in worship look like Psalms, they will develop themes over many lines with minimal repetition. They will be rich in theological and experiential content. They will tell us much about God, man, sin, salvation, and the Christian life. They will express the whole range of human experience and emotion. Second, what does a Christian worship song sound like? Many are quick to point out that God has not given us a book of tunes. No, but He has given us a book of lyrics (the Psalms) and their form will do much to determine the kinds of tunes that will be used. Put simply, the tunes will be suited to the words. They will be sophisticated enough to carry substantial content over several lines and stanzas. They will use minimal repetition. They will be appropriate to the emotional mood of the Psalm or Bible-based Christian hymn. Sing the Bible.[24]

[24] Johnson, *Reformed Worship*, 37.

Pastors and those preparing for ministry need to become experts in the sung praise of the church (even if you are not musical), especially if you do not have background in the historic songs of the church. Part of your job is to explain to the people of God how the singing of the church serves as a means of grace in the congregation's worship of God. That means you will need to know hymnody and psalmody and the best of modern Christian songs.

I have a pet theory that the average congregant either can't or doesn't know more than about 200 hymns, songs, and tunes. That is, even in churches that have used a wide range of traditional hymnody and "stretched" their members to sing, say, 200–400 songs over the matter of a relatively short duration, I don't think that the average, non-musical, member *really* knows, or perhaps can know, more than 200 songs, and most, very likely, know substantially fewer. My guess is that this number has shrunk over the last fifty years, and may be closer to 50. So what, you ask? Well, there are many ramifications, but what I want the pastor to realize is that if the average member only knows somewhere between 50–200 songs, and possibly can't or won't know more than that, we better be sure that they know the very best songs possible, lyrically, melodically, and theologically. And that means we need to know our hymnody and psalmody well, and be very deliberate in the diet of sung praise in our congregations.

"See" the Bible

That is, we are to observe the appointed visible ordinances or sacraments in public worship. When we say that we are to "see" the Bible, we do so because God's sacraments are "visible words" (so said Augustine). The sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) are the only two commanded dramas of Christian worship (Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38–39; Col 2:11–12; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26). In them we see with our eyes the promise of God. In the reading and preaching of the Word, God addresses our mind and conscience through the hearing. In the sacraments, he uniquely addresses our mind and conscience through the other senses. In, through, and to the senses, God's promise is made tangible.

A sacrament reminds us and assures us of a divine promise. That is, it points to and confirms a gracious promise of God to His people. Another way of saying it is that a sacrament is an action designed by God to sign and seal a covenantal reality, accomplished by the power and grace of God, the significance of which has been communicated by the Word of God, and the reality of which is received or entered into by faith. Hence, the weakness, the frailty of human faith welcomes this gracious act of reassurance. And so, these "visible symbols of Gospel truths" are to be done as part of our corporate worship. Though they will be occasional, this is not to denigrate them in the least. They are by nature supplemental to and confirmatory of the promises held out in the Word; and the grace conveyed in them is the same grace held out via the means of preaching.

The pastor-theologian will want to equip his congregation with an understanding and appreciation of how God's ordinances work in public worship and the Christian life. So, how might we do this? Well, take for instance, baptism. What do we want our congregants to do and think as they observe the administration of baptism in the context of public worship? There is a *Westminster Larger Catechism* question that addresses that matter. It says:

> The needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.[25]

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* thus gives the pastor-theologian at least five ideas to apply to the congregation in aiding their participation and observance of Christian baptism in a public service of worship. How may we "improve our baptism" (meaning spiritually benefit and grow from our due consideration of the meaning and significance of our baptism)?

> 1. When we are under trial and temptation, or present at a service where a baptism is being administered, we are to reflect on the meaning and significance of our own baptism.
> 2. When we observe the administration of baptism, we are to gratefully consider its nature and the purpose for which Christ institutes it, as well as the privileges that it represents and assures us of, as well as the vows associated with it.
> 3. When we observe the administration of baptism, we ought to be humbled by our sins, and falling short of our walking in a manner consistent with the Gospel and the vows we have made in the church.
> 4. When we observe the administration of baptism, we should endeavor to grow in the sense of our assurance of being forgiven for our sin, and of our having received all the other blessings that come to us in union with Christ, and especially we should draw strength from considering the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin in our life, and quickening of grace.
> 5. When we observe the administration of baptism, we should resolve again to live by faith, to live in godliness, as those who belong to Christ, as well as to walk in brotherly love, because we have been baptized by the same Spirit into one body.[26]

This provides an example for us in thinking how we can instruct our congregation in benefiting from the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper as a means of grace in the public worship of the church.

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[25] *Westminster Larger Catechism*, 167.
[26] Ridgeley also expounds this in his *A Body of Divinity*, 2:515–16.

Radically Biblical Worship

As a whole, then, the aim of the faithful pastor-theologian is for the congregation's gathered worship of God to be radically biblical. Our aspiration is to have a public worship service that is according to Scripture: that is, a service rooted in the Bible's teaching about the form and substance of congregational worship. This is sometimes called the "regulative principle" in arranging our public worship—the axiom that *we ought to worship God in accordance with the Bible's teaching about the public worship of God*. This axiom applied, in turn, helps us with the whole scope of worship. How we go about corporate worship is the business of the second commandment, but it is also a central concern for the New Testament church as well (see, for instance, John 4, 1 Cor 11 and 14, and Col 2).

For our worship to be biblical in all its aspects means, among other things: (1) that its content, parts and corporateness, are all positively in accord with Scripture; (2) that it is simultaneously a communal response of gratitude for grace, an expression of passion for God, the fulfillment of what we were made and redeemed for, a joyful engagement in a delightful obedience, as Scripture teaches; (3) that it is a corporate, Christ-provided, Spirit-enabled encounter with the almighty, loving, and righteous Father, and thus always has in view the Triune God, again in accord with the Bible's teaching; and (4) that it aims for and is an expression of God's own glory, and contemplates the consummation of the eternal covenant in the church triumphant's everlasting union and communion with God.

Determining that the Bible will guide our worship, helps the church ensure the following: that the elements of worship (e.g., singing, praying, reading Scripture, preaching, administering the sacraments, making solemn vows, confessing the faith and giving offerings) are unequivocally and positively grounded in Scripture; that the forms of worship (e.g., how you go about singing, praying, reading Scripture, preaching, administering the sacraments) are in accord with Scripture and serve the elements they are intended to help convey; and that the circumstances of worship (e.g., incidentals like whether you sit—in pews or chairs—or stand, whether you meet in a church building or a storefront, what time you meet, how long you meet, etc.), are maximally helpful in assisting us to do what the Bible calls us to do in worship.

We are concerned about the forms and circumstances of worship so much for their own sake as much as for the sake of the elements and substance of worship, and for the sake of the object and aim of worship. The Reformers (from whom we have learned so much about Scripture) understood two things often lost on moderns. First, they understood that the liturgy (the set forms of corporate worship), media, instruments, and vehicles of worship are never neutral, and so exceeding care must be given to the "law of unintended consequences." Often the medium overwhelms and changes the message. For example, if you sing "Amazing Grace" to the tune of "Gilligan's Island" (the meter works, but the tune doesn't—a light, quasi-sea-shanty, with comedic associations, coupled with gravely serious words), it changes the whole tone of what one is doing in singing that text, and easily becomes a sacrilege. Second, they knew that the purpose of the elements and forms and circumstances of corporate worship is to assure that you are actually doing worship as it is defined by the God of Scripture, that you are worshiping the God of Scripture, and that your aim in worshiping Him is the aim set forth in Scripture.

So we care about how we worship not because we think that liturgy (meaning simply, the order of service) is prescribed, mystical or sacramental, but precisely so that the liturgy can get out of the way of the gathered church's communion with the living God. The function of the order of service is not to draw attention to itself but to aid the soul's communion with God in the gathered company of the saints by serving to convey the Word of God to and from God, from and to His people. C. S. Lewis puts it this way: "As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don't have to notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God."[27] This is why the great Baptist preacher Geoffrey Thomas can say: "In true worship men have little thought of the means of worship; their thoughts are upon God. True worship is characterized by self-effacement and is lacking in any self-consciousness."[28] That is, in biblical worship we so focus upon God Himself and are so intent to acknowledge His inherent and unique worthiness that we are transfixed by Him, and thus worship is not about what we want or like (nor do His appointed means divert our eyes from Him), but rather it is about meeting with God and delighting in Him. Praise decentralizes self.

We also believe that worship ought to be reverent. If worship is meeting with God, how could it be otherwise? It is precisely the reverence and awe of the greatness of God that should characterize worship at its best. We agree with Hughes Oliphant Old who says, "The greatest single contribution which the Reformed liturgical heritage can make to contemporary American Protestantism is its sense of the majesty and sovereignty of God, its sense of reverence, of simple dignity, its conviction that worship must above all serve the praise of God."[29] That's why we aim for a worship service that is scriptural, simple, Spiritual, and God-centered.

So, with these principles in mind, we aspire to the following qualities in our congregational services of worship. We strive to help the congregation offer scriptural, simple, Spiritual, God-centered, Lord's Day worship to the living and true God.

We want our public worship to be scriptural, that is, ordered by God's own Word. One of the distinctives of our worship is that it aims to be completely guided by Scripture. It is, in fact, worship that is according to Scripture. This is known as "the Regulative Principle." This approach to how we worship is aptly summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 21.1: "The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does good to all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture."[30]

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[27] C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (San Diego, CA: Harvest Books, 1964), 4–5.
[28] Geoffrey Thomas, "The Nature of True Worship," 2012, christianstudylibrary.org.
[29] Old, *Worship*, 176.
[30] *Westminster Confession of Faith* 21.1.

Since our worship is for God, our first question is not, "What do we want to do?" or even "What would others like to do?" but "What does God want us to do?" For direction, we look to the Bible where God directs by command or approved example how to worship Him. In the Bible, we find God accepting these acts of worship: singing, praying, reading the Bible, preaching, celebrating sacraments, giving offerings, confessing the faith, and making holy vows.

We want to assure that our corporate worship is Bible-filled and Bible-directed, that the substance and structure are biblical, that the content and order are biblical. To put it slightly differently, we want to worship "by the book" in two ways: so that both the marrow and means of worship are according to Scripture. We want the form and substance of corporate worship to be suffused with Scripture and scriptural theology.

Second, we want our public worship to be simple. It requires no elaborate ritual, no prescribed book of common prayer, on the one hand, nor does it have need for some high-tech, electronic, technologically sophisticated setting, on the other. True Christian public worship is merely based on the unadorned and unpretentious principles and order found in the Bible, by precept and example, which supply the substance of new covenant worship. Everything that is claimed to be essential or key or important to thriving Christian congregational worship (whether it be sound and lighting, instruments, clerical vestments, or prescribed liturgy based upon some fixed form of the past) must pass the test of the catacombs. Is this essential to the faithful corporate worship of persecuted Christians huddled away in a place of hiding worshiping God together in Spirit and in truth?

Third, we want our public worship to be Spiritual. Christian congregational worship is Spirit-gathered, Spirit-dependent, Spirit-engendered, and Spirit-empowered, because left to ourselves we will not worship the right object, according to the right standard, for the right motivation, and to the right end. It is God the Holy Spirit who creates, enables and energizes our desire and capacity to worship. By His ministry we are ushered into God's presence and commune with Him.

Fourth, we want our public worship to be the worship of God. Christian worship is all about God. He is the object of our worship, the focus of our worship. We gather as a congregation, not to seek an experience but to meet with God and give Him praise. The *whom* of worship is central to true worship (see John 4:22, 24). It is what the first commandment is all about. We aim to worship the God of the Bible. Many Christians leave Sunday services asking, "What did worship do for me?" Yet it is more helpful and biblical to think just the opposite: "What did I give to God in worship?" "How did I encourage the brothers and sisters to praise Christ for His grace?" "How did I take advantage of the means of grace in order to glorify God?" Ask not what this service will do for you, but what you will give to God through this service, and the rest will take care of itself. Don Carson puts it this way:

> Should we not remind ourselves that worship is a *transitive* verb [a verb that requires a direct object]? We do not meet to worship (i.e. to experience worship): we aim to worship GOD. "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only": there is the heart of the matter. In this area, one must not confuse what is central with byproducts. If you seek peace, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find peace. If you seek joy, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find joy. If you seek holiness, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will

> find holiness. If you seek experiences of worship, you will not find them; if you worship the living God, you will experience something of what is reflected in the Psalms. Worship is a transitive verb, and the most important thing about it is the direct object.[31]

Finally, we want our public worship to embrace the Lord's Day. The gathering of God's people every Lord's Day (Sunday) for corporate worship is God's discipleship plan for the church, and Lord's Day morning and evening worship is vital to that discipleship. If we believe, with the majority of Christians in all ages (and with the Westminster Divines), that the Old Testament Sabbath command has a weekly new covenant fulfillment in the Christian Lord's Day, then we will also believe that the whole of that day (following the explicit one-day-in-seven pattern of the old covenant of grace) is to be spent in worship, deeds of mercy, necessity and witness, and rest. If that is the case, then both prudential factors and the testimony of history indicate that the best way to help the Lord's people keep the Lord's Day (as opposed to the Lord's hour or the Lord's morning, or even the Lord's Saturday night) is to frame the first day of the week with gathered praise: morning and evening. And such is not without biblical precedent or justification.

The importance of Lord's Day corporate worship is established by four tremendous realities set forth in the New Testament: (1) the resurrection of Christ, which is foundational to the re-creative work of Christ in making a people for himself (Mark 16:1–8, cf. v. 9; 2 Cor 5:14–17; Gal 6:15–16; Col 1:15–22); (2) the eternal rest foreshadowed in the Lord's Day (Heb 4:9); (3) the Lord's Day language and observance of the New Testament church (Rev 1:10, cf. Matt 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19–23; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2): and (4) the New Testament command to the saints to gather, Christ's promise of presence with us when we do, the faithful example of the gathering of New Testament Christians, and Jesus' express command that we disciple new converts in the context of the local church (Heb 10:24–25; Matt 18:20; Acts 1:4; Matt 28:18–20).

Consequently, regular and faithful congregational Sunday morning and evening worship (even in a culture where the latter, especially, is disappearing) is a needed emphasis in our time. We view the whole Lord's Day as "the market day of the soul" and aim for the whole congregation to anticipate Lord's Day worship with relish.

Conclusion

In sum, the faithful pastor-theologian aspires to lead, and wants his people to understand, embrace, and be edified by, scriptural, simple, Spiritual, God-centered, Lord's Day worship of the living and true God, in which we read the Bible, preach the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible, and "see" the Bible.

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[31] D. A. Carson, *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993), 15 (emphasis added).

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 167–189

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF THE PASTOR-THEOLOGIAN: HOW JOHN F. MACARTHUR ENCOURAGES GODLINESS IN THE LIVES OF PASTOR THEOLOGIANS

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This article highlights the importance of the private life of the pastor-theologian. Though the calling of the pastor-theologian involves heavy attention to the needs of his congregation, this ministry is founded on his own attention to his life and doctrine (1 Tim 4:16). Thus, rightly may it be said that he has an imperative in his private life to live in accordance with his message, not just for the benefit of his church, or evangelistic efforts, but ultimately for the glory of the Master. By giving proper attention to the essential components of his private life, the pastor-theologian's ministry will have an eternal impact on the souls under his charge, bringing glory to the Triune God.

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Introduction

Why is the pastor-theologian's private life so important? Because it reflects his true self and will impact his ministry's reach and effectiveness. History informs us of men who lived a lauded public life, but it was not their *true* life. In many cases, time told us that their private life was not as purported. John MacArthur has often stated that *time and truth go hand in hand*. Eventually, a man's character will become evident—his true self will be manifested. There is a caveat to MacArthur's thought—the reality that heaven's account will offer the actual report, whereas time may provide a false history. Some will live a duplicitous life until the record of eternity corrects the record of time. They live a public life that is honorable in the eyes of many; however, they are privately a different person. There are men whose public life faltered after a genuine and excellent start because they stopped nurturing their private life.

Fortunately for the body of Christ, there are men whose private lives parallel their public presence. The pastor-theologian's calling is to be such a man—one who desires to reflect the undeniable character of Christ in the public circle. He is a man who must strive for godliness and nurture his soul through spiritual focus and prayer. John MacArthur has instructed and inspired men for over half a century to be such men—ministers of Christ who desire godliness and strive for the upward call in Christ—men whose private lives do not contradict the one viewed by those they influence. They accomplish this by demonstrating the imperative of personal godliness for the pastor-theologian, as well as its various components. As one lives out his life privately, it results in a wide-reaching impact, extending beyond the borders of his immediate communion with God.

The Imperative of the Private Life of Godliness

Sadly, the spiritual downfall of pastors, because of moral failure and theological compromise, is ever-increasing during a time when leaders in the church are too often losing their spiritual moorings with each day. One would hope for a return to an era of strong male leaders, emanating a sense of Christlikeness which attracts those devoted to sound doctrine and personal holiness, leading to increasing levels of personal growth. It is the privileged call of the pastor-theologian to develop the spiritual life of the church through biblical exposition, theological discourse, personal guidance (shepherding), and setting a godly example for the people to emulate. MacArthur commented on the spiritual and internal troubles of evangelicalism's largest denomination and the various factors causing the difficulty, stating that a part of the solution is to see the need of the hour for "separation from the world in our personal life as the norm."[1]

A means of protecting the pastor-theologian against the wiles of the flesh and the temptation of the world is nurturing a life of holiness that exhorts him to grow deeper in his journey with Christ. His quest to be a *man of God* in integrity, prayer, and Godward contemplation demonstrates this journey. A life that stands distinct and honorable is vitally needed because of the spiritual influence of the pastor-theologian. Alfred Gibbs reminds every pastor and spiritual leader that their public behavior matters. He likened the pastor-theologian to a clock offering direction:

> A preacher occupies a far more prominent place in the public eye than those who take no part in preaching. Therefore there exists the need for a correspondingly circumspect walk before men (Eph 5:15–16). A pocket watch and a public clock both serve the same purpose, to tell the time. If a watch gets out of order, only the owner is affected; but if a public clock goes wrong, hundreds of people are misled. Thus a prominent position carries with it a far greater necessity and responsibility for a consistent life. This will involve merciless self-judgment, separation from all known sin, and, in some cases, denying of the legitimate things of life, that the testimony of Christ and "the ministry be not blamed" (1 Cor 6:12; 2 Cor 6:3).[2]

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[1] John MacArthur, interview by Carl A. Hargrove, Sun Valley, CA, November 7, 2022.

[2] Alfred Gibbs, *The Preacher and His Preaching*, ed. John Bjorlie (Dubuque, IA: ECS Ministries, 2010), 49.

Like any genuine gospel minister, Gibbs believed that the Word was the source of the pastor-theologian's well-being. Therefore, he stated,

> He must both make and take time for the devotional reading of the Bible for his own soul's profit. It is possible to be so busy cultivating other people's gardens that one's own is apt to be neglected. One can be so occupied with feeding others that he becomes undernourished. It has been pointed out that there are two kinds of readers: those who go through a book, and those who allow a book to go through them.[3]

This instruction's personal nature enforces the pastor-theologian's requirement to discipline himself for godliness. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin state: "Moral and doctrinal rectitude are the inseparable twins of the Christian life" because they join the doctrinal clarity and expectation of the Scriptures to the everyday moral expressions in the life of those eternally designed by God to follow Him (Jer 1:5, 10; 1 Cor 15:8–11).[4] Using Timothy as an example of the call and expectation of a pastor-theologian, one must have an objective sense to be "ministerially self-aware" so that he will have no cause to retract from the message that announces and represents Christ.[5]

The pastor-theologian must hold fast to the message as it has taken hold of him through the divine call of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3:12–13) to strive passionately for its moral standards (3:15–21). Nevertheless, the life of the pastor-theologian is not one of an individual striving for self-benefit; the spiritual leader, with dedicated passion, seeks the spiritual benefit of others (2 Cor 1:24; Phil 2:20; Col 1:25). This is one reason William Hendricksen stated the following: "Holy living and sound teaching must go together if Timothy (or, for that matter, any apostolic representative, any minister, any elder, etc.) is to be a blessing."[6] The gospel proclamation cannot be separated from the character of the proclaimer.[7] Since the greatest blessing for any person is God's saving and sanctifying knowledge, it is only fitting that the blessing of guiding people in that knowledge is, in fact, a blessing

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[3] Gibbs, *The Preacher and His Preaching*, 41, 43–44. Gibbs creates an unrecognized but necessary religious degree: "Each preacher should become a D. D. D. D. D. That is to say, he should study the Bible: (1) Diligently—This calls for heroic measures and a holy determination to allow nothing to hinder. It may necessitate getting up half an hour earlier in the morning, but the time will be well invested; (2) Devotionally—He must allow the Bible to speak to his own heart and minister to his own spiritual needs before he can minister to the needs of others; (3) Discerningly—He must learn to 'distinguish between things that differ' (Phil 1:10, Marg.); he must study so as to 'rightly divide the Word of truth' (2 Tim 2:15); all the Scriptures relating to a subject need to be consulted before one can come to a right conclusion regarding it, hence, the need for comparing what this Scripture says with what other Scripture affirms; (4) Doctrinally—He must get a grasp of the great doctrines of the Bible; sound words, plus sound doctrine, make a sound believer and a sound preacher, whose sound preaching should leave the audience 'sound in the faith' (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9,13; Col 2:7); (5) Dispensationally—He must find out where he is in relation to God's present program, or he may discover he is at cross-purposes with God and His plan for this age." Gibbs, 41, 43–44.

[4] Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 141.

[5] Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 254.

[6] William Hendriksen and S. J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 4:160.

[7] William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 264.

without equal. It is the pastor-theologian's joyous labor to be as Christ was while on earth—the representative of God and proclaimer of the life-transforming power of the Good News (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18, 24).

What Scripture expects and Gibbs stated, John MacArthur has exemplified for sixty-five years, from preaching his first sermon at age eighteen to the undeniable effluence of God's grace in his fifty-four years of pastoring Grace Community Church. His influence on pastor-theologians is worldwide as Grace Community Church, Grace to You, and The Master's University & Seminary and its affiliated ministries have trained men and women and sent them throughout the globe to proclaim, teach, and defend the excellencies of Christ. However, for all the formal and informal training provided, there is an element encouraged by MacArthur that makes the expression of the training truly effective and sincere: the pastor-theologian must nurture his soul if he is to be a sincere man of God amid a world in need.

The call to ministry is not simply declaring what has been discovered through the academic exercise of education, the painstaking efforts of developing teaching curricula, or thoughtful approaches to sermon preparation. Intellectual discovery is genuinely nurtured in the pastor-theologian's devotion to practical godliness. A life developing in godliness established by communion with God and character maturation through spiritual disciplines are foundational to a life-lasting impact. The pastor-theologian must be a man of holiness expressed in prayer, integrity, and meditation on the truths of the faith.

John MacArthur created such an expectation for those he has influenced over the decades by holding fast to the biblical expectation of the minister and demonstrating a consistent desire for personal growth and discovery. He remains a beacon of light for those seeking inspiration to fight the good fight (2 Tim 4). One vital element to his decades-long ministry of exposition and leadership development stems from a deeply felt desire to understand the Scriptures so that he might communicate to the people of God the rich and abiding truths that inform them of God's person and the unfolding plan of salvation. Even at the sagacious age of eighty-three, he maintains a heartfelt desire to understand the Scriptures and ensure that he represents it accurately and speaks with clarity to those sitting under its authority and care. On many occasions, he has stated that the benefit of biblical exposition is the sanctifying effect on the life of the preacher, and it is this effect on his life that motivates his desire to investigate the text thoroughly. The Word's sanctifying power must be a reason for diligence in study and preparation. This relationship is so meaningful that after responding to the comment that expository preaching is an instrument for sanctification, MacArthur said,

> Yes. I say that [i.e., that preaching results in sanctification] every time I preach an expository message. Whenever I preach a message, I would do it [i.e., study and delivery] all over again just for the sanctifying experience that the Word brings into your life.[8]

This is the commitment of every pastor-theologian who understands his calling—he is a light-bearing example of hope for the people of God and the lost.

[8] MacArthur, interview.

The pastor-theologian realizes that he is but a reflection of the light he announces. If he is to maintain a life of consistency and fulfill his duty as a soldier of Christ (2 Tim 2:24), he must have a private life that reflects his commitment to the message he proclaims. There can be no dichotomy between life and doctrine. Paul's words remind the pastor-theologian that his private life is one informed and controlled by his orthodoxy as he writes, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (1 Tim 4:16).

Paul's instruction for Timothy to "pay close attention" to himself is the call to develop a private devotion to Christ that attests to the gospel's transforming power. He is a living example of the sufficiency of the Word and its message. His life is to announce that God's Word changes even the most egregious sinner and places in them a desire for the presence of the God they once avoided and even abhorred. Undoubtedly, this was the testimony of the Apostle Paul:

> [8] And last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. [9] For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. [11] Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Cor 15:8–11)

If the pastor-theologian is to maintain a life that constantly reflects the power of the gospel to transform, he must engage in an unremitting watch over his life with an objective eye. MacArthur stressed the importance of personal examination when he commented on 1 Timothy 4:16:

> Paul wraps up his charge to Timothy regarding the qualities of a noble servant by commanding him to *pay close attention to* himself *and* his *teaching.* Each of the eleven characteristics of an excellent minister found in verses 6–16 fit into one of these two categories. A true man of God will concentrate totally on personal holiness and public instruction. The benefit of so doing is twofold: it will *ensure salvation both* for the minister himself, *and for those who hear* him. It will bring about salvation for him in the sense that final salvation, deliverance from sin and entrance into eternal glory, demands perseverance. It is the unmistakable teaching of Scripture that persevering in the faith is a mark of genuine salvation. Jesus said in John 8:31, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" (cf. Matt 10:22; 24:13; Acts 13:43; 14:22; Rom 2:7; Col 1:23; Heb 3:14). Such perseverance is the result of giving careful heed and holding on to one's own devotion to spiritual virtue. While the perseverance of the saints can only be accomplished by the power of God, it is nonetheless the responsibility of each believer.[9]

One may ask, what is the objective of the pastor-theologian? Unmistakably, he is called to preach and teach in such a manner that those whom he trains grow in

[9] John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 181.

holiness to the glory of God. A text often referred to by John MacArthur is 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."[10] Paul's words remind us of our transformation into the image of Christ by the Spirit's internal work of sanctification.

For decades MacArthur has included the 2 Corinthians 3:18 reference with his signature, for friends, colleagues, and visitors, to remind them of the sufficient work of the Spirit using the Word to take lives once in rebellion to God by a continual act of grace that transforms their lives into the image of the Savior's pristine example. Under the providence of God, the pastor-theologian is one component of the spiritual compass that congregants, pastoral mentors, and peers use to navigate their life decisions. The apostle Paul was clear in this matter when he stated, "Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me" (1 Cor 4:16), and again, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (11:1), and still again, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (Phil 3:17).[11]

The Apostle sets his life and fellow workers in the spiritual harvest as examples for others to follow. This is a tremendous responsibility when considering exemplary leadership's temporal and eternal obligation. Temporally, it acts as a motivation and roadmap for those observing (1 Cor 11:1). Eternally, the pastor-theologian's example has an immeasurable impact on the lives of those following Christ, which has various ramifications for eternal matters. Only the Savior knows the full measure of the spiritual influence of each believer's life. Many positive and negative choices of each person have an eternal impact, such as witnessing and some coming to faith, discipling the faithful who will repeat the lessons learned, or planting seeds of faith through teaching and exemplary behavior that inspires the faithful to strive with intention. The sober minister's life matters because it is bound to the destinies of countless souls.

In my domestic and international travels, I have met numerous people whom John MacArthur has influenced, and these people have beautifully diverse backgrounds spiritually, educationally, financially, and culturally. However, the common bond among them was the faithful example of John MacArthur that encouraged them in their walk of faith. For many, it was his unadulterated preaching of the gospel that brought them to a saving knowledge of Christ. And for all, his resolute preaching was instrumental in their spiritual growth. Every minister of the Savior desires the salvation of the sinner and the spiritual maturation of the body (Rom 1:16; 10:8, 15; Eph 4:11–13; Col 1:28). He desires this because he realizes that his calling is to be an excellent soldier (1 Cor 9:7; Phil 2:25; 2 Tim 2:3, 4; Phlm 2) for the Master who commissioned him to make disciples of the nations for the glory of God (Eph 4:11; 1:6, 12, 14). The pastor-theologian is a man enlisted to fight the battle of the ages, while Yahweh of Hosts divinely supports him to engage with the strength of the Sovereign Savior (Col 1:29). Paul's language of divine enablement is pronounced: "For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His working, which He works in me in power"; εἰς ὃ καὶ κοπιῶ ἀγωνιζόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐν δυνάμει (Col 1:29). Paul can only *agonize* in the work of the faith as he avails himself of the divine energy and power of the Savior's grace.

[10] John MacArthur, *2 Corinthians,* MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 41, and see 123–35.
[11] John MacArthur, *Philippians*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 2001), 255.

In the many spiritual battles for doctrinal integrity fought by MacArthur, he would be the first to acknowledge the source as God's enablement.

The secret to longevity in the ministry, which MacArthur has experienced for fifty-four years at Grace Community Church, is a reliance on divine grace. It is only possible to labor with consistent intensity (κοπιῶ ἀγωνιζόμενος) by the gracious energy provided (κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐμοὶ ἐν δυνάμει) by the One commissioning the work.[12] In wider Greek usage, κόπος means "beating, slapping" until there is weariness that results from being repeatedly struck; and by analogy, Paul is referring to the physical tiredness caused by work and exertion.[13] There are eighteen occurrences of this term in the New Testament, with the majority of them appearing in the Pauline corpus (11x).[14] The man of God must always nourish himself amid the strain of ministry. And when he does become exhausted in the work, the pastor-theologian must find joy in the privilege of laboring for the Master. In nourishing his soul, the pastor-theologian must give attention to the proper components of the private life of godliness.

The Components of the Private Life of Godliness

The opening quote of MacArthur's treatment of the *Man of God* is M'Cheyne's timeless statement that we must "remember you are God's sword— his instrument— I trust a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."[15] What we have seen of John MacArthur's ministry spanning over five decades at Grace Community Church has its foundation in 1 Timothy 6:6–16. This passage was foundational in developing his philosophy of ministry, which set the guidelines for his motivation and behavior. Paul, who is MacArthur's spiritual hero, helped him develop an approach to ministry and life to which M'Cheyne refers—being a spiritual weapon for the Lord's causes. MacArthur states the importance of this text: "If a pastor wants to have a life worthy of a doxology, a life that he can lift up before God to bring Him honor, then he must follow the instruction and this portion of Scripture."[16]

Pastoral ministry is a lofty call, carrying eternal consequences because the pastor is a shepherd and theologian who speaks for God in his pulpit, writing, and lifestyle. All of these have the effect of drawing people closer to the living God or acting as a stumbling block. The genuine pastor-theologian desires to live as a beacon of light (Matt 5:16; Phil 2:15) that the Spirit uses to draw God's elect to a relationship with Him. The Spirit also uses the pastor-theologian to shield the church against the

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[12] See John MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 81–82.

[13] Κόπος, BDAG, 558–59; "Κόπος, Κοπιάω," TDNT, 3:827–30; "Κόπος," EDNT, 2:307.

[14] Ibid.

[15] John MacArthur, *The Man of God: The Essential Pursuits of a Godly Servant* (Los Angeles: Grace Books, 2019), 9. M'Cheyne originally made this statement in correspondence with a ministerial colleague to warn him against his emphasis on academic excellence that was not matched by personal godliness. The pastor-theologian must heed the words of M'Cheyne as if the letter were written to him—make sure that, above all, you are growing in an intimate knowledge of God evidenced by godliness in life and ministry.

[16] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 13.

attacks of the world through his exemplary life that affords no legitimate reason for questioning the faith he proclaims (1 Pet 2:12, 15). This protection of the church's testimony occurs when the pastor-theologian conducts himself as a man of God.

MacArthur's exposition of 1 Timothy 6:6–16 is seminal for painting a picture of the pastor-theologian's life as a man who longs to taste more of Christ. He must nurture his call as a man of character through communion with God since he "belongs to God in a personal way."[17] MacArthur emphasizes the personal nature of the call to ministry, as a minister committed to representing Christ because he does not belong to the church, an association, or familial relationships, but is a man called to live and die for the Savior's cause.[18] This being the case, the servant of God must surrender all for the sake of the call, and it will require nurturing his walk with the Savior, which will increase a sincere ambition to please the One who commissioned him for the work of the gospel. He has the unique privilege of following Christ in His example of serving the Heavenly Father (John 8:29; 2 Cor 5:9; Col 1:10).

Since the minister of truth is a man of God with a unique calling, as one who would join a select, long line of people empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the excellencies of God through the Word, he must be "perfected by the Spirit and the Word" if he is to fulfill the lofty calling placed upon him.[19] MacArthur writes: "They are men whose lives are lifted above worldly aims and temporal things and devoted to divine service. They are men who belong to the spiritual order, of which things temporal, transitory, and perishing have no permanent relationship."[20] The fleeting world has no hold on the pastor-theologian because he has an acute knowledge that the reality of a former life that offended the Lord now serves to worship and call others to the same; he grasps the tremendous nature of salvation by grace and basks in the privilege of Christ's upward call to matters eternal (Phil 3:1–21).

Fleeing Worldliness

The pastor-theologian must be known as a man who *flees* from myths and worldly fables, empty chatter, the love of money, and greed.[21] If he does not do this, he will succumb to their constant calls to compromise and damage his life and those influenced by him. In his communion with God, he must have the disposition of the psalmist who loved the Word because of its power to transform his soul, renew his mind, and reveal the Author of the inspired words to him (Pss 19:7–14; 119; John 17:17).

Devotion to Truth

The Word is a revelation of the One who calls the man to Himself. Therefore, the pastor-theologian must saturate himself with the words of life before they are preached to others. MacArthur's habit during the earlier years of pastoral ministry of becoming familiar with a book of the Bible by reading it daily for thirty days is

[17] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 13.
[18] Ibid.
[19] MacArthur, 15.
[20] Ibid.
[21] MacArthur, 23.

worthy of applying. This early life habit profited his soul and those under his shepherding care, as the results showed in his exposition of texts and in his ability to provide biblical answers to a myriad of challenges and questions arising in ministry over the years.

In being devoted to God's Word, the pastor-theologian tastes the goodness of God and wants others to enjoy the experience of his spiritual meal. The psalmist expresses his desire to experience an intimate relationship with the Lord, when he says: "O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! O fear the LORD, you His saints; for to those who fear Him there is no want" (Ps 34:8–9).

MacArthur's master plan for the future of Grace Community Church was not one of projecting a dynamic and expanding ministry. Rather, it was a simple commitment to faithfully and expositionally teach the Word of God as he loved, served, shepherded, and very intentionally developed leaders.[22]

Pursuit of Godliness

The minister of God must be a man who pursues a life of holiness (1 Tim 6:11).[23] Before developing the particular expressions of a holy life, the pastor must be resolved to engage in a passionate pursuit. Paul's use of the present imperative δίωκε provides another window into the minister's call to employ his whole self in the effort to please the Lord in every manner of life. He must be a godly man because every man of God is called to emulate the living God (Eph 5:1). The word δίωκε means "to strive for, to aspire to something, to press toward an object, to persecute, to follow in haste, or to run after."[24]

It is important to note, as MacArthur explains, that Paul's call for the pastor-theologian to pursue righteousness is a practical call to "right behavior, right conduct, right speech, and obedience to God's standard in your life. This is the most comprehensive summary term for all virtues."[25] Behavior is foundational to the minister's ability to help others maintain spiritual focus in their calling, as his life decisions act as a spiritual template worth following. The righteous behavior MacArthur references is expressed in the words of wisdom found in Proverbs 4:20–27. They are informing those under his influence to fix one's spiritual sights on the matters of moral excellence and avoid the various distractions during one's life journey.

> [20] My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. [21] Do not let them depart from your sight; keep them in the midst of your heart. [22] For they are life to those who find them and health to all their body. [23] Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. [24] Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you. [25] Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. [26] Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. [27] Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil.

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[22] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 25.
[23] MacArthur, 28.
[24] Διώκω, BDAG, 254.
[25] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 29.

The constraints of wisdom (living with skill) control the gospel minister's private life. It is a personal life of actionable decisions that cause him to stand out as others concede to the ideological spirit of the age and temptations of the flesh. In the passage, the person seeking this manner of life must notice the intensity of walking with a skilled focus. If the pastor-theologian does not have this focus, his life and testimony are susceptible to compromise. He must heed the admonition of this divine and ancient wisdom and follow the intense demands of a devoted life. Derek Kidner comments that the repetition of the charge to live according to such admonition is purposeful, "as a major part of godliness lies in dogged attentiveness to familiar truths."[26] Kidner's observation ought to compel the man of God to immerse himself in the familiar truth so that the truth would guide him in every moral and ministry choice. He must never become too familiar with God's Word or call. He must always maintain a circumspect approach to life, lest he become another moral casualty.

The passage is an exhortation to follow and remain faithful to the call of wisdom, which is a call to moral consistency. Solomon's use of body metaphors implies that wisdom affects the whole of man, and the one who would practice a God-honoring life must surrender every aspect of their mental and emotional faculties.[27] Waltke affirms that the life of faith cannot be duplicitous because "what one is and what one does are inseparable."[28] Paul, Timothy's spiritual father, admonishes Timothy to be a man of God guided by righteous conviction. Solomon communicates this by using the voice of a father exhorting his children to surrender to the path that offers life.

Give attention—the words of wisdom, passed from the heart of experience, call any listener to be "fully alert" and to "listen attentively" because the nature of the message is essential to the hearer's life. The pastor-theologian acts as a spiritual father to those under his care, and like a father, seeks to convince them of the true path of life. However, the force of his words is carried by the consistency of his life to hear for himself before he communicates to others—for this is an aspect of wisdom—to respect and seek divine wisdom so that he is a worthy guide.

Incline your ear—this is the first of the metaphors meant to capture the need for wisdom to permeate the heart. Incline (נטה) is similar to giving attention (קשׁב) with an emphasis on the effort of "bending towards" or even "diverting" one's previous course to accommodate the information that will enrich life.[29]

Do not let them depart—this is the first negative command that calls the listener to make sure that the knowledge gained is not a temporary decision or fixation but one that orders decisions for everyday life into eternity. One of the chief tools in the pastor-theologian's box is a persevering conviction under the pressures of an increasingly hostile society. Gospel men are those who stand firm in their faith despite the allurements of the world.

Watch over your heart with all diligence—the principle of guarding the heart is repeated for emphasis as it is the source of decision-making and life. The man of God must show extreme care to watch (מִשְׁמָר), as though in "a place under guard, a prison

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[26] Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2008), 65.

[27] Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 88; Ronald M. Murphy, *Proverbs*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas-Nelson, 1998), 28.

[28] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 296.

[29] נטה, *HALOT*, 692–93.

(Gen. 42:19), or standing guard."[30] Wisdom tells the one who would please God that he is to live with a priority that guards the motives of his heart *above all* because, as Peter A. Stevenson writes, "keeping one's own mind should transcend any other self-protecting thought."[31] Tremper Longman III states that it is of utmost importance to the father that his son "preserves the integrity of the heart."[32] Only then will his life be free of hypocrisy and infused with a sustaining grace to live above the call of the world and the internal solicitations of the flesh.

