

# CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Preface to the Revised Edition	11
Preface to the First Edition	13
Acknowledgments	15
Introduction	17
<b>PART 1: The Preparation for Exposition</b>	
1. Defining the Task: A Philosophy of Expository Preaching	23
2. Laying the Foundation: A Theology for Expository Preaching	59
3. Developing the Preacher: The Life of the Expositor	95
<b>PART 2: The Process of Exposition</b>	
4. Studying the Text: The Interpretation Process	139
5. Organizing the Sermon: Unifying and Outlining	181
6. Organizing the Sermon: Amplifying, Introducing, and Concluding	215
<b>PART 3: The Presentation of the Exposition</b>	
7. Expressing the Thoughts: The Development of Preaching Style	251
8. Playing the Voice: Proper Use of the Preaching Instrument	283
9. Making the Connection: Preaching with Heart and Head	313
10. Preaching the Word: Keys to Effective Physical Delivery	351
Conclusion	387
Notes	391
Appendices	406
Appendix 1: Observation Example	407
Appendix 2: Structural Diagram	408
Appendix 3: Sermon Summary Sheet	411
Appendix 4: Relaxation Exercises	412
Appendix 5: Breathing Exercises	414
Recommended Bibliography	417
Scripture Index	421
Subject Index	429

# I

# DEFINING THE TASK

## A PHILOSOPHY OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

*I therefore lay down this proposition  
that a sermon should always be expository.*

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“**I** chabod—the glory has departed!” Many people feared the departure of God’s presence from Israel (see 1 Sam. 4:21) would be the same epitaph written on the tombstone of preaching at the close of the twentieth century. Both conservative and liberal homiletics bemoaned the apparent demise of God’s primary means of gospel proclamation.

At the midpoint of the twentieth century Merrill Unger observed, “To an alarming extent the glory is departing from the pulpit of the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup> Almost thirty years later Fred Craddock argued that because the preacher could no longer “presuppose the general recognition of his authority as a clergyman, or the authority of his institution, or the authority of Scripture,” he “seriously asks himself whether he should continue to serve up monologue in a dialogical world.”<sup>2</sup> Like the powerless Israelites without the ark, the church—devoid of strong preaching—was facing the prospect of welcoming the new millennium defenseless and weak.

Thankfully, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, God raised

up dissenting voices that were not only issuing a clarion call for the indispensability of preaching, but were making a strong appeal for it to be done through expository messages. Books like D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones's *Preaching and Preachers* (Zondervan, 1971), Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* (Baker, 1980; rev. 2014), and John Stott's *Between Two Worlds* (Eerdmans, 1982) were just a few of the watershed works that caused many pastors and preachers to rethink their philosophies of preaching in the wake of powerless churches and a flood of sermonic trends. Interest arose in revisiting the timeless, dependable method of biblical exposition as the heartbeat of the preaching event.

David Allen describes the shift:

With everything from Harry Emerson Fosdick's 1928 harangue to Fred Craddock's "New Homiletic"; from the Hybel's/Warren's baby boomer "purpose-driven" sermonic church to the "great communicator" gurus Young/Stanley; from the "your-best-life-now" Osteens to the sometimes whacky misadventures of the emerging church; and from Buttrick's broadside to Pagitt's dialogical diatribe, expository preaching has come under attack these days. But somehow expository preaching manages to live on, refusing to give up the ghost. In fact, in some homiletical pockets of Christendom, it is experiencing something of a revival.<sup>3</sup>

Today, numerous churches that evidence solid and substantive growth are characterized by a commitment to the practice of expository preaching. As preachers young and old turn back to the Bible for the substance and authority of their preaching, the gospel demands that we not look back. Preachers must continue to think rightly about preaching and practice it faithfully if God's power is to be unleashed against the gates of hell.

## THE BIBLICAL ROOTS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Right thinking about preaching begins with what the Bible says about preaching. And while the Bible is not intended to be a homiletical textbook, it must serve as the starting point for determining what preaching is and how we should do it. So how does the Bible describe the preaching event? A brief survey of biblical terms describing the preaching event reveals the roots of

expository preaching. These roots are foundational for a proper understanding of biblical preaching.

