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THE MISSING EXEGETICAL LINK

"Why were you so angry today?" The question struck me as odd, but I trusted the person who asked it.

"Angry?" I replied. "What do you mean?"

"You just seemed deeply troubled during your sermon. Is everything okay?" Ironically, the theme for my message that day was the joy of the Lord. How could anyone confuse my emphasis on rejoicing in all things as being upset?

I decided to see for myself. When I watched the video of my preaching I could not believe what I saw. With my forehead wrinkled, I maintained a serious demeanor throughout my delivery. Seldom smiling, rarely moving, I explained the intricacies of delighting in God as we enjoy His peace that surpasses our comprehension.

While unpacking the richness of our hope in Christ, I had appeared stoic and bored. *What* I said was right. *How* I said it was all wrong. The experience taught me that tone and demeanor matter more than I realized.

Chances are you can relate. Think about how the tone of common phrases can be misunderstood simply by shifting the emphasis of our words. "*How* have you been?" is a genuine inquiry about someone's welfare. But "How have *you* been?"—with a different volume and inflection—can be an accusatory question that expresses disgust with another person. I fear that most of us who preach think far too little about the realities of our vocal tone and

facial expression. The pathos of what we say touches people as much as our content, sometimes even more.

Think about the most memorable sermons you can recall. Though the directives of the message moved you, more than likely the accompanying emotions also stirred your heart. You might even feel similar reactions as you remember those messages. *But why?*

Deep in our psyche, the tone of what we hear resonates with us on a profoundly personal level. Likewise, when what we hear in a sermon conflicts with what we see and feel from the messenger, our ability and willingness to receive divine truth diminishes. We simply cannot afford to ignore the emotive consequences of sermon pathos. In an age that values genuineness and personal perspectives, people often mock and belittle the notion of absolutes. The belief that truth exists, is knowable, and should be shared with others is more than many modern minds are willing to accept. For many, the only truth that is certain is that there is no truth!

We simply cannot afford to ignore the emotive consequences of sermon pathos.

This atmosphere demands solid reasoning, rooted in fact and pieced together within a logically enticing framework. For those wishing to be true to the Bible's message and doctrine, *what* we say remains the frontline commitment that biblical fidelity requires. With the rise of a new generation that elevates the value of personal experience, however, *how* we say what we say has never been more important.

SHIFTING HOMILETICAL SANDS

The last third of the twentieth century marked the failed experiment that came to be known as the New Homiletic.[1] At its core, the movement was a reaction to and rejection of propositional preaching. Championed most effectively by Fred Craddock,[2] this strategy effectively undermined the Bible's authority in order to elevate the common experience of a sermon's audience. By emphasizing the narrative nature of Scripture, its advocates prioritized the

use of vivid storytelling, emotive language, and engaging plots.

The movement's underlying goal was to engage the visceral senses while empowering hearers to arrive at their own textual conclusions. The resulting affective experience for listeners came at a price, however. While elevating the benefits of pathos in preaching, New Homiletic proponents effectively diminished the priority of logos.[3] Though this type of preaching engaged listeners, its practitioners often entertained congregations with sermons in search of a text.

The catalysts for the New Homiletic were complaints of boring exposition and the theological residue of neoorthodoxy. Tragically, these presuppositions placed the New Homiletic outside the boundaries of orthodox tradition. Yet, the recent decline of the mainline church and a renewed emphasis on the authority of Scripture has, by its very nature, cut the proverbial legs out from under sensational approaches to preaching. As we move further into the twenty-first century, contemporary preachers are returning in droves to the old priority of elevating what Scripture actually says, as they engage in verse-by-verse teaching rather than creating existential collaboration (i.e., arriving at truth *with* the listener rather than presenting truth *to* the listener).