If this all-encompassing protection is to take place, it will require diligence in filling the heart with the thoughts of God and the purpose of life from the Word of God. The God-honoring walk requires persistence because of the multiple distractions, temptations presented, and the nature of the spiritual labor (Deut 6:17; 28:1; Josh 23:11; Ps 119:4, 95; Prov 12:4; 21:5; 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 6:11; 2 Pet 1:5). Charles Bridges provides sober admonition for the man seeking to please the Savior in every manner of life: "The rules laid out in verses 23 to 27 constitute an invaluable safeguard for Christian lives. Since we are attacked at every point, every possible place with sin that may gain a foothold has to be guarded against—the heart, the mouth, the eyes, the feet."[33]

Solomon's call to watch over the heart is impossible apart from intervening grace (Phil 2:12–13). Bridges reminds us that when we exercise our responsibility to strive in God's righteous ways, "all the means of our perseverance are greatly increased."[34] These means are the keys to the private nurturing of a minister's life, explains Bridges: "Watch and pray. Nurture a humble and dependent spirit. Live in the atmosphere of the Word of God. Resist the evil world, even in its most plausible forms. This will be a conflict until the end of our lives."[35]

Let your eyes…and your gaze—The pastor-theologian must see himself as a child before the Lord and walk circumspectly on the path of faith, and, as Stevenson notes, "by implication, he should not cast envious looks at the ways of evil men."[36] The downfall of far too many ministers is the heart that lacks contentment, because the heart of dissatisfaction will seek ways to satisfy the cravings of discontent, which is assuredly a path leading to destruction (Ps 73). It is only as the man of God fixes his gaze on the beauty of God (Ps 27:4) that he will find an escape.

Watch the path—the writer returns to guarding what the listener will view having already exhorted them to look straight ahead. The man of God is competent and willing to confront himself as he notes potential compromise. A man who cannot watch his path of life and faith is not qualified to lead others on their spiritual journey.

The proverbial text is instructive for the sensitive hearer because it invokes him to a life of godliness, focusing on the righteous path by constantly assessing one's

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[30] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs,* 297; מִשְׁמָר, HALOT, 649.

[31] Peter A. Stevenson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2001), 63. Waltke views the force of *above all* (מִכָּל) as the "standard by which the quality of guarding the heart is measured (i.e., it must be reckoned as more important than anything else that one needs to restrain). Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 297.

[32] Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 154.

[33] Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 39.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Stevenson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* , 63.

heart and providing correction as needed. MacArthur says, "Righteousness looks at the actions that are right. Godliness looks internally at the reverence, holiness, piety, and devotion of heart to the Lord whom he, the man of God, loved. Right behavior flows out of a right heart attitude—a worshiping heart."[37] These words affirm the need for the minister to objectively examine his *heart* if he expects to walk in wisdom and please the One who called him into service. MacArthur reminds every minister that they are a part of a unique spiritual force called by God to fight the good fight against the wiles of this corrupt society as we "storm the fortresses of error" in an intense battle that never stops. We do so as soldiers fighting for "the noblest cause in the world: the truth of God."[38] The exhortation from 1 Timothy 6 is the pattern for any man who would consider himself a soldier in the fight of faith. There can be little argument against the soberness of this position and its righteous expectations. Bridges provides a fitting synthesis of the man of God's response to the instruction of this passage:

> The man of God must only have one standard (Isaiah 8:20). He must not think about anyone from a "worldly point of view" (2 Corinthians 5:16). He must often put the church to one side, no less than the world, in order to listen more carefully to God's command. He must discern and crush the first sign of sin, guarding every avenue of sin—the senses, the memory, the imagination, the touch, the taste. He must walk by the straight rule of the Gospel, or else he will not only make himself stumble but the church as well (Galatians 2:11–14).[39]

Before a man can be a pastor or a theologian who truly desires to honor God, he must first be a man of God who flees from the vices of the world and the internal temptation of the flesh, follows God-honoring behavior, fights for the protection of divine truth, and is faithful to the cause of the Savior in all things until his final breath. The call is clear, privileged, and demanding, but it will only occur with an intentional focus. The pastor-theologian must have a private life that nurtures an unwavering character useful in the cause of the King for the matters of heaven. If there is such a commitment, he will possess a personal and devoted heart for holiness manifested in prayer, meditation, and Christlike behavior.

> The life of a faithful minister has at its end a doxology. That's how it ought to end. What amazing praise for such a high calling when it's offered to God as an acceptable sacrifice. Because the man of God is fleeing and following and fighting and faithful, the end of his life is a doxology. The end of his life is going to be praise to God.[40]

Therefore, the pastor-theologian must be a man of godliness because it is the call of all believers to live in devoutness with the hope of eternal life.[41] As one called to

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[37] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 29.
[38] MacArthur, 36–37.
[39] Bridges, *The Book of Proverbs*, 40.
[40] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 42–43.
[41] John MacArthur, *Titus*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 9, 11.

proclaim the truth and help others discern error, writes MacArthur, the servant's life is a testimony that "God's truth produces godliness. The transformation wrought through saving faith is visibly manifest in holy conduct."[42] The wonder of the transforming power of the gospel is that it "breaks sin's power and dominion in our lives and gives us a new nature that desires holiness."[43] Therefore, it is natural that the proclaimer of truth has an insatiable appetite for holiness conditioned by the supernatural event of salvation. However, prior to life in Christ, the natural desire of any person is incapable of having a God-honoring desire for the holiness of God. It may have existed in the realm of religious zeal but not one's spiritual nature (Phil 3:4–7). The pastor has the spiritual ambition of demonstrating the grace of God in his life before the world and for the church's edification. The man who aspires to this end, states MacArthur, is one who will lead a private life of self-control:

> The self-controlled pastor walks with God in the integrity of his heart. He has the continuing grace of God working in his life to the degree that he is spiritually mature and morally pure. He should be able to say with Paul, "Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in *holiness* and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you" (2 Cor. 1:12).[44]

Heart for the Lost

In the futile attempts of the modern church to make itself more attractive in society, it is missing the elements which will afford the body of Christ influence and respect—the people who comprise the true church must be people of unquestionable virtue and holiness. MacArthur explains that the privilege of godliness in life also acts as the "inducement" for sinners to listen to the good news as they see "its transforming power producing holiness, love, peace, and the other fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) in the lives of believers."[45] The most important outcome of the godly man's life is leading sinners to faith in Christ because he and every saint are commissioned people for the glory of God. MacArthur states, "The sovereign purpose of all exhortations to holy living in Scripture is to honor and glorify God through the righteous living of His people, leading to the salvation of more sinners."[46] This statement must be considered with a sense of earnest reflection. No man can be a genuine pastor without a heart for the lost, which motivates righteous living and draws unbelievers to the cross.

It must remain an immense privilege for the minister to know that his life, once in rebellion with God, is now an instrument for the glory of a holy Savior. The holiness of God is the attribute that emanates His uniqueness as He is set apart, distinct, and absolutely pure. We cannot say that holiness is the *main attribute* of God, for this would be a misunderstanding of His essence. However, we may say that

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[42] MacArthur, *Titus*, 8, 71, 90.
[43] MacArthur, 113.
[44] MacArthur, 42–43.
[45] MacArthur, 118.
[46] MacArthur, 106.

God's holiness is prominent in the biblical narrative among His attributes.[47] This being the case, it is correct and even necessary for MacArthur to state that,

> Holiness embodies the very essence of Christianity. The holy Savior has saved sinners to be a holy people (1 Pet 2:4–10). That's why one of the most common biblical names for a believer is *saint*, which simply and wonderfully means "saved and set apart" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). When one considers that a holy God saves, it is no surprise to learn that he gives his Holy Spirit to every believer at salvation. A primary purpose of this gift is to equip believers with the power to live a holy life (1 Thess 4:7–8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). So God wants Christians to share his holiness (Heb 12:10) and to present themselves as slaves of righteousness, which will result in holiness (Rom 6:19): "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). Thus the author of Hebrews writes, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Holiness is the core of a Christian's experience.[48]

The Commitment at The Master's Seminary

One teaching objective of the pastor-theologian is to help the student of Scripture overcome the obstacles hindering their personal sanctification.[49] The pastor-theologian must achieve this in his pedagogy, continually expanding his knowledge of the subject taught, and setting an example worthy of following because it is consistent with his teaching and public doctrinal commitments. This is one reason the faculty of The Master's Seminary includes men who are pastors or elders in a local church or who have a significant role in the life of their local body.

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[47] Culver comments on the importance of God's holiness in the biblical narrative, and by implication, the life of the pastor-theologian: "God's character is holy. Biblical testimony to His holiness is very extensive and is mainly in the Old Testament. In a unique sense, holiness is basic to every aspect of God's goodness. Therefore, we might expect it to be highlighted in the early portions of the Bible. To resume treatment of the holiness of God's character, we can state: in a unique sense, holiness is basic to everything about God, not merely one among many moral attributes of goodness. Not without reason did A. H. Strong frame and persuasively defend the proposition, *holiness is the fundamental attribute of God*. We might well expect it to have been highlighted in the initial encounter of the great legislator and revelator Moses with God on the occasion of his call and commission to lay the groundwork of biblical revelation and revealed religion at the first appropriate occasion (Exod 3:1–5). The same unrelieved glare of manifest holiness accompanies every subsequent, direct, personal encounter of divine and human in the Bible. The practical importance of God's holiness extends to everything about Christian character, action and hope for the future…. In biblical religion and most of biblical literature, however, holiness as ethical and moral purity is the most prevalent and important affirmation God has to make about Himself." See Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical & Historical* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2006), 94–95, 97.

[48] MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 60–61.

[49] MacArthur and Mayhue, 62. Consider the following points: 1) One may think more highly of self than one ought and not pursue holiness as one should (Rom 12:3). 2) One may presume upon salvation and assume that since one is saved, holy living is optional (Rom 6:1–2). 3) One may have been erroneously taught about the nature of Christian living and so neglect the lordship of Christ (1 Pet 3:15). 4) One may lack the zeal or energy to make holiness a priority (2 Cor 7:1). 5) One may think that he or she is saved but not truly be so and then try to live a holy life in the power of the flesh (Matt 13:5–7, 20–22).

The Master's Seminary expects men to invest in the student body, serve the local church, and build disciples as men of the Great Commission. This expectation stems from MacArthur's vision for a seminary committed to "training men because lives depend upon it," as the motto of the seminary conveys. The sobriety of this charge affects the type of men who lead students and the type of students attracted to it. In the theological training at The Master's Seminary, there is always an element of pastoral training and application to a pastor's call to godliness, regardless of the subject matter. In some significant manner, a seminar on eschatology, language courses, or Advanced Hermeneutics will never be divorced from a discussion on their import for modeling a life consistent with our doctrine. The Master's Seminary has the utmost commitment to doctrinal and moral integrity as it is resolved to maintain the vision of its former President and present Chancellor to prepare pastor-theologians for work in the harvest fields of the Master. This vision is one reason I am privileged to teach the required course on pastoral prayer and electives focusing on pastoral holiness for our M.Div. students with hopes that they will nurture their private life. Since the "ultimate goal of systematic theology"[50] is maturing the body of Christ for the glory of God, as MacArthur and Mayhue articulate, then the pastor-theologian must be a man committed to the mission of the church and resolved to live a life of integrity.

Godliness and Integrity

In *The Power of Integrity,* MacArthur challenges the church and ministers to an uncompromising life that seeks to "cultivate integrity from righteous motives"[51] for the glory of God. Although integrity is the standard expectation of the minister of Christ and God's people, it must be nurtured in the life of every person of faith. As the child of God grows more intimately with the Savior (Pss 16:11; 34:8; Phil 3:10; 1 Thess 4:10), their level and commitment to integrity will increase. MacArthur comments on the relationship between integrity and compromise as follows:

> The Christian life cannot be lived apart from God. To do so is to compromise your very being. That's where the power of integrity begins. Only as you and I derive our being from our relationship with Christ can we ever hope to live like He did, to suffer like He did, to withstand adversity like He did, and to die like He did—all without compromising.[52]

The conscientious minister of faith realizes that integrity is nurtured by truth. The pastor-theologian's desire to equip the church with the whole counsel of God opens the doors of not simply intellectual knowledge but a genuine knowledge of the godly life. Therefore, the pastor must be a man committed to integrity in teaching; if he is not, he will misdirect the intentions and passions of the body. Like the church at Colossae, they will seek godliness through means with no actual power to sanctify

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[50] MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 63.

[51] John MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity: Building a Life without Compromise* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), xi.

[52] MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity*, 16.

(Col 2:23). MacArthur succinctly captures the relationship between truth and godliness, saying:

> Divine truth and godliness are inextricably related. No matter how sincere our intentions might be, we cannot obey God's will if we do not know what it is. We cannot be godly if we do not know what God is like and what He expects of those who belong to Him. God's truth produces godliness.[53]

It should be apparent that godliness in integrity must pervade the life of a saint, especially the man of God. A pervasive life of integrity is the normal expectation of the gospel minister; therefore, MacArthur appropriately states that "spiritual integrity—with its basic components of sincerity and blamelessness—means that a believer is a person who's an integrated whole, one who reflects that fact in every area of his life."[54] Vigilance in the Christian life is an authenticating mark for a person transferred from the kingdom of darkness to one of light (Col 1:13; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:10). The need for vigilance must be directed to personal sanctification, and it must be comprehensive, as MacArthur states:

> Clearly there is a direct correlation between integrity and biblical holiness. And God leads every believer along the path to holiness through the process of sanctification. As Dr. Lloyd-Jones said, that process culminates in Christian maturity as each believer is conformed into the image of Christ. That is true holiness and integrity. Therefore, if we would be men and women of integrity, we must also be men and women of holiness. And that requires complete diligence and attentiveness toward all aspects of sanctification, including the vital area of personal holiness.[55]

Godliness and Faith

Godliness can never be disconnected from a life of faith, and it is the struggle of faith that tests and matures the virtues of a true pastor-theologian. The godly man leaves no aspect of his life undisclosed in his walk of faith because his path is one of wholehearted reliance on the Lord for every facet of life.[56] The trust to which MacArthur refers must be steadfast in the everyday choices of the genuine minister. A life of faith is one of constant surrender to the will of God for every ministerial and personal decision. There is no area free from the occupancy of Christ's lordship. The minister must constantly examine the areas of this life and ask if there are rooms where the Lord Jesus Christ does not have the influence He rightfully deserves. Faith is developing but requires an unrelenting passion to know more of God and invite His Word to take entire residence in the heart. Consider the words of MacArthur on the need for untiring devotion to the One who calls the man of God to this life of faith:

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[53] MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity*, 38.
[54] MacArthur, 45.
[55] MacArthur, 124–125.
[56] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 31.

> This is an unwavering confidence—loyalty to God's power, purpose, plan, and provision. He lives under God's sovereignty happily, gladly, joyfully, entrusts himself to God. No frustration, no forcing, no manipulation; just trusting God. His life is then marked by "love," *agapē*, the highest volitional love, unrestricted, unrestrained toward God, toward man. He is a man who loves God. He is a man who loves others. He is a man who is completely happy to trust the sovereign purposes of God. This is the man of God.[57]

Godliness and Doctrinal Fidelity

John MacArthur's conviction that "your holiness, your virtue supports your message"[58] is a statement lost in the churches "selling [themselves] to pragmatism…which removes the drive to be countercultural."[59] Unfortunately, the church finds itself in a position which makes it "difficult to keep its garments unspotted; that's why you hear so many stories of men with influence compromise doctrine who are compromised morally."[60] Compromised standards of godliness will inevitably lead to compromise in doctrinal clarity. MacArthur's undeniable obligation to the veracity of Scripture is embedded in an equal resolve to honorable living as it is a defense against abandoning the tenets of the faith:

> The Lord requires leaders in His church who are pure, *holy*, and above reproach. Anything less is unacceptable to Him and should be unacceptable to His people. Moral compromise, like doctrinal compromise, spells disaster for the church. Important as they are, battles to defend the inerrancy and authority of Scripture lose much of their effectiveness if the defenders of those doctrines fail to also defend and uphold God's equally crucial standards of personal righteousness. And compromisers of the integrity of leadership will much more easily compromise the truth. Unfaithful in the battle for sound living, they are much more likely to fail in the battle for sound doctrine as well.[61]

MacArthur provides several means to maintain doctrinal integrity which also serve as the impetus for the pastor-theologian's personal communion with God and his growth in Christlikeness. Anyone who would speak for the living God and stand for the sufficiency of His Word must commit to the following according to MacArthur: They must *believe*, *memorize*, *meditate*, *study*, *obey*, *defend*, *live*, and *proclaim* it.[62]

Godliness and Beholding

Of the disciplines MacArthur mentioned, meditation on the Word appears to be a greater struggle among contemporary preachers as it requires a need for a concerted effort to be still before the Lord (Pss 1:2; 4:4; 63:6; 77:12; 104:34; 143:5; 145:5; Phil

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[57] MacArthur, *The Man of God*, 31.
[58] MacArthur, interview.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] MacArthur, *Titus*, 19–20.
[62] MacArthur, 34–35.

4:8). An example of meditation is captured in Psalm 27:4 where David expresses his desire to *behold* the beauty of God.

- **LSB:** "to behold the beauty of Yahweh and to inquire in His temple."
- **ESV:** "to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple."
- **NET:** "so I can gaze at the splendor of the LORD and contemplate in His temple."
- **YLT:** "to look on the pleasantness of Jehovah, and to inquire in His temple."
- **CEV:** "to see how wonderful You are and to pray in Your temple."

To behold (לַחֲזוֹת) implies *clinging, lingering, and having a chained gaze*, *to look with pleasure, satisfaction*.[63] This is an invaluable lesson for every believer—the key that unlocks and defines success in the Christian life is a desire to know and make known the beauty of God beyond all else. In the private life of the pastor-theologian, he desires the same as David, and knows as David knew, that Yahweh is inherently beautiful because He is a God of infinite excellence, and therefore the definition and example of beauty.[64] Again, there is an admonition for the man of God to pace himself so that amid the demands of ministry, he has sufficient time to meditate on the wonder of God's greatness, the implications of theology, and the moral demands and excellence of God's Word. John MacArthur is a man given to meditation, which adds to the richness of his preaching because he has been immersed in asking the questions of the text, God's character, and seeking the Lord's grace to be an instrument for His glory. In a personal interview, MacArthur stressed the pastor's call to offer a "life of constant thanksgiving that flows from seeing the faithfulness of God displayed in countless ways. It is these meditations that make the heart full of gratitude."[65]

Godliness and Relationships

There are at least nineteen markers that reveal a person's commitment to godliness in his relationships with others. They can be summarized as follows:

> 1) displaying brotherly love (John 13:35); 2) preferring one another in honor (Rom 12:10); 3) not lagging behind in diligence to do good works and avoid evil (Rom 12:11); 4) being fervent for the cause of Christ (Rom 12:11); 5) serving the Lord with integrity and priority (Rom 12:11; Col 1:29); 6) rejoicing in hope despite the opposition from the world (Rom 12:12); 7) persevering in tribulation and boldly facing suffering, as a result of faithfulness to the Word (Rom 12:12); 8) devotion to prayer, which develops practical holiness and integrity (Rom 12:12; Eph 6:18); 9) contributing to the needs of the saints as stewards (Rom 12:13); 10) practicing hospitality, which is an expectation of spiritual leaders

[63] חָזָה, TDOT, 280–90; חָזָה, HALOT, 301.

[64] See the various expressions of the beauty of God in Scripture: 1) character and mighty acts (Neh 9:17; Job 9:10; Ps 71:17; 75:1; 78:4; 86:10); 2) creation (Gen 1:31; Job 38; Ps 139:14); 3) holiness (Isa 6:1–3; Ps 96:9); 4) sovereignty (Rom 8:28); 5) compassion (Ps 103:8–18); and also in the Gospels: 6) in Christ (Matt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Luke 7:13); 7) wisdom (Rom 11:33–36); and 8) love (John 3:16; 15:13; Eph 3:17–19).

[65] MacArthur, interview.

> (Rom 12:13); 11) blessing those who persecute us, which demonstrates a godly perspective (Rom 12:14); 12) learning to sympathize and empathize, which demonstrates a heart of compassion (Matt 7:12); 13) being impartial, which reflects one's understanding of God's dealings with mankind (Rom 12:16); 14) avoiding elitism, which reveals a commitment to follow the example of Christ in ministering to the lowly (Rom 12:16); 15) avoiding conceit, which indicates a proper assessment of self (Rom 12:16); 16) not returning evil for evil, which reflects a trust in God's sovereign plan (Rom 12:17); 17) respecting what is right and true, which serves as a good testimony to the world (Rom 12:17); 18) living at peace with everyone when possible (Rom 12:18), 19) overcoming evil with good, which maintains the priority of Christlikeness in our witness to the world (Rom 12:20).[66]

The godly life of the pastor-theologian will be manifested in his relationships with other individuals. But this external conduct must be grounded in the pastor-theologian's internal union with the Savior.

Godliness and Prayer

Of all the ministerial accomplishments of John MacArthur, there is one area in which he, like every other man of God, desires he had done more—prayer. This is not unusual for any man of God to confess. No genuine minister of the gospel will ever say, *I am satisfied in all I have accomplished for the Savior's cause*. In a personal interview, MacArthur stated plainly, "I wish I had prayed more. If I had sought the Lord in prayer more than I have done, then I wonder what else I could have done for Him, what ministries might be more developed, have further reach, have a greater impact for Christ."[67] His words must be taken to heart for ministers of the Lord, particularly younger men with natural talent. There is a specific admonition to them because of a tendency to be self-reliant. Yet, it is also a warning to the seasoned pastor because of confidence in past success and experience. MacArthur's statement is also a warning to men who would minister without the power of God's grace through the means of prayer. Men who minister in this fashion are not acting as faithful men of God. Rather, they operate as practical atheists because they suppose they may live life and minister the words of life without divine aid, which is a form of denying the Savior and His sufficient means.

It is not true that every man who struggles to nurture a prayer life will succumb to moral temptation. However, such a man does place himself on the edge of a trail with a deep valley below. Of course, many do fall, even though for a while it appeared that their life matched their doctrine, only to discover a life of duplicity. J. C. Ryle succinctly and soberly identifies a reason for such a dichotomy of life. Ryle's challenge to prayer as a combatant to temptation should be heeded; for if not heeded, a spiritual fall may await:

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[66] See MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity*, 139–58.
[67] Ibid.

> You may be very sure men fall in private, long before they fall in public. They are backsliders on their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world. Like Peter, they first disregard the Lord's warning to watch and pray; and then, like Peter, their strength is gone, and in the hour of temptation they deny their Lord. The world takes notice of their fall, and scoffs loudly. But the world knows nothing of the real reason.[68]

If not nurtured with the Word, prayer, and genuine fellowship, the private life of the man of God will undergo decay which may eventually lead to public disgrace. Ryle's warning that a life without prayer is a life on the verge of failure is sober food for the minister of God. It is clearly best to eat the food of sobriety than the bitter meal of a shamed life and the guilt of reproaching the name of Christ. A life without prayer is one lived with a sense of self-reliance, and self-reliance cannot possibly honor and bring glory to the Savior. God is most glorified when His grace is on display in the lives of His chosen ones. It is then that creation sees the manifold kindness of the Lord. Ryle was convinced that prayer was the lifeblood of the believer. These words indicate that if the pastor-theologian is to reflect the glory of his theological discourse and preaching, he must be a man given to prayer and personal devotion as he fosters a life of holiness. When asked about the relationship of holiness and the pastor's prayer life, MacArthur stated:

> I think in an overall sense, the widest point for us to begin, we must be praying without ceasing. It means that prayer is our spiritual breathing. You can hold your breath for a while. But eventually, you must take in air as the pressure builds. I believe that you must cultivate a ready communion with the Lord, so in one sense, everything turns to praise or petition, thanksgiving, or beseeching. It is how we can live and thrive in the world.[69]

The pastor-theologian understands that all he accomplishes for Christ has its source in the grace of God and the prayers of the believers. Even the most gifted minister will succeed in the cause of the Savior only as the Lord supplies him with the spiritual power to work. Every soul that comes to faith does not trace its source to the eloquence of the speech but to the sovereign hand of the Spirit calling and regenerating souls. This reality is a reason MacArthur said, "Because God says, *call upon me, and I will answer you and do great and mighty things*—this means that when God is doing great things, then believers are calling on the Lord. I honestly do think that a man's ministry, when it takes on the character of divine blessing, is not just him praying; it is many people seeking God's gracious hand on the ministry."[70]

Amid the minister's schedule, there are many opportunities for appointments, teaching, formal instruction, counseling, administrative duties, and a host of other obligations. If the pastor-theologian is to nurture a private life that honors Christ and prepares him for the tasks ahead, he must fight the propensity to neglect seeking the face of God in prayer. It is in his seeking that he will find the wisdom and strength

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[68] J. C. Ryle, *Do You Pray? A Question for Everybody* (Welwyn Gaden City, UK: EP Books, 2018), 29.
[69] MacArthur, interview.
[70] Ibid.

for the tasks before him. Every minister must feel the weight of disregarding their Master and divine friend. His disregard is the object of criticism in MacArthur's analogy of a friend we ignore. This analogy should act as a convicting principle for the busy pastor-theologian who forfeits communion with God in prayer, particularly when he justifies neglect by rationalizing that he is working hard for the Lord with whom he spends infrequent time. The lack of time spent is an indication of the minister's reliance on personal strength, education, and experience. This is a dangerous position for the pastor, as it places him in the role of one who preaches dependency on the grace of Christ to congregations but lives a life of self-righteous reliance. MacArthur's words remind us of our friendship with Christ that must not be neglected and the sufficiency of His grace for the work of Christ that must be sought:

> Imagine spending an entire workday with your best friend at your side. You would no doubt acknowledge his presence throughout the day by introducing him to your friends or business associates and talking to him about the various activities of the day. But how would your friend feel if you never talked to him or acknowledged his presence? Yet that's how we treat the Lord when we fail to pray. If we communicated with our friends as infrequently as some of us communicate with the Lord, those friends might soon disappear.[71]

In a personal conversation, MacArthur explained his perspective on prayer, saying the following:

> As long as you feel that insufficiency and dependence on God, you will pray without ceasing. I think there is a sense in which prayer is not just time spent talking to the Lord. But it's somewhat of an unspoken dependency, an unspoken satisfaction. So that I can say, this is what You have ordained. This is what You have brought. Then I don't fight it. I don't resist it.[72]

When the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray, He offered a concise yet profound template for their consideration. The instruction provided is a lasting pattern for the church, as each major aspect of the prayer has multiple implications. Overall, prayer is an indication of a relationship between a redeemed soul and the gracious Savior who maintains open communication through prayer for our benefit. The major contribution of the Savior's teaching for the church and its leaders is reaffirming the true disciple's relationship with God. MacArthur distinguishes seven features of Christ's lesson on prayer. If the pastor-theologian is to maintain an abiding relationship with the Master, he cannot disregard these seven implications of prayer:

> The initial benefit of this prayer is the way it exhibits the believer's relationship with God. "Our Father" presents the father-child relationship; "hallowed be Your name," the deity-worshipper; "Your kingdom come," the sovereign-subject; "Your will be done," the master-servant; "give us this day our daily bread," the

[71] John MacArthur, *Alone with God: Rediscovering the Power and Passion of Prayer* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011), 20–21.

[72] MacArthur, interview.

> benefactor-beneficiary; "forgive us our debts," the savior-sinner; and "do not lead us into temptation," the guide-pilgrim.[73]

The importance of prayer for the gospel preacher is its effect on the life of the preacher in a manner similar to preparation and preaching—it sanctifies him. Prayer, MacArthur explains, is "a sanctifying grace that changes our lives dramatically."[74] The person who engages in sincere communion with God in prayer cannot do so and remain unchanged because sincere prayer recognizes one's sheer dependence, enjoys the unique and intimate experience of God's presence, and senses the Spirit's support amid human frailty (Rom 8:26). All of these elements are used to move and mature the conscience of the one seeking conformity to Christ as their shortcomings become more apparent. Prayer is also a shield for the soul as our "petition is thus another plea for God to provide what we in ourselves do not have. It is an appeal to God to place a watch over our eyes, our ears, our mouths, our feet, and our hands—that in whatever we see, hear, or say, and in any place we go, and in anything we do, He will protect us from sin."[75]

Prayer also must consume the pastor-theologian and every believer in the realm of evangelism. No genuine pastor-theologian can minister in his particular area of giftedness but lack a passion for lost souls. The church without a heart for lost souls is assuredly a church without a vision of Christ's purpose and its own. MacArthur has exhorted the people of Grace Community Church, students, and church leaders for decades with the reminder that our existence on the earth must focus on evangelism, as the opportunity to do so does not extend into eternity. This may seem an obvious point, but the church's lack of priority in evangelism makes the point not so obvious. Perhaps the church may seek lost souls more if they sought the Lord's favor in the task? Every organization in Grace Community Church's network of ministries has the ultimate objective of witnessing to the lost as an edified body of believers will be an evangelistic body because they understand their purpose for existence. If the pastor-theologian is to be one thing, he must be a man with a passion for the lost, and that passion must manifest itself in witnessing to them and praying for their souls. It is no wonder MacArthur stressed the need for evangelistic prayer:

> The central function of the church on earth is to reach the lost. Paul knew that the Ephesians would never do that as long as they maintained their selfish exclusivism. To carry out their mission in the world, they must be made to understand the breadth of the gospel call. And the first feature in understanding that is to come to grips with evangelistic praying. Praying for the lost should never be cold, detached, or impersonal, like a public defender assigned to represent a defendant. Understanding the depths of their misery and pain, and their coming doom, we must cry to God for the salvation of sinners.[76]

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[73] MacArthur, *Alone with God*, 56.
[74] MacArthur, 107.
[75] MacArthur, 146, 148–49.
[76] MacArthur, 170, 172.

Conclusion

Pastor-Theologian John MacArthur's unyielding commitment to preaching, teaching, and living the truth is a life that inspires private and public godliness. His teaching over the decades on what it means to be a *man of God* provides a foundation for a life worthy of the divine call to Christian ministry. It is one of godliness manifested in a life of integrity and nurtured through private devotion. Over the sixty years of gospel preaching, pastoral care, leadership development, conference speaking, and educational guidance, he remains a flagship of commitment to biblical godliness in doctrine and lifestyle. This standard of excellence in character is the spiritual anchorage for the Grace Community Church network of international ministries, and by God's grace, MacArthur has set an example for others to follow as they seek Christ.

His consistency of life, one free of moral scandal, is inspiring for genuine men of God as they navigate the increasing hostilities of society and mounting opportunities for moral compromise. In a significant sense, MacArthur is from another time not only because of his age, but also because of his strength of conviction. With his bold commitment to Christ and the truth, which is lacking both in secular and church culture, MacArthur stands as an increasing minority. If the church is to have a more effective impact in the world, the pastor-theologians must be expected to live according to what they teach, and what they teach must be Scripture. The man of God must be a soldier of Christ, given to a godly lifestyle, so that others will say, *I will follow him as he follows Christ* (1 Cor 11:1).

John MacArthur understands the sobriety of the call of pastoral ministry to a life of godliness and its subsequent influence for the glory of God. He also grasps the need for a prudent life because a failure in the pastor-theologian's private life will lead to the church's and its people's detriment. The possibility of dishonoring the name of Christ must motivate the man of God to be a man who enjoys the presence of God and strives to direct hearts to the glory of God. Any exhortation in MacArthur's writings, preaching, and lecturing is an exhortation for every pastor-theologian to live as a servant-leader who nurtures his private life so that it will mirror what he proclaims and instructs others. In the end, those whose lives remain consistent with their doctrine must, like MacArthur, declare that it was only "the goodness of God. He is the one who protected me."[77]

It is the prayer of many that God will continue to protect John MacArthur so that he will finish his course, and even after he crosses into his eternal reward, all who knew and were influenced by him may say, "There was a man of God who nurtured his private life; his life matched his doctrine, and by God's grace I will do the same!"

[77] MacArthur, interview.

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 191–202

THE IMPORTANCE OF A UNIFIED DOCTRINAL STATEMENT FOR THE MASTER'S SEMINARY AND FOR TRAINING PASTOR-TEACHERS

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This essay explores elements of integrity which explain why a unified theology is an imperative for The Master's Seminary (TMS) and for training pastor-teachers. Biblical, educational, and ecclesiastical integrity all contribute to training pastor-teacher in accord with the primary purpose or intent of TMS. The concluding remarks prescribe both a preventative approach to avoid or correct doctrinal drift and a suggestive reading list related to this subject.

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Introduction

If I were to be asked, "Why does The Master's Seminary have a unified[1] doctrinal statement?" or "What is so important about TMS having a unified doctrinal statement?", I would answer with this one word: integrity.[2] Biblical integrity, educational integrity, and ecclesiastical integrity are the metrics that demand a TMS unified doctrinal statement which has the full, unreserved, and annual affirmation of the entire Board, leadership, and faculty.

"Integrity" is of Latin origin (*integritās*), meaning "intact, complete, sound, whole." It has come to be used in an ethical sense of a person being wholly upright, moral, honest, and truthful in regard to accepted beliefs and/or practices, both

[1] In the context of training pastors and teachers, "unified" connotes a doctrinal/theology statement that the entire Board, leadership, and faculty can affirm as biblically true.

[2] The following biblically-based resources expand on this essay's discussion of integrity. John F. MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997); John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 11–26; Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990).

attitudinally (character) and behaviorally (conduct). Put simply, integrity is essentially expressed by living in harmony with one's beliefs. Biblically speaking, the concept is rich with life application in the Psalms (7:8; 15:2; 25:21; 26:1, 11; 41:12; 101:2) and Proverbs (2:7; 10:9; 11:3; 19:1; 20:7).

Psalm 78:70–72 vividly illustrates the idea from the life of King David. God took him from shepherding actual sheep (78:70–71a) in order to shepherd the nation of Israel, which he did with integrity (Heb., *tōm*) of heart and skillful hands (78:71b–72). God later set David's standard of walking in integrity of heart and uprightness before Solomon, promising blessing if he and his sons obeyed God's Word, or blight for disobedience (1 Kings 9:4–9; 1 Chron 28:9). Integrity qualified David to be recognized as a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; 1 Kings 14:8; Acts 13:22).

John MacArthur captures the essence of "integrity" in the training for and practice of pastoral ministry, when he states:

> Integrity is one of the indispensable attributes of Christlike character, especially for those who would be shepherds. As vital as it is to be sound in doctrine and faithful in teaching the truth of Scripture, it is by no means *less* crucial for Christian leaders to be upright in heart and consistent in their obedience to the moral and ethical principles of God's law.[3]

Answers to the following questions would help to determine the integrity of any seminary:

1. Does the seminary have a unified set of biblical beliefs that inform biblical behavior (i.e., biblical integrity)?
2. Does the seminary's curriculum and teaching content uniformly reflect the biblical mandates for doctrine and ministry? Does the seminary teach and train students for pastoral ministry as taught in Scripture and as reflected in its catalog, website, and promotional literature (i.e., educational integrity)?
3. Do the seminary's graduates bring to their churches a biblical doctrine that corresponds with the school's doctrinal statement and curriculum (i.e., ecclesiastical integrity)?

Integrity begins with a unified doctrinal statement that leads to a seminary intentionally training pastor-teachers in such a way that they reflect what Scripture teaches about their beliefs and their preaching and shepherding. The remainder of this essay intends to flesh out these three pillars of integrity as they relate to seminary training which rests on the foundation of a unified doctrinal statement.

Biblical Integrity

Isolating scriptural doctrine from Christian ministry cannot be sustained biblically. J. Gresham Machen labeled this kind of thinking "the modern hostility to doctrine."[4]

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[3] John F. MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 320.

[4] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 18. The entirety of Chapter 2 (pgs. 17–53) is well worth reading.

Christianity strongly resists being separated from doctrine because the Christian life is a way of life that is founded on a biblical message. That is reflected in Paul telling Timothy to watch both his life and doctrine closely (1 Tim 4:16). Thus, to demonstrate biblical integrity, any seminary must accord with sound doctrine, train pastor-teachers to proclaim it, and point them toward true authority which comes from God.

The Importance of Sound Doctrine

It is no understatement that sound doctrine has been neglected in many churches and Christian institutions today. But is the current distaste for biblical doctrine new? Christ lamented about this in His day as He cited Isaiah, saying, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (Matt 15:8–9; Cf. Isa 29:13). Strange teaching of every kind tickled the ears of first-century people who were carried away from the truth because they could not endure sound doctrine (Eph 4:14; 2 Tim 4:3–4; Heb 13:9).

Doubters and deniers must seriously revisit Pilate's inquiry, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) and embrace again Christ's answer to His disciples that God's Word is truth (John 17:17). If truth is the quest, then Scripture is the source. Reflect on Moses' words later quoted by Jesus in fighting off Satan's wilderness temptations: "…man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; cf. Deut 8:3). Biblical truth is the essence of life.

Biblically speaking, Christian doctrine is scriptural truth. Two New Testament words most often relate to doctrine, teaching, or instruction—*didachē* and *didaskalia*. Comparing their combined fifty-one appearances affirms that Christian doctrine refers to Scripture, whether read, explained, or even theologically systematized. Perhaps the modern avoidance of doctrine lies partially in the fact that "doctrine" has been understood too narrowly like a doctrinal statement or theological essay, rather than more broadly in the Scriptural sense of biblical content. The Bible never envisioned doctrine referring to ivory tower musings over theological speculation or minutiae.

Paul, in his last epistles written to Timothy and Titus, emphasized that doctrinal teaching must be "sound" (*hygiainō*), which appears eight times.[5] "Sound" was primarily a medical term used of physical well-being and wholeness (3 John 2). In the Pastoral Epistles, however, it is employed metaphorically with teaching or doctrine (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9, 2:1), faith (Titus 1:13, 2:2), and words (1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13), all referring to Scripture as the gold standard (inerrant and infallible) by which all purported doctrine is to be measured for its authenticity or lack thereof.

Scripture always refers to "sound doctrine" in relationship to Christian doctrine which finds its ultimate source in God, while all other doctrine is either of man (Col 2:22) or demons (1 Tim 4:1). Christian doctrine is sound—all other is unsound (1:10; 6:3). Christian doctrine is good, thus profitable; all other is bad and valueless (1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 3:16).

Since Christian doctrine is all about biblical truth and biblical truth is all about God's Word, then seminaries and churches must affirm a high view of Scripture and doctrine. But with equal importance, they must also make Scripture the basis for translating sound Christian doctrine into godly living "so that in every way they will

[5] TDNT, "ὑγιής, ὑγιαίνω," 8:307–13.

make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 2:10). Simply put, Christian doctrine serves as the constitution of godly living. Doctrine proves as indispensable to Christianity as a skeleton to the body or oxygen to breathing. Without Christian doctrine, believers would be stripped of truth. The New Testament epistles overflow with exhortations to make "sound doctrine" the very heart of Christian faith and ministry.