### Divine Revelation

First and foremost, preaching is rooted in the divine. God has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind, and He has chosen human vessels to be the channels of that revelation. The Hebrew word *nābî*, one of the most common terms for prophet, conveys the idea of one who pours forth or announces. It includes the implication of being moved by divine impulse to prophesy (see Deut. 13:1; 18:20; Jer. 23:21; Num. 11:25–29). Two other Hebrew words are translated “seer” in the Old Testament. *Hōzeh* suggests to glow or to grow warm (e.g., Amos 7:12). *Rōēh* simply means one who sees (e.g., 1 Chron. 29:29; Isa. 30:10). These terms indicate that the prophet was one whose heart had been warmed by something the Lord allowed him to see.

Some New Testament terms also imply the divine origin of preaching. The Greek word *logos* is used to refer to a word, or saying. Sometimes the communication of God’s message to man is referred to as preaching the Word, or *Logos*, to people (e.g., 2 Tim. 4:2). Another word *rhema*, emphasizes that which has been uttered by the voice (see Rom. 10:17). When the Word was spoken in the New Testament, God actually was communicating Himself through the act of proclamation. New Testament preaching was in actuality divine instruction by those who communicated the gospel (see Eph. 2:17).

The frequently used *kērussō* means to proclaim after the manner of a herald. This word also implies a message of authority that calls upon the listeners to hear and to obey (see Rom. 10:14–15; 1 Cor. 1:21, 23; 2 Tim. 4:2). Jesus used this word to commission His followers just prior to His ascension, ordaining preaching as the primary method of dispensing the gospel (see Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47). The New Testament preacher was one who proclaimed the message of the King of Kings to men. The preaching event, then, was accompanied by an atmosphere of seriousness, authority, and divine mandate.

### Clear Explanation

Preaching also has its roots in the clear explanation of God’s revelation. God has always provided teachers to help people understand His Word. Nehemiah 8, for example, is an excellent illustration of a preaching event. The ingredients in many modern worship experiences were present—a pulpit, a worship leader, the book of God’s Law, a unified and expectant congregation, proclamation, and both verbal and physical response. The Levites taught

the people God's Word as "they read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Neh. 8:8). "Clearly" is the Hebrew *pārash*, which means to distinguish, or to specify distinctly. The word "sense" is *śēkel*, which means to give the meaning, indicating perception, or insight. The idea of clarity to make understanding possible was paramount.

Similarly, while on earth Jesus provided clear explanation to His hearers, both in the synagogue worship and in other contexts. He often read and explained the Scriptures as a visiting rabbi (see Luke 4:16–21). To the disciples on the Emmaus road, "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The word translated "interpreted" is the Greek *diermēneuō*, which means to unfold the meaning of what is said, or to explain through. Reflecting upon the teaching of Jesus, those disciples used a similar word: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). The word "opened" is *dianoigō*, which means to open thoroughly. The word means to open the sense of the Scriptures, or to explain them. Paul did the same thing in Thessalonica, "explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead" (Acts 17:2–3).

New Testament preaching also included the element of teaching. The word used to describe this element is *didaskō*. The apostles "did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus" (Acts 5:42). In listing the requirements of the bishop-pastor, Paul said that the man had to be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). He also charged the young pastor Timothy to

follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. . . . What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2)

New Testament preachers prioritized the systematic, intentional teaching of basic doctrine.

Other words also highlight the idea of understanding in New Testament preaching. *Epiluō* literally means to unloose or to untie. The word conveys the idea of explaining what is obscure and hard to understand (see 2 Peter 1:20). Thus, the word means to interpret. The word is used to describe the preaching ministry of Jesus and His use of parables (see Mark 4:34). New Testament preaching involved unloosing God's revelation. *Suzēteō* the Greek

word translated “disputed” in Acts 9:29, means to seek or to examine together. Paul “spoke and disputed against the Hellenists” (Acts 9:29). New Testament preachers sought to lead their listeners to examine with them the truths of God’s Word and to seek understanding of them.