Allowing a biblical text to speak for itself does not require that we forfeit the emotional appeal and connection that made the New Homiletic enticing in the first place. In fact, the opposite is true. Rooted in every biblical passage is an emotive design waiting to be found. Thus, bland sermons reveal much more about the messenger than the message itself! Rather than shun the propositional nature of the Bible, we should wrap every application in the contextual and grammatical mood surrounding each biblical imperative. Capturing the meaning of Scripture without also communicating its heart falls short of the divine mandate to preach the Word.

THE GREAT EXEGETICAL OVERSIGHT

Long before preachers sought creative avenues to connect with their audiences, the ancient philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) offered skilled guidance on rhetorical means. Though his categories of logos, pathos, and ethos are meaningful to most communicators, widespread misapplication of Aristotle's claims regarding pathos frequently hinders effective exposition. Those wishing to make the biblical text primary rightly focus upon the development of Scripture's themes and arguments, or what Aristotle called *logos*. Prioritizing

accurate content is a must for those who believe that the message of the Bible is unique and should, therefore, be received rather than determined by the audience. Proponents of expository preaching celebrate that God has spoken, that He inspired and recorded His words in the Bible without error, that He communicates in order to reveal His redemptive plan, and that preaching the gospel supernaturally brings people into the kingdom.[4]

Furthermore, the contemporary pursuit of personal ethos is a marker of successful communication, even if modern practitioners reach beyond the great rhetorician's original definition of the concept. For Aristotle, a speaker's perceived character validated his ethos with an audience. A quick survey of recent preaching literature, however, reveals the elevation of who we really are in addition to what we project. Though what people perceive is important, the truth behind their perceptions is of equal concern. I appreciate the calls for ministerial integrity that accompany so many homiletical guides. Because holy living greatly enhances the delivery of the Holy Word, the apostle Paul admonishes us to pay close attention to our lives as well as our teaching (1 Tim. 4:16).

Contemporary discussions regarding passion, however, are not as helpful. Reducing Aristotle's concept of pathos to a preacher's natural disposition or his energetic delivery ignores a fundamental requirement of sound exegesis. Modern calls for passionate preaching are usually nothing more than an exhortation to bring enthusiasm and fervency to the pulpit. While heat and gusto can counter the spiritless monotony often associated with academic lectures, this path entices audiences to magnify the messenger more than the message. The weakness of personality-driven preaching emerges, however, when the emotive design of the Bible deviates from the current mood of the preacher.

In addition, for Aristotle the implications of rhetorical pathos are as far-reaching for the audience as they are the public speaker. In other words, *affecting* mood is just as much a priority as *communicating* it. "Disposing the listener" in some way was Aristotle's phrase to describe the awakening of emotional triggers through what he called pathos.[5] Doing so is necessary because no decision, regardless of how rational it might be, exists apart from the natural feelings that accompany it. Separating logic from emotion is an egregious error when one realizes that these friends complement rather than contradict one another.[6] Divorcing the sensation of an idea from the reason behind it not only hinders decision-making, it renders it impossible.

In a preaching context, this requires those who handle the Word to not only embody the emotional tone of their text, but also to elicit the same from their congregation. This, I believe, is the missing exegetical link of our day.

Many falsely dichotomize the Bible's message and mood, as if attending to the Scripture's emotional goals is somehow manipulative. Separating pulse from meaning, however, is to stop one step short of thorough interpretive efforts. Though we thoughtfully consider how a Scripture should be explained, we spend little to no effort identifying the sensation evoked when we succeed. Correctly identifying a passage's intricate emphasis is no excuse for carelessly ignoring its revealed emotion. Uncovering emotional flow is not a distraction from exegetical focus; it is the fruit of it.

Once the energy of Scripture is extrapolated, the preaching moment becomes an opportunity to emulate the biblical mood for members of a congregation even as we seek to evoke the same response within them. Simply put, *pathos in preaching means the preacher embodies the spirit of the text while seeking to help his audience do the same.* Because people will feel something when we preach, our goal is to focus them on the energy of Scripture so that they feel the breath of God as they receive His message.