Paul reminded Timothy and Titus of the following responsibilities: 1) to be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching (1 Tim 4:6); 2) what you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching (2 Tim 1:13); 3) preach the Word (4:2); 4) hold firmly to the trustworthy message…exhort others by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9); and 5) teach what is in accord with sound doctrine (2:1). Just imagine where the integrity of the gospel would be if Paul had not publicly confronted Peter over faulty doctrine (Gal 2:11–21).

Christ's ministry (Matt 7:28–29), the apostles' ministry (Acts 5:28), and the early church's ministry (Acts 2:42) all revolved around sound doctrine. In effect, to minimize or question the value of doctrine belittles Christ, the apostles, and the early church, not to mention countless Christian martyrs like John the Baptist (Mark 6:21–29), William Tyndale, and Jim Elliot. Why would anyone not fully embrace sound doctrine possessing such a glorious legacy, providing priceless eternal value (2 Tim 3:16), and promising God's blessing for obedience (Josh 1:8; Rev 1:3)?

Imagine what would happen if the standard of sound doctrine were forsaken. On what basis would false teachers be rejected (Rom 16:17; 2 John 9–10) or false doctrine be refuted (Titus 1:9)? How would believers know what was true and worth holding on to (1 Tim 3:9; Rev 2:24–25)? How would Christians distinguish between right and wrong? How would sin be confronted and corrected?

Obviously, these kinds of spiritual disasters must be prevented at all costs. Modern believers, like their spiritual ancestors, must contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Historically, indifference to Christian doctrine has produced heretics, but attention to doctrine has crowned heroes of the faith. So rather than getting beyond doctrine, we urgently need to get back to doctrine and steadfastly remain there.

The Role of Pastor-Teachers

But, sound doctrine in and of itself is not enough. Paul wrote to the church of Rome, "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14). God intended for sound doctrine to be heard as proclaimed by pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11). The Greek noun which is translated "teachers" (*didaskalos*) is from the same word group (*didaskalia*) discussed above and translated as "doctrine, teaching." John MacArthur explains it in this way:

> Though teaching can be identified as a ministry on its own (1 Cor 12:28), pastors and teachers are best understood as one office of leadership in the church. Often the word "and" (*kai*) means "that is" or "in particular," making teachers in this context explanatory of pastors. That meaning cannot be conclusively proven in this text, but the text of 1 Timothy 5:17 clearly puts the two functions together when it says: "Let

> the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (lit., "labor to exhaustion in word and teaching"). Those two functions define the teaching shepherd.[6]

Functionally, Paul refers to pastors (*poimēn*) who proclaim doctrine. Therefore, TMS purposes to develop pastors whose preaching and teaching content is doctrinal, that is, that it is the teaching of Scripture. Dr. Martyn-Lloyd Jones summed it up well, "True expository preaching is, therefore doctrinal preaching…"[7]

Proclamation with Divine Authority

So, at the heart of biblical ministry, doctrine is proclaimed by pastor-teachers. Now, one other thought completes this section on "Biblical Integrity." It is that pastor-teachers in their proclamation are to do it with "authority." But with whose authority? Man's or God's?

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul exhorts Timothy to "preach (*kērysso*) the word." The Greek verb for "preach" means to herald and in this case the preacher is to proclaim "the Word" (i.e., the Word of God) (Acts 6:4; 18:5; Eph 5:26; Col 4:3; Jas 1:21–23). He is to sound forth God's message on behalf of God with God's authority, not his own (cf. Titus 2:15). Therefore, the pastor-teacher has 1) no other word to preach than God's Word, and 2) no other authority than that of God, both in his commission to preach and the content of his preaching.

In light of the comments above, it would be appropriate to ask several pressing questions:

1. Who would want to preach any other word than God's Word?
2. Who would want to disregard the King of kings' proclamation and substitute some other message?
3. Who would want to disregard His marching orders from on high?
4. Who would dare to think that he has a better message than God?
5. Who wants to stand before God and have to explain why he took a different direction in his preaching than that prescribed by God?

The answer is that no preacher committed to a God-glorifying and Christ-honoring ministry would. Every pastor should herald the Word of God, sound doctrine to his hearers, doing so in the authority of God Himself.

Therefore, TMS is committed to enrolling men who have been enabled (2 Tim 2:7) and appointed (2 Cor 5:18–20) by God, plus entrusted (2 Tim 1:14; 2:2) with His Word. The TMS Academic Catalog makes the seminary's primary mission abundantly clear: "The Master's Seminary exists to equip godly men to be pastors and/or trainers of pastors for service to Christ."[8] Thus the mission of TMS is to train

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[6] John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 143; cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 284 where he reasons that "all pastors were to be teachers, though not all teachers were to be pastors."

[7] D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 110.

[8] The Master's Seminary Academic Catalog 2022–2023, pg. 16, https://tms.edu/academic-catalog/

men for pastoral ministry—to preach the Word of God and to teach others to do the same. This mission begins with biblical integrity that then extends to educational and ecclesiastical integrity.

Educational Integrity

Having begun with biblical integrity reflected in an institution's *unified doctrinal statement*, then a *curriculum* must be assembled whose teachings result in a student or graduate unapologetically believing what scriptural doctrine teaches and who is intentionally committed to shaping his ministry in such a fashion. This curriculum must reflect the knowledge and skills that the Bible prescribes for a pastor-teacher.

The TMS website affirms that, "To have a ministry that pleases God, pastors must prioritize His Word. Our *doctrinal statement* carefully outlines the seminary's teaching position on major biblical doctrines. It is the framework for every class, syllabus, and lecture."[9] Thus, the *curriculum* is designed to produce a well-rounded pastor and preacher. The Master of Divinity program prepares one to handle God's Word precisely and shepherd God's people effectively as prescribed by Scripture.

Next, there needs to be a well-chosen *faculty* who by belief, substantial educational preparation, and pastoral experience are able to teach the curriculum as laid out by the seminary without deviation from the uniform doctrinal beliefs of the school. All of this process might be termed as "a logical and functional coherence" that proceeds accordingly: first comes a coherent biblical *doctrine*, that then informs the *curriculum* to train pastor-teachers, which subsequently requires a doctrinally unified and well-prepared *faculty*. These three vital elements to a seminary education find unified doctrine at the core of this endeavor. In so doing, there will be no separation of or contradiction between sound doctrine and faithfulness in ministry.

Ultimately, these three steps—a uniform *doctrine*, a biblically based *curriculum* to train pastor-teachers, and a *faculty* with both uniform doctrinal convictions and demonstrated educational capabilities—will result in a *catalog* that explains in detail what the purpose, method, and outcomes are which a seminary pursues. It promises in detail what each student and each church who receives a graduate should expect as a result of being trained at that school. The catalog, in a sense, serves as a promise in regard to what the seminary will do and a certification or guarantee as to what a graduate believes doctrinally.

What a man preaches and how he shepherds the flock should be the result of an educational process that begins with a unified doctrinal statement. This kind of *educational integrity* complements *biblical integrity* and leads to *ecclesiastical integrity*.

Ecclesiastical Integrity

This final element of integrity requires that the students and graduates of The Master's Seminary fulfill their commission as pastor-teachers of the churches in which they serve (Eph 4:11). How does this happen? The students and graduates must

[9] See John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017) for an expansion of the TMS doctrinal statement found in the TMS catalog.

be committed to their Scripture-prescribed, primary, pastoral role in which they are trained at The Master's Seminary.

Scripture speaks of Christians "being of the same mind" (Rom 15:5; Phil 2:2) and "attaining to the unity of the faith" (Eph 4:13). Paul elaborates on this *oneness* in Ephesians 4:4–6 where he emphasizes "one faith" (v. 5). Churches are biblically exhorted to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). This can only occur if seminaries adhere to and teach from a unified doctrinal stance that defines the content of a pastor's preaching. The mind around which believers are to be united is the mind of Christ (1 Cor 1:10, 2:16) which encompasses the doctrinal intent of the entire Bible.

Paul outlines the specific God-ordained responsibilities of a pastor-teacher in the last of his thirteen epistles with a five-fold charge to Timothy regarding his proclamation of a unified theology extracted from the Bible.

1. *Preserve and protect God's Word with diligence*: "Hold to the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*" (2 Tim 1:13–14).
2. *Propagate God's Word with purpose*: "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2).
3. *Process God's Word with precision*: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).
4. *Persist in and practice God's Word with spiritual profit*: "But you, continue in the things you learned and became convinced of, knowing from whom you learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be equipped, having been thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:14–17).
5. *Preach God's Word with authority*: "Preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2).

If this is what a seminary is committed to in training its students and enabling its graduates to practice, then it has demonstrated ecclesiastical integrity by producing a pastor-teacher who is marked by the uncompromised preaching and teaching of God's Word characterized by a unified doctrine once for all delivered to the saints.

Because TMS teaches a unified doctrinal position, over 1,800 graduates and over 600 current students at TMS, and over 7,000 alumni and over 2,000 current students of TMAI share a common biblically-based education, a common doctrinal conviction, and a common ministry model. As a result, TMS and TMAI are widely trusted for their fidelity to Scripture and its outworking in local churches worldwide.

Conclusion: How to Avoid the Unavoidable[10]

Yet, as history has shown, many seminaries that might have at one point possessed biblical, educational, and ecclesiastical integrity have fallen by the wayside. This may cause one to wonder: Is it possible for The Master's Seminary to maintain its integrity?

A starting point for this query can be found in the letters to the churches in Revelation. In Revelation 3:8, Jesus addresses the church of Philadelphia and says, you "have kept My Word and have not denied My name." When the church in Philadelphia heard this commendation from the Lord Jesus, I can only imagine how uplifting it must have been for this small band of believers. Yet, they were the exception to the rule. In Christ's messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3, five received strong rebukes (Smyrna in 2:8–11 and Philadelphia in 3:7–13 were the exception). Ephesus forgot her love for Christ (2:1–7). Pergamum entertained false teaching (2:12–17). Thyatira tolerated sin (2:18–29). Sardis was spiritually dead (3:1–6). Laodicea became self-righteous (3:14–22).

I remember my favorite seminary professor, Dr. John Whitcomb, being concerned about the future of the seminary that I attended. He sent me an article recalling the first graduate seminary in America, Andover (now Andover Newton). Begun in 1807 as a beacon of doctrinally sound pastoral training, Andover produced graduates like Adoniram Judson, the 19th century missionary whom God used mightily to preach the gospel in Myanmar (Burma). Andover long ago began abandoning the Christian faith, and just recently formed a sweeping interfaith education program, offering training in multiple religions. In fact, their student body now represents over 30 different faiths.

This is a sobering thought as we look to protect the future integrity of The Master's Seminary. Seminaries are almost unavoidably corrupted by doctrinal error and sin within several generations. Given the bleak forecast from history, our challenge is to obey Christ's command to Philadelphia: "I am coming quickly; hold fast to what you have" (3:11). The mission is clear: avoid the unavoidable.

The life-expectancy of integrity in Bible-believing seminaries is usually brief, so we have given great thought for many years as to what might threaten The Master's Seminary. What flaming arrows in his packed arsenal will Satan try to use? (Eph 6:16) With Scripture guiding us, we have identified the following: a) two general threats; b) six specific threats; c) ten shields of protection; and d) one shield of shields.

Two General Threats to The Master's Seminary

Knowing Satan's ploys from Scripture, I have asked myself: "If I were Satan, how would I try to derail The Master's Seminary?"

To start with, I would bring two broad, deviously subtle threats. I would try to slowly change the mission and the doctrine of TMS. I would create tiny fissures and weaknesses, so imperceptible that they would cause no immediate alarm. After

[10] This section represents a lightly edited version of the original article "Avoiding the Unavoidable: Protecting The Master's Seminary for Future Generations," *TMSJ* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 1–4.

causing a sufficiently weakened structure, then would I launch a bold offensive to detonate multiple fatal explosions.

Six Specific Threats to The Master's Seminary

If I were Satan, what specific threats would I slowly introduce? First, I would encourage hiring the wrong faculty. History shows that one wrong faculty member can lead to the eventual demise of a seminary by his subtle altering of the seminary's mission and/or doctrine.

Second, I would encourage neglecting a biblical commitment to the local church. TMS exists to serve the church by training qualified shepherds. Once we forget our dedication to Christ's bride, we become a self-serving institution instead of an instrument in the hands of God to bless His people.

Third, I would encourage neglecting finances. As a 50-year student of seminary history, the foot-high stack of articles in my office proves that a seminary's approach to money has staggering implications. The Master's Seminary is a spiritual enterprise, but pragmatically fueled by finances. Economic pressure can tempt a seminary to slide down the icy slope of increasing enrollment at all costs. Typically, this includes relaxing doctrinal standards, lowering admission requirements, accepting unsaved students, and broadening degree programs to widen overall marketing appeal. For the sake of money, the seminary abandons its founding roots.

Fourth, if I were Satan, I would erode a focused curriculum. The curriculum at TMS, designed to mold Bible expositors and shepherds, is the expression of our mission. As Andover has done, I would replace Hermeneutics, Greek, Hebrew, Theology, Apologetics, and Evangelism with World Religions, Interfaith Engagement, the Arts, and Ethics in Society.

Fifth, I would distract the board of directors, the leadership, and the faculty away from the importance of vibrant relationships with one another. While love for God, the Scriptures, and the church motivates these men, it is their love for each other that provides encouragement and accountability.

Finally, if I were Satan and wanted to ruin TMS, I would overemphasize the intellectual and undermine the spiritual. Devotion to God would become devotion to research. Vast numbers of self-labeled evangelical seminaries have venerated scholarship ahead of the "simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:3). Scholarship is a vital tool, but not the goal. The goal is to love and obey God more fully in order to be equipped to shepherd others into Christlikeness. Clearly, Satan has formidable weapons. Seeing history's poor record, we could embrace an Elijah complex and simply give up. Or, we could conclude that by human effort alone The Master's Seminary has arrived as the best seminary ever, thus testing the Lord by taking human credit. With either extreme, God could easily snatch away His abundant grace that He has bestowed upon us.

Ten Shields of Protection for The Master's Seminary

We have a solemn responsibility to protect The Master's Seminary. Because we have identified ten shields that in tandem serve to defend the Lord's work here, we can

hope that if the enemy makes a massive attack, all ten would be concurrently employed, particularly if it seemed that the seminary was retreating in mission and doctrine.

The first shield involves the history, mission statement, and doctrinal statement of TMS. We have a founding mission, and we have an extensive doctrinal statement. These are the metrics, the benchmarks by which we evaluate ourselves. Each year we ask: "Is our core mission and doctrine today what it was when we started?" We also scrutinize possible changes to make us more biblical and help us carry out our fundamental purpose more effectively.

The second shield is the Board of Directors for The Master's University and Seminary. Comprised of godly men in ministry, business, and other professions, they sign annual statements of agreement with the mission and doctrine of TMS. They are passionate about the Lord's work and will faithfully guard our integrity.

The third shield is the current faculty and leadership. Our Chancellor, John MacArthur, is passionate for the long-range excellency of The Master's Seminary. Our faculty is charged with the careful and prayer-filled protection of TMS. As an officer in the United States Navy, I learned a simple axiom: If you are in charge, you are responsible. You are accountable. And now, as the former dean at TMS, I apply the same lesson. I not only adhered to the classic motto, "Not on my watch," but now hope to help build enough strength and protection into the seminary that future deans will be well served. I would prayerfully add, "Not after my watch either."

The fourth shield is our former faculty. Now in our 37th year, TMS is at the point where we have faculty members who have either moved into a new ministry or retired, but maintain their commitment to The Master's Seminary. If they saw an actual breach of integrity, I think they would unite with the board, leadership, and faculty in addressing this.

Possibly the most vital defense, the fifth shield is the careful hiring of new faculty. History demonstrates that one wrong man will, often sooner than later, disrupt the classroom and the faculty. Since the beginning, we have utilized an extensive screening process. Prior to an invitation to visit, the candidate is reviewed thoroughly. When invited to visit, he stays for a week or longer, giving us ample opportunity to get to know him, his wife, his doctrine, and his giftedness. He may be a good guy, but not right for TMS or not at this time. Or he may be a wolf in sheep's clothing and not good for TMS at any time. Consequently, to hire a new faculty member, we must have the agreement of the entire faculty, leadership, and board. This serves us well now, and in the future, and it serves the candidate well whether hired or not.

The sixth formidable shield is our alumni. The vast majority of over 1,800 graduates stay well-connected to the seminary. They stay in contact with faculty, they receive the journal, support us financially, attend the Shepherds' Conference, and return to preach in chapel. They are a tight group of men, staying in close contact with each other, whether here in America or overseas. If TMS were to deviate from our mission or doctrine, the response of this army of God's men would be astounding.

Similarly, the seventh shield is our current student body. Our students came to TMS to learn under the faculty's unified doctrinal beliefs, so I am certain that if one of our faculty said something in class even remotely off-base, such as suggesting that Jesus was not fully God and fully man concurrently, the Dean would have a line of students at his door the minute class dismissed.

The eighth shield involves our supporters and donors, standing over 14,000 strong. We have deep affection for their ministry to us. Even if they are not intimately acquainted with the daily operation of the seminary, our supporters and donors have a highly keen interest. Having worked hard for a lifetime and having sacrificially and generously given to TMS, these supporters and donors are wise stewards of wealth and want to see a return on their investment. They want to see doctrinally sound men of God rise to the challenge of ministry. We want to bless our supporters and donors with good reports of God's work even as they bless us by holding us accountable to our mission.

The ninth shield is Grace Community Church. The elders and thousands of worshippers at Grace Church stand as sentinels over TMS, having been invested since day one. Each May we hold graduation in the Worship Center. Though graduation almost always falls on Mother's Day, it is invariably packed with thousands of members and all the elders of Grace, in addition to the families of the graduates. Grace members have loved our students, being actively involved in their lives in countless ways. And since the doctrinal statements of the church and seminary are the same, we are bound together in love and belief.

Finally, the shields of Grace to You (GTY) and The Master's Academy International (TMAI) are keeping a watchful eye on TMS. The leadership of GTY and TMAI are concerned with perpetuating the ministry and teaching of John MacArthur, which is doctrinally what we teach at TMS. If it looks like we are going off-track, they will certainly ask tough questions and get involved with correcting the course.

The Shield of Shields for The Master's Seminary

While these ten shields are effective, the overarching shield of shields is prayer: humble, constant, grateful, faith-filled, God-centered prayer. Our faculty gathers regularly to intercede on behalf of TMS. Many of our students gather weekly to pray for the seminary and for one another at our Associated Student Body prayer time. We cherish the faithful prayers of you, our faithful friends and supporters. Yes, we have thought carefully about the possible threats to TMS and our defenses, but it is only the merciful power of God that is sought in prayer which neutralizes the diabolical threats and empowers our defenses.

Can The Master's Seminary avoid the unavoidable? The church in Philadelphia is proof that by God's grace and our faithfulness, we can. Our Chancellor, our president, our board, our leadership, our faculty, our alumni, and our students all have a common yearning to stand with Philadelphia and hear from our King: "You have kept My Word and have not denied My name."

For further study, see the resources in this note (with asterisks before the most helpful sources).[11]

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TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 203–223

JOHN OWEN: PASTOR THEOLOGIAN[1]

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While John Owen is recognized as a towering, academic theologian, Owen also has much to offer as a pastor. Many of Owen's theological contributions stemmed from a pastoral desire to shepherd the flock of God entrusted to him. In effect, his works on Christian doctrine emit his pastoral heart. At the same time, his pastoral commitments, such as preaching and shepherding the flock, bear notable theological emphases. Owen knew that both the knowledge of doctrine and the knowledge of people are essential components of the pastor-theologian, such that he accomplished his stewardship of being a pastor-theologian in a manner worthy of God.

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Introduction

Given the opportunity to write on a pastor-theologian in the history of the church, to select John Owen (1616–1683) appears at first sight to be trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. He was, surely, too much of a theologian to be a pastor. That intuitive reaction has stimulated the reflections that follow.

We understandably and instinctively (and rightly) think of Owen as a great theologian, perhaps the greatest theologian England has produced since the Reformation. In sharp contrast we rarely think of him as a pastor. As a theologian, most readers of his *Works*, including seminary-educated pastors, feel that he so towers above them that he can scarcely serve as a model for lesser mortals. Yet all the indications are that the mature John Owen saw his calling centered in the church rather than in the academy, and as pastoral rather than purely theoretical. While no doubt naturally gifted for and drawn to the intellectual disciplines involved in Christian theology, he did not see a radical disjunction between serious theological

[1] It is a privilege to dedicate these reflections on John Owen to Dr. John MacArthur, with gratitude to God for his long and fruitful ministry as a pastor-theologian, and with deep appreciation of his personal friendship and kindness.

reflection and devoted pastoral ministry—in fact the reverse. We can confidently say of him as has been said of Calvin before him that he became a theologian ultimately in order to become a better pastor. He grasped the inseparable relationship Scripture sets up between truth and life, doctrine and devotion, theology and pastoral ministry and its underlying principle that biblical doctrine *always* has godliness in view.

But in addition to this, what is perhaps more surprising for anyone more familiar with his reputation than with his life story—John Owen ministered in a wider variety of contexts than the majority of contemporary ministers, and, indeed, than most others we might think of as historical models of pastor-theologians. This is by no means to say that he was the pastor-theologian *par excellence*. But the fact that he often faced and felt many discouragements reassures us that he sat where most pastors sit. And the combination of gifts, graces, and providential circumstances in his life make his ministry worthy of observation.

John Owen—*Curriculum Vitae*

An imaginary short-form version of Owen's *curriculum vitae* will, perhaps, illustrate this contention. At one time or another between 1643 (when he became minister of his first pastoral charge at Fordham in Essex), and his death forty years later (when he was minister of a gathered congregation of around two hundred souls in London), Owen's CV reveals a ministry exercised in an almost bewildering variety of contexts in which his theology was put to pastoral test:

JOHN OWEN

Date of Birth 1616
Academic Qualifications B.A. (1632); M.A. (1635); D.D. (1653)

Personal Background
Father is an Anglican minister with reforming sympathies. Early interests were academic; personal spiritual pilgrimage reached a turning point, if not a crisis point, during a service at St. Mary's Church, Aldermanbury under the ministry of an unknown substitute preacher. Brought to assurance of my spiritual condition as a Christian on that occasion. Since then, life and energies have been devoted to knowing and serving God in Christ in the power of the Spirit and being faithful to the calling to minister to the church Christ purchased with his blood.

Ministry and Life
Varied and extensive experience in ministry, including the following.

- Extensive pastoral experience in small congregations, one of less than fifty and another of around two hundred, as well as in one large church
- Part of these ministries involved teaching biblical doctrine to the children in the church
- Various experiences of ministry to rural artisans

- Served as a military chaplain, travelling both to Scotland and to Ireland, and preaching to both the enlisted soldiers and the leadership of the army
- Work with students, and while a professor at Oxford University, served as a pastor-teacher to students, including team-preaching with Oxford colleague, Dr. Thomas Goodwin
- Involved, at various times, in a ministry of preaching and counselling to politicians, members of the nobility, and men at the level of General in the English Army
- Occasionally called upon in the arena of public affairs for counsel or with a view to publishing materials to help clarify issues
- Served in contexts of varying denominational-type commitment, including Episcopalianism, although personal views at that time tended towards a form of Presbyterianism. Currently minister in an Independent Church in the City of London
- Ministered in various house-church contexts, and for a season in what was, technically, an underground church movement
- Experience in broad discussions on inter-church relations. Had a main role in producing *The Savoy Declaration*
- Experience in local church union, having become the pastor of two congregations that successfully united together in the city of London
- Endeavoured to write extensively on a variety of topics of importance and relevance to Christians in their personal lives, and also tried to address various theological and societal issues of relevance and importance within the context of the various upheavals through which both England and Scotland have been passing in recent years
- Ongoing experience of testing and suffering, both ministerial (lost various appointments because of opposition) and also personal (first wife and our eleven children have all predeceased me)
- Have had little time for leisure in recent years but in earlier life had some interest in music (play the lute) and also athletics (high jump)
- Deeply committed to the work of God in the British Isles and have declined invitations to minister in the North American Colonies
- Health is probably average or less than average for my age; been declining in strength for some years

Publications

In addition to various *ad hoc* writing (book prefaces and commendations, etc.), a collection of past writings would extend to some twenty-four volumes of around six hundred pages each. Areas of special theological interest and expertise are mainly expressed in these writings.

In keeping with the spiritual brotherhood of Puritan ministers to which he belonged, Owen viewed theology as the art of living well to God. The body of divinity, the sum of biblical theology, was for him, therefore, not the special prerogative of the intellectual elite, but the property of all the people of God, and therefore needed to be possessed by them.[2] He recognized that the transformation of our lives into the image of Christ is effected through the renewing of the mind—and this requires instruction in the knowledge of God, his works, his ways, and his words—in a word, doctrine or theology (Rom 12:1–2). This lay at the heart of all his ministry, as David Clarkson, his colleague and successor, was able to tell his congregation, some of whom had known him personally and intimately for many years: "I need not tell you of this that knew him, and observed that it was his great design to promote holiness in the power, life, and exercise of it among you… He was a burning and a shining light, and you for a while rejoiced in his light."[3]

Thus, far from being the ivory-tower theologian the sight of the twenty-four substantial volumes of the Goold edition of his *Works* might suggest, Owen fully tasted the challenges and struggles experienced by all pastors, by church planters, by ministers to students, by military chaplains, and until the Great Ejection in 1662, tasted the trials experienced by faithful ministers who struggle to reform spiritually mixed denominations.

Recognizing Owen in these various pastoral contexts helps us see his ministry less as that of a uniquely gifted intellectual giant and more as a pastor-theologian whose gifts were brought in tribute at the feet of Christ for the blessing of his people. If Owen is viewed only as a towering intellectual, we will tend to see in him only a standard we cannot reach. But observe him in the above contexts and he becomes relevant to us as a man who illustrates what it means to be a pastor-theologian serving (and at times struggling) to be faithful to Christ and his people in a wide variety of life-contexts and situations. His life then becomes in equal measures instructive, encouraging, and challenging. Few if any pastors today will attain his learning, but all pastors can hold before themselves his vision and his example of what it means to be a pastor-theologian.

Owen is famous for his reticence about the autobiographical, and for his exaltation of the theological. He may well have kept a personal journal. But if he did, he either destroyed it or had it destroyed at his death. But since our work always expresses our own perspective and gifts, Owen's view of ministry inevitably comes to expression in his writings. They give us substantial access to his thinking, and on occasion offer specific reflections on the work of the pastor-theologian. We can,

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[2] The sheer number of catechisms written in the 16th and 17th centuries displaying systematic theology in condensed form and in question-and-answer format is testimony to this. By the mid-17th century, there were well over 150 different catechisms in print in England.

[3] In Leadenhall Street, London. This church was a union of Owen's own small congregation with the larger congregation of the Westminster Divine, Dr. Joseph Caryl, whom Owen had known for almost twenty-five years. See David Clarkson, *Funeral Sermon on Dr. John Owen* in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* ed. Thomas Russell (London: Richard Baynes, 1826), 1:411–422 (this can be conveniently viewed at http://www.ccel.org). Clarkson (1622–1686) served as Owen's assistant during his final illness from 1682–1683 and was an able minister in his own right. Richard Baxter praised him for his "solid judgment, healing moderate principles, acquaintance with the Fathers, great ministerial abilities, and a godly upright life," see Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London: T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, J. Lawrence and J. Dunton, 1696), 97.

perhaps, best express his views and practice by thinking of him first of all as a pastor who was a theologian and then as a theologian who was a pastor.

The Pastor as Theologian

Owen's first published work, *A Display of Arminianism* (1642),[4] was calculated to "display" (provide an exposé of) the unbiblical nature of the High Church theology associated with William Laud. But it simultaneously was a "display" of his intellectual capacities, his reformed orthodoxy, and his polemical powers, and perhaps even calculated to impress. These characteristics would soon reappear in his writings, including perhaps his most famous (and notorious) work, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647).[5] They are then present in his later massive studies such as *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* (1654—a kind of 600 plus page book review)*,*[6] *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655),[7] and his treatment of the history of theology in his major Latin work *Theologoumena Pantodapa* (1661).[8] But while major undertakings, from one point of view they are punctuation marks in his varied life. For the four decades of his career as an author were largely taken up with themes that are immediately related to the practical and pastoral up-building and well-ordering of the church of Christ and its members. These began with his *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* (1643)[9] and continued through to the end of his life in 1683 in the at-times seraphic *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* (published posthumously in 1684).[10] Thus, the *themes* Owen covers and, on occasion, the indications he gives us of the *origins* of his work, both underline his sense of calling as a pastor-theologian.

Inspiration and Authority

The inspiration and authority of Scripture was foundational for Owen. But like the apostle Paul, his exemplar, he recognized that the Scriptures were not only (i) Spirit-given and God-breathed, but also (ii) given for a pastoral purpose, namely: *usefulness* in doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, and this in turn impacts the character of preaching.[11] It is noteworthy, then, that his major treatment of the doctrine of Scripture is found within the context of his ground-breaking, multi-volume work on the Holy Spirit, *Pneumatologia.*[12] For Owen, the foundation for both epistemology and spiritual ministry was one and the same, namely the self-authenticating, Spirit-given-and-affirmed Scriptures. They are not only the words of men but the Word of God "which is at work" as it is received by

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[4] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen,* ed. W. H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–1853), 10:5–137.

[5] Owen, *Works*, 10:145–424.

[6] Owen, 11:5–666.

[7] Owen, 12:5–590.

[8] Owen, 17:15–480.

[9] Owen, 13:3–49.

[10] Owen, 1:275–415 with its 1691 addition, 1:418–461.

[11] 2 Timothy 3:16–4:5. The chapter break here is understandable but perhaps unfortunate.

[12] Owen, *Works,* 3–4.

faith (1 Thess 2:13). Through the Spirit's ongoing ministry this Word comes loaded with its own energy to convert and transform.[13]

The Trinity

Perhaps even more impressive is the approach Owen adopted when he turned to the doctrine of the Trinity. Here in his *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly,* it becomes clear that far from viewing the doctrine of the Trinity as the most speculative, abstruse and least practical of all Christian doctrines, the truth is the reverse.[14] His preface is worth quoting at length because it underlines that the origin of this significant work of *theology* is *pastoral,* written as a *pastor*-theologian.

> Christian Reader,
>
> It is now six years past since I was brought under an engagement of promise for the publishing of some meditations on the subject which thou wilt find handled in the ensuing treatise. The reasons of this delay, being not of public concernment, I shall not need to mention. Those who have been in expectation of this duty from me, have, for the most part, been so far acquainted with my condition and employments, as to be able to satisfy themselves as to the deferring of their desires. That which I have to add at present is only this: having had many opportunities, since the time I first delivered any thing in public on this subject (which was the means of bringing me under the engagements mentioned), to re-assume the consideration of what I had first fixed on, I have been enabled to give it that improvement, and to make those additions to the main of the design and matter treated on, that my first debt is come at length to be only the occasion of what is now tendered to the saints of God. I shall speak nothing of the subject here handled; it may, I hope, speak for itself, in that spiritual savour and relish which it will yield to them whose hearts are not so filled with other things as to render the sweet things of the gospel bitter to them. The design of the whole treatise thou wilt find, Christian reader, in the first chapters of the first part; and I shall not detain thee here with the perusal of any thing which in its proper place will offer itself unto thee: know only, that the whole of it hath been recommended to the grace of God in many supplications, for its usefulness unto them that are interested in the good things mentioned therein.[15]

The work is based on the apostolic benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 ("The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"). The exegesis of the text is brief; the goal is *an exposition of*

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[13] So far-reaching was Owen's conviction about divine inspiration that in his view (in which he was not alone) it extended to the vowel points of the Hebrew Bible.

[14] Owen, *Works*, 2:3–274

[15] Owen, 2:3. At the time (the preface is dated to July 10, 1657), Owen had been at Christ Church College for some five years. The reason for the hiatus between the original expositions and their publication lay in the fact that as Oxford University's Vice-Chancellor (the British equivalent of "University President" in the USA) he had faced a massive institutional reconstruction project following the Civil War.

the reality to which the text points. Hence the exposition proper is much more than an explanation of the words used. It is not possible here to elaborate on this important and characteristic aspect of Owen's expositions. But it is a key to the depth of them and the riches of application that can be found in them, and its importance should not be ignored in an era in which exegetical preaching and *lectio continua* have become *de rigeur* in many evangelical contexts. Exposition must rise beyond the level of an exercise in literary criticism, a kind of plain man's exegetical commentary with a few applications added. This falls short of what was central to Owen, namely the exposition of the objective realities to which the text of Scripture points but with which the words themselves are not identical. For Owen, the Scripture's testimony is to the realities the words describe and therefore the truth expressed in Scripture must be penetrated and laid bare. Preaching Christ, for example, must not stop short at an explanation of the words used or the flow of a passage but involves the "placarding" of the *person* of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.[16]

The process behind Owen's exposition of the Trinity involves several stages: first, the material has been formulated in his mind by meditation on *the realities* to which 2 Corinthians 13:14 points; second, this has then been shaped into a series of *expositions of the nature and significance of the realities embedded in the text*; and third, this in turn has then been further developed into *the theology with which we are confronted along with its profound pastoral implications*. There is a remarkable interplay here between Scripture, theology, and preaching and an equally remarkable illustration of the *pastor* as *theologian*. Daniel Burgess in commending it was tempted to call it "the very highest of angel's food."[17]

Once the biblical foundations for the formal doctrine of the Trinity have been simply and briefly explained, Owen's interplay of high theology and powerful pastoral ministry employs two well attested theological principles.

Principle number one is that the whole Trinity participates in any of the works of the Trinity (*opera trinitatis indivisa sunt*).

Principle number two is the related doctrine of Appropriations: in the activities of the undivided Trinity, each Person appropriates a distinct role. Thus, in creation the Father operates through the Son in the Spirit. In redemption the Father sends the Son who alone is incarnate by the Spirit, who then applies the redemption planned by the Father and gained by the Son. So while all three Persons of the Trinity engage in all of these divine works, each Person fulfils His own agreed and distinct role.

For Owen—he is not unique here but is perhaps supreme—this carries major *pastoral* implications for the believer's communion with God. The premise of the book is essentially this:

> That the saints have distinct communion with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (that is, distinctly with the Father, and distinctly with the Son, and distinctly with the Holy Spirit), and in what the peculiar *appropriation* of this

[16] The goal of apostolic ministry then is expressed in Paul's words in Colossians 1:28: "*Him* we proclaim." Preaching Christ is not for Owen the teaching of lessons about Him, but the manifesting ("placarding," Gal 3:1) of His Person, "clothed with the gospel" (to borrow Calvin's expression).

[17] Owen, *Works*, 2:4.

> distinct communion unto the several persons doth consist, must, in the first place, be made manifest. [18]

The practical effect of this is a sense of enlargement in both our knowledge of God and our fellowship with Him.

An illustration may help here. Most Christians have had the experience of being led in prayer by someone who begins by addressing the Father: "Our heavenly Father…"; then transitions to thanksgiving: "We thank You for…"; but then, without any change in the Person addressed, the individual praying adds: "We also thank You for coming to die for us on the cross…." We know that our liturgist does not mean to commit the heresy of Patripassianism. He knows well enough that only the Son was incarnate and suffered on the tree; he has simply mixed up his wording.

In such a context, we intuitively grasp the doctrinal issue Owen takes as foundational. What he does, however, is draw out the positive theological-pastoral implications of this. If it was the Son (and not the Father or the Spirit) who died on the cross for us, then we are able to praise the Son and have communion with Him *with respect to this special dimension of His Person and work*—communion with Him in grace. And this is a unique aspect of our knowledge of Him and therefore our fellowship with Him. So too, *mutatis mutandis,* for the distinct roles and activities of the other two members of the undivided Trinity, the Father, and the Spirit.

Owen is further seen at his best here in his emphasis on the fact that the believer's distinct communion with the Father is *in love.* This, he says, "is the great *discovery* of the gospel."[19] Outside of Christ, one might think, we know God only as One who condemns us; we cannot think of Him in any other way, disguise our thoughts as we might.[20] But in his ministry, Owen had encountered and observed—apparently often—a pathological spiritual condition in both the way the gospel was proclaimed and in the ongoing instincts of believers. The gospel is sometimes (too often?) preached as: "The Father loves you because Christ died for you." But this, as Owen saw clearly, turns the gospel on its head. Such preaching can never ultimately persuade us that the Father *Himself* loves us. This portrayal concludes that love has been *purchased*; it is a *constrained* love, not a free, unfettered, unconditional love on the part of the Father Himself.

The gospel truth, Owen insists, is *not* "The Father loves us *because* Christ died for us" but "Christ died for us *because* the Father loves us"; "the Father loves us *and therefore* the Son died for us." This is a different logic, the logic of the gospel of the Trinity. The divine love for sinners originates in the heart of the Father. Christian believers therefore need to discover and be reassured of this: "The Father himself loves you" (John 16:27).

For Owen, then, at this point right theology has the most important implications for pastoral ministry. If theology goes wrong here, the preacher will distort the gospel, and as a pastor he will be unable to untie the knots he has created in his

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[18] Owen, *Works*, 2:9–10.

[19] Owen, 2:19.

[20] Cf. the conclusion to Paul's argument in Romans 1:18–32 in his statement in v. 32 that, "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."

people's souls. There will always be lingering doubts about the reality and depth of the Father's love. This at least was what Owen had witnessed:

> . . . as this love is peculiarly to be eyed in him, so it is to be looked on as the *fountain* of all following gracious dispositions. *Christians walk oftentimes with exceedingly troubled hearts, concerning the thoughts of the Father towards them. They are well persuaded of the Lord Christ and his good-will; the difficulty lies in what is their acceptance with the Father.*[21]

There is often a relentlessness in Owen's writing. He does not let go of a theme until he has exhausted it as far as Scripture allows. This is one of those places. But this is the relentlessness of a physician determined to find a diagnosis, and prescribe a cure, or a surgeon determined to excise every vestige of a malignancy. His concern here is the cognitive gap between who the Father really is and how He is perceived, and the resulting affection-dissonance this creates:

> Many dark and disturbing thoughts are apt to arise in this thing. *Few can carry up their hearts and minds to this height by faith, as to rest their souls in the love of the Father; they live below it in the troublesome region of hopes and fears, storms and clouds*. All here is serene and quiet. But how to attain to this pitch they know not.[22]

Later Owen circles the wagons one more time:

> How few of the saints are experimentally acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the Father in love. With what anxious, doubtful thoughts do they look upon him! What fears, what questionings are there, of his good-will and kindness. *At the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in him towards us, but what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus.* It is true, that alone is the way of communication; but the free fountain and spring of all is in the bosom of the Father.[23]

Here we might well echo the feeling of the author of Hebrews that "time would fail me to tell" of similar illustrations of the way Owen's *theological* acumen is placed at the disposal of his *pastoral* ministry. It is illustrated repeatedly in his *Exposition of Psalm 130*,[24] in *The Dominion of Sin and Grace*,[25] in *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*,[26] and in *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers together with the Ways of its Working and Means of Prevention Opened, Evinced and Applied together with a Resolution of Sundry Cases of Conscience thereunto appertaining.*[27]

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[21] Owen, *Works*, 2:22, italics mine.
[22] Owen, 2:23.
[23] Owen, 2:31–32, emphasis mine.
[24] Owen, 6:325–648, published in 1668.
[25] Owen, 6:505–560, posthumously published in 1688.
[26] Owen, 6:263–497, published in 1681.
[27] Owen, 6:155–322, published in 1668.