### Practical Application

Preaching also is informed by the biblical emphasis on the practical application of God’s Word to the lives of contemporary listeners. The word translated “proving” describes Paul’s preaching method in Thessalonica (Acts 17:3). The Greek word is *paratithēmi*, which means to place alongside. Paul’s preaching was an application of biblical truth. The same word is used with regard to Jesus’ use of parables (see Matt. 13:34). He took parables, laid them alongside the issues of life faced by the people, and made practical application. New Testament preachers made personal, specific application to their hearers.

Sometimes the application came in the form of encouragement. The Greek *parakaleō* means to call to one’s side. It carries the idea of comfort, exhortation, and instruction. The ideas of strength and encouragement also are embedded in the word. Paul admonished Timothy to “exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). New Testament preachers were gifted to bring strength and encouragement to those who listened to them preach.

At other times the application came by way of rebuke or conviction. The Greek word *elegchō*, translated as “rebuke” in Titus 1:9, suggests to bring to light or to expose by conviction. Paul said pastors should “be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (v. 9). He further commanded Titus to “rebuke with all authority” (Titus 2:15). New Testament preachers often had to deal directly with the sins of the people. By preaching the Word they turned on the light so that their hearers could see themselves as God saw them.

### Eternal Redemption

Preaching also can be traced back to God’s redemptive activity with mankind. The Hebrew word *bās’ar* means “to be fresh or full” or “to announce glad tidings” (e.g., Ps. 40:9; Isa. 61:1). God’s messengers were men who brought good news. A parallel word in the New Testament is *euangelizō*, which also means “to announce glad tidings.” Specifically, it refers to the good news of salvation that God gives to men in Christ Jesus. A note of joy and victory characterizes the word. Jesus’ own job description on earth was to announce

good news (see Luke 4:18). The New Testament preachers went everywhere announcing these glad tidings (e.g., Acts 8:4, 35). This good news, or gospel, provided preaching with its content: the hope of glory (see Rom. 5:2; Col. 1:27).

Paul, too, centered his preaching on Jesus, claiming to the Corinthians that he had “decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). He used *kērugma* to describe the foolish event that God had chosen to save people (see 1 Cor. 1:21). The word is from *kērussō* and refers to the message of the herald rather than to his action. John Piper says this “is what a town-crier did: ‘Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! The King has a proclamation for all those who swear allegiance to his throne. Be it known to you that he will give eternal life to all who trust and love his Son.’”<sup>4</sup> The message of Jesus Christ was good news, and New Testament preachers proclaimed it joyfully and victoriously. Their preaching truly was driven by the Christ event.

### Public Proclamation

Preaching also is informed by the idea of public proclamation before a corporate assembly. In Ecclesiastes 1:1, “the preacher” comes from the Hebrew word *qōbelet*, meaning a caller, preacher, or lecturer. The root word is *qāhal*, which means to assemble together. The picture is of one who spoke before an assembly of people. Another significant Old Testament word is *qārā*, which means to call out (e.g., Isa. 61:1). The prophet was one who called out to the people, addressing the message of God to them.

At times preaching in the New Testament also involved the dynamic of dialogue between preacher and people. At Thessalonica, Paul “reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2). The word is *dialegomai*, which means to speak through or to ponder or revolve in the mind. It came to mean “to converse with” or “to discuss.” New Testament preaching had a conversational nature about it, engaging the listeners in a journey of discovery. A similar thought is found in the verb *homileō*, which means to converse, or talk with (e.g., Acts 20:11). Biblical preachers were not giving a soliloquy. They preached, and the people listened, but the listeners sometimes responded with feedback.

### Personal Confession

The personal confession of the preacher was another aspect of the biblical preaching event. Preaching often was viewed as giving a witness before a group of people. The word *martureō* means simply to be a witness, to affirm that one

has seen, heard, or experienced something. Paul, in his beautiful and insightful summary of his ministry at Ephesus, defined his preaching content as “testifying . . . of repentance toward God, and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). New Testament preachers who faithfully proclaimed the truth of God did not do so from secondhand experience. They knew from experience the truth of what they preached to others. Like John, they were able to say, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Another word used to describe the public nature of New Testament preaching is *homologeō*. This word means to say the same thing or to agree with. Preaching in the New Testament sense had the idea of confession or profession. About young Timothy, Paul said that he had “made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12). Rightly understood, Bible preaching was confessional in nature. The preachers said what God said, agreeing with him about the truth proclaimed.