HITTING THE RIGHT TARGET

Since biblical pathos includes the emotive structure and intention, or what might be called the inspired tone of a text, faithful exposition requires discerning and declaring the spirit of holy writ. Mere passion in the pulpit will often fall short of this goal because it may not accurately correspond to the Holy Spirit's revelatory mood. Since the Bible pulsates with emotion, faithful exegetes will not only give attention to *what* the biblical text says, but also *how* it says it. Osborne explains that "true meaning is lost without the portrayal of the emotions to guide the interpreter. There is no depth without the personal element, no grasp or feel for a passage without the underlying tone."[7]

The prophet Nathan clearly sought an emotional impact as well as a logical result when he rebuked David with the declaration, "You are the man!" in 2 Samuel 12:7. Urgency, lament, and even righteous anger leap off the page when we survey Romans 1:18–32. The sarcasm of 2 Corinthians 11–12 is difficult to overlook as we observe the apostle Paul defending his apostleship. Passionate appeals woven into the biblical record reinforce instead of detract from the overall message of each passage. Preachers should highlight rather than avoid revealed sentiments like these. The aforementioned passages fall flat if we disregard the feelings that accompany their content. Ignoring the textual pathos simply is not an option. Hollifield exhorts,

> The preacher who desires to exegete Scriptures accurately and attractively can do so by giving greater attention to the emotional dimension. The inspired text itself can establish the parameters for the emotional content and delivery of the sermon, meaning that emotions of the sermon are informed by careful exegesis.[8]

A thorough preaching hermeneutic necessitates what could be called *emotional exegesis* due to the following realities:

1. Every biblical text has an inspired pathos.
2. We cannot separate the Bible's lexical realities from its emotive structures.
3. Discerning pathos is not only possible, but also essential for correct interpretation.
4. Utilizing the persuasiveness of biblical pathos is not manipulative.
5. Emulating and eliciting textual pathos leads to better understanding and accurate application of a biblical passage.

To avoid contradictory tones competing with the Bible's message, the preacher's goal is to stand behind the text so that its message and mood resonate with listeners. Though personally connecting with an audience is important, doing so should never come at the expense of connecting hearers to the logical and emotional goals of a text's original author. Elevating the mood or personality of the preacher often distorts an accurate understanding of all that a biblical writer seeks to communicate in the Scripture passage. Apart from rhetorical pathos, it is possible for those who preach to speak the truth as it relates to the Bible's logos while missing the mark of a persuasive appeal for action.

If *what* we say is all that matters, mailing our sermons to parishioners would be just as effective as delivering them in person. If, however, *how* we communicate truth influences people's willingness to receive it, operating within the boundaries of textual energy is essential. Utilizing pathos narrows the preacher's target beyond proclamation to the responsible persuasion. Just as biblical material was written with a desired result in mind, so too the biblical sermon must channel information toward its expressed application. Logos without pathos will likely inform without inspiring. Equally misleading, pathos without logos may inspire without informing. Both approaches are dangerous and ineffective.

Logos without pathos will likely inform without inspiring.

York refers to these ditches as the two fundamental errors of preaching.[9] On the one hand, *factoid* sermons promote knowledge without action. On the other hand, inductively reasoned messages connect but do not instruct. Both ingredients are necessary for a sermon to strike the bull's-eye of responsive life change. We dare not reduce preaching to *putting the truth out there* when God wants us to help listeners do something with it. Likewise, we should equally refuse to motivate audiences with unbiblical directives, regardless of how inspiring they might be.