The origins of this last-named work exhibit the same pattern as before. Personal meditation on the text of Scripture has led to the examination of his own heart, and observation of others' lives has led to ministry to them, and only following the obvious spiritual benefit they have received, eventually led to a work of pastoral theology:

> What the Scripture plainly revealeth and teacheth concerning it, — what believers evidently find by experience in themselves, — what they may learn from the examples and acknowledgments of others, shall be represented in a way suited unto the capacity of the meanest and weakest who is concerned therein. And many things seem to render the handling of it at this season not unnecessary. The effects and fruits of it, which we see in the apostasies and backslidings of many, the scandalous sins and miscarriages of some, and the course and lives of the most, seem to call for a due consideration of it. Besides, of how great concernment a full and clear acquaintance with the power of this indwelling sin (the matter designed to be opened) is unto believers, to stir them up to watchfulness and diligence, to faith and prayer, to call them to repentance, humility, and self-abasement, will appear in our progress. *These, in general, were the ends aimed at in the ensuing discourse, which, being at first composed and delivered for the use and benefit of a few, is now by the providence of God made public.*[28]

The Mortification of Sin

This pattern is repeated in his short work on *The Mortification of Sin.* It again reflects his own meditation on Scripture—this time on Romans 8:13: "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Owen does not rest content with explaining the wording of the statement—that would be wooden and empty and found to result in the "comfortable success" with which, he tells us, the material met when he first expounded it, leading to its eventual publication:

> Something I have to add as to what in particular relates unto myself. Having preached on this subject unto some comfortable success, through the grace of Him that administereth seed to the sower, I was pressed by sundry persons, in whose hearts are the ways of God, thus to publish what I had delivered, with such additions and alterations as I should judge necessary…. On these and the like accounts is this short discourse brought forth to public view, and now presented unto thee. I hope I may own in sincerity, that my heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life in the station wherein the good providence of God hath placed me, are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; that so the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things: for the compassing of which end, if this little discourse (of the publishing whereof this is the sum of the account I shall

[28] Owen, *Works*, 6:155–156; emphasis mine.

> give) may in any thing be useful to the least of the saints, it will be looked on as a return of the weak prayers wherewith it is attended by its unworthy author, John Owen.[29]

What Owen's introduction does not explicitly state is the striking pastoral wisdom lying behind the original preaching of the material. For this searching, powerful, and deeply practical little book contains the substance of sermons that would almost certainly have been heard by his students at Oxford University. Doubtless, Owen was younger-than-average when he graduated at the tender age of sixteen, but not a few of those who heard the original preached form of *Mortification* would still have been in their teens. This is the work of a *pastor*-theologian with acute insight. To have built this teaching into teenagers through his preaching was surely to provide a strong foundation for lasting spiritual growth.

Many who in more recent decades have discovered these pages have recognized that Owen's teaching belongs to a different order of reality than that purveyed by the plethora of books that offer what is little more than life improvement lessons. The fundamental difference here can be summed up simply as theology, that is to say biblical theology: a biblical doctrine of God and his character leading to a right view of sin. Owen's right views of God and of sin lead to seeing the necessity of mortifying it, just as his right view of grace is essential to its pardon and conquest.

Mortification of sin is not merely disguising or even diverting it. It is the practice of seeking to put to death that for which and to which Christ died. Understanding the heinousness of our sin—as Christ-crucifying—and the wonder of the method of grace—as sin-suffocating—should belong to the bread-and-butter knowledge of all under-shepherds of the flock. But only a pastor-*theologian* will grasp how essential this is for young believers. Others will regard it as too sobering for those whose real need is to be entertained—but also sadly deceived about the size of the challenge the Christian life really is.

With this brief glance at Owen the pastor as theologian we must turn our attention to the way he exemplifies the idea of the theologian as pastor, particularly in fulfilling his central role in the church, namely as a preacher.

The Theologian as Pastor

Owen shared the view common among the Puritans that the central task of the pastor-theologian was the preaching of the Word. In his own words: "The first and principal duty of a pastor is *to feed the flock* by diligent preaching of the Word."[30] Such was his appreciation of real preaching that he is famously recorded as replying to King Charles II's question why he listened to "yon tinker" (John Bunyan): "Could I possess the tinker's abilities, please your majesty, I would gladly relinquish all my learning."[31] Nor was he embarrassed to invite

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[29] Owen, *Works*, 6:3. Cf. Owen, 1:275.

[30] Owen, 13:74.

[31] John Brown, *John Bunyan, His Life, Times and Work* (1825, revised by Frank Mott Harrison, London: Hulbert, 1928), 368.

Bunyan on occasion to minister to his own select congregation in White's Alley, Moorfields in London.[32]

Owen's thinking about preaching as the context in which the gifts of the pastor and the theologian combined for the whole church is found in several contexts. These include: reflections on the special calling of the preacher given for the instruction of Christians in general; preached material in which he directly addresses the work of the preacher; and in sermons and addresses of various kinds delivered either in public or congregational contexts and addressed to Christians in general. For our access to these, we are indebted to Owen's friend, Sir John Hartopp, who would have used some form of shorthand to curate Owen's *ipsissima verba* and then, as a personal spiritual discipline, later transcribed them in full.[33]

Here we must limit ourselves to considering Owen's understanding of the task and the variety of contexts in which he sought to fulfil it.

The Task and Its Prerequisites

If the task of the pastor-theologian is feeding the flock through the ministry of God's Word, then certain personal prerequisites follow. A preacher should be distinguished in three ways:

1. His life should be marked by the following: spiritual wisdom of some degree of eminence (otherwise how can he shepherd the flock?); unction—he notes that "authority…proceeds from unction"[34] and is a matter of divine influence, not merely a man's appointment to office; ability to handle the Scriptures; a knowledge of the spiritual condition of those in his care in terms of their temptations, spiritual decay, and level of understanding; a marked zeal for God's glory and their good through his ministry.
2. He should be a man of prayer who intercedes for the fruitfulness of his ministry, for the presence of Christ in the gatherings of the church, and for the wider state of the church.
3. He needs to have a depth of theological understanding that enables him to preserve true doctrine. This in turn requires both a *knowledge* of the truth, and a *love* for it. In addition, he should be marked by an avoidance of

[32] Brown, *John Bunyan*, 368. It seems Owen was the major catalyst behind an effort to release Bunyan from prison. He may well have been one of the first to read (certainly to be aware of) *Pilgrim's Progress*, apparently encouraging Bunyan to offer it to his own publisher Nathaniel Ponder (whose success in publishing Bunyan led to him being known as "Bunyan Ponder").

[33] Hartopp's home life was remarkable in that his mother's second husband was the Civil War General, Owen's friend Charles Fleetwood, while his own wife, Elizabeth, was Fleetwood's daughter by his first marriage. There was considerable interest in the practice of shorthand in 17th century England; a variety of instructional manuals were available. Many of Hartopp's transcriptions are included in Owen's *Works.* Others remain unpublished. These sermons underline that in common with all ministers, Owen's ministry should never be viewed through rose-tinted spectacles. At the beginning of one unpublished sermon, he notes (with regret) that some members had disagreed with comments he had recently made about renewing the Church Covenant; indeed, it seems that there were people in attendance who did not even know there *was* a Church Covenant.

[34] Owen, *Works*, 9:456.

> novelties on the one hand and an ability to expose and oppose doctrinal error on the other.

In Owen's view, the conversion of sinners lies at the epicenter of this work. He shares the general perspective of the Puritan spiritual brotherhood that it is especially through the preaching of the Word that people are brought to faith and nurtured in Christ.[35] As a result, preaching should be Word-rooted but congregation-oriented. The edification of the hearers, because they are loved, not simply the exegesis of the text because the preacher enjoys study and the activity of teaching, must prevail. Preaching is the handmaiden of love for the flock—both on God's part and on the part of the pastor (1 Tim 1:5). The pastor-theologian is precisely that—a pastor, an under-shepherd called by God not only to teach but to nurture his flock in grace in a manner that exhibits a Christ-like sensitivity to their capacities (John 16:4b, 12). In this connection, Owen issues a stern warning: "Those who take upon themselves to be pastors, and neglect the work of feeding the flock, may at as cheap a rate, and with equal modesty, renounce Jesus Christ."[36]

On the assumption that a man has gifts in the interpretation and public exposition of Scripture (without which there is no place for him in the ministry), the chief demands are threefold: hard work, heart exercise, and love for the people. It would not be overstating it to say that Owen hated to see either laziness or lovelessness. He argued that it was not learning in the Scriptures *per se*, but "*experience of the power of the truth"* that fed ministry.[37] It is, he noted, "*an easier thing to bring our heads to preach than our hearts.*"[38] Real preaching must then first be experienced by the preacher if it is to be communicated in a lastingly fruitful way:

> A man preacheth that sermon only well unto others which preacheth itself in his own soul. And he that doth not feed on and thrive in the digestion of the food which he provides for others will scarce make it savoury unto them; yea, he knows not but the food he hath provided may be poison, unless he have really tasted of it himself. If the word do not dwell with power *in* us, it will not pass with power *from* us.[39]

In order to do this well, like the Good Shepherd, an important element in the theological toolkit of the pastor is *knowing sheep and especially his own sheep*. He must be able to provide "milk" when they are young, or when they are sick; he must be able to feed them well when they are mature enough to digest meat. He must have Christ-like wisdom to know what is needed and disciplined patience to provide them with a diet that is appropriate. And he must be able to do all this simultaneously.

Owen saw at least two symbiotic relationships that were essential to the pastor-theologian: the relationship between Scripture and theology; and the relationship

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[35] A point underlined in the catechisms of the Westminster Assembly. *Larger Catechism* Question 155; *Shorter Catechism* Question 89.

[36] Owen, *Works*, 9:437.

[37] Owen, 9:455.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Owen, 16:76.

between knowledge of doctrine and knowledge of people. Time spent with and among the congregation was not detrimental but advantageous to true theological understanding and to preaching. So, like others in the Puritan tradition, Owen operated with his own "preaching grid." This was not a mere "check-list" to be ticked off in grading his sermons, but an awareness of the condition of his hearers. Here he thought in terms of biblical categories: the afflicted, the tempted, the distressed, the perplexed, the spiritually decaying, and those who were making real spiritual advance. The pastor-theologian never forgets that the "whole flock in this world are a company of tempted ones."[40] He therefore needs to develop what Christ had in perfect measure and balance—"the tongue of those who are taught" to "know how to sustain with a word him who is weary" (Isa 50:4). Nothing is of greater importance in ministry, then, than that the preacher should have patience, meekness, and genuine concern for the flock. Here Paul's inspired watchword is *apropos*: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, *with complete patience and teaching*" (2 Tim 4:2).

Owen recognized here that there is a difference between preaching that exists for its own sake (i.e., for the preacher's) and preaching that exists for the sake of the hearers: "Preaching sermons not designed *for the advantage of them to whom they are preached*…will make men weary of preaching…as much as make others weary in hearing of them."[41]

Academic learning and intellectual ability are inadequate on their own to meet the true end of ministry. There must, in addition, in the exposition of the Word, be a true self-giving on the part of the preacher—to the Lord, "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4),[42] but also to the people. The pastor-theologian does this by giving himself to the kind of study and preparation that calibrates his own spirit to the truth he will expound. But preachers are also called to "give themselves" to those to whom they preach. Herein lies the challenge of preaching, for challenging though exegesis is, the most challenging element of preparation lies in the application of the word to the preacher's heart and then to those of his hearers. This can be accomplished only by prayerful dependence on the Lord.[43]

It is within this matrix that unction is conceived and will come to birth in the preaching. Not all contemporary views of preaching are enamoured of "unction," but Owen was in no doubt that fruitful preaching is dependent on it. Fruitful ministry of the Word cannot be reduced to men's exegetical skills or teaching gifts alone. If Jesus received an "unction" that was "without limit" in order to preach, something of the same order, albeit in sovereignly differing measures, is required in all preaching.

This prompts a question: Is there a kind of preaching that God seems to favour with such unction? In concert with most within the Puritan spiritual brotherhood, Owen seems to have believed so. His preaching belonged to the so-called "Plain Style," famously articulated in William Perkins's *Art of Prophesying,*[44] and later recommended by the Westminster Divines "as being found by experience to be very

[40] Owen, *Works*, 16:85.
[41] Owen, 16:77, emphasis mine.
[42] Owen notes, significantly, "Prayer is in the first place." Owen, 9:457.
[43] See his discussion in Owen, 9:456–58.
[44] First published in Latin in 1592 (English 1606).

much blessed of God…"[45] The characteristics of this style were: (i) The text itself would be summarized; (ii) its "main point" highlighted and clarified; (iii) its teaching expounded in the light of the rest of Scripture; (iv) where necessary, errors would be refuted (but never majored on), and difficulties clarified and resolved; (v) applications were made to the mind, heart, conscience and will; and (vi) indications were given of how progress could be recognized.

Here we find traces of the Ramist logic and rhetoric that had helped to shape Puritan preaching.[46] This is sometimes referred to in demeaning comments about the "interminable divisions" in 17th century reformed preaching, but this is to miss the point, for what is in view here is the deep, logical penetration of the true and full significance of a text or passage. This helps explain the difference between the Puritan tradition of preaching and the more recently developed "exegetical" preaching in the *lectio continua* fashion. The latter tends to treat passages of a length manageable within an entire series that will not tax the patience of a congregation, and therefore self-limits the penetration of the text to an explanation of contents with a few suitable applications.

It is certainly arguable that for Owen and his contemporaries this stops short of the ends for which preaching was divinely ordained. For him and his contemporaries, the value of the Ramist methodology, which they adapted for their own purposes, was that it provided the intellectual framework to lay bare the full significance of the text. This had multiple effects on preaching and preparation for it: (i) it encouraged deeper penetration of the text, so that its wording opened up into the interior logic expressed in it and the reality beyond itself to which the text pointed (but with which it was not identical)—thus the *telos* of exposition was not the explanation of what the words said but the reality they described; (ii) it meant that applications were more likely to rise from within the text itself and therefore exhibit the way in which the Word itself worked in believers to effect the realities to which it pointed. Thus what we find in Owen's preaching is not in the form of (i) this is what the text says, followed by, (ii) here are some ways *the preacher* suggests this is applicable.

Rather the "fracking" of the text which the Ramist methodology encouraged uncovered the applications of the text enshrined within the inner logic of the text itself. In this way, the ugly ditch between what Scripture "says" and how Scripture is "applied" was filled in not by a logic extraneous to but implicit within the text itself. The implication of applying these principles to preaching was in essence: stay down with the text, probe it increasingly and penetrate it more fully, and the applications will emerge from within the text or context itself so that the Word will begin to do its own work.

Illustrations of how Owen did this emerge in his handling of such texts as 2 Corinthians 13:14 in *Communion with God,* Romans 8:13 in *On the Mortification of*

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[45] *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, 1645, "Of the Preaching of the Word." The entire section summarizes a great deal of Puritan homiletical wisdom and practice and remains a valuable document.

[46] The Ramist logic and rhetoric refers to the epistemological method of the French intellectual Pierre Ramus (1515–1572), who died in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Ramism developed a way of understanding by analysis into constituent elements. This had an impact on what today would be called "communication theory," and which became influential in the two English universities (more especially in Cambridge). It should be noted that the method did not function as predetermining the meaning of the text but as a tool that encouraged its fruitful exposition, application, and communication.

Sin, and Romans 8:6 in *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded.*[47] In mining the text, one arrives at the whole of Scripture underneath it and is drawn to the bibliological implications that arise from it. It was in this sense that, far from being a method of "interminable divisions," the way the Ramist background music played in the minds of the 17th century preachers eased the way to a process of ever deepening understanding that, when employed properly, brought together the mind of the theologian and the heart of the pastor in penetrating and effective preaching.

Preaching Central but Not Alone

Preaching has continued to occupy a central place in the Reformed tradition in the broadest sense. But in Owen's ministry of the Word, we find three additional elements that have received less attention but should stimulate reflection on how the principles they express can be applied today. These elements are worth highlighting because there is a tendency to assume that by returning to the *lectio continua* pattern we have fully recovered the practice of the Reformers. Exploring them in detail, however, would require a separate article altogether.

The first element is found in the practice that marked Owen's ministry from its earliest days, the practice of catechetical instruction. The reformed churches took to heart Calvin's comment that the church cannot survive without it.[48] In Calvin's Geneva there was a weekly catechism service following the morning diet of worship. Knox developed this in Scotland. And with many others, Owen himself composed several catechisms, each serving a distinct purpose and geared in terms of age and ability.[49] These fulfilled a threefold purpose: (i) they brought the ministry of the Word to close quarters; (ii) they brought the pastor and his people closer together; and (iii) they built into the mind of the catechumens the basic framework of biblical theology that enhanced their appreciation of the regular pulpit exposition.

No doubt catechisms can be used woodenly (I ask the question; you give the memorized answer by rote; I ask the next question; you repeat the next memorized answer). However, it is clear that the Puritan use was much more dynamic and expansive—exploring, explaining, developing, and personalizing the question and answer method. The innuendo (and more than innuendo) of modern psychology that this kind of rote-learning is either or both brain-washing or harmful is given the lie by the depth of personal engagement involved in this style of catechetical instruction and also by the way in which it equipped the catechized to think biblically, logically, and clearly from a foundation and centre in Scripture.[50] The point here is that Owen

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[47] Owen, *Works*, 2:3–274; 6:3–86; and 7:263–497 respectively.

[48] "Believe me, Monseigneur," Calvin wrote in 1548 to Edward Seymour, the Protector Somerset under Edward VI, "the Church of God will never preserve itself without a Catechism, for it is like the seed to keep the good grain from dying out and causing it to multiply from age to age." John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), 2:191.

[49] By the time of the Westminster Assembly, there were over 150 catechisms in print in England.

[50] The classic *apologia* in the Puritan period comes, famously, in Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor.* Electrifying preacher though he must have been, Baxter tells us, "I study to speak as plainly and as movingly as I can (and next to my study to speak truly, these are my chief studies), and yet I frequently

did not assume (any more than did Richard Baxter, with whom he did not always see eye to eye) that his regular preaching *on its own* would place into the minds and hearts of his people the framework of biblical thinking and theology that would enable them to grow exponentially in understanding the gospel.

There is an important lesson for us here in an era in which the *lectio continua* method of preaching has become almost *de rigeur* in some quarters and is sometimes touted as a return to the old reformed tradition. But that tradition never separated the ongoing exposition of Scripture from catechetical instruction. It understood that where there is no doctrinal framework in the mind and memory, it is likely that less of the truth expounded will be grasped and become serviceable to a believer.

It should be said here, in passing, that such catechetical instruction need not necessarily be in the specific form of employing a text of questions and answers, albeit the 16th and 17th century pastors found this to be a highly efficient form. The more fundamental point is that the doctrines of Scripture need to become familiar to believers along with a knowledge of the verses of Scripture. But however it is accomplished, it is clear that to do it effectively himself or to train others to do so, the pastor must indeed be a theologian, for here not only inter-personal pastoral wisdom but also on-your-feet theological acumen are required.

A second sphere in which Owen enhanced his regular pulpit ministry lay in the context of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. There is a common assumption that the Puritans had a low view of the sacraments in general and the Lord's Supper in particular and paid little attention to them in their theology. But this is to confuse a *sacramentalist* view of baptism and the Supper with a *high* view. Owen did give serious attention to the Supper *in its proper context,* namely the life of the church. And, thanks once again to his friend Sir John Hartopp, we have a record of Owen's practice.

What we find in the material Hartopp recorded are not only examples of Owen's "regular" sermons preached when the Lord's Supper was being celebrated, but also of additional messages of two different kinds in which the setting is no longer the pulpit. Owen himself probably introduced a practice in his congregation in London of gathering the church informally on the Friday evening prior to at least some celebrations of the Supper.[51] On some such occasions he gave instruction on the meaning of the Supper. In addition, Hartopp recorded some "Table Addresses"—brief comments given by Owen when, presumably, he spoke from the table spread with the communion elements.

Clearly Owen held that the Supper was not a meal to be rushed. And while he had a well-known Prayer Book liturgy, he did not replace it with a casual and barren administration. Rather, he came to the table surrounded by the flock and typically lingered there with them by giving these brief Christ-centered addresses pointing to Christ, crucified, risen, and present among his people. The "host" was not the victim (Latin: *hostia*), but by his presence through the Spirit, the true Host invited his guests to dine with

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meet with those who have been my hearers eight or ten years, who know not whether Christ be God or man…" Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, ed. William Brown (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1974), 196. It is somewhat paradoxical (and embarrassing to the leadership of Protestant churches) that the loudest voice in support of, and best-known exponent of, the need for catechesis in the past fifty years has almost certainly been Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

[51] In theory, the Congregationalists held that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently and preferably weekly, but it is not clear that this was in fact the practice in Owen's congregation.

him at the table. Owen himself describes these brief "Table Addresses" as "familiar exercises."[52] He might well have called them *familial* exercises, because they are brief and affectionate messages to the church family he served.

All this is beautifully illustrated in his reflections on July 7, 1673, a month after the union between the small congregation he led and the more substantial Leadenhall Street fellowship, when Owen very simply explained the mystery of the Lord's Supper. "In this ordinance" he says, there is a special "exhibition and tender of Christ."[53]

Here, the Christ who presented Himself to God on the Cross of Calvary as a sacrifice for our sins, and who has presented Himself in heaven to the Father to intercede for all for whom He atoned, now presents Himself to us in the Supper, as the One who has blotted out our sins.[54] Thus,

> There is, in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, an especial and peculiar communion with Christ, in his body and blood, to be obtained…. We have this special communion on account of the special object that faith is exercised upon in this ordinance, and the special acts that it puts forth…[55]

Owen is here seeking to accomplish several goals. One is to help his people understand the meaning of the Supper; another is to help them appreciate its practical significance for them as a church family; a third is to share with them in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ at the table and thus to enjoy the benefits of knowing Jesus Christ crucified and risen. It is often in the context of the pastor with his people together at the Lord's Supper that we discover both how much of a theologian a pastor really is, and how much of a pastor he is as a theologian. And in this we encounter Owen at his Christ-centred and church-nurturing best. There are, surely, lessons to be learned by today's pastor-theologians by reflecting on these "Table addresses."[56]

A third sphere in which we find Owen's more intimate ministry of the Word is in the weekday gatherings of his congregation of which we have some knowledge. While that knowledge is limited to the latter years of his life, the practice was probably characteristic of his whole ministry. These gatherings, which he described as being "for conference"[57] are paralleled only rarely today.[58] At them, Owen discussed questions of pastoral and spiritual moment. Some of these questions probably arose out of his own pastoral observations and concerns; other "cases of conscience" may well have been posed by members of the congregation and possibly in a spontaneous *ad hoc* fashion, and then discussed by Owen without any formal preparation.[59]

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[52] Owen, *Works*, 9:554.

[53] Owen, 9:564.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Owen, 9:523.

[56] Owen, 9:517–622. These were published in 1760. Three additional table addresses can be found in *Works*, 16:527–531 and were published in 1798.

[57] Owen, 9:403.

[58] For example, where the old Scottish tradition of the communion "season" is maintained and is one of the days of the four or five day "season" is designated the "Question Day."

[59] It was said of Owen that he was able to give a better address without any warning than many could give after careful preparation.

On these occasions he may have spoken for twenty minutes or half an hour. The brevity of Owen's recorded comments suggests that there was probably more general contribution and discussion. In particular, the tone of these addresses suggests a degree of informality (but by no means levity). One index of this is the much heavier concentration of the first person singular than we find in John Hartopp's verbatim records of his regular preaching.[60] Here probably more than anywhere else, it is possible to feel we are members of Owen's flock wrestling through issues, but also his personal friends as he addresses us in an informal and at times personal way.

The questions discussed give us a hint of the serious spirituality Owen's ministry engendered, and also of the challenges faced by his congregation. His responses to the questions posed indicate both his awareness of these struggles and the wisdom that emerged from his own experience and engagement with Scripture. Among the issues discussed are:[61]

> Seeing the act of closing with Christ is secret and hidden, and the special times and seasons of our conversion unto God are unknown unto most, what are the most certain evidences and pledges that we have cordially and sincerely received Christ, and returned unto God?
>
> How may we recover from a decay of the principle of grace?
>
> It was queried by some, how we may make our application unto Christ; not in general, but under what notion and apprehension of the person of Christ?[62]
>
> When our own faith is weakened as to the hearing of our prayers,—when we ourselves are hindered within ourselves from believing the answer of our prayers, have no ground to expect we should be heard, or no ground to believe we are heard,—what are those things that greatly weaken our faith as to the answer of our prayers; that though we continue to pray, yet our faith is weakened as to the hearing of our prayers? And what are the grounds that weaken men's faith in such a state?
>
> What shall a person do who finds himself under the power of a prevailing corruption, sin, or temptation?
>
> What is our duty with respect to dark and difficult dispensations of God's providence in the world?
>
> How are we to prepare for the coming of Christ?

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[60] Most pages of these brief discussions are peppered with first person singular comments.

[61] Owen, *Works*, 9:358–405. The specific discussions listed are on pages 362–64; 368–72; 373–75; 379–81; 390–92; 392–98; 398–405.

[62] The way the question is framed that gave rise to this particular discourse suggests that either Owen is following up on an issue that had been raised to him in private discussion or perhaps even a follow up question to a discussion earlier in the same evening.

Here Owen was again seeking to achieve several goals. One lay in the way he opened himself, his gifts, and his ministry to the congregation in what was clearly an intimate and personal context.[63] He is inviting them to think things out biblically along with him. In addition, he is helping his fellow believers by sharing with them his own steps in thinking through issues from first principles and from a centre in Scripture (surely a relevant example in a day when many are little conscious that there *are* "first principles"). All in all, this must have functioned to effect a deeper intimacy of pastor with people, a sense of sharing the same space and time, wrestling with issues in the Christian life along with him as members of the one covenant family. And, endearingly here, Owen is not embarrassed to admit that he by no means has all the answers. His own theology taught him that at times it is appropriate to say, "I cannot fully answer that question."[64]

Gatherings such as this, with a less-formal agenda, are rare today in church life, and yet they do seem to mirror the patterns of engagement that we find in the New Testament in the ministries of both our Lord and the apostle Paul. They had considerable potential to strengthen bonds of fellowship both between pastor and people and among the people, and to increase the ability to think and therefore to live biblically. What may seem daunting about them is that the pressing need for the pastor-theologian leading them is precisely that he meets that description—and to be a combination of both a loving pastor and an astute theologian. For only when the pastor has a substantial and strong theological grid, and a solid knowledge of Scripture, and an experiential appreciation of how the logic of the gospel works, is he likely to be able to think clearly and fully enough (and on his feet) for such meetings to have genuine spiritual profit. But a pastor's love for his people and their welfare should, surely, energize him to become such a theologian.

Conclusion

The premise of these reflections has been that while we are accustomed to thinking of John Owen as a theologian of daunting proportions, we rarely view him as a *pastor-theologian* who labored in the trenches. In doing so he was very conscious of his own weaknesses. But to this ministry he gave himself without reservation, driven on by his devotion to Christ and to his people. To this, as we have seen, his colleague David Clarkson testified in his memorial sermon. It is telling that, fully three years before Owen's death, John Hartopp recorded the closing words of Owen's discussion of the duties of believers in the difficult days through which they were then living. They are a moving expression of his love for his flock and provide more than a hint of the extent to which he had exhausted his resources in serving Christ:

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[63] In answering the question of discourse V (see preceding footnote), he comments, "I shall give you my thoughts and directions in it." Owen, *Works*, 9:373. This wording, "I shall give you *my* thoughts," may suggest that others would follow through on his comments, perhaps making contributions of their own ("I would like, if I may, to add *my* thoughts to what Dr. Owen has just said…").

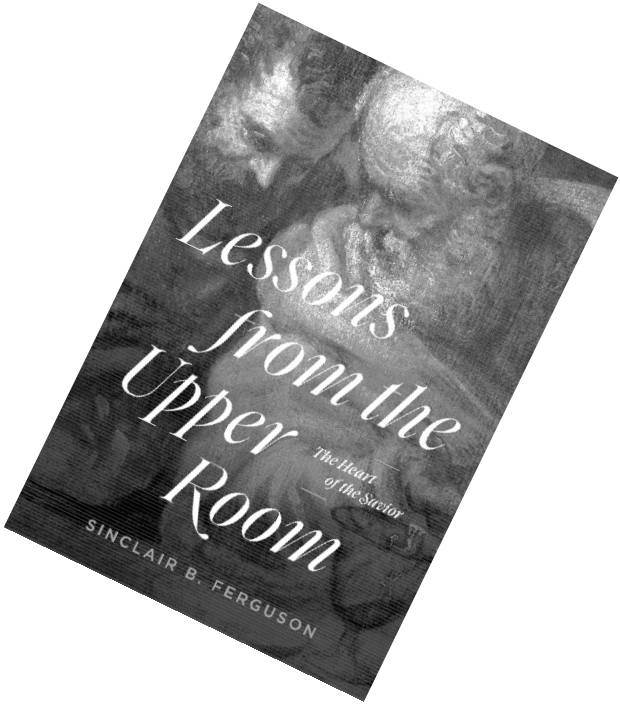
[64] Thus, for example, he begins his answer to question 9 above on April 9, 1677: "This is a hard question; there are difficulties in it, and, it may be, it is not precisely to be determined. I am sure we should be wonderfully careful what we say upon such a question, which determines the present and eternal condition of the souls of men." Owen, *Works*, 9:386.

> I am ready to faint, and give over, and to beg of the church they would think of some other person to conduct them in my room, without these disadvantages. The last day will discover I have nothing but a heart to lead you in the ways of God, —to the enjoyment of God.[65]

The congregation provided assistance for him. But they valued his ministry so much that they held on to him, even if it meant he was preaching less frequently. They knew that he had made their growth in grace and Christ-likeness his chief goal, and that they had enjoyed the rare privilege of being cared for and ministered to by a pastor-theologian. Clarkson said they had rejoiced in that and could rejoice in it still more. So can we. We can remember him as a leader who continues to speak to us the Word of God, and—perhaps surprisingly—there is much we can seek to imitate in the ministry of John Owen—pastor-theologian.

[65] Owen, *Works*, 9:405.

"BUT TAKE HEART; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD." —JOHN 16:33



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TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 225–244

WILLIAM PERKINS ON THE CALLING OF A GOSPEL MINISTER

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* * * * *

William Perkins, known for preaching "one Christ, by Christ, to the praise of Christ," held a robust perspective on the calling of a gospel minister. As evidenced by Perkins's writings, to be called to gospel ministry is to receive the responsibility for an immense undertaking. This calling originates from God, comes through the Holy Scriptures, and is confirmed by the church and one's desire for the ministry. It is a calling to serve as a steward of God's Word. The minister's life should manifest the working of the Spirit, sanctifying him unto God so that he may preach the truth experientially. In so doing, he will inevitably encounter opposition along his way, as he treads out the path which Christ Himself trod. Yet he perseveres in his calling, knowing that faithful is the One who has called him and will be with him to the end.

* * * * *

Introduction

William Perkins (1558–1602) was one of the main architects of Reformed experiential preaching in England.[1] Patrick Collinson, scholar of Elizabethan history,

[1] It is a joy for me to write an article (together with my research assistant, Paul Smalley) about the Puritan William Perkins in a publication dedicated to thanking God for the ministry of my good friend John MacArthur Jr., who by God's grace has labored for decades in expository preaching for the glory of Christ and promoted the reading of sound biblical literature such as that by the Reformers and Puritans. I treasure my growing friendship with Dr. MacArthur over the last two decades and have deep respect for his faithfulness to and perseverance in promoting the well-being of the church and the kingdom of God.

called him "the prince of puritan theologians and the most eagerly read."[2] Perkins exemplified the kind of preaching that informed the mind with the Holy Scriptures and by God's grace directed the soul into faith and love. William Ames (1576–1633) warmly recalled, "When being young, I heard worthy Master Perkins so preach in a great assembly of students, that he instructed them soundly in the truth, stirred them up effectually to seek after godliness, made them fit for the kingdom of God; and by his own example shewing them what things they should chiefly intend, that they might promote true religion, in the power of it, unto God's glory and others' salvation."[3]

Perkins's major written treatment of the gospel ministry is *The Calling of the Ministry: Two Treatises, Describing the Duties and Dignities of that Calling*, which constitutes about 80 pages in volume 10 of the modern edition of his *Works*. Published posthumously in 1605, it was the first English treatise on this topic since the Reformation. The manuscript derived from the notes of William Crashawe (1572–1626), an auditor and admirer of Perkins. The first treatise, an exposition of Job 33:23–24, was a sermon "preached in the university church, to the body of the university."[4] The reference is to the University of Cambridge, where Perkins ministered as the lecturer (preacher) at St. Andrew the Great parish church. The second treatise, an exposition of Isaiah 6:5–8, seems also to have been preached in Cambridge.[5] Ian Breward captures the historical significance of these treatises: "No general and substantial sketch of the duties and ideals that should inspire a parish minister had appeared from an English pen since the Reformation, a surprising fact when one considers the numerous aids issued in the 14th and 15th centuries. Overseas models were used instead. Books like Hemmingius's *The Preacher* (1574), or Hyperius's *The Practis of Preaching* (1577), did something to fill the gap left between academic training and pastoral duties, but it was Perkins who was the first to set out in some detail the theology of ministry and pastoral care that was exemplified in predecessors like Richard Greenham."[6]

Perkins is most famous for another treatise on preaching, *The Art of Prophesying*.[7] W. B. Patterson identifies this work as "the first major English book on preaching."[8] Paul Schaefer writes, "An entire generation of preachers was indeed shaped by Perkins, not only through this small tract on hermeneutics and homiletics, but also through his

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[2] Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 125. For a brief biography of Perkins, see Joel R. Beeke and J. Stephen Yuille, *William Perkins*, Bitesize Biographies (Welwyn Garden City, England: EP Books, 2015). For a fuller treatment, see W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[3] William Ames, "To the Reader," in *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (1639; facsimile repr., Amsterdam: Walter J. Johnson, 1975), A3r, punctuation modernized.

[4] William Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry: Two Treatises, Describing the Duties and Dignities of that Calling*, ed. Joseph A. Pipa and J. Stephen Yuille, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 10, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 10:205.

[5] The title page appears to include both treatises as "delivered publicly in the University of Cambridge" (Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:195).

[6] Ian Breward, "William Perkins and the Ideal of the Ministry in the Elizabethan Church," *The Reformed Theological Review* 24, no. 3 (October 1965): 77.

[7] Perkins repeatedly pointed to the prophets as models and exemplars for Christian preachers. The point of connection lies in the fact that both prophets and preachers are ministers of God's Word.

[8] Patterson, *Protestant England*, 114.

own deep piety mixed with his exacting and penetrating preaching….A succession of 'Puritan worthies' arose directly from Perkins's ministry."[9]

In this article, we will draw from these treatises and several other writings by Perkins to present his understanding of what the Holy Scriptures say about the calling of a gospel minister. This calling is one from God to steward that with which he is entrusted under Christ. To perform such a stewardship properly, he must be renewed in his inner man so that he may experientially preach the Word, persevering through the hardships of ministry. As we will see, the ministry ranked high in Perkins's theology, and he often referred to it in the doctrines and applications of his works.

The Minister's Calling from God

Perkins believed that the ministry of the Word is not of human origin or initiative, but that it is instituted by God and filled with men appointed by God. Faithful service as God's minister requires that a person be deeply convinced that the Lord has called him and set him apart as His servant.

The Calling of God's Servant

Perkins said, "Every minister of the gospel ought to have a good and lawful calling. A man cannot preach 'unless he be sent' [Rom 10:14]."[10] He adds, "No man is to undertake this function unless God calls and sends him."[11] God's ordinary method of calling ministers is not by mere "motions" of the Spirit or by "visions," but through the general principles of the Holy Scriptures, the testimony of one's own conscience to having a hearty desire for the ministry, and the church's confirmation of his worthiness and ability to do the work. All three aspects converge in a true calling. If conscience and church, operating according to God's Word, agree in confirming a man to ministry, "it is as effectual a calling as if you heard the voice of God from heaven."[12]

With respect to a man's willingness to serve as a minister, Perkins urged prospective preachers to count the cost with due care. Men who rashly enter the ministry expecting ease and honor will either prove very worldly pastors or will do their duties "with much grief and vexation." But the man who takes account of "what it will cost him to be a minister, what he must undertake, what he must lose, and what he is sure to find is so settled and resolved aforehand as he goes through all dangers and contempts with comfort, courage, and contentment."[13]

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[9] Paul R. Schaefer, "*The Art of Prophesying* by William Perkins (1558–1602)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 41.

[10] William Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Paul M. Smalley, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 2, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 2:14.

[11] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:272.

[12] Perkins, 10:277–79.

[13] William Perkins, *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses*, ed. Randall J. Pederson and Ryan Hurd, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 3, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 3:128.

Perkins clarified that it is not the church that makes a man into a minister, but that he must be called by God. Every lawful calling is from God the Father (Matt 9:38), God the Son (Eph 4:11), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). He states, "The church's authority is no more but a ministry or service, whereby it does testify, declare, and approve whom God has called."[14]

The Servant of the Lord Christ

The ministry of the Word belongs to Christ, and so to minister the Word is to serve Christ. Fittingly, Perkins said, "This office of teaching is inseparably annexed to the person of Christ, and is by Him accordingly executed even after His ascension…. As for the ministers of the gospel, they in teaching are no more but instruments of Christ…. This must teach us reverence in hearing God's word, and care with diligence in keeping of it."[15]

The minister is "the servant of God," and hence, Perkins said, "If they are God's servants, then they are not their own masters. They have a master, even God, whose they are, and for whom and from whom they come." As God's servants, "let them do their service to God, and expect their reward from God."[16]

Perkins said, "The ministry…is not the word or doctrine of man, but of God. By this the ministers of the gospel are taught to handle their doctrine with modesty and humility, without ostentation, with reverence, and with a consideration of the majesty of God whose the doctrine is which they utter, that God may be glorified."[17] If they are faithful, "but are not regarded nor rewarded by men as they deserve, let them be content and continue in their faithfulness. For they are God's ambassadors." If anyone should "either condemn or any way injure them, be assured that God is mighty and powerful so He will mightily revenge it."[18] As "God's messengers and servants," ministers "must not be servants of men, to please or flatter." Rather, Perkins said, they just "regard their master's glory, and be ashamed to do anything, whether in their doctrine or lives, which may dishonor Him." Furthermore, "they must not deliver their own fancies or inventions [ideas from their own imagination or speculation], but that message they received."[19]

Men find courage to be servants of the gospel from the gospel itself. If a ministerial student is beset with "fear and shrinking" over the hardship and responsibility of ministry, Perkins counseled, "Let that man set himself in God's presence, enter into himself, search his conscience, find out his sins, confess and bewail them to God, crave pardon in Christ's blood, and grace to leave them, and cease not till he hears the voice of God's Spirit sounding in his conscience: 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' Then when God shall ask, 'Whom shall I send?' you will answer

[14] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:15.

[15] Perkins, 2:44. See also William Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg A. Salazar, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 6, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 61.