### Intentional Persuasion

One of the most important elements in the preaching event was persuasion. The New Testament word *peithō* means to use words to persuade others to believe. In Acts 13:43 we are told that Paul and Barnabas spoke to Christian converts and “urged them to continue in the grace of God.” In Corinth, Paul “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). Paul brought into focus the whole matter of persuasion as a part of preaching when he said, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others” (2 Cor. 5:11). The particular word used in this passage means to persuade, or to induce one by words, to believe. The Bible preachers were persuaders. By use of preaching, they brought men to the point of believing that Jesus was the Christ and deciding to commit themselves to him.

Scripture indicates that New Testament preaching was apologetic in nature as well. The word *apologia* suggests a verbal defense or a speech in defense of something. Addressing the Jerusalem mob, Paul said, “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you” (Acts 22:1). Other passages use the same terminology (see Phil. 1:7, 17; 2 Tim. 4:16). Bible preachers, in the best sense of the term, gave a defense for the gospel. They presented the message of the Lord Jesus in the most convincing, appealing, and persuasive way possible.



## A DEFINITION OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

This book is not about all things preaching. It's unapologetically about *expository* preaching. When the biblical words above are brought together with the instructions about preaching found in the Bible, they can only lead to one conclusion: preaching today should be expository in nature. So we share the conviction that faithful exposition of Scripture is not only the bread and butter of pastoral preaching in the local church, but it's actually the very essence of all real preaching. In describing the difference between a lecture and a sermon, Lloyd-Jones says that "a sermon does not start with a subject; a sermon should always be expository."<sup>5</sup> Stott agrees: "I cannot myself acquiesce in this relegation (sometimes even grudging) of expository preaching to one alternative among many. It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching."<sup>6</sup>

The resurgence of expository preaching, however, has subtly entertained a broader understanding of the practice that includes varying perspectives. Again, Allen helps us:

Much that goes under the umbrella of exposition today is not really worthy of the name. While there are many books on the subject of preaching, those that promote an expository approach to preaching are few and far between. Of these, many treat the subject in more general and traditional ways.<sup>7</sup>

So let's make sure we're using the same dictionary and not just the same words. *Exposition* obviously is built on the root verb "expose," which means to lay open or uncover. When a preacher is doing exposition he is laying open what the Holy Spirit is saying in a given biblical text. So we can define expository preaching like this:

---

### Def'ə-nish'ən

**expository preaching** *n.* The process of laying open the biblical text in such a way that the Holy Spirit's intended meaning and accompanying power are brought to bear on the lives of contemporary listeners.

---

The above definition contains four key components that merit closer analysis—the subject of the biblical text, the process of laying open, the pursuit of the Spirit’s intended meaning, and the aim of bringing it to bear on contemporary listeners.

### **The Subject: The Biblical Text**

Foundational to the practice of expository preaching is the subject at hand, which exclusively is the text of the Bible. Edwin Charles Dargan suggested that the development of modern preaching was largely influenced by three factors: ancient oratory and rhetoric, Hebrew prophecy, and the Christian gospel.<sup>8</sup> Ancient oratory and rhetoric (which will be addressed later) heavily influenced the development of sermon form. Hebrew prophecy, however, gave preaching its roots in the divine with regard to both its message and motivation. Later, the Christian gospel provided preaching with its specific content and commissioned it as the primary means of propagation. In other words, preaching in the Bible assumed either the words spoken by prophets or by the apostles and their associates.