COMMON CONCERNS

Whenever homileticians discuss the role of pathos in preaching, concerns over manipulation inevitably (and rightly) surface. An even broader objection is an outright rejection of rhetoric's legitimacy as it relates to the delivery of sermons. Many are hesitant to wed the sacredness of preaching with what they consider to be the worldliness of rhetoric, fearing that "the preached word would eventually be the mate prostituted."[10] Other authors propose that the persuasiveness of ancient rhetoric is not only inconsistent with Paul's theology of preaching, but that it is also completely incompatible.[11]

These concerns correctly anticipate rhetorical excesses that are deceptive and manipulative. Pathos is not a license for emotionalism that ignores the emotive guardrails within a given text (see chapter 3). Many of the reckless scenarios used as reasoning to avoid this area of preaching would be shunned by a significant majority of pulpiteers.[12] These abuses notwithstanding, the claim that Scripture identifies and rejects all uses of rhetoric is patently false.[13] Aside from the fact that Paul's letters are rhetorical masterpieces, his rejection of "persuasive words of wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:4 NASB) likely refers to the Sophist strategy which prized a speaker's delivery more than the message he proclaimed. Fee insists that "it is not rhetoric in general, but rhetoric of a very specific and well-known kind, that [Paul] is disavowing."[14]

When John A. Broadus categorized homiletics as a branch of rhetoric,

critics lamented that such a categorization severed the head of preaching from theology, dropping it into Aristotle's rhetorical basket.[15] Though the accusation was overstated, many today still insist that these historical disciplines cannot work side by side. Not only is this delineation unhelpful, it unnecessarily posits theology as a servant of rhetoric. What I am suggesting here is actually the opposite. Dismissing the implications of rhetorical realities simply because some have abused their power is shortsighted and reckless. Bailey warns,

> Those who abandon rhetoric to the modern medicine men surrender to the advertisers, politicians, and religious demagogues the cumulative knowledge of the centuries regarding what motivates and attracts people. Rhetoric is inherently an indifferent instrument which may be employed for justice or injustice, for good or evil.[16]

Though rhetoric is no substitute for the power of God and cannot prevent theological missteps, it remains a helpful tool in the hand of a theologian committed to prioritizing biblical theology. When an interpreter honors the exegetical boundaries woven into Scripture, Aristotle's insights become vehicles by which we unleash the truth rather than compete with it. As long as the Bible is our starting point, laying the triple template of logos, pathos, and ethos over a text focuses our task. Lexical accuracy is important, but an affective delivery is equally essential. Conservatives that no one can/will listen to may speak the truth, but they are not preaching. Likewise, liberals who skillfully engage their audience but have nothing of substance to say aren't preaching either. We need logos and pathos in order to carry out our charge to preach the Word.

A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY

So what exactly am I recommending? For the text to remain primary, its content must inform each dimension of the preaching moment. The logos, or meaning, should regulate the goal of every sermon we preach. Themes, outlines, explanations, and applications should be born out of careful exegesis and analysis. No preacher is free to say whatever he chooses while delivering his message. Honoring rhetorical logos is a commitment to discover your message in the pages of Holy Scripture rather than deciding for yourself what

it will be. The biblical writer's intent limits what those who preach can and should communicate.[17]

As the hard work of exegesis progresses, interpreters will begin to uncover clues that point to the emotive structure of the biblical passage at hand. We must dismiss the temptation of imposing a transcendent mood that contradicts or confuses the inspired pathos of the written Word. Thoughtful Bible students will consider how the feelings and passions of their text affect its overall meaning. Additionally, we will need to calculate the best possible scenarios that will re-create the same tone within our future audience, even as we begin to discern how we might embody the same spirit within our delivery.

Speaking the truth without living the truth may be the greatest deterrent of persuasive preaching.