[16] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:273–74.

[17] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:37.

[18] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:274.

[19] Perkins, 10:274–75.

readily and with joy, 'Here am I, send me.'"[20] If men "are driven from this calling, beholding the contempt, reproach, and dangers which belong unto it," Perkins pointed them to Isaiah's eager offering of himself and commented, "Surely, [it was] because he saw he was in God's favor. He had Him and His commission on his side. And he held this for a sure ground: If God is on my side, who can be against me?"[21]

The Minister's Stewardship under Christ

The minister is a servant of the Lord Jesus, our Prophet, Priest, and King. Under Christ, he stewards God's Word and His flock, reflected by the titles given to him in the Scriptures. Perkins said that a minister is called "to go between God and His people, to be God's mouth to the people, and the people's to God…[and] to take the care and charge of souls."[22] The minister must always remember that he is not Christ, but only "Christ's instrument."[23] Yet "the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments" are nothing less than "the hand of God whereby He offers unto us" the benefits of Christ's sacrifice.[24]

The Steward of God's Word

Perkins said that the two main duties of a minister are the "preaching of the Word and praying unto God in the name of the people."[25] Preachers are Christ's "ambassadors" (2 Cor 5:19–20).[26] In addition to the public ministry of preaching, ministers have the "private ministry" of giving "admonition" or "comfort" according to one's spiritual state.[27]

The "ordinary or usual means" by which faith arises and increases is "the preaching of the word."[28] The gospel "is the instrument and as it were the conduit pipe of the Holy Ghost" to pour "faith into the soul."[29] The aim of the ministry, however, is not merely conversion but conformity to Christ: "till Christ be formed in you" (Gal 4:19). Perkins said, "The end of all preaching is to make sinful men to become new creatures like unto Christ."[30]

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[20] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:276.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Perkins, 10:212.

[23] Perkins, 10:226.

[24] William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed*, ed. Ryan Hurd, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 5, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 5:207. See Paul R. Schaefer Jr., *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 104–105.

[25] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:290. On the minister's calling to prayer, see Perkins, *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses*, 3:251; Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:207; Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:355.

[26] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:290. On the minister's calling to prayer, see Perkins, *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses*, 3:251; *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:207; *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:355.

[27] William Perkins, *Exposition upon the Whole Epistle of Jude*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 4, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 4:68–69.

[28] Perkins, *Christian Religion*, 5:491.

[29] Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, 6:154. Cf. *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:291.

[30] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:292–93.

It must be appreciated how vast a shift in clerical responsibilities took place in the sixteenth century. The Reformation moved the focal point of the church's assembly from the altar to the pulpit. Susan Wabuda said, "The role of the priest, who celebrated the sacraments, heard confessions, and offered the sacrifice at the altar, was transmuted into a minister whose main responsibility was to interpret the Word."[31]

The minister is a steward of the most powerful spiritual weapon in the world: God's Word. Perkins said, "The preaching of the gospel has in it a divine power. No creatures except the good angels have power comparable to the devil's; and yet the preaching of the gospel is stronger than Satan, for it gathers a church where the devil has his throne [Rev 2:13]."[32]

The Steward of God's Flock

Perkins said, "The Holy Spirit commands a pastor to 'know his flock' [Prov 27:23]….He must have a particular and distinct knowledge of the state of it, and the more particular the better." This requires the minister to reside with his people, contrary to the practice common in Perkins's time that the rector or vicar who held the living or income from the parish would farm out the work of parish ministry to curates.[33]

He thought it "very necessary" that there be "conferences of pastors and people," that is, conversations between them about spiritual things. Such conversations are "the life of preaching," for through them "teachers know better what to teach, and the people better to conceive things that are taught."[34]

It is interesting to note that, while Perkins rejected the Roman Catholic sacrament of confession to a priest for penance, he encouraged "that confession whereby a Christian voluntarily at all times may resort to his pastor, open his estate [spiritual condition], disburden his conscience of such sins as disquiet him, and crave his godly assistance and holy prayers."[35]

Ministers should also catechize adults and children in the doctrines of the faith.[36] Perkins said, "It were to be wished that catechizing were more used than it is of our ministers," for the ignorance of the people causes them to "profit little or nothing by sermons."[37] Like little children, they need someone to cut their food for them. Catechism "is to lay the foundation, without which all labor in building is vain."[38]

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[31] Susan Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 65.

[32] Perkins, *Three Chapters of Revelation*, 4:476.

[33] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:245.

[34] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:295.

[35] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:245. See William Perkins, *A Reformed Catholic*, ed. Shawn D. Wright and Andrew S. Ballitch, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 7, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 7:148–49. See John R. Tufft, "William Perkins, 1558–1602: His Thought and Activity" (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1951), 258.

[36] Note Perkins's own catechism, *The Foundation of Christian Religion*, 5:481–509.

[37] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:295.

[38] Ibid.

The Minister's Spiritual Life with God

It was a pre-Reformation ideal that the priest be a holy preacher, cleansed from sin and infused with divine love, so that through his teaching of the Word, God would put His Spirit in the people and move them to obey his commandments (Ezek 36:27).[39] He was to be sanctified, devoid of disqualifying sins, and viewing even the most subtle of iniquities as vile in the sight of his Master. This ministerial ideal was taken up and given a decidedly evangelical and Reformed character by leaders such as Perkins.

The Sanctification of the Minister

First and foremost, ministers of the gospel must be converted. Perkins said, "No minister is well qualified to the holy duties of the ministry unless he has truly repented of his sins, and has obtained pardon and mercy in the Messiah."[40] The sacred duties of the minister, carried out in the holy presence of God in the assembly of the church, demand holiness of the minister himself.[41]

Perkins warned of "the monstrous presumption of such ministers as dare venture rashly into the ministry, to tread upon the holy ground of God with unclean feet [and] to handle the holy things of God with unwashed hands. For what is it to enter into the ministry but to enter in the chamber of presence of the great King?"[42] The presence chamber in the royal palace was a room where the king would meet with people to do the business of the court; all its proceedings followed strict protocol to honor the monarchy.[43] Perkins said, "Therefore, if God rebuked Moses for stepping too hastily toward the bush (where His presence was), and said, 'Come not too near, for the place where thou standest is holy ground' [Exod 3:5], then how will God rebuke and check the consciences of such carnal men as carelessly and carnally rush into the pulpit and to God's holy table, where God is present in a far more excellent manner than He was in the bush?"[44]

To be qualified as God's gospel messenger, ministers not only must be converted but "must labor for sanctity and holiness of life." Perkins queried, "Can he commend the state of grace to another, and never [have] felt the sweetness thereof in his own soul? Dare he come to preach sanctification with polluted lips, and out of an unsanctified heart?"[45]

The minister is "a faithful witness of God to aver and testify this truth [of the gospel] from his own conscience, knowledge, and feeling, of the infallible certainty

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[39] Susan Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 68–69. See Desiderius Erasmus, *Ecclesiastae sive de Ratione Concionandi* (Antwerp: Martinus Caesar, 1535).

[40] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:269.

[41] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:352.

[42] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:252.

[43] E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), 1:13–15; *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household, Made in Divers Reigns. From King Edward III to King William and Queen Mary. Also Receipts in Ancient Cookery* (London: The Society of Antiquaries, 1790), 278–79, 338, 340–41, 347, 354–57, 361, 369–70, 373.

[44] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:252–53.

[45] Perkins, 10:209.

of God's promises unto the doubtful and distressed conscience of the sinner."[46] Like David, the minister must be a witness by "his own experience" to God's mercy for the repentant (Ps 32).[47] He must have "the inward sense and experience of the Word in his heart."[48]

The minister's office involves leading by both "doctrine, and a good life," and the people learn from him both "by hearing, and seeing" (cf. 1 Tim 4:12).[49] If a minister's love for God or people weakens or if he commits any known sin, he must repent quickly.[50] Thomas Fuller (1608–1661) said of Perkins, "He lived [his] sermons, and as his preaching was a comment on his text, so his practice was a comment on his preaching."[51]

To speak for God to people, the minister must have "the tongue of the learned" (Isa. 50:4). Perkins said, "He must not only read the book [the Scriptures], but eat it, that is, not only have the knowledge of divine things flowing in his brain, but engraven in his heart and printed in his soul by the spiritual finger of God. And, therefore, for this end, after all his own study, meditation, commentaries, and after all human helps, he must pray with David: 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may see the wonders of thy law' [Ps 119:18]."[52]

Perkins asked, "A minister is to preach unto the people the fear and reverence of the Lord, but how can he do so…[if he has not been] cast down in admiration of God's glory and majesty?" Without this humility, the honor associated with the ministry would bring men "to pride and to be puffed up with self-conceits." Hence, God has mercifully decreed "that all His true ministers shall have some means or other to be cast down…at [the] sight of their own wickedness as they shall throw down themselves at Christ's feet, and denying themselves wholly, shall acknowledge that they are in Him whatsoever they are, and do rely and trust only on His grace and help."[53] This implies that the ministerial calling is not mere vocational choice like deciding to go into law or politics; it requires a work of God in the soul.[54]

At the heart of ministerial holiness is love. Perkins said, "If ministers love their people, they will forget their own dignity, which often times they might stand upon, and will make themselves even servants to all, that they might win some [1 Cor 9:19]."[55]

The Sins of the Minister

The church ought not to tolerate scandalous sins in her ministers. Perkins said, "All ministers, therefore, as they would see any fruit of their ministry, let them first sanctify themselves, and cleanse their hearts by repentance, before they

[46] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:218.
[47] Perkins, 10:219.
[48] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:351.
[49] Perkins, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1:233. Cf. *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:105.
[50] Perkins, *Three Chapters of Revelation*, 4:444.
[51] Thomas Fuller, *Abel Redevivus: or, the Dead Yet Speaking. The Lives and Deaths of the Modern Divines* (London: by Thomas Brudenell for John Stafford, 1651), 436.
[52] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:208–9. Cf. *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses*, 3:207.
[53] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:237.
[54] Perkins, 10:239.
[55] Perkins, 10:264.

presume to stand up to rebuke sin in others. Else, let them not think that their golden words shall do so much good as their leaden lives shall do hurt."[56] Churches must make sure "that their ministers be godly men as well as good scholars, as their lives inoffensive as well as their doctrine sound, or else they will find in woeful experience that they pull down as much with the one hand as they build up with the other."[57]

In reference to Isaiah confessing "I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5), Perkins said, he must have referred to "the corruption of his nature" and "some actual sins in his life," not heinous sins that would have disqualified him but "smaller faults, or negligence, in his ministry."[58] The believer's remaining iniquity "always appears more, the nearer a man comes to God."[59] Isaiah's example reminds us "what a tender conscience godly ministers must have…even of the lowest and least sins."[60] Perkins advised, "A minister cannot be too careful in his calling, words, diet, company, recreation, apparel, gestures, and in his whole carriage [manner of conducting himself], because little sins are so great in him."[61]

Isaiah not only said, "I am a man of unclean lips," but also, "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). Perkins noted that ministers often share in the guilt of their people's sins, "either by provoking them…or by not reproving them."[62] Perkins also said that corruption in the people often drags down the minister so that "his faith is weakened, his zeal and courage abated, God's grace in him dulled, and much decayed."[63] Perkins said, "Here is good warning for all ministers to be wary and choice of their company with whom they will most privately converse."[64] A minister should not isolate himself from sinners, but he should recognize that his regular companions will affect his spiritual life (Ps 1:1; 1 Cor 15:33).[65]

However, when ministers grieve over "imperfections and blemishes" in their lives, they may also take comfort that "they are not alone," for even godly Isaiah had to mourn over his sins.[66] This also shows them the folly of thinking that even the holiest of men can stand on the merit of their works, for the manifestation of God's holiness destroys all such pretenses.[67] The minister, like all Christians, is justified by faith in Christ alone apart from the merit of his works.[68] Though ministers cannot be justified by their holiness, their sincere godliness is necessary to serve their Master.

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[56] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:254.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Perkins, 10:240.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Perkins, 10:241.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Perkins, 10:245.
[63] Perkins, 10:246.
[64] Perkins, 10:248.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Perkins, 10:242.
[67] Perkins, 10:243.
[68] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:111–25.

The Minister's Experiential Preaching of the Word

As we noted above under the minister's stewardship, the primary task of his calling is the preaching of God's Word.[69] This, too, is a spiritual work that must be done from the heart.

The Preacher of the Word

Perkins considered the Word of God to possess incomparable excellence. The Holy Scriptures are sufficient, so that nothing may be added to them or taken from them with respect to directing us in salvation and obedience (Deut 12:32; Rev 22:18–19). The Scriptures are pure of all error (Ps 12:6). Jesus said of the Scriptures: "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:18). God works powerfully through the Scriptures upon the hearts of men (Heb 4:12). The core of the Bible's message is the person and work of Christ.[70]

Perkins said that "the sum of the sum" of his instruction on preaching is this: "preach one Christ by Christ to the praise of Christ."[71] The minister is like a painter commissioned to make a portrait of Christ crucified, not with visible images but the gospel painted in the heart.[72] The aim of preaching is to serve as an instrument by which God unites people to Christ by the Spirit.[73]

Hence, it is the calling of the minister to preach repentance from sin and faith in Christ (Acts 20:21), promising "free forgiveness" and "perfect salvation…to all who shall truly believe in Him."[74] The minister is responsible "not to preach the law alone or the gospel alone…but both the law and the gospel," and in that order to benefit the hearers.[75]

In the mind of Perkins, discerning whether a passage of Scripture is law or gospel is foundational to proper application.[76] The law brings a sinner down "to the very gates of hell" by a sight of his sins; the gospel leads him "to lay hold on Jesus Christ," in whom a believer "is righteous and just, and by Christ so justified as he is no more a sinner in the presence and account of God."[77]

The Demonstration of the Spirit

There is a spiritual dynamic in preaching that transcends human skill. Perkins said, "He that can discourse well in philosophy cannot thereupon presently

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[69] On Perkins's view of the supremacy of the Holy Scriptures and the primacy of biblical preaching, see J. Stephen Yuille, "The Wholesome Doctrine of Faith and Love," in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 127–36.

[70] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:291–92.

[71] Perkins, 10:356.

[72] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:150.

[73] On union with Christ in Perkins's soteriology, see Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood*, 79–82, 98–99.

[74] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:217.

[75] Perkins, 10:219. On Perkins's comparison of preaching law and gospel to "salt" (Matt 5:13), see J. Stephen Yuille, *Living Blessedly Forever: The Sermon on the Mount and the Puritan Piety of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 41–48.

[76] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:334.

[77] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:217, cf. 268. See also Perkins, *Christ and the Devil*, 1:223.

preach and dispense the Word of God aright, for preaching is a spiritual duty, which cannot be performed by natural gifts only."[78] The Spirit of God must speak through the minister. This does not involve new revelation but is the preaching of the Bible in the "demonstration of the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:4). It is, Perkins explained, "to speak in such a plain[ness], and yet such a powerfulness, as that the capacities of the simplest may perceive not man but God teaching them in that plainness, and the consciences of the mightiest might feel not man but God reprove them in that powerfulness."[79]

Hence, the preacher must use his scholarship in the study but conceal it in the pulpit.[80] He must preach with such plainness of truth and power of application that "even ignorant persons and unbelievers, may judge that it is not so much he who speaks as the Spirit of God in him and by him."[81] Rather than impressing his hearers with long quotations in foreign languages or entertaining them with "the telling of tales and all profane and ridiculous speeches," he must speak words "both simple and perspicuous, fit both for the people's understanding and to express the majesty of the Spirit."[82] The ministry of the Word must be plain to the mind and powerful to the heart.[83]

Perkins's contemporary, Henry Smith (1560–1591), said, "To preach simply, is not to preach unlearnedly, nor confusedly, but plainly and perspicuously, that the simplest which doth hear, may understand what is taught, as if he did hear his name."[84] Fuller wrote of Perkins, "His sermons were not so plain but that the piously learned did admire them, nor so learned but that the plain did understand them."[85] He brought doctrine into the pulpit without the technical theological terminology of the schools so that his preaching was "wholesome meat for his people."[86] In all, he was "an excellent surgeon . . . of a broken soul."[87]

The Form of the Sermon

The method that Perkins taught follows a relatively simple order: (1) read the text of the Holy Scriptures, (2) explain the meaning of that text, (3) draw out points of doctrine (with proofs and refutations), and (4) make applications.[88] Applications were often called "uses." The cycle could be repeated as the preacher moved through

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[78] Perkins, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1:732–33.

[79] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:206. On "plain" and applied biblical preaching, see also Donald K. McKim, "Ramism in William Perkins" (PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1980), 289–93.

[80] On theologians who influenced Perkins to promote plain preaching, see Joseph A. Pipa Jr., "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching" (PhD Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985), 128–30.

[81] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:349–50.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:148.

[84] Henry Smith, *The Works of Henry Smith* (Edinburgh: James Nichol; London: James Nisbet & Co.; Dublin: G. Herbert, 1866), 1:337.

[85] Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State, and the Profane State*, ed. James Nichols (London: Thomas Tegg, 1841), 81.

[86] Fuller, *The Holy State*, 81.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:356.

a passage of the Bible. This method appears as early as the writings of Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563) and John Hooper (c. 1495–1555).[89]

This "new Reformed" method became common among Puritan preachers. It is more structured than the "ancient" homily of the church fathers (used also by John Calvin [1509–1564]), and less complex than the "modern" method of the medieval schools. The ancient homily was just a running commentary on Scripture with applications. The modern method adapted classical rhetoric to Aristotelian logic and added the citation of many church authorities. It was favored by many preachers in the Church of England.[90] Anglican preachers tended to fill their sermons with repetition, plays on words, alliteration, similes, examples from history, quotations from church fathers and secular writers (often in Greek or Latin), and subtle reasonings.[91] Perkins and the Puritan movement used such practices minimally to focus instead on a plain "manifestation of the truth" (2 Cor 4:2). Perkins said that "human testimonies, whether of the philosophers or the fathers, are not to be alleged [quoted]…with this exception, 'Unless they convince the conscience of the hearer'…. And then it must be done sparingly."[92]

The Power of the Preaching

Perkins said that the minister must preach with a "fiery tongue from the Holy Spirit" (cf. Acts 2:3–4). However, "that fire must come from heaven; that is, his zeal must be a godly and heavenly zeal. But he who has a railing, lying, slanderous, malicious, or contentious tongue, has a fiery tongue indeed, but it is kindled by the fire of hell, as Saint James says [Jas 3:6]."[93]

To be sure, the preacher must correct and reprove, but with gentleness and humility. Perkins said that, in preaching against sin, "Let the love of the person appear…and let the minister include himself (if he may) in his reprehension [criticism], that it may be mild and gentle."[94] Ministers should avoid "rigor and austerity" and "ought on the contrary to put on the bowels of compassion toward offenders, if there is any hope of amendment, following herein the footsteps of Christ Himself, who was very tender over Jerusalem, so as He wept over it."[95]

As the messenger of the Lord, the minister must preach with a good conscience, an inward feeling of the truths he preaches to others, the fear of God, love for the people, personal honor and integrity, authority as an ambassador of Jehovah, and zeal for God's glory in men's salvation.[96] Truth, zeal, and a holy life are the honor of the ministry.[97] Such zeal arises from the experience of God's work in the preacher's own soul. Perkins said, "Every minister must see that he has experience in himself of that

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[89] Pipa, "Puritan Preaching," 132–40.

[90] J. W. Blench, *Preaching in England in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: A Study of English Sermons 1450–c. 1600* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1964), 71–73, 94, 100–102.

[91] Pipa, "Puritan Preaching," 38–40.

[92] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:332, citing Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12.

[93] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:266.

[94] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:345.

[95] Perkins, *Epistle of Jude*, 4:245.

[96] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:352–53.

[97] Perkins, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1:732.

he teaches others and have a taste of that in his own heart which he would others seasoned withal, else his teaching shall be cold."[98]

The minister must also have "wisdom in heavenly divinity, namely, to apply their doctrine to their audience in a manner as the circumstances of place, times, or persons do require."[99] An ignorant and proud people need to hear the law. People cast down by the law need the gospel. Common people need basic instruction. Civil rulers need to hear their duties before God. University and seminary students benefit from discussions of finer points of theology. Ordinary audiences need the substance of the gospel.[100] The preacher must craft his application to address people according to their differing spiritual conditions of ignorance versus knowledge, hardness versus humility, and weakness of faith versus evangelical assurance.[101]

While preaching is divinely powerful, the power of the Word operates according to God's will, not the preacher's will. Preaching is God's means by which He saves His elect (Rom 10:14). Thus, the preacher should submit himself to be an instrument of God's execution of His election: "to single out man from man and gather out of this world such as belong to the church of Christ."[102]

Ministers must reckon on both human depravity and sovereign grace when considering the results of their preaching. Perkins said, "There is nothing in the world more contrary to the nature of man than the preaching of the Word."[103] How, then, can anyone be saved? Perkins answered, "The Word preached is the scepter of Christ's kingdom, which against the nature of man by the operation of the Holy Ghost joined therewith does bend and bow the heart, will, and affections of man to the will of Christ."[104]

As instruments of redemption, ministers "must pray earnestly for people" (1 Sam 12:23), "mourn for the impenitent, when they will not turn to God" (Ps 119:136; Jer 9:1), and "privately confer, visit, admonish, and rebuke, and principally they must preach, and in such good manner, and in so diligent measure, as that they may redeem and win souls."[105] Perkins said, "This should be the end of their preaching, to deliver a soul from hell."[106]

Ministers must labor "to the uttermost of their power" to advance the gospel and build up the church, because Satan constantly works for "the overthrow of true religion, and the pure worship of God."[107] The minister "must be diligent in praying for his own and other particular churches of God, that they may know, believe, and obey the same doctrine which is taught them out of God's Word."[108]

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[98] Perkins, *Epistle of Jude*, in *Works*, 4:46.

[99] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:267.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 10:335–49.

[102] Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed*, 5:279. On Perkins's happy wedding of the doctrines of election and covenant, see Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 124–26, 129–30.

[103] Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed*, 5:280.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:227.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Perkins, *Christ and the Devil*, 1:146–47.

[108] Perkins, *Three Chapters of Revelation*, 4:426.

The Minister's Calling to Persevere

Perkins understood that it is one thing to talk about preaching and quite another to patiently endure the hardships of ministry over the years. The minister's calling will inevitably result in suffering, opposition, and difficulty, necessitating perseverance.

The Opposition of the World

Even before the preacher opens his mouth, he may face disinterest and resistance among his hearers. Some object against preaching because they are "enthusiasts," which means they claim to be so indwelt and inspired by God that they do not need external helps such as the Holy Scriptures. Perkins answered them by saying that God works through means, and He calls the elect through the Word (Acts 13:48; Rom 8:30; 1 Thess 1:4–5).[109]

Others object to preaching because they think that they do just as well to read their Bibles at home. Or they are concerned only to care for their bodies and are content to leave their souls to God. Perkins replied that God reconciles sinners to Himself through His ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20). Reading the Bible is excellent, but we need someone to explain and apply it to our consciences. Worldly people live for their bodies, but Christ said, "Seek first of all the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matt 6:33).[110]

The ministerial calling is a calling to suffer for the gospel. The wicked hate preaching because it uncovers their sin and inflames their conscience. Therefore, they strive against ministers and afflict them (Jer 15:10). The minister also faces "the difficulty of discharging the duties of his calling," the spiritually demanding tasks of preaching, prayer, and soul care.[111] "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor 2:16). And the church often provides poor financial support to its ministers, leading many gifted young men to seek other vocations.[112]

The Submission of the People

Perkins realized that people often do not appreciate the painful process of being spiritually formed under God's law and gospel. But they must submit to such preaching for their own good. Perkins said, "He must never look to taste the sweetness of the gospel, who has not first swallowed the bitter pills of the law. If, therefore, you would be declared righteous by the gospel, be content first to be pronounced miserable by the law."[113] Just as people value a lawyer who can get them acquitted from legal charges and a physician who can restore their lost health, so they should treasure ministers who introduce them to the One who can justify them before God's bar of justice and heal them from the deadly wounds of sin.[114]

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[109] Perkins, *Divine Worship*, 7:498–99.
[110] Perkins, 7:499–501.
[111] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:212.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Perkins, 10:220.
[114] Ibid.

The hearers must receive God's messengers as the angels of God and "hear them gladly, willingly, reverently, and obediently."[115] Though the message sometimes "crosses their corruption and is quite contrary to their disposition," it remains "a message from your God and King."[116] Thus, as ministers preach law and gospel, they bind and loose with heaven's authority, being the heralds of heaven's message (Matt 16:16; John 20:23; cf. Isa 44:26).[117] Perkins boldly informed "rulers and great men of this world" that they "must submit themselves to this powerful word of the ministers, to be taught by it, and to be reconciled by means of it," even to "lick the dust of Christ's feet," as the prophet says (Isa 49:23).[118] The message that ministers preach, "though a man speaks it, yet it is the Word of God," and all men should "acknowledge the power of the keys and censures (being rightly applied), their promises and their threatenings to be as from God, and to submit to them accordingly."[119]

The people of the church should "see the excellency of this calling, which has a commission and power to redeem them from hell and damnation, and what honor is due unto it."[120] Therefore, they should submit to the ministry of the Word, "for if the minister has a commission to redeem your soul, it must be by the Word and holy discipline."[121] If they rage and rebel against the ministry, Perkins said, "You do indeed a great wrong to the minister, for you frustrate his commission; but alas, [you do] a far [wrong] greater to yourself, for you frustrate your own salvation."[122] God's Word teaches us "not to oppose ourselves against ministers of God, but without pride and fierceness to yield subjection and obedience to their ministry….[Heb 13:17] We must permit our teachers after a sort to kill us—for their ministry must be as it were a sacrificing knife to kill the old man in us, that we may be an acceptable offering to God."[123]

Perkins believed that the fate of a nation could hinge on how its people responded to the preaching of the Word. In a sermon preached in 1593 to the crowds at the Sturbridge Fair, Perkins warned that England had sinned grievously against God's love. Perkins said, "[God] has imparted His treasures of His Word and sacraments to us. His holy Word has never [been] better preached, and the mysteries thereof never more plainly opened, since the times of the apostles."[124] Yet, Perkins asserted, the nation had responded with willful ignorance and contempt of true Christianity. God's holy name was commonly blasphemed, and the Sabbath profaned. Men regularly cheated each other in dishonest business dealings and spouses cheated on each other. Perkins called for evangelical repentance: "I exhort you in the name of God, search

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[115] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:206.
[116] Perkins, 10:207.
[117] Perkins, 10:222.
[118] Perkins, 10:223.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Perkins, 10:228.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Perkins, *God's Free Grace and Man's Free Will*, 6:395.
[124] William Perkins, *Exposition upon Zephaniah 2:1–2 . . . Containing a Powerful Exhortation to Repentance*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 9, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 107. On this sermon, see Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England*, 115–17.

yourselves, find out your sins, confess them to God freely and ingenuously, confess their deserts to be hell and damnation, humble your hearts to God, cry and call for pardon as for life and death, purpose and promise to leave them, begin a new course of life, believe steadfastly, and doubt not but of pardon and forgiveness in the blood of Christ, continue in that faith, and that new course of life."[125] Only then, he indicated, could the nation hope to avoid divine judgment.

Perkins asserted the necessity of hearing sermons frequently because the preaching of God's Word is "an ordinance of God," His "usual means…to begin and confirm faith and all graces" (cf. Rom 10:14), to grant the new birth (cf. 1 Cor 4:15), and "to beat down the kingdom of the devil" (cf. Luke 10:18).[126] Hearing God's Word is a sign of subjection to God, whereas a lack of preaching and hearing God's Word is "one of the great curses of God upon earth" (cf. Amos 8:11).[127]

The Attitude of Profitable Hearers

Rather than scorn the Word or sit under preaching with a hard heart, people must subject themselves to God's Word. This requires faith in all of the Word of God as trustworthy and true (cf. 1 Thess 1:5), fear toward God that causes us to tremble at His Word (Isa 66:2), and humility to receive what God says with an eager longing to be saved (Acts 2:37; Jas 1:21). We must fix our hearts on the Word by making it "our treasure" that we love above all things (cf. Ps 119:72, 97) and by building our conduct and comfort on it as our "foundation."[128]

Perkins gave counsel for our duties in preparing to hear the Word preached, hearing it with profit, and responding after hearing it. First, in preparation we must cleanse our hearts as much as possible from the "presumption" that we already have enough knowledge and wisdom, "troubled affections" such as anger toward the preacher, and "abundance of evil corruptions" such as hardness of hearts, the cares of this world, and the insistence that the sermon must suit our wicked hearts.[129] We must also pray that God "would give us the hearing ear," and consciously set ourselves "in the presence of God" to hear Him speak.[130]

Second, in hearing the sermon we must listen with discernment as to whether the preacher is declaring the truth of God from the Holy Scriptures. We must also take care that the Word "is rooted and grounded" in our hearts "like good seed in good ground."[131] This requires us to have a "right understanding" of the Word, join it with

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[125] Perkins, *Exhortation to Repentance*, 9:108–11.

[126] Perkins, *Divine Worship*, 7:496–97.

[127] Perkins, 7:497.

[128] Perkins, 7:501–2.

[129] William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 8, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 8:271–72.

[130] Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 8:271–72. Perkins urged the "private hearer" to judge the doctrine he hears according to the Holy Scriptures, which are above all judgment because they are "the judgment of the Holy Spirit," but he cautioned the layman to "not censure the teacher or his ministry" or to "publish or broach any point of doctrine, but that which is plainly propounded in the Word, and taught by the ministers thereof," to avoid "schisms and heresies"; for, ministers, he said, are to be judged by other ministers in the church (8:273).

[131] Perkins, 8:273.

faith (Heb 4:2), "be affected" by it with appropriate tenderness of heart, joy, and grief, and allow it to have "the greatest sway" in our hearts.[132] This is hearing with "a right disposition."[133] Perkins declared that the great essential is faith, and he illustrated that "the Word of God preached is as a cup of wine."[134] Those who drink without faith find it "sour and tart"; but faith is like "sugar," which when mixed with the Word, makes it "as a cup of sweet wine" delightful to those who drink it in.[135]

Third, after the sermon we must treasure the Word in our hearts (Ps 119:11), meditate or ruminate on it as an animal chews the cud, experience the goodness of God in His Word (Ps 34:8), examine ourselves by it (Ps 119:59), and obey it (Jas 1:22).[136]

The Preciousness of Profitable Preachers

People should value faithful ministers. A good minister of Christ is rare, even "one of a thousand" (Job 33:24). Therefore, the people should highly esteem faithful ministers and receive them even as angels of God (Gal 4:14). Perkins said, "Have you then a godly pastor? Run to him for conference [godly fellowship], comfort, [and] counsel. Use his company, frequent his sermons, account him worthy of double honor, think it no small or ordinary blessing, for you have one of a thousand. And bless God for bestowing His mercy to you, which He has denied to so many others. For some have no minister, [and] some have a minister, and yet alas he is not one of a thousand."[137]

Perkins's mentor at Cambridge, Laurence Chaderton (c. 1536–1640) lamented in 1578, "Where are the lips of those ministers which do preserve knowledge, or those messengers of God, at whose mouths his poor people should seek his law? Nay rather, where be not whole swarms of idle, ignorant, and ungodly curates and readers, who neither can, nor will, go before the dear flock of Christ in soundness of doctrine, and integrity of life?"[138]

The Puritan mourning over an ignorant, ill-equipped, and ungodly ministry was all the more poignant because of the centrality of the local minister to the life of the church. In the Elizabethan era, there was no national machinery to bring about deep reform in the church. In fact, many forces opposed it. Godly ministers, therefore, were key to spiritual renewal. Ian Breward said, "It appeared that the Reformation in depth desired by the Puritans could only be achieved when a godly and articulate Reformer was found in every parish."[139]

Perkins offered three reasons why a good minister is so rare. First, the ministerial calling is hated by the wicked because it uncovers their sin and inflames their conscience. Therefore, they strive against ministers and make their lives miserable

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[132] Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 8:273–74.
[133] Perkins, 8:272.
[134] Perkins, *Damnation or Grace*, 8:490.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 8:274.
[137] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:215.
[138] Laurence Chaderton, *An Excellent and Godly Sermon . . . Preached at Paul's Cross the XXVI Daye of October, An. 1578* (London: Christopher Barker, [1578]), C3r. See Mal. 2:7.
[139] Breward, "William Perkins and the Ideal of the Ministry," 76.

(Jer 15:10).[140] Second, there is "the difficulty of discharging the duties of his calling," to be faithful in such spiritually demanding tasks as preaching, prayer, and soul care. Indeed, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor 2:16).[141] Third, in the New Testament, the ministry is no longer financially supported in the manner that Israel was compelled to support the Levites. Consequently, some gifted for ministry turn elsewhere vocationally due to a lack of sufficient financial remuneration.[142] It is illuminating to note Crashawe's comment that in the hundred parishes with which he was directly familiar, only two to five percent of the money collected in tithes was used for the minister's salary, resulting in a grossly underpaid ministry.[143]

This last reason for the scarcity of good ministers prompted Perkins to urge "rulers and magistrates…[to] maintain and increase, and do all [the] good they can to the schools of the prophets, to universities, colleges, and schools of good learning, which are the seminaries of the ministry."[144] He also called upon university students to "bend their studies and their thoughts to the ministry," for "the most excellent vocation" is worthy of men with "the most excellent gifts."[145] Ministers and ministerial students should not allow the contempt of the world to deter them from entering the ministry, for it bears the inestimable honor of being the ministry of righteousness and reconciliation. Though ministers are little esteemed in this world, they will be honored and loved by the children of God.[146]

People must not use the spiritual imperfections of their ministers as an excuse to reject the ministry of the Word or neglect attendance upon it. The preaching of the Word is God's ordinance. We must not refuse the spiritual food God offers even though those who serve it to us are "subject to manifold infirmities."[147]

Ministers themselves should strive to be the best ministers they can be in both ability and faithfulness, so that, "however the number of good ministers is small, it shall be nothing smaller for [because of] you."[148] Each ministry should so "honor his calling so that he may thereby allure and draw others to a love and liking thereof."[149] Furthermore, true ministers should not discourage each other but unite in love as a holy "brotherhood," giving each other "the right hand of fellowship" (Gal 2:9), and standing together "against the scorn and contempt of the world."[150] Perkins said, "Their office is to publish and persuade peace between God and men, to which they are unfit that cannot maintain peace among themselves….And when there cannot be consent of judgment by reason of human frailty, yet so long as the foundation is

[140] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:211–12.
[141] Perkins, 10:212.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Crashawe, Epistle Dedicatory to the second treatise, in Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:233. His information pertained to East Riding of the County of York (Yorkshire). The "tithe" in this context was not a voluntary gift from church members but a tax on parish crops and income imposed by the civil government.
[144] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:213.
[145] Perkins, 10:215.
[146] Perkins, 10:219–20.
[147] Perkins, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1:313–14.
[148] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:214.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

maintained, there must be consent in affection."[151] The latter statement means that ministers who hold to the core doctrines of the gospel must love and respect each other even when they differ over secondary matters.

Most of all, the lack of good ministers should move all Christians "to pray the Lord of the harvest to thrust out more laborers into His harvest. And for those who are called already, [we must pray] that God would make them faithful in that high function, and as Elisha craved of Elijah, that the good 'spirit may be doubled, and trebled upon them' [2 Kgs 2:9], so that the number may be increased."[152] The people of the church should pray for ministers' faithfulness, giftedness, and overcoming of Satan's attacks, which is one way that we obey Christ's instruction to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Matt 6:10).[153]

The Endurance of Faithful Ministers

Regardless of how people receive ministers, the Lord is with them. Perkins wrote, "Let this be an encouragement for all pastors and ministers of God's church to labor painfully and faithfully in their places, for the goodness of the Lord will never fail them, nor shall they want comfort whenever they stand in need thereof."[154] Though it may not seem plausible that God would manifest His holiness and impart His saving grace through the ministry of lowly men, Perkins reminds us that God is pleased to work through "a weak means; nay, a means that seems contrary."[155] He said, "So great, so admirable, and so powerful are the ordinances of God," though the ministry "is exercised by a weak man, mortal and miserable as others are."[156]

In obedience to their calling, ministers, like Paul, "must be laborers indeed (1 Cor 3:9) and workmen (2 Tim 2:15). And they must show themselves to be so by their care and industry in winning souls to God."[157] If our labors seem "in vain," Perkins said, "We must follow the calling and commandment of God, whether we have good success or no, and whatsoever come of it….For it must suffice us that the work we take in hand is pleasing unto God."[158]

Regardless of how people receive ministers, the Lord is with them. Perkins said, "Let this be a comfort and encouragement to all true ministers, for if God bids them go, He will go with them Himself. If He sends them, He will not forsake them, but assist them, bless them, open their mouths, enlarge their hearts, harden their foreheads, and give power unto their words to convert His children and to confound and astonish the hearts of His enemies."[159] Furthermore, God will give them eternal rewards for their service. Thus, Perkins exclaims, "As they are bid 'Go,' so once they

[151] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:63.
[152] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:215–16.
[153] Perkins, *Lord's Prayer*, 5:445–46.
[154] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:269.
[155] Perkins, 10:264.
[156] Perkins, 10:265.
[157] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 2:278.
[158] Perkins, 2:279.
[159] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:280.

shall be bid 'Come'…. 'Come thou good and faithful servant, enter into thy master's joy' [Matt 25:21]."[160]

Conclusion

Perkins's teaching on the ministry reflects the idealism, realism, and optimism of Reformed experiential Christianity. Breward says of *The Calling of the Ministry*, "Perkins said much of value…about the motives, trials and joys of the ministry. He made no attempt to gloss over its difficult side, but attempted to weed out the faint-hearted by setting out the very highest standards."[161] Perkins's teaching on ministry reflected the "sincerity and devotion" and "strenuous consecration" of Puritan ministerial expectations.[162]

In a world where theology and application are too often divorced, Perkins is a model of preaching doctrine for life. Raymond Blacketer says, "Perkins had the ability to translate the complexities of academic theology into clear and practical teaching for the people in the pews."[163] He labored to train other ministers in this same blessed art. Blacketer writes, "Since Perkins saw the conversion and spiritual renovation of the people in the pews as the primary means of reform in the church, he was particularly concerned with the training of preachers who could be effective in fostering piety in their congregations."[164]

Perkins's wedding of doctrine and godliness was a central feature of Reformed orthodoxy in general and the English Puritans in particular. Though we should not try to reproduce Puritan culture in the twenty-first century, we can find much instruction and inspiration for our preaching in the writings of Perkins and his fellow Puritans. Let us rather seek grace to follow such godly preachers only insofar as they followed Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11:1). Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), the John Owen, so to speak, of the Dutch "Further Reformation," commended the practical application of theology to piety and said, "The English labored more than any other Reformed people in this branch of theology…and Perkins, the Homer of practical Englishmen to this day, stands above all."[165]

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[160] Perkins, *The Calling of the Ministry*, 10:280.

[161] Ian Breward, "The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602" (PhD Dissertation, University of Manchester, 1963), 173–74.

[162] Breward, "The Life and Theology of William Perkins," 174.

[163] Raymond A. Blacketer, "William Perkins (1558–1602)," in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 45.

[164] Blacketer, "William Perkins (1558–1602)," 45–46.

