

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXEGESIS AND EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Robert L. Thomas

The distinctive characteristic of expository preaching is its instructional function. An explanation of the details of a given text imparts information that is otherwise unavailable to the average untrained parishioner and provides him with a foundation for Christian growth and service. The importance and centrality of thorough exegesis in preparing the expositor for this service cannot be overstated. Exegesis must itself be on a solid footing and must lead to development in supplementary fields that, in turn, provide important data for expository preaching, too. With the raw material of sermon preparation thus obtained, common-sense principles must be applied in putting the material into a form that the congregation can receive with ease and learn from.

* * * * *

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 them with these interpretations previously unknown to them. The final test of the effectiveness of Bible Exposition is how well individuals who hear the sermon can go home and read the passage with greater comprehension of its exact meaning than they could before they heard the message.

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. Such a service is the ideal way to cooperate with the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture as He takes an improved grasp of the text's meaning and shows its applicational significance to individual listeners. That is the best avenue for building up the saints. The NT puts heavy emphasis on using the mind as the principal avenue to Christian growth (e.g., Rom 12:2; 1 Pet 1:13), so the preacher should do the same.¹

BUILDING TOWARD BIBLE EXPOSITION

¹Stott 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: 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).

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. 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.²

An essay of this nature 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 NT (or the Hebrew OT). A few suggestive comments regarding exegesis are in order, however, so as to identify what this foundational process entails.

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 (1 Cor 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

²"Cheater's Greek (or Hebrew)," an expression coined to describe alleged time-saving 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.

in the NT and Hebrew and Aramaic in the OT. It does not content itself with the uncertainties of working from a translation or translations. 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 close of the twentieth 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.

OT scholar Lasor says that NT writers did not follow a grammatico-historical method in their use of the NT, so Bible interpreters today should not be limited by that method.³ What he fails to observe, however, is that NT writers received direct divine revelation whereas contemporary interpreters do not. They therefore cannot take the liberties with the text that the NT writers took with the OT text.⁴

Theologian 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).⁵ This opinion in essence dispenses with the well known "analogy of faith" principle in biblical interpretation. It sees the Bible as inconsistent with itself.

³William S. Lasor, "The Sensus Plenior and Biblical Interpretation," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation* (ed. by W. W. Gasque and W. S. Lasor; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 267-68.

⁴Larry D. Petegrew, "Liberation Theology and Hermeneutical Preunderstandings," *BibSac* 148/591 (July-September 1991) 283.

⁵Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 133-35, 142.

Philosopher Thiselton informs us that hermeneutics is a circular process and human prejudgments make objective interpretation impossible.⁶ 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.

Missiologist Haleblan 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.⁷ 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 connotation for the original recipients of the writings has become completely irrelevant.

Redaction critic Marshall cites as non-historical a number of sayings attributed to Christ in the Gospels, viewing them to be later additions added by the church for clarifying purposes.⁸ Traditional interpretation, on the other hand, views the gospels as containing accurate historical data about Jesus.⁹

⁶Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 105, 110; *idem*, "The New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation* (I. Howard Marshall, ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 317.

⁷Krikor Haleblan, "The Problem of Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 9/1 (January 1983) 97-99, 103.

⁸I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (rev. ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990) 57, 62 (n. 50), 78-79, 82 (n. 49), 85, 108 (n. 11).

⁹The scope of this essay does not permit a full portrayal of all the current hermeneutical pitfalls. A few more examples from other recent sources may help to show what to look for 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; 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.

The circulation of subtle hermeneutical variations such as the above has contributed heavily to the interpretive confusion prevalent in evangelicalism in the 1990's. 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 fixed through a valid application of text-critical principles. The canons of the OT and NT are also in place and are the object of the expositor's interpretive efforts. A thorough background knowledge of authorship, date of writing, destination, and the like`i.e., the field called Biblical

(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, i.e. when it does not violate a feminist liberation perspective (Letty M. Russell, "Introduction: Liberating the Word," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* [Letty M. Russell, ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985] 16). By her own admission this places her at odds with the grammatical-historical method of interpretation (ibid.; *idem*, "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* [Letty M. Russell, ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985] 55-56; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* [Letty M. Russell, ed.; Philadelphia; Westminster, 1985] 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`i.e., 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.