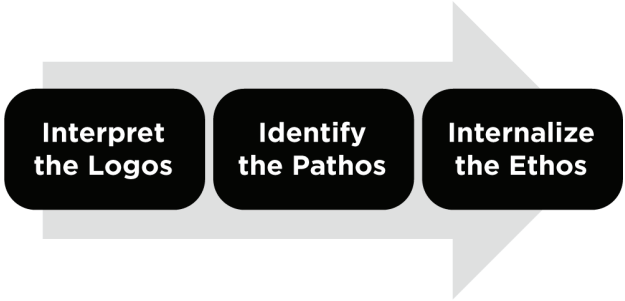
Finally, as the fuller implications of a text's logos and pathos crystalize, faithful preachers will turn inward to develop and challenge their own level of commitment. Although attention to personal ethos may seem to be the least important of Aristotle's rhetorical categories, we must remember the indispensable value of believability. When a messenger's perceived character is lacking, the probability of his message getting through is significantly diminished. A preacher may adequately explain our need to forgive others in his message, but if he is known for holding grudges, his ethos effectively sabotages his logos. Speaking the truth without living the truth may be the greatest deterrent of persuasive preaching.

This is not to suggest that effective communication is the only motivation for moral development. Certainly, the eternal consequences for ignoring the truth we preach to others are far-reaching (1 Cor. 9:27). Yet, those called to herald the good news should continually appraise the persuasive impact of their integrity or lack thereof. Handling the souls of men and women is too important to ignore the stumbling blocks our attitudes or behavior may create.

Comprehensive sermon preparation will often cycle through three developmental stages multiple times, as shown on the next page.

DIAGRAM 1

THE THREE-STEP CYCLE TO DEVELOP A SERMON



Each rhetorical step compels us to interpret with the end in mind. Pathos is particularly vital because it forces us to consider how our audience will receive the truth we teach. Esteeming the text while ignoring those it touches is an insidious form of neglect. Ironically, those who eschew rhetoric because of their supposed commitment to the primacy of Scripture do more to hinder the Word's effectiveness than those who develop their oratorical skills. Monotone preaching, for example, does not demonstrate the power of Scripture; it strangles it. Misplaced emotions that contradict the tone of a passage do not fan the Bible's emotional impact; they dilute it. Annoying habits such as verbal fillers, nervous gestures, or erratic movements do not highlight a text's focus; they blur it instead. Logos without pathos almost guarantees that we will not be heard.

If persuasion is our goal, interpreting a text's meaning, identifying its mood, and internalizing its ethos is the best way to prepare for inspiring delivery. These steps enable us to explain what we learned and elicit what we feel while fully embracing our words with integrity. As shown in Diagram 2, persuasion happens when we explain the meaning (logos), embody the mood (pathos), and embrace the ethos. Not only does this approach increase our enthusiasm for preaching, but it also increases our effectiveness.

IN THE PULPIT

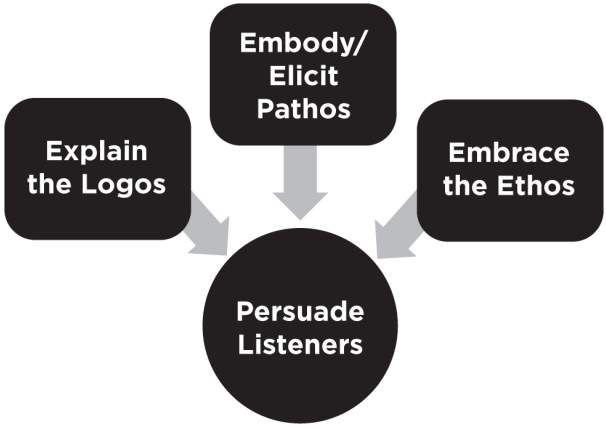
With Jerry Vines

All preachers enter the pulpit from a definite cultural setting. I grew up in a small town in the midst of a rural countryside. My pastor was very skilled in his sermon delivery. Fervent, but not overly so. Although I attended a large

church in town, the churches in the country had an influence on me. Many of the wonderful pastors in the country were very fervent preachers. I do not question their love for Jesus, nor their sincerity. Perhaps unconsciously I identified strong emotion with "preaching in the Spirit." If the pastor didn't come out of the pulpit sweating, breathless, completely exhausted, and hoarse, he really hadn't preached! I equated this with what some today would call passion in the pulpit.