As we’ve noted above, the primary reason for associating preaching with the biblical text is that preaching is rooted in the divine. God has chosen to reveal Himself to humankind, and He has chosen us to be channels of that revelation. Preaching, therefore, is not about addressing just any subject, however good and beneficial that subject may be. Expository preaching implies a specific content—the Word of God as revealed in the Bible. Although all truth is God’s truth, He never intended for His preachers to speak about every true and right idea under the sun. The preacher has not been given the responsibility of addressing every good subject known to man, nor is he expected to become an expert in every field. The preacher is responsible for immersing himself and his people in the Bible.

The effect of confusion about the preaching event is ever so subtle at this point. The preacher is a minister of grace and desires to meet people’s needs and heal their hurts. But what happens when the specific answers that people are seeking in order to deal with certain issues in life are not specifically spelled out in the Bible? The preacher then is tempted to make the Bible say things it does not say. He ends up offering practical and even helpful information but neglecting the truth that the Holy Spirit inspired in order to transform people into Christ’s image. That which the preacher gives is not heresy or blatant error, but neither is it the truth that people need in order to work out their salvation.

This subtlety may be described as the difference between *good stuff* and *God's stuff*. Good stuff is information or principles that are gleaned from observation. When Aristotle delineated his principles of rhetoric, for example, he developed his assertions by engaging in one particular activity: observation. He watched enough public speakers that he was able to glean certain "truths" for speaking effectively. Those principles have had profound impact on preaching and all other forms of public speaking. To say the least, those principles are good stuff. They are both helpful and useful. Those principles, however, will not have any eternal or supernatural effect on people.

Although no preacher would think of preaching on how to do good public speaking, many other doctrines of "good stuff" appear more relevant to contemporary churchgoers and debut as the feature in many sermons. If a person observes enough people dealing with stress in the workplace, certain helpful principles can be gleaned for addressing the issue. If one observes enough people journeying through divorce recovery, guidelines can be developed that are helpful for that crisis. The observation of enough parents rearing their children will produce much practical benefit for such a task. While certain truths in Scripture certainly can be applied to these and other life experiences, to say that God provides a specific treatise for such would be a stretch. Common sense reveals that to address all the scenarios that result from the possible combinations of factors related to these and similar issues would require multiple volumes much larger than the Bible.

God's stuff, on the other hand, is the truth that is revealed in the Bible. Though that truth may inform certain principles that might be categorized as good stuff, its primary intent is to bring people to Jesus and mold them into His likeness. The faithful expositor will rightly interpret, exegete, and expound on a text of Scripture so as to give people the information God deemed necessary for life and godliness. When the preacher relegates God's stuff to secondary status by focusing on good stuff, a serious problem arises. The tragedy is not what people are getting, because they likely are getting some helpful information. The tragedy is what people are not getting, which is the truth that is necessary to accomplish God's purposes.

Much helpful information gleaned by observation is easily accessed in the plethora of Christian psychology and counseling materials. Such material, however, should not be the primary subject matter of your sermon except in such cases where it is the primary intent and content of a text of Scripture. Sermon content should be driven by the biblical text. You must be most careful about standing up to say "Thus saith the Lord" when the Lord did not saith.<sup>9</sup>

## The Process: Laying Open

Contrary to the opinion of some preachers and homileticians, expository preaching is not determined by the length of a particular Bible passage, the amount of exegetical detail derived from that passage, or even the successive treatment of verses or books in the Bible. Instead, expository preaching is determined by how the passage is handled—not just in the sermon—but also in the journey that leads to the sermon. G. Campbell Morgan writes, “Being sure that our text is in the Bible, we proceed to find out its actual meaning, and then to elaborate its message.”<sup>10</sup> Tony Merida expands on that same idea:

Expository preaching as a sermon *process* means that exposition deals with the in-depth study of the text for the purpose of communicating the message the original author intended. The process . . . includes looking at certain features in the text such as authorship, date, context, words, and sentence structure. The expositor is then trying to uncover the meaning of a passage, which has been covered up by time, culture, language, and our presuppositions.<sup>11</sup>

So, first and foremost, expository preaching is not about a sermon form, but a process by which the words of God are first discovered and then communicated to people so they can understand them.