Introduction regarding the book under scrutiny 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," as it is called, 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 end of the twentieth 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. That 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.¹⁰ He must now select from this massive

¹⁰As 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

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 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 explanation is the core of Bible Exposition.

Auxiliary fields of study. Yet Bible Exposition includes much more. In a logical development of theological and ministerial disciplines, it is built upon other fields of investigation besides just exegesis. 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

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 it would take an expositor many hours of preparation to uncover. 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.

the Christian church from century to century can be evaluated properly only through the eyes of the Bible correctly understood. Lessons learned by earlier generations of believers, both good and bad, make excellent sermon illustrations. They also provoke 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 NT 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, apologetical 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 been determinative of 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 form an effective combination that makes up what we call 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 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. That

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, i.e., a counseling situation.

(c) Christian Education. Education that is really Christian will derive from exegesis. What is true of secular educational method-ologies 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.

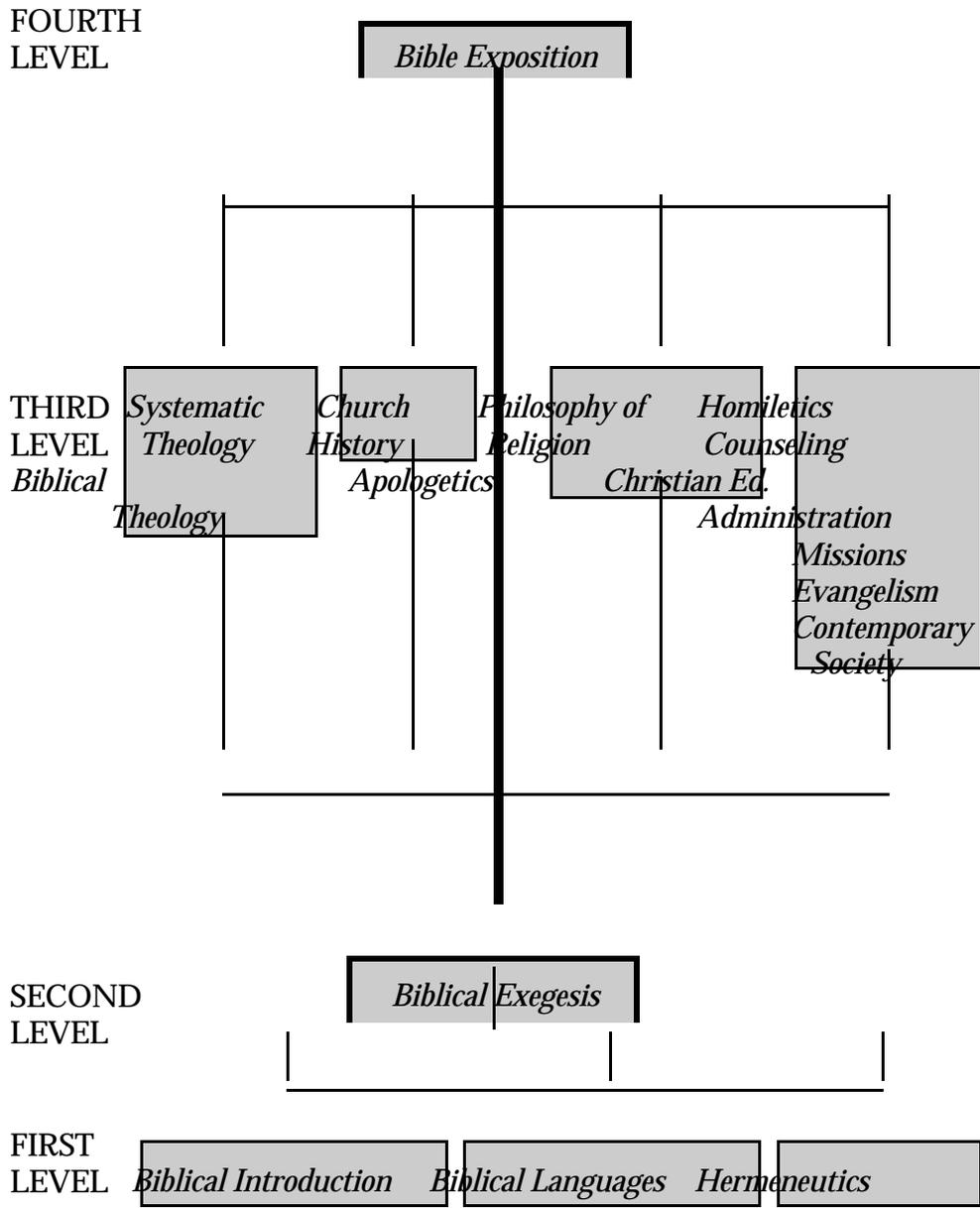
(d) Administration. Unfortunately many have attempted to incorporate secular administrative philosophies into local-church operations. Pragmatism has often been given as a reason for this: "If it works in the business world, use it." Such reasoning is ethically inferior, however. The biblical dimension in administration gives first attention to this 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 (cf. 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 will sometimes 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 manmade 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 combatting 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 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 the following schema:



Schema of Relationships Between Fields of Theological Study

The schema above reflects the building blocks that eventually lead 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. With a breakdown in exegesis comes a collapse of the whole structure of which expository preaching is the climax. Based on thorough exegesis, Bible Exposition can fruitfully draw upon the full spectrum of theological disciplines.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHERS

The above remarks reflect that Exegesis and Bible Exposition are not the same. Exegesis may be 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."¹¹ 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 (cf. 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 warning issued above is worth repeating. A transition from exegesis to Bible Exposition is mandatory. Pulpiters 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 situation.

As the above schema reflects, exegesis must also be expanded to embody other fields of doctrinal and ethical relevance. A preacher

¹¹Robert L. Thomas, *Introduction to Exegesis* (Sun Valley: author, 1987) 15-16.

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.

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 over thirty years of personal preaching, listening to other preachers, and preparing would-be expositors:

(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.

(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, *dynamis* (*dynamis*), the Greek word for "power," could be compared to the English word "dynamic."¹² This gives the listeners a point of reference to facilitate recollection of what the Greek term is. To repeat an above-mentioned 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 NT 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

¹²Caution 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.

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 difficult 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 non-sequential 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 results are tragic for the exegetical process, 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 important,¹³ but whatever version is chosen, the preacher will have to correct or clarify the translation during the message. He must be careful to limit these corrections, perhaps to only two or three, during the process of a message 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

¹³See "Bible Translations: The Link between Exegesis and Expository Preaching," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 1/1 (Spring 1990) 53-73.

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 need 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ To some congregations unaccustomed to 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

¹⁴Wonderly 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* [vol. 7 of *Helps for Translators*; London: United Bible Societies, 1968] 37-39); cf. Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1964) 132-44.

¹⁵A 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.

what we do know into practice." This ill-conceived philosophy assumes that knowing and doing are antithetical i.e. 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 previously 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-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.¹⁶ 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

¹⁶The interest-span of a given audience can be increased by patiently and gradually increasing the amount of instructional emphasis from message to message. Progressively listeners will grow 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.

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 to gear one's message for novelty is strong. 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 consequent popularity it produces. If he opts for this route to gain applause or acceptance by his listeners, he has abused 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.¹⁷

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

¹⁷Guarding 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 (cf. 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 (cf. Robert L. Thomas, "Improving Evangelical Ethics: An Analysis of the Problem and a Proposed Solution," *JETS* 34/1 [March 1991] 17-19).

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).