[165] Gisbertus Voetius, "Concerning Practical Theology," in *Selectae Disputationes Theologicae*, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 274. Homer is (supposedly) the author of the epic poems foundational to ancient Greek literature, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 245–257

EZRA: A PREACHER-THEOLOGIAN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Ezra provides an exemplary model for the preacher-theologian as he demonstrates a leadership reproducing itself with God's guidance and blessing. His family heritage set him up for a life of serving the Lord. He committed his life to studying the Word of God and to practicing it in life. As the Lord brought him into a position of high standing, he displayed great courage and wisdom because the hand of God was upon him. These God-given qualities carried him through the journey with the Israelites back to their homeland to build the temple and restore the worship of Yahweh. Ezra's example is one to follow for every pastor and leader in ministry today.

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Introduction

During my years of teaching at The Master's Seminary I had the opportunity to observe Dr. John MacArthur, a godly pastor who sets a high bar proclaiming the Word of God from the pulpit and living out what he preaches. As a professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, my favorite biblical example is Ezra. Ezra 7 describes a dedicated servant of the Lord with "the hand of Yahweh his God" (v. 6 LSB) upon him. He is willing to go anywhere at any time, even if it involves a dangerous and lengthy journey. He is willing to serve among a people where there is conflict, to work where there are and will be great problems, to dedicate his life to the Word of God by teaching and translating it.

Between the end of chapter 6 and the commencement of chapter 7, fifty-eight years have passed. In 538 B.C., Cyrus the Great (559–530 B.C.), king of Persia, had issued a decree allowing the Jews exiled to Babylon to return to Jerusalem so they might rebuild the temple and the city. Two years later (536 B.C.), the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem began rebuilding the temple the Babylonians had destroyed seventy years prior (Ezra 3:8). When they started the restoration, they received

opposition from non-Jewish peoples in the land (4:1–24) and after a short time the building of the temple came to a halt because of that opposition (536–520 B.C.).[1] The Jews then appealed to the king of Persia, Darius the Great (522–486 B.C.), and he allowed them to resume building the temple in 520 B.C. Four years later (516 B.C.) they completed and dedicated the new temple. According to Ezra 6:15–18, they joyfully celebrated the temple's completion. Simultaneous to the celebration, those who remembered the temple of Solomon wept loudly because the new temple did not exhibit the same glory as the former building (3:12–13; cf. Hag 2:2–3). Once again, the temple is standing and services to the Lord have begun. Now, fifty-eight years after the Passover celebration at the newly built temple (6:19–22), Ezra 7 resumes the history in 458 B.C. during the reign of Artaxerxes I king of Persia (464–423 B.C.) to introduce the man Ezra.

The Importance of Family (Ezra 7:1–6)

Family counts. Ask anyone who has grown up in a failed family or a seriously dysfunctional family what it is like to face the challenges of life without the many advantages of a healthy and happy family supporting them. Having a family devoted to worshiping and serving God provides a young person with a priceless heritage. Family looms large in the life of Ezra.

Ezra's Lineage (7:1–5)

The text introduces Ezra (for whom this Old Testament book is named) as "Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah" (v. 1b). The word "son" here is best understood as "a descendant."[2] Between Ezra and Seraiah a number of generations remain unlisted in this abbreviated genealogy.[3] Azariah (עֲזַרְיָה, *ʿăzaryâ*, "Yahweh has helped"[4]) is the

[1] The short period of time might have been a few months or as long as six years (536–530 B.C.). Arguments for a longer period of time include: (1) In Ezra 4:4 the "from" in LSB translation ("dismayed them from building") is not present in the Hebrew: וּמְבַלְּהִים אוֹתָם לִבְנוֹת, *ûməbalahîm ʾôtām libnôt*, lit. "and dismaying them building"). (2) In Ezra 4:5 "all the days of Cyrus" may indicate attempts to stop the building continued until the end of Cyrus' reign (530 BC). The attempts were ongoing, because the building of the Temple had not totally stopped. (3) While Cyrus was king it would have been very difficult for the opposition to succeed in getting him to issue a stop order—he's the one who issued the decree to rebuild the Temple. (4) When the Jews' benefactor (Cyrus) had passed from the scene, they no longer enjoyed his protection and the work would have soon come to a total halt.

[2] Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 126.

[3] According to Leslie C. Allen, "Ezra," in *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard, and Robert K. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 56, compared with the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6, the genealogy of Ezra skips "six names in the middle. Whereas 1 Chronicles 6:14 continues the listing to Jehozadak, the exiled son of the last high priest before the exile, this list begins with his father Seraiah. We recall from Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2 that Jehozadak was the father of Jeshua, the first high priest after the exile. By starting with Seraiah, this genealogy associates Ezra with a collateral line through another, unnamed son of Seraiah. So Ezra is invested with impressive priestly credentials, as a cousin of the contemporary high priestly family" (emphasis original). The Babylonians executed this Seraiah after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:18–21) in 586 B.C., 132 years before the events of Ezra 7.

[4] Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra-Nehemiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 4:649.

longer Hebrew form of the shortened Aramaic name Ezra (עֶזְרָא, *ʿezrāʾ*).[5] Therefore, Ezra bears a name some of his ancestors also bore. "Son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok" (vv. 1c–2b)—Zadok is the head of the Zadokites, the priests of the line of Aaron who are promised to remain as priests in the millennial kingdom (Ezek 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11). "Son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah" (vv. 2c–3b)—there is that name Azariah again, a favorite in Ezra's family line. "Son of Meraioth, son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas" (vv. 3c–5b)—Phinehas is the brave priest in Numbers 25:6–15 who acted on behalf of Israel's holy God. When adultery and blatant pagan disobedience took place before the eyes of the people of Israel, he picked up a spear, ran into the tent, and pierced the man and woman engaged in illicit intercourse. Phinehas showed that he would give his life, if need be, to protect the sanctity of God's people and to be obedient to God's Word. This same heroic priest is an ancestor to Ezra. The genealogy concludes with two more names: "son of Eliezer, son of Aaron the chief priest" (v. 5c). These first six verses reveal the importance of family. Ezra's lineage goes all the way back to Aaron, Israel's first high priest. A lot rides on this young man's shoulders. He receives a legacy teaching him to obey God and to be dedicated to His Word. And, what a legacy his lineage is. It includes Phinehas who stood for the holiness of God and Zadok to whom God promised a line that will serve the ultimate Davidic king in the future millennial kingdom. This Ezra is leaving Babylon to make the trek to Jerusalem where he will lay his life on the line to serve the Lord God of Israel.

Ezra's Vocation (7:6a)

Ezra was a scribe. We think of a scribe as someone who just writes all day long, like a secretary. However, a scribe in ancient Near Eastern cultures did more than that.[6] A scribe was a man who had been highly trained, not just in one language but in many languages. Moses was a scribe trained in the household of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. He was taught the languages of the ancient Near East. He was able to write and to read all those languages—e.g., Akkadian (a cuneiform language), Aramaic, Persian, Phoenician, Ugaritic, and Egyptian. He was very learned and highly skilled to perform his scribal duties (see Acts 7:22). In addition to languages, scribes received training in law, government, and diplomacy. They served as ministers of state and as teachers. Allen identifies Ezra's scribal position as "virtually 'secretary of state for Jewish affairs.'"[7] Beyond all the capabilities of a secular scribe, Ezra was a godly, spiritual scribe with the hand of his God upon him. The word "skilled" (מָהִיר, *māhîr*; v. 6) occurs also in Proverbs 22:29 ("Do you see a man skilled in his work?

[5] Tiberius Rata, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 92.

[6] See D. W. Baker, "Scribes and Schools," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 884–88; Anthony J. Saldarini, "Scribes," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1012–13.

[7] Allen, "Ezra," 60. Or, a "high commissioner for Jewish affairs"; Philip A. Noss and Kenneth J. Thomas, *A Handbook on Ezra and Nehemiah*, United Bible Societies' Handbooks, ed. Paul Clarke et al. (New York: United Bible Societies, 2005), 157. See C. Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 52–58.

He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men"). That same word (*māhîr*) is used of the poet being "ready" (or "skilled") in Psalm 45:1c [Heb. 45:2c]: "My tongue is the pen of a skillful writer/scribe." In its only other occurrence in the Old Testament, LSB translates it as "prompt" (Isa 16:5) with the idea of speed and zeal, since the root meaning of *māhîr* is "swift, fast, quick."[8] Ezra is a man so trained that when he hears another language in which he has been trained, he can immediately translate and transcribe as it is being spoken or read. In other words, he is capable of simultaneous translation and inscription.

The text describes Ezra as skilled "in the law of Moses,"[9] not purely a secular scribe (Ezra 7:6). Above all else, he is expert in Mosaic law, "which Yahweh, the God of Israel had given" (7:6). The ultimate author of the law is God Himself—He is its source, not Moses. In the Bible, scribes as well as priests are commanded to preach and teach the law of God. Deuteronomy 33:10 declares that priests must instruct the people in God's law. Malachi 2:4–9 accuses the priests and scribes of Malachi's day of not teaching the Word of God and not obeying it as they ought. Later, Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees of His day because they do not faithfully teach and obey the Word of God (Matt 23). As a scribe and a priest, Ezra is skilled in the law of Moses.

Among the cultural ruins of the ancient Near East, an Assyrian stone relief depicts scribes standing in the presence of an officer of the king in the royal palace and writing on a tablet of clay (for a cuneiform language like Akkadian) and on a piece of parchment (in Aramaic) as the officer speaks.[10] They record information in different languages and different scripts on different media. Being "skilled" in the law of Moses, Ezra does not need to run to commentaries to discover the meaning of God's Word. He does not need to say to someone, "Well, I'll get back to you with an answer about that." He remains ready and swift with the answer. He is swift with his knowledge because he is thoroughly trained. Ezra is practiced in Scripture; he spends a lifetime dedicated to the Word of God in such a fashion that it resides in his mind and heart. It is like what Spurgeon said of John Bunyan: "Prick him anywhere; his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God."[11] Ezra is saturated with the word of God. He immerses himself in its meditation day and night (cf. Ps 1:2). He reads it. He delights in it. He memorizes it. He teaches it as one

[8] David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 8 vols. (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011), 5:164. See, also, James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 4542, "expeditious, i.e., pertaining to executing an action in a prompt and prudent manner, implying rapidity and diligence to the task."

[9] According to H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 92, "there can be no doubt" the reference is to the Pentateuch.

[10] See https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1848-1104-5. This relief (ca. 728 B.C.) dates to the reigns of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.) and the Judean king Ahaz (735–715 B.C.).

[11] C. H. Spurgeon, "The Last Words of Christ on the Cross," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 45:495.

possessing "a quickness of grasp and ease of movement"[12] through the complexities of Mosaic law he acquires from his deep and devoted study.[13] In other words, Ezra is a preacher-theologian with a reputation as "an interpreter par excellence."[14]

Gary Smith aptly summarizes and explains the biblical description of Ezra:

> The testimony of 7:6 shows that Ezra was an outstanding student who searched God's word with a strong dedication to developing exceptional skills in exegesis and application. This gave him credibility; he was a true believer and a dedicated disciple who knew what he was talking about. He did not study the Mosaic law code because he was curious about the ancient traditions of his grandparents. He was not in this occupation because he had to be, because it paid well, or just because his parents pushed him into it.[15]

Ezra's Blessing (7:6b)

The Lord God of Israel had given Ezra charge of the law of Moses. That law had come from God Himself by direct revelation to Moses. What a blessing that was to all Israel (cf. Rom 9:4–5). King Artaxerxes grants all that Ezra asks, "because the hand of Yahweh his God" is upon him (Ezra 7:6b; similar phraseology occurs also in 7:9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 2:8, 18). Ezra's lineage goes all the way back to Aaron. Ezra's vocation is as a scribe of God's law, and Ezra's blessing comes from the hand of God being on him. That is what makes Ezra who he is. We might attribute Ezra's character to his family or his home environment. But, it involves more than family and a fantastic legacy. Family cannot guarantee how a person turns out. It is a work of God. Family can be significant. Godly men and women who have come out of great, godly families have gone on to serve the Lord in amazing ways. Indeed, Ezra is like that. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that Ezra himself loves the Word of God. He studies the Word of God, teaches the Word of God, and writes the Word of God (the book of Ezra itself). In Nehemiah 8, we find out that he gets involved in one of the first known translations of the Word of God. After Ezra arrives in Jerusalem, he gathers all the people together inside the city and he reads the law of God to them. Yes, he stands and he reads to them the Torah which Moses had written. Some think he read only selected portions of the Torah, but he at least read a large portion of it.[16]

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[12] Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 70.

[13] Dr. MacArthur has repeatedly exhorted seminary students to care for the depth of their study of Scripture, and God will take care of the breadth of their ministry. This principle has proven itself for at least 2,500 years since Ezra's ministry's amazing breadth of impact resulting from the depth of his study of God's Word.

[14] F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 99.

[15] Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 79.

[16] Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 224: "It must have been a large scroll, for it was read for some six hours. Some argue that it could not have been the whole Pentateuch because that would have taken much longer than six hours. But if he read 'in' it, we should conclude that he read selected parts." Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxxviii–xxxix argues that "the Book of the Law of Moses" in Nehemiah 8:1 "was similar to, if not yet fully identical with, our Pentateuch."

All the people stand while he reads the law of Moses. It takes all morning, half of the day, to read, but they do not move. They do not leave. They stand and listen. As Ezra reads, men whom he appointed to the task are scattered throughout all the people. Those men translate what Ezra reads into a language the people understand. Why was that necessary? The people returning from Babylon no longer speak fluently in Hebrew, the language of their grandparents. They have adopted the language of Babylon—Aramaic. They bring the new language with them and it sticks among them so that even today the Hebrew language in Israel is printed in Aramaic letters rather than the ancient paleo-Hebrew letters from the time of Moses.[17] Ezra understands that the Jews require the Word of God in the language they currently speak.[18] Therefore, he arranges to have men in the audience who are skilled scribes like himself who as he reads the Torah can translate immediately from Hebrew into Aramaic. That is the type of man Ezra is. That is the type of service he renders. Such is his love for the Word of God. Indeed, he is profoundly proficient in the Scriptures and deeply dedicated to God's written revelation. As we read Nehemiah 8, we find some rather exciting details about what happens when the people hear the Word of God read aloud and translated. First, the text says that they understand (Neh 8:8, 12). Second, when they understand, they long for more. They are not satisfied with hearing the law of Moses that one time—they return on the second day to hear more (v. 13). Third, they obey the Word (vv. 14–16). Fourth, when they obey, God gives them great joy (v. 17). The greatest joy comes from the greatest obedience resulting from the best understanding of God's Word. If we can understand the Word of God, we can obey it. If we obey it fully, we will experience great joy. This is the situation in which those beautiful words, "the joy of Yahweh is your strength" (v. 10) arises.

But the amazing events do not come to an end—Nehemiah 9 records the Scripture-saturated prayer of the people. Ezra infuses them with a love for God's Word. They keep on with reading and hearing the Scriptures. That is how they rediscover instructions about how to observe the Feast of Booths (*Sukkot*). In fact, they observe the Feast of Booths exactly as written in the law of Moses (Lev 23:33–43). For the first time in one thousand years—not since the days of Joshua the son of Nun—has Israel observed the Feast of Booths like they do at that time. Why? Because of the dedication, the skill, and the love of a man of God like Ezra. Such love for the Word spreads like fire among the people. It is not Ezra alone, however. Such fervor does not depend upon humans and human flesh. The Spirit of God does the work of God in the midst of the people of God by the faithfulness of a man of God. All of this occurs because the hand of the Lord God of Ezra is upon him.

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[17] Martha L. Carter and Keith N. Schoville, eds., *Sign, Symbol, Script: An Exhibition on the Origins of Writing and the Alphabet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1984), 42. See, also, F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, 3rd rev. ed. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), 52–53.

[18] Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, 164: "by speaking to the people in the Aramaic language, the language most spoke. Although Hebrew and Aramaic are similar, they are different enough that many people would have had at least some trouble understanding the Hebrew that Ezra spoke."

The Impact of Obedience (Ezra 7:7–10)

Ezra's Journey (7:7–9a)

The group of returnees leaving Babylon for Jerusalem includes some of the Israelites ("the sons of Israel"), priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants (v. 7). Ezra gives the date as the seventh year of King Artaxerxes (in other words, 458 B.C.[19]). The faithful scribe arrives in Jerusalem in the fifth month (v. 8). Because he had left in the first month, the journey took about four months—from April 8 (the first day of Nisan that year) until August 4 (the first day of Ab that year; v. 9).[20] His obedience and his travels succeed "because the good hand of his God" is upon him (v. 9). The addition of "good" to describe God's "hand" speaks to the reality of God's providential grace and benevolence. Ezra travels through the deserts from Mesopotamia all the way to Jerusalem—walking (perhaps riding part of the way) through those hot, arid lands. He makes his way through the midst of dangerous peoples and environments.

Chapter 8 describes how he prepares for this journey. First, he takes inventory of the people, identifying them by families and giving their numbers (8:1–14). Second, he gathers the returnees together in a temporary camp to make certain everyone is ready for the journey. For three days (8:15) Ezra takes time to check and organize the caravan. Kidner observes that "The three-day pause by the river was no waste of time: this was the right moment to take stock and be prepared for unwelcome discoveries."[21] While providing a time of orientation for the returnees, Ezra notices the lack of Levites in their midst (v. 15). What good will come of a journey to restore the temple in Jerusalem if Levites and temple servants are absent? So Ezra sends a carefully selected group[22] of eleven men to summon Levites for teaching and temple servants for taking care of the facilities, sacrifices, and offerings (vv. 16–20). To ensure complete understanding of the selected group's mission, Ezra tells them what to say and to whom (v. 17). These are the marks of a superb administrator and leader. The Levites who respond to Ezra's call consist primarily of his relatives in the line of Phinehas—he has maintained his family relationships through whom he received such a valuable legacy. He neither ignores nor neglects his family ties.

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[19] Allen, "Ezra," 61: "In the year 458 the Persians were trying to cope with a revolt in Egypt, which was exacerbated by Greek military support. The political aim may have been to keep the neighboring province of Judah firmly on the Persian side by granting cultic concessions and a measure of local autonomy based on native traditions."

[20] Cf. Israel Loken, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2011), Ezra 7:8–9, Logos Digital Edition; Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 145.

[21] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 74.

[22] Ezra 8:16 designates the first nine as "chief men" (רָאשִׁים, *rāʾšîm*, literally "heads") and the last two as "teachers" (מְבִינִים, *məbînîm*, literally "discerners"). Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 141 points out that because "the same word in Neh 8:7–9 refers to the interpretation and teaching of the law, it likely carries that idea here."

Ezra's Protection (7:9b)

Ezra knows his fellow travelers will face dangers along their journey of approximately nine hundred miles over a demanding terrain.[23] The third preparation Ezra makes for the journey is to proclaim a fast and a season of prayer to beseech the Lord's protection (8:21–23). He is ashamed "to ask from the king for a military force and horsemen to help" them "against the enemy on the way" (8:22a). Ezra's decision to not ask for an armed escort lies in the fact that he believes they are going with "the hand of God" upon himself and upon his fellow pilgrims. They must trust God for protection. "Instead of a Persian military escort getting credit for safety, God should get renown for His sufficiency to protect His people against dangers."[24] Ezra appears to depend somewhat upon the writing of the prophet Isaiah for guiding him. Isaiah prophesied that the restoration of Zion would take place and that "Yahweh will go before you, and the God of Israel *will be* your rear guard" (52:12). Isaiah also wrote that those carrying "the vessels of Yahweh" must be purified for their task (52:11). Evidence supporting this association can be argued from Ezra 7:27 and Isaiah 60:7 and 13, the only three verses in the Old Testament using the same Hebrew word (פאר, *p ʾr*)[25] for adorning or beautifying the temple. Ezra is a teacher of all Scripture, not just the Torah (Law of Moses). He bases his faith in God on His written revelation.

In addition to his first three steps, Ezra takes a fourth: he makes sound arrangements for transporting all the wealth Artaxerxes sends along with the returnees (Ezra 8:24–30). The caravan includes gold, silver, and bronze ingots, vessels, and utensils worth millions of dollars by today's evaluation (8:25–27). The caravan also transports grains, wine, and other food supplies to take care of at least five thousand[26] people for four months, as well as the supplies to conduct the initial services for Yahweh in the temple at Jerusalem. This abundance makes the caravan a target for bands of highway robbers and outlaws. Therefore, Ezra spreads the goods out among all the people, so that if they lose someone or a pack animal, they only lose a small portion of what they are carrying as a group. He shows superior wisdom in making these arrangements. Though wise, Ezra exercises a faith greater than his wisdom. Ezra is protected by God's gracious hand upon him.

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[23] Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 100: "A direct route from Babylon to Jerusalem is about 500 miles, but they probably took the route through northern Syria to avoid the desert. In those days such a journey was dangerous."

[24] James E. Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2008), 738.

[25] Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000), 908; hereafter, *HALOT*.

[26] This number is obtained by adding women and children (8:21) to the 1,496 men (8:1–14), 40 Levites (8:18–19), and 220 temple servants (8:20). Cf. Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 70: "Since these figures do not include wives and children, there must have been a relatively large contingent that went to Jerusalem with Ezra."

Ezra's Determination (7:10)

Ezra "set his heart" (הֵכִין לְבָבוֹ, *hēkîn ləbābô*, literally "he firmly resolved"[27]), he determines, to set life-goals honoring his God. First, he determines "to study" (לִדְרוֹשׁ, *lidrôš*, "search, enquire, investigate"[28]) "the law of Yahweh." In other words, Ezra does not consider himself to have already gained a complete understanding of every aspect of Mosaic law or of all instruction Yahweh has given to any of the writers in the Hebrew Bible. He spends time reading, rereading, and carefully interpreting the biblical text. Second, he determines "to practice"[29] (וְלַעֲשׂוֹת, *wəlaʿăśōt*) what God's written revelation demands of him. Obedience is "better than sacrifice," as Samuel so eloquently declared (1 Sam 15:22). All who follow God must do more than just read or listen to His Word (Jas 1:22). Third, beyond studying the Word and doing it, Ezra determines "to teach" (וּלְלַמֵּד, *ûləlammēd*) Yahweh's "statute and judgment" (חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט, *ḥōq ûmišpāṭ*) in Israel. The two terms for kinds of laws represent all kinds of laws or instructions. Some scholars think that "*ḥōq* refers to the cultic ordinances and *mišpāṭ* to the civil laws."[30] Millard holds that *ḥōq* indicates "important enactments preserved permanently."[31] For the second word (*mišpāṭ*), Enns identifies its meaning as "decisions…regulatory and normative for Israel's conduct."[32] Ezra dedicates himself to pass the Word of Yahweh on to others, to preserve it permanently, and to make it normative for how all Israelites conduct themselves. Today we possess the gospel concerning Jesus Christ as the core message of divine revelation in both Old and New Testaments. We must set our hearts to study the gospel, to obey the gospel, and to teach the gospel. As with Ezra, "This threefold approach to ministry sets a solid model for all those who aspire to serve God."[33]

The Implementation of a Royal Decree (7:11–26)

Ezra's Courier Duty (7:11–24)

This section of Ezra 7 provides an Aramaic copy of King Artaxerxes' royal memorandum regarding the task and authority he assigns to Ezra. Artaxerxes had spoken the memorandum, and scribes like Ezra (perhaps even Ezra himself?) wrote it down as he spoke. The authoritative nature and high legal aspect of this document appears in Artaxerxes' description of himself as "king of kings" (v. 12).[34] Ezra's exalted standing in the eyes of the king comes with the testimony that he is "the scribe of the law of the God of heaven." Oh, that we would be known by the leaders of our

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[27] *HALOT*, 465.

[28] *HALOT*, 233.

[29] Literally, "do."

[30] Helmer Ringgren, "חָקַק *ḥāqaq*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 16 vols., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:143.

[31] Alan Millard, "חָקַק (*ḥāqâ*)," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:251.

[32] Peter Enns, "מִשְׁפָּט (*mišpāṭ*)," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:1143.

[33] Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, 76–77.

[34] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 100 points out that this title, "though occasionally used by the Babylonians, was a typical self-designation by the Achaemenid kings" (kings of Persia).

government as servants of the God of heaven! It ought to be our goal to be so saturated with the Word of God, so obedient to it, and so desirous of teaching it to others that even our governmental leaders would identify us this way. There is no greater calling, no greater appointment, than to serve the God of heaven and His Word. From verse 14 we learn that Artaxerxes' seven counselors[35] are also fully aware of Ezra's reputation. The king commands Ezra to take the written Word of the God of Israel and use it to evaluate what is happening in Judah and Jerusalem. Artaxerxes also commands Ezra to use all the goods Ezra's caravan takes with them from the royal coffers to "do according to the will of" Israel's[36] God (v. 18). He also decrees that "all the treasurers who are *in the provinces* beyond the River" must respond to any need that Ezra demands of them (v. 21). That involves all the region west of Mesopotamia and south of modern Turkey all the way to Egypt.

To accomplish the royally assigned tasks, Ezra must be a man of action and obedience. Artaxerxes knows that Ezra does not dilly dally over the law of God or the commands of his king. He does not respond by questioning the orders or demanding reasons to obey. No amount of ridicule from nay-sayers will delay him in accomplishing what he has been commanded. His obedience is never half-hearted. With his whole mind, soul, and body he loves God and His Word.

Ezra's Commission (7:25–26)

At the end of his decree, Artaxerxes includes a personal note for Ezra himself: "And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges" (v. 25). Like Daniel, Ezra is known for being wise. He is like a second Daniel. The Jewish people believe that Ezra is like the second Moses.[37] Ezra stands before pagan governors and the Persian emperor. Yet he does nothing but what God tells him to do. He acts according to and teaches nothing other than what God commands. Artaxerxes does not say, "You have your wisdom from my gods." He does not claim Ezra has wisdom imparted by schools and human teachers. No, he says Ezra's wisdom is from Israel's God. Smith identifies the plausible source of Artaxerxes' acquaintance with Ezra's character: "The king must have had years of experience working with Ezra and recognized that he had a special measure of wisdom from God and a practical ability to find and appoint skilled people to judicial positions of great responsibility."[38]

As for those who fail to obey the law of Israel's God and the laws of Persia, Artaxerxes decrees a variety of legal punishments designed to fit the nature of each crime (v. 26). In order that he might fully implement the royal decree, Ezra carries a copy with him. He need only present it to anyone who stops him and asks him who he is and what he is doing. Even in Jerusalem the decree establishes his authority to appoint governors and officers, as well as priests for the temple services. He has authority to

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[35] This detail demonstrates the authenticity and historicity of the account; Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 133 citing Herodotus 3.31, 71, 83–84; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.6.4–5.

[36] The "your" in "your God" is plural.

[37] Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 58: "According to 2 Esdras, Ezra was the only prophet left after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (12:42). A second Moses, he rewrote the Scriptures in forty days (14:19–48); like Elijah, he would be taken up to heaven (8:19; 14:9)."

[38] Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, 77.

establish the worship of the God of heaven according to the law of the God of heaven. The highest human authority of that time and region is Artaxerxes and he recognizes that the God of heaven is the highest authority over Ezra. The situation is reminiscent of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king who learned this lesson after being driven from his palace and living as an animal until he understood that the Most High in heaven rules over the kingdoms of mankind (Daniel 4).

The Imperative of Divine Blessing (7:27–28)

Ezra's Praise (7:27)

For the first time in the narrative, Ezra himself speaks (note use of "our fathers," "to me," "I," "my God," "upon me," "I," and "with me"). He recognizes that it is God who works on the heart of Artaxerxes (cf. 6:22; Prov 21:1) to provide for the beautifying of the temple in Jerusalem. He praises "Yahweh, the God of our fathers." By using the memorial name of God, the highest divine proper name—Yahweh—he may allude back to the exodus from Egypt when God acted as Yahweh to deliver His people (see Exod 3:14; 6:7). He is the God whom Ezra serves—the covenant-keeping God of Israel. He is the God whose temple will be restored in Jerusalem, where He chose to locate His dwelling place on earth (Exod 15:17; Deut 12:5; Ps 74:7).

Ezra's Blessing (7:28a)

Ezra says Yahweh has extended His steadfast, faithful love (חֶסֶד, *ḥesed*)[39] to him. Whether or not *ḥesed* implies a covenant relationship, God loves with a love that will never let go—a love that says, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," no matter what happens (cf. Heb 13:5). Yahweh extended His love to Ezra in a very public fashion witnessed by King Artaxerxes, his counselors, and all the princes of the realm. Joseph and Daniel had also experienced Yahweh's faithful love in ways obvious to Pharaoh and his nobles in Joseph's case (Gen 39:2–5, 21–23; 41:38–40) and to the kings and royal officers under whom Daniel served (Dan 1:9; 2:46–48; 6:16–28). God had indeed blessed Ezra and Ezra gives Him thanks and praise. This characteristic marks every godly Christian leader: as recipients of God's love, they possess hearts and mouths filled with praise and thanksgiving to God.

Ezra's Courage (7:28b)

Being strengthened by God's hand upon him, Ezra "takes courage" (הִתְחַזַּקְתִּי, *hiṯḥazzaqtî*).[40] He needs courage and strength to lead the returnees all the way back to Jerusalem and to take charge of the situation awaiting him there. So he gathers

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[39] R. Laird Harris, "698a חֶסֶד (*ḥesed*)," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 1:307, after presenting a summary of discussions about the word's meaning, concludes, "The word 'lovingkindness' of the KJV is archaic, but not far from the fulness of meaning of the word." LSB also uses "lovingkindness."

[40] *HALOT*, 304. LSB translates the verb as "was strengthened."

"chief men" (the same word, *rāʾšîm*, as in 8:16[41]) from Israel to go with him. Ezra's God-given wisdom allows him to accurately discern which men possess the leadership qualities required for the journey and tasks ahead. He is a leader of leaders. Like Ezra, Christian leaders must have God-given courage, God-given wisdom, and God-chosen companions in ministry. It is not enough to lead followers; leaders must lead leaders. When godly leaders choose others with key leadership qualities, they cannot micromanage them—they must let them lead. Let them do the job they have been chosen to do. That is not easy. It takes immense courage to lead leaders. For the third time the text tells readers that Ezra is who he is, and is doing what he does, because of "the hand of Yahweh [his] God upon [him]" (7:6, 9, 28). The threefold repetition points to the key truth involved in Ezra's upbringing, calling, and commissioning. Recognizing this truth produces humility in God's servants and increases their faith.

Implications

First of all, a godly family produces godly servants. There are many whom God calls to lead in His service who do not grow up in a godly family. It is not a requirement but is a great blessing. One of the great joys of church ministry is watching families remain faithful to the Word of God through several generations. How wonderful to see children and grandchildren volunteering for missionary service, evangelizing fellow students, or taking the gospel to neighbors. A godly family is a priceless heritage. Ezra had one. Are we ourselves making certain to pass on a godly, Bible-directed heritage? Will an Ezra arise from our line?

Secondly, by "the good hand of God" we can do God's will. Every morning we must wake up and realize we are not strong enough or wise enough to do the things God asks of us in His precious Word. We must depend upon Him. That is why we need to spend time in the Scriptures every day. That is why we must spend time in prayer every day. Nothing we can do of our own accord with our own wisdom, knowledge, and power will accomplish the Lord's work. Indeed, that is a task we have for the rest of our lives. We must never stop being students of the Word of God. We must study and obey God's Word.

Thirdly, as in the case of Ezra, obedience to the Word of God takes place best in the company of God's people. Ezra does not go back alone—he takes at least five thousand people with him. He chooses leaders, priests, teachers, singers, and people to care for the temple facilities. Notice that he chooses everyone involved in providing for corporate worship. Even during the four months of their long journey from Babylon to Jerusalem they must have conducted corporate worship on a regular basis. Then, arriving in Jerusalem, they would become involved in the corporate worship practiced in the house of God. Ezra cannot do it alone. If he does it alone, he fails to do what he has been tasked to do. We, too, depend upon other believers in both service and worship. We cannot serve God the way Ezra does without the company of God's people.

Lastly, the man of God's choosing leads and trains leaders. He must identify, teach, and appoint leaders for ministry in the church of Jesus Christ. He must depend

[41] See footnote 21 above.

upon "the hand of God" upon him and be courageous. Ezra provides a superb model for the preacher-theologian in our own day because he exemplifies a leadership reproducing itself with God's guidance and blessing.

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TMSJ 34/1 (Spring 2023) 259–283

PAUL AS PASTOR-TEACHER: ESSENTIAL QUALITIES FROM 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1–12

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* * * * *

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, Paul delivers six essential qualities that the pastor-teacher is to live out and fulfill in leading the church. The pastor-teacher must communicate God's Word regardless of the cost, for the approval of God alone, without ulterior motives, out of sacrificial love, without a demand for compensation, and for the eternal welfare of his listeners. Indeed, the apostle Paul himself serves as an example of this portrait of the pastor-teacher, since he describes how he carried out his ministry by fulfilling these six qualities.

* * * * *

Introduction

Hebrews 13:7 states, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." When I consider the application of this exhortation to my own life, John MacArthur immediately comes to mind. Ever since I was introduced to his verse-by-verse exposition on the radio over three decades ago, his influence on me has been immeasurable. But not only have I been impacted by his faithful Bible teaching, I have been immeasurably blessed by his pastoral leadership as well. Twenty-five years ago, my wife and I were delighted to become members of Grace Community Church. Five years ago, I had the privilege of joining the team of elders at the church—a privilege that has afforded me the opportunity to view Pastor John's leadership more directly. In response to all of this, I cannot help but be forever grateful to God for such an example of a pastor and teacher—a response I know I share with countless others.

While the influence of John MacArthur's example is incalculable, anyone who knows him well also knows that he does not take the credit. He sees himself as part of

a long line of pastor-teachers tracing their way back to Paul of Tarsus, who himself stated, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). MacArthur writes,

> Of all the biographies I have read and the lives that have left their mark on my character, no one mortal individual has left a deeper impression on me than the apostle Paul. I sometimes feel I know more about him than anyone else except Christ, because I have spent a major portion of my life studying the biblical account of his life, letters, and ministry, learning leadership at his feet.[1]

Consequently, when seeking to identify the qualities that make MacArthur's ministry so exemplary, we are led to study those qualities that defined the apostle Paul. It is to that which we now turn. Such a study could take a systematic approach, but in keeping with my appreciation for the ministry of John MacArthur, I will approach it expositionally, forming lessons about Paul's model from just one portion of his writings.[2] And although all of Paul's letters serve as windows into his pastoral care and preaching, one passage stands out as exceptionally instructive—one which also finds consistent application in the ministry of John MacArthur. That text is 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12.

Composed late in AD 50, during Paul's eighteen-month stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11), 1 Thessalonians ranks as Paul's most personal letter written to a local church.[3] Evidencing his deep love for this congregation, the letter contains several impressive statements of thanksgiving (1 Thess 1:2–10; 2:13; 3:9–10); it repeats the loving address ἀδελφοί ("brothers") with unparalleled frequency (14x in five chapters); and its section describing Paul's yearning to see the church members face-to-face is steeped with highly affectionate language (2:17–3:10). Paul is not exaggerating when

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[1] John MacArthur, *Called to Lead: Twenty-Six Leadership Lessons from the Life of the Apostle Paul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), x.

[2] Noteworthy systematic treatments of the ministry of Paul as pastor-preacher include: Raymond Bailey, *Paul the Preacher* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991); John William Beaudean, Jr., *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, NABPR Dissertation Series 6 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988); W. E. Chadwick, *Pastoral Teaching of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984); John Eadie, *Paul the Preacher: A Popular and Practical Exposition of His Discourses and Speeches as Recorded in the Acts of the Apostles* (repr.; Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005); Jonathan Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study*, NSBT 42 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017); Duane Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); John MacArthur, *Called to Lead: Twenty-Six Leadership Lessons from the Life of the Apostle Paul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004); John MacArthur, *Remaining Faithful in Ministry: Nine Essential Convictions for Every Pastor* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Jerome Murphy-O'Conner, *Paul on Preaching* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963); Brian S. Rosner, Andrew S. Malone, and Trevor J. Burke, eds., *Paul as Pastor* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018); Klaas Runia, "What Is Preaching according to the New Testament?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 3–48; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008); James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); James W. Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

[3] On the one hand, the authorship of 1 Thessalonians can be understood as a joint effort: "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians" (1:1a). All three men were responsible for bringing the gospel to Thessalonica and discipling the new converts, so all three were known to and loved by the Thessalonian Christians. On the other hand, it is clear by the first-person singular pronoun "I" used in the letter that Paul was responsible for its composition (2:18; 3:5; 5:27).

he states to the Thessalonians, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exaltation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and our joy" (2:19–20).

A large part of Paul's purpose for writing can be traced to his unplanned and abrupt departure from Thessalonica. Despite strong opposition, Paul saw significant numbers turn from paganism to embrace the gospel he proclaimed (Acts 17:1–4; 1 Thess 1:9–10). But the opposition eventually won the support of the city's administration, and Paul was forced to leave before he was able to instruct the new converts adequately (Acts 17:5–9).[4] Warned of serious consequences should he return, Paul went on to focus his efforts on Corinth some 350 miles to the south, but he never gave up his concern for the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:17–18; 3:10). Within weeks of his forced departure from Thessalonica, he sends Timothy back to minister to the church as his surrogate (3:1–5), and when Timothy later rejoins Paul in Corinth with news of the Thessalonians' perseverance, Paul picks up his pen to write this letter of pastoral encouragement and instruction.

A particularly important section is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Next to Paul's description of his ministry principles in 2 Corinthians 2:14–6:10 and his address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:18–35, this text is arguably the most constructive for understanding Paul's ministry as a pastor-teacher. Having opened the letter with an unusually lengthy thanksgiving statement (1 Thess 1:2–10), Paul transitions in 2:1 to remind the Thessalonians of the character of the ministry he, Silvanus, and Timothy exhibited when they were in Thessalonica. Evident from the section that follows is that opposition to the church there remained strong, even after the missionaries' withdrawal.[5] It appears as though critics capitalized on Paul's absence, claiming that he was no different than the peripatetic philosophers who stayed to teach in each city only as long as the compensation kept coming.[6] But once the material incentives ceased, or if antagonism arose, these itinerant teachers would surreptitiously depart. This is what happened to Paul—so the critics claimed.

Consequently, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy recognized the need to provide the fledgling congregation with an apologetic to help them stand strong. George Milligan summarizes this well when he writes,

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[4] An example of the instruction Paul had not been able to convey to the Thessalonians face-to-face related to the fate of the "dead in Christ" (cf. 1 Thess 4:13–18). Unlike the teaching on the Day of the Lord (5:1–11), this instruction was new revelation and not previously delivered either in the Old Testament or in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. Compare 4:13, "But we do not want you to be uniformed, brethren, about those who are asleep," with 5:1, "Now as the times and epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."

[5] Some of the recent scholarship, preferring to force 1 Thessalonians into a predetermined rhetorical mold, has concluded that the opposition to which Paul alludes is only theoretical in nature. In other words, Paul invents a hypothetical adversary to create an opportunity for the instruction (*parenaesis*) which he provides in 2:1–12. The traditional view remains the best: the opposition to which Paul alludes was real, and Paul's instruction in 2:1–12 provides the Thessalonian believers with the apologetic necessary for their defense.

[6] F. F. Bruce summarizes the allegations poignantly: "A fine lot these Jewish spellbinders are! They come here and persuade you to join their following, but as soon as trouble blows up, off they go and leave their dupes to face the music," see *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), xxv.

> Having borne witness to the reality of the 'election' of their Thessalonian converts, the Apostles now turn to deal more particularly with certain charges that had been brought against themselves after their departure from Thessalonica, and of which they had heard probably through Timothy…. This section of the epistle accordingly takes the form of an 'apologia,' or a vindication of the part of St Paul and his companions of their apostolic claims, in so far as these were evidenced by their entrance into Thessalonica (vv. 1, 2), the general character of their preaching (vv. 3, 4), and its particular methods (vv. 5–12).[7]

This *apologia* did not need to articulate anything new to the congregation; instead, it would focus on that which the Thessalonians already knew.[8] It would call attention back to the believers' first-hand knowledge of this missionary team's integrity, identifying the chief qualities that Paul and his companions exhibited in their teaching and pastoring. As a result, the believers would have the confidence they needed to persevere in the face of opposition. But more than that, the *apologia* would supply all subsequent readers of the letter with a powerful summation of the qualities that are essential for the faithful ministry of the Word and shepherding of souls. First Thessalonians 2:1-12 reads as follows:

> [1] For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, [2] but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. [3] For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; [4] but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. [5] For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— [6] nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. [7] But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. [8] Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. [9] For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. [10] You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; [11] just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, [12] so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

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[7] George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 16.

[8] That Paul calls the Thessalonians to testify in 2:1–12 to what they already knew is observable through his frequent use of the phrases "you yourselves know" (v. 1), "as you know" (vv. 2, 5, 11), "you recall" (v. 9), and "you are witnesses" (v. 10).

From this *apologia* in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, six essential qualities of a pastor-teacher can be observed.[9] He must be:

1. Resolved to Communicate God's Word regardless of the Cost (vv. 1–2)
2. Motivated to Communicate God's Word for the Approval of God Alone (vv. 3–4)
3. Determined to Communicate God's Word without Ulterior Motives (vv. 5–7a)
4. Compelled to Communicate God's Word out of Sacrificial Love (vv. 7b–8)
5. Committed to Communicate God's Word without a Demand for Compensation (v. 9)
6. Devoted to Communicate God's Word for the Eternal Welfare of His Listeners (vv. 10–12)

Resolved to Communicate God's Word Regardless of the Cost

After recalling all that God had done in the lives of the Thessalonians in 1:2–10, Paul transitions in 2:1–2 to call upon the Thessalonians to remember all that God had done through the missionaries.

From a general reading of 2:1–2, it appears that the opponents of the church in Thessalonica were claiming that the ministry of Paul and his companions had been "in vain" (κενὴ γέγονεν, v. 1). Who were these opponents? Based on Luke's account, the early adversaries were Jewish (cf. Acts 17:5), but by the time Paul writes, the opposition had morphed into a more Gentile composition. Later in the letter he indicates specifically that the Thessalonian believers were enduring sufferings "at the hands of your own countrymen" (2:14)—a reference to the multi-ethnic populace of the city.

More certain is the fact that this opposition did not arise from *within* the church, such as from a Judaizing faction.[10] Paul addressed the members as "brothers" with unusual frequency in the letter, including here in 2:1.[11] He speaks of them as imitators of the missionaries (1:6) and as effectively advancing the missionaries' message (1:7–8). The missionaries viewed the Thessalonian believers as their crown of "exaltation, glory, and joy" (2:19–20), and the report brought back to Paul by Timothy (3:6) indicates that these feelings were mutual. There is no indication of an attitude of growing distrust within the church regarding the integrity of Paul and his ministry companions—a conclusion also implied by the absence of a title of authority, like ἀπόστολος ("apostle"), in the salutation (1:1).

Thus, integral to Paul's effective *apologia* is his ability to build upon the Thessalonians' common knowledge. He states at the outset, "For you yourselves know…" (2:1a). Leon Morris helpfully explains this approach:

> The calling of the Thessalonians to witness was a masterly defense. It is clear that Paul had been accused of insincerity. His enemies said that he was more

[9] These six qualities will be drawn from the six sentences that comprise the *apologia* following the punctuation provided by the NA28 edition of the Greek New Testament.

[10] Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "Infants, Nursing Mother, and Father: Paul's Portrayal of a Pastor," *Calvin Theological Journal* 37 (2002), 210–12.

[11] For other references, cf. also 1:4; 2:9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25.

> concerned to make money out of his converts than to present true teaching. The accusation would be made easier because itinerant preachers, concerned only to feather their own nests, were common in those days. The apostle was being represented as nothing more than another of this class of vagrant preachers. Paul's emphatic calling of the Thessalonians to witness did two things. In the first place it showed his confidence in them. He had no fear that they would succumb to the propaganda being put before them. In the second place it demonstrated that all the facts required for his vindication were facts of common knowledge…. An accusation of insincerity could scarcely stand in the light of such public knowledge of the man and his work.[12]

To what could the Thessalonians attest? First, they knew the circumstances of the apostolic trio's *arrival* in the city to preach the gospel: "…that our coming to you was not in vain" (2:1b). The term "coming" (εἴσοδος, "entrance") draws attention to the well-known practice of a traveling philosopher's "entrance" into a city. With it came much pomp and circumstance. Often, the philosopher's entire success rested on how well this entrance was orchestrated. Bruce Winter explains it as follows,

> In summary, the 'entry' was planned, the invitations issued, the preliminary speech provided the opportunity to praise one's past, the *encomium* praised the audience whose good will had to be secured, the topic was settled, and the speaker rose up to declaim. The outcome meant either wealth or fame in πολιτεία and παιδεία and in the courts, or, of course, rejection.[13]

The missionaries' "entrance" to preach the gospel in Thessalonica did not measure up to such "professionalism." There was no fanfare, no VIP invitations, no recital of a resumé of past accomplishments, and certainly no fawning over the audience. But this humble entrance left it susceptible to the opponents' claims of "vanity." The term (κενός, "vanity") is used figuratively to describe something that is either "devoid of intellectual, moral, or spiritual value," or "without purpose or result."[14] Although Paul uses the latter nuance in 3:5 ("for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be *in vain*"—i.e., without result), it is best to understand the term "vanity" here in 2:1 as referring to the former nuance ("our coming to you was not *in vain*"—i.e., without intellectual, moral or spiritual value). The critics could not claim Paul's preaching ministry did not have results; Acts 17:1–9 and 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 indicate otherwise. Instead, they claimed his lack of sophistication displayed its want of intellectual prowess. It did not measure up to the expectations of the culture. In a word, it was to them "foolishness" (cf. 1 Cor 1:18).

As the context that follows indicates, the issue was not *results* but *character*.[15] Paul's lack-luster, modest arrival—and then his precipitous departure—was used by

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[12] Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 58.

[13] Bruce Winter, "The Entries and Ethics of Orators and Paul (1 Thessalonians 2:1–12)," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (1993): 60.

[14] BDAG, κενός, 538.2, 3.

[15] Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 130–31.

the opponents to depict him as a scam. But failure to live up to the expectations of the culture never did sway Paul. This was his norm, and his description of this same manner of entrance into Corinth explains why this was so:

> And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Cor 2:1–4)

In strong antipathy to the accusations of the opponents (1 Thess 2:1), Paul describes the true nature of the missionaries' entrance into Thessalonica: "but [ἀλλὰ] after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition" (2:2). Paul begins with two temporal participles to describe the experience of the missionaries prior to arriving in Thessalonica. The first—from προπάσχω—means "to suffer previously;" it describes a kind of suffering caused by bodily injury.[16] The second—the passive of ὑβρίζω—means to be treated "in an insolent or spiteful manner."[17] These terms summarize well what Luke records as having been experienced by the missionaries in response to their preaching in the city of Philippi (cf. Acts 16:22–24, 37–39). Such facts, as Paul once again states, were already well-known to the Thessalonians: "as you know" (1 Thess 2:2).

The kind of abuse endured by the missionaries in Philippi would have left them severely injured and bruised, most likely for far longer than the time it took to travel the one hundred miles along the *Via Egnatia* to Thessalonica. Far from the kind of triumphal entry coveted by the philosophers, the missionaries would have arrived in the city with the signs of their suffering still visible. But despite this, the missionaries "had boldness to speak"—boldness to repeat the same activity that earned them the suffering in the first place.

The term Paul uses here to describe the ministry of the Word in Thessalonica is particularly noteworthy. The verb, παρρησιάζομαι, means "to express oneself freely, *speak freely, openly, fearlessly.*"[18] It emphasizes courageous proclamation—here with "the gospel of God" as its content. As an ingressive aorist,[19] the verb tense suggests that Paul and his companions *became* bold—that is, the suffering in Philippi actually served to intensify their resolve. Whereas the philosophers would have fled for safety in response to such persecution, Paul and his companions were determined to continue regardless of the consequences it had for their well-being. And to underscore this resolve further, the suffering was not just a past reality; it marked the

[16] BDAG, προπάσχω, 873.
[17] BDAG, ὑβρίζω, 1022.
[18] BDAG, παρρησιάζομαι, 782.
[19] Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 25.

new context into which they entered as well. They had boldness to speak "amid much opposition" now in Thessalonica.[20]

The exhibition of such resolve certainly could not be traced to human willpower. Instead, Paul describes it as "in our God"—or better, "by our God" (v. 3).[21] The phrase highlights the fact that natural ability was not responsible for such dedication. It was supernaturally endowed by God. This was the proof of the apostolic trio's integrity; it was the evidence that vindicated them against the charges of their enemies. In essence Paul states, "Our courage under adverse circumstances is a sufficient proof that there was nothing hollow, specious, or unreal in our preaching."[22] They were resolved to preach, regardless of the cost.

This must be true of today's pastor-teacher as well. Hirelings and charlatans are those who are in the ministry only for the earthly rewards, fame, or social platform. They are quick to yield to the demands of the culture when the pressure rises. They adapt their message and are willing even to keep silent about certain issues for the sake of acceptance. They equate political correctness with gentleness. They parrot the fads of the culture in their communication and lifestyle. And when disappointment or opposition arises, they either rebrand themselves or quit.

But not the pastor-teacher who imitates Paul. It may or may not be God's plan for him to experience the suffering Paul did for the sake of the truth, but he can certainly count on unpleasant consequences for staying true to the apostolic message. Consequently, he must possess the kind of resolve Paul exhibited if he is to remain fruitful. Charles Spurgeon captures some of the nature of this resolve when he writes,

> It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living *sacrifices*, whose lot is to be consumed; we are to spend and to be spent, not to lay ourselves up in lavender, and nurse our flesh. Such soul-travail as that of a faithful minister will bring on occasional seasons of exhaustion, when heart and flesh will fail.[23]

Motivated to Communicate God's Word for the Approval of God Alone

A second essential quality to draw from Paul's *apologia* in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 is found in vv. 3–4. The presence of the γὰρ ("for") at the beginning of this second sentence indicates that it provides the explanation for the previous one. The same logical priority should be maintained for the pastor-teacher: he will be resolved to communicate God's Word regardless of the personal cost incurred *because* he is motivated by the approval of God alone.

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[20] The term for "opposition" or "struggle" (ἀγών) is taken from the realm of athletic competition, where the runner "agonizes" for the victor's crown against competitors. As Morris notes, "It denotes not a token opposition, a tepid struggle, but a very real battle," see Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 61. What is in view here is no mere *intellectual battle* or *anxiety of the soul*.

[21] Although the phrase can be taken as expressing *sphere*, it is best understood here as expressing *instrumentality,* see Charles Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 92–93; Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 133.

[22] James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 92.

[23] C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875), 170.

Paul now asserts that the missionaries' "exhortation" did not originate in "error, impurity, or by way of deceit" (v. 3). The term "exhortation" (παράκλησις) here is of crucial importance for understanding Paul not only as a gospel herald, but as a *pastor*. The standard terms that communicate NT proclamation are κηρύσσω ("to make public declarations,"[24] e.g., 2 Tim 4:2) and εὐαγγελίζομαι ("to proclaim the divine message of salvation,"[25] e.g., 1 Cor 1:17). As Klaas Runia explains, the former term is the most prominent one for describing the act of preaching.[26] It emphasizes authoritative, public proclamation. It is used when the activity of a κῆρυξ ("herald") is accentuated, and as Gerhard Friedrich notes,

> It is demanded that they (the heralds) deliver their message as it was given to them. The essential point about the report which they give is that it does not originate with them. Behind it stands a higher power. The herald does not express his own views. He is the spokesman for his master.[27]

The verb εὐαγγελίζομαι is the second most prominent verb used to describe NT preaching and is largely synonymous with κηρύσσω.[28] The difference between the two verbs lies in the fact that while κηρύσσω emphasizes authoritative proclamation without specific reference to the content of that proclamation, εὐαγγελίζομαι goes further and implies its content. It is "the powerful proclamation of the *good news*, the impartation of σωτηρία."[29]

But Paul uses neither of these terms here to summarize his ministry of the Word in Thessalonica (although κηρύσσω will be used once later, in 2:9). Instead, he chooses the term παράκλησις ("exhortation"), from the verb παρακαλέω ("to urge strongly").[30] Although the action described by this verb includes an evangelistic nuance of exhorting people to embrace the gospel by wooing them toward salvation,[31] it is a term that is also consistent with *congregational preaching*—"the admonition which is addressed to those already won and which is designed to lead them to conduct worthy of the gospel."[32]

In short, the term παράκλησις highlights the *pastoral* component of the proclamation of the word more than κηρύσσω and εὐαγγελίζομαι. It is a favorite of Paul particularly for this reason. It emphasizes more than a transfer of information. It includes *passionate, personal appeal* as well, having squarely in its sights the benefit of the listener.[33] It is this kind of appeal that is central to the work of the pastor-teacher. On a human level, his ambition is to woo sinners toward salvation

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[24] BDAG, κηρύσσω, 543.2.

[25] BDAG, εὐαγγελίζω, 402.2.

[26] Runia, "What Is Preaching," 7.

[27] Gerhard Friedrich, κῆρυξ, *TDNT* 3:687–88, in Runia, "What Is Preaching," 8.

[28] Runia, "What Is Preaching," 9.

[29] Gerhard Friedrich, εὐαγγελίζομαι, *TDNT* 2:720, in Runia, "What Is Preaching," 10; emphasis added. For a good treatment of these two verbs, see Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, 17–40.

[30] BDAG, παρακαλέω, 764.2.

[31] Otto Schmitz, παρακαλέω, παράκλησις, *TDNT* 5:794, in Runia, "What Is Preaching," 18.

[32] Runia, "What Is Preaching," 19.

[33] Charles J. Ellicott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians: With a Critical and Grammatical Commentary and a Revised Translation*, 4th ed. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1880), 17; Milligan, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 17.

and the saved toward obedience, and he does so as one intensely concerned about their individual well-being.

Regarding the nature of this exhortation, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that it did not originate out of "error or impurity or by way of deceit" (1 Thess 2:3). Once again, it can be assumed that this denial is made in response to accusations brought against the apostolic trio to discredit the fledgling Thessalonian church. The first term, "error" (πλάνη), stands in antithesis to "truth" (ἀλήθεια).[34] Implied by it is the allegation that the missionary team proclaimed their message out of *mistakenness* or *delusion*—that they themselves had been *fooled*. But Paul asserts the opposite. He was certain that the message he and his companions preached was not "the word of men" but "the word of God" (2:13). Gottlieb Lünemann summarizes Paul's logic here as follows: "Accordingly the sense is: the apostle and his associates avoided not sufferings and trials in the preaching of the gospel, because their preaching rested not on a fiction, a whim, a dream, a delusion…but it is founded on reality—that is to say, it has divine truth as its source."[35]

The second allegation, that of "impurity" (ἀκαθαρσία), could refer either to *covetousness* (the lust for material gain) or to *sexual immorality* (the lust for physical pleasure). The second is the more probable nuance as this was the common way Paul used the term in his writings, including in 1 Thessalonians (cf. 4:7). Sexual promiscuity was not uncommon among the peripatetic philosophers of that day,[36] so the claim was a convenient one for the apostle's opponents. But once again, Paul categorically denies it.

The third allegation, that of "deceit" (δόλος), implies that the antagonists were charging Paul and his companions with being religious hucksters. The term δόλος refers to "taking advantage through craft and underhanded methods"[37]—of "gaslighting," to put it in contemporary parlance. In other words, not only were the missionaries themselves mistaken, but they also knowingly sought to deceive others as well—all the while seeking to use their public platform to satisfy the desires of the flesh. Paul denied all of it.

Following the same denial-and-affirmation structure of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–2, Paul counters this three-fold accusation about the nature of their preaching (v. 3) with a powerful affirmation: "but [ἀλλὰ] just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts" (v. 4). Far from originating in human corruptions, the ministry they discharged in Thessalonica originated in God Himself.

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[34] Although the term πλάνη could imply "deceit," that *active* notion will be convened by the third term in this triad of allegations, δόλος ("deceit"). Instead, it is best to understand πλάνη in the passive sense, as "error."

[35] Gottlieb Lünemann, "The First Epistle to the Thessalonians," in *Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament,* vol. 8, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1–2 Thessalonians*, ed. Heinrich A. W. Meyer (repr.; Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), 467.

[36] Milligan, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 18; J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 20; Morris, *Thessalonians*, 62. Abraham J. Malherbe notes that the Cynic philosophers were often characterized as those who "were out for their own glory (δόξα), sexual gratification (ἡδονή), and money (χρήματα), the very things against which serious Cynics pitted themselves in their ἀγών [struggle]" ("'Gentle as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to 1 Thess 2," *Novum Testamentum* 12, no. 2 [April 1970]: 207).

[37] BDAG, δόλος, 256.

Paul specifically connects their ministry of the Word to the "approval of God." The verb δοκιμάζω originally had the idea of "to put to the test," often being used to describe the process of testing the genuineness of objects like metals. The New Testament use of the term often includes the added nuance of the test being successfully passed. The idea then is "tested and approved."[38] Used by Paul here, the point is that the missionaries—the objects of divine examination—had been *esteemed as worthy*. Moreover, as a perfect passive verb, Paul's emphasis is that the examination had already taken place and the resulting approval led to an established status. They *stand* as having been approved—not, of course, due to their own inherent worthiness, "but as a manifestation of the free and gracious counsel of God."[39] Such an affirmation directly answered the charges of ministering in error, sensuality, and deceitfulness (v. 3). Having been made worthy by God's grace, they were consequently "entrusted with the gospel."[40] They fulfilled this stewardship with the unassailable stamp of God's approval.

Paul's assertion is then brought to a climax with the statement that he and his companions fulfilled this ministry "not as pleasing men, but God" (v. 4). God had already affixed his stamp of approval, but the status this afforded would not be taken for granted. They still would endeavor to obtain it. The verb "to please" (ἀρέσκω) means "to act in a fawning manner" or, as here, "to give pleasure or satisfaction."[41] It describes the effort made to gain the approval of another. The term certainly described the motivation of the peripatetic philosophers; they were incessant man-pleasers. On his part, Paul does not deny that he and his fellow missionaries engaged in seeking approval as well. The categorical difference, however, was the audience from whom the approval was sought. Whereas the philosophers would craft their speeches to flatter men, the missionaries crafted their speech to please *God.* This was a non-negotiable for Paul, as he also expressed to the Galatians: "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10).

This motivation to communicate God's Word for the approval of God alone is what characterizes all true men of God. They recognize that the issue is never *whether* one is motivated by external approval, for it is impossible to negate this basic drive. As creatures, we are created to please. To think that this impulse should be neutralized—and the pastor-teacher made a stoic, dispassionate creature—has no place in Paul's thought. To the contrary, we must decidedly foster this motivation, being sure to have God as the sole object of our pursuit. In this pleasing of God, we must always strive to "excel still more" (1 Thess 4:1). John Calvin speaks of this when he writes, "Let us therefore, leaving off all other things, aim exclusively at

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[38] BDAG, δοκιμάζω, 255.2b.

[39] Lünemann, "Epistle to the Thessalonians," 467–68.

[40] John Calvin explains the logic of this approval as follows: "Paul, however, does not glory in having been *approved of*, as though he were such of himself; for he does not dispute here as to what he had by nature, nor does he place his own power in collision with the grace of God, but simply says that the Gospel had been committed to him as a faithful and *approved* servant. Now, God approves of those whom he has formed for himself according to his own pleasure," see John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. John Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 249–50.

[41] BDAG, ἀρέσκω, 129.

this—that we may be approved by God and may be satisfied to have His approbation alone, as it justly ought to be regarded by us as of more value than all the applauses of the whole world."[42] Countless maladies in the pastorate today would be solved by the application of such counsel.

Determined to Communicate God's Word without Ulterior Motives

The third quality that Paul emphasizes in his *apologia* in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 is found in vv. 5–7a. This section is well known to textual critics, translators, and exegetes as one of the most notoriously difficult texts in Pauline literature. Due to variant readings in the Greek manuscripts, disagreement arises over versification, textual reading, and punctuation. Regarding versification, most English translations (e.g., NASB; KJV; NIV; ESV) place the clause "even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority" at the end of v. 6, whereas Greek texts (e.g., NA28; UBS 4th rev; TGNT) and a few English translations (e.g., CSB) display the clause as the first part of v. 7.

A more determinative issue pertains to the variant readings of one term in v. 7. Some Greek editions (e.g., TGNT) opt for the reading of ἤπιοι ("gentle") in v. 7, whereas others (e.g., NA28; UBS5; WH) opt for νήπιοι ("infants"). The difference comes down to the absence or presence of the Greek *nun* at the beginning of ἤπιοι—the difference, as it would read in the original, between HPIOI and NHPIOI. In favor of the reading ἤπιοι ("we became *gentle*"; NASB; KJV; ESV; CSB), proponents argue that it makes little sense that Paul would shift metaphors so quickly in the context from "infants" (v. 7a) to "nursing mother" (v. 7b). Moreover, the term "gentle" fits hand-in-glove with the nursing-mother metaphor that follows. Finally, the presence in certain Greek manuscripts of the *nun* at the beginning of ἤπιοι (creating the reading νήπιοι, "infants") can be accounted for by the duplication of the *nun* from the end of the previous word, ἐγενήθημεν ("we became").

But in favor of the reading νήπιοι ("we became *infants*"; NIV, NET), proponents argue that this is the reading of superior Greek manuscripts. Moreover, they account for the reading ἤπιοι ("gentle") in other manuscripts as the result of a confused copyist's effort to "correct" what he thought was a mistake. The reading νήπιοι ("infants") is the harder reading, and therefore the more likely one since copyists tended to clarify rather than to complicate.[43]

Naturally, the decision in this second issue affects the third—the rendering of the grammar and punctuation of vv. 6–7. If the reading is "gentle," then the first half of v. 7 belongs with the second half. If the reading is "infants," then the first half of v. 7 belongs with v. 6, and a new sentence begins in the middle of v. 7.

All told, the difficulties have no bearing on doctrine. However, it is best to accept "infants" as the right reading of the text in v. 7. In other words, the third sentence in

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[42] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 337.

[43] For helpful treatments of the issue, see J. A. D. Weima, "'But We Became Infants Among You': The Case for NHPIOI in 1 Thess 2.7," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000): 547–64; J. A. D. Weima, "Infants, Nursing Mother, and Father: Paul's Portrayal of a Pastor," *Calvin Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 209–29; Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 65–72.

Paul's *apologia* of 2:1–12 should read as follows: "For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed, God is witness, nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority; but we proved to be infants among you" (NASB, corrected). According to this conclusion, the structure of vv. 5–7a follows the same denial-and-affirmation form of the previous two sentences (vv. 1–2, 3–4).

As he has done in the previous two sentences, Paul again begins by listing the allegations made against the apostolic trio, this time with a "neither [v. 5a]…nor [v. 5b]…nor [v. 6]" formula, followed again by the strong contrasting conjunction "but" (ἀλλὰ) to introduce the consequent affirmation (v. 7a). The introductory conjunction "for" (γάρ) indicates that what Paul sets out to do in this next sentence provides further insight into what he has already claimed.

Paul lists three accusations made by his opponents: (1) that the missionaries "came with flattering speech"; (2) that they "came with a pretext for greed"; and (3) that they "sought glory from men." The first of these allegations focused on Paul's *manner* of ministry (v. 5a). The Greek term for "flattery" used in v. 5a (κολακεία) occurs only here in the NT, but it was common in the classical writers and carried the idea of twisted methods "by which one man seeks to gain influence over another, generally for selfish ends."[44] Of this term Lightfoot states, "It is flattery not merely for the sake of giving pleasure to others but for the sake of self-interest."[45]

On the one hand, the Greek philosophers did view flattery in a negative light, at least in principle. Aristotle claimed that the teacher who seeks to make others happy "for the sake of getting something by it in the shape of money or money's worth…is a Flatterer."[46] Yet many of them employed flattery anyway, especially when their livelihoods depended upon it. Consequently, such an allegation could easily be brought against Paul. Flattery was the *modus operandi* of traveling teachers. But once again, Paul categorically denies it as having any place in his ministry. As Weima states, "the apostle wants to distance himself from the street-corner philosophers and wandering rhetoricians who typically used flattering speech to ingratiate themselves to the crowd."[47] And this distancing was not hard for Paul to do. The Thessalonians could easily testify that his manner of ministry was devoid of such ingratiating language—which is why Paul again states, "as you know" (v. 5a). In short, Paul eschewed any attempt to use language to manipulate and impress.

The second allegation focused on Paul's *motive* for ministry (v. 5b). The opponents of the church suggested that Paul's "pretext" (πρόφασις, his alleged motive publicly stated in order to conceal his real one[48]) for coming to Thessalonica was monetary. The term Paul uses for "greed" is vivid. Derived from the comparative adjective πλέον ("more") and the verb ἔχω ("to have"), the term πλεονεξία essentially means "to have more"—it was used to describe "the state of desiring to have more than one's due."[49] In short, it was synonymous with "idolatry" (Col 3:5).

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[44] Milligan, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 19.

[45] Lightfoot, *Epistles of St. Paul*, 23.

[46] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 4.6.9.

[47] Weima, "'We Became Infants among You,'" 216.

[48] Ellicott, *Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 19.

[49] BDAG, πλεονεξία, 824.

Although such a claim was again apropos for the typical itinerant philosopher, Paul categorically denies it. But now, because this allegation dealt specifically with unseen motivation, he calls upon the One who alone can examine and exonerate hearts: "God is witness" (v. 5b).

The third allegation focused on Paul's *mission* in ministry: "nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others" (v. 6a). The emphasis of this charge lies on the verb "seek" (ζητέω). While it is true that the missionaries did indeed receive commendation (δόξα, "fame, recognition, renown"[50]) from their converts, the missionaries were clear that such adulation was never *intentionally* sought. As Leon Morris states about the missionaries' attitude to such honor, "They may well have received it, and they certainly deserved it, but Paul's point is that they did not seek it. Their motives were pure."[51]

That this commitment was true of Paul's ministry as a whole is communicated by the phrase "either from you or from others" (v. 6a). In other words, he sought recognition neither from the Thessalonians themselves nor from anyone else to whom he ministered throughout his travels. The remarkable nature of such consistent selflessness is apparent in the clause that follows: "even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority" (v. 6b). Paul here uses a concessive participle to qualify the entire previous clause. Paul and his companions did not make a claim of importance (βάρος, "authority" or "influence that one enjoys or claims"[52]), *even though* they held a status to which importance and respect were naturally due. They were, of all things, "apostles" of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! If any could throw their weight around, they could! Yet in the ordinary practice of ministry, Paul refused to exploit his divinely bestowed title for the sake of personal advantage.[53] Although we see him claim his apostleship when necessitated by the threat of false teaching (e.g., 2 Cor 10–13), his general pattern was not to insist on special honors by reminding others of his rights and privileges. Paul describes this approach in more vivid detail in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23,

> For though I am free from all *men,* I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

In contrast to the three allegations listed in vv. 5–6, Paul asserts, "but [ἀλλὰ] we proved to be infants among you." Why would he use the analogy of "infants" (νήπιοι)? Quite simply, infants do not have ulterior motives. While Paul elsewhere

[50] BDAG, δόξα, 257.
[51] Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 66.
[52] BDAG, βάρος, 167.2.
[53] It is noteworthy that Paul does not include his title ἀπόστολος in this letter (cf. 1:1).

teaches the doctrine of total depravity (e.g., Rom 3:9–18; Eph 2:1–3), an infant was nonetheless considered the epitome of *innocence.* While human beings adapt to conceal their motives as they grow older, infants consistently communicate what is truly in their hearts. So it was with Paul and his companions. They were *innocent* and *transparent.* What the Thessalonians heard and saw was what the missionaries really were. The trio did not seek influence over others through manipulative speech. They did not conceal their motives from public view. They did not use their authority for personal advancement. Instead, their personal example could not be distinguished from the message they preached, and neither could be distinguished from the motivation of their hearts.[54]

The same must be true of the pastor-teacher today. Paul's denials and affirmation of vv. 5–7a teach us that ulterior motives in ministry—those motives concealed from public view or masked by disguise—are inherently disqualifying. Drawing application from this text, Jefferey Weima wisely states,

> The notion of innocence evoked by the first metaphor of infants also presents a powerful challenge for pastors today in terms of their motives in ministry. It raises such self-reflective questions as: Do I serve only to have my Lord one day say: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" or to have my parishioners regularly tell me: "What a great minister you are!" When I lead worship services, do I pray that people will leave church saying: "What a Savior!" or do I also hope to hear: "What a preacher!" Do I seek to be faithful in all aspects of ministry, or do I concentrate my time and energy on those parts that bring me public recognition and prestige? Do I visit lower and middle-income members of my congregation with the same eagerness and frequency as those who are clearly well to do? Am I content serving in my modest church, or am I preoccupied with winning a call from a larger and more prestigious congregation? Do I expect members of my church and community to cut me a special deal on goods or services just because of my status as a pastor?[55]

An old Puritan prayer serves as a fitting response: "It is my deceit to preach, and pray, and to stir up others' spiritual affections in order to beget commendations, whereas my rule should be daily to consider myself more vile than any man in my own eyes…. Let me learn of Paul…. Lord, let me lean on thee as he did, and find my ministry thine."[56]

Compelled to Communicate God's Word out of Sacrificial Love

The fourth sentence of Paul's *apologia* in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, following the punctuation of the NA28, is found in vv. 7b–8: "As a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children, having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to

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[54] To associate living a godly life so closely with proclaiming a faithful message must not lead to the conclusion that they are the same. As P. T. O'Brien states, "One ought not to confuse the content of the gospel with a manner of life lived in conformity to it," see P. T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 89.

[55] Weima, "'We Became Infants among You,'" 220.

[56] Cited in G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 71.

impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (NASB, corrected). Paul now leaves behind any direct reference to the allegations of the opponents and instead lists only positive assertions about the nature of the missionaries' ministry in Thessalonica. To add to his previous three emphases, he now brings a fourth: *the demonstration of sacrificial love*.

When he wanted to emphasize innocence, Paul employed the metaphor of the infant (vv. 5–7a). Now to emphasize love, Paul employs another vivid word picture drawn from family life—that of the "nursing mother." It is noteworthy that Paul does not use the common term μήτηρ ("mother") to communicate his intent. Instead, he chooses a term found only here in the NT—the term τροφός ("nurse").[57] The noun is a cognate of the verb τρέφω, which means "to care for by providing food or nourishment" or "to care for children by bringing them up."[58] For example, the verb is used in the former sense by Jesus in Matthew 6:26a to describe God's care for his creation: "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds [τρέφει] them." It is used in the latter sense in Luke 4:16a to refer to the upbringing of Jesus: "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up [τεθραμμένος]."

Although the noun τροφός in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 could refer generally to a "nurse" or "caretaker" of children (even a wet nurse), it is best to understand the term as referring to a "nursing mother" based on three elements in the context. First, this "nurse" is said to "tenderly care." The verb θάλπω means "to cherish" or "comfort,"[59] and it contains the idea of affectionate care. The verb is elsewhere found only in Ephesians 5:28–29, where Paul speaks of the husband's responsibility to care for his wife just as he "cherishes" his own body. Second, this "nurse" is said to tenderly care "for her own children." Paul's use of the reflexive pronoun, ἑαυτῆς ("her own"), strongly implies that his analogy is not merely to a nurse or caretaker, but to a nursing *mother*.[60] Third, this "nurse" is said to tenderly care as one "having so fond an affection" (v. 8a). The causal participle is from the verb ὁμείρομαι, which means "to have a strong yearning for."[61] The term is found only here in the NT, testifying further to the unique language which Paul employs to emphasize his point. As Weima states, "The participle…reinforces the meaning of the nursing-mother metaphor as it expresses in a powerful way the deep and continuing (note the present tense) love that Paul has for his readers."[62]

All told, the metaphor Paul employs provides a powerful depiction of the sacrificial nature of the missionaries' ministry. It is one thing for Paul to say that he and his companions cared for the Thessalonians. It is much more to claim that this care can be compared to that shown by a nursing mother to the infant she holds in

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[57] Frame notes that "the change from νήπιοι to τροφός is due to a natural association of ideas," see Frame, *Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, 100.

[58] BDAG, τρέφω, 1014.

[59] BDAG, θάλπω, 1014.

[60] Paul elsewhere refers to those converted under his ministry as his "children" (1 Cor 4:14, 17; Gal 4:19; 1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 10). This is not a belittling designation. Instead, it describes the kind of sacrificial responsibility Paul carried with respect to those whom he recognized as belonging to this designation.

[61] BDAG, ὁμείρομαι, 705.

[62] Weima, "'We Became Infants among You,'" 222. Paul will use similar language of *yearning* to describe his affection for the Thessalonians in 2:17–3:5.

her arms. As Gene Green concludes, "They nurtured and cared for the Thessalonian believers, not as hired help, as tender as such people might be, but as a nurse would do when she cares for the fruit of her own womb."[63] There can hardly be a more vivid picture of willing, personal sacrifice.[64]

With this picture now in view, Paul says, "we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives" (v. 8b). As in the case of the new mother who considers it her joy—not her burden—to nourish her child from her own life, Paul claims that the trio was compelled to invest in the Thessalonian converts, not out of duty, but out of joy. They considered such ministry "as good and worthy of choice."[65] And what they imparted is defined as "not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives." Whereas up to this point Paul's emphasis has been on his faithful *speaking* of the Word of God (cf. vv. 2, 3, 4, 5), now the impartation of the Word takes a second seat to something even more costly, "our own lives,"[66] with the term "lives" (ψυχή, literally, "souls") communicating the idea of "whole being."[67] As John Chrysostom rightly observes, "For merely to preach is not the same thing as to give the soul. For that [preaching] indeed is more precious, but the latter is a matter of more difficulty."[68]

Such an attitude toward an audience of relative strangers was unheard of in that day. As Green notes, "unlike those orators who would swing into a town to declaim and gain praise for themselves, these messengers gave both the message and themselves to their hearers."[69] Indeed, the ministry of the true pastor-teacher is the imparting of *both* word *and* life—the transfer of that which belongs to God (the gospel), and that which belongs to self (one's own life).

To cap off this extraordinary expression of affection, the apostle Paul then identifies the root cause for such affection: "because you had become very dear to us" (v. 8c). The adjective ἀγαπητός pertains "to one who is dearly loved, dear, beloved, prized, valued."[70] Paul previously used the participial form to describe the Thessalonians as "beloved by God" (ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] θεοῦ) in his thanksgiving (1:4). Now he uses the cognate adjective to express how he and his companions

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[63] Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 128.

[64] Calvin's assessment of the metaphor is also helpful: "For a mother in nursing her infant shews nothing of power or dignity. Paul says that he was such, inasmuch as he voluntarily refrained from claiming the honor that was due to him, and with calmness and modesty stooped to every kind of office. *Secondly*, a mother in nursing her children manifests a certain rare and wonderful affection, inasmuch as she spares no labor and trouble, shuns no anxiety, is wearied out by no assiduity, and even with cheerfulness of spirit gives her own blood to be sucked. In the same way, Paul declares that he was so disposed towards the Thessalonians, that he was prepared to lay out his life for their benefit," see Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles*, 252.

[65] BDAG, εὐδοκέω, 404.

[66] The οὐ μόνον…ἀλλὰ καὶ ("not only…but also") construction identifies the second element—which here is "our own lives" as emphatic.

[67] Fee, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 75 fn. 74; Morris, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 71; Weima, "'We Became Infants among You,'" 223.

[68] John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. W. C. Cotton, J. Ashworth, and James Tweed (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 353.

[69] Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 128.

[70] BDAG, ἀγαπητός, 7.

viewed the Thessalonian believers. The connection cannot be missed. As true pastors and teachers for the congregation of the redeemed in Thessalonica, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy could not help but relate to its members as they did. Aware of God's profound love for these Thessalonians evidenced in their election unto life, the trio could not help but love them sacrificially and joyfully in response.

Ultimately, the language of this sentence (vv. 7b–8) is both unique and profound. Wanamaker observes that "no other passage in the whole of the Pauline corpus employs such deeply affectionate language in describing Paul's relation with his converts."[71] This has much to teach us as pastor-teachers. In a day in which it is common for pastors to complain about their congregations, when pastors find greater interest in the academy or conference circuit than in their churches, when pastors spend more time on social media than in meeting with their members, or when pastors isolate themselves and spend time only in their studies and behind their pulpits, Paul's words are a timely admonishment. Love—not just for people in general, but for the individuals of one's local church—is a prerequisite for the office of pastor-teacher. Love—not just by profession, but in concrete expression to all members of the church without discrimination—is a most practical outworking of the pastor's doctrine of election (cf. 1:4; 2:8). As Paul himself said it best: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1).

Committed to Communicate God's Word without a Demand for Compensation

Paul's fifth sentence of his *apologia* in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 identifies a fifth essential quality of a faithful pastor-teacher in v. 9: he is committed to proclaim the Word of God apart from any *quid pro quo* relationship. Paul writes, "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." He briefly addressed the allegation of materialism back in 2:5, having denied that the trio came to Thessalonica "with a pretext for greed." Now he explains this in greater detail.[72]

It was common knowledge that the traveling philosophers of the day planned their oratorical deliveries around the prospect of financial gain. Some charged fees for their speeches. Others sought out wealthy patrons who could provide compensation in return for special educational services. Others begged while squatting in public buildings. Some were known to work a trade on the side.[73] The fact that Paul had been hosted in Thessalonica by a wealthy patron, Jason (who also provided the bond to secure the missionaries' release from custody; cf. Acts 17:5–9), and that he received monetary gifts from the Philippian church while still in

[71] Wanamaker, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 102.

[72] Almost the same wording of 1 Thessalonians 2:9 will be repeated in 2 Thessalonians 3:8, "nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you." Paul's principle of personal responsibility and material self-sufficiency was important to recall not only for the *apologia* of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, but for the chastisement of certain believers within the church who refused to work and instead lived off the charity of other believers (cf. 1 Thess 4:9–12; 2 Thess 3:6–13).

[73] Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 52.

Thessalonica (Phil 4:15–16), could have been cited by the antagonists as evidence that Paul and his companions were of the greedy sort. Whatever the reason, Paul provides in this sentence one of his most definitive statements on his policy of ensuring that the ministry of the Word would be available to all without charge.

Once again, Paul calls upon the Thessalonian believers to testify as eyewitnesses: "For you recall" (1 Thess 2:9a). As he has done already in vv. 1, 2, and 5 (cf. also vv. 10, 11), Paul brings to remembrance what the Thessalonian believers already knew, helping them to understand that their defense against the allegations of their own countrymen was largely to be found in their own firsthand knowledge of the missionaries' lives. The object of such remembrance is twofold: "our labor and hardship" (v. 9a). The noun κόπος ("labor") originally referred to a striking or beating (literally, "a blow"), and so came to be used to describe the kind of work that included "'wear and tear,' the fatigue arising from continued labor, and hence the labor which brings on lassitude [exhaustion]."[74] It described the kind of work that produced *fatigue.*[75] The second noun, μόχθος ("hardship"), is generally synonymous with the first, but depicts a kind of work that is even harder and more intense. It emphasizes not just fatigue, but *pain*.[76]

Paul uses these graphic terms to describe what was demanded of him both by his trade and by his love for the church. Regarding his trade, Paul was most likely a leatherworker.[77] Hock explains the kind of work this trade entailed as follows: "Leatherworking involved two essential tasks: *cutting* the leather, which required round-edge and straight-edge knives; and *sewing* the leather, which required various awls. These tasks would have been done at a workbench, with the leatherworker sitting on a stool and bent over forward to work."[78] On the one hand, this kind of labor was convenient for itinerant teachers like Paul. He would have been able to carry all his tools in a small satchel, and then as he arrived in a city he could offer his services in the *agora*, procuring any of the leather products he needed from the vendors around him. He would have been able to put in his own hours and determine the amount of labor he wished to do.

On the other hand, this kind of labor was extremely taxing. His hands would have been left calloused and his back sore.[79] It would have also taken a considerable amount of effort to turn enough of a profit to support oneself—so much so that the life of the artisan was widely considered slavish and humiliating, especially for one

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[74] Lightfoot, *Epistles of St. Paul*, 26.

[75] Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 149.

[76] A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 4:19; Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 149.

[77] There is debate over the meaning of σκηνοποιοὶ ("tent-makers") in Acts 18:3, the only instance where Paul's trade is identified. Some interpret the term as referring to a stagehand who manufactured various items for theaters (the preference of BDAG, σκηνοποιός, 928). The most common understanding of the term is that of a "tent-maker" (BDAG, σκηνοποιός, 928), or a "weaver of tent-cloth" made from goat hair. These suggestions are weak (see Hock, *Tentmaking*, 21). A better understanding of the term is "leatherworker," meaning that Paul would have worked with various kinds of leather goods (tents, awnings, shoes, etc.), cutting, sewing, and repairing the material as hired (Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 150).

[78] Hock, *Tentmaking*, 24.

[79] It is possible that Paul's refence to his unrefined writing style in Galatians 6:11 ("See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand") is a reference to the toll his leatherworking took on his hands.

like Paul, a Roman citizen.[80] In sum, as Morris observes, "The combination [of the nouns 'labor' and 'hardship'] stresses that the work that the preachers had done had not been token work, something in the nature of a public show meant only to demonstrate their willingness. It was laborious toil. They had to work hard."[81]

Paul states that this work while in Thessalonica was done "night and day" (νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας, v. 9b). As adverbial genitives of time, the terms do not indicate *duration* of time—as if to suggest Paul worked twenty-four hours per day—but *kind* of time—during the night and during the day.[82] In other words, Paul's workdays started early and ended late, conveniently organized around his opportunities to preach and to pastor.

Although the missionary team received lodging from Jason (Acts 17:5–7), and even some financial assistance from the already-established Philippian church (Phil 4:15–16), they still did not have enough to cover their expenses. But they refused to request any additional compensation from the fledgling congregation. Their purpose for such an approach is stated concisely: "so as not to become a burden to any of you" (1 Thess 2:9b). Found only here and in 2 Thessalonians 3:8 and 2 Corinthians 2:5, the verb ἐπιβαρέω has the idea of placing a burden (βάρος) upon (ἐπί) someone.[83] Used figuratively, it refers to the demand for "material support such as financial remuneration, free food, and lodging."[84] Paul refused to make such a demand; the gospel of God he offered would always be made free of charge—no matter one's social status (note "any of you," v. 9b). Elsewhere Paul did teach that local churches bore the responsibility to support their pastor-teachers (1 Cor 9:3–14; 1 Tim 5:17–18). But he does not take this right for himself nor establish it as a condition for gospel ministry. As F. F. Bruce writes,

> Other traveling preachers, both Christian (cf. 2 Cor 11:20) and non-Christian, did make themselves burdensome financially and in other ways. Paul in particular made it his policy to be different from them and to shut the mouths of those who would have liked to say that he, like others, was in this preaching business for what he could get out of it (cf. 2 Cor 11:12).[85]

Ultimately, Paul's preaching was always done without any *quid pro quo*. This was just another evidence that Paul and his missionary companions—like nursing mothers—"imparted not only the gospel of God but also [their] own lives" (v. 8b). And this quality must carry on in all pastor-teachers who claim to follow Paul as he followed Christ—the One of whom Paul said, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

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[80] For a detailed description see Hock, *Tentmaking*, 29–37.

[81] Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 73.

[82] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 124: "Paul is not suggesting here that he and his colleagues were working 24-hour shifts among the Thessalonians, but that they labored both in daytime and nighttime. The stress is not on the duration, but on the kind of time in which they worked." In other words, Paul's workdays at the leatherworking shop started early and ended late. (The use of the accusative would have communicated the idea that they worked through the night and day—duration, "extent of time.")

[83] Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, 4:19.

[84] Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 150.

[85] Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 35.

Although laborers are always worthy of their wages (Luke 10:7; 1 Tim 5:18), and although those who work hard at preaching and teaching are "worthy of double honor" (1 Tim 5:17), the preacher of God's Word and the pastor of His people must never determine the intensity, sincerity, or faithfulness of their ministries on what is promised to them in return. The same sacrifices of time, energy, and emotion must be shown without discrimination to the wealthy in the congregation as equally as to the poor, never conditioning the quality of ministry on the possibility of a returned favor. Indeed, we should be willing, if need be, to work long and hard hours in the secular world in order to preach and to pastor. As Chrysostom wisely states, "The teacher ought to think none of those things burdensome, that tends to the salvation of his disciples."[86]

Devoted to Communicate God's Word for the Eternal Welfare of His Listeners

The sixth and final quality that Paul emphasizes in his *apologia* of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 is found in vv. 10–12.

> You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

This final, lengthy sentence is comprised of two parts: (1) two appeals based on the firsthand knowledge of the Thessalonians (vv. 10, 11); and (2) a final, climactic purpose clause that explains the grand intention of the missionaries' ministry (v. 12).

At the very beginning of the *apologia*, Paul called the Thessalonians to attest to what he was about to deliver ("For you yourselves know…," 2:1). As he then delivers that *apologia*, he repeatedly draws them back to that testimony, emphasizing over and over that Paul's verbal assertions were consistent with the Thessalonians' personal knowledge (vv. 2, 5, 9). In doing so, Paul shows absolute confidence that the Thessalonians would affirm every detail of his defense. Furthermore, back in v. 5, Paul even called God as witness ("God is witness"), again with full confidence that the Righteous Judge would vindicate each element of his response to the opponents' allegations.

Now, in this final sentence, Paul calls both of them together—the Thessalonians and God—to serve as his defenders: "You are witnesses and so is God" (v. 10a). The double construction adds particular solemnity to Paul's final sentence. As Marshall notes, "The solemnity of the tone suggests strongly that Paul was dealing with real accusations that were being used by the opponents of the church to denigrate the missionaries and their message and so turn the converts against them."[87]

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[86] Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 358.

[87] I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 73.

What is called forward now as evidence is the particular *nature* of the missionaries' behavior: "how…we behaved toward you believers" (v. 10b).[88] The verb γίνομαι, "to become," is used here in the sense of "to present oneself, to behave, to conduct,"[89] having been used in this sense already several times in the previous context (cf. vv. 5, 7). By it, Paul is not suggesting that the missionaries *became* something in Thessalonica that they were not previously. Rather, it emphasizes how the consistent conduct of the missionaries became impressed upon the Thessalonian believers when the missionaries arrived and then lived among them.

Paul describes this behavior with three adverbs: "devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly" (v. 10b). The first two terms are positive affirmations; the last is a denial. Placed as they are in the original Greek before the main verb, these three terms receive the emphasis in the first part of the sentence.[90] Although generally synonymous, slight variations can be detected between the three. The first, ὁσίως, is found only here in the NT. Paul employs it to describe the behavior of the missionaries in terms of its *vertically oriented* nature. It speaks of devotion *to God*. In other words, the trio conducted themselves in "a manner pleasing to God."[91] The second term, δικαίως, describes the *horizontally oriented* nature of their behavior. It pertains "to quality of character, thought, or behavior,"[92] and emphasizes moral righteousness with respect to human relationships (cf. Titus 2:12).[93] The third term, ἀμέμπτως, asserts the nature of the behavior of the missionaries as a denial—that is, "without blame" (cf. 1 Thess 5:23).[94] Its meaning is far-reaching, stating the same thing as the previous two terms but as a negative. Allege as they may, none of the accusations of the critics would stick; the missionaries were *above reproach.*

All told, Paul does not claim these characteristics as true only of the private lives of the missionaries. Instead, they were manifested explicitly "toward you believers" (2:10). Once again, Paul emphasizes the consistency that existed between their preaching and their behavior.

After making yet another reference to the Thessalonian believers' common knowledge ("just as you know," v. 11a), Paul now employs his third of three metaphors for describing the missionaries' relationship to the members of the Thessalonian church: "as a father" (v. 11b). While the metaphor of infants communicated *innocence* and the metaphor of the nursing mother communicated *affectionate self-sacrifice*, this third metaphor emphasizes *authority*. Weima explains,

> The image of a father in the patriarchal society of the ancient world was of one who possessed ultimate authority over all members of the household, including, of course, the children. In fact, both Greco-Roman and Jewish sources emphasize the hierarchical relationship of father to their children, often with

[88] After verbs of knowing, saying, hearing, testifying, etc., the adverb ὡς (translated here as "how") is used as a marker of discourse content, and can be more specifically rendered here as "that, the fact that" (BDAG, ὡς, 1105). It will be used again in this same sense in v. 11.

[89] Lightfoot, *Epistles of St. Paul*, 28; Fee, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 62 fn. 39.

[90] Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 153.

[91] BDAG, ὁσίως, 728.

[92] BDAG, δικαίως, 250.

[93] Lightfoot, *Epistles of St. Paul*, 27; Lünemann, "The First Epistle to the Thessalonians," 474.

[94] BDAG, ἀμέμπτως, 250.

> language that jars the egalitarian spirit of our modern age…. In light of the overwhelming testimony of the Greco-Roman and Jewish sources that depict the father as an authoritative figure, it might be easy to create a stereotyped image of the father as a cold, omnipotent ruler of his household. This image, however, must be balanced by the many texts that clearly reveal the great affection that fathers had for their children. A father may have been a powerful figure in the ancient world but the term *father* also served to evoke the emotion of love.[95]

This *paterfamilias* metaphor was ideal for communicating the authoritative nature of the missionaries' ministry of the Word: "how we were *exhorting* and *encouraging* and *imploring* each one of you as a father would his own children" (v. 11b; emphasis added). In particular, each one of these three participles emphasizes the authoritative nature of the missionaries' instruction, applied without distinction to each member of the congregation.[96]

First, the participle παρακαλοῦντες ("exhorting") recalls the cognate noun παράκλησις ("exhortation") used back in v. 3. As already noted, the verb παρακαλέω and its cognates are very common in Paul's writings, especially in his Thessalonian correspondence (e.g., 2:11; 3:2, 7; 4:1, 10, 18; 5:11, 14). It emphasizes *strong urging or appealing*.[97] It engages the *will*. It describes a father's chief responsibility in communicating knowledge and wisdom to his children through authoritative appeal. He has the distinct responsibility in a child's life to communicate what matters most—not just presenting data, but in urging the child to embrace that which leads to life. Accordingly, it also describes the pastor-teacher's responsibility. Every pastor-teacher must utilize his delegated authority to convey divine truth to the people in his congregation. There is no place for dispassionate communication. He must teach and preach the truth always as a dying man to dying men.

The second participle, παραμυθούμενοι, emphasizes the notion of "encouraging." Its basic idea is "to console, cheer up."[98] Paul uses the same verb in 5:14 when he instructs believers to "encourage the fainthearted." If the previous term emphasized the pressing of truth to the will, this one emphasizes the pressing of promises to the heart. It describes a father's crucial role of bringing calm, stability, and hope to a family—particularly to the children who desperately need their father's confidence and assurances. The same is true in the church. Knowing the promises and faithfulness of God deeply, the pastor-teacher must be the one to administer hope

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[95] Weima, "Infants, Nursing Mother, and Father," 224–25. Regarding the metaphor of the father, Victor Furnish also adds, "In this context it is used more particularly to accent the seriousness with which he [Paul] has taken his responsibility to provide instruction and guidance (v. 12). He is emphasizing his pastoral *devotion to* his Thessalonian 'children,' not primarily his *authority over* them," see Victor Paul Furnish, *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 61–62. For a helpful treatment of the "father" analogy, see Trevor J. Burke, "Pauline Paternity in 1 Thessalonians," *Tyndale Bulletin* 51, no. 1 (2000): 59–80.

[96] Paul states that these three activities encompassed in the ministry of the Word—exhortation, encouragement, and imploring—was aimed at "each one of you" (ἕνα ἕκαστον ὑμῶν). This indicates the individual nature of the missionaries' ministry—it was not just administered "publicly" but also "house to house" (Acts 20:20). Chrysostom comments, "Strange! In so great a multitude to omit no one, neither small nor great, neither rich nor poor," see Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 360.

[97] BDAG, παρακαλέω, 765.

[98] BDAG, παραμυθέομαι, 769.

to the fainthearted. He must be the consummate encourager, the one who skillfully soothes hurting and needy souls with the divine promises.

Third, the participle μαρτυρόμενοι translates as "imploring." An infrequent verb from Paul, μαρτύρομαι is found only here and in Galatians 5:3 and Ephesians 4:17. The verb means "to urge something as a matter of great importance"[99]—as one would in a court of law. This, too, summarizes poignantly the duty of every father. In response to the triviality of child-like thinking (cf. 1 Cor 13:11) and to children's desire to persist in such immaturity, the father must constantly endeavor to instill upon his children the right priorities that will form them into mature, successful adults. The same is true of pastoral ministry. No pastor-teacher can shrink back from declaring to his congregation that which is truly profitable and necessary for their own souls (Acts 20:21, 27). His mission must mirror Paul's mission: "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Col 1:28).

Tying all the details of this father-metaphor together, Weima again writes,

> Paul's role as a father to the Thessalonian church has some important implications for ministers today. In our current egalitarian age, many want to downplay the authoritative role that pastors have…. The concept of servant-leadership has become the new paradigm for pastors to adopt—a paradigm that emphasizes the notion of servanthood and by default downplays the idea of authority. How does all this relate to the authoritative, fatherly role that Paul played as pastor to the Thessalonian church? On the one hand, the metaphor of father suggests that pastors do, in fact, have an authoritative role within the family of God…. On the other hand, the metaphor of father does not justify a pastor's abusive use of authority…. The authority that a minister has must be exercised in the activities of "appealing, encouraging, and imploring" believers to respond faithfully to the God "who is calling them into his own kingdom and glory." That is the authoritative, fatherly role that pastors have been divinely called to have within the family of God.[100]

Paul draws his *apologia* to a close with one final purpose statement. He acts as an ideal father to his spiritual children with one goal in mind: "so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (v. 12). This is Paul's end—not even just of this sentence (vv. 10–12), but of his entire ministry. In a sense, this is what we could say Paul *lived for*.

The verb περιπατεῖν ("to walk"), a Hebraism (cf. הָלַךְ; 2 Kings 20:3; and Gen 5:24; 6:9), is frequent in Paul. Occurring thirty-two times in Paul's letter, the verb is his favorite to describe the nature of the Christian life from now until glory. To use the words of John Bunyan, the Christian life is *a pilgrim's progress*.

But not just any walk will do. Paul and his companions lived the life he just described and fulfilled the ministry he just described in order to cultivate a particular kind of lifestyle: one that was "worthy of the manner of God" (v. 12). As Lünemann states, "Christians [walk worthy of God] when they actually prove by their conduct and

[99] BDAG, μαρτύρομαι, 619.
[100] Weima, "Infants, Nursing Mother, and Father," 228.

behavior that they are mindful of those blessings, which the grace of God has vouchsafed to them, and of the undisturbed blessedness which He promises them in the future."[101] In essence, this lifestyle worthy of the manner of God was the kind of lifestyle Paul had just described—one that was devout, upright, and blameless (v. 10; cf. Eph 4:1; Col 1:9–10). What he himself envisioned for his people is what he himself demonstrated; what he himself demonstrated is what he envisioned for his people.

But while Paul saw his own walk as the model, he certainly did not see himself as the one who established the path. This was done by "the God who calls you [τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς] into His own kingdom and glory" (v. 12b). The participle refers back to the concept of *election* used back in 1:4, "knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice [τὴν ἐκλογὴν] of you." The destiny of these believers was sovereignly determined before time, but temporally applied through the ministry of pastor-teachers like Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. Accordingly, Paul saw his ministry as having an indispensable, instrumental role in the accomplishment of God's redemptive purposes. With this reality firmly in mind, he was committed to communicate God's Word for the eternal welfare of his listeners.

Today's pastor-teachers need to have this same commitment firmly in their own minds. Salvation belongs to the Lord, but He is nonetheless a Lord of instruments. The pastor-teacher's role is to be this effective instrument in God's purposes for the preparation of His people for future glory. Every sermon, counseling session, hospital visit, phone call, email, text message, and unplanned conversation must be seized and utilized toward that end. In the same way a father never ceases to be a father once children are born to him, so the pastor-teacher can never cease to function in his role for the people given to his care by the Lord. That is the burden of such an authority.

Conclusion

These are the essential qualities for the pastor-teacher that we gain from Paul's *apologia* of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12. He must be:

1. Resolved to Communicate God's Word regardless of the Cost
2. Motivated to Communicate God's Word for the Approval of God Alone
3. Determined to Communicate God's Word without Ulterior Motives
4. Compelled to Communicate God's Word out of Sacrificial Love
5. Committed to Communicate God's Word without a Demand for Compensation
6. Devoted to Communicate God's Word for the Eternal Welfare of His Listeners

In closing, my mind once again returns to Hebrews 13:7 and the admonition to "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." In an ultimate sense, the apostle Paul serves as this example. His defense of his ministry in 1 Thessalonians provides us with the essentials we as pastor-teachers must imitate today. But in an immediate sense, Pastor John MacArthur has put these same qualities on display with remarkable clarity. For that we must thank the Lord and ask that He grant us the grace and ability to imitate such faith.

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[101] Lünemann, "The First Epistle to the Thessalonians," 477.

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JESUS: THE ULTIMATE PREACHER

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The Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of the living God, was a preacher. He was the Preacher. While Jesus truly and perfectly cared for the sick, the lame, and the blind, the primary focus of Jesus during His life was to preach. When people sought Him to see and experience physical healing, Jesus said in Mark 1:38: "Let us go elsewhere, to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for." The message He preached was clear and exclusive: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). In this, Jesus stands as the example par excellence of the ultimate Preacher to every man called to the ministry of the Word of God.

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Introduction

When you read the story of Jesus in the Gospels, what do you see?

Some only see Jesus, the miracle worker. Without a doubt, Jesus performed mighty acts during His public ministry. The Lord repeatedly demonstrated His divine authority over the natural elements, unclean spirits, physical diseases, and even death itself. After stilling a storm on the Sea of Galilee with a simple command, the disciples asked, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:41). The disciples would receive an answer to their question shortly after they landed safely on the other side of the sea: "Jesus, Son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7).

The miracles of Jesus were more than displays of power. They were glimpses of the glory of His true identity. For this reason, John calls the miracles of Jesus "signs" (John 2:11; 20:30–31). The Lord's mighty works confirmed His divine Person. The upstart rabbi from Nazareth was the only begotten Son of God, who gives eternal life to those who believe in Him. Unfortunately, many professing Christians read the miracles of Jesus and only see a potential "genie" they can manipulate for their own purposes.

Others read the Gospels and only see acts of compassion. Indeed, the Lord's life and ministry were characterized by "grace and truth" (John 1:14). All too often, however, the grace of Jesus is emphasized, while the truth of Jesus is neglected. What a shame!

The kindness of Jesus is seen in His many encounters with individuals. Large crowds followed Him everywhere He went. Much of the travels of Jesus were His attempts to withdraw from the crowds for communion with the Father and the instruction of His disciples. Yet people were not merely faces in the crowd to Jesus. He cared for every individual He met. The Lord had compassion on the multitudes "because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36). But the Lord's dealings with people were always redemptive. He did not perform mere "random acts of kindness." His care for people was to bring them to repentance, faith, and obedience to God.

Increasingly, people read the story of Jesus and see a revolutionary. Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Contemporary "followers" of Jesus would beg to differ. Many want earthly kingdoms. And they will use Jesus to get what they want, one way or another. Thus, the Lord's holy name is coopted for whatever cause is adopted. Jesus made His mission in the world very clear: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Faithful Christians and healthy churches view themselves as the continuation of the Lord's gospel-driven mission in the world. But many have abandoned the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ in the pursuit of worldly prominence, political influence, and social justice.

Instead of submitting and obeying the Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19–20), Christians tend to pursue their own missions. We strive to manipulate the authority of Christ to accomplish our selfish agendas. On the one hand, you cannot do God's will if you do not depend on His authority. On the other hand, you cannot depend on God's authority if you do not do His will. The Lord does not give His authority to what He has not authorized. The ministry of the pastor-theologian must be to fulfill the commission of God.

The Preaching Ministry of Jesus

What was the ministry of Jesus truly about? A scene from a time early in the ministry of Jesus points us in the right direction—that He was determined to preach. The Lord had a long and taxing day of ministry. It should have been a day of rest. After all, it was the Sabbath. But people in need kept showing up. And Jesus ministered to them all. In fact, the day ended with Jesus standing at Peter's doorway, healing the sick and casting out demons. Yet, after the busyness of the previous day, Jesus arose early in the morning, before sunrise, and went to a desolate place to pray (Mark 1:35).

The fame of Jesus dramatically increased overnight. The following day, Peter's yard was again filled with a large crowd of people in need, looking for Jesus' help, but Jesus was not there. And the disciples did not know where He was. After an extended search, they found Jesus and confronted Him: "Everyone is looking for You," Peter exclaimed (Mark 1:37).

A new and larger crowd was waiting for Jesus to perform more miracles. If Jesus rode this wave of momentum, His ministry could really take off. By sneaking off, Jesus missed a golden opportunity. So, the disciples urged Jesus to return to Capernaum to salvage the situation before it was too late. Jesus refused to return to

the city, saying, "Let us go elsewhere, to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for" (Mark 1:38).

Think about that! The gathered people had legitimate needs. Without a doubt, Jesus cared about their needs. But He also knew that they preferred to see miracles, rather than hear preaching. They were amazed by the power He displayed. But they ignored the message He proclaimed. Two thousand years later, not much has changed. In our spiritually backward society, there are many who have what you might call "enthusiastic unbelief." These people may like Jesus, but they do not trust Him and obey Him. Like the disciples, we may get excited by such crowds, but Jesus is not impressed. He continues to ask, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

We live in a world in which there is a conspiracy against preaching. But this is nothing new. Paul warned Timothy, "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, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim 4:3–4). Is not this the reality in our day and time? I am old enough to remember when preachers were the most respected men in a community. No more! The Christian ministry has suffered so many scandals over recent years that preachers are no more trusted than politicians.

There was a time, in the not-so-distant past, when Christians felt like we were playing "home games" in our society. Traditional values were publicly embraced, not just accepted or tolerated. Sure, the desire of the eyes, the desires of the flesh, and pride in possessions have always reflected the false value system of the world (1 John 2:15–17). But traditional values so dominated the cultural landscape that people tried to keep the vices in the "closet." That day is gone. It is now Christians who live in the closet, in the fear of being canceled by a society of people whose "glory is in their shame, who set their thoughts on earthly things" (Phil 3:19).

But the reality is even more dire than the cultural wars that garner so much attention. The spiritual battle is internal, not just external. When Paul warned Timothy of the coming time when people would not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3–4), he was not merely talking about unbelieving sinners in the streets, as it were. He was talking about professing believers—members of churches—who walk in a false presumption of salvation. Their lack of genuine faith would be demonstrated by their unwillingness to endure sound doctrine.

Yet, Paul does not say that those who reject the truth will quit the church and go home. They will instead search out preachers who will say what their itching ears want to hear. The Scriptures are filled with warnings against false teaching. But there is the other side of the coin. False teachers would not have a platform if worldly "Christians" were not such an eager audience. It is one thing for there to be a conspiracy against preaching in the world. It is another thing for there to be a conspiracy against preaching in the church.

The central, primary, and definitive function of the church is to preach the Word (2 Tim 4:1–2). It is not just the calling of the man who fills the pulpit. It is the duty of the church, as a body, to devote itself to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. The church prostitutes herself when she tries to meet needs, help people, or change society without biblical proclamation being first, foremost, and foundational.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom 10:13). Isn't that good news? It's not just good news. It is the best news in the world! Those who are dead in sins and trespasses have no hope of salvation without the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If the sinner turns from his sin and trusts in Christ, he will receive free forgiveness, new life, and eternal hope. Praise the Lord! Yet there is a great dilemma that prevents lost people from calling on the Lord for salvation. Paul articulates this crisis in a series of questions: "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14–15).

The disciples presented their worldly-influenced agenda to Jesus. Jesus countered by presenting His spiritual priorities (Mark 1:38). They thought Jesus should return to Capernaum and continue healing the sick. Jesus determined to travel to the neighboring villages and cities to preach. That was the unrivaled priority of Jesus. He began His ministry "proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel'" (Mark 1:14–15). Nothing—neither time, people, nor circumstances—changed His priorities. Jesus preached to fulfill His divine calling.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of the living God, was a preacher. He was *the* Preacher. As I mentioned earlier, preaching has fallen on hard times. That does not make our generation unique, however. To some degree, it is the truth of every generation. Preaching and preachers are constantly "out of season" (2 Tim 4:2) among sinful people and societies. "And this is the judgment," states John 3:19, "that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." The world is consumed by spiritual darkness. People love the dark and hate the light. Yet God sent His Son, the Light of the world, to preach the truth of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

The Preaching Ministry of the Word

As we seek to appreciate the significance of the preaching ministry of Jesus, we must understand what preaching is. Paul charged Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). The verb for "preach" that Paul uses was political, not religious. The term refers to the function of a herald. In the ancient world, if a king had news to announce, he could not walk into a press room and speak to a global audience. The ruler could not send out a post from his official social media account, with the expectation that it would soon go viral. A ruler with "breaking news" sent out his herald to speak on his behalf.

When the herald arrived in a village or town, he would open his mouth and declare his message in a solemn tone. He stood to announce a formal message, not give a casual update. The assembled audience would listen carefully and take heed of the message. It was not the king speaking directly. Yet, in a real sense, it was. Many citizens would never see the king in their lifetime. But the herald represented him. To ignore the message of the herald was to reject the authority of the king. At the same time, the herald was diligent to proclaim his message faithfully, clearly, and accurately. After all, to misrepresent the king's message was just as dangerous as it was to reject the king's authority.

This is the image that would have come to Timothy's mind when Paul exhorted him to preach the Word. It was a charge to be God's herald, God's spokesman, God's messenger. Yet, it was not the herald's *function* that Paul emphasized, but the herald's *message*. Paul did not just tell Timothy that he must preach; he told Timothy that he must preach God's Word (2 Tim 4:2). Ultimately, the power of preaching is not in the act of preaching. The power is in the content. What a man preaches is always more important than how that man preaches. It is not our preaching that makes the gospel work. It is the gospel that makes our lousy preaching work.

Jesus was a preacher in the truest sense of the term. He preached the Word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ was the ultimate Preacher. He therefore should be the model to all who are called and commissioned to preach the Word.

Too many preachers today look to the wrong models. Thus, the pulpits of our land are filled with Ted-Talk speakers, motivational speakers, and would-be life coaches, rather than faithful proclaimers of biblical truth. We need to study church history and be reminded of what biblical preaching has been when at its best. We need to seek out models who are pastor-theologians, men whose preaching is Christ-centered, gospel-saturated, and truth-driven. Most importantly, we need to consider Jesus. We should look to Christ as our guide, model, and example. To follow Christ in the pulpit is to be a Christian preacher.

When we speak of looking to Christ as the standard for pulpit ministry, it is easy to become quickly discouraged. To follow the standard of Jesus in preaching and teaching can feel as hopeless as trying to follow His example of supernatural works. Have you recently read the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7)? Have you studied the parables of Jesus? Have you meditated on the wisdom of Jesus's teaching in His "casual" conversations with His disciples and others?

No one ever spoke as Jesus spoke. He spoke the truth because He is the truth (John 14:6). He baffled the minds of the most learned scholars of His day. Yet the common people heard Him gladly. He taught with insight and imagination. The rabbis of His day basically quoted other rabbis. They recycled truth claims from one another. As a result, they spoke traditions of man rather than the Word of God (Matt 15:8–9). Not Jesus! When Jesus spoke, the crowds of people who heard Him were amazed and astonished, "for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt 7:28–29).

Three Challenges to the Preaching Ministry

I am occasionally asked what concerns I see on the horizon that young preachers should be ready to face. Well, I'm no prophet. But the obvious path society hurls down makes it reasonably easy to read the road signs. It is the same path a society takes as it turns its back on God. "There is a way *which seems* right to a man," said the wise man, "but its end is the way of death" (Prov 14:12).

My concern for the young man preparing for ministry is the concern for myself and the generation of preachers in my peer group. It is a threefold concern. First of all, preachers must be ready to respond to attacks against the authority of the Bible (2 Tim 4:2; 1 Pet 3:15). The "battle for the Bible" is not over. In every generation, the serpent of old finds new ways to ask, "Indeed, has God said?" (Gen 3:1). We must not be deceived by the schemes of the enemy. We must live and serve with

confidence that the Word of God stands forever when all the things of this world fade and fall (Isa 40:8).

Likewise, we must be ready to face attacks against the exclusivity of Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). It is good and right to have the heart to reach the world with the love and truth of Christ. But we must be careful. If you lean over too far to reach the world, you may fall in. No amount of concern or compassion should lead us to compromise the exclusive message of Christ alone.

In the Upper Room, Thomas asked Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How do we know the way?" (John 14:5). In response, Jesus declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). If believing that Jesus is the only way to God is intolerant, then we must conclude that Jesus is intolerant. He is the first one who said it! In so doing, He gave the only true path to a right relationship with God. I can state it in five words: Jesus only and only Jesus.

Thirdly, we must be ready to face attacks against the message of the gospel (John 15:18–21). Paul was ready to preach the gospel in Rome. His readiness was not sermonic; it was convictional. Paul declared, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH'" (Rom 1:16–17). To be ready to preach—wherever the Lord has called you—you must have confidence in the power of the gospel of Christ to save all who believe in the unchanging promise of God's Word.

These three concerns that the preacher faces today go together organically and build on one another. The authority of the Bible is attacked in order to undermine the exclusivity of Jesus Christ in order to corrupt the message of the gospel with a false gospel that cannot save. A faithful pastor must strive to be a faithful preacher. That is, he must strive to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, whose preaching was truth-driven and text-driven.

Imitating the Truth-Driven Preaching of Jesus

After His betrayal and arrest, Jesus stood trial before Pilate. But Pilate was not as quick to railroad Jesus to an unfair conviction as the religious leaders had hoped. The roman governor wanted to know the accusations against Jesus that justified a death sentence. He found no acceptable answers from the religious leaders. So, he interrogated Jesus himself: "Are You the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33). Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world (18:36).

Pilate did not get the point about the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. He only heard Jesus admit that Jesus considered Himself a king. Jesus said to Pilate, "You yourself said I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (18:37). This is what the earthly ministry of Jesus was all about.

So many pastors and congregations look to the miracles of Jesus to shape their understanding of how the church should minister. In the process, they ignore the truth Jesus taught—unless, of course, they can twist the words of Jesus to guarantee health, wealth, and success. In the process, they fail to recognize that the works of Jesus

confirm the words of Jesus. The wonders Jesus performed confirmed the authority with which He spoke. Christ was born and came into the world to bear witness to the truth.

When Jesus spoke these words, Pilate replied with a question, "What is truth?" (18:38). This is one of the most remarkable questions in the Bible. Think about it. Jesus was brought before Pilate so that the governor could determine the truthfulness of the claims against Him. Yet, he asked Jesus what truth was. It was not a philosophical question. I'm sure Pilate understood that truth is that which is consistent with objective reality. That was not his concern.

Pilate was not asking, "What is truth?" as much as he was asking, "How does truth matter at a time like this?" He rightly sensed that Jesus was innocent of the charges the religious leaders had brought against Him. He felt the right thing to do was to set Jesus free. He even tried to do just that in his own cowardly and convoluted way. But there was a riotous mob outside Pilate's door, angrily chanting, "Crucify, crucify…. Away with *Him*! Away with *Him*! Crucify Him!" (19:6, 15). If this mob scene got out of hand, he would have to summon the Roman authorities to contain it. Thus, in a moment of crisis like this, Pilate asked "What is truth?"

Pilate's question was a perfect display of situational ethics at work. It is the question of our age. When we speak of "traditional values," we are not merely talking about cultural customs. We are talking about a time—in the not-too-distant past—when there was general agreement in our society about what was true or false, right or wrong, good or evil. My, how times have changed! Forget trying to reach a consensus about the deeper issues of life, death, and eternity. We are now at a point where we cannot agree on what a man or woman is. In our moral confusion, we have rendered formerly agreed-on words, like "marriage," virtually meaningless. "What is truth?" the world continues to ask.

Pilate may have been confused about the truth. But Jesus was not confused. And He refused to compromise the truth—even if bearing witness to the truth cost Him His life, as was the case. The preacher who would be like Christ must give himself to truth-driven preaching. We must proclaim the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. For those in bondage to sin, lies, and death, there is only one hope of freedom. Jesus declared, "If you abide in My word, *then* you are truly My disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31–32).

The United States was founded on the freedom of religion. Constitutionally, Americans have the legal right to be theologically wrong. Religious tolerance is a national virtue. But God does not give us the right to be wrong about Him. Standing among the intellectually elite and religiously superstitious people of Athens, Paul boldly announced, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now commanding men that everyone everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He determined, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31).

Imitating the Text-Driven Preaching of Jesus

Ask a professing Christian if he is going to heaven, and he will most likely eagerly and confidently answer in the affirmative. But ask a simple follow-up question, "How do you know you are going to heaven?" Then the stammering and

stuttering will begin. Through fits and starts, many would point to themselves and their works—wrong answers!

Here is the correct answer: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8–9). The affirmations—by grace, through faith, *it is* the gift of God—are all-important. But so are the negations—not of yourselves, not of works. The affirmations and denials teach us that we need to know what we believe and why we believe it. We need to know where we stand and why we stand where we stand.

Again, the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate Preacher, is our standard. His preaching was truth-driven and it was text-driven. The people who heard Jesus noted that He spoke as one with authority (Matt 7:28–29). What was the basis of that authority? Jesus said, "For I did not speak from Myself, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment—what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49). Jesus spoke the truth with divine authority. That authority was rooted in the written Word of God. Christ was a truth-driven preacher because He was a text-driven preacher.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus confronted and corrected those who thought He was teaching something new that conflicted with the Law and the Prophets. He said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:17–18). The problem was not that Jesus rejected the authority of the Old Testament. It was that, as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, He forced people—including the religious scholars of the day—to see the truth of God's Word in ways the blinded eyes had never seen.

As He cleansed the temple, Jesus announced, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN" (Matt 21:13). Later, He asked the chief priests and scribes, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?" (21:16).

When a Pharisee asked Jesus about the lawful grounds of divorce, Jesus asked him in return, "What did Moses command you?" (Mark 10:3). And pointing to Genesis 2, He reminded the Pharisee how God designed marriage in the beginning (Mark 10:5–9). When the Sadducees tried to trap Jesus with a trick question, He replied, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt 22:29). Jesus repeatedly proclaimed the truth by proclaiming the Scriptures.

I was a teenager when I was called to pastor my first church. During my installation service, E. V. Hill preached a message entitled, "What Can That Boy Tell Me?" He acknowledged that the congregation had many concerns about what I would be able to teach them, being so young and inexperienced. Then he walked them through passages that affirm the sufficiency of Scripture. He argued that I could tell them whatever the Word of God tells me to tell them.

More than three decades have passed since then. But I pray I will never outgrow the wise counsel I received that night. At this point, I have many miles behind me. I am a husband, father, and pastor with much study, practice, and experience to draw from. But my basis of authority has not changed. It is the Word of God.

Truth is truth, whether I experience it or not. The Word does not need my life experience to validate its message. Paul declared, "All Scripture is breathed out by

God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be equipped, having been thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). We need not grope in the dark, looking for the truth to preach. To preach the truth, preach the Word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth, Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

After the resurrection, Jesus walked the road to Emmaus with two of His disciples. But they did not know that it was Jesus. As they walked together, the disciples began to talk to Jesus about the terrible things that had happened to Jesus in Jerusalem. They were the things He had predicted—His crucifixion and resurrection. Yet the brothers were blinded by their grief. They felt all the messianic hopes they had placed in Christ were dashed. Jesus could have shown them His hands and feet, as He did to Thomas, to prove His identity. But that is not what He did. He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:25–26).

Jesus opened the eyes of the men to the truth by helping them understand the Scriptures. Luke reports, "Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, He interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). The Bible is a book about Jesus from beginning to end. Even after His resurrection from the dead, He verified His identity as the Son of God through Old Testament prophecy, promises, and predictions. He proclaimed the truth by proclaiming the Word.

The Lord said, "You search the Scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:39–40). The Scriptures do not make sense without Jesus. It all points to Him. Don't be ashamed of the Word of God. Proclaim the Scriptures so that your hearers may know, trust, and serve Christ. As Paul wrote, "Him we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Col 1:28).

Conclusion

The world cries out for tolerance. Weak pastors and churches respond to this siren call by negotiating biblical truth. But the cry for tolerance is a smokescreen to get us to lose sight of what matters the most. Sometimes, in my travels, a flight is late, grounded, or canceled because of mechanical problems. All around me, fellow passengers with missed connections or upended travel plans get upset. Not me. I am comforted by the notion that the pilots, mechanics, ground crew, flight attendants, and air traffic controllers are intolerant. God forbid that a mechanic sees something malfunctioning on the plane, yet says, "It's no big deal! Let's allow them to take off anyway and hope for the best."

Airplane flights are life and death matters, no matter how frequently you fly, and no matter how good the plane's safety track record is. Yet piloting a plane is nowhere near as important as preaching the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Do not tolerate any mishandling, misinterpretation, or misrepresentation of the truth of God's Word. "But you," Paul advises Timothy (and each of us who preach the Word), "be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim 4:5).