This process is the natural outgrowth of the two primary forms of preaching that characterized the biblical period. First, preachers during the biblical period were involved in *revelatory* preaching. The prophets, Jesus, and then the apostles proclaimed God’s first-time revelation as they spoke. In other words, they spoke information from God that man had never heard before. Second, preachers during the biblical period also engaged in *explanatory* preaching. After God’s revelation had been given, they provided explanation of that revealed information as people returned to it time and time again. Nehemiah 8, noted above, makes this point well. Ezra and his colleagues went to great extents to explain the Scriptures to the people.

Jewish religious life served to carry on this explanatory emphasis. Hebrew scribes served as conservators of God’s truth as they interpreted Scripture, copied Scripture, and preserved the oral law. From their ministries emerged the term “homily,” which means a talk based upon Scripture.<sup>12</sup> Synagogue services included Scripture reading and exposition as a part of worship. Regular meetings in the synagogue included a time when rabbis would read a portion of Scripture and then explain it to the people in attendance. This activity con-

stituted the focal point of the meetings and gave synagogues an educational quality.<sup>13</sup> These practices later would influence the development of Christian worship, including the reading and explanation of Scripture. Stott notes,

It was already customary in the synagogues for the reading of Scripture to be followed by an exposition, and this practice was carried over into the Christian assemblies, being the origin of the sermon in public worship. It was taken for granted from the beginning that Christian preaching would be expository preaching, that is, that all Christian instruction and exhortation would be drawn out of the passage which had been read.<sup>14</sup>

Christian preaching, then, has its roots in the explanation of God's Word that took place in Jewish synagogue worship.

The apostle Paul also made a clear connection between the explanation of Scripture and the preacher's view of its authority. Maybe his most vivid call to expository preaching in pastoral ministry was his instruction to young Timothy: "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). Stott says,

The public reading of Scripture came first, identifying the authority. What followed was exposition and application, whether in the form of doctrinal instruction or of moral appeal, or both. Timothy's own authority was thus seen to be secondary, both to the Scripture and to the apostle. All Christian teachers occupy the same subordinate position as Timothy did. They will be wise, therefore, especially if they are young, to demonstrate both their submission to the authority of Scripture and their conscientious integrity in expounding it, so that their teaching is seen to be not theirs but the word of God.<sup>15</sup>

Paul later would make a similar connection when he followed his claim that "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16) with his charge to Timothy to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). Submission to the authority of God's Word demands the clear explanation of the biblical text.

As the biblical period closed, preaching naturally evolved to include the explanatory form only. God's revelation ceased as far as that which is necessary for the accomplishment of His eternal redemptive purposes. Consequently,

this uniform quality—which characterized all post-apostolic proclamation—established the clear explanation of God’s revelation as the heartbeat of all true preaching. In every subsequent generation, God faithfully has called and provided preachers and teachers to help people understand His revelation.

We often hear people today make the critical declaration, “The Bible is irrelevant!” And why wouldn’t they draw that conclusion? It’s a book written thousands of years ago in languages we don’t speak today. It’s about people who lived in faraway places, immersed in radically different cultures than our own. On top of all that, it claims the only way for a person to know God is to put their faith in a homeless guy who died on a criminal’s cross by a dump outside the city of Jerusalem. It sounds irrelevant indeed! Yet those of us who trust the Bible know it to be the most relevant message in the universe. But we must understand that it seems irrelevant because it’s been covered up over time by layer upon layer of time, culture, language, and other factors that veil—if not completely hide—its relevance. Expository preaching is the necessary process of peeling back those layers so people can see and embrace the Bible’s relevance.

### **The Pursuit:**

#### **The Holy Spirit’s Intended Meaning and Accompanying Power**

What we’re after in the expository preaching process is a twofold work of the Spirit of God. The preacher wants to know what the Spirit said when He inspired the biblical text, and he wants the Spirit to empower his communication when he preaches what the Spirit has said in the biblical text. That means we’re in hot pursuit of the Holy Spirit’s intended meaning in every text of Scripture, as well as His attending power to our proclamation of it.

An extremely close relationship exists between the process of laying open the biblical text and the actual reason for doing so. Robert Thomas identifies the connection:

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.<sup>16</sup>

The reason for laying open the text of Scripture is so we can reveal what the Holy Spirit intended to say when He inspired it!