DIAGRAM 2

THREE ELEMENTS OF PERSUASION



The kind of preaching I have just described actually has a long history in the field of public discourse. Bizzell shares a graphic quote from Quintilian, the Roman rhetorician, about overwrought speakers: "Such pleaders try by their delivery to gain the reputation of speaking with energy, for they bawl on every occasion. [They use every opportunity] to clap the hands together, to stamp the foot on the ground, to strike the thigh, the breast, and the forehead with the hand, makes a wonderful impression on an audience."[18] One can easily see the parallels between his description and what I mentioned in the opening paragraph. Such overwrought excitement in the pulpit can also be a cover-up for a lack of understanding of the Scripture passage, or for inadequate preparation. Lyman Beecher said, "When I have nothing to say I always holler."[19]

As Adam has indicated, there is more to preaching with passion in the pulpit than our emotions and physical involvement in the message. Passion also involves the pathos of the Scripture passage the preacher shares with his

congregation. And it involves conveying the same emotion to the listeners for purposes of persuasion.

Jim Shaddix and I cracked the door to the fascinating world of passion—or pathos—in the pulpit, in the first two books in the *Pulpit* series.[20] In this book Adam throws the door wide open.

What's the old saying? "Even a blind pig finds an acorn now and then!" In the sixty-plus years of my preaching ministry, I instinctively incorporated many of the ideas about passion Adam has so cogently expressed. I just didn't understand the dynamics that moved me in that direction. There are some preachers who seem to have a natural talent for utilizing the dynamics of passion in their preaching. Perhaps there was some of that on my part. The good news is that preachers can learn how to make use of the tools of passion in pulpit delivery. Quoting again from *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian says, "Some will have oratory to be a natural talent, though they do not deny that it may be assisted by art."[21] Adam and I believe it is possible to learn how to draw from the emotional mode of Scripture, place it deep in our heart, and pass its truth on persuasively with Holy Spirit power.

Looking back over my preaching through the years, I now understand how I utilized pathos. When I preached on the sublimity of God's creation in Genesis 1 ("In the beginning God . . ."), I preached the passion of the text with wonder-filled words and eyes filled with amazement. I preached the lament psalms with sorrow-tinged vocal delivery and physical indications of heartache. Thanksgiving psalms were preached with a joyful, uplifting vocabulary, tone of voice, and bodily excitement. To preach about the return of Christ (in my sermon "Rescued") I used an illustration of Air Force Captain Scott O'Grady's rescue from Bosnia, accompanied with videos of jet planes flying and a helicopter landing. Paul's letters moved me in delivery with the emotional moods of anger, empathy, joy, and hopefulness. By these approaches I sought to let my emotional mode connect with the passion of the Scripture passage and in turn with those who heard me. For some in the audience, the result would be to respond with life-changing decisions.

Preaching with passion in the pulpit lends itself to what I call "heart preaching," and I'm a strong advocate of such preaching. The psalmist said, "Deep calls unto deep" (Ps. 42:7a). We will not touch the hearts of the people unless we convey to them what our passage of Scripture has stirred within us.

George Whitefield was a heart preacher par excellence. He made Bible scenes come alive in his preaching. He was moved by the Scripture passage, made it a part of his own heart, then proclaimed it to the hearts of

his listeners. Stout, in his fascinating book *The Divine Dramatist*, says that Whitefield "became" the biblical characters he presented. He was Zacchaeus climbing up and down the sycamore tree. He took on the personality of Christ. Stout says, "He was not 'acting' as he preached so much as he was exhibiting a one-to-one correspondence between his inner passions and the biblical saints he embodied."[22] Whether consciously or unconsciously, Whitefield took the pathos of Scripture and made it real in his own heart. That is heart preaching!

So, you are going on an exciting journey with Adam and me. As indicated in the introduction, Adam will do the heavy lifting in each chapter. I will add practical comments about how to translate what Adam teaches you in the study into your preaching with passion in the pulpit!