This pursuit makes complete sense when we stop and think about the logic. The phrase “Thus saith the Lord” frequently has been used to summarize the preaching event—and rightly so. In one sense, preaching simply is speaking on God’s behalf. Such a task has huge ramifications. Every word the preacher speaks, whether he attributes it to God or not, is received by the audience as being the mandate of heaven. What a responsibility! The implications, then, demand that the preacher do everything within his power to ensure that his sermons accurately reflect what God has spoken. In other words, an extremely close relationship must exist between the intended meaning of the text of Scripture and the sermon.

Expository preaching is driven by a high view of Scripture, a subject we’ll take up in more detail in the next chapter. Such regard for Scripture is rooted in the conviction that the Bible is inspired by God’s Holy Spirit. James Hernando defines inspiration as “the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that enabled and motivated the human authors of Scripture to produce an accurate record and revelation of God’s redemptive will, purpose, and activity.”<sup>17</sup> The Spirit-inspired text of Scripture accurately reflects what God has said, and that truth compels preachers to handle it and communicate it rightly. Unger asserts, “If the Bible is considered merely to contain the Word of God, rather than actually to be in toto the Word of God, there is naturally a decreased sense of responsibility to study its text minutely, or to systematize its theology, or authoritatively to declare its message.”<sup>18</sup> But since the Bible is the very Word of God, it demands to be studied minutely, systematized theologically, and declared authoritatively. And those tasks are implicit in expository preaching.

Finding the Spirit’s meaning in a text by studying it minutely and systematizing it theologically involves more than just discovering the author’s intended meaning for the original readers. Certainly, exploring the original audience, situation, and historical context of a particular passage is always the starting point and groundwork that must be understood first. Fee and Stuart were right in saying, “A text cannot mean what it never meant.”<sup>19</sup> But finding the Holy Spirit’s intended meaning in the biblical text involves more. As those who live and preach on this side of the cross it is imperative that we draw out of every Bible passage the full meaning of the Holy Spirit’s intent as it relates to the person of Christ. Some preachers fail to show how a text connects to Christ and the gospel; others fail to make the connection to Christ and the gospel without first seeing and understanding the passage’s original historical context. Expository preaching involves both. After all, Jesus Him-

self claimed to have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17), to be the one with whom Moses and the Prophets were concerned (Luke 24:27), to be the one the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms were about (Luke 24:44), and to be the one about whom the Scriptures bear witness (John 5:39).

It is true that God's Spirit worked through each human author in the biblical canon to speak to their respective historical audiences. But it's equally true that He worked through those same human authors to speak to a larger audience about His larger plan of redemption. Consequently, expository preaching demands we do the work of exposing Christ in every text of Scripture. This assertion does not suggest that every passage in the Bible speaks specifically about Jesus. It does suggest, however, that every passage either points to Christ futuristically, refers to Christ explicitly, or looks back to Christ reflectively. The preacher's task at this point is what makes expository preaching distinctively Christian. Otherwise our preaching will be equally relevant in Jewish synagogues or Muslim mosques.

An exegetically accurate and Christocentric sermon is not enough, however, to foster life change in the lives of listeners. The preparation, delivery, and reception of the message all must be attended by the Holy Spirit's effectual power if anything otherworldly is going to happen in the preaching event. Expository preaching is dependent on the accompanying work of God's Spirit to illuminate the minds of both preacher and people, and to attend to the presentation of the inspired Word in such a way that conviction and transformation result in the exchange. Timothy Keller says,

To be sure, your listeners are responding to your skills, preparation, character, and conviction in a general sense. And these are critical elements of any good communication, including good preaching and teaching. But for the act of preaching in particular, there's something even more central to persuasion: your listener's sense of the Holy Spirit working in and through you.<sup>20</sup>

Expository sermons that are prepared, delivered, and received in the flesh are nothing more than academic exercises. God must breathe life into the preaching of His Word for it to take effect in the lives of people, and that breath must fill the preacher and move the listener. Expository preaching is true preaching only when it is accompanied by the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit.