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WEIGHING SERMON SUBSTANCE:
EVALUATING A SERMON'S DEGREE OF EXPOSITORY MERIT,
DOCTRINAL ESSENCE, AND CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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December 2011

APPROVAL SHEET

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To Jesus,

who is the Word of God, the Truth of God, and the Gospel of God

and to

Amy,

who hungers for the Word, the Truth, and the Gospel with me

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PREFACE

In Exodus 4:11-12, the Lord forthrightly tells Moses the solution for ineloquence: “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes *him* dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to say.” This assurance of the Lord’s sovereign equipping has given me repeated comfort during my seminary journey as I have grappled with the difficulty of ministry training and the gravity of Christian preaching. The completion of this dissertation is tangible evidence that the called man may still rely on the empowering presence of the Lord.

Just as the Lord graciously provided Aaron to help Moses in his task, he has provided numerous “Aarons” for me. He has shown me that his sovereign equipping often flows through the influence of others. This dissertation is no exception.

The influence of my supervisory committee permeates this work. Their convictions regarding the nature of Christian preaching both fueled my interest and informed my positions. Dr. Robert Vogel is as diligent a reader as he is theologian and preacher. His feedback is reliably thoughtful, straightforward, and sound. I have found that we are of kindred spirit in virtually every issue related to preaching. Dr. Hershael York is a model of pastoral sensitivity and insight even in the academic setting. He demands excellence and delivers encouragement that have both inspired my best efforts. Dr. Russell Fuller has taught me how to read the Scriptures not only in terms of grammar,

but also in terms of an “old school” confidence in its unity and reliability. Of course, this perspective is the hallmark of Southern Seminary. Every professor that I have had has affirmed for me the beauty of God’s Word, his truth, and his gospel.

I must also acknowledge the influence of my family. My father is the greatest model of a self-motivated, hard worker that I have in my life, but even more importantly, he has an ever-growing passion for the glory of God which he impresses upon me repeatedly. My mother is one of the greatest theologians I know, and it seems that I eventually test in conversation with her every significant spiritual thought that I have. My brother, John Michael, is a scholar in his own right. He has spent more time reading and thinking about my dissertation than anyone other than me. He has given feedback on every section and encouraged me repeatedly. The rest of my family, from my sister to my in-laws, have provided steady support through this entire process.

Three local churches deserve specific recognition for their role in carrying me and my family to this point. First Baptist Church in Naples, Florida, sent us to seminary with its blessing and faithfully supported us through financial scholarship. Upon coming to Louisville, we were irresistibly drawn to the sweet spirit of Bethlehem Baptist Church, which became our church family and afforded for me seven years of ministry opportunity. Finally, Ninth and O Baptist Church has blessed my family in numerous ways as they have seen us through the end of my training.

Finally, my wife, Amy, has not been an “Aaron” in my life. She has been for me the rod of God. The Lord’s power and grace toward me is manifested most visibly through her. As Moses held his staff, I have held her hand. The Lord gave her to me just before I set out on this journey, and she has been close by my side every step of the way. I

have leaned on her for support, and God has delivered four incredible miracles through her. Their names are Bailey Elizabeth, Jenny Morrison, Mary Cooper, and Ashlyn Ray.

A dissertation is like an academic Red Sea. My encounter filled me with a deep sense of ineloquence for the task. But the impossibilities of the situation pushed me to depend upon the possibilities of the Lord. Now that I have reached the other side, I rejoice in the power of God, but I also realize that my time of service is only beginning. I now pray that, like Moses, my future years of ministry will demonstrate faithfulness to Him who is always faithful to me.

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Louisville, Kentucky

December 2011

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

“Brethren, weigh your sermons.”¹ The chapter in which Charles Spurgeon pens this imperative demonstrates his concern for the substantive issues of expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness. In “Sermons—Their Matter,” Spurgeon weaves these concepts throughout his discussion. Concerning expository merit, he claims that the most powerful sermon is “not a lecture about the Scripture, but Scripture itself opened up and enforced.” He adds, “those sermons which expound the exact words of the Holy Spirit are the most useful.”² He further prescribes a doctrinal essence for sermons: “Sermons should have real teaching in them, and their doctrine should be solid, substantial, and abundant.”³ His final exhortation concerns Christ-centeredness: “Preach Christ, always and evermore. . . . More and more am I jealous lest any views upon prophecy, church government, politics, or even systematic theology, should withdraw one of us from glorying in the cross of Christ.”⁴ These quotations offer a small sample of Spurgeon’s thoughts related to exposition, doctrine, and Christ-centeredness. For Spurgeon, a

¹C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 71.

²*Ibid.*, 73.

³*Ibid.*, 70.

⁴*Ibid.*, 79.

sermon's "weight" depends heavily upon these three aspects.

Spurgeon is certainly not alone in his prescriptions. His emphases are supported by many of church history's greatest preachers and theologians.⁵ Still today, there are strong evangelical advocates who share Spurgeon's priorities. Mark Dever advocates the combined gravity of expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching in that his first three marks of a healthy church, which he especially highlights as "essential," correlate to these three aspects. His first mark is "Expository Preaching" because it reflects "the centrality of God's Word." His second mark is "Biblical Theology." He explains, "We must understand God's truth as a coherent whole." His third mark is "The Gospel," and he asks, "Does our Gospel consist only of universal ethical truths for our daily lives or are there once-for-all, historical, special saving actions of God in Christ at the root of it?" Notably, Dever stresses a homiletical connection among these marks: "They all reflect the concern to preach rightly the Word of God."⁶

Indeed, many preachers readily embrace the combined gravity of these sermon aspects, but the question remains, "How is one to weigh a sermon?" Haddon Robinson notes the lack of an established means for such a task: "Regrettably the Bureau of Weights and Measures does not have a standard expository sermon encased in glass against which to compare other messages. Ministers may paste the label *expository* on whatever sermon

⁵For a survey of the historical commitment to expository preaching, see James F. Stitzinger, "The History of Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 27-43. For doctrinal preaching, see Daniel Doriani, "Doctrinal Preaching in Historical Perspective," *Trinity Journal* 23, no. 1 (2002): 35-52. For preaching Christ, see Sidney Greidanus, "The History of Preaching Christ from the Old Testament," in *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 69-176.

⁶Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 29.

they please, and no consumer advocate will correct them.”⁷ Robinson laments this situation with specific regard to exposition, but it is relevant to doctrine and Christ-centeredness as well.⁸ Of course, Robinson’s work itself is an attempt toward a solution, as are other contemporary works on expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching, but his contribution is from the angle of “development and delivery,” not evaluation. In fact, the angle of development and delivery is the common angle that homileticians take regarding these issues,⁹ so in spite of all the prescription, a substantive and well-balanced method for evaluating a sermon’s degree of expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness has not been developed. Further, contemporary works tend to emphasize one of these issues or another, not synthesizing them with equal attention. This reality is especially true with regard to evaluation. This dissertation seeks to accomplish such a synthesis.

Thesis

The gravity of expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching calls for a substantive and well-balanced evaluation method that weighs a sermon’s degree of demonstration of these matters.

⁷Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21.

⁸Robert Smith discusses the difficulty of defining doctrinal preaching: “While preachers know what doctrinal preaching is, it is difficult to articulate succinctly what it is in one descriptive and pregnant sentence.” Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 12. Sidney Greidanus similarly expresses the contemporary difficulty of easily defining Christ-centered preaching: “Strange as it may seem, we are not at all clear on what it means to ‘preach Christ.’” Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 3.

⁹The major evangelical works on expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching are primarily concerned with sermon development, not evaluation. A simple survey of the titles in the bibliography demonstrates this reality.

First, the primary burden of the thesis is to demonstrate the value of an “evaluation method.” This recognition sets a focus for the project. Though the works of many scholars and preachers are incorporated, a full interaction with a particular scholar is beyond the scope of this project, and any remarks about a preacher’s pulpit ministry are tentative. The main burden is to demonstrate a void in the field of homiletics and the possibilities for filling that void by a proposed method. The expectation is not to produce a flawless method that is immune from debate or improvement, but it is to propose a legitimate method that is well-rounded and theologically sound.

Second, the “preaching” intended in the thesis is in the pastoral context. The reason for this qualifier is that I am largely driven by a concern for the health of the local church. Of course, there are other important preaching settings, but this dissertation does not consider how the method would relate to them.

Third, the thesis is narrowly focused upon “expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching.” Put in terms of evaluation, expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness¹⁰ are among the weightiest concerns related to a pastoral preaching ministry. As the paper proceeds, these aspects are discussed with increasing specificity, but from the start, it may be understood that each one correlates to a God-centered emphasis. Exposition emphasizes the importance of God’s Word. Doctrine emphasizes God’s truth, and Christ-centeredness emphasizes God’s gospel.

Since the three aspects are all related to substantive sermon content, this dissertation is securely nestled in the classical rhetorical category of the *logos*.

¹⁰Hereafter, expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness are regularly referenced as “the three aspects.”

Accordingly, it has little to say about the concerns of *pathos* and *ethos*. Since these three all contribute to a sermon's reception, this dissertation is not an attempt to evaluate the ultimate impact of a sermon. Certainly, emotional and character factors may positively or negatively affect the impact of weighty content. Also, other matters of content, beyond the three aspects, fall outside of this dissertation except in cases in which they prove relevant. Issues of application prove relevant to all three aspects and, therefore, are addressed under the discussion of each aspect.¹¹

Fourth, the thesis is concerned with evaluating "degree." The concern for degree is important to this project because it seeks to correct a common tendency that simply characterizes sermons in stark extremes. Not all sermons can be readily described as "expository" or "not expository," as "doctrinal" or "not doctrinal," or as "Christ-centered" or "not Christ-centered." Though these characterizations have their place in extreme examples, this dissertation proposes a five-level graduated system of classification that is sensitive to the possibility that sermons may fall along a continuum.

Fifth, the thesis seeks a method that is "substantive." The matter of substance is important due to the subjective nature of sermon evaluation. Ultimately, the evaluator must be skilled in his art, but this acknowledgment does not mean that his art is devoid of an element of objectivity. In this project, such an edge is provided by carefully determining a central concern for each aspect and distinctive elements. This process grounds the evaluation in definitive matters of inquiry. The task of the evaluator is to apply his understanding and discretion in answering the substantive questions of concern.

¹¹The importance of application is evident in chap. 3 where I present a central concern for each aspect. In short, central to each aspect is the importance of its contemporary, life-impacting nature. Also, in chap. 4, the last distinctive element for each aspect is particularly concerned with application.

Sixth, the thesis is concerned with being “well-balanced.” This concern flows from a conviction regarding the combined gravity of the three aspects and a subsequent desire to see them discussed with equal attention. An additional desire is to compare their relative presence in any given sermon. Therefore, the method uses a parallel format that applies the five-level continuum mentioned above to weighing each aspect.

Seventh, the prescriptive element of the thesis must be understood. The goal is to prescribe a method that fills a void in the field of homiletics but not to prescribe that every single sermon in a pastoral ministry should necessarily demonstrate the three aspects to their fullest degree. Sermons may be weighty for different reasons related to the three aspects. The practical dynamics of weekly preaching are too complicated to demand that every sermon be a full demonstration of all three aspects. However, the balance of a pulpit ministry over time should reflect a healthy diet.

Two Fundamental Premises

This dissertation is based on two fundamental premises. First, if the three aspects are indeed biblical priorities of preaching,¹² then they should be evaluated in a meaningful and helpful way.¹³ Stated conversely, if they are not evaluated, then the evangelical emphasis upon biblical priorities is missing an avenue for insight and

¹²Their priority is addressed in the first part of chap. 2 under “The Combined Gravity of the Three Aspects.”

¹³Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird capture the interrelationship of prescription and evaluation in their work on rhetorical criticism: “Practice, theory, and criticism are, in the broadest sense, indivisible elements of an art. Each influences the other, with the result that all are modified by the circular action.” They later add, “Criticism helps to reveal the operation of theory in practice, thus clarifying its meaning and perhaps in some instances even formulating new theory.” Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for the Rhetorical Appraisal* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948), 16-21.

accountability. A standard of expectation should also provide a standard for evaluation. Therefore, success in this dissertation would provide support for evangelical theory and practice. By evaluating the final product, the developmental angle should be strengthened.

Another premise undergirding this dissertation is that the three aspects are in fact distinguishable. This clarification is needed because homileticians sometimes use the terminology in ways clouded with imprecision. The tendency to confuse terms comes from the fact that expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching have areas of overlap. This dissertation seeks to acknowledge these areas while maintaining that each aspect has a central concern and distinctive elements specific unto itself.

Perceived Benefits

The proposed method may provide several benefits for the church: (1) Such a method may provide a legitimate basis for discussing a sermon in relation to the three aspects. Even where two evaluators may disagree, the method provides parameters for the disagreement. Thus, it may be used in a variety of contexts among scholars, church leadership, pastor search committees, preaching instructors, and even concerned laymen to foster reflection and dialogue about preaching. (2) Such a method may show which of the three aspects is strong or weak in any given sermon and show the relative weight of the three aspects to one another within a single sermon. (3) Such a method, if applied to a large number of sermons from a particular preacher, may show the strength and proportion of a pulpit ministry over a period of time regarding the three aspects. Thus, it may serve as a source of affirmation or challenge for a preacher so long as the results are handled in an appropriate manner. (4) Such a method may be used in a large study of

preaching to assess patterns with regard to the current state of preaching. (5) Such a method may provide a means for personal evaluation in relation to the three aspects both before and after sermon delivery. In this capacity, it would help a preacher to see his own tendencies and how he might add weight to his own preaching.

Relationship to the Field of Rhetoric

Because this dissertation is concerned with the evaluation of a public speaking event, the sermon, its relationship to the field of rhetoric should be framed. As a preface to this section, the tension suggested by John Broadus, between rhetoric and homiletics, should serve as an overarching insight. After acknowledging that rhetoric and homiletics are “kindred arts,” Broadus cautions against allowing the priorities of rhetorical study to govern the study of preaching.

Still, preaching is properly very different from secular discourse, as to the primary source of its materials, as to the directness and simplicity of style which becomes the preacher, and the unworldly motives by which he ought to be influenced. And while these and other peculiarities do not render it proper to treat homiletics as entirely distinct from rhetoric, they ought to be constantly borne in mind by the student of homiletics and by the working preacher.¹⁴

Aware of Broadus’ caution, it is relevant to consider three major aspects of rhetorical study and suggest how this dissertation relates to them.

Rhetoric as Persuasion

Over its 2,500 year history, rhetorical study has been primarily associated with persuasion. Hence, the value of a discourse mainly depends on its impact upon an audience. In this respect the classical works of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian

¹⁴John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1888), 30-31.

complement one another and still exercise a powerful influence over contemporary study.¹⁵ From the perspective of composition, rhetoric is focused upon “the available means of persuasion” and their thoughtful selection and presentation.¹⁶ From the perspective of evaluation, rhetorical criticism is focused on the actual means implemented and their perceived effects. Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird explain this angle: “A rhetorical judgment is a composite of data and interpretation that is intended to reveal the *effect* of a given speech upon a particular group of listeners.”¹⁷

As stated above, this dissertation is not focused on persuasion but content. Because it is not focused on persuasion, the listener-centered orientation of classical rhetoric is not appropriate for this project. When persuasion is the chief criterion, the listener is the ultimate “judge” of success;¹⁸ however, when faithfulness to a message is the chief criterion, the source of the message is the judge. Thomas Schreiner echoes this sentiment: “God’s word rather than popular opinion must be the test of faithfulness. It is the calling of pastors to feed the flock with God’s word, not to please people with what

¹⁵Edward Corbett explains the pervasive focus on persuasion in the history of rhetorical study: “From its beginnings and throughout its history, classical rhetoric was thought of as the art of persuasive speech. Its end was to convince or persuade an audience to think in a certain way or to act in a certain way.” Corbett’s work is a demonstration of the complementary contributions of the classical studies. Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 32.

¹⁶Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, trans. Lane Cooper (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1932), 7.

¹⁷Thonssen and Baird, *Speech Criticism*, 9.

¹⁸The fundamental commitment of Aristotle’s work is that the target audience is the ultimate “judge” for persuasive choices. See Lane Cooper’s introduction in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, xx-xxii. Thonssen and Baird explain this priority of Aristotle upon the history of the study: “Aristotle believed, and practically all writers since his time have concurred, that the audience determines the speech’s end and object. In other words, the important aspect of the speech situation is the speaker-audience relationship. Implicit in this idea is the very core of a theory of rhetoric.” Thonssen and Baird, *Speech Criticism*, 15.

they desire to hear.”¹⁹ Therefore, in this dissertation, a concern for biblical fidelity to biblical priorities largely supplants a preoccupation with the listener.

The listener is not irrelevant to my concerns. In fact, I am extremely concerned about listener needs. The listener is best served through the proclamation of the three aspects because these aspects address the fundamental needs of all listeners.²⁰ As a result, the three aspects will always prove relevant and applicable. Of course, this claim requires examination, which is provided in the coming chapters, but once established, evaluation may move forward without being consumed with listener-centered peculiarities which are more relevant to a focus on persuasion.²¹

There is, of course, a strong element of persuasion in Christian preaching. Though persuasiveness should not be elevated to the central place, the faithful preacher should be concerned with the reception of his message.²² Given that this is a basic concern, the question becomes, “How should a preacher seek to persuade his listeners?” On this question, the three aspects are of first importance. More than any other persuasive tactic, the preacher must hold forth God’s Word, God’s truth, and God’s Christ as the primary

¹⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 21.

²⁰Martyn Lloyd-Jones specifically addresses the matter of being overly concerned with listener peculiarities. He argues that the common needs of all listeners are much more important to keep in view. See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 134.

²¹I am not saying that a preacher should not be concerned with his own particular context, but simply that such concerns are not the focus of this project. I am content to be neutral about the preacher’s choices regarding his particular situation while reserving my judgments to his incorporation of the three aspects in whatever situation he addresses.

²²Three times in the book of Acts, Luke explicitly describes Paul’s preaching as an attempt to “persuade” πείθω (Acts 18:4; 26:28-29; 28:23). Also, in 2 Cor, Paul’s own self-description of his ministry includes the same effort (2 Cor 5:11).

vehicle for working an effect upon his listeners.²³

Rhetoric as Eloquence

Though rhetoric has traditionally focused on practical persuasion, eloquence has always been an interwoven matter. Eloquence may be understood simply as “the art of speaking,” which in this sense encompasses both rhetoric and poetry.²⁴ As such, it concerns matters of artistry as much as it concerns persuasion. Quintilian’s emphasis on the “good man skilled in speaking” brings out the importance of both character and eloquence. For Quintilian, the good speaker is an effective persuader because he is more generally a respectable, well-rounded man who presents himself with refined oratorical skill.²⁵ In this sense, the eloquent man may elicit whatever effect he desires upon an audience whether persuasion, emotion, admiration, or understanding.

Quintilian promoted an integrity that is sometimes lacking in orators who simply understand eloquence in terms of the superficial particulars of elocution. The ancient Sophists were sometimes criticized for this tendency, but as long as there have been speakers, there have been those who have exaggerated the particulars of delivery to the detriment of substance. Such was Francis Bacon’s complaint against the Renaissance school of rhetoric.²⁶ Similarly, with regard to preaching, Spurgeon and Broadus criticized nineteenth-century ministers who were, in their opinions, too enamored with style,

²³The “spiritual efficacy” of the three aspects is explored in chap. 2.

²⁴George Campell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), xlix-l.

²⁵Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 108-09, 602.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 613-14.

delivery, and artistry.²⁷ Spurgeon and Broadus' ridicule highlights an important point: Whenever eloquence becomes more about the superficialities related to speaking than about the ideas in the sermon, there is an inherent conflict with Christian preaching.

On this point, John Piper explains his concern for a "Christian eloquence" in preaching.²⁸ Piper wrestles with Paul's disdain for the sophistry of his day and with the possibility that gratuitous eloquence empties the cross of its power. However, he also recognizes the presence of beautiful eloquence in the Bible and the inability for a speaker to escape employing some attempt at eloquence. Piper offers two governing principles for a Christian evaluation of eloquence. On the one hand, "Does it feed [egotistical] boasting?" and on the other hand, "Does it exalt Christ?"

Piper's discussion applies to the evaluation of sermon content. First, the Christ-exalting judgment of eloquence is partially determined by the type of content the eloquence serves. If the content of a sermon is saturated with Christ's Word, his truth, and his gospel, then a judgment upon the value of the eloquence is positively influenced. Second, one aspect of a preacher's eloquence concerns his ability to articulate content in a clear and purposeful manner. The evaluation of such articulation is what this project seeks to promote.

Rhetoric as Exposition

"Exposition," in the field of rhetoric, simply refers to the process of stating a

²⁷Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 301. Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery*, 21.

²⁸John Piper, "Is There a Christian Eloquence? Clear Words and the Wonder of the Cross," in *The Power of Words and the Wonder of God*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 67-80.

view clearly.²⁹ Thonssen and Baird explain its relationship to persuasion: “Argument depends heavily upon expository detail. Since all argument, regardless of type, must make certain ideas clear before it can lead to the fixation of belief or attitude, it follows that expository detail is prerequisite to argumentative development.”³⁰

Even though exposition has always been inherent in rhetoric, until the last century, exposition did not receive primary attention in rhetorical study until I. A. Richards confronted the field’s neglect of “the communication of meaning through discourse.”³¹ Richards’ exalted concern for exposition is evident in his definition of rhetoric which centers not on persuasion but on communication: “Rhetoric . . . should be a study of misunderstanding and its remedies.”³² Richards’ body of work, therefore, explores “the growth of our meanings” as words and things interact among various individual “contexts.”³³ This concern for exposition resonates with my project. The clear

²⁹This broad notion is taken directly from I. A. Richards. See I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 24. In chaps. 3 and 4, I demonstrate that “exposition” in the field of homiletics includes a set of typical expectations that are not necessarily intended by the general use of the term in the field of rhetoric.

³⁰Thonssen and Baird, *Speech Criticism*, 344-45.

³¹Paul Corts, “I. A. Richards on Rhetoric and Criticism,” *Southern Speech Journal* 36, no. 2 (1970): 115. In addition to Corts’ acknowledgment of Richards’ influence upon rhetoric, Kevin VanHoozer credits the work of Richards and Richards’ colleague C. K. Ogden for expressing the “call” that has made language and meaning the “preeminent problem of twentieth-century philosophy.” See Kevin J. VanHoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 16.

³²Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 3.

³³Three concepts in this sentence reflect emphases of Richards. First, Richards understands meaning in organic terms. As a person’s interaction with a concept increases over a lifetime, the concept gradually grows greater detail and nuances within the mind of that individual. Second, Richards has given detailed study to the interaction of words with things. He contends that because there is no necessary connection between a word and its referent, communication is largely concerned with how words operate as “signs” for various things. Third, Richards emphasizes the individual “contexts” that people have concerning words. The idea is that the different experiences of people with words and concepts causes the growth of meaning in different ways among people. Therefore, for Richards, communication is largely the

communication of meaning is implicit to expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching. The preacher's goal is for the growth of meaning in the minds of his hearers as his words address divine things and impact the listeners' personal contexts.

However, the work of Richards and other secular rhetoricians and linguists has hardly provided a paradigm of exposition for Christian preaching. The reason for this reservation lies in the strong bent toward deconstruction and subjectivism in secular communication study. The desire for a detailed inquiry into the philosophy of communication is not where secular scholarship has erred but, rather, in the neglect of a theocentric foundation for such inquiry. Ultimately, the Christian preacher's hope of communication is not in fully understanding the functions of language³⁴ but in the trinitarian God who grounds, executes, and enables communication. VanHoozer captures this foundation.

Indeed, God's very being is a self-communicative act that both constitutes and enacts the covenant of discourse: speaker (Father), Word (Son), and reception (Spirit) are all interrelated. Human communication is a similarly covenantal affair, though we cannot pour ourselves into our communicative acts and ensure their effects as God can through his Word and Spirit. Humans have the dignity of communicative agency, though not its perfection.³⁵

Of course, a trinitarian foundation is acutely relevant to the study of preaching where "exposition" relates to lofty spiritual content and where reception is a matter of

process of understanding how meaning grows, how words signify, and how individual contexts relate. Ibid., 19, 30, 34-35. Also, Corts' article offers a summary of Richards' body of work. See Corts, "I. A. Richards on Rhetoric and Criticism."

³⁴Lloyd-Jones strongly opposed the notion that the biggest problem in the pulpit was "the problem of communication." While acknowledging the preacher's responsibility to explain Christian concepts in understandable ways, he nevertheless directs his readers to the more fundamental human problem of sinful opposition to receive the word of God. He appeals to the Holy Spirit as the preacher's only hope of communication. Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 130-142.

³⁵VanHoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 456.

spiritual enlightenment.³⁶ But the breadth of VanHoozer's point must not be missed. He claims that all communication, Christian or secular, homiletical or rhetorical, expository or persuasive, finds its ultimate foundation in the transcendent God of Christianity.³⁷ Therefore, as much as homiletics may benefit from rhetoric, rhetoric may benefit from homiletics because it is the field of homiletics that explicitly acknowledges that which is foundational to both. With God as the ground and hope for successful communication, a study of sermon content or speech content has legitimate hope for quality analysis.

Relationship to the Field of Qualitative Content Analysis

Technically, the field of qualitative content analysis represents a variety of research methods that are primarily used in the social sciences. It is distinguished from "quantitative content analysis" in that it "goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings."³⁸ Qualitative analysis involves the subjective interpretation of "texts" in order to discover meanings, patterns, or

³⁶For example, Martin Luther believed that preachers "must preach the Word faithfully in order to get the Word to the ears of the congregation. After that, Luther insisted, only the Holy Spirit could take the Word from the ear into the human heart." See R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 46.

³⁷This foundation for understanding communication is akin to Mohler's discussion of a foundation for understanding truth. Mohler argues for a "revelatory epistemology." He explains that the issue of communication is fundamental to his concern: "It is the understanding that God has spoken to us in a reasonable way, in language we can understand, and has given us the gift of revelation, which is his willful disclosure of himself, the forfeiture of his personal privacy." He then explicitly relates his discussion of truth to hermeneutics: "Evangelicals have always believed and taught that it is God's revelation that brings us out of hermeneutical and epistemological nihilism and into a world of true meaning." Mohler grounds the attempt for clear speech in the possibility of actual success, in the hope that truth can be communicated adequately and meaningfully. R. Albert Mohler, "What Is Truth? Truth and Contemporary Culture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no.1 (2005): 63-75.

³⁸Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (November 2005): 1278.

themes.³⁹ Though not in the concrete sense of quantitative analysis, it may still lead to statistical representations based on the conclusions of study.

In some respects this dissertation draws upon this discipline. The proposed evaluation method is fundamentally subjective and, therefore, qualitative. It involves the interaction with “texts,” sermons. It involves the classification of content, the three aspects, and it leads to statistical representations and thoughtful explanations based on the engagement. However, a couple of important distinctions must be made between my efforts and those represented by the field of qualitative analysis.

First, the goal of this dissertation is not to draw qualitative assessments of social dynamics. If I were attempting to assess social dynamics involved in preaching, then this dissertation would more formally be an attempt at qualitative analysis. For example, Ronald Allen’s work, which identifies patterns for how people listen to sermons according to relational, logical, and emotional tendencies, is a formal example of qualitative analysis.⁴⁰ However, this dissertation is not concerned with social dynamics but, rather, with substantive priorities.

Second, qualitative analysis is fundamentally inductive in its use of samples. The goal is “to make valid inferences from text.”⁴¹ However, this dissertation does not intend to make inferences from texts but to make assessments of texts (sermons). Therefore, this dissertation is fundamentally deductive. I begin with theological priorities, interact with

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship/Content/Feeling* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

⁴¹Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 1985), 9.

established homiletical theory, and then evaluate sermons from the resulting construct. In the area of qualitative analysis called “directed content analysis,” pre-determined categories developed from prior research are applied to texts in order to test existing theory. This dissertation is more closely related to this process. However, the main purpose of directed analysis is still to test the theory from the observations in the texts.⁴² Though this dissertation may help refine homiletical theory, it is not primarily intended to test theory but to weigh sermons.

In conclusion, the field of qualitative content analysis informs this dissertation in some respects, providing some helpful insights into the development of the evaluation method. These are incorporated as the proposed method is explained in chapter 5 and evaluation standards are highlighted in the conclusion. However, because of the sociological associations and fundamentally inductive direction, the priorities and methods of qualitative content analysis do not parallel the direction of this dissertation.

Relationship to Other Christian Fields of Study

Homiletics is impossible to isolate from other Christian disciplines because preaching requires the perceptive integration of many other fields. Indeed, preaching God’s message is, in many ways, the goal of other Christian fields of study.⁴³ Several Christian disciplines especially relevant to this dissertation warrant consideration.

⁴²Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 454.

⁴³Grant R. Osborne repeatedly emphasizes the ultimate goal of preaching among the various theological disciplines: “It is my contention that the final goal of hermeneutics is not systematic theology but the sermon. The actual purpose of Scripture is not explanation but exposition, not description but proclamation.” He offers a chart that demonstrates how other disciplines culminate in a “homiletic theology.” Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 29, 354.

Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Broadly understood, “hermeneutics” refers to the entire process of interpretation. It encompasses theory by describing “the principles people use to understand what something means,”⁴⁴ and it also encompasses the practices of exegesis and “contextualization.”⁴⁵ Grant Osborne uses the term “general hermeneutics” practically synonymously with “exegesis” as the work of discovering the original meaning of a text. He then advocates the term “applied hermeneutics” as the work of understanding the modern significance of a text.⁴⁶ Therefore, a grasp of hermeneutics is vital for the preacher in his study as he attempts to interact with the Bible, but it is also vital for the one who would evaluate sermons. Such a grasp is particularly important for evaluating expository merit where biblical interpretation is the focus. If the evaluator is to judge the expository merit of a sermon, he must have a sense for the underlying theory and practice that results in quality exposition. The evaluator must do more than simply observe that the Bible is the subject of discussion; he must also have a sense for the accuracy of that discussion. Therefore, though this dissertation is not focused on hermeneutics, it is important to the process of definition and evaluation. Sound exegesis is necessary for properly understanding the biblical priority of the three aspects, and it is also needed in evaluating expository merit. The proposed method must leave room for recognizing not only the attempt at exposition but also the quality of its conclusions.

⁴⁴William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1993), 4.

⁴⁵Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 57.

Biblical and Systematic Theology

Biblical theology explores “the theological content of the Old and New Testaments, or the theology found within the biblical books,”⁴⁷ and it “gives special attention to the teachings of *individual authors and sections* of Scripture, and to the place of each teaching in the *historical development* of Scripture.”⁴⁸ Systematic theology “involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.”⁴⁹ The former emphasizes the historical diversity of perspectives represented in the Bible while the latter emphasizes the contemporary significance of the overall unity of those perspectives. The two disciplines inform each other. Biblical theology provides the building blocks for systematic theology while systematic theology provides a check for biblical theology. They are both related to the discipline of hermeneutics because “both biblical and systematic theology collate the revelation of God in his Word . . . so they are two parts of the larger task of understanding and applying the Word.”⁵⁰

Though this dissertation is not focused on either field of study, both are relevant. First, an attempt to understand the biblical priority of the three aspects is itself a theological exercise. Second, these two disciplines are particularly relevant for evaluating the doctrinal essence of a sermon because a “doctrine is what the whole Bible teaches us

⁴⁷Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 26.

⁴⁸Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 22.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁰Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 353.

today about some particular topic.”⁵¹ In chapters 3 and 4, it is argued that doctrinal preaching should demonstrate some level of sound biblical or systematic theology in the pulpit. Third, since biblical theology explores redemptive history, it is a necessary component of Christ-centered preaching. Further, systematic theology wrestles with harmonizing a full biblical picture of the nature of God’s salvation in Christ.

Christology and Soteriology

The related theological fields of Christology, the study of the person and work of Christ, and Soteriology, the study of God’s way of salvation, have particular significance for discussing a sermon’s Christ-centeredness. The two fields merge specifically in the work of Christ which both secures God’s salvation and enables our understanding of Christ’s personhood. Along these lines, Millard Erickson emphasizes a balanced Christology that begins with Christ’s work.

It should be noted that there are two major reasons for approaching the person of Christ through the work of Christ. One is the desire for greater coherence between Christology and soteriology. . . . it is not possible to speak of what Christ does in our lives without relating that work to the nature of Christ, which it presupposes. The second reason is the desire to demonstrate the relevance of the doctrine of Christ. It is difficult for most persons to take an interest in the discussion of some of the issues concerning the nature of Christ unless they see how it affects them.⁵²

Christology is intimately connected with soteriology. The personal dynamics of salvation, captured in justification, sanctification, and glorification, find their source in the Savior and, therefore, point those who are being saved to him. So for the purposes of preaching, gospel-centeredness is akin to Christ-centeredness.

⁵¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 25.

⁵²Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 693.

So though this dissertation is not a detailed investigation of Christology or Soteriology, the two fields come together with great implications for sermon evaluation. Any method that proposes to analyze a sermon's Christ-centeredness must presuppose a sound Christology and Soteriology. As with expository merit and doctrinal essence, it is not enough for the evaluator to simply recognize a discussion about Christ. He must also have a sense for the soundness of what is presented.

Methodology

After the introduction, I devote a chapter to demonstrating the place for an evaluation method that measures the degree of the three aspects with substance and balance. In chapters 3 and 4, I arrive at a concise statement of a central concern for each aspect and then delineate supplemental distinctive elements for each aspect, establishing the justification and foundation for constructing the proposed evaluation method. In chapter 5, I proceed to the actual matter of presenting the proposed method. In chapter 6, I demonstrate the potential value of the method by applying it to various sermons from current evangelical pastors and discussing the results. Finally, in the conclusion, I reflect on the value of this project and offer suggestions for further study.

The Spirit of the Evaluator

To critique another man's preaching is an audacious act. Therefore, a word should be said about the attitude accompanying this project. In his work on sermon evaluation, William Roen offers a needful reminder concerning the spirit of the evaluator.

Of course, the tools we will be learning for critical listening are not intended as weapons for an attack. Even the negative criticism of sermons should always be humble and loving criticism, intended not to tear the preacher apart but to build [him]

up—it should be in every sense “constructive.” Certainly that is the only kind of criticism that should take place in the church.⁵³

My earnest desire is to edify the church and bring glory to God. As this project requires me to function as both theorist and analyst, I pray that I demonstrate a constructive spirit. Such a spirit is incumbent upon anyone who would critique another’s preaching, especially if that one would preach himself. Christ’s caution in Matthew 7:2 finds specific application in the present endeavor. The notion that a person will be judged by his own measure serves as a sobering motivation for diligence, good sense, and fairness. May the Lord be lifted high, not only through the content of sermons but also through the interaction of his saints. “O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Ps 34:3).

⁵³William Roen, *The Inward Ear: A Sermon Evaluation Method for Preachers and Hearers of the Word* (New York: The Alban Institute:1989), xiii.

CHAPTER 2

DEMONSTRATING THE PLACE

Three main factors demonstrate the place for this dissertation within the field of homiletics. The first factor regards the combined gravity of the three aspects. The second factor regards the need to speak in terms of degree about the fulfillment of the three aspects. The third factor regards the current state of sermon evaluation.

The Combined Gravity of the Three Aspects

In order to demonstrate the combined gravity of the three aspects, this section argues two basic claims. First, the most important thing about a sermon is its content. Second, the most important content that a sermon can present is expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered. The term “combined gravity” is used because the three aspects have a distinct yet inter-dependent relationship to one another.

The Primacy of Content

Kent Hughes explains how the classical rhetorical categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* may be adapted for the discussion of preaching: “The categories, broadly understood and given Christian qualification, provide helpful headings through which to think about preaching.”¹ Therefore, he presents them “broadly” in terms of the overall

¹Kent Hughes, “The Anatomy of Exposition: *Logos*, *Ethos*, and *Pathos*,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (1999): 46.

quality of content, the overall character of the preacher, and the overall passion exuded by the preacher.² Though Hughes' categories are not precise and his explanations of *ethos* and *pathos* miss the classical focus upon the listener, he helpfully distinguishes the substantive content of a sermon from the character dynamics and the emotional overtones of a sermon.³

Hughes also provides a needed insight with regard to *logos* in that he highlights its foundational importance. He calls it the “first reason for [God’s] smile” and “fundamental to pleasing him in preaching.”⁴ Significantly, his “qualification” of this category with reference to preaching emphasizes its relationship to Scripture. Though the rhetorical concept of *logos* is generally present with reference to main ideas and development, Hughes insists that the biblical notion of *logos*, God’s self-expression, must control this category.

[*Logos*] means that as we stand before God’s people to proclaim his Word, we have done our homework. We have exegeted the passage, mined the significance of its words in their context, and applied sound hermeneutical principles in interpreting the text so that we understand what its words meant to its hearers. And it means that we have labored long until we can express in a sentence what the theme of the text is – so that our outline springs from the text. Then our preparation will be such that as

²Bryan Chapell and Paige Patterson also discuss these categories in complementary ways with reference to preaching. See Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 25-26, and Paige Patterson, “Ancient Rhetoric: A Model for Text-Driven Preachers,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 11-35.

³Ronald Allen provides definitions that are adapted to preaching, and more precise with regard to classical *ethos* and *pathos*: *Logos* is concerned with the ideas of the sermon and how the preacher develops those ideas. *Ethos* is concerned with the character of the preacher and the listeners’ relationship with the preacher. *Pathos* is concerned with the feelings stirred by the sermon. I highlight Hughes’ distinctions because *logos* is my focus, and he provides a needed qualification with regard to *logos*. I explain this qualification in the next paragraph. See Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship/Content/Feeling* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 2.

⁴Kent Hughes, “A Word to Those Who Preach the Word,” in *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, in *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), xi-xii.

we preach, we will not be preaching our own thoughts about God’s Word, but God’s actual Word, his *logos*.⁵

Hughes contends that the most fundamental concern in preaching is that a sermon’s ideas and development be consistent with God’s message. For two reasons, *logos* is the most important category for sermon evaluation.

The biblical picture of preaching emphasizes *logos*. The most pervasive notion of preaching in the Bible is that of stewardship to another’s message. A faithful preacher in the Bible does not speak on his own but is, rather, a channel for God’s revelation. He has received, and he must deliver. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix explain this role: “Preaching is rooted in the divine. God has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind, and He has chosen human vessels to be mediums of that revelation.”⁶ Albert Mohler states this same understanding simply: “We preach because God has spoken.”⁷

In the Old Testament, a prophet does not speak on his own but, rather, speaks for another.⁸ This relationship is captured first in Exodus 7:1-2 where God dubs Aaron נָבִיא (prophet) for Moses and then explains this relationship: “You [Moses] shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh.” One may readily see that Aaron’s relationship to Moses is parallel to Moses’ relationship to God. So though

⁵Ibid.

⁶Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 18.

⁷R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 40.

⁸W. A. Grudem, “Prophecy, Prophets,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 701.

Moses is not labeled a prophet until his self-labeling in Deuteronomy 18:15, both his and Aaron's role of receiving and then communicating a message shows the essence of the prophetic ministry.

This role is the expectation for all other prophets in Scripture.⁹ In Deuteronomy 18, the Lord promises through Moses another prophet who would be like Moses in that "he shall speak to them all that I [the Lord] command him" (Deut 18:18). This criterion is extended in verse 20 to all prospective prophets who above all must not speak "presumptuously" in the name of the Lord. Wayne Grudem explains, "Since a true prophet can speak only God's message, not his or her own, it follows that a false prophet is one who has no message from God but presumes to speak in God's name anyway."¹⁰

Because the prophetic priority focused on the content of the message preached, the *ethos* and *pathos*, though important, were secondary. Of course, many of the prophets were men of great character who demonstrated and elicited tremendous feeling, but the value of a prophet's preaching did not depend chiefly on such considerations. Hence, Moses' directions in Deuteronomy 18 do not focus on character qualities or emotional considerations but on the message that is actually preached.

Christopher Wright struggles with the adequacy of Moses' instructions for discerning prophetic validity. Based on Jeremiah 23, where Israel's prophets are denounced for their lack of character, Wright suggests that *ethos* should also help listeners

⁹Christopher Wright explains this expectation: "True prophecy would follow *God's model*, namely Moses himself . . . The immediate context speaks of Moses' role as the mediator of God's word and will, and that would certainly be the hallmark of all true prophets to come." See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, in *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 217.

¹⁰Grudem, "Prophecy, Prophets," 702.

to determine the value of the prophetic message.¹¹ An emphasis upon *logos* does not necessarily discount contributing insights related to character. However, even in Jeremiah 23, the primary problem is that the *logos* of the prophets had not been consistent with God's revealed Word. This notion is captured several times in the chapter but perhaps most concisely in verse 22: "If they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people." Instead, these prophets proclaimed idolatry, encouraged stubbornness, ignored evil, emphasized human wisdom, boasted recklessly, and perverted the words of the living God (see vv. 13, 17, 22, 27, 32, and 36.). Hence, John Calvin concludes that their *logos* gave sufficient indication of their falsity: "[Jeremiah] says that it was an evident proof that they were not God's prophets, because they did not faithfully teach what they ought to have derived from the Law."¹²

Two examples may be cited of Old Testament prophets whose *ethos* and *pathos* were in serious question but whose "sermons" were, nonetheless, full of weighty significance due to their *logos*. First, the prophet Jonah reluctantly preached to a city with whom he had no relationship or status, yet God's message was faithfully delivered and many were saved through his ministry. Second, Balaam, who was not even a prophet of Israel and who was motivated by greed, spoke the message of the Lord truly and, in turn, blessed Israel. In spite of the moral and emotional questions regarding these men, an evaluation of their "sermons" must consider the emphasis in Scripture upon their content.

This observation leads to the matter of the prophetic נָשָׂא (burden) in which the

¹¹Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 219.

¹²John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations*, vol. 3, in vol. 10 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, ed. and trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, n.d.), 182.

prophetic message is correlated with weightiness. This correlation is explicit in texts where the prophetic message is literally “the burden of the word of the LORD” (Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1). In this phrase, translators are divided between the metaphorical meaning, “burden,” and the contextual meaning, “oracle.”¹³ Returning to the Jeremiah 23 passage discussed above, the מִשָּׁאָה becomes the theme of the last eight verses of the chapter.¹⁴ In these verses, the prophets are condemned for their presumption to speak “the burden of the LORD” falsely. Jeremiah then spins the word to demonstrate the gravity of the issue. He explains that there would be heavy judgment upon the false prophets who had themselves become a “burden” to the Lord.¹⁵ When one considers this Old Testament metaphor, a strong insight concerns the gravity of the matter of stewardship to God’s *logos*.¹⁶

In the New Testament, the preaching picture is significantly enriched; however, the emphasis upon stewardship to a message remains clear. In an article that attempts to define preaching biblically, Klaas Runia explores key New Testament verbs for preaching. The quotations in the following explanations are taken from his work.

κηρύσσω: “the activity of an herald . . . who makes an announcement or declaration.

¹³For example, the New American Standard Bible translates מִשָּׁאָה דְבַר־יְהוָה two different ways. Zech 9:1 and 12:1 render the phrase “the burden of the word of the LORD” while Mal 1:1 renders it “the oracle of the word of the LORD.” A survey of other translations also shows a split on the best choice for מִשָּׁאָה, not only in these three verses but also in other contexts.

¹⁴J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 503-06.

¹⁵Ibid., 505.

¹⁶Grudem explains that the מִשָּׁאָה suggests “a heavy sense of responsibility.” Grudem, “Prophecy, Prophets,” 703.

. . . The herald does not express his own views. He is the spokesman for his master. The New Testament again and again emphasizes this content or the message.”

εὐαγγελίζω: “the bringing of ‘good news’ . . . Always however, just as in the case of κηρύσσειν, it is the proclamation or preaching of event.”

μαρτυρέω: “μάρτυρες are the people who testify what they have seen and heard, namely, of what God has done in Jesus Christ. The emphasis is on factuality . . . the confessional witness.”

διδάσκω: “The message of redemption is not only ‘announced,’ but it also demands the unfolding, the exposition of its meaning. In this sense, ‘teaching’ and ‘preaching’ belong together.”

προφητεύω: “In the New Testament, too, the prophet is the mouthpiece of God.”

παρακαλέω: “It is used for exhorting people on the basis of the Gospel. . . . It is never a merely moral appeal, but it is always the imperative which follows the indicative of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

These highlights show that content is the overarching emphasis of New Testament preaching. The most prominent verb, κηρύσσω, refers to heralding another’s message. Similarly, εὐαγγελίζω is a proclamation of God’s salvation message. Μαρτυρέω emphasizes the factuality of the confession. Διδάσκω is the careful explanation of content.¹⁸ Προφητεύω maintains its Old Testament emphasis on being the “mouthpiece” for another. Even the verb, παρακαλέω, which has strong moral and emotional overtones, is always grounded in the indicatives of the gospel message. In his synthesis, Runia emphasizes the priority of content in preaching: “This is the one great and indispensable condition for all true preaching. Does the preacher proclaim the message of God as given

¹⁷Klaas Runia, “What Is Preaching According to the New Testament?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29, no. 1 (1978): 7-21.

¹⁸Διδάσκω may broadly encompass both theological content and ethical content. This breadth of doctrinal teaching is addressed in chap. 3 under the heading “The Central Concern of Doctrinal Preaching.”

to us in Scriptures? . . . There is no other absolute condition that stands on par with this.”¹⁹

The priority of *logos* is also demonstrated by Paul’s comments in Philippians 1:15-18. After admitting to the reality that some men were spreading the message of the gospel from “envy and strife” and “selfish ambition,” Paul, nevertheless, expresses joy in their preaching: “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice” (verse 18). The explanation for Paul’s positive spin on such a circumstance is his prioritization of *logos*. He rejoices in the proclamation of the content regardless of “pretense.” These men to whom Calvin ascribes “depraved affection” were unwittingly advancing the kingdom of God.

As the wicked disposition of those of whom he has spoken might detract from the acceptableness of the doctrine, he says that this ought to be reckoned of great importance, that they nevertheless promoted the cause of the gospel, whatever their disposition might be.²⁰

Paul does not rejoice in smooth argumentation that reflects the persuasive priorities of classical rhetoric. Rather, he rejoices in the proclamation of God’s revealed message. This distinction is clear in 1 Corinthians where Paul rejects “cleverness of speech” and “the wisdom of the wise” for “preaching the gospel” and “the word of the cross” (1:17-19).²¹

¹⁹Ibid., 39.

²⁰John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, in vol. 21 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, ed. and trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, n.d.), 37, 39.

²¹Paul’s *ethos* is also quite prominent in this passage, and his denouncement of rhetoric is itself eloquent. But it is important to recognize that Paul’s concern for his *ethos* and his use of eloquence was to serve the greater priority of God’s *logos*. Paul did not want to get in the way of the message. In his commentary, Craig Keener explains that Paul was careful to submit his own persona and tactics to focus on God’s message: “Paul uses his educated argumentation in the service of God’s wisdom, not for the applause of the elite.” See Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29.

This survey of the biblical picture of preaching is admittedly brief. There are many aspects that concern a proper definition of preaching, but it is evident even from this concise treatment that the issue of stewardship to God’s message is primary. The biblical picture of preaching emphasizes *logos*.²²

Logos is the proper ground for ethos and pathos. Robert Thomas explains another reason to prioritize the *logos* in sermon evaluation: “The New Testament puts heavy emphasis on using the mind as the principle avenue to Christian growth . . . so the preacher should do the same.”²³ In the Bible, the *logos* provides the proper ground for both the *pathos* and the *ethos*. Right emotions and character flow from correct thinking. Along these lines, Jonathan Edwards grounds “holy affections” in the enlightenment of the mind to spiritual truth.

Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. . . . Knowledge is the key that first opens the hard heart, enlarges the affections, and opens the way for men into the kingdom of heaven.²⁴

Edwards attributes the concerns of *logos*, “information,” “instruction,” “light,”

²²For further insight into the biblical picture of preaching, see John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1961). In his first chapter, Stott affirms the foundational importance of stewardship to a message: “What, then is a preacher? He is a steward. . . . The steward is the trustee and dispenser of another person’s goods. So the preacher is a steward of God’s mysteries, that is, of the self-revelation which God has entrusted to men and which is now preserved in the Scriptures” (17).

²³Robert L. Thomas, “Exegesis and Expository Preaching,” in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 108.

²⁴Edwards offers seven verses in the same paragraph to support his claim: 1 John 4:7, Phil 1:9, Rom 10:2, Col 3:10, Ps 43:3-4, John 6:45, and Luke 11:52. See Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections: In Three Parts*, in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1834), 281-82.

“knowledge,” to the right development of the affections which are, for him, not simply emotional experiences but also directly connected to good Christian character.²⁵

Edwards’ understanding is consistent with the teaching of Paul in Romans 12:2. At this significant point of transition in the epistle, Paul expresses the importance of right thinking: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” In context, Paul is explaining that true worship and holistic character transformation are developed by a “renewed mind.” Thomas Schreiner explains, “Human beings are transformed as their thinking is altered.”²⁶ Leon Morris emphasizes that the process of mind renewal grounds a proper *pathos* and *ethos*: “Paul does not envisage a mindless emotionalism, but a deeply intelligent approach to life, as characteristic of the Christian who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit.”²⁷

Conclusion about the priority of *logos*. Since the Bible prioritizes stewardship to God’s message and since correct thinking is the proper ground for Christian character and emotional transformation, *logos* should be the first priority in Christian proclamation. Spurgeon summarizes the priority of the *logos*: “The true value of a sermon must lie, not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth which it contains. Nothing can compensate for the absence of teaching; all the rhetoric in the world is but

²⁵Part 1 of *Religious Affections* is devoted to this connection which Edwards captures in the statement, “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.” *Ibid.*, 236.

²⁶Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 648.

²⁷Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 435.

chaff to the wheat in contrast to the gospel of our salvation.”²⁸ No matter who the preacher is, no matter how stirring the message, the substance of his sermon must be a faithful presentation of “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). However the *logos* is discussed, as ideas, content, message, word, truth, doctrine, or gospel, it is the priority of preaching. Though *pathos* and *ethos* are contributing factors to the impact of a sermon, the *logos* is the category that determines a sermon’s true weight.

Perhaps a question will capture this point: “Which is better, to encounter false ideas from a stirring and otherwise trustworthy preacher or to encounter true ideas from a bland or even phony preacher?” The latter option is far better because of the priority of right thinking. Of course, it would be best to encounter true ideas from a stirring and trustworthy preacher. This best-case scenario is captured by Danny Akin: “What we say is more important than how we say it, but how we say it has never been more important.”²⁹ Though intending to highlight a well-rounded delivery, nevertheless, Akin affirms the priority of the *logos*; it is “more important.”

The Case for the Three Aspects

Given that the *logos* is the priority in sermon evaluation, I now turn to explain why the three aspects are particularly essential to sermon content. First, the biblical foundations and practical benefits of expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching

²⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 70.

²⁹David L. Allen, “Introduction,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 7.

are advocated elsewhere.³⁰ Second, my project is mainly concerned with the development and demonstration of an evaluation method.

Expository preaching. Deuteronomy 8:3 reveals the vital source of nourishment for all people: “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.” If, as I argue above, the preacher is merely a mouthpiece for God’s sustaining message, it follows that he should expound the words of the Bible. In the above survey of the biblical picture of preaching, it is already evident that God’s Word is to be the source of preaching content. This consideration is what leads Mayhue to claim, “A biblical and theological content is the *sine qua non*, or indispensable quality, of New Testament proclamation.”³¹ Therefore, the kind of preaching that most closely interacts with God’s written revelation is particularly able to communicate with gravity.

This priority is evident in the Old Testament as well as the New. Nehemiah 8 describes a situation that has many parallels to a Christian worship service. There is “a pulpit, a worship leader, the book of God’s Law, a unified and expectant congregation, proclamation, and both verbal and physical response.”³² In this setting, the key activity is

³⁰For an evangelical argument for expository preaching, see Haddon Robinson, “The Case for Expository Preaching,” in *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 17-32. For doctrinal preaching, see Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, “The Value and Benefit of Doctrine,” in *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 20-38. For Christ-centered preaching, see Edmund P. Clowney, “Preparing a Sermon that Presents Christ,” in *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 45-58.

³¹Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 7.

³²Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 19.

that of reading and expounding God’s Word for the hearers: “And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading” (8:8). Consistent with this picture, Paul makes clear the responsibility that lay upon the New Testament pastor:³³ “I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim 4:1-2). After the “solemn charge,” Paul gives five imperatives to the minister in which the first imperative, “preach the word,” governs the others.³⁴ A pastor’s readiness, reproofs, rebukes, and exhortations are to be intimately related to the preaching of the Bible.

When the Bible is faithfully preached, there are many benefits for both the preacher and the congregation.³⁵ Perhaps the most compelling relates to the empowerment of the hearers. Vines and Shaddix explain, “As the pastor faithfully preaches the Word of God, the people receive strength.”³⁶ They argue that the spiritual maturity of the congregation is directly related to the faithfulness with which they are exposed to expository preaching. This benefit is compelling because it recognizes the inherent power of the Bible. There is an efficacy to expository preaching that flows from the nature of the

³³“Although directed first of all to Timothy, Paul’s commission in 2 Tim 4:1-5 applies to every minister of the gospel in every age, every place, and every circumstance.” John MacArthur, Jr., *2 Timothy*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 167.

³⁴George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 453.

³⁵For a few good treatments of such benefits, see Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 32-37, Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 11-13, and Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20-21.

³⁶Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 36.

Word of God. In Nehemiah 8 and 9 the diligent exposition of the Word results in remorse, celebration, obedience, confession, and unity. In Psalm 19:7-8, the Word of God “restores the soul,” “makes wise the simple,” “rejoices the heart,” and “enlightens the eyes.”

According to Hebrews 4:12, “the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” If these effects upon the hearers are intimately connected with the reception of God’s Word, it is the height of neglect for a preacher to avoid biblical exposition. In accordance with Isaiah 55:10-11, the preacher who consistently communicates God’s Word to his congregation will experience the glorious truth that it does not return “empty.”

Doctrinal preaching. Mayhue claims that the content of a sermon must not only be biblical but also “theological.” The reason for this dual emphasis is that the content of the Bible, and hence biblical exposition, is necessarily focused on “the things of God.”³⁷ Millard Erickson elaborates, “The primary result of special revelation is knowledge of God. . . . this is real, objective, rational information.”³⁸ Such information demands careful articulation and synthesis. Gerald Bray captures this necessary relationship between exposition and doctrine.

The message of the Bible is a message of spiritual truth addressed to the human mind. Dogmatic definitions of its content are not an aberration, but the logical outcome of the process of revelation itself. Salvation for the whole man cannot

³⁷Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” 7.

³⁸Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 216.

bypass the mind, but must use it for the powerful weapon which it is.³⁹

Louis Berkof further explains why the content of Scripture should translate into doctrine.

The Church does not find her dogmas in finished form on the pages of Holy Writ, but obtains them by reflecting on the truths revealed in the Word of God. The Christian consciousness not only appropriates the truth, but also feels an irrepressible urge to reproduce it and to see it in its grand unity.⁴⁰

Because biblical truth necessitates strong doctrine, biblical preaching must be doctrinal.

As noted above, Runia explains that preaching and teaching are intimately related in the Bible and that a sharp distinction is difficult to maintain. This observation is acutely relevant in the pastoral epistles where Paul emphasizes the importance of doctrine repeatedly.⁴¹ Hence, in 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul connects the profitability of the Scriptures with its doctrinal character. All four of the benefits that he ascribes relate to doctrinal concerns: teaching, reproof, correction, and training.⁴² Then he explains that the preaching of the Word must be done to counter those who “will not endure sound doctrine” and who “will turn away their ears from the truth” (4:3-4). Because of the pastoral responsibility to proclaim the Bible expositionally and doctrinally, Paul tells Timothy to be a diligent workman who is able to “rightly divide” God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15).

In his treatment of preaching, David Eby focuses specifically on the book of

³⁹Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Bristol: Mentor, 1997), 37.

⁴⁰Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 23.

⁴¹“Paul used the term ‘teaching’ (*didaskalia*) fifteen times in the Pastorals, and in the remainder of the New Testament it occurs only six times.” Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 236.

⁴²Lea and Griffin acknowledge the doctrinal relevance of each benefit. See *ibid.*, 234-35.

Acts, which he calls “God’s manual on church growth and preaching.”⁴³ He spends two chapters on “the content of power preaching” in which his points are thoroughly related to doctrinal matters. He emphasizes such things as the person and work of Christ, salvation by grace, sin and guilt, eternity and accountability before God, the exclusive nature of Christ’s salvation, the basic truths about God, and perseverance. In a stirring segment, Eby concludes by calling preachers to proclaim the whole counsel of God.⁴⁴

You stand against the trend. You swim against the tide. You go to battle for biblical content and biblical truth. You refuse to be reluctant to preach doctrine. You decline to be an ear tickler. You revolt against the tendency to downplay doctrine. . . . Acts calls you to preach sound, solid, firm, beautiful content – content that people must have to live before a holy God, truth that people need for the road.⁴⁵

Because doctrine is closely linked to exposition, it shares in its efficacy. This relationship is implied in Jesus’ statement, “If you abide in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). D. A. Carson explains that there is an intellectual, moral, and gospel dynamic to understanding “truth” in this verse.⁴⁶ The Word of Christ impacts human intelligence, behavior, and relationships. If this is so, Jesus’ statement relates to all matters of doctrinal concern, and he is making at least two striking claims about the nature of doctrine. First, all true doctrine comes from his mouth. Second, true doctrine is vital to experiencing freedom. Along these lines, R. L. Dabney explains that “no people can be formed into

⁴³David Eby, *Power Preaching for Church Growth: The Role of Preaching in Growing Churches* (Bristol: Mentor, 1998), 15, 68.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 55-67.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁴⁶D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 348-49.

stable, consistent and righteous Christians without much doctrinal instruction.”⁴⁷ There is no excuse for the preacher who neglects wrestling with doctrine or diligently proclaiming it from his pulpit.

Christ-centered preaching. Both the concern for exposition and the concern for doctrine have a center, the gospel of Jesus Christ. As biblical content impacts the human mind with God’s message and as that message is processed doctrinally, the priority of God’s salvation through his Son is revealed with unquestionable clarity. Greidanus asserts, “There can be no doubt that Christ is the heart of apostolic preaching.”⁴⁸ He also offers an insight by Richard Lischer that demonstrates this focus.

A cursory review of the objects of the New Testament verbs for ‘preach’ shows how saturated with Christ that early proclamation was. Some of the objects are: Jesus, Lord Jesus, Christ, Jesus Christ as Lord, Christ crucified, Christ as raised from the dead, Jesus and the resurrection, good news about the Kingdom, Jesus as the Son of God, the gospel of God, Word of the Lord, the forgiveness of sins, and Christ in you—the hope of glory.⁴⁹

Related to this insight, Edgar Andrews explains that 67 of 132 references to preaching in the New Testament explicitly claim the gospel or Christ as the object. He adds, “Since the gospel is necessarily ‘the gospel of the glory of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 4:4), all these instances speak to preaching Christ.” He then explains that the other objects, like “kingdom,” “word,” or “faith,” assume a relationship to Christ.⁵⁰ Therefore, even in

⁴⁷Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric or a Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Carlisle, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1870), 55.

⁴⁸Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 4.

⁴⁹Richard Lischer, *Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 73.

⁵⁰Edgar Andrews, *Preaching Christ* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Times, 2005), 8-9.

instances where Christ is not the primary focus, he undergirds and informs the subject matter.

In one of the most important New Testament passages with regard to pastoral ministry,⁵¹ Paul summarizes the content of his preaching with a single pronoun and then presents important dynamics associated with it: “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works in me” (Col 1:28-29). First, proclaiming a Christ-centered message is the primary work of the New Testament pastor. The Greek words for “labor” and “striving” emphasize extreme vigilance in this calling.⁵² Anything less than full commitment to this priority would be pastoral neglect. Second, proclaiming Christ is a rich activity that is full of “admonitions” and “teaching.” Robertson summarizes these two elements as “warning about practice” and “teaching about doctrine.”⁵³ MacArthur explains that these dynamics were “linked” in Paul’s commitment to proclaim the Word: “The consistent pattern of Paul’s ministry was to link teaching and admonishment and bring them together in the context of the general doctrinal truths of the Word.” Therefore, Christ-centered preaching is related to doctrinal preaching in its connection to doctrinal

⁵¹Kent R. Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 44.

⁵²According to A. T. Robertson, κοπιᾶω implies “weary toil,” and ἀγωνίζομαι implies “contending” or “agony.” Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul*, vol. 4 of *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 486.

⁵³Ibid., 485.

truth and expository preaching in its connection to the Bible.⁵⁴ Third, preaching Christ is efficacious. Paul explains that the purpose for proclaiming a Christ-centered message is that men may become “complete in Christ.”

Concerning the efficacy of preaching Christ, the New Testament is full of statements that affirm the power of proclaiming Christ and his gospel. Going back to Jesus’ statement in John 8:31-32, the “truth” that “sets free” is intimately related to its source, who is Christ. In Romans 1:16, the gospel is “the power of God for salvation.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, the gospel is the means God uses to “call” his people to himself. In 2 Peter 3:17-18, the antithesis of “being carried away by error” and “falling from steadfastness” is “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The list of verses that demonstrate the effectual nature of preaching Christ is extensive because the entire New Testament testifies to God’s determination to work through the message of his Son. Referencing Hebrews 12:1-2, Andrews explains that the gospel of Christ both converts and completes God’s children: “Christ is not only the author of our faith—he is the only one who can bring it to perfection.”⁵⁵

The Combined Gravity of the Three Aspects

The three aspects, though distinct in many ways, are intimately related to one another. The Bible is not equivalent to theology; theology is not equivalent to Christ, nor is Christ equivalent to the Bible. In the same way, biblical exposition is not necessarily the

⁵⁴John MacArthur, Jr. *Colossians and Philemon*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 80.

⁵⁵Andrews, *Preaching Christ*, 10.

same as doctrinal instruction; doctrinal instruction is not necessarily the same as gospel proclamation, nor is gospel proclamation necessarily the same as biblical exposition. Yet all three relate to God's revelation.

Much of the discussion to this point suggests this reality. The *logos* of a sermon must faithfully relay God's message because stewardship is basic to preaching. A sermon presents the word of God only in as much as it faithfully conveys what God has revealed. Runia explains this important condition: "Our preaching is the authoritative word of God only in as far as it is the true exposition and actualization of the prophetic and apostolic preaching."⁵⁶ Faithfulness to the prophetic and apostolic message requires a combined emphasis upon exposition, doctrine, and Christ. The prophetic and apostolic message is recorded in the Bible. It is rich in truth, and it culminates and centers upon Christ. If the ministry of preaching is to be a faithful stewardship to a revealed message, then it must demonstrate expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness.

Further, the three aspects themselves inform and strengthen one another. As Bray and Berkof demonstrate, a commitment to expound God's Word properly results in theological synthesis since the mind naturally organizes and classifies the truths it receives. Both exposition and doctrine must center upon Christ or else they miss the focus of apostolic proclamation. Further, Christ himself is both the proclaimer and the embodiment of God's Word who claims to be the very basis of all truth. Though these dynamics are complex and mysterious,⁵⁷ they show the inter-related nature of the three aspects.

⁵⁶Runia, "What Is Preaching According to the New Testament," 46.

⁵⁷An admission of complexity and mystery does not mean that the relationship among the three aspects cannot be explored and defined in helpful ways. Chaps. 3-5 explain distinctions, similarities, and qualifications of the three aspects for the sake of evaluation.

Finally, the three aspects share a combined efficacy. The Bible is full of statements about the powerful nature of God's Word, God's truth, and God's gospel. The implication is that a pulpit's power is found in these inter-related aspects. In the introduction, I claim that the three aspects address the fundamental needs of all listeners. The reason is that, according to the Bible, they share a unique ability to feed the soul and shape the heart. Because of this ability, the preaching of each aspect provides for effective application. In chapter 4, the substance of application is specifically addressed, but the power of application is the emphasis here. The most potent spiritual transformation comes from expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching.

Because of the biblical emphasis upon them and their inter-related, efficacious nature, the preaching pastor should not neglect any of the three aspects in the regular diet of the church. Neither should the evaluator neglect them in exploring the content of a sermon. Together, they share a combined gravity that contributes to a sermon's substantive weight.

The Need to Speak in Terms of Degree

A central tenet of this project is that the three aspects within a sermon should be measured in terms of degree. In this section, I address each aspect successively. Ultimately, degree is both a matter of definition and execution because there are broad and narrow understandings of each aspect and a range of fulfillment that may be demonstrated in any given sermon. Sensitivity to degree is important because it allows for more honest theory and more insightful evaluation.

Expository Degree

The broad understanding of exposition refers to any preaching, no matter the form, that accurately conveys and applies a message from the Bible.⁵⁸ Donald Miller advocates such an understanding: “Truly biblical exposition is limited only by the broad principle that *the substance of one’s preaching should be drawn from the Bible.*”⁵⁹ Sermons that are arranged topically or thematically, that are introductions to entire books, that are narrative stories, or that are concerned with just a single verse might all be considered expository under the broad understanding. Tony Merida also offers validation for a broad view.

Exposition, or Word-centered preaching, may be done in various ways respectfully. I believe a person may preach a “topositional” sermon, which includes sermons on a particular doctrine that requires a verse with verse approach. However, this still carries the expositional commitment of seeking the intent of those various authors. I also believe that the preacher may select various themes through a book, such as the “I Am” statements in John. Another means of doing exposition would be to do a book overview sermon, in which the preacher attempts to cover the major themes of a Bible book in a single sermon.⁶⁰

The broad view practically equates all truthful preaching of the Bible with “expository preaching”⁶¹ because it reduces the issue of exposition to accurately conveying God’s Word.

⁵⁸In his dissertation concerning the harmonization of doctrinal and expository preaching, Joel Breidenbaugh discusses broad and narrow attempts to define expository preaching. Joel Breidenbaugh, “Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching: A Proposal and an Analysis for the Twenty-First Century” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 47-49.

⁵⁹Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 21.

⁶⁰Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 10.

⁶¹Miller explicitly equates the two when he states that “*all true preaching is expository preaching, and that preaching which is not expository is not preaching.*” Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching*, 22.

Though a broad understanding receives some affirmation in the field, expository preaching is typically discussed under much narrower terms that focus upon a particular passage. Though there may still be freedom concerning the form of the presentation, the important distinction is the focus of the presentation on a single passage.⁶² Haddon Robinson's influential definition is articulated in this narrow sense by emphasizing "a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context."⁶³ Bryan Chapell's explanation captures this sense concisely: "Expository preaching attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific biblical passage."⁶⁴ Mohler also expresses a narrow understanding in that he defines expository preaching as a sermon "that takes its message and its structure from the biblical text."⁶⁵ Even Merida, who gives explicit credence to a broad understanding, devotes the bulk of his book to instruction in a narrow approach.⁶⁶

So though many homiletics are compelled to provide some latitude for the label "expository," there is a tendency in the field to discuss exposition in the narrow

⁶²There is an even more narrow understanding of expository preaching that involves a methodical verse-by-verse approach that takes each verse in order as it moves through a passage. However, it is actually hard to find leading evangelical homiletics in favor of such a rigid view. This possibility is typically acknowledged but then rejected as bad practice that falls short of effective preaching. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is a good example of such acknowledgment and rejection. See Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 72.

⁶³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

⁶⁴Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 22.

⁶⁵Though Mohler also includes the notion of following a passage's structure, he does not advocate a verse-by-verse "running commentary" approach as discussed in n. 62. Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 49.

⁶⁶This observation is also true of Hershael W. York's work. Though not necessarily as broad as Merida, York's understanding of expository preaching is broad enough to include a "one-sermon overview of a book." However, the specific instruction in the following chapters narrowly concerns single passages. Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 34. Even Miller's work tends toward narrow discussion of individual texts, though it is not as obviously structured as Merida's and York's. See Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching*.

sense. Perhaps these two observations flow from two desires. On the one hand, many homileticsians want to acknowledge an interpretive legitimacy to the broad notion. They may recognize that such preaching can “expose” biblical truth in a very real sense, and therefore, they may sense a wisdom in not discrediting it.⁶⁷ On the other hand, many homileticsians see a heightened sense of biblical priority that accompanies a narrow expository approach. They have difficulty avoiding the idea that the narrow understanding is more about “exposing” the richness of Bible than the broad understanding.

Various terms also exist for classifying sermons that suggest degrees of exposition. The most generic designation is “biblical.” This term is quite vague and may refer to any sermon that interacts with the Bible in some way.⁶⁸ More descriptively, John Broadus explains the classic three “species” of sermons: subject, textual, and expository.⁶⁹ According to Broadus, subject sermons demonstrate the least commitment to exposition because they merely take an idea from a text and then sub-divide it with no regard to the text’s own divisions. A textual sermon demonstrates greater commitment to the text because it uses the subdivisions of a particular passage to discuss a topic or set of topics.

⁶⁷Breidenbaugh explains that one of the issues in defining expository preaching concerns the danger of discrediting influential Christian preachers such as “Spurgeon, Edwards, Whitefield, and Wesley.” He expresses the need to acknowledge their status as legendary Christian preachers while also offering a clear contemporary expectation for the term “expository.” Breidenbaugh, “Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching,” 47.

⁶⁸Breidenbaugh cites Robert Smith, Jr.’s use of the term with reference to exposition. See Breidenbaugh, “Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching,” 48. Also, Mayhue cites Iain Murray’s use of the term in a less expository way. See Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” 9. Miller contrasts the term “biblical preaching” with a narrow view of expository preaching but then equates it with his broad understanding of expository preaching. See Miller, “Defining the Task: What Is Biblical Preaching?” in *The Way to Biblical Preaching*, 17-36.

⁶⁹John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1888), 288-318. Mayhue discusses these classic divisions similarly under the terms: topical, textual, and expository. See Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” 7-10.

Broadus explains that such a sermon has a distinct advantage over a subject sermon because “it is much more intimately in contact with the text.”⁷⁰

Broadus then explains that an expository sermon is distinguished from a textual sermon by its “occupation” with the text. He further explains the notion of a “strictly expository sermon, in which not only the leading ideas of the passage are brought out, but its details are suitably explained, and made to furnish the chief material of the discourse.”⁷¹ Ultimately, Broadus suggests a continuum to explain the differences among the various sermon species: “We at once perceive that there is no broad line of division between expository preaching and the common methods, but that one may pass by almost insensible gradations from textual to expository sermons.”⁷²

Whether the discussion is in terms of “broad versus narrow” or “textual versus expository,” the issue of expository degree is inescapable. Though a broad understanding may have some textual merit, a narrow understanding is more focused on interaction with a text of Scripture. Further, a sermon may be comparatively heavy or light in its actual commitment to expose a text. This reality is clearly acknowledged by Broadus in that he asserts a continuum of practice with regard to textual interaction. In conclusion, any given sermon falls into a range of various levels of commitment to treating a passage. It is, therefore, helpful to think about sermons in terms of their level of textual involvement. In spite of this observation, the issue of expository degree receives little explicit acknowledgment among contemporary scholarship.

⁷⁰Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 294.

⁷¹Ibid., 303, 309-10.

⁷²Ibid., 303.

Doctrinal Degree

The discussion of expository degree also has implications for doctrinal preaching. Just as a preacher may demonstrate degrees of occupation with Scripture, he may demonstrate degrees of occupation with Christian doctrine. The same logic behind Broadus' acknowledgment of an expository continuum carries over to the discussion of doctrinal preaching.

In the broadest sense, every sermon is doctrinal because every preacher operates with a theology. William Carl expresses this sense.

The preacher who delivers a sermon in the pulpit is presenting doctrine. He or she may not be aware of it, but that is what is happening. . . . The congregation may or may not be able to name the specific doctrine or doctrines being presented. But if they hear and understand what is being said, they are being shaped and molded in their views of God and the Christian life.⁷³

Carl explains that preachers tend to have certain doctrines that “color” their preaching.⁷⁴ He is not describing an explicit “hobby horse” as much as a “governing” concept that tends to shape sermon content even in subtle ways.⁷⁵ Broadly understood in this way, all preaching is doctrinal because of the pervasive influence of doctrine upon the preacher's thought.

Though these observations are well taken, such a broad understanding is hardly helpful for establishing parameters for doctrinal preaching and is certainly not what is

⁷³William Carl, *Preaching Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 5.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁵Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar spend several pages discussing this reality. They conclude with a similar claim to that of Carl: “Preaching, then, has to do with theological reflection, whether or not one is intentionally preaching doctrine. Indeed, every sermon and each fragment of every sermon is theological in nature, often times consciously so, but perhaps sometimes unconsciously. Preaching is a profoundly theological task.” See Robert G. Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine: For the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 23-25.

typically intended when evangelical homileticians use the term. Even Carl, who never addresses the inadequacy of such a loose concept, moves quickly to a more specific operative definition that describes a “focus on one or more Christian doctrines.”⁷⁶ Such a focus reveals a narrower concept of doctrinal preaching and points toward the possibility of practical standards.

Frank T. Wilson also indicates a broad and narrow understanding of doctrinal preaching. He first acknowledges a simple definition of doctrine that is synonymous with the generic notion of teaching, but then he explains a more narrow notion. His explanation specifies an understanding of doctrinal preaching that relates to a focused presentation of established Christian principles.

By simplest definition, doctrine means something that is taught. In a more formal usage, it has more precise and binding implications. It consists of “a principle, or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief.” There is an element of acceptance, authority, taking a position, [and] recognition of a constraining or compelling point of reference.⁷⁷

Wilson’s “simplest definition” may be more narrow than Carl’s broad acknowledgment described above. If in the words, “something that is taught,” he means deliberate instruction of some type, he at least includes the notion of intentionality. But Wilson’s “more formal” explanation points to a much narrower sense of doctrinal preaching. He anticipates the authoritative presentation of specific, binding principles. Though the broad definition has some merit, the narrow definition has specific focus. Such focus demonstrates a greater commitment to the task of teaching Christian doctrine from the

⁷⁶Carl, *Preaching Christian Doctrine*, 8-9.

⁷⁷Frank T. Wilson, “Doctrinal Preaching,” *International Theological Center* 9, no. 2 (1982): 121.

pulpit.

Since it is possible for a sermon to have a specific doctrinal focus, a sermon may actually move toward demonstration of such focus in a few basic ways. Since the next two chapters explore this issue in detail, at this point three general observations are sufficient to demonstrate the reality of doctrinal degree in a sermon.

To add focus, it may first be noted that a sermon becomes more doctrinal in nature when it addresses a specific doctrinal issue. This statement is supported by the definition of doctrine given by Wayne Grudem: “A doctrine is what the whole Bible teaches us today about some particular topic.”⁷⁸ Grudem understands the issue of doctrine to require topical inquiry. He explains that such inquiry may concern a “major doctrinal category,” such as the doctrine of God, or be more specific, such as the doctrine of God’s justice. But ultimately, the discipline of theology depends upon doctrinal foci for exploration. It follows that the preacher who explicitly identifies a doctrinal issue and intentionally explores it, has moved his sermon in a doctrinal direction. The more a sermon demonstrates careful inquiry into a particular topic, the more doctrinal it becomes.

Another, basic expectation regarding a doctrinal sermon is lucid explanation. Robert Smith explains that doctrinal preaching is “teaching to instruct the mind.”⁷⁹ R. L. Dabney expresses concern that preachers use clear terminology that will aid listener learning: “Your doctrinal teachings should be science made popular.”⁸⁰ Dabney is

⁷⁸Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 25.

⁷⁹Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 1.

⁸⁰Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 51.

concerned that doctrinal content be made accessible through appropriate and thoughtful language and illustrations. Dabney's concern highlights the reality that a preacher may demonstrate more or less sensitivity to the linguistic context and knowledge base of his hearers. Greater sensitivity and thoughtfulness in this regard should translate into more effective doctrinal comprehension.

Perhaps the most important factor that points to a sermon's doctrinal degree concerns the straightforwardness of the truths and principles it contains. From an evangelical perspective, a doctrinal sermon should hold forth matters of established Christian teaching. Smith's "operational definition" of doctrinal preaching demonstrates this emphasis: "Doctrinal preaching is the magnifying of Jesus Christ through the explanation and application of the basic truths of the Christian faith."⁸¹ Smith acknowledges that there are "basic truths" that should be addressed in doctrinal sermons. Therefore, the strength of a doctrinal sermon largely depends on the degree with which a preacher prominently holds forth such truths.

Though there is a broad sense in which all sermons are doctrinal, sermons become more narrowly doctrinal as they demonstrate focus upon specific matters of Christian conviction. Such focus is strengthened as a preacher provides specific topics, thoughtful explanations, and strong propositions. Therefore, any given sermon may demonstrate various degrees of doctrinal focus. Yet, as with exposition, the issue of degree is seldom addressed in the evangelical discussion.

Millard Erickson and James Heflin offer an example of a work that could have

⁸¹Smith, *Doctrine that Dances*, 25.

benefitted from acknowledging the issue of degree. Their work is intended as a solution to the problem of preaching doctrine in the contemporary context.⁸² However, their proposed solutions are little more than an introduction to various sermon types. The book covers expository, topical, narrative, and dramatic styles with little discussion of actual factors that would add to the doctrinal weight of a sermon. A responsible discussion of doctrinal preaching should acknowledge criteria for strengthening a sermon's doctrinal degree. Such criteria are presented in chapter 4.

Christ-Centered Degree

When speaking of Christ-centeredness, again there are broad and narrow notions. The broadest definitions practically equate theocentric preaching with Christocentric preaching while narrow definitions demand a diligent focus on the gospel. Sidney Greidanus captures the breadth of perspectives.

For some, preaching Christ means preaching "Christ crucified" in the sense of linking every text to Calvary and Christ's atoning work on the cross. Others broaden the meaning to preaching "Christ's death and resurrection." Still others seek to link the text to the work of the eternal Logos, who is active in Old Testament times especially as the Angel of Yahweh, the Commander of the Lord's army, and the Wisdom of God. Others broaden the meaning even further to preaching sermons that center on God, for, it is argued, since Christ is the second person of the Trinity and fully God, a God-centered sermon is Christ-centered. Still others argue that "the Lord Jesus Christ is recognized as Jehovah," and therefore we can substitute the name of Christ wherever we see "Jehovah" in the Old Testament.⁸³

Greidanus lists five notions of Christ-centeredness. Though he does not define them carefully, they appear to broaden as the paragraph unfolds. The distinction between the

⁸²"This book is an attempt to find ways to preach the crucial doctrines in ways that may be more effective than some of the past practices." Erickson and Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins*, 9.

⁸³Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 3.

first two, preaching “Christ crucified” and preaching “Christ’s death and resurrection” is not entirely clear, but both narrowly anticipate that a message be linked to the redemptive work of Christ. The third notion is more broad in that it includes the various ways that Christ is hidden in the Old Testament. Though this notion of Christ-centeredness would certainly still include a specific message about Christ’s redemptive work, it is broadened to include the exploration of the role of the Son as the agent of the Father throughout the Bible. The distinction between the fourth and fifth notion is also unclear, but they both relate theocentric preaching to Christ-centered preaching. This notion simply relies on Christ’s divinity as the foundation for Christ-centeredness. If “a God-centered sermon is Christ-centered,” this view does not necessarily anticipate the demonstration of Christ’s unique work of redemption or even the his unique personhood within the Trinity.

Greidanus ultimately proposes a redemptive-historical approach to preaching Christ which he acknowledges has at least two degrees of focus. His broader concern is that a passage in the Bible be understood and presented with reference to God’s kingdom work of redemption in the Messiah.⁸⁴ This view is not as narrow as one that demands an explanation of Christ’s redemptive work in every sermon, but it is more narrow than one which simply discusses Christ as the second person of the Trinity who is hidden in the Old Testament. Then he acknowledges a more specific understanding of preaching Christ.

Preaching Christ is as broad as preaching the gospel of the kingdom – as long as this kingdom is related to its King, Jesus. . . . More specifically, to preach Christ is to proclaim some facet of the *person*, *work*, or *teaching* of Jesus of Nazareth so that people may believe him, trust him, love him, and obey him.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Ibid., 8.

⁸⁵Ibid.

Given the above perspectives, at least four notions of Christ-centered preaching may be identified. The first notion anticipates an explicit focus upon redemptive details of Christ's ministry. The second notion anticipates a thoughtful awareness of the redemptive purposes of God in Christ throughout the Bible. In other words, it expects kingdom connections to be an important dynamic of the message. The third notion anticipates some distinction of the second person of the Trinity as the eternal *Logos* in the Bible but not necessarily in a redemptive historical context. The fourth notion simply anticipates a theocentric emphasis because a discussion of God's character is consistent with the divinity of the Son. These notions gradually broaden from a focused emphasis upon the earthly, Messianic ministry of Christ to a general discussion of his divine qualities.

The evangelical reader may recognize an element of validity to each of the above perspectives while not necessarily assigning them equal degrees of focus on Christ. It is certainly proper to relate the character of Yahweh to the character of Christ or to highlight legitimate ways that the Son, as the second person of the Trinity, is active in the Scriptures. Such sermons may have a Christ-exalting dynamic that should not be discredited. Nevertheless, a sermon that specifically relays God's redemptive purposes in Christ better captures the Messianic emphasis of the term "Christ" and, thus, bolsters the credibility of the label "Christ-centered." Further, a sermon that goes beyond mere redemptive connections to an explicit focus on specific aspects of Christ's person and work demonstrates even greater "centeredness" upon Christ. Such a sermon does not merely explore kingdom dynamics, but specifically presents the King of the kingdom.

The reality is that in both definition and practice Christ-centeredness is a matter of degree. Allowing for a continuum in which some understandings are considered more

Christ-centered than others is more responsible than simply discounting legitimate insights of various views. For example, one may commend Greidanus' understanding that preaching Christ encompasses Jesus' relationship to "the full sweep of redemptive history" while still acknowledging that a theocentric sermon may significantly point to Christ's divine character even without explicit kingdom connections. Further, one may admit that a sermon that specifically emphasizes aspects of Christ's person and work is more centered on Christ than a sermon that simply draws out some kingdom connections in the discussion. A sermon that clearly presents aspects of Christ's ministry should be considered more Christ-centered than a sermon that merely points to the need for redemption, and it is certainly more Christ-centered than a sermon that merely discusses Jesus in broad terms concerning his divinity without any reference to his Messianic role.

This reality even confronts a preacher who seeks to establish a thoughtfully defined understanding of preaching Christ. Taking Greidanus again for example, some of his own sermons are more broadly theocentric than narrowly Christocentric,⁸⁶ yet he does not distinguish their level of Christ-centeredness. The problem is that though Greidanus acknowledges a broad and more specific understanding of preaching Christ, he does not provide sufficient clarity for how the issue of degree affects the final product. An evaluation method should allow for the possibility that a preacher may approach various levels of focus on Christ in any given sermon.

⁸⁶In the appendix of *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, Greidanus offers three sample sermons as examples of the fruits of his method. However, the first sermon, "The King of the Universe," only relates specifically to Christ in three paragraphs of the seven page sermon. The reference seems more a brief tangent to an otherwise theocentric sermon than the result of a sermon fully constructed to center on Christ. See Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 478-84.

Summary of the Issue of Degree

The issue of degree is needed in the discussion of expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching. For each aspect, the issue is evident on the level of definition and on the level of execution. Regarding definition, there are broad and narrow understandings of the three aspects that have lesser and greater degrees of legitimacy. Regarding execution, various levels of focus may be actually demonstrated within any given sermon. Yet the issue of degree, though implicit in the discussion of all three aspects, does not receive much explicit consideration in the field.

The following chapters address this issue by establishing “central concerns” and “distinctive elements” for the three aspects. The central concerns provide foci for evaluation while the distinctive elements articulate ways that the foci may be approached. Such a construct provides specific areas of consideration that help to analyze a sermon’s degree of demonstration of the three aspects.

The Current State of Sermon Evaluation

Since the end goal of this project is to develop an evaluation method that is substantive and well-balanced, the current state of sermon evaluation should be considered for its contributions. Published evaluation methods are sparse, and most homiletical literature is written from the side of prescription.⁸⁷ However, the handful of relevant resources should be considered.

⁸⁷The evaluation materials that I consult in this section are not exhaustive with reference to sermon evaluation but are the most relevant from the materials that I have discovered. I have searched the library catalogue of Southern Seminary. I have searched the various databases available through the library website which include EBSCO and the American Theological Library Association. I have also conducted multiple internet searches such as searches utilizing Google and Amazon. I have also consulted the bibliographies of numerous printed materials.

Relevant Evaluation Articles and Essays

Derke Bergsma discusses the issue of discerning “moralistic sermons,” “doctrinalistic sermons,” and “redemptive historical sermons.”⁸⁸ His article presents the three sermon types as conflicting possibilities with redemptive historical sermons as the best. His concern for “redemptive historical” sermons is certainly a concern for Christ-centered preaching: “No sermon is complete unless its place in the history of redemption, which centers in Jesus Christ, is clarified.”⁸⁹

He describes moralistic sermons as attempts to provide moral advice from the characters of the Bible, but criticizes the tendency to preach moralistically without emphasizing the redemptive, empowering grace of God in the Bible. In other words, he is concerned about the danger of proclaiming a legalistic message. He also criticizes doctrinalistic preaching on three grounds: (1) He claims that its goal is purely intellectual. (2) He claims that its treatment of individual doctrines misses the grand relationships of redemptive history. (3) He claims that it tends to isolate passages of Scripture losing sight of the Bible’s “organic nature.” Though Bergsma’s concerns are well taken, especially his concern for moralistic legalism, doctrinal sermons are not necessarily defined by the problems he outlines. As the following chapters demonstrate, doctrinal preaching is not incompatible with Christ-centered preaching.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Derke Bergsma, “Evaluating Sermons,” *Preaching* 9, no. 6 (2000): 28-29.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰The basic theme of Robert Smith’s work on doctrinal preaching is that doctrinal preaching is not simply intellectual: “Doctrinal preaching is both content centered (teaching to instruct the mind) and intent centered (preaching to move the heart). Doctrine and joy interpenetrate and are intertwined.” Smith is also concerned with faithful exposition and the redemptive flow of the Bible. See Smith, *Doctrine That Dances*, 1, 75-102.

Clifford Jones tends to weave various concerns regarding the three aspects throughout his entire article devoted to comprehensive sermon evaluation.⁹¹ For example, he discusses Christ-centeredness under the same section as theological-doctrinal concerns. He separates the question of exegesis from that of unity though it may be argued that both are fundamental concerns of exposition. He treats the issue of application alone though it is an issue for all three aspects. So though Jones shares many of the priorities that are developed in this dissertation, his evaluation categories are not organized sufficiently for the type of systematic evaluation intended in this dissertation. Further, he shows little concern for measuring degree. His article is full of insights but offers little in the way of careful method.

Robinson and Craig Brian Larson edited a collection of short essays from notable preachers on sermon evaluation.⁹² The nine-essay section is comprehensively focused on all of the dynamics of preaching and not narrowly on substantive sermon content. Consequently, the three evaluation forms that surface from William Willimon, Virginia Vagt, and Robinson are broadly concerned with the overall impact of a sermon. A concern for listener reception is especially prominent.⁹³

⁹¹Jones offers “ten elements” of evaluation. They are as follows: introduction, exegesis/research, theology, content/material, supportive material, organization/structure, language/style, delivery, conclusion/application, and overall impact. See Clifford Jones, “Evaluating the Sermon: Ten Elements to Consider After You Preach” [on line]; accessed 18 March 2010; available from <http://www.preaching.com>; Internet.

⁹²Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, eds., *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 687-715.

⁹³The emphasis upon listener reception in these forms is observed in the following examples: Willimon offers many points of evaluation from the perspective of the listener: “My interest was maintained.” “I was not inspired.” “The sermon was too long.” “The preacher sounded like he/she loved us.” “I identified with the preacher.” “The sermon did not help me encounter God.” Vagt asks the following questions of the listener: “What, if anything, did you gain from the sermon?” “Do you think today’s sermon will change your life in any concrete way?” “If you could tell the pastor one suggestion

Only a handful of questions surface that concern substantive sermon content, and most are quite vague. Willimon has two points out of twenty that clearly concern the three aspects: “The Scripture text was not used or illumined,” and “The sermon did not sufficiently emphasize the greatness of Christ.”⁹⁴ Vagt asks two questions out of nine that relate to content: “What are the main points you remember from today’s sermon?” and “If you could give the pastor one suggestion about sermon content or delivery, what would it be?”⁹⁵ Robinson asks seven questions out of forty three that generally relate to concerns which surface in this dissertation.

Is the development clear? Is the overall structure clear?
Does the sermon have a central idea? Can you state it?
Do the main points relate back to the main idea?
Is the sermon built on solid exegesis?
Is the analysis of the subject thorough? Logical?
Is the supporting material logically related to its point?
Is the message related to hearers’ knowledge?⁹⁶

Though the value of these forms for the overall consideration of sermons should not be discounted, they do not adequately address sermon content related to the three aspects. Further, they are heavily concerned with the classical rhetorical priorities on listener reception which I address in chapter 1 and do not treat in this dissertation.

about sermon content or delivery, what would it be?” Robinson asks the following listener-centered questions: “Does the message get attention?” “Does the speaker convince you that he or she is right?” “Is it interesting?” “Do you feel the speaker is talking to you?” “Is the speaker friendly?” “Is the voice easy to listen to?” “Is there good facial expression?” “Is the sermon adapted to the hearers’ interest? Attitudes?” Ibid., 700-02.

⁹⁴Ibid., 700.

⁹⁵Ibid., 702.

⁹⁶Ibid., 701.

Relevant Tools from Prescriptive Texts

Occasionally, a prescriptive work offers a form or a standardized outline in an appendix that may be used for evaluation. One of the most substantive is the “Preaching Evaluation Form” offered by Michael Fabarez.⁹⁷ The main part of the form contains thirty-three questions under two broad divisions: “Content of the Message” and “Delivery of the Message.” Each question is to receive a mark from one to ten. The last part of the form contains three open-ended questions about the overall sermon effect.

The twenty-one content questions are of particular interest. However, upon examination, only a few of Fabarez’s questions are related to the weighty matters of exposition, doctrine, and Christ-centeredness. For example, with regard to Christ-centeredness, the only relevant question is, “Were Christological truths clearly presented?” The effect is that his evaluation form is too general with regard to the three aspects.

Also of interest is Fabarez’s concern for degree. He calls for a graded response to each question from one to ten so that his sensitivity to degree is clear. However, the form assumes that the listener will be able to measure degree without giving criteria for the possible point values. It appears that the only criteria is how the listener feels concerning the content. Furthermore, the ten point range makes the distinction between each point difficult to understand.

Merida provides a “Sermon Evaluation Form” that is similar to Fabarez’s in that it offers thirty-seven questions and distinguishes content questions from delivery and style

⁹⁷Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 200-02.

questions.⁹⁸ Like Fabarez, Merida also shows a concern for degree but only offers a range of one to seven in answering each question as opposed to the ten point range of Fabarez. Ultimately, the observations concerning Fabarez’s form relate to Merida’s as well.

Vines and Shaddix offer an “Expository Sermon Checklist” “as a guide for determining a sermon’s expository nature.” It covers seven criteria: being based on the “actual meaning” of a biblical passage, being related to the “immediate and general context,” elucidating “eternal, timeless truths,” having a “compelling theme,” representing the passage structure in the “main divisions of the sermon,” applying the truths with “every possible method,” and calling the hearers “to obey those truths and to live them out in daily life.”⁹⁹ This list is helpful because it supplies specific substantive expectations for interacting with a sermon, and it is entirely concerned with content. However, the chapter is not organized to address these criteria successively. They do not discuss the possibility of degrees of demonstration, nor do they offer any comparable lists for doctrinal or Christ-centered preaching.

For an example of a standardized outline that may serve the purpose of evaluation, Greidanus offers an “Expository Sermon Model.”¹⁰⁰ Its main divisions concern the introduction, body, and conclusion, and it offers a description of elements that should exist for each. So under “The Sermon Body,” he includes, “1. Expose the *structure of the text*. . . . 2. The *main points* should usually support the theme and be of the same rank. [etc].” Such an outline moves toward the void that Robinson expresses concerning the

⁹⁸Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 218-20.

⁹⁹Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 31.

¹⁰⁰Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 349-50.

lack of a “standard expository sermon.”¹⁰¹ However, it is intended to help sermon development, not evaluation. Further, it is only concerned with exposition.

Another relevant evaluation form is offered by Scott Thomas, the president of the Acts 29 Network.¹⁰² Thomas explains that the evaluation form is actually used by the Acts 29 Network and Mars Hill Church to evaluate sermons preached among them. This form has two main sections, “Faithfulness to Scripture and God” and “Message Delivery and Communication.” Four of the points in the first section are focused on content.

1. The preaching assertions (points) were clearly rooted in the text and squared with the whole teaching of scripture.
2. The central theme was an illustration of Christ - the message was clearly all about Jesus.
4. The speaker avoided moralizing or psychologizing, and distinguished these from the gospel.
6. Christ and His finished work were applied as the practical solution to any problem.¹⁰³

The first point combines the concerns for exposition and doctrine while points 2, 4, and 6 are explicitly related to Christ-centeredness. On the form, there are five possible answers to each of these concerns that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Though it does not reflect detailed research, this form isolates content from delivery, requires that the evaluator answer the concerns in terms of degree, is practically applied to pastoral preaching, and addresses the three aspects. However, it does not address the aspects

¹⁰¹See introduction.

¹⁰²Scott Thomas, “Characteristics of Good Preaching” [on-line]; accessed 10 March 2010; available from <http://www.acts29network.org>; Internet.

¹⁰³The two points not related to content are point 3, “The speaker seemed in awe of God, not merely focused upon his sermon and the audience,” and point 5, “The goal was to get people face-to-face with God, rather than merely instruct.” Ibid.

distinctly, exclusively, or proportionately.

Relevant Books on Sermon Evaluation

H. C. Brown, Jr. offers a brief work on sermon evaluation that is intended as a means for personal evaluation. Brown moves the reader through ninety-five questions about preaching commitments and sermon construction. Brown's work offers some relevant questions. However, it is intended as a comprehensive examination of construction and style, not a careful examination of weighty content. Though some of his questions relate to exposition, Brown does not address the three aspects with specific concern, and his work is notably missing any emphasis upon Christ or the gospel.¹⁰⁴

William Roen discusses sermon evaluation from a rhetorical critical angle that at first appears promising for this dissertation. In his introduction, he voices a concern about the lack of emphasis on sermon evaluation in the field of homiletics and about the need for substantive methods.

It is surprising, therefore, that while so much attention has been paid the art of preaching, so little ink has been spent teaching us how to listen to the Word preached and talk about what we hear. . . . As preachers, when we finish a sermon, we always have feelings about "how it went." Often, however, we are unable to put those feelings into words.¹⁰⁵

Though Roen reinforces the claim that a void exists regarding sermon evaluation, his work is ultimately disappointing. He promises tools for listening to a sermon but hardly delivers. His chapter devoted to *logos* is an attempt to analyze a sermon by Martin Luther King Jr., but he offers no critical paradigm for his evaluation and delivers only one salient critique

¹⁰⁴See H. C. Brown, *Sermon Analysis for Pulpit Power* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971).

¹⁰⁵William H. Roen, *The Inward Ear: A Sermon Evaluation Method for Preachers and Hearers of the Word* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1989), x.

about King’s tendency toward digression.¹⁰⁶ Further, the evaluation form that he offers at the end of his book only contains two questions related to *logos*: “What was the unifying idea or image in the sermon?” “How did the rest of the sense of the sermon relate to it?”¹⁰⁷ The result is that Roen’s work is not very helpful.

In his work devoted to pastor search committees, Chris Brauns devotes the middle section to sermon evaluation. These chapters represent one of the most thorough efforts available concerning the evaluation of expository preaching. After devoting a chapter to explaining the priorities and theory behind expository preaching, Brauns offers three chapters on evaluation. At the end of this section, he offers a “Sermon Evaluation Form” and a grid for “calculating the final score.”¹⁰⁸

Among the questions on his form, he addresses the need for having a “central thought or focus,” being “faithful to the biblical text,” expressing “spiritual boldness and urgency,” being “aimed” at the “hearts of the audience,” being “clear and easy to follow,” being “interesting,” and having quality “gestures, nonverbal communication, and overall presentation.” His form requires an answer from 1-5 for each issue. His final calculations are based on a “weight multiplier” for each answer in which some issues are more important than others. The highest multiplier is five and pertains to the issue of being faithful to the text. The lowest multiplier is one and pertains to matters of style. In the end, the sermon may receive a score from 0-100.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 64.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁸Chris Brauns, *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search: Biblical Principles & Practices to Guide Your Search* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 128-31.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

Brauns' efforts are highly compatible with my efforts in this dissertation. Not only do I agree with his main propositions about expository preaching, concerning both its importance and distinctives, but I also appreciate his attempt to measure a sermon's success in terms of degree and a final score. He also affirms the contention that content is the most important issue in preaching in that he gives the matter of biblical faithfulness the highest multiplier. There are, however, some differences between Brauns' work and this dissertation: (1) I distinguish among the three aspects whereas he is content simply to speak in terms of expository preaching. (2) I seek to be more detailed about content dynamics whereas his questions are still rather broad. (3) I am more exclusively concerned with *logos* whereas his questions also include dynamics of *pathos* and *ethos*. (4) I reserve the weight metaphor for the content of the sermon whereas he uses it with regard to the overall delivery. Still, Braun's work provides both confirmation and consultation for this dissertation.

Summary of the Current State of Evaluation

In summary, quality preaching evaluation attempts that demonstrate scholarly research are difficult to find. I have not discovered any method that is exclusive to the three aspects. Further, evaluation materials typically concern the total impact of the sermon from content to delivery. Some of evaluation forms give implicit acknowledgment to the reality of "degree" in that they require a graded answer to their various questions. However, explicit criteria for acknowledging and discussing degree is seldom given. In contrast, the method proposed in this dissertation has substantive questions, careful definition, and a narrow focus while its concern for measuring degree is explicit.

Conclusion

This chapter offers three propositions that demonstrate the place for this dissertation: (1) The content of a sermon is the weightiest concern in sermon evaluation, particularly with regard to the three aspects. (2) The presence of the three aspects in a sermon are necessarily matters of degree. (3) Published substantive evaluation methods are relatively sparse and not generally focused on the three aspects or how to carefully measure their degree. Therefore, the gravity of the three aspects is calling for a substantive evaluation method that weighs a sermon's demonstration of their degree.

CHAPTER 3

DISCERNING THE CENTRAL CONCERNS

Having demonstrated the place for this dissertation, I proceed to develop the proposed solution, a substantive and well-balanced evaluation method. The first step is to set forth operative understandings of the three aspects that are useful for widespread evaluation. This chapter and the next concern this step. These chapters do not presume to present a consensus understanding of the three aspects, but an effort to evaluate other preachers must attempt a fair understanding. Therefore, the operative understandings are grounded through interaction with evangelical homileticians.¹

The three aspects can each be helpfully understood in terms of a “central concern” and “distinctive elements.” The central concerns are holistic notions that dictate the basic expectations for the three aspects. They provide an overall focus for the evaluation method. The distinctive elements, addressed in the next chapter, are specific expectations that help to strengthen the focus provided by the central concerns. The proposed method first emphasizes the central concerns and affords them greater weight than the more particular distinctive elements.

This chapter offers a concise statement of the central concerns. For each aspect,

¹In order to keep the range of material manageable, I give primary weight to modern evangelical scholarship. This decision is justified by the fact that the categories under consideration are of particular importance for modern evangelicals and the fact that I share evangelical convictions regarding the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. However, other materials are addressed where relevant.

three parallel steps are followed. First, the emphases of selected evangelical scholars is explored. Second, an operative understanding of the central concern is explained. Third, pertinent matters specific to the aspect at hand are briefly addressed.

The Central Concern of Expository Preaching

Evangelical Scholarship

In explaining his influential definition of expository preaching, Haddon Robinson clearly emphasizes the centrality of a biblical passage's original meaning: "First, and above all, the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon."² This emphasis flows from a desire to confront listeners directly with the authoritative content of the Bible: "Ultimately the authority behind expository preaching resides not in the preacher but in the biblical text. For that reason expositors deal largely with an explanation of Scripture, so that they focus the listener's attention on the Bible."³ Because Robinson is committed to the discovery and communication of the biblical writer's meaning, he qualifies a "biblical concept" as that which is "derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context."⁴ Thus, Robinson reveals that expository preaching requires a hermeneutical commitment to study the Word carefully. For Robinson, the proper grasp of a biblical passage is foundational for an expository sermon.

Robinson then explains that the goal of this focus is application: "Application

²Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21-22.

³Ibid., 24.

⁴Ibid., 21.

gives expository preaching purpose.”⁵ Though he treats application to the preacher separately from application to the listener, both of these sections emphasize the present significance of the text. Robinson insists that the expository preacher should perceive, embrace, and relate the contemporary impact of the ancient message.

Robinson’s concern for meaning and significance is echoed by Richard Mayhue who summarizes the expository commitment as “a serious effort to interpret, understand, explain, or apply God’s truth in the context of the Scripture(s) used.”⁶ Mayhue explains that such a focus is captured in the terminology itself.

Consider the English word group “expose, exposition, expositor, expository.” According to Webster, an exposition is a discourse to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand. Applying this idea to preaching requires that an expositor be one who explains Scripture by laying open the text to public view in order to set forth its meaning, explain what is difficult to understand, and make appropriate application.⁷

Beyond reinforcing Robinson’s emphases on explanation and application, Mayhue’s quotation demonstrates that an integrity issue is at stake whenever the terminology of exposition is invoked. The term “expository” suggests a “laying open” of content. In expository preaching, the Bible is “opened” through diligent treatment of its meaning and significance. Such a commitment is central to the term itself. Hence, John Stott explains, “The expositor prizes open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure,

⁵Ibid., 27.

⁶Richard Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” in *Biblical Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 7.

⁷Ibid., 8. Harold Bryson explains the influence of the etymology of the word “expository” in the homiletical discussion. See Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching Through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 15-18.

unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed.”⁸

Bryan Chapell expresses his emphasis in a complementary way. His main burden is also that the meaning of a passage be conveyed so that its significance upon the modern hearers is plain: “Expository preaching does not merely obligate preachers to explain what the Bible says, it obligates them to explain what the Bible means in the lives of people. . . . The preacher should frame every explanatory detail of the sermon so its impact on the lives of listeners is evident.” Chapell quotes John Broadus with regard to the necessity of application: “The application of the sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done.”⁹

Beyond the notable scholars just discussed, expository preaching has been defined in many other contemporary evangelical treatments.¹⁰ The following definitions represent a sample from the field. Each one clearly demonstrates an emphasis upon the explanation and application of Scripture.

Exposition, then, may be defined as the process of laying open a biblical text in such a way that its original meaning is brought to bear on the lives of contemporary listeners.¹¹

Expository preaching is the exegetical and Spirit-driven process of explaining and applying the meaning of a particular text or texts for the purpose of transforming

⁸John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 126.

⁹Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 78-79.

¹⁰For a current discussion of the various attempts to define expository preaching, see Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 6-15. Also see Bryson, *Expository Preaching*, 11-39.

¹¹Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 28.

people into the image of Christ.¹²

Expository preaching is “Bible-centered preaching.” That is, it is handling the text in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers.¹³

Expository preaching is any kind of preaching that shows people the meaning of a biblical text and leads them to apply it to their lives.¹⁴

Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible.¹⁵

It is no wonder that Tony Merida claims that explanation and application are the consistent emphases of expository advocates: “Most proponents of exposition emphasize the need for the preacher to explain and apply a particular text or texts by understanding it in context.”¹⁶

Operative Understanding

The central concern of expository preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage.

First, the phrase “exposing the meaning and significance” indicates the dual concerns for explanation and application. Robert Stein carefully nuances “meaning” and “significance”: “The meaning of a text is that pattern of meaning the author willed to

¹²Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 10.

¹³Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 11.

¹⁴Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 33.

¹⁵R. Albert Mohler, Jr. *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 65.

¹⁶Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 8.

convey by the words (shareable symbols) he used.”¹⁷ “Significance refers to how a reader responds to the meaning of the text.”¹⁸ So “meaning” captures the historical commitment to understanding the author’s original intentions while “significance” captures the contemporary commitment to apply the implications of the meaning to lives today.¹⁹ An expository sermon “exposes the meaning” through careful explanation and “exposes the significance” through thoughtful application.

Second, the words “thoroughly involved” reveal that this concern encompasses the entire sermon. Different sermons may have various proportions of explanation, illustration, and application,²⁰ but the central concern for all of these components regards their relationship to the text. Because it is holistic, this concern also applies to introductions and conclusions which may or may not effectively draw attention to the passage. Every component of a sermon may either direct to a passage or distract from a passage.

Finally, the common expectation for an expository sermon is that it be focused on “a biblical passage.” The definitions of expository preaching given above repeatedly point to a focus on a passage of Scripture. Though some would acknowledge a broad

¹⁷Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 38.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁹Stein’s distinctions complement those of E. D. Hirsch. Hirsch explains that the exploration of significance is the work of criticism, but he insists that criticism must be based on the discovery of objective meaning: “The object of interpretation is textual meaning in and for itself and may be called the *meaning* of the text. The object of criticism, on the other hand, is that meaning in its bearing on something else (standards of value, present concerns, etc.), and this object may therefore be called the *significance* of the text.” E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (London: Yale University Press, 1967), 211.

²⁰Chapell discusses these components and the possibility of expository sermons demonstrating various proportions of them. See Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 82-89.

understanding of exposition that allows for a multiple text, topical approach, such a broad notion is not the common expectation for the word “expository.” The commonality of this narrow expectation is understandable once one grasps the concern for being thoroughly involved with exposing meaning and significance. The degree to which a preacher attempts to handle a variety of texts correlates to limitations in giving thorough attention to any one of them. So there is a practical tension between the desire for focus and the desire for breadth. Because the commitment to a diligent exposure of meaning and significance is foundational to exposition, the basic expectation is to focus upon a single passage of Scripture.

Pertinent Matters

Given that the central concern of expository preaching involves a single passage, there is a question about how a multiple text sermon may relate to the central concern. At this point, the issue of degree is extremely helpful. In a multiple text sermon, the preacher may demonstrate degrees of expository commitment to the texts that he handles. Though he is not committed to a thorough involvement with any one of them, he may, nevertheless, demonstrate various degrees of commitment ranging from accurate mention to thoughtful presentation. Therefore, a multiple text sermon may approach fulfillment of the central concern of expository preaching though total fulfillment may not occur.

Having limited my central concern to a single passage, the question of what constitutes a legitimate passage remains to be addressed. Walter Kaiser asserts that expository preaching “takes as a minimum one paragraph of Biblical text (in prose

narrative or its equivalent in other literary genre).”²¹ Kaiser’s restriction is only with regard to “a minimum” length. Though “paragraph” is a flexible term, his concern is obviously that a brief statement, short phrase, or a single word should not be considered an adequate focus upon an author’s thought. On the other hand, the maximum length of a passage matters as well. Just as there is a tension between the attempt to cover multiple texts and the ability to be thorough with any one of them, there is a tension between using a long passage and the ability to be thorough.

Anywhere from a short paragraph to a full chapter are healthy expectations for an expository sermon’s text. For narrative units, the limits may be a little broader. To aid discretion, Chapell’s notion of an “expository unit” is helpful: “An expository unit is a large or a small portion of Scripture from which the preacher can demonstrate a single spiritual truth with adequate supporting facts or concepts arising within the scope of the text.”²² The key concepts from this explanation are those of singularity and adequacy. The goal is to select a passage that has a demonstrable singularity of purpose and that can be adequately examined for the author’s supporting thoughts.

Finally, the issue of preaching consecutively through a book of the Bible is of interest. Vines and Shaddix call this commitment “systematic exposition.”²³ They explain

²¹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Crisis in Expository Preaching Today,” *Preaching* 11, no. 2 (1995): 4. Similarly, David Allen argues, “The paragraph unit is best used as the basic unit of meaning in expounding the text of Scripture. Expository preaching should at minimum deal with a paragraph (as in the Epistles), whereas, in the narrative portions of Scripture, several paragraphs that combine to form the story should be treated.” David L. Allen, “Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 107.

²²Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 53.

²³Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 31-32.

that some scholars include it in their definitions of expository preaching, and they affirm it as “the best preaching you can do.”²⁴ Certainly, a commitment to systematic exposition would have an understandable impact on the long-term evaluation of a pastoral preaching ministry. It takes the notion of thorough involvement and expands it beyond a single sermon to a weekly commitment and, therefore, allows for a biblical author’s message to resonate more clearly to the listeners. However, the mere commitment to preach from the same book every week is no indication of the actual quality of each individual sermon. For each sermon, the central concern is still in question. Since my project is focused specifically upon the evaluation of individual sermons, the commitment for systematic exposition, though admirable, is not highly relevant.

The Central Concern of Doctrinal Preaching

Evangelical scholarship

R. L. Dabney and Broadus offer complementary discussions of doctrinal preaching.²⁵ Dabney offers a succinct definition: “Doctrinal preaching is that which aims to

²⁴Bryson includes this commitment in his definition of expository preaching: “Expository preaching is the art of preaching a series of sermons, either consecutive or selective, from a Bible book.” Bryson, *Expository Preaching*, 39.

²⁵Dabney and Broadus write with a lucidity regarding doctrinal preaching that has hardly been improved by contemporary scholars. Because of advancements in exegetical study and biblical theology, the contemporary evangelical discussions of expository and Christ-centered preaching are more evolved from historic treatments; however, the sound contemporary advocates of doctrinal preaching are readily comparable to their nineteenth century counterparts. I say “sound” because the new homiletic has influenced the discussion of doctrinal preaching in negative ways among those who do not give evangelical weight to authoritative revelation. Allen explains, “The New Homiletic, with its disdain for ‘propositional, deductive’ preaching, its elevation of the audience over the text, and its privileging of experience over knowledge, substitutes a narrative sermon form that often leaves the meaning of the text blurred or undeveloped. . . . Due to the truncated view of biblical authority of many of its practitioners, it does not take seriously enough the text of Scripture itself as God’s word to us.” Allen, “Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon,” 103-04. See also D. L. Allen, “A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 508-13.

instruct the people methodically in the truths of the Gospel.” This definition may sound restrictive to the particular message of “the Gospel,” but Dabney clarifies that his understanding is not restricted to any particular doctrinal interest: “But we intend the treatment of all the doctrines which make up the system of revealed theology. . . . [The preacher] must not keep back any revealed truth.”²⁶ Dabney also explains the doctrinal quality of the sermons of Jesus and the apostles: “They are full of explanations of, and evidences for, the great truths and facts which make up the Christian system.”²⁷

Broadus does not offer a succinct definition of doctrinal preaching as Dabney does, but his conviction concerning the issue is similar. Broadus remarks,

Doctrine, i. e. teaching, is the preacher’s chief business. Truth is the life-blood of piety, without which we cannot maintain its vitality or support its activity. And to teach men truth, or to quicken what they already know into freshness and power, is the preacher’s great means of doing good. . . . But these truths ought not simply to have place, after a desultory and miscellaneous fashion, in our preaching. The entire body of Scripture teaching upon any particular subject, when collected and systematically arranged, has come to be called the doctrine of Scripture on that subject . . . and in this sense we ought to preach much on the *doctrines* of the Bible.

Four important similarities between Dabney’s and Broadus’ descriptions of doctrinal preaching may be observed. First, they both emphasize “truth.” The dogmatic nature of their understanding of truth must be recognized. Dabney and Broadus do not regard speculations and opinions as doctrinal subjects but, rather, those things which are firmly grounded in the Word of God. Hence, Dabney uses the phrases “revealed

²⁶Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric or a Course of Lectures on Preaching* (London: W&J Mackay, 1979), 50-51.

²⁷Dabney appeals to two Scriptures in support of preaching all biblical doctrines, Acts 20:26-27 and 2 Tim 3:16: “The Scriptures leave no room for question here. The preacher must be able to take his charge to witness with the apostle that ‘he is pure from the blood of all men, for he has not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God.’ ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine.’” *Ibid.*, 55.

theology,” “revealed truth,” and “truths and facts” while Broadus uses the phrases “Scripture teaching,” “doctrine of Scripture,” and “*doctrines* of the Bible.” The point is that doctrine concerns firm propositions that carry the authority of God’s Word. Second, they both emphasize the breadth of revealed truth that may furnish the content of a doctrinal sermon. Broadus explains that the “entire body of Scripture teaching upon any particular subject” is acceptable while Dabney emphasizes all doctrines in the system of revealed theology. Third, they both emphasize the instructional character of doctrinal preaching. In other words, the concern is that truth be presented and explained in a manner that may be readily grasped by the hearers. Broadus is concerned that the preacher “teach” and “quicken” men while Dabney is concerned that the preacher “instruct” by giving “explanations” and “evidences.” Fourth, they both emphasize the systematic nature of doctrinal preaching. Positively, Dabney claims that doctrinal instruction should be methodical while, negatively, Broadus explains that doctrine should not just be “desultory and miscellaneous.” They both desire for the pulpit to offer planned, intentional instruction.

Dennis Johnson claims that the purpose of doctrinal preaching “is to impart to listeners various aspects of the Bible’s system of truth about the triune God, creation, humanity, sin, redemption, and consummation.”²⁸ His statement suggests the four concerns of Dabney and Broadus for truth, breadth, thoughtful instruction, and systematic organization. Johnson’s quotation also demonstrates that both biblical and systematic theology contribute to doctrinal preaching. His explanation has a redemptive historical

²⁸Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 44.

tone in the movement from God and creation to redemption and consummation, and it also demonstrates the need for topical synthesis. Further, in one sense, Johnson's list is comprehensive in that his categories broadly encompass the entire storyline of the Bible. However, each category also provides for a plethora of sub-categories and discussion points that may be explored.

Irvin Busenitz first explains that expository preaching may have doctrinal implications "in brief excursus, paragraphs, or sentences." However, more narrowly, he acknowledges that a sermon that gives "specific unified attention" to a doctrinal topic may "furnish perspective, expand theological understanding, and provide greater appreciation for the nature and character of God."²⁹ The important observation here is that Busenitz's more narrow understanding makes an organizing principle out of a doctrinal issue. Such a sermon is topically concerned with a particular doctrinal question.

Robert Smith describes the "trifocal" nature of doctrinal preaching. First, it is apologetic in that it "affirms what is orthodox, or correct teaching" and "contends for 'the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.'" Second, it is polemical in that it "stands against false teaching." Third, it is "catechetical" in that it "nourishes the congregation" and "edifies the body of Christ."³⁰ This trifocal nature points to the dogmatic edge of doctrinal preaching in that Smith emphasizes a stand for and against various teachings. Smith also demonstrates a consideration for the listeners inherent in doctrinal instruction since the goal is for their nourishment and edification.

²⁹Irvin A. Busenitz, "Thematic, Theological, Historical, and Biographical Expository Messages," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 220.

³⁰Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 4.

Along these lines, Smith also explains doctrinal preaching in terms of a commitment to both the Bible and the listeners: “[Doctrinal preachers] must be faithful to the text of Scripture, and they must be sensitive to the hearers. In reality they not only exegete the text, but they also exegete the hearers.”³¹ This dual commitment again demonstrates Smith’s concern for authoritative truth and considerate instruction.

Smith affirms William Carl’s definition that “doctrinal preaching will tend to focus on one or more Christian doctrines.”³² This acknowledgment again points to the topical nature of doctrinal preaching and also agrees that anything clearly taught in Scripture may furnish the content of a doctrinal sermon.

Finally, Smith offers an “operational definition” of doctrinal preaching: “[Doctrinal preaching] is *the magnifying of Jesus Christ through the explanation and application of the basic truths of the Christian faith.*”³³ First, the subject of doctrinal preaching must be basic Christian truth. The notion of “basic truths” again points to the propositional nature of doctrine. Second, this content should demonstrate clarity and significance through “explanation and application.” Third, Smith understands such content to bring glory to Christ. This goal blends with the aspect of Christ-centeredness discussed below. Here, it is simply acknowledged that all of God’s truth relates to Christ and, therefore, promotes his glory in its proclamation.

³¹Ibid., 22.

³²Ibid., 23-24.

³³Ibid., 25.

Operative Understanding

The central concern of doctrinal preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma.

As with the central concern for expository preaching, the notion of thoroughness is present in this statement. However, in this case, the concern is not thoroughness with a text of Scripture but with a matter, or topic, of established Christian dogma. A sermon that gives “specific unified attention” to a particular doctrine or set of doctrines is most consistent with Dabney and Broadus’ concern for being “systematic” and “methodical.” Rather than just randomly explaining theological concepts, a doctrinal sermon is expected to demonstrate intentionality in its overall organization. Wayne Grudem explains that the word “systematic,” in systematic theology, should have the sense of “carefully organized by topics.”³⁴ This recognition does not equate doctrinal preaching with doing systematic theology in the pulpit and all of its connotations, but it does recognize that a topical organization is particularly relevant for teaching doctrine.

The word “teaching” should also be explained. “Teaching” as a noun is synonymous with “doctrine,” but the activity of teaching is what I have in view. Doctrinal instruction should demonstrate a strong sensitivity to the conceptual growth of the learner. This concern relates to matters of lucidity and application. Similar to the concern of expository preaching that a text’s meaning and significance be opened for the hearers, the concern of doctrinal preaching is that a doctrine be carefully explained so that it may be readily and meaningfully embraced by the hearers.

³⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 24.

Finally, the notion of “established Christian dogma” is fundamental to an evangelical notion of doctrinal preaching. The concern is that the preacher actually stand for definitive Christian truth and not merely speculate or reflect on theological topics. Not all matters of Christian truth have the same degree of theological importance or biblical clarity, but a sermon must demonstrate some level of dogmatic assertiveness for it to be significantly labeled “doctrinal.” If the preacher is not clearly distinguishing truth from error, he is not preaching doctrinally.

Pertinent Matters

First, the firm emphasis on truth must be addressed because some scholars attempt to use the term “doctrine” while avoiding strong propositional overtones. For example, Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar operate with an unacceptably soft notion of doctrine.

By *doctrine* we mean only a discrete subject or theme in the whole of a theology. The word sometimes connotes the church’s absolutist formulations of the faith. Doctrine equals dogma. Dogma equals undebatable. Without any such connotations we use doctrine as a way of speaking of a focus of reflection on the gospel.³⁵

They later add, “The preacher never assumes that she or he has spoken universal truth for all humans of every time and place.”³⁶

The problem is that a historical perspective of Christian doctrine is more than

³⁵Robert G. Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine: For the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 21-22.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 33. The authors do qualify this statement as not applying to “some notable exceptions,” but the softness of their perspective is repeatedly revealed throughout their work, even with regard to basic Christian truth. For example, they readily challenge the long established satisfaction theory of the atonement as a metaphor that “obviously . . . no longer works” (29-30).

simply a “focus of reflection” that is “without any [dogmatic] connotations.” Rather, it refers to firmly held, timeless teaching. Even a survey of secular dictionary definitions of “doctrine” demonstrates the frequent use of terms like “principle,” “dogma,” “authoritative,” and “established.” An evangelical perspective embraces such strong overtones and specifically connects such strength to the Bible’s testimony. This is why Millard Erickson refers to the “doctrinal factor” as what a biblical passage “always means.”³⁷ This perspective does not necessitate that all doctrines be held with equal fierceness or with a lack of charity, but it does mean that there must be some significant level of conviction and dogmatism behind the term.³⁸ Louis Berkof explains that a clearly defined doctrine holds a binding expectation on those within its sphere.

When the Churches of the Reformation officially define their doctrines and thereby turn them into dogmas, they also implicitly declare them to rest on divine authority and to be expressions of the truth. And because they regard their dogmas as embodiments of the truth revealed in the Word of God, they consider them as entitled to general recognition, and insist on such recognition in their own circles.³⁹

John Stott adds, “Historic Christianity is essentially dogmatic, because it purports to be a revealed faith.”⁴⁰

This understanding is consistent with the Apostle Paul who explains to Titus

³⁷Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 30.

³⁸After criticizing “antidogmatism” as a perversion in the modern church, Gerald Bray offers a helpful caution against “over-dogmatism.” Bray’s entire work is a defense of the dogmatic character of historic Christianity. Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Bristol: Mentor, 1997), 60-64.

³⁹Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 33. Berkof writes extensively on the necessity of understanding doctrine and theology in dogmatic terms. See especially chaps. 2 and 3, 18-52.

⁴⁰John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist: A Study in Some Essentials of Evangelical Religion* (London: Tyndale Press, 1970), 13.

that an elder must be a person who is “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). Therefore, if there is nothing definitive to one’s use of the term, if there is nothing timeless to which one must “hold fast,” then he is really not talking about “doctrine.” Just as the term “expository” demands integrity with regard to careful explanation, so too the term “doctrinal” demands integrity to the notion of dogmatic propositions.

Second, the term “doctrinal” should also be explained in terms of its breadth. The understandings discussed above are that doctrinal preaching addresses all matters of biblical truth. However, the term is sometimes used among evangelicals with reference strictly to gospel truths in a narrow sense. For example, Edmund Clowney summarizes “doctrinal preaching” as preaching “to instruct the church concerning the person and work of Jesus.”⁴¹ The term “doctrine” may even find both connotations in the various uses of the same author. For example, John MacArthur explains doctrine in terms of the gospel: “The scriptural concept of doctrine includes the entire message of the gospel—its teaching about God, salvation, sin, and righteousness.” However, in the same article MacArthur also speaks of doctrine in much more general terms.

True doctrine transforms behavior as it is woven into the fabric of everyday life. But it must be understood if it is to have its impact. The real challenge of the ministry is to dispense the truth clearly and accurately. . . . No believer can apply truth he doesn’t know. Those who don’t know the Bible’s principles for marriage, divorce, family, childrearing, discipline, money, debt, work, service to Christ, responsibilities to the poor, care of widows, response to governments, eternal rewards, and other

⁴¹Edmund Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 50.

teachings will not be able to apply them.⁴²

Because the broad sense of the term is common and because an entire aspect of my project is devoted more narrowly to Christ-centeredness, I use the term “doctrinal” broadly with reference to all matters of biblical truth.

The Central Concern of Christ-Centered Preaching

Evangelical scholarship

Sidney Greidanus acknowledges the broad possibilities for Christ-centered preaching but clarifies a more specific focus which is “to proclaim some facet of the *person, work, or teaching* of Jesus of Nazareth so that people may believe him, trust him, love him, and obey him.”⁴³ Greidanus identifies three dimensions that specifically supply the content of a Christ-centered message: Christ’s person, work, and words. For Greidanus, some significant connection to Jesus is the main concern of a Christ-centered message.

However, Greidanus’ discussion does not specify a clear focus for Christ-centered preaching. On the one hand, his understanding is more focused than simply preaching on any doctrinal matter that may be considered a “kingdom truth” because he emphasizes the need to connect the message to the ministry of Christ. On the other hand, his discussion leaves much room for definition because of the breadth that Greidanus concedes in making Christ-connections. According to Greidanus, the preacher may take

⁴²John MacArthur, “Doctrine Is Practical” [on-line]; accessed 18 March 2010; available from <http://www.gty.org>; Internet.

⁴³Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 8.

any angle related to Jesus' person, works, or words and deliver a Christ-centered message. He does not demand a gospel presentation nor even the presentation of an aspect of redemption.

Greidanus offers several explanations that reveal the breadth of his latitude regarding Christ-connections. First, he is broad regarding a sermon's connection to Christ's person. A sermon may simply refer "to some facet of the person of Christ."⁴⁴ Second, regarding the work of Christ, he explains that a sermon may refer to anything in Jesus' comprehensive ministry: "Usually the work of Christ is associated with his work of reconciling us to God (atonement) through his suffering and death. But we can also think of his miracles of healing . . . his resurrection . . . his ascension . . . and his coming again."⁴⁵ Finally, regarding the words of Christ, he explains that a sermon may discuss any subject addressed by Jesus: "Jesus' teaching includes not only teachings about himself . . . his mission, and his coming again but also teachings about God, God's kingdom, God's covenant, God's law . . . and the like."⁴⁶ These explanations all leave tremendous room for what is to be considered a focus on Christ, especially when one considers the last quotation. Virtually, any theological discussion would qualify. The bare fact that such a discussion is connected to Christ's words is hardly a sufficient criteria for Christ-centeredness. While affirming that connecting the message to Christ is at the heart of Christ-centered preaching, further guidelines are needed for determining a central concern.

Bryan Chapell raises a key consideration in his notable sensitivity to the matter

⁴⁴Ibid., 9-10.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

of Christ-centered motives. Chapell is extremely concerned about legalistic preaching. Therefore, he discusses Christ-centeredness in terms of the contrast between human futility and divine provision.

However well intended and biblically rooted may be a sermon's instruction, if the message does not incorporate the motivation and enablement inherent in a proper apprehension of the work of Christ, the preacher proclaims mere Pharisaism. Preaching that is faithful to the whole of Scripture not only establishes God's requirements, but also highlights the redemptive truths that make holiness possible. . . Christ-centered preaching replaces futile harangues for human striving with exhortations to obey God in dependence upon his work.⁴⁷

Chapell is concerned that sermons may fail to present God's grace in Christ. He desires for the preacher to base his exhortations on "the work of Christ" and "redemptive truths" that lead to true "motivation and enablement," "holiness," and "dependence upon his work."

Chapell is adamant that truly Christ-centered preaching focuses on the redemptive work of God in Christ and the hope it provides for hopeless sinners.⁴⁸

Graeme Goldsworthy also expresses this concern.

The preacher can aid and abet [a] legalistic tendency that is at the heart of the sin within us all. All we have to do is emphasize our humanity: our obedience, our faithfulness, our surrender to God, and so on. The trouble is that these things are all valid biblical truths, but if we get them out of perspective and ignore their relationship to the gospel of grace, they replace grace with law.⁴⁹

Goldsworthy highlights the reality that there is an element of validity to legalistic preaching so that a preacher may accurately convey the Bible's teachings about human

⁴⁷Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 12.

⁴⁸He later adds, "Exhortations for moral behavior apart from the work of the Savior degenerate into mere pharisaism even if preachers advocate the actions with biblical evidence and good intent. Spirituality based on personal conduct cannot escape its human-centered orbit though it aspires to lift one to divine heights." *Ibid.*, 268-69.

⁴⁹Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: An Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 118.

responsibility but miss the need for the gospel.

Dennis Johnson explains how this concern reflects the apostles' preaching.

Instead of motivating obedience by offering God's favor as contingent on human performance, the apostles spoke for a God who had *begun* the process of new creation by extending unmerited mercy and who thereby evokes from renewed people a grateful love and eager desire to obey. On the basis of the obedient life and vicarious death of Jesus . . . God initiates a new creation and inaugurates a new covenant, graciously granting not only forgiveness and right standing for Jesus' sake but also mighty personal transformation by his Spirit of grace.⁵⁰

Johnson explains that the preaching of the apostles emphasized God's initiative in bestowing his "unmerited mercy" which results in "forgiveness," "right standing," and "mighty personal transformation." Johnson also explains that the apostles based their proclamation on "the obedient life and vicarious death of Jesus." He, therefore, echoes the concern of Chapell and Goldsworthy to present the source of proper motivation. A sermon that is Christ-centered should direct the hearers to the grace of God which is available only because of the redeeming work of the Messiah.

The concern of Chapell, Goldsworthy, and Johnson highlights a potential deficiency even for sermons that talk about Jesus, namely, that a sermon may discuss Jesus while not really highlighting the nature of his salvation. Johnson explains that unless the preacher identifies a "redemptive purpose . . . it is possible to say all the right words and yet send all the wrong signals."⁵¹ Andrew Weyermann articulates this potential problem with specific reference to Christ's words.

The use of Christ as a teacher and guide is both inevitable and helpful for faith that seeks to know what should be done in living out the Christian faith. What happens in the homiletical plot, however, when this is the only role Christ plays?

⁵⁰Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 265.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 267.

Christ is not necessary, and the benefit of Christ is not offered. . . . the Jesus preached may enrich the Christian understanding of God's will, but the Christ who is savior is dispensable.⁵²

Weyermann cautions that Christ's teachings may be presented in a way that actually fosters legalism. For him also, the key to Christ-centeredness is found in recognizing God's gracious work in his Son. Goldsworthy offers a similar caution with regard to the use of Christ's teachings in a sermon.

Perhaps the worst form of neglect is preaching from the teachings of Jesus in a way that reduces their significance to moralism. . . . Of course the teachings of Jesus are important, but care is needed to understand the objectives and the intent of his words.⁵³

Like Weyermann, Goldsworthy understands that Jesus' words are an important point of focus, but he is concerned that they may be presented in a way that is counterproductive to the gospel.

Goldsworthy is sensitive to the legalistic preaching of Christ's teachings because his larger concern is that the entire ministry of Christ be communicated so that it is accurately understood and insightfully applied.

Jesus is no longer here in the flesh. The way he dealt with his contemporaries is not necessarily the way he now deals with us. He spoke to them face to face. He speaks to us now through his word in the Bible, and he makes himself present to us by his Holy Spirit. We must take care not to simply read ourselves back into first-century Palestine and into the presence of Jesus of Nazareth.⁵⁴

This quotation conveys the reality that Jesus' person, work, and words are all in danger of

⁵²Weyermann is a Lutheran homiletician who may or may not fit one's notion of "evangelical"; however, his article resonates with evangelical concerns. Andrew M. Weyermann, "Christ-Centered Preaching," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28, no. 6 (December 2001): 595-96. On this point, also see Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 117-18.

⁵³Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 224.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 223.

misuse in preaching if their redemptive context is misunderstood. A Christ-centered sermon should not simply claim Christological connections; it should claim legitimate redemptive connections that promote the true nature of Christian faith.

Because of the concern for legitimacy and insight concerning the ministry of Christ, a common link among contemporary Christ-centered advocates is an emphasis upon redemptive-historical hermeneutics for providing Christological connections in preaching. Dennis Johnson explains the basic approach.

Redemptive-historical hermeneutics, therefore, offer a framework for preaching Christ from all the Scriptures . . . in a way that treats each text's and epoch's distinctiveness with integrity and at the same time does justice to the progressively unfolding clarity by which God sustained his people's hopes for the redemption that has now arrived in Jesus.⁵⁵

According to Johnson, the preacher needs awareness of both the broad "framework" of the Bible and the specific "distinctiveness" of each passage in order to make appropriate Christological connections. The goal of such interpretation is to point to Christ in legitimate ways. Redemptive-historical hermeneutics is not an end in itself. It serves the greater concern that the grace of God in Christ be preached insightfully and powerfully.⁵⁶

Operative Understanding

The central concern of Christ-centered preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ.

This central concern highlights the need to discuss Christ but, also, to discuss him in terms of God's gracious provision. First, it is fundamental to Christ-centeredness

⁵⁵Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 49.

⁵⁶Specific interpretive dynamics of redemptive-historical hermeneutics are addressed below under the heading "Pertinent Matters."

that the sermon clearly “point to” Christ. In other words, a Christ-centered sermon should explicitly direct the listeners’ thoughts toward Jesus. As with the other aspects, the terminology itself demands integrity and, thus, anticipates that the identity and/or ministry of Christ receive significant attention. There may be a broad sense in which the reality of Christ undergirds a discussion of God’s character and kingdom. In such cases, Christ may not even be explicitly mentioned and the sermon may still fulfill a degree of Christ-centeredness.⁵⁷ However, as Greidanus acknowledges, there is a more narrow and straightforward expectation that recognizes the need to relate sermon content explicitly to Christ.⁵⁸ This expectation is incomplete in itself but, nevertheless, part of a focused understanding. Certainly, a sermon is more Christ-centered if it actually prioritizes an explicit discussion of who Christ is or what he has done than a sermon that does not. A sermon that simply discusses God’s character and kingdom but leaves the Christological connections to the listener should be considered less Christ-centered than a sermon that makes the connections clear.

In keeping with Greidanus, any angle regarding Christ’s character or ministry may furnish the subject matter of a Christ-centered sermon. However, on this point, the matter of degree is also relevant because certain angles, especially regarding Christ’s work of redemption, more readily point to “the redeeming grace of God.” I use the words “more readily” because some dynamics of Christ’s ministry are obviously linked to redemption while others require more thoughtful consideration. For example, a sermon about a miracle performed by Christ may not emphasize redemptive truths as readily as a

⁵⁷Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 295.

⁵⁸Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 8, 10.

sermon about the resurrection of Christ. On the other hand, one preacher may be diligent to explain the redemptive significance of a miracle while another is careless in his presentation of the resurrection.⁵⁹ While some aspects of Christ's ministry are more directly conducive to a redemptive focus than others, the way that the aspect is handled by the preacher is the ultimate determiner of Christ-centeredness.

The connection between God's redeeming grace in people's lives and the person and work of Christ is the most significant concern of Christ-centered preaching. The benefits of God's grace in Christ are numerous, from forgiveness and reconciliation to the giving of the Holy Spirit. By directing people to God's redeeming grace, the preacher prevents the human tendency toward legalism and directs people to the true source of personal transformation. Therefore, while my central concern acknowledges the fundamental understanding of Greidanus to present some facet of Christ, it also emphasizes sensitivity for the communication of God's empowering grace. A sermon may make Christological connections but still foster legalism if the impact of God's grace is not properly emphasized. The Christ-centeredness of such a sermon is diminished though Christ may be explicitly discussed.

Additionally, the focus of Christ-centered preaching is not simply to highlight God's grace but to emphasize "God's grace found exclusively in Christ." Christ is the only way of God's grace. The preacher should be careful not to communicate the idea that God saves through avenues other than his Son. A person must trust in Christ alone. Of course, the Father and Spirit also play a role in the bestowal of grace,⁶⁰ but redemption is entirely

⁵⁹Guidelines for assessing degree are presented in chap. 5.

⁶⁰Trinitarian dynamics of Christ-centeredness are addressed in chaps. 4 and 5.

based on the Messiah's victorious ministry.

As with the other central concerns, the matter of thoroughness is again present, but it requires clarification. Every part of the sermon is not necessarily expected to mention Jesus or some aspect of his person, work, or words. The more important priority is that the construction and direction of the sermon be thoroughly developed to direct listeners to God's redeeming grace found exclusively in Christ.⁶¹ Certainly, a Christ-centered sermon may mention Jesus at every step, but a sermon may also move toward Jesus with direction and purpose. Redemptive historical connections may require development before the explicit mention of Christ's significance. A sermon that is thoroughly developed to point to God's grace in Christ is different from a sermon that merely makes passing references to Jesus or attaches a mention of him on the end. In the one, Christ is an afterthought. In the other, he is at the center of its development and purpose.

Pertinent Matters

The label "Christ-centered" is not synonymous with "evangelistic." "Evangelistic preaching" typically refers to a simple gospel message intended to exhort unbelievers to Christ by presenting gospel basics.⁶² However, Christ-centeredness is a broader concept. It would certainly include a good evangelistic sermon, but it affords the preacher more liberty to delve into various aspects of Christ's character and ministry for

⁶¹"Christ-centeredness will be determined by the development of the text and the purpose of the message rather than by some artificial standard." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 301.

⁶²For a work on this preaching type, see Al Fasol, Roy Fish, Steve Gaines, and Ralph Douglas West, *Preaching Evangelistically: Proclaiming the Saving Message of Jesus* (Nashville: B&H, 2006).

the weekly nourishment of the church.

Three explanations establish this distinction. First, unlike evangelistic preaching, a pastor's preaching should not assume a lost disposition upon the listeners nor a total naivety concerning gospel basics. A pastor who uses his pulpit every week simply as an evangelistic platform neglects his many listeners who are already in Christ and hungry to grow. Second, a pastor's preaching that simply states the simple truths of the gospel every week is shallow. Edgar Andrews explains the danger of "superficiality."

Many people advocate "the simple gospel" . . . Didn't Paul just preach "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21)? No—for the passage quoted goes on to say that Paul declared "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). . . . There must indeed be simplicity in our proclamation of Christ, for the gospel must be comprehensible to weak and foolish sinners like ourselves. But what passes for simplicity is often superficiality—in which the gospel is stripped of its biblical content.⁶³

Third, there is still a strong evangelistic impact inherent in Christ-centered preaching. When lost sinners who may be present hear Christ expounded, they are sometimes drawn. As a preacher presents aspects of God's grace in Christ, sinners hear of their deepest needs and the most satisfying truths. The lost may very well be saved as they truly encounter God, themselves, and the Mediator.⁶⁴ Certainly, such people would need to be intentionally educated with the gospel basics, but the Holy Spirit may initially use a variety of Christ-centered angles to awaken the lost.

Redemptive-historical hermeneutics must be further addressed. It has already

⁶³Edgar Andrews, *Preaching Christ* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Times, 2005), 17-18.

⁶⁴On this point, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains, "You will find that people who have listened to your more evangelistic preaching without having come under its power, without having been converted, may well be converted when you are preaching to the saints, as it were, and edifying the believers." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 70.

been observed that this discussion flows from the larger concern to present Christ insightfully and powerfully. Additionally, it flows from the concern for expository credibility. Redemptive-historical hermeneutics serves these two concerns by attempting to establish legitimate interpretive principles for connecting any passage in the Bible to Christ.⁶⁵ The recognition that this discussion is as much about exposition as it is about Christ-centeredness is important because the quality of redemptive-historical interpretation may relate more to expository merit than Christ-centeredness. It is possible to present a message that “points to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ” while improperly interpreting a passage.⁶⁶ In such a case, a sermon may be heavily Christ-centered while lacking in degree of expository merit.⁶⁷ Of course, a lack of interpretive diligence may greatly diminish the level of insight into the grace of God. Nevertheless, an evaluator must be prepared to distinguish between a failure to present God’s redeeming grace in Christ and a failure to interpret a passage properly.

If a preacher is to incorporate successfully redemptive-historical hermeneutics, he must understand the major interpretive dynamics involved. First, a preacher needs to

⁶⁵J. Ligon Duncan demonstrates how these two desires are commonly mingled. Duncan’s concern is for expository merit, but he discusses it under the subject of Christ-centeredness: “But we ought to be able to preach Christ naturally and exegetically from all of the Old Testament. That does not mean that we force Christ in an odd way into places where he is not found in the Old Testament, but that we realize that there is always a way to Christ and to his cross from every passage in the Old Testament.” J. Ligon Duncan III, “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament,” in *Preaching the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 47.

⁶⁶Chapell refers to the “much repeated characterization” of Spurgeon’s preaching in this regard. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 273.

⁶⁷This possibility undergirds Chapell’s distinction concerning approaches to presenting redemptive truth in a sermon. On the one hand, he discusses “topical and textual approaches,” which he admits may present redemptive truth effectively though not in an expository manner, and on the other hand, he presents “expository approaches.” See *Ibid.*, 272-280.

understand the storyline of salvation history in the Bible.⁶⁸ Every passage of the Bible is part of the larger redemptive context. Throughout the Bible, God reveals his redemptive plan with increasing information and clarity. If a preacher is not sensitive to the overall progress of revelation, he is susceptible to imposing the aspects of one epoch upon another.⁶⁹ Second, he must understand the place and function of any given passage in the redemptive story. This aspect involves a study of the particular content of a passage with reference to its genre and epoch so that its unique contribution to God's plan is understood.⁷⁰ Third, a preacher needs to understand how Christ fulfills the progress of revelation in both his first and second coming so that he can recognize similarities and differences between the passage and the ultimate fulfillment in Christ. A passage is not completely understood in terms of its canonical significance until it is related to the "mature message" of redemption which Christ institutes.⁷¹ Fourth, a preacher needs to embrace appropriate interpretive strategies for explaining how the specifics of various moments in salvation history relate to the fulfillment in Christ.

Interpretive strategies provide the means of moving from any given passage

⁶⁸Goldsworthy explains this biblical theological principle with reference to preaching: "God's revelation is embedded in history and involves a historic progressiveness. . . . From the evangelical preacher's point of view, biblical theology involves the quest for the big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation." Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 22.

⁶⁹The possibility for overlap between expository priorities and Christ-centered priorities regarding context presentation is explained in chap. 5.

⁷⁰Goldsworthy explains how the characteristics of genre and epoch come together in interpretation: "The characteristics of the various literary genres can never be looked at apart from the historical and salvation-historical contexts in which they occur. . . . While it is important to understand in general literary terms how an aphoristic proverb functions, the theological function of a proverbial saying in one of the Gospels may be very different from the function of the proverbial sayings in Proverbs." Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 137-38.

⁷¹Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 270.

through salvation history to the fulfillment in Christ. The first three dynamics just mentioned may be understood as answering the question, “What?”: What is the broad redemptive storyline? What is the specific contribution of the passage? What is the kingdom of Christ in all its fulness? An interpretive strategy answers the question, “How?” Hence, Chapell asks, “How, then, can expositors always uncover a redemptive focus that remains fair to the text?” This question is important because of a right criticism of allegorical interpretation. Dennis Johnson explains that such interpretation neglects a thoughtful handling of a text: “Allegory draws direct symbolic connection between the historical details of an Old Testament event and our hearers’ experience of theology, with little or no regard for the event’s symbolic depth and redemptive significance *in its own place in redemptive history*.”⁷²

The explanation of how a passage connects to Christ can be relatively straightforward or quite complex, but basic strategies should be presented in order to provide a starting point for the evaluator to consider the quality of any given connection. Chapter 4 provides specific strategies, which are articulated by Chapell and Greidanus. Both of these scholars are notable for a high esteem of individual contexts and their depth of consideration of redemptive connections.⁷³ Ultimately, the preacher is responsible to supply the rationale for his redemptive connections so that the “How?” question is reasonably answered. Chapter 5 explains that the evaluator is responsible for assessing the quality of such a rationale and explaining his assessment.

⁷²Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 232.

⁷³See Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 263-311, and Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 227-78.

A major concern in the redemptive-historical discussion is the matter of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. In general with regard to this subject, a couple of clarifications are necessary. First, regarding Christ-centeredness, the central concern is the same for either testament. The expectation remains that the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ be presented. There is no need to accommodate the central concern simply because the message derives from the Old Testament. Either a sermon presents God's grace in Christ or not. The fact that a sermon is derived from the Old Testament does not remove the listener's need for hearing about God's redemption. Second, given that the central concern is unchanged, it may be frequently more challenging to present a Christ-centered message from the Old Testament than from the New Testament.⁷⁴ As the various works on this subject demonstrate, the desire to be very expository and the desire to be very Christ-centered are not always obviously reconciled. The challenging nature of the task does not mean that they are mutually exclusive, but practical considerations may affect the direction of any given sermon. As explained in the introduction, every sermon does not necessarily need to demonstrate the three aspects to their fullest degree, but rather, a pulpit ministry in general should demonstrate a healthy balance. Consequently, some sermons may focus on redemptive-historical dynamics carefully while others rely on the context provided by those sermons. This reality may be especially appropriate if a preacher is weekly moving through a biblical book.

Conclusion

The central concerns that are presented in this chapter provide an overall focus

⁷⁴Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives*, 117-18.

for preaching the three aspects. This chapter does not advocate anything radical from established evangelical perspectives, but certain operative decisions must be made for the sake of clarity and consistency. The perspectives proposed are a synthesis of homiletical scholarship, practical necessity, and personal conviction. In conclusion, the central concern of expository preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical text. The central concern of doctrinal preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma, and the central concern of Christ-centered preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ. In the next chapter, more specific distinctive elements are explained that help fulfill the vision provided by the central concerns.

CHAPTER 4

DELINEATING THE DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS

This chapter delineates distinctive elements for each of the three aspects. Each element stems from its respective central concern. This step is important to the project because it explains substantive matters of secondary consideration that help to nuance the evaluation of a sermon. The distinctive elements are expectations for specific kinds of content that a preacher may incorporate in order to strengthen the expository merit, doctrinal essence, or Christ-centeredness of a sermon. Each is a particular way of advancing its respective central concern. They are “distinctive” because they are both distinct to the three aspects and distinct from one another.¹ They are “elements” because each one is merely a part of the sermon. A sermon may display all, none, or just some of these elements.

For each aspect, I propose six distinctive elements. This symmetry is in the interest of developing a well-balanced picture of the three aspects. To accomplish this symmetry with integrity, I have first considered the many legitimate expectations that are commonly proffered for each aspect and then sought to categorize the priorities with thoughtful proportion. All of these elements find rich support among evangelical scholars. I do not stringently follow any one scholar’s particular point of view but, rather, offer the

¹Though they are distinct from one another, there are also ways that the distinctive elements can overlap. These ways are addressed briefly in a few places in this chapter but explained more fully in chap. 5.

following lists as my own synthesis of the issues. Though distinct, there is still a breadth to each of these elements that keeps them from being overly restrictive. More specific issues related to expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching find their places under the six-ribbed umbrellas formed by these distinctive elements.

The Distinctive Elements of Expository Preaching

The six elements of expository preaching can be viewed as three pairs. Though all six elements are distinct, each one relates to the one with which it is paired more closely than to the others. The first two elements focus on the main content derived from a text. The middle two concern textual and contextual details that support interpretation, and the last two concern the significance of a passage.

Distinctive Element 1

The first distinctive element of expository preaching is that the preacher shapes a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author's main idea.

Donald McDougall states this expectation plainly: "The central idea of a true expository message reflects the central idea intended by the Bible author himself."² Much of Haddon Robinson's work is devoted to this important expectation, that the "big idea" of the sermon be consistent with the main idea of the passage under consideration. He explains why this element is important to exposition: "Because each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea, we do not understand a passage until we can

²Donald G. McDougall, "Central Ideas, Outlines, and Titles," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 188.

state its subject and complement exactly.”³ He then insists that the “exegetical idea” should find fresh articulation in the “homiletical idea.”⁴ Tony Merida emphasizes the same process and calls it “the heart of classical expository preaching.”⁵

John MacArthur explains the importance of a main idea for exposition.

First of all, make sure that every expository message has a single theme that is crystal clear so that your people know exactly what you are saying, how you have supported it, and how it is to be applied to their lives. The thing that kills people in what is sometimes called expository preaching is randomly meandering through a passage.⁶

MacArthur’s statement reveals that this distinctive element actually involves two matters of execution. First, the preacher is expected to state a “crystal clear” idea. At some point, he must be explicit as to the main burden of his sermon. Second, he is expected to actually organize his sermon under that main idea so that the sermon is not a display of “random meandering.” Only when the preacher does both of these things, has he truly shaped a main idea. When the main idea is consistent with the text and truly governing of the content, the sermon contains an important element that is distinctive to expository preaching.

³Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 42.

⁴*Ibid.*, 46, 66-70, 103-06.

⁵Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 76-85. Also see Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 139-40.

⁶John MacArthur, “Frequently Asked Questions about Expository Preaching,” in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 284-85.

Distinctive Element 2

The second distinctive element of expository preaching is that the preacher incorporates supporting points that adequately cover the passage and are consistent with its logic.

A preacher may articulate a main idea that is consistent with the passage but neglect the supporting logic that the passage itself provides. In such a case, one expectation of exposition is fulfilled, but the concern for detailed explanation is neglected. However, if a preacher submits his supporting points to the logic of the passage, the sermon demonstrates a deeper commitment to exposition. This element is related to the first element in the desire to allow the passage to govern the thought of the sermon. However, it is possible to have a clear, governing main idea that is consistent with that of the biblical author without necessarily developing it in the way of the biblical author.

This element does not necessarily demand that the homiletical sequence perfectly follow the textual sequence, though it frequently may.⁷ The priority is for the supporting content and logic to be covered in some way or another. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix explain such preaching under the label “expository sermonizing.”

The finest type of expository preaching is the expository sermonizing approach. This approach reflects understanding of the passage on the part of the preacher. He prepares a logical presentation of the content of the text. He has a proposition, main divisions, an introduction, and a way to conclude. Using this structure as a guide, he explains, illustrates, argues, and applies the truth of the passage and establishes its relevancy to the lives of the listeners.⁸

⁷Robert L. Thomas, “Exegesis and Expository Preaching,” in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 116.

⁸Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 152

Vines and Shaddix mention several dynamics in this quotation, but their main point is that the “finest type” of exposition demonstrates “a logical presentation of the content of the text.” Not only does the main idea, or “proposition,” reflect the burden of the passage, but the supporting points, or “divisions,” do as well. Such a demonstration is distinctive to exposition because it advances the central concern of thoroughly explaining the meaning of a passage.

Just as element 1 does not guarantee the fulfillment of element 2, element 2 does not guarantee the fulfillment of element 1. Just as a preacher may discern and emphasize the main idea of a passage while neglecting the supporting content, a preacher may also cover the content of a passage while neglecting the central, unifying idea. For example, a “running commentary” sermon may demonstrate this tendency.⁹ So even though these two elements relate, they are distinct. The reality is that a sermon may demonstrate a full, partial, or indiscernible commitment to either of these first two elements.

Distinctive Element 3

The third distinctive element of expository preaching is that the preacher explains key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage.

Robert Thomas explains a priority that especially applies to this element.

An explanation of the details in 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. . . . With the raw material of sermon preparation thus obtained, common-sense principles must be applied in putting the material into a

⁹Ibid., 153. Also see John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1888), 304-05.

form that the congregation can receive with ease and learn from.¹⁰

Thomas' concern for the "explanation of the details" is especially relevant with regard to grammatical and syntactical analysis because such analysis involves the original languages which are "unavailable to the average untrained parishioner." Detailed analysis, regarding lexical studies, sentence structure, etc., is vital for exposing meaning, so helpful insights should be explained by the preacher. However, the preacher should use "common-sense" in his explanations so that they can be received by laymen "with ease."

This distinctive element does not demand that the preacher burden his listeners with too much technical information. Rather, a preacher should be selective about the "key words or phrases" that need addressing.¹¹ Acknowledging the need for restraint and discretion, a healthy dose of textual explanations helps listeners to discover a passage's meaning for themselves.

With regard to breadth, this element applies to any of the dynamics among words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. Thomas explains,

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,¹² but it is only a small beginning. Of at least equal, and probably greater, importance is the way the words are joined in sentences, paragraphs, sections, etc. This area of syntax is too frequently overlooked. Yet only a full appreciation of syntactical relationships can provide a specific understanding of the flow of thought that the Spirit intended in

¹⁰Robert Thomas, "Exegesis and Expository Preaching," 107.

¹¹Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 101.

¹²It should be noted that a preacher can explain Greek and Hebrew words without actually quoting the ancient words in the pulpit. Opinions differ regarding the wisdom in quoting the ancient languages from the pulpit, but with regard to this distinctive element, any explanation of important words applies.

His revelation through the human writers of the Scripture.¹³

When the sermon possesses key explanations of grammatical and syntactical matters, the listener is provided with an important element for understanding the interpretation of the passage; hence, the central concern of expository preaching is advanced.¹⁴

Distinctive Element 4

The fourth distinctive element of expository preaching is that the preacher explains the passage within its literary and/or historical context.

Vines and Shaddix express the importance of context in expository preaching: “The meaning must be related to the immediate and general context of the passage.”¹⁵ Any given passage exists within various levels of context that significantly impact interpretation; therefore, it advances the central concern of expository preaching when the sermon exudes contextual care and includes contextual insights. Irvin Busenitz explains, “Only when [placing the preaching text within the broader contextual framework] is done will one grasp the authorial intent and release the power of the ‘rightly divided’ Word.”¹⁶

The two most significant contextual categories with reference to exposition are literary context and historical context. The literary context concerns matters related to the

¹³Thomas, “Exegesis and Expository Preaching,” 110.

¹⁴In his discussion of literary features, Robert Vogel’s comments apply to both distinctive elements 3 and 4 to explain their place in the sermon. He explains that interpretive details related to genre, form, history, devices, and grammar are essential not just for the pastor’s exegesis in the study but also for his exposition in the pulpit. See Robert Vogel, “Biblical Genres and the Text-Driven Sermon,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 170-71.

¹⁵Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 31.

¹⁶Irvin A. Busenitz, “Thematic, Theological, Historical, and Biographical Expository Messages,” in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 217.

written product, such as genre, structure, and flow of thought. These considerations lead to the recognition of literary devices such as imagery and figures of speech. The historical context concerns matters related to the original setting, progress of cultures, and available knowledge of the author.¹⁷ Various scholars discuss context in different terms, but these two categories broadly encompass the main contextual factors for determining authorial intent.¹⁸ When the preacher addresses such relevant contextual matters, he makes the interpretation of the text more accessible to the listeners and, thus, advances the central concern of expository preaching.

Distinctive Element 5

The fifth distinctive element of expository preaching is that the preacher derives and explains legitimate timeless principles from the passage.

These last two distinctive elements stem from the concern for explaining the modern significance of a passage. To do this, the process of principlization is the first step for moving from historical description to contemporary application. Kaiser defines principlization: “To ‘principlize’ is to state the author’s propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church.”¹⁹ Kaiser explains that principles are the

¹⁷David Alan Black, “Exegesis for the Text-Driven Sermon,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 138-42.

¹⁸For example, Walter Kaiser’s notable discussion of contextual analysis is set in different terms. He covers “sectional context,” “book context,” “canonical context,” and “immediate context.” However, his chapter is really a blend of literary concerns and historical concerns. He regrets any “severing” of interpretation “from the original writer’s intention in all of its historical particularity.” Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 69-85, 81.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 152.

ground for application. Similarly, MacArthur explains, “If we fail to give our hearers some clear principles they can apply, we have failed to present God’s Word properly.”²⁰

Principlization may be done with regard to matters of heavy doctrinal import or in less overtly doctrinal statements, such as observations about life. The important aspect with regard to exposition is that the historical content of the text be helpfully translated into timeless statements conducive to application. The preacher is not necessarily expected to explain the warrants that confirm the principles, but some explanations would certainly help the listener to recognize and receive the principles of the passage. The main issue is for the preacher to present the timeless nature of the Bible so that listeners may develop a Christian perspective of theology and life.²¹

Distinctive Element 6

The sixth distinctive element of expository preaching is that the preacher offers thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage.

Hershael York and Scott Blue insist on the expository commitment of application: “Application is inherent in the definition of an expository sermon. It is impossible to preach a true expository message without relating the biblical text to the contemporary hearers.”²² Principlization presents the mind with the timeless nature of biblical truth, but specific application addresses the will with relevant matters of

²⁰MacArthur, “Frequently Asked Questions about Expository Preaching,” 281.

²¹See R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 67-69, and John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 170-71.

²²Hershael W. York and Scott Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (1999): 80.

obedience. Principlization provides the logical bridge between the original meaning and the present situation while application focuses narrowly on the present impact of the text.²³ Bryan Chapell explains that application connects the Bible with life in direct ways that the listener may miss.

Preachers make a fundamental mistake when they assume that by providing parishioners with biblical information the people will automatically make the connection between scriptural truth and their everyday lives. . . . Application is the present consequence of scriptural truth. . . . The exposition of Scripture remains incomplete until the preacher explains the duty God requires of man.²⁴

Application may be internal, addressing the mind and heart, or external, addressing behavior. The important matter is contemporary relevance. With regard to the breadth of application, Daniel Doriani offers “four aspects of application” that the preacher may explore. The first is “duty” which asks, “What should I do?” The second is “character” which asks, “Who should I be?” The third is “goals” which asks, “To what causes should we devote our life energy?” And the fourth is “discernment” which asks, “How can we distinguish truth from error?”²⁵ The specific form of application in a sermon may or may not be hortatory. Application may appear as explicit exhortations or as explained situations. The fundamental issue is that of exploring the contemporary impact of the Bible on the lives of the listeners.

²³I do not mean to suggest that there is always a stark contrast between explanation and application. Certainly, there may be times that the distinctions are blurred; nevertheless, an expository sermon should demonstrate a clear concern for application. Daniel Doriani acknowledges that there is sometimes overlap between explanation and application but, nonetheless, bases his entire work on the premise that “there is a definite but permeable boundary” between them. Daniel Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 20-27, 39.

²⁴Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 200.

²⁵Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 97-98.

The Distinctive Elements of Doctrinal Preaching

The distinctive elements of doctrinal preaching are not in easily related pairs as with expository preaching. I have sought to delineate each list in a manner most appropriate for the aspect at hand so as not to impose the discussion from one aspect upon another. For this list, the first five elements concern the presentation and explanation of doctrine while the sixth concerns application.

Distinctive Element 1

The first distinctive element of doctrinal preaching is that the preacher proclaims a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth.

Fundamental to doctrinal preaching is the clear presentation of a doctrine or set of doctrines. Robert Dabney writes that a doctrinal sermon “will set forth some theses of [the preacher’s] theology.”²⁶ Given that the central concern focuses on “matters of established Christian dogma,” the truths at hand should be stated plainly as straightforward propositions. Further, inherent to such statements is the demand for reception.²⁷ Spurgeon explains, “Believing, therefore, that there is such a thing as truth, and such a thing as falsehood, that there are truths in the Bible . . . it becomes us to be

²⁶Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric or a Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Carlisle, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1870), 51.

²⁷Frank T. Wilson explains the demanding nature of doctrine: “Doctrine sets the boundaries of belief and determines the direction and character of response to ideas, propositions, life styles and philosophies encountered in the long stretch of human experience. . . . [Doctrine] calls for affirmation, identification, loyalty, and propagation. . . . It is important to recognize the potential for belief and unbelief, faith and non-faith, inherent in doctrinal statements.” Frank T. Wilson, “Doctrinal Preaching,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 9, no. 2 (1982): 121-22.

decided as to what we teach, and to teach it in a decided manner.”²⁸

There are, of course, various levels of priority and conviction among doctrines, but on some level, the preacher should say, “This is the truth that we must believe.” John Stott addresses a proper humility that, nevertheless, holds straightforward truth claims.

Christian dogmatism has, or should have, a limited field. It is not tantamount to the claim to omniscience. Yet in those things which are clearly revealed in Scripture, Christians should not be doubtful or apologetic. The corridors of the New Testament reverberate with dogmatic affirmations beginning “We know,” “We are sure,” “We are confident.”²⁹

When the preacher presents matters of truth plainly, he preaches doctrine in a manner consistent with the Bible and advances the central concern of doctrinal preaching.

Distinctive Element 2

The second distinctive element of doctrinal preaching is that the preacher clarifies a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms.

It is one thing to proclaim a doctrine as a propositional truth. It is another to take time to clarify the doctrine to help ensure proper understanding. The central concern of “teaching” anticipates a significant effort on the part of the preacher to explain doctrine in an accessible manner. The preacher’s goal is not to present a stuffy, abstract theological lecture that disregards the listener. Rather, it is to restrict and expand the meaning of the doctrine in the listener’s mind through language that connects. Therefore, the doctrinal preacher should carefully consider the needs of the layman for grasping the doctrinal truth.

²⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: Complete and Unabridged* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1954), 221.

²⁹John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist: A Study in Some Essentials of Evangelical Religion* (London: Tyndale Press, 1970), 15.

Dabney explains, “[Doctrinal preaching’s] form will be popular, and in the concrete, rather than abstractly scientific. And you will consult that plainness of argument and paucity of separate points suitable to those who only listen to the fleeting words, instead of poring over the permanent page.”³⁰

There are numerous ways that the preacher can clarify or expand doctrinal propositions for the layman. He may restate them in various ways or specify them with various qualifiers. He may define difficult terms or illustrate challenging concepts. He may need to explain apparent contradictions or paradoxes. The preacher may also incorporate metaphorical language designed to capture the doctrine through concrete imagery.³¹ In the end, the main concern is that the preacher make a demonstrable effort to clarify doctrine by offering thoughtful explanations in accommodating language.

Distinctive Element 3

The third distinctive element of doctrinal preaching is that the preacher offers a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines.

In chapter 3, I explain that the central concern of doctrinal preaching naturally tends toward topical organization because doctrinal inquiry is inherently topical and systematic. Therefore, William Carl explains that doctrinal preaching “tends to focus on

³⁰Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 51.

³¹With regard to metaphor, the Bible is full of examples where doctrinal truth is expressed through such imagery. Of course, such imagery has an effect on the *pathos* of a sermon, but it may also contribute to the *logos* because a metaphor may capture meaning for the listener in ways that abstract explanations fall short. Smith’s work is particularly insightful with regard to the relationship between doctrine and metaphor. See Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 29, 36.

one or more Christian doctrines regardless of its starting point.”³² Along these lines, David Larsen explains an important parallel between topical preaching and theological study: “Topical preaching has a venerable place in the history of the craft. Its legitimacy is seen in the validity of biblical and systematic theology.”³³ Larsen argues that since biblical and systematic theology exist on the merits of topical inquiry, topical inquiry has merit for the pulpit as well. It is, therefore, evident that when a preacher does indeed organize his sermon around a particular issue or question, he models the discipline of theology and makes his sermon more doctrinal.

I do not mean to equate the comprehensive organization or meticulous detail of systematic theology texts with the expectations of doctrinal preaching. Certainly, a theological textbook has more room for thorough inquiry into a topic than the pulpit, but this difference does not exclude the pulpit from selectively addressing doctrinal topics on an appropriate scale.³⁴ A preacher may offer a significant measure of inquiry into a theological issue. By offering a selective and insightful topical organization, the preacher demonstrates a sensitivity for being systematic and fulfills an inherent expectation to the study of doctrine.

Topical organization means more than just a sermon that moves through various topics. Such a sermon could actually be a demonstration of random organization. Rather, a sermon that is topically organized intentionally presents a doctrinal matter or

³²William J. Carl III, *Preaching Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 9.

³³David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 31.

³⁴Busenitz discusses the matter of narrowing topical inquiry so that it is manageable in a sermon. Busenitz, “Thematic, Theological, Historical, and Biographical Expository Messages,” 218-19.

related set of doctrinal matters and then covers various dynamics in a systematic way. The preacher may present a specific doctrinal question and then organize his sermon as an intentional answer to the question, or he may simply introduce a doctrinal subject that he subsequently breaks down in a series of sub-points. My point is that such efforts are more intentionally doctrinal than merely moving through several doctrinal issues as the sermon progresses without clearly showing their relationship to a larger concern. Though such movement may still demonstrate a degree of topical organization in particular sections, the most doctrinal type of topical organization will encompass the entire sermon.

Distinctive Element 4

The fourth distinctive element of doctrinal preaching is that the preacher explores the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines.

The doctrinal preacher should explore the broad biblical picture of any doctrines at hand to get a sense of the canonical context. MacArthur explains this logical step: “Out of the text flows the principle, the principle then becomes the basis upon which you survey the Scripture.” This expectation flows from the very essence of doctrinal inquiry. Since a doctrine, by definition, is “what the whole Bible teaches us today about some particular topic,”³⁵ a sermon becomes more doctrinal when it explores the broad biblical picture. According to MacArthur, this element of a sermon is inherently theological: “So learn to be a theologian. And by that I don't mean a philosophical theologian as much as I mean a biblical theologian. . . . So, the idea then is you find a principle and then you explode that

³⁵Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 25.

principle throughout all of Scripture.”³⁶

Such exploration may accomplish a variety of doctrine related goals. For example, it may demonstrate the unity of the Scriptures regarding the doctrine and, thus, reinforce both the validity of the proposition and the trustworthiness of the Bible. It may help to systematize the doctrine within the whole of Christian theology by relating it to other doctrines in the Bible.³⁷ It may help to clarify or nuance the doctrine. It may reveal the place of the doctrine in redemptive history or demonstrate important moments where the doctrine is prominent. It may demonstrate the power of the doctrine applied to the lives of biblical saints. The particular benefits may overlap with other elements, but the important issue for this element is that of venturing into other parts of the Bible in order to give the doctrine context and to allow the broad biblical picture to have its effect.

Distinctive Element 5

The fifth distinctive element of doctrinal preaching is that the preacher grounds a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic.

When Martin Luther famously declared, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason, my conscience is captive to the Word of God,” he was appealing to the basis for all doctrine, namely, solid exegesis and sound logic. Luther was not appealing to two separate authorities, as though the Scripture is one source of theology and reason is another. Rather, he was simply acknowledging the intimate connection between good

³⁶John MacArthur, “Expository Preaching” [on-line]; accessed 1 March 2009; available from <http://www.gty.org>; Internet.

³⁷Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 64.

interpretation and logical discernment.³⁸ Dabney takes this reality for granted: “Your doctrinal teachings . . . will, of course, not be deficient in sound logic.”³⁹ But Millard Erickson more carefully explains the theological relationship between the Bible and right thinking:

Theology is biblical. It takes as the primary source of its content the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This is not to say that it simply draws uncritically on surface meanings of the Scriptures. It utilizes the tools and methods of biblical research. It also employs the insights of other areas of truth, which it regards as God’s general revelation.⁴⁰

Similarly, Wayne Grudem explains,

Jesus and the New Testament authors will often quote a verse of Scripture and then draw logical conclusions from it. They *reason* from Scripture. It is therefore not wrong to use human understanding, human logic, and human reason to draw conclusions from the statements of Scripture.⁴¹

Erickson and Grudem both acknowledge that though the Bible is the authority, critical processes, such as hermeneutics, exegesis, principlization, and extrapolation are required for deriving Christian doctrine. Therefore, the preacher should ground doctrine in Scripture and sound logic to justify the doctrine’s existence.

At this point, there is a notable overlap between doctrinal preaching and expository preaching because the expectation is for the doctrinal preacher to present his doctrine through the appropriate use of Scripture. This distinctive element is needed because of the temptation to abuse proof texts. Martyn Lloyd-Jones addresses this danger.

³⁸“Scripture and Plain Reason” [on line]; accessed 25 March 2010; available from <http://www.gty.org>; Internet.

³⁹Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 51.

⁴⁰Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 23.

⁴¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 34.

The tendency of some men who have a systematic theology, which they hold very rigidly, is to impose this wrongly upon particular texts and so to do violence to those texts. In other words they do not actually derive that particular doctrine from the text with which they are dealing at that point. The doctrine may be true but it does not arise from that particular text.⁴²

In such an instance, the preacher is actually hurting the central concern because he is teaching a careless foundation for building doctrine. However, when the preacher grounds the doctrines he is discussing through the proper use of the Bible and sound logic, he advances the central concern of doctrinal preaching. The above mentioned elements pertaining to topical organization and the broad biblical picture demonstrate a desire for breadth that does not necessarily allow for the careful explanation of every passage incorporated into a sermon, but at the very least, a brief and sound explanation should accompany the referencing of a passage.

Distinctive Element 6

The sixth distinctive element of doctrinal preaching is that the preacher explains the power and importance of applying a doctrine or set of doctrines individually and/or corporately.

John MacArthur explains the powerful relationship that doctrine has to practical living.

The distinction between doctrinal and practical truth is artificial; doctrine is practical! In fact, nothing is more practical than sound doctrine. . . . Before the preacher asks anyone to perform a certain duty, he must first deal with doctrine. He must develop his message around theological themes and draw out the principles of the texts. Then the truth can be applied.⁴³

⁴²D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 66.

⁴³John MacArthur, "Doctrine Is Practical" [on-line]; accessed 18 March 2010; available from <http://www.gty.org>; Internet.

MacArthur's comments demonstrate two things. First, there is a sense in which all doctrinal instruction is inherently practical, for the mind is the avenue of emotional and character transformation. So when the preacher instills his listeners with biblical truth, the listeners receive a practical benefit in their lives.

However, there is a second sense in which doctrinal principles, once grasped, call for explicit application. Contemporary listeners do not always see a doctrine's relevance readily. When the preacher thoughtfully suggests specific applications, he brings the doctrine's practical importance into focus. Dabney explains this need: "It is the duty of the preacher so to establish the dogmas of the faith in the understandings of the people, that they shall not remain abstract dogmas, but shall reveal their close bearing upon the life."⁴⁴ Lloyd-Jones adds,

Having isolated your doctrine in this way and, having got it quite clear in your own mind, you then proceed to consider the relevance of the particular doctrine to the people who are listening to you. This question of relevance must never be forgotten. As I have said, you are not lecturing, you are not reading an essay; you are setting out to do something definite and particular, to influence these people and the whole of their lives and outlook. Obviously, therefore, you have got to show the relevance of all this. . . . You are to show that this message is vitally important for them, and that they must listen with the whole of their being, because this really is going to help them to live.⁴⁵

Because doctrine is inherently practical, the move from explaining a doctrine to applying it may not always be abrupt or obvious. Preachers sometimes "shift instinctively, without apparent methodological self-consciousness, from doctrine to its significance."⁴⁶

⁴⁴Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 52.

⁴⁵Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 76.

⁴⁶Dorioni, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 219.

The point of this distinctive element is not that the move to application be stark but, simply, that discernable effort is made to apply doctrine to life explicitly.

Doriani suggests four ways that a preacher can consider the relevance of doctrine. They concern the nature of reality, the implications of reality, perennial questions, and situational personal matters.⁴⁷ Two broad categories may also be considered, namely, the personal impact and the corporate importance of the doctrine. Just as much as doctrine is important for one's personal walk with Christ, doctrine is foundational for unity and cooperation in the local church. Without going into further discussion of the particulars of application, the important thing is that various thoughtful applications be present within a doctrinal sermon. The significant nature of doctrine calls for practical application in the pulpit.

The Distinctive Elements of Christ-Centered Preaching

The distinctive elements of Christ-centered preaching are various dynamics that point to God's grace in Christ. There is somewhat of a logical progression through these six elements. They move from sin to God's character to his provision in Christ to the promises entailed in the gospel and to the conditional matter of faith. However, the progression is not really the important issue with regard to this project. The main emphasis is the importance of their presence to a Christ-centered sermon.

Distinctive Element 1

The first distinctive element of Christ-centered preaching is that the preacher

⁴⁷Ibid., 220-24.

addresses deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition.

If the preacher is going to “point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ,” he should make the need for God’s grace evident. The more listeners understand their hopelessly lost state, the more they are prepared to receive the rescue of Christ. In this respect, Chapell emphasizes the importance for a Christ-centered message to identify problems related to human weakness. He calls this redemptive priority the “Fallen Condition Focus” (FCF): “The FCF is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage.”⁴⁸ He later explains the FCF’s logical place in a Christ-centered sermon: “A good place to begin the construction of a Christ-centered sermon is with a clear statement of a Fallen Condition Focus that the text addresses. . . . Scripture’s intent characterizes us all as beings made of Swiss cheese . . . full of holes human efforts cannot fill.”⁴⁹ He also explains that the reality of such deficiencies is traced back to the fall of man.

Our lack of wholeness is a consequence of the fallen condition in which we live. Aspects of this fallenness that are reflected in our own sinfulness and in our world’s brokenness prompt Scripture’s instruction and construction. . . . The corrupted state of our world and our being cry for God’s aid.⁵⁰

Chapell contends that a message with an FCF is prepared to demonstrate how the grace of God fills the holes left by the effects of sin.

And many such holes exist. The consequences of being fallen are thoroughly

⁴⁸Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 42.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 291.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 41.

woven into the entire fabric of human existence. Millard Erickson devotes five chapters of his systematic theology to exploring the nature, source, results, magnitude, and social dimensions of sin.⁵¹ All of these categories supply abundant discussion and demand regular attention from the pulpit. Humanity's moral blindness, social discord, and righteous condemnation are all examples of fallen condition foci. Edgar Andrews summarizes the duty of the Christ-centered preacher with regard to these things: "Sin must be defined, its origin explained. We must make clear what are the effects and consequences of sin, both in time and eternity."⁵² The preacher who offers a careful analysis of the fallen state of his listeners concerning the presence, power, and penalty of sin fulfills an important element for Christ-centered preaching because he points people to their need of Christ. Only then can they receive the exclusive means of God's redeeming grace.

Distinctive Element 2

The second distinctive element of Christ-centered preaching is that the preacher explains and magnifies the good and sovereign character of God.

Chapell's purpose for identifying the fallen condition focus is to lead to "what God is revealing about his own nature that provides redemption."⁵³ Without a proper understanding of who God is, the fallen human condition is unaddressed and the mission of Christ makes no sense. Therefore, the Christ-centered preacher should make much of

⁵¹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 579-674.

⁵²Edgar Andrews, *Preaching Christ* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Times, 2005), 3.

⁵³Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 296.

the character of God. Mark Dever states plainly, “God is fundamental to the gospel.”⁵⁴ In many ways, God-centeredness is broader than Christ-centeredness,⁵⁵ but the two are intimately related. In other words, a God-centered sermon may not always be explicitly Christ-centered, but God-centeredness lies beneath the entire narrative of the gospel.⁵⁶

Though the person and work of Christ is the heart of apostolic proclamation, the gospel begins and ends with God. Christ is God’s Christ.⁵⁷ God is both the source and goal of the gospel that he has published because the entire story is an expression of his character. This reality is why the central concern of Christ-centered preaching focuses on “the redeeming grace of God.” The ministry of Christ is the gospel’s exclusive avenue, but the experience of God’s beautiful character is its highest end. John Piper explains: “What makes all the events of Good Friday and Easter and all the promises they secure good news is that they lead us to God. . . . The ultimate good of the gospel is seeing and savoring the beauty and value of God.”⁵⁸ Christ himself is included in that ultimate good by virtue of his Trinitarian status, but the point is that the gospel is ultimately about God and his character.

Further, God’s good and sovereign character provides the explanation for both

⁵⁴Mark Dever, “Improving the Gospel: Exercises in Unbiblical Theology,” in *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2009), 99.

⁵⁵Greidanus explains, “In focusing on the sovereignty and glory of God, theocentric interpretation is broader than christological interpretation but does not necessarily exclude christocentric interpretation.” He claims that John Calvin’s preaching is an example of theocentric preaching that is not necessarily Christocentric. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 137.

⁵⁶Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 296.

⁵⁷Luke 9:20; Rev 11:15; Mark 1:14; Rom 1:1.

⁵⁸John Piper, *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 42, 56.

the gospel's dilemma and solution. The dilemma for fallen man is in the combined reality of God's perfect goodness and his perfect sovereignty, his righteous indignation and his unstoppable wrath. The "dilemma" for God is between his good desires to punish sin and to show mercy, to destroy evil and to love sinners. However, God's solution is also due to his good and sovereign character. In Christ, God's goodness reaches even to sinners and his power overcomes every obstacle.⁵⁹ Therefore, a preacher needs to draw attention to God's sovereign goodness in order to supply the framework for understanding God's grace in Christ. Christ-centered preaching should focus on God and carefully explain his good and sovereign character.

Distinctive Element 3

The third distinctive element of Christ-centered preaching is that the preacher explains and magnifies aspects of Christ's person and/or work.

If the preacher is concerned to present the exclusive nature of Christ's salvation, his preaching will obviously highlight aspects of Christ's person and work. In his analysis of the content of the preaching in Acts, David Eby emphasizes the overwhelming focus upon the person and work of Christ: "There is no mistaking the central theme of the preaching of Acts: Jesus' unique identity, his death and his resurrection was the uncontested soul and substance of all apostolic discourse."⁶⁰ Further, the thorough preaching of Christ's person and work is the "soul and substance" of the entire New

⁵⁹Rom 1:16; 3:21-26; 5:8; 8:1-4

⁶⁰David Eby, *Power Preaching for Church Growth: The Role of Preaching in Growing Churches* (Bristol: Mentor, 1998), 56.

Testament.⁶¹

Just as the fallen condition of humanity and the sovereign goodness of God offer an array of content for discussion, so too, the person and work of Christ provides numerous angles that call for explanation. Along these lines, Piper demonstrates that there is much to be explained.

The gospel is a message about *historical events*—the life and death and resurrection of Christ—summoning us to open them. . . . The gospel is a message about what those events *achieved* before we experienced anything or even existed—the completion of perfect obedience, the payment for our sins, the removal of the wrath of God, the installation of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah and king of the universe, the disarming of the rulers and authorities, the destruction of death—all of these summoning us to open them.⁶²

The things listed by Piper all relate to the identity and ministry of Jesus. Focusing on such things fulfills the most straightforward and basic understanding of what it means to be Christ-centered.

Distinctive Element 4

The fourth distinctive element of Christ-centered preaching is that the preacher explains the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ.

A sermon becomes more Christ-centered when the preacher frames his content in light of the redemptive-historical impact of Christ. Albert Mohler explains that the listener needs to be shown “the sweeping story of Jesus,” “that the Bible is not just a compendium of good short stories, but a grand, life-encompassing metanarrative of God’s work of redemption in the world.” He continues, “We must read and explain accurately to

⁶¹Andrews, *Preaching Christ*, 18.

⁶²John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation,” in *Preaching the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 113.

our people what that text means and how it applies to their lives. Yet we have another task as well, for we must take that particular text and place it within the larger story of Scripture.”⁶³ Edmund Clowney is especially adamant that Christ-centeredness demands this commitment: “Preachers who ignore the history of redemption in their preaching are ignoring the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in all the Scriptures.”⁶⁴ He later adds, “All presentation of Jesus has a narrative dimension. His coming brings the climax to the great story of the Bible.”⁶⁵ So whether preaching from the Old Testament or the New Testament, from a topic or a theme,⁶⁶ a sermon becomes more Christ-centered when the preacher explains how the content relates to salvation history which Christ fulfills.

As with other elements, there are multiple dynamics to how this commitment may appear in a sermon. Chapell explores three basic strategies for recognizing how the content of a passage may relate to the redemptive story of Christ: text disclosure, type disclosure, and context disclosure. First, Chapell explains that there are many texts in the Bible that make direct reference to the person and work of Christ: “Specific mention of Jesus or his saving activity may occur in a Gospel account, a messianic psalm, an epistle’s explanation, a prophetic utterance.”⁶⁷ In such cases, the Christ-centered preacher should explain his passage “in terms of the redemptive activity it reveals.” Second, Chapell

⁶³Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 96.

⁶⁴Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 10.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁶Chapell’s work is particularly concerned with expository approaches, but he acknowledges that topical preaching can also address matters of redemptive-historical significance. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 273.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 274.

acknowledges that there may be typological connections for the preacher to draw out “between persons, events, and things that first appear in the Old Testament to preview, prepare, or more fully express New Testament salvation truths.”⁶⁸

Third, Chapell explains that context disclosure is the necessary strategy when “neither text nor type discloses the Savior’s work.”⁶⁹ He sub-divides context disclosure under four possible “redemptive foci.” The “predictive” focus predicts God’s redemptive work in Christ. The “preparatory” focus prepares God’s people to understand various aspects of God’s redemption in Christ. The “reflective” focus requires the interpreter to reflect on God’s character and/or human nature with the purpose of recognizing the sources and causes of Christ’s redemptive work.⁷⁰ Finally, the “resultant” focus pertains to aspects of faith and practice that result from God’s work of grace in Christ.⁷¹ Chapell’s work confirms that there is a variety of ways for the preacher to discuss the redemptive-historical context of his message from any passage in the Bible and, as a result, make his message more Christ-centered.

With specific regard to Old Testament preaching, Greidanus offer seven strategies for making Christological connections. He refers to them as a “Christocentric method” for preaching the Old Testament.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid., 275.

⁷⁰Chapell explains that the reflective focus is “the most common tool for constructing Christ-centered messages where there is no direct reference to Jesus’ person or work.” He also explains that it does no harm to the text in its redemptive inquiry: “The preacher who asks these questions takes no inappropriate liberties with the text: What does this text reflect of: God’s nature that provides the ministry of Christ; and/or human nature that requires the ministry of Christ? Without doing violence to the text these questions actually place every biblical text within a redemptive context.” Ibid., 277.

⁷¹Ibid., 275-80.

1. The way of “redemptive-historical progression” is the “broadest and foundational path” that traces God’s story of salvation through all of history and understands its focal point to be the person and work of Christ.
2. The way of “promise-fulfillment” is a “more direct road to Christ” in which an Old Testament text contains an explicit messianic promise that can be easily connected with its New Testament fulfillment.
3. The way of “typology” recognizes that Old Testament “events, persons, and institutions” may foreshadow the escalated fulfillment of redemption found in Christ.
4. The way of “analogy” is a “more general road” that uses Old Testament realities as examples for New Testament parallels.
5. The way of “longitudinal themes” focuses on a theological idea to trace its development throughout the canon.
6. The way of “New Testament references” utilizes a direct quote or allusion of an Old Testament text in the New Testament in order to explain its redemptive connection.
7. The way of “contrast” observes a discontinuity between an Old Testament passage and the New Testament situation and explains its transformation in light of Christ.⁷²

As much as the strategies of Chapell and Greidanus may help the preacher to develop a sermon, they may also help the evaluator to consider the legitimacy of redemptive-historical explanation within a sermon. When the preacher presents the redemptive-historical context in appropriate ways, the Christ-centeredness of a sermon is strengthened.

Distinctive Element 5

The fifth distinctive element of Christ-centered preaching is that the preacher holds forth gospel-related promises concerning the present and/or future state of believers.

If the preacher is going to highlight the “grace” of God, he must present the

⁷²See Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eardmans, 2007), 2-6. Also see, Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 227-78.

promises of the gospel in contrast to the problems addressed in distinctive element 1 regarding the fallen condition of mankind. Of course, these promises are exclusively tied to the person and work of Christ, “for as many may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes” (2 Cor 1:20). Therefore, a Christ-centered preacher should explain and magnify those promises secured by Christ.

Further, the gracious promises of God supplied by Christ are essential for inspiring saving faith; hence, Piper claims that “saving faith means, in its essence, prizing the superior worth of all that God is for us in Jesus.”⁷³ “All that God is for us” captures both the primary promise of the gospel, which is a reconciled relationship to God, and all the related benefits of that glorious central reward. Therefore, if a preacher seeks to highlight Christ and the nature of real saving faith in Christ, he will regularly highlight the inexhaustible promises of the gospel.

Greg Gilbert explains that the gospel offers promises on two basic levels. There are those that specifically relate to the cross as “fountainhead” promises for participation in the kingdom of God, such as forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God and there are those that relate more broadly to the outworking of the kingdom among those who have entered.⁷⁴ He demonstrates from the New Testament that both levels are legitimate subject matter for preaching the gospel. However, while he explains that there is no New Testament problem with preaching the cross in isolation from the kingdom, he warns against emphasizing the kingdom in isolation from the cross: “The gospel is not the

⁷³John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 14.

⁷⁴Greg Gilbert, “What Is the Gospel?” in *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 126.

declaration of the kingdom; it is . . . the declaration of the kingdom *together with* the means of entering it.”⁷⁵ In other words, it is dangerous to preach kingdom promises without reference to the “fountainhead” promises related to forgiveness and reconciliation that specifically relate to the cross of Christ. Gilbert explains why: “All the rest is unattainable and indeed *bad* news unless we point people there.”⁷⁶ Therefore, the Christ-centered preacher should explore the broad spectrum of the gracious promises of God, from cross to kingdom, but he should also keep a clear sense of priority with reference to the all-important promise of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God. If so, he will properly motivate believers from their present relationship status with God and their guaranteed inheritance of the kingdom.

Distinctive Element 6

The sixth distinctive element of Christ-centered preaching is that the preacher emphasizes the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith.

In discussing the “fountainhead” promises of God, Gilbert emphasizes that the promises of the gospel demand the reception of faith. The way to enter the kingdom is not merely by hearing the promise of forgiveness and reconciliation, but really a person enters “by repenting and being forgiven of [one’s] sins through faith in Christ and his atoning death.”⁷⁷ Going back to Piper’s notion of gospel promises, “all that God is for us in Jesus,” he offers this notion in the context of a response. He explains that the response of

⁷⁵Ibid., 128.

⁷⁶Ibid., 130.

⁷⁷Ibid., 126.

“saving faith” is that of “prizing” the promises. The Christ-centered preacher should not simply proclaim gospel promises but also proclaim the gospel condition of prizing those promises, the condition of saving faith.

Andrews captures the important dynamic of repentance as an essential quality of saving faith and the subsequent need for its proclamation.

In preaching the good news concerning Christ we must also preach repentance. This is much neglected in our day, when many “believe” in Christ without any experience or understanding of repentance. Jesus commanded that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). He himself preached “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.”⁷⁸

Further, Eby’s references from Acts on this subject demonstrate that repentant faith is more specifically a repentant, obedient, persevering faith.

Peter spoke, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you” (2:38); “Repent and . . . return” (3:19); and “. . . Repent of this wickedness of yours” (8:22). Paul and Barnabas urged the believers in Pisidian Antioch “to continue in the grace of God” (13:43), i.e. to go on in the very repentance and faith in which they began their walk in grace (13:24, 39). Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” (16:31). Paul “solemnly testified to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (20:21; see also 17:30), declaring to all people “that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (26:20).⁷⁹

Of course, preaching repentance, obedience, and perseverance can be antithetical to Christ-centeredness if they are preached in a legalistic manner. Though they are gospel conditions, they must be understood properly in light of God’s saving initiative or else a preacher may preach a sermon “in which every sentence is true, while the whole

⁷⁸Andrews, *Preaching Christ*, 15.

⁷⁹Eby, *Power Preaching for Church Growth*, 58.

is oppressive.”⁸⁰ Chapell addresses this concern and explains how listeners should be called to devotion: “[Preachers should] issue the summons on the basis of God’s actions and by his power. We never inadvertently teach others to seek answers without his truth, perform his bidding without his strength, or reap his blessing without the acceptance he alone provides.”⁸¹ In other words, the call to saving faith must be in the context of the overall central concern to “point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ.” Further, it should be in context with other distinctive elements. If the preacher addresses the hopeless deficiencies of mankind, if he magnifies the good and sovereign character of God, if he explains the person and work of Christ, then the call of repentance, obedience, and perseverance will not fall with oppressive legalistic force but with a holy sense of urgency to receive the wonderful grace of God.

Conclusion

Having presented the central concerns and distinctive elements (see Table 1), I am now prepared to move to the presentation of the evaluation method. Everything to this point has been for the purpose of grounding the next two chapters in which the evaluation method is presented and then demonstrated. With regard to the distinctive elements, I offer several final observations.

First, though the elements offer more specificity than the three central concerns, they are still quite broad. They describe distinctive kinds of content but they are not overly restrictive for the preacher. It is possible for a preacher regularly to demonstrate these

⁸⁰This quotation is used by Doriani to express the legalistic impact of some evangelical preaching. See Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 229-304.

⁸¹Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 299.

Table 1. The Central Concerns and Distinctive Elements

Expository Preaching	Doctrinal Preaching	Christ-Centered Preaching
Central Concerns		
The central concern of expository preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage.	The central concern of doctrinal preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma.	The central concern of Christ-centered preaching is that the sermon be thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ.
Distinctive Elements		
1. The preacher shapes a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author's main idea.	1. The preacher proclaims a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth.	1. The preacher addresses deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition.
2. The preacher incorporates supporting points that adequately cover the passage and are consistent with its logic.	2. The preacher clarifies a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms.	2. The preacher explains and magnifies the good and sovereign character of God.
3. The preacher explains key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage.	3. The preacher offers a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines.	3. The preacher explains and magnifies aspects of Christ's person and/or work.
4. The preacher explains the passage within its literary and/or historical context.	4. The preacher explores the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines.	4. The preacher explains the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ.
5. The preacher derives and explains legitimate timeless principles from the passage.	5. The preacher grounds a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic.	5. The preacher holds forth gospel-related promises concerning the present and/or future state of believers.
6. The preacher offers thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage.	6. The preacher explains the importance of applying a doctrine or set of doctrines individually and/or corporately.	6. The preacher emphasizes the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith.

elements while still having a great deal of variety with regard to the specific content of his sermons. Second, even if the preacher is unfamiliar with these specific lists, he may still be expected to include the kinds of content that these lists describe. Since the lists are developed from common evangelical expectations, there should be nothing in any of the lists that would be out of character for the evangelical preacher. Third, though the elements are distinct from one another, there are areas of overlap. Significant observations related to this reality are addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DEVELOPING THE METHOD

At this point in the dissertation, a theological and theoretical foundation for substantive and well-balanced evaluation of the three aspects is provided. However, if the thesis is to be fully realized, I must also practically demonstrate what is meant by “a substantive and well-balanced method that weighs a sermon’s degree of demonstration regarding these matters.” Therefore, in the next two chapters, I attempt the construction and demonstration of an evaluation method that treats the three aspects with substance, balance, and sensitivity to degree.

This chapter has three sections. First, the overlapping dynamics among the three aspects are addressed. Second, the “Substance Evaluation Form” to be used with the method is explained. Third, the method itself is presented.

Overlapping Dynamics

The Basic Issue

As stated in the introduction, a fundamental premise for this dissertation is that the three aspects represent three separate matters but not in a mutually exclusive way. They have overlapping dynamics. Therefore, the evaluation method that I construct must allow for such overlap. A sermon may be strong in all three aspects, weak in all three, or mixed in various ways.

The three aspects are distinctly conceived but not necessarily contradictory. In chapter 2, I argue for the “combined gravity” of the three aspects on the basis of their unique yet influential relationship. In that chapter, their interrelatedness is observed from a theological examination of preaching in which God’s Word, his truth, and his gospel are interwoven matters of stewardship for the preacher. The distinctions among these aspects justify treating them on an individual level as I do in chapters 3 and 4, but their interwoven nature demands consideration as well.

Possibilities for Overlap

The inter-relatedness of the three aspects is specifically observable in the conceptual overlap among the central concerns and distinctive elements. None of them are completely isolated from all the others. If an evaluator is to have the right perspective, he must be aware of the ways that various content dynamics may relate to more than one expectation.¹ Therefore, both the central concerns and the distinctive elements should be specifically examined for possible areas of overlap.

Overlap with regard to the central concerns. It is possible for all three central concerns to be fulfilled by a single sermon focus. Such overlap would occur whenever a preacher accurately explains the meaning and significance of a biblical passage (expository) in terms of established Christian dogma (doctrinal) that points to the grace of

¹It is typical of qualitative analysis to allow for overlap among categories. Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth explain that this is one of its basic advantages over a quantitative approach: “In quantitative content analysis, categories need to be mutually exclusive because confounded variables would violate the assumptions of some statistical procedures . . . However, in reality, assigning a particular text to a single category can be difficult. Qualitative content analysis allows you to assign a unit of text to more than one category simultaneously.” Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth, “Qualitative Analysis of Content” [on-line]; accessed 3 March 2011; available from <http://www.ils.unc.edu>; Internet.

God in Christ (Christ-centered). Good printed examples of this possibility exist in the “Preaching the Word” commentaries where the pulpit-tailored, expository essays are frequently framed in terms of doctrinal matters that relate to the gospel. For example, Kent Hughes’ treatment of Romans 3:21-31 is an exposition of the passage with regard to the doctrine of justification.² His focus is expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered all at once.

While it is possible that all three concerns may be fulfilled at once, it is also possible that any two of the three may be fulfilled to the exclusion of the other. The evaluator must be prepared for the possibility that a single homiletical focus may relate to just two of the aspects. For example, a sermon may provide a strong doctrinal presentation of Christ-centered truths while not demonstrating much commitment to interacting with a biblical passage.

Overlap in general with regard to the distinctive elements. Before addressing several specific areas of overlap among the distinctive elements, it should be noted that every element may overlap with another in some way. A grammatical explanation may offer insight into Christ’s person,³ or a doctrinal clarification may magnify an aspect of God’s character.⁴ These are just two of the innumerable ways that the eighteen elements may overlap. Beyond this general observation, there are several specific

²R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, in *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 81-87.

³For example, see William Mounce’s explanation of the use of ἐγώ εἰμι in the book of John. William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 124.

⁴For example, see Wayne Grudem’s explanation of the Trinity. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 231-41.

areas of overlap that the evaluator may expect to encounter with some frequency.

Overlap with regard to context. One significant area of overlap concerns the fourth element of each aspect because each one relates to contextual information. For exposition, the immediate literary and historical context is emphasized. For doctrine, it is the complete canonical picture, and for Christ-centeredness, it is the redemptive-historical development. Though these are specific contextual emphases, they may frequently co-mingle in their actual presentation. For example, a preacher's discussion of historical context may include redemptive-historical observations relevant to both a basic understanding of the author's original meaning and to the salvific plan of God.⁵

Still, the evaluator must be sensitive to how a contextual discussion is actually functioning in the sermon so that he does not presume overlap where none exists. The mere recognition of contextual information is not enough. The evaluator must consider if the information is in the service of understanding the author's original meaning, of clarifying a more complete theological understanding, of unfolding the redemptive plan of God in Christ, or of some mixture of the three.

Overlap with regard to application. Another area of overlap concerns the sixth element for each aspect because each one relates to application. For exposition, the application concerns the significance of a passage. For doctrine, it concerns the significance of Christian dogma, and for Christ-centeredness, it is a response to the gospel.

⁵For example, in a sermon entitled "Hope Race and Power," Tim Keller explains the historical situation of Rom 14, concerning the debate over unclean foods, with reference to Christ's fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. Tim Keller, "Hope Race and Power," 25 April 2004 [on-line]; accessed 1 October 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com>; Internet.

In large part, the content that precedes an application determines which aspect it serves. If the preacher has diligently presented the meaning of a biblical text, any applications will likely flow from that exposition. In a different sermon, the identical application may flow from a doctrinal presentation. In the one sermon, the application fulfills the distinctive element of expository preaching while in the other it fulfills that of doctrinal preaching. In a sermon that significantly blends two or three of the aspects, a single application may fulfill more than one distinctive element.

Overlap with regard to derived principles and doctrinal affirmations.

Another possibility of frequent overlap is with regard to the fifth distinctive element of expository preaching and the first and third distinctive elements of doctrinal preaching. The expository preaching element emphasizes the importance of deriving legitimate timeless principles from a passage. The doctrinal preaching elements emphasize the importance of articulating a doctrine in a propositional manner and then of grounding that doctrine in solid exegesis and sound logic. It should be evident that legitimate principles derived from exposition may often result in doctrinal propositions.⁶ Also, the emphasis upon grounding a doctrine in solid exegesis and sound logic is based on the same concern of exposition to derive legitimate principles from a passage. The priority of proper exegesis undergirds both.

Having acknowledged this possibility of overlap, nevertheless, not all sermon principles are clearly doctrinal, nor are all matters of doctrine necessarily timeless

⁶This reality is so common that some speak of exposition in terms of finding the doctrine of a passage. Joel Breidenbaugh cites William Perkins and Martin Lloyd-Jones in this regard. See Joel Breidenbaugh, "Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching: A Proposal and Analysis for the Twenty-First Century" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 60.

principles. A preacher may offer principles that are not matters of established Christian dogma.⁷ On the other hand, a preacher may proclaim historical doctrinal truths that are not necessarily principles.⁸ They may have a timeless impact, but the doctrinal truths themselves are simply convictions of historical fact.

Overlap with regard to doctrinal propositions and Christ-centered

elements. Overlap may also frequently exist between the first distinctive element for doctrinal preaching which concerns the proclamation of propositional truth and any of the distinctive elements of Christ-centered preaching. The overlap exists because the gospel of Christ is fundamentally doctrinal.⁹ Therefore, it should frequently be the case that a Christ-centered focus is full of doctrinal propositions. However, it is possible that elements of Christ-centeredness can be discussed in terms that are not structured as doctrinal truths.¹⁰ So there is not necessarily an overlap among these elements. The evaluator must be ready to discern the specific nature of the presentation.

⁷For example, in a sermon on Matt 7:12, John Piper explains the fulfillment of the “Golden Rule” with principles related to imagination, self-denunciation, and generosity. Each of these principles is derived from a careful consideration of the verse, but none relates directly to Christian dogma. John Piper, “Abortion and the Narrow Way that Leads to Life,” 23 January 2011 [on-line]; accessed 28 February 2011; available from <http://desiringgod.org>; Internet.

⁸For example, in a sermon on 1 Cor 15:1-8, Steve Gaines proclaims the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ though he does not articulate them as timeless principles but simply as historical facts. Steve Gaines, “The Gospel,” 24 April 2011 [on-line]; accessed 6 May 2011; available from <http://www.bellevue.org>; Internet.

⁹In chap. 3, I discuss the narrow use of the term “doctrine” with reference to gospel related truths and opt for a broader use of the term that regards all matters of established Christian dogma.

¹⁰For example, in a sermon on the subject of anxiety, Mark Driscoll devotes part of his discussion to Jesus’ ability to sympathize with humanity’s struggles, but he does not frame his discussion in terms of doctrinal propositions. Mark Driscoll, “Jesus and Anxiety,” 14 November 2010 [on-line]; accessed 29 December 2010; available from <http://www.marshillchurch.org>; Internet.

Overlap with regard to God’s character and the person of Christ. Beyond the obvious verbal connection between “explaining and magnifying” in these elements, there is the theological overlap between the character of God and the person of Christ. Since Christian theology is Trinitarian, the evaluator should be ready for the possibility of conceptual overlap regarding discussions of God and Christ. Just as in the Scriptures, explanations of God’s character or Christ’s person will relate more or less specifically to the particular person in view or to the nature of God in general. Further, a discussion of the Holy Spirit may relate to God in general or more specifically to a Christ-centered focus on the gospel. A discussion may also relate specifically to the Spirit. The Trinitarian dimensions of preaching are infinitely complex, so it is impossible to anticipate all of the possibilities for overlap. It is nevertheless important to be ready for them and to attempt to understand and explain them as they appear.

Conclusion of Overlapping Dynamics

The following method is predicated upon the distinct yet inter-related nature of the three aspects. The dynamics involved in this reality are many, but the evaluator can prepare himself by thinking about the possibilities for overlap among the central concerns and distinctive elements. The evaluator should be prepared for the central concerns to merge in various sermons and also be prepared for numerous possibilities of overlap among the distinctive elements.

The Substance Evaluation Form

In order to accomplish the method below, I have constructed a “Substance Evaluation Form” (see Appendix 1). The form is simply an organizational tool for the

evaluator. It has a section for basic information, a section for notes, three sections for examining the three aspects, and a final section for final comments.

The form treats the three aspects in a well-balanced manner by means of several parallels: (1) Each aspect contains a question related to the central concern. (2) Each aspect contains six questions related to the distinctive elements. (3) Each aspect uses an identical scoring method in which the scoring range is 0-100. Each question of central concern is worth 0-40 points while the questions about distinctive elements are worth 10 points each. (4) Each aspect uses a consistent labeling system for the final categorization.

In an effort to promote proper proportion in the evaluation, a question of central concern receives four times the weight as a question about a distinctive element. For each aspect, the central concern question may receive one of five answers: not really, a little, somewhat, much, very much. The answers equate to 0, 10, 20, 30, and 40 points respectively. Each question about distinctive elements may also receive the same five answers.¹¹ These answers equate to 0, 3, 5, 8, and 10 points respectively. After all of the questions are answered with acceptable explanations, the scores from the central concerns are added to the scores from the distinctive elements and a final score is assigned.

The result of this configuration is that any sermon may receive a score from 0-100 for each aspect. A final label is then to be given according to the score. A score from 0-19 receives the label “not” in front of “expository,” “doctrinal,” or “Christ-centered” depending on which aspect is in question. A score from 20-39 receives the label “not very,” from 40-59 “somewhat,” from 60-79 “soundly,” and from 80-100 “very.” For

¹¹Guidelines for the central concern and distinctive element answers are explained in the next section.

example, the final evaluation of a sermon may be that it is “very expository,” “soundly doctrinal,” and “not very Christ-centered.”

Such scoring allows for a full range of results while giving the evaluator adequate distinctions for assigning values for each question. Further, upon the final analysis the labels are applied according to increments of twenty along the one-hundred point scale. This decision has been made to prevent the discussion from being too scientific and to provide workable categories for comparison. These ranges provide for ample demonstration of the potential and variety of the results.

The Evaluation Method

The evaluation method consists of five steps: (1) prayer, (2) listening and notation, (3) evaluating the central concerns, (4) evaluating the distinctive elements, (5) scoring and summary.

Step 1: Prayer

At the end of chapter 1, the importance of humility in sermon evaluation is addressed. Concerning this issue, C. J. Mahaney laments the frequent human failure to work with a proper personal perspective: “So many human ventures, so many grand designs of mankind, have been undermined because humility was lacking on the part of those involved.” He then asks, “In all your ventures, are you aware of your need for God’s grace to give your efforts lasting value? Do you long for God’s providential help and blessing?”¹² The evaluator must recognize his need for God’s grace. Therefore, the

¹²C. J. Mahaney, *Humility: True Greatness* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2005), 24.

importance of prayer cannot be overstated. Humble petition is the starting point for positive contribution. The evaluator's prayer should address personal and interpersonal dynamics of his task.

On a personal level, the evaluator must be aware of his need for insight and wary of the spiritual danger of listening to Christian preaching in a purely academic manner. Sermon evaluation is a privileged task in which the evaluator has the opportunity to hear God's Word even while he labors. There is never an excuse for listening to an evangelical sermon in a cold or detached manner. In James 1:22-24, the apostle warns against being merely a hearer of the Word who is not impacted in a life-changing way. The analytical nature of sermon evaluation presents a unique challenge in this regard. If the discipline of analyzing sermons has a numbing effect upon the evaluator with regard to God's message, he would be better off to leave the work to another. Even where the final evaluation may levy serious criticisms against a sermon, the initial attitude of the evaluator should recognize the privilege and responsibility of hearing Christian preaching. Further, an attempt at evaluation in a detached, cold manner may spoil the evaluator's ability to hear the content as it is intended to be heard. With these considerations in mind, the evaluator's best means for orienting a proper mentality is prayer.

On an interpersonal level, the evaluator must be wary of the danger of being unfair, un-careful, or unclear so that the value of his evaluation for others is diminished. The evaluation task comes with an ethical standard that requires the evaluator to seek to be honest and diligent in his judgments.¹³ One of the main purposes for evaluation is to

¹³Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 549-50.

foster constructive dialogue about preaching. Therefore, the evaluator needs an unbiased orientation toward the preacher, a quality interaction with the content, and clear articulation in his answers. A failure to execute with regard to any of these needs may significantly reduce the value of the entire activity.

Given these personal and inter-personal needs of sermon evaluation, the following sample prayer may guide the evaluator in his petition.¹⁴

Father, I am attempting this task with a passion to see your Word, your truth, and your gospel proclaimed to others. Please grant me humble insight and use this evaluation to advance your kingdom.

First, advance your kingdom in my own life. As I listen to this sermon, use it to make me more like Jesus. Do not allow my role as an evaluator to overshadow my responsibility as a hearer. Help me to remember that you are evaluating my heart far more profoundly than I could ever evaluate another's words. I want to feast at your table even as I labor in your service.

Second, advance your kingdom in the lives of others. I pray that, by your grace, anyone who may interact with the final evaluation would be positively impacted. Where my comments are accurate and fair, please confirm them in the hearts of others. Where my comments fall short, please prevent them from leading others astray and still use them to foster constructive dialogue. I especially pray for the preacher of this sermon. Whether he ever interacts with my evaluation or not, grow and sustain him. Grant him a deep personal relationship with you, and bless him with a Spirit-given passion for expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching.

Father, right now, I need a sensitive heart, attentive ears, an analytical mind, an insightful spirit, balanced judgment, and an articulate pen. I ask for all these in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Step 2: Listening and Notation

After prayer, the evaluator must take the time to listen carefully to the entire sermon while taking diligent notes. The quality of the final evaluation is directly related to the quality of the evaluator's comprehension and recollection.

¹⁴I voiced this prayer before every sermon evaluation performed in the next chapter.

Taking notes. The evaluation form involves twenty-one total questions. They must be answered only after the evaluator has carefully listened to the entire sermon. Unless the evaluator has an exceptional memory, he will not be able to answer the questions adequately. Therefore, he must take diligent notes. The notes do not need to be word-for-word, but they should capture every significant thought.¹⁵ His notes should also demonstrate the logical movement and organization of the sermon as much as possible. The notes may include various quotations from the preacher, and of course, any content that the evaluator recognizes as relevant to the evaluation questions. In short, the notes should efficiently capture the entire development of the sermon from introduction to conclusion. In “Appendix 3: Sample Evaluations,” I offer several examples of my own listening notes. The average length is about three pages of single-spaced indented notes.

Recorded sermons. With respect to sermon access, there are three basic options: live sermons, recorded sermons, or printed sermons. Each medium has its strengths and weaknesses for evaluation purposes.¹⁶ This dissertation focuses on recorded

¹⁵It is acknowledged in the field of qualitative analysis that the distinct priorities of a project and practical considerations may call for evaluations to be based on something less than a word-for-word transcription. “While a complete transcript may be the most useful, the additional value it provides may not justify the additional time required to create it.” Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth, “Qualitative Analysis of Content,” 3.

¹⁶With a printed sermon, the whole sermon is available without reference to time which diminishes the danger of missing content. Also since the evaluation method that I am presenting is content focused, the emotional overtones that are lost through print would likely not impact the outcome significantly. Therefore, though I have not chosen to evaluate printed sermons in this dissertation, my method should work well with printed sermons.

A live sermon, in which the evaluator is present among the congregation, has certain obvious benefits with regard to comprehension. The evaluator not only can see and hear the preacher, but he also takes part in other preaching dynamics that contribute to comprehension such as audience interaction and setting awareness. The problem with a live sermon is that it is simply too easy to miss substantive information. With no opportunity for pause or playback, the evaluator may miss content while recording his notes. Further, if the evaluator is present among the congregation, his work space is likely limited and the convenience of a computer may be unavailable or inappropriate. Therefore, a live sermon is least

sermons because of the balance of two priorities.

First, a basic desire is for this project to be constructive for the widespread evaluation of contemporary preaching. Concerning this priority, it is simply easier to access recorded sermons than to be present among various congregations or to acquire full printed manuscripts. With regard to studying popular evangelical preaching, some contemporary preachers post both recorded and printed versions of their sermons on the internet,¹⁷ but recorded sermons are far more prevalent.

Second, obviously thorough comprehension of the message is still a priority. It is, therefore, fitting to use recorded sermons. With a recorded sermon, the evaluator is able to hear the inflections and timing of delivery that contribute to understanding. He is also able to pause or replay parts of the message for the sake of comprehension or notation. A video recording is ideal because movements and gestures may contribute to meaning, but the advantages over an audio recording should not be exaggerated. The primary benefits of hearing the voice and manipulating playback are the same for both.

Step 3: Evaluating the Central Concerns

Having listened to the entire sermon with detailed notes in hand, the evaluator is prepared to consider the degree to which the sermon has fulfilled the three aspects. Therefore, the third step is to answer the central concern questions on the evaluation form by determining the degree of fulfillment and providing a brief explanation for each. It is

desirable for this type of evaluation. It is not that an evaluation cannot be done, but that the conclusions would be more tentative than with a recorded or written sermon.

¹⁷John Piper is an example of a preacher who posts both recorded and printed versions of his sermons on the internet. See <http://www.desiringgod.org>; Internet.

important to address all three central concerns before considering the distinctive elements because the evaluator's thought processes may get bogged down in the details of the distinctive elements to the effect that he loses the big picture. Immediately following the sermon, the evaluator should have the best sense for the overall direction of the message.

The broad subjectivity involved in answering the central concern questions is not a weakness. The reason is that it is important to allow the evaluator room for discretion. The broad impression of a well-informed evaluator, who understands the central concerns properly and who listens to a sermon carefully, is a meaningful piece of the final evaluation. However, it is important for the evaluator to type a brief explanation for his answers in order to provide clarity and to give others the opportunity to agree or disagree with his reasoning.

Evaluating the central concern of expository preaching. To address the central concern of expository preaching, the evaluator must answer the following question: "Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical text?" For his answer, he must determine where the sermon falls among five possible degrees and briefly explain his decision. The following descriptions serve as a guide for determination.¹⁸

"Very much" (40 points): The whole of the sermon focused on a legitimate expository unit in Scripture. The preacher carefully and accurately explained the passage's original meaning, and he thoughtfully considered its contemporary significance.

"Much" (30 points): The sermon may not have focused on a particular passage from

¹⁸Chap. 3 serves as the basis for these descriptions as well as the following descriptions for doctrinal essence and Christ-centeredness. Here I simply consider how a sermon may approach the fulfillment of the priorities established in that chapter.

start to finish, but at least one passage received diligent attention and heavily contributed to the message. Though a biblical author's original meaning may not have determined the overall direction, the Scriptures were interpreted thoughtfully and accurately.

“Somewhat (20 points): The sermon contained some thoughtful interaction with one or more passages with some attention given to explanation and application. The direction of the sermon was influenced by the Scriptures though the contributions of such content were not necessarily major.

“A little” (10 points): The sermon interacted with the Bible in some helpful ways. The Scriptures were not necessarily used incorrectly. A text or handful of texts may have contributed to the discussion, but no careful attention was given to any particular passage. Further, the direction of the sermon was based on something other than a biblical author's original message.

“Not really” (0 points): The preacher may or may not have referenced or read a passage, but his sermon demonstrated no legitimate concern for interacting with a passage of the Bible. The Scriptures may have been misinterpreted, misapplied, or simply neglected throughout the sermon.

In all of these possibilities, the evaluator must keep in mind the importance of not only the level of attention given to Scripture but also the quality of interpretation and application. Certainly, the expository merit of a sermon is affected by the accuracy with which the Scriptures are handled. Of course, one would expect a regular correlation between the attention given to a passage and the quality of its interpretation. The amount that misuse should affect evaluation is determined by the evaluator's conviction about the importance. Slight issues or legitimate difficulties should be evaluated with grace and not necessarily affect the evaluation; however, gross misinterpretations or misapplications, especially those that heavily influence the sermon, may warrant severe deductions in answering this question of central concern. Of course, any such issues must be explained in the evaluator's answer.

Evaluating the central concern of doctrinal preaching. To address the central concern of doctrinal preaching, the evaluator must answer the following question: “Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma?” The following descriptions serve as a guide for this determination.

“Very much” (40 points): The whole of the sermon focused on dogmatic Christian matters in which the preacher clearly presented and embraced a central position in an orderly way and demonstrated its importance.

“Much” (30 points): The sermon was not entirely devoted to the discussion of dogmatic Christian matters. Nevertheless, the preacher devoted significant attention to Christian doctrine and the sermon was heavily influenced by the dogma which was presented.

“Somewhat (20 points): Some of the sermon was devoted to doctrinal matters in the form of a supplemental doctrinal excursus or brief explanations having to do with the development of thought. However, the doctrines discussed were not central to the main direction of the sermon.

“A little” (10 points): The preacher discussed some doctrinal matters or made some doctrinal claims, but he did not devote much effort to their explanation, and they were not significant in the overall development of the sermon.

“Not really” (0 points): The preacher may or may not have mentioned some doctrinal matters, but he did not make any significant effort to explain them or demonstrate their importance.

Just as the quality of interpretation affects the expository merit of a sermon, so too the quality of theology affects the doctrinal essence of a sermon. From an evangelical perspective, there are non-debatable doctrines that must be vigilantly guarded. Such primary issues should not be questioned or misrepresented from the pulpit. Of course, one would not expect a preacher who is truly evangelical to challenge primary doctrines. But if such a challenge did occur, the doctrinal evaluation of the sermon should be diminished. Other doctrines represent secondary or tertiary issues that leave room for grace or debate. In such cases, the evaluator should not necessarily penalize the sermon. He may declare

the sermon doctrinal on some significant level even if he personally disagrees with the position presented. It is up to the discretion of the evaluator to determine how significantly a theological disagreement should weigh into his decision and then to explain his decision.

Evaluating the central concern of Christ-centered preaching. To address the central concern of Christ-centered preaching, the evaluator must answer the following question: “Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ?” The following descriptions serve as a guide for this determination.

“Very much” (40 points): The whole of the sermon explicitly presented aspects of God’s redeeming grace found in Christ while avoiding legalistic motivations, or the whole sermon was clearly developed to culminate in God’s redeeming grace found in Christ, even though Christ may not have been the explicit subject for some parts of the sermon.

“Much” (30 points): Though the whole sermon was not necessarily developed to focus on or culminate in God’s grace in Christ, the preacher emphasized and explained correct gospel understandings in the sermon in ways that significantly influenced the message. God’s redeeming grace in Christ was clearly presented .

“Somewhat (20 points): The preacher gave helpful gospel reminders that were sprinkled throughout the sermon to point to God’s grace and prevent legalism, or a quality appeal to Christ was added at the end of the sermon though the sermon was not really constructed to culminate in Christ.

“A little” (10 points): The sermon contained a few gospel reminders that may have curbed a legalistic impression, or the sermon discussed God’s grace in Christ briefly with a slight effect on the overall message, or a brief appeal to Christ was added at the end of the sermon.

“Not really” (0 points): The preacher may or may not have mentioned Jesus at some moments in the sermon, but he did not make any legitimate effort to explain or emphasize aspects of the gospel, or Jesus may have received much discussion, but the emphases were not based in God’s redeeming grace, or the whole of the sermon was legalistic or oppressive.

Just as the evaluation of expository merit is affected by the quality of interpretation and the evaluation of doctrinal essence is affected by the quality of theology, the evaluation of Christ-centeredness is affected by the quality of convictions expressed about the gospel. Therefore, it is important for the evaluator to consider the soundness of the Christology and soteriology that is presented. This priority is already reflected in the sensitivity to legalistic preaching inherent in the above designations, but it encompasses all theological matters related to salvation. As with the other aspects, the evaluator must use his discretion to determine how much a problematic view should be penalized. Just as with the evaluation of doctrinal essence, a challenge to a primary doctrine should be penalized strongly while a more debatable matter might receive a small penalty or none at all.

Conclusion for evaluating the central concerns. The central concern questions provide an important perspective on the substantive value of a sermon. These questions are intentionally broader than the following distinctive element questions. Therefore, it is vital that the evaluator understand the central concerns clearly and apply his understanding carefully. For each aspect, he must not only consider the attention and effort given to the concern but also the quality of the interpretation or theology present. Because of these dynamics, his answer should include a brief but thoughtful explanation of the decision that he makes. Once he has answered all three central concern questions, he is ready to address the distinctive elements.

Step 4: Evaluating the Distinctive Elements

Step 4 is to answer the distinctive element questions on the evaluation form by

determining the sermon's degree of fulfillment for each and providing a brief explanation. The distinctive element questions provide a more specific, substantive edge to the overall evaluation than simply the broad impression provided by the central concern questions. The intention behind these questions is to hone the final evaluation into a more meaningful product. Indeed, general impressions of sermons are common. Therefore, the distinctive element questions move the evaluation beyond a general impression by providing eighteen areas of substantive support for the final evaluation. They serve as a check and balance to the broad subjectivity inherent in answering the central concerns. Of course, there is still subjectivity involved in addressing the distinctive elements, but it is less drastic because of the increased specificity and smaller range of point values involved for each question.

The following questions are direct adaptations from the distinctive elements presented in chapter 4. Each question may receive one of the same five answers as those of the central concerns, but the point values are one fourth of those for the central concerns. The five options together with their point values are as follows: "not really" (0), "a little" (3), "somewhat" (5), "much" (8), and "very much" (10). For the sake of space in the following descriptions, each possible degree for each element is not summarized as with the central concerns. Rather, each question is simply listed with a brief explanation of the range under consideration. In Appendix 2, I provide tables to foster an adequate overview of the basic possibilities. These descriptions are intended as starting points, but it is ultimately up to the evaluator to provide a careful decision and adequate explanation for each question.

Evaluating the distinctive elements of expository preaching. The six

evaluation questions for the distinctive elements of expository preaching are as follows:

Question 1: Did the preacher shape a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author's main idea?

The answer ranges from a sermon that had a clear main idea that was consistent with the main idea of the passage to a "meandering" sermon with no apparent direction or a sermon in which the main idea is completely inconsistent with the passage.

Question 2: Did the preacher incorporate supporting points that adequately covered the passage and were consistent with its logic?

The answer ranges from a sermon with a thorough and accurate presentation of the passage's content and logic to a sermon that clearly neglects the biblical author's own thoughts concerning the subject.

Question 3: Did the preacher explain key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage?

The answer ranges from a sermon with a thoughtful presentation of significant grammatical/syntactical details that truly aid interpretation and add insight to the message to a sermon that completely lacks such details.

Question 4: Did the preacher explain the passage within its literary and/or historical context?

The answer ranges from a sermon with a thoughtful presentation of significant literary/historical explanations that truly aid interpretation and add insight to the message to a sermon that completely lacks such details.

Question 5: Did the preacher derive and explain legitimate timeless principles from the passage?

The answer ranges from a sermon with explicitly stated principles that are prominent and clearly derived from the passage to a sermon that offers a muddled presentation of timeless truth that lacks significant identifiable principles.

Question 6: Did the preacher offer thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage?

The answer ranges from a sermon with thoughtful, specific applications that clearly work out the implications of the passage for the listeners to a sermon with an obvious absence of any discussion of the modern significance of the passage.

Evaluating the distinctive elements of doctrinal preaching. The six

evaluation questions for the distinctive elements of doctrinal preaching are as follows:

Question 1: Did the preacher proclaim a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth?

The answer ranges from a sermon with a clear central doctrinal proposition or set of propositions that receives diligent attention to a sermon with no recognizable focus on propositional doctrinal statements.

Question 2: Did the preacher clarify a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms?

The answer ranges from a sermon that demonstrates obvious effort to clarify doctrine through various means, such as restatement, definition, qualification, explanation, illustration, and metaphor, to a sermon in which the doctrine remains overly abstract, unexplained, open for misunderstanding, and largely inaccessible to the layman.

Question 3: Did the preacher offer a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines?

The answer ranges from a sermon that has a clear topical organization which regards a specific doctrinal matter and classifies, labels, and groups doctrinal truth to a sermon that has no recognizable organization with regard to doctrine.

Question 4: Did the preacher explore the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines?

The answer ranges from a sermon with an in-depth presentation of other key Scriptures that enlightens or expands doctrine in significant ways to a sermon with no legitimate interaction with other Scriptures concerning doctrinal matters.

Question 5: Did the preacher ground a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic?

The answer ranges from a sermon with clear, biblical, well-reasoned justification for any doctrines presented to a sermon that offers no legitimate justification for its doctrines.

Question 6: Did the preacher explain the power and importance of applying a doctrine or set of doctrines individually and/or corporately?

The answer ranges from a sermon that clearly applies doctrine in specific ways to the contemporary situation of the listeners, either individually or corporately, to a sermon that offers no legitimate consideration of the significance of doctrine upon the listeners.

Evaluating the distinctive elements of Christ-centered preaching. The six evaluation questions for the distinctive elements of Christ-centered preaching are as follows:

Question 1: Did the preacher address deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition?

The answer ranges from a sermon that intentionally and clearly explains insightful aspects of humanity's fallen condition concerning the presence, power, or penalty of sin and the weaknesses of human nature to a sermon that contains no serious mention of humanity's fallen condition.

Question 2: Did the preacher explain and magnify the good and sovereign character of God?

The answer ranges from a sermon in which aspects of God's character are powerfully explained and magnified to a sermon with no significant attention given to God's character.

Question 3: Did the preacher explain and magnify aspects of Christ's person and/or work?

The answer ranges from a sermon in which aspects of Christ's person or work are powerfully explained and magnified to a sermon with no significant attention given to Christ.

Question 4: Did the preacher explain the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ?

The answer ranges from a sermon that presents clear and insightful aspects of the redemptive-historical context to a sermon with no legitimate attempt to address redemptive-historical considerations.

Question 5: Did the preacher explain and magnify gospel-related promises?

The answer ranges from a sermon in which gospel-related promises are essential to the message and receive diligent focus to a sermon that makes no mention of gospel-related promises.

Question 6: Did the preacher emphasize the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith?

The answer ranges from a sermon that clearly defines and emphasizes the dynamics of true saving faith especially in terms of repentance, obedience, and/or perseverance to a sermon that offers no legitimate comments about the importance of faith.

With regard to the Trinitarian overlap between the second and third distinctive elements that focus on the character of God and the person and work of Christ, some functional guidelines must be established for the sake of consistency. Discussions of God in general or specifically as Father should count only toward the second distinctive element that regards God's character. In order to receive acknowledgment for the third

distinctive element, the discussion must explicitly relate to the Son. In such a case, the discussion should not receive credit under the element of God's character unless the preacher explicitly makes a connection along those lines.

With regard to the Holy Spirit, he may be discussed in various ways that relate to the distinctive elements of Christ-centered preaching. This reality comes from the Spirit's intimate relationship to the Father and Son and his pervasive influence in God's redemptive work. Therefore, the Spirit may be discussed in relation to God's character in general such as a discussion of God's power or presence. He may be discussed specifically in relation to Christ such as a discussion of Christ's continual presence among believers. He may be discussed with regard to man's fallen condition and need for regeneration. He may be discussed with regard to the promises of God or with regard to the dynamics of faith. Finally, a preacher's presentation may blend several of these elements with regard to the Spirit. Therefore, the evaluator must apply discretion to carefully consider how the Holy Spirit is presented and which distinctive element or elements are being fulfilled.

Conclusion for evaluating the distinctive elements. The descriptions in this section are admittedly brief because the distinctive elements are addressed in chapter 4. If the evaluator understands the issues presented in that chapter and the range of fulfillment presented in this chapter, then he should be able to apply his understanding to the distinctive element questions with adequate justification.

Step 5: Labeling and Reflection

Once all twenty-one questions on the evaluation form have been answered with explanations, the evaluator is able to accumulate the final scores and apply a label for each

aspect. Upon this calculation, he may find that the sermon is strong in all three aspects, weak in all three, or some mixture among the various possibilities. At this point, it is important that he reflect on the final evaluation and type some final observations in a brief paragraph. The evaluator may include any thoughts that he deems significant, but he must remember to keep a spirit of constructiveness and grace, even for a disappointing sermon. The following questions are examples of final considerations that may prove significant.

Are there any particular insights that would have helped this sermon demonstrate better fulfillment of any of the three aspects?

Was there any aspect that was strong in its central concern but weak in its distinctive elements or *vice versa*? Is there an explanation for such a discrepancy?

What questions were the most difficult for the evaluator to answer? Why?

What elements were most clearly fulfilled by the preacher? Why?

Considering the length of the sermon, did it seem too short to fulfill any of the aspects adequately? Did it seem too long for such an inadequate fulfillment?

Is the evaluator confident in the final evaluation labels, or are there reasons for uncertainty with the particular sermon under consideration?

Are there any difficulties with the evaluation process that may need to be improved in the wake of this sermon?

The evaluator should be careful to convey only his most striking thoughts so that the summary does not quibble over difficult details. His individual answers to the twenty-one questions should sufficiently address more specific considerations. The point of this step is to convey only the most striking thoughts about the sermon. Once the evaluator completes this step, the evaluation is complete.

Conclusion

No evaluation method could perfectly capture all of the dynamics that

contribute to a sermon's expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered fulfillment. However, the above method provides for legitimate analysis of the significant issues regarding the three aspects. It evaluates the weightiest matters of sermon content in a balanced, substantive manner that is also sensitive to degree. It, therefore, answers the call afforded by the gravity of the three aspects and fills a void in the field of homiletics.

Of course, the quality of the final product depends upon the quality of the evaluator. Thinking about sermons in such a critical manner is not a casual exercise, nor is it for the ill-informed. Therefore, the evaluator must understand both the expectations inherent to the three aspects and the expectations for the evaluation method. Further, he must work carefully and exude a spirit of constructiveness and grace. If he is to evaluate weighty things, his own preparation and diligence should be weighty as well.

The evaluation form itself also reflects a spirit of seriousness and grace. Though a positive label must be earned through the demonstration of substantive expectations, the twenty-point range per label helps to prevent the evaluation from being overly stringent or guilty of rash quantification. It is worth noting that it is not necessary for a sermon to have a perfect score in order to receive the label "very." Rather, any sermon receiving a score from 80-100 would receive this label. On the opposite extreme, it is quite understandable that a sermon in the 0-19 range should receive the label "not." So the method provides for legitimate scrutiny and appropriate caution at the same time. In the next chapter, I demonstrate the fruit of these qualities as I practically apply this method to actual sermons.

CHAPTER 6

DEMONSTRATING THE POTENTIAL

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the potential of the proposed evaluation method by applying it to actual sermons. Therefore, this chapter explains the results of sample substance evaluations that I have conducted. When the balance and substance of actual evaluations are considered with the resulting possibilities for interaction, it is evident that such a means of evaluation provides a legitimate answer to the call of the thesis.

Selection and Evaluation of Sermons

Selecting the Pastors

For a demonstration of the method, I chose to evaluate sermons from twenty nationally known evangelical pastors. For each pastor, I evaluated three sermons. The desire was that sixty sermons spread among a variety of preachers would provide significant diversity for a study sample. Choosing to evaluate the sermons of well-known, evangelical pastors has several positives: (1) Because the men are pastors and not just preachers, such as itinerant evangelists, their sermons are examples of evangelical pastoral preaching. They were chosen because this project is particularly concerned with pastoral preaching and is based on evangelical priorities. I have not developed my method with other types of preaching in view. (2) Because well-known pastors influence a large

segment of the public, their sermons are especially subject to critique. Though, in truth, all Christian preaching is subject to thoughtful critique, the evaluation of broadly heard sermons is especially appropriate. (3) Because the men are well-known, there is a significant interest level concerning the sermons being evaluated, more than would be likely from unknown preachers. (4) Because these men utilize significant media ministries for spreading their sermons, access to their preaching is readily available. This reality was not only helpful in gathering the sermons for evaluation, but it also serves as an accountability measure since sermons critiqued in this project are readily available to the reader for his own consideration.

The main purpose of this chapter is to focus on the value of the method. Though the individual sermon evaluations are interesting, their role in this project is to show the method at work. Therefore, I do not attempt a comprehensive analysis of all of the issues that are discovered. Also, I am not attempting to draw any strong conclusions about the overall nature of any pastor's pulpit ministry. A sample of three sermons is far too limited for assessing the character of an entire ministry. So as the results for individual pastors are explained in this chapter, the explanations must be understood merely as examples of the possibilities for ministry evaluation and as preliminary findings that may lead to further research.

The specific selection of pastors was based on my own interest and desire for diversity. Though a precise formula for diversity was not followed, the final list of pastors includes a variety of evangelical traditions and priorities. The following pastors were selected for sermon evaluation:

Alistair Begg: Begg is the pastor of Parkside Church in Chagrin Falls, Ohio near

Cleveland. His weekly preaching is broadcast through the radio program *Truth for Life*. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.parksidechurch.com.

Mark Dever: Dever is the pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C. The church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Dever is also the founder of 9Marks Ministries which seeks to equip church leaders and promote church purity. Audio streaming of his preaching is available at www.capitolhillbaptist.org.

Mark Driscoll: Driscoll is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington. The church is affiliated with the Acts29 church planting network of which Driscoll is the founder. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.marshillchurch.org.

Tony Evans: Evans is the founding pastor of Oakcliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. The church is a prominent example of multi-cultural ministry. Evans is also the founder of The Urban Alternative, a ministry that promotes life and culture transformation through the teaching of the Bible. Evans' preaching is broadcast through its radio program. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.lightsource.com.

Michael Fabarez: Fabarez is the founding pastor of Compass Bible Church in Aliso Viejo, California near Los Angeles. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.lightsource.com.

Jentezen Franklin: Franklin is the pastor of Free Chapel in Gainesville, Georgia and Irvine, California. The church is Pentecostal. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.freechapel.org.

Steve Gaines: Gaines is the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee near Memphis. The church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.bellevue.org.

Bill Hybels: Hybels is the founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois near Chicago. Hybels is a prominent leader among the "seeker sensitive" movement. Hybels is also the chairman of the Willow Creek Association which helps guide the development of thousands of churches around the world. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.willowcreek.org.

Timothy Keller: Keller is the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, New York. The church is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America. Keller is considered by many as an example of apologetic preaching to post-moderns. Audio downloads of his preaching are available at www.redeemer.com.

John MacArthur: MacArthur is the teaching pastor at Grace Community Church in

Sun Valley, California. His preaching is broadcast through the radio program *Grace to You*. Audio and video streaming of his preaching is available at www.gty.org.

Joel Osteen: Osteen is the pastor Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. His preaching is broadcast through a variety of television stations. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.joelosteen.com.¹

John Piper: Piper is the preaching pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The church is affiliated with Converge Worldwide, formerly the Baptist General Conference. Piper is the lead figure behind Desiring God Ministries which seeks to offer a variety of resources for the edification of the church. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.desiringgod.org.

David Platt: Platt is the pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. The church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Video streaming of his sermons is available at www.brookhills.org.

Andy Stanley: Stanley is the teaching pastor at Northpoint Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. Stanley is a prominent leader among the “seeker sensitive” movement. The church has a number of “strategic partners,” other churches that share in the ministry model of North Point. Stanley’s messages are video broadcast to these churches. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.northpoint.org.

Charles Stanley: Stanley is the pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. His preaching is broadcast on various radio and television stations through the program *In Touch*. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.intouch.org.

Dave Stone: Stone is the pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The church is associated with the Christian Church movement. Stone’s preaching is broadcast through the radio program *The Living Word*. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.southeastchristian.org.

Rick Warren: Warren is the pastor of Saddleback Church in Anaheim, California. Warren is a prominent leader among the “seeker sensitive” movement. The church

¹Osteen’s status as an evangelical has been challenged due to his questionable stances on such issues as sin, prosperity, and Christian exclusivism. (See Michael S. Horton, “Joel Osteen and the Glory Story” [on-line]; accessed 16 June 2011; available from <http://wscal.edu>; Internet.) However, in this paper, I am not attempting to determine his evangelical credibility. I have included his preaching for evaluation for the sake of diversity and because he is considered an evangelical by many. Since my purpose is to demonstrate the value of my evaluation method, it is of interest to evaluate the preaching of a pastor who may be considered on the fringes of evangelicalism.

has multiple networks for church planting and ministry efforts. Video streaming of his preaching is available at www.saddleback.com.

Ralph West: West is the pastor of The Church Without Walls in Houston, Texas. The church is a prominent example of multi-cultural ministry. Live video streaming and downloads of his sermons are available at www.ralphdouglaswest.org.

Ed Young Jr.: Young is the pastor of Fellowship Church in Dallas, Texas. His preaching is broadcast over various television stations through *Ed Young Television* ministry. Video streaming of his sermons is available at www.edyoung.com.

Jim Cymbala: Cymbala is the pastor of The Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York, New York. The church is a prominent example of multi-cultural ministry. Audio streaming of his sermons is available at www.brooklyntabernacle.org.

Selecting the Sermons

With regard to selection criteria for the individual sermons, three basic criteria were determined: (1) The sermons had to be relatively recent. This criterion was determined simply for the sake of being relevant in the current preaching environment. With this concern in view, the majority of the sermons chosen were preached within the past two years. (2) The sermons had to be preached during the main weekend worship gathering of the church. This criterion was determined in the interest of fairness for the pastors, so that the evaluations would be of the messages to which they likely devoted their greatest amount of weekly preparation. Further, such messages are their greatest source of influence. (3) For each pastor, at least one sermon from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament was evaluated. This criterion was determined especially because the aspect of Christ-centeredness is in view. As suggested in chapter 3, it may be frequently more difficult, or at least less common, to preach a highly Christ-centered message from the Old Testament. This requirement ensured that at least twenty sermons

from each testament would be evaluated.²

Evaluation of the Sermons

Having selected the pastors and determined the sermon criteria, I embarked on the evaluations. I essentially accomplished them in three rounds of twenty sermons each, with some variance due to sermon availability. The basic effort was to evaluate one sermon from every pastor before accomplishing second and then third evaluations. This procedure helped to ensure that any subtle modifications in my thought processes over the course of the sixty evaluations would not be reflected in any one pastor's sermon evaluations more than another. Most evaluations required about two hours to accomplish from prayer, to listening and notation, to answering the questions, to providing final comments. Some evaluations required closer to three hours due to sermon length or challenging issues.

In the end, I found that the results demonstrate much potential. There are overall sermon results, individual pastor results, and specific sermon results worth noting. In addition to the following discussion, I provide three sample evaluations in Appendix 3. I also provide a "Master Evaluation Table" of the results for every sermon in Appendix 4.

Overall Sermon Results

The overall sermon results may be organized in different ways. Before offering

²If I were attempting an evaluation of a particular pulpit ministry, the selection criteria for sermons would need to be more scientifically determined to ensure fairness, focus, and randomness, but since this project is simply seeking to demonstrate the evaluation method in action, no such criteria is needed. Ultimately, any set of evangelical sermons will provide interesting content for the demonstration of the method. I have simply determined a few guidelines to promote fairness and ensure a degree of diversity.

several charts for digestion, one significant note should be made. There was typically a relationship between a sermon's fulfillment of one of the aspects and its fulfillment of the other two (see Appendix 4). In 25% of the sermons (15 out of 60), the three aspects all received the same degree label, and in just over 50% (32 out of 60), they all received one of two adjacent labels. The rest of the sermons demonstrate considerable diversity of mixtures, but even these sermons tend to favor the left or right sides of the table.

This observation is significant because it confirms two fundamental propositions of this dissertation. The first is that the three aspects are inter-related and, thus, supportive of one another. For example, it is expected that the expository preaching of the Word will regularly yield strong Christ-centered doctrine. The second fundamental proposition is that the three aspects are distinct and do not necessarily guarantee the fulfillment of one another. For example, the expository preaching of the Word does not always guarantee strong Christ-centered doctrine. If these two propositions are true, one would expect to see a common relationship among their fulfillment but also a variety of mixtures. The results from the evaluations confirm both of these expectations.

Total Results Per Label

One way to examine the overall results is to give the final number of sermons that received each label. Table 2 displays the overall results for each aspect. The table provides for several significant observations.

First, the distribution of labels among the sermons is relatively even for all three aspects. The range from the label used the least to the label used the most was only fourteen. "Somewhat Christ-Centered" was used 6 times while "Very Doctrinal" was

Table 2. Total Number of Sermons that Received Each Label

Labels	Not	Not Very	Somewhat	Soundly	Very
Expository	8	12	11	12	17
Doctrinal	12	8	13	7	20
Christ-Centered	14	11	6	10	19
Totals	34	31	30	29	56

used 20 times. Considering that the full range was potentially from 0 to 60, these results demonstrate considerable balance. Such balance suggests that my method successfully produced a gradual progression from “not” to “very” that was not highly susceptible to skipping any particular label.

Second, and related to the above observation, the proportions for all three aspects are relatively similar. One of the best ways to see the similarity is to note the number of sermons for each aspect that are on the left and right sides of the chart. For expository merit, there are 20 sermons with a “not” or “not very” label. For doctrinal essence, there are 20, and for Christ-centeredness, there are 25. On the other side, expository merit has 29 sermons with a “soundly” or “very” label. Doctrinal essence has 27, and Christ-centeredness has 29. In other words, no single aspect was drastically fulfilled more or less than the others. This evenness of proportion suggests that all three aspects are similarly challenging to accomplish for preachers. It also suggests that my evaluation method does indeed treat them in a well-balanced manner.

Third, exactly half of the total number of labels given was on the ends of the spectrum while the other half fell within the three labels in the middle. Of the 180 labels

given, 90 of them were either “not” or “very” while 90 of them were “not very,” “somewhat,” or “soundly.” This observation supports another of the fundamental propositions in this dissertation, that many sermons cannot be easily classified in stark extremes. Without multiple degrees of distinction, half of these sermons would likely be regarded in terms that are too polarized, not giving ample consideration to the ways in which they approached the expectations of exposition, doctrine, and Christ-centeredness.

Fourth, the results are slightly weighted to the right side of the table. The label that was most common for each aspect was “very” and close to half of the sermons from each aspect were either labeled “soundly” or “very.” This observation may be indicative of several of the following dynamics.

It is probably true that my selection of preachers slightly gravitated toward men who are highly proficient at preaching in an expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered manner. I suspect that others who are sympathetic with my priorities would affirm as much from a consideration of the pastors on my list. Further, several of them are notable proponents through their writings, such as Begg, Keller, MacArthur, Dever, Fabarez, and Piper.³ Of course, it was appropriate to include the preaching of these men in a project that evaluates the actual fulfillment of the priorities that they promote. However, one might expect such inclusion to tilt the scale of the overall results toward weightier conclusions. With this in mind, the fact that the results are indeed tilted in such a way

³See the following: Alistair Begg, *Preaching for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010). Tim Keller, “The Gospel and the Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World,” in *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, 103-23 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007). John MacArthur, Jr. and the Master's Seminary Faculty, *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005). Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004). Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002). John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990).

actually suggests that the method is appropriately balanced.

Another dynamic is that in explaining the method, the importance of a spirit of grace on the part of the evaluator is emphasized. Therefore, I sought to model this spirit in my actual evaluations. I did not hesitate to give low scores where warranted, but in difficult cases, I may have frequently erred on the side of grace. Ultimately, I would rather be slightly gracious than to give undue criticism to another man's preaching. Hence, the results may have been tilted toward the right side of the scale.

Another dynamic is that since the distinctive elements are intimately related to the central concerns, it may be likely that preachers who truly set out to be expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered will more readily preach a sermon that is "very" much a fulfillment of those priorities. Such a tendency does not guarantee that the priorities will be fulfilled, but it may help to explain why the results are tilted toward the right.

Returning to the significant observations provided by Table 2, a fifth observation may be made. Though the results are slightly weighted to the right side of the scale, nevertheless, more than one-third of the labels fell in the "not" or "not very" categories and over half reached no higher than the "somewhat" category. I do not propose that every sermon should be weighty in all three aspects all the time. Rather, I argue that the overall balance of a ministry should demonstrate a heavy emphasis on all three aspects. Still, with over one-third of the labels being deficient and over half not reaching above the "somewhat" label, one might readily wonder whether the balance over time for many of the preachers would demonstrate a heavy emphasis on all three aspects. Considering that all of the preachers are considered evangelical, this observation is of concern. This chart shows that the successful demonstration of a sermon that is

expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered is by no means automatic, even for those who sympathize with these priorities.

Combined Weight of Sermons

Given the above concern, another table may be helpful. In chapter two, it is explained that the three aspects share a combined gravity that comes from their inter-related nature. Though the fulfillment of one does not ensure the fulfillment of the others, they each contribute to the weight of a sermon. Therefore, a sermon may be weighty for different reasons related to the three aspects. Since every sermon does not have to demonstrate an even emphasis upon all three aspects, one option is to combine the results from all three aspects into an overall score for a sermon. Such a combination leaves room for a sermon to be deemed reasonably weighty even when not all aspects are fulfilled evenly. The result is a “combined weight” for each sermon.

To do this combination, I simply assigned a number value for each label from zero to four: “not” (0), “not very” (1), “somewhat” (2), “soundly” (3), and “very” (4). These values may be added together to give the combined weight. Because there are three aspects, the possibilities range from zero to twelve. Obviously, sermons that are very high on this scale are strong in all three aspects while sermons that are very low are weak in all three. However, this scale also leaves room for a sermon that may have been weak in one of the aspects to still fall on the weighty side and visa-versa. For example, a sermon that was “very expository” and “very Christ-centered” but “not very doctrinal” would still receive a combined weight of 9. As another example, a sermon that was “not very expository” and “not very doctrinal” but “soundly Christ-centered” would receive a

combined weight of 5. Table 3 shows the total number of sermons from the sample for every possible combined weight.

Table 3. Total Number of Combined Weights

Combined Weight	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Number of Sermons	5	4	3	6	1	4	1	5	6	7	6	6	6

First, sermons with a combined weight of 0 to 2 are of special concern because they could not have fulfilled any aspect greater than “somewhat.” In other words, there was no aspect fulfilled in such a way that would pull the score toward the weighty end of the spectrum. In the final results, exactly twenty percent (12 out of 60) of the sermons are in this range. These twelve sermons are divided among seven pastors. So over one-third of the pastors preached at least one sermon that was weak in all three aspects.

Second, on the other end of the spectrum, sermons with a combined weight of 10 to 12 are obviously quite strong in all three aspects. The gravity of these sermons is especially commendable. In the final results, exactly thirty percent (18 out of 60) sermons are in this range. These sermons are divided among eleven pastors. So over half of the pastors preached at least one sermon that was strong in all three aspects.

Third, sermons in the 3 to 6 range may have been strong in one aspect while quite weak in the other two, or they may have been rather balanced in a low to moderate fulfillment of all three aspects. No matter the mixture, the overall gravity of the sermons in this range is limited and subject to further critique. Twenty percent (12 out of 60) of the

sermons are in this range.

Fourth, sermons in the 7 to 9 range are either weak in one aspect while strong in the other two or balanced in a moderate to sound fulfillment of all three aspects. Though sermons in this range are not necessarily as desired as those in the 10 to 12 range, they should not be discounted either. In such sermons the preacher has reasonably emphasized at least two aspects of God's Word, his truth, and his gospel. Such sermons deserve an acknowledgment of weightiness and have hope for being spiritually effectual upon the hearers. They may be considered a legitimate contribution to an overall pulpit ministry. Thirty percent (18 out of 60) of the sermons are in this range.

Old and New Testament Results

Since I evaluated at least one sermon from each pastor based in the Old Testament and at least one based in the New Testament, it is of interest to compare the evaluation results for indications of possible patterns. Table 4 includes all of the sermons that had a clear base text.⁴ There were 23 from an Old Testament text and 32 from a New Testament text.

Significantly, the sermons from the New Testament tended to be stronger regarding all three aspects. This difference is evident from several observations: (1) In all three aspects, over 40% of the sermons from the New Testament received the label "very." In contrast, only 17% of the Old Testament sermons received the label "very

⁴I have decided not to include sermons in this chart that had no clear base text even if the sermon was predominantly based in one or the other testament. The reason is that with no base text, the preacher is more free to develop his sermon in whatever direction he desires. Though in reality this frequently happens even with a base text, at least a base text serves as a reference point for evaluation. This decision excludes five sermons that I evaluated. They are identified in Appendix 4 by the phrase "selected" in place of a Scripture reference.

Table 4. Comparison of Results from Old and New Testament Texts

Labels		Not	Not Very	Somewhat	Soundly	Very
Expository	OT	17%	22%	17%	26%	17%
	NT	3%	19%	19%	19%	41%
Doctrinal	OT	35%	13%	30%	13%	9%
	NT	9%	13%	19%	13%	47%
Christ-Centered	OT	35%	17%	13%	9%	26%
	NT	16%	16%	6%	22%	41%

expository.” Only 9% received the label “very doctrinal,” and only 26% received the label “very Christ-centered.” (2) In all three aspects, the entire right side of the table significantly favors the New Testament sermons. For expository merit, the combined percentage of “soundly” and “very” is 43% for Old Testament sermons but 60% from New Testament sermons. For doctrinal essence the ratio is 22% to 60%, and for Christ-centeredness, it is 35% to 63%. (3) Without listing all the proportions, the left side of the table also reveals a significantly greater percentage of Old Testament sermons that were weaker than New Testament.

Multiple reasons for this difference may be suggested: (1) Perhaps the sample of sixty sermons is not sufficiently representative of typical preaching patterns. (2) The New Testament may typically lend itself to more overt doctrinal instruction which may in turn result in more direct exposition. (3) Since the New Testament context is closer to that of the contemporary church, quality treatment of the Old Testament may simply be more difficult. (4) Obviously, the New Testament more explicitly discusses Christ and the gospel than the Old Testament which naturally yields more Christ-centered sermons. (5)

Perhaps the amount and the nature of narrative in the Old Testament inclines its preaching to be less doctrinal or gospel oriented. In contrast, the majority of the narrative in the New Testament is explicitly about Christ and the spread of the gospel. (6) Perhaps the strong legal tone of the Old Testament requires a greater diligence on the part of the preacher to emphasize grace.⁵

However homileticians may wish to discuss these dynamics, clearly this evaluation method provides a resource for the discussion. The results appear to support the notion that the Old Testament is frequently more difficult to preach, not only with regard to Christ-centeredness but also with regard to exposition and doctrine. At the very least, these findings serve as a caution for the preacher who is preparing a sermon from the Old Testament. He may be prudent to give extra consideration to the three aspects. Otherwise, he may deliver a sermon that seems to have a compelling message but is actually quite light with regard to its content.

Results for Each Question

Since there are twenty-one questions on the evaluation form, there are multiple ways that the resulting answers could be organized and compared. For example, it may be of interest to see whether there is a relationship between a particular central concern and a particular distinctive element. Or one may wish to examine the relationship among the fourth distinctive elements for each aspect which concern various contextual perspectives or perhaps the sixth distinctive elements which concern application. Further, the most

⁵Most of these reasons are echoed by Sidney Greidanus in his discussion of the difficulties of preaching from the Old Testament. See Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 16-25, 33-39.

commonly or least commonly fulfilled questions could be isolated for study. Rather than depict these various possibilities, I offer a single table that gives the overall results for each question (see Table 5). This organization provides for several notable observations.

First, when compared with Table 2, there are numerous instances where the answers to the central concern questions do not automatically correlate with the final labels. For example, not every sermon that had a central concern answer of “very much” received a final label of “very” in that aspect. The central concern of Christ-centered preaching received 23 answers of “very much,” but there were only 19 sermons ultimately labeled “very Christ-centered.” Such fluctuation holds true for all five possible degrees of central concern answers and final labels.

The reason for this discrepancy is the incorporation of the distinctive element questions. The broad impression provided by the central concern questions is very significant but should not be the final word. The distinctive element questions are more specific and, thus, serve as a check on the central concerns. They provide a more substantive means for determining the final label than merely the broad impression. The discrepancies among the central concern answers and the final labels demonstrate that the distinctive element questions do indeed accomplish their purpose. Of course, in many of the cases, the central concern answer did correlate to the final label, but there were numerous instances where the broad impression was in need of modification upon closer examination.

The sermon “Case Closed” by Begg serves as a specific example.⁶ The

⁶Alistair Begg, “Case Closed,” 5 December 2010 [on-line]; accessed 8 April 2011; available from <http://www.truthforlife.org>; Internet.

Table 5. The Overall Results for Each Question

		Not Really	A Little	Some-what	Much	Very Much
Central Concerns	Expository preaching	6	12	11	11	20
	Doctrinal preaching	10	13	12	7	18
	Christ-centered preaching	12	15	5	5	23
D. E. of Exposition	Main idea consistent with text	11	5	14	9	21
	Supporting points covered passage	16	8	14	5	17
	Explained grammar/syntax	31	11	6	3	9
	Explained literary/historical context	18	13	7	8	14
	Derived legitimate timeless principles	6	13	9	16	16
	Thoughtful application to the hearers	6	6	15	8	25
D. E. of Doctrine	Central doctrine as propositional truth	7	7	8	17	21
	Clarified in understandable terms	14	4	13	9	20
	Topical organization of doctrine	27	6	9	7	11
	Explored the broad biblical picture	29	9	6	5	11
	Solid exegesis and sound logic	13	5	9	10	23
	Applied individually/corporately	8	5	14	10	23
D. E. of Christ-Centeredness	Addressed fallen human condition	10	12	7	7	24
	Magnified God's character	6	21	7	8	18
	Magnified person/work of Christ	17	9	6	5	23
	Explained redemptive context	27	9	6	7	11
	Held forth gospel-related promises	14	10	14	7	15
	Emphasized response of faith	8	9	13	10	20

following is my answer to the central concern question for expository preaching.

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage? Very much. Romans 8:33-36 is a rather small expository unit that cuts off in the middle of Paul's thought, but it is full of rich content that Begg treated very thoughtfully and carefully. The entire sermon from beginning to end was completely devoted to expounding its meaning and significance. Begg covered the rest of the passage from 8:37-39 in that evening's sermon, so I am allowing latitude for his choice of cut-off point.

Then, as I interacted with the distinctive element questions, I found that three of the six elements were fulfilled rather well. Begg's main idea was consistent with Paul's. He had supporting points that covered some of Paul's thought progression though not all, and he derived sound principles from the verse. However, three of the elements were not fulfilled well. He did not explain any grammatical/syntactical details. He barely touched on the context, and he offered little in the way of direct application. So in the end, the sermon was thoroughly concerned with the passage and consistent with it, but it was also deficient in several elements that particularly help listeners to interpret the meaning personally. These deficiencies do not warrant a harsh deduction in the final label, but they do warrant the slight deduction from "very expository" to "soundly expository."

The sermon "Fasting that Changes the World" by Platt provides an example of a sermon where the distinctive element considerations raised the final label from what was suggested by the central concern answer.⁷ The following is my answer to the central concern question for doctrinal preaching.

Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma? Somewhat. Platt started the sermon with an explanation of the purpose for fasting. Fasting and its purposes are a well established matter for doctrinal instruction in the church. Platt discussed two principles for why the church fasts. The rest of the

⁷David Platt, "Fasting that Changes the World," 2 February 2011 [on-line]; accessed 21 April 2011; available from <http://www.brookhills.org>; Internet.

sermon gave a long list of ways the church should pray for missionaries, but it was less dogmatic than the beginning discussion concerning the principles. Platt simply gleaned examples from Acts 13-14.

So my initial impression was that the sermon was “somewhat doctrinal.” But as I answered the distinctive element questions, I found that four of the six were fulfilled strongly by Platt while another was somewhat fulfilled. Only the fourth distinctive element which concerns the exploration of other Scriptures was not fulfilled strongly. Since his sermon presented clearly explained doctrinal propositions in an organized manner and applied them insightfully, the final label was boosted to “soundly doctrinal.” Upon final count, this type of adjustment, either down or up, occurred twenty-six times in my evaluations.

Another observation may be made from Table 5 regarding the central concern of Christ-centered preaching. The final tally reveals an inclination towards polarization in my answers. The answers “not really,” “a little,” and “very much” were used 50 times while the answers “somewhat” and “much” were used just 5 times each. This observation intrigued me because I was not aware of favoring the extremes until the overall results were accumulated. Upon reviewing the evaluations, I still affirm the appropriateness of the answers. Therefore, perhaps the fulfillment of this central concern simply tends to be more polarized than the others.

There may be a couple of reasons for this tendency: (1) The difficulties of preaching from the Old Testament mentioned above may contribute to a polarization of sermons that are Christ-centered or not. When preaching from the Old Testament, perhaps a preacher can tend to “forget” about preaching Christ so that Christ and the gospel are barely mentioned. On the other hand, when the preacher preaches from the New

Testament, Christ is frequently front and center, so that it is quite common for the sermon to focus upon him.⁸ (2) Perhaps a focus on Christ requires more intentionality than expository or doctrinal preaching. It may be more natural for preachers to preach a message that is at least partially supported from the Bible or partially concerned with Christian doctrine than a message that just partially focuses Christ. It may be that Christ is either the deliberate subject of the sermon in which he receives much attention, or he is largely overlooked. Both of these suggestions are worthy of further investigation.

Another observation that can be made from Table 5 is that there are four distinctive elements that are notable for being less commonly fulfilled than the others. In my evaluations, preachers commonly did not explain grammar or syntax, did not offer a topical organization of a doctrine, did not explore the broad biblical picture of a doctrine, or did not explain the redemptive historical context. With regard to these distinctive elements, roughly half of the time they received an answer of “not really.” In only one-sixth of the instances, did they receive an answer of “very much.” Perhaps many evangelical preachers would deem these elements less necessary than others, or perhaps there are many who are uncomfortable with grammatical/syntactical explanation. Further, such things as the thoughtful organization of a doctrinal topic and the commitment to explain redemptive historical connections may require an extended level of intentionality that some preachers may not prioritize.

⁸Graeme Goldsworthy discusses the reality of two types of passages in the Bible, those that are clearly about Jesus and those that are not “about the gospel events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” He suggests that many evangelical preachers simply focus on God or faith when preaching from the latter. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 2.

Conclusion About Overall Sermon Results

The preceding analysis is sufficient to demonstrate that the evaluation method succeeded in offering a well-balanced means for examining the various substantive issues. Further, the potential for interacting with overall sample results in the discussion of preaching is extensive.

Individual Pastor Results

In this section, I briefly discuss the individual results for each pastor studied. Though these results do not provide a reliable assessment of entire pulpit ministries, they are useful for demonstrating how such an assessment could be made if a larger sample of sermons were studied. These initial impressions also reveal questions for further research.

Average Combined Weight Per Pastor

The “Master Evaluation Table” in Appendix 4 groups the final label results from each pastor together so that they may be easily reviewed. These results may be examined to determine the average combined weight of the three sermons from each pastor. Of course, a single sermon may have uncharacteristically affected the average for a pastor low or high, but Table 6 depicts the type of results possible with my method.

First, five pastors stand out for having a lower average than the rest of the group. Franklin, Osteen, and Young had an average of 1 while Andy Stanley and West had an average of 3. The average among the other fifteen pastors was 8.3. So though this glance at their preaching is only tentative, these numbers encourage further inquiry to these pastors’ commitment to the three aspects. Extensive study of their preaching may confirm or correct this initial impression.

Table 6. The Average Combined Weight of the Three Sermons from Each Pastor

Combined Weight Average ⁹	Pastors
0	
1	Franklin, Osteen, Young
2	
3	A. Stanley, West
4	
5	Hybels, Warren
6	Stone
7	C. Stanley
8	Cymbala, Driscoll, Evans
9	Fabarez, Gaines, Keller, MacArthur
10	Dever, Platt
11	Begg, Piper
12	

Second, the pastors in my study who are also notable scholarly advocates for expository, doctrinal, or Christ-centered preaching, by virtue of their books and articles,¹⁰ all demonstrated a quality degree of commitment to the three aspects in actual practice. This assessment is especially true of Begg, Piper, and Dever who all averaged in the very high range of combined weights. Fabarez, Keller, and MacArthur all averaged 9. There is a reciprocating benefit of the fact that the evaluations affirm the gravity of their preaching. First, the reliability of the method is bolstered in that the evaluations appear to be

⁹Averages with a decimal were rounded.

¹⁰See n. 3 on p. 166.

consistent with the preaching of the pastors who are notable as scholarly authorities regarding the three aspects. Second, the reliability of their pastoral preaching is bolstered in that the sample results found them to be practicing what they preach, or better, preaching what they preach.

Third, of the eight pastors who averaged a combined weight of 6 or less, six of them are high profile “seeker-sensitive” pastors.¹¹ Two of the most notable leaders among the seeker movement, Hybels and Warren, both averaged 5. Stone averaged 6 while Andy Stanley, Osteen, and Young averaged 3, 1, and 1 respectively. If these numbers were to hold true for a larger study, they might help to confirm the common criticism of the seeker movement that it often promotes “watered down” content for the sake of intrigue.¹²

However, the results also suggest that seeker-sensitive preaching occurs on different levels of gravity. For example, in this small sample, the averages of Warren, Hybels, and Stone reflect a gravity greater than that of Stanley, Osteen, and Young. Further, if the preaching of Driscoll, Cymbala, and Keller were included under the label, which some scholars might be inclined to do, their results demonstrate a more impressive degree of gravity. A more extensive study of seeker-sensitive preaching could offer insight into the common tendencies among them as well as those who stand out for various commitments.

¹¹In the last section of this chapter, I address the possibility of defining a more clear definition of “seeker sensitive” and performing a more detailed study. For my current purposes, the widespread acknowledgment of these names for this category is sufficient.

¹²This is the first criticism raised by Douglas Groothuis in his article about dangerous characteristics of the seeker-sensitive movement. Douglas Groothuis, “Arguing with Success” [on-line]; accessed 19 July 2011; available from <http://equip.org>; Internet.

Christ-Centeredness of Seeker Sensitive Pastors with Low Combined Weight

To demonstrate the extension of an issue that may surface in evaluation, I examined the Christ-centeredness of the sermons from the six seeker pastors with the lower average combined weights. The reason for isolating this aspect with regard to their sermons is that the proclamation of Christ is of particular necessity in reaching seekers. Table 7 shows the results for Christ-centeredness from the three sermons from each of these pastors.

Table 7. Christ-Centeredness of the Sermons from Six Seeker-Sensitive Pastors

Christ-Centeredness	Not	Not Very	Somewhat	Soundly	Very
Hybels		2		1	
Osteen	2	1			
A. Stanley	2			1	
Stone	1	1		1	
Warren	2		1		
Young	2		1		

The results from this sample are not necessarily encouraging. One may have expected that these pastors' sermons would have a lower combined weight due to less emphasis upon exposition and doctrine, not less emphasis upon Christ. Perhaps their sermons would not be heavy in Bible or other areas of dogma, but still heavy in gospel matters for the sake of winning seekers. But this sample suggests a bent away from Christ-centered sermons. Half of the eighteen sermons were "not Christ-centered." Another 4

were “not very,” and 2 were “somewhat.” Only one-sixth of the sermons were “soundly Christ-centered,” and none were “very Christ-centered.” These results are of initial concern and may warrant further study.

Conclusion about Individual Pastor Results

Though the individual pastor results from this dissertation are not conclusive, due to the small sample from each pastor, they are fascinating to consider in terms of the potential for the evaluation method. A larger study of a particular pastor or group of pastors could provide a substantive perspective of various pulpit ministries. The seeker-sensitive comments above serve as an example of how the method may be used to examine a particular sub-group of evangelical preachers. Since the individual results in this dissertation are tentative, they are not considered any further in this chapter.

Specific Sermon Results

Beyond all of the above ways to organize and summarize the results, the evaluation method is particularly helpful because it gives specific categories for feedback concerning a single sermon. This section offers several examples of such feedback.

“Epilogue: Re-Creation”

In a sermon entitled “Epilogue: Re-Creation,” Platt preached the final sermon of a year long series that covered the entire sweep of salvation history.¹³ This culminating sermon had two main parts. In the first part, which required more than half of the 57

¹³David Platt, “Epilogue: Re-Creation,” 2 January 2011 [on-line]; accessed 8 January 2011; available from <http://www.brookhills.org>; Internet.

minute sermon, Platt reviewed the main stages of redemptive history up to the era of the church: creation, fall, patriarchs, exodus, united monarchy, divided monarchy, and Jesus. In the second part, about twenty minutes, Platt focused attention on the future of God's plan by turning to Revelation 21-22.

The sermon was striking for both its doctrinal essence and Christ-centeredness. With regard to Christ-centeredness, this sermon was one of three that I evaluated that received a perfect score of 100.¹⁴ It also received the label "very doctrinal." The reason for both of these results is that Platt's presentation of salvation history accessibly explored the topic of God's presence with his people, and it provided a rich redemptive emphasis that culminated in the experience of the saints with God and Christ in the final chapters of Revelation.

The evaluation of expository merit was not as simple. Concerning the central concern question, several considerations were involved in my answer. On the one hand, Platt devoted less than half of his sermon to a very lengthy passage (Rev 21-22) that would be difficult to cover in a full sermon. On the other hand, due to the near hour length of the sermon, he was still able to devote twenty minutes to the passage and offer many insights from it. Given these considerations, I answered the central concern question.

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage? Somewhat. Platt spent about twenty minutes in the second half of his sermon exploring many of the future realities described in Revelation 21-22. These two chapters are strongly connected, but they are really too long for a thorough engagement. Though Platt offered good insights and allowed the passage

¹⁴The other two sermons that receive a perfect score in the aspect of Christ-centeredness are Mark Driscoll, "The Coming of the Kingdom," 17 April 2011 [on-line]; accessed 23 April 2011; available from <http://www.marshillchurch.org>; Internet, and Michael Fabarez, "The King of Kings and Some Unlikely Princes and Princesses," 17 April 2011 [on-line]; accessed 30 April 2011; available from <http://www.compasschurch.org>; Internet.

significantly to influence his presentation, much of the content from the two chapters was not addressed.

Table A1 in Appendix 2 indicates that this question is to receive the answer “somewhat” if the sermon demonstrated “thoughtful interaction with one or more passages that influenced the direction of the sermon.” Platt’s interaction was thoughtful and clearly supported the theme of God’s presence with his people.

So the initial impression of the central concern was that the sermon would be “somewhat expository.” However, as I addressed the distinctive elements of expository preaching, I was compelled to answer three of them “very much.” Platt’s main sermon idea was about the culmination of God’s presence with his people which is highly consistent with the main idea of the passage. Further, Platt derived sound principles from the chapters in Revelation about the beauty of God’s presence, and he insightfully applied them to his congregation by calling them to lay down their earthly concerns for the sake of God’s kingdom. The other three questions received two answers of “somewhat” and one answer of “much.”

Consequently, because Platt’s distinctive elements of expository preaching were quite strong in the sermon, the final label for expository merit was “soundly expository.” This label was an increase from the initial impression of the central concern answer, but it was justified due to the substantive considerations of the distinctive elements. In the end, this sermon was an example of a topical organization, rich in doctrine and Christ-centeredness, that still offered sound exposition.

“A New You Resolution”

In the New Year’s sermon entitled “A New You Resolution,” Andy Stanley’s

main idea was clear: “It is always a mistake to decide what you want to accomplish before you first determine who you want to be.”¹⁵ As in his sermon, “One Not Everyone,” the main idea was a clear, timely piece of practical wisdom. Since Stanley is an excellent communicator, he was able to unite his message under this single idea in an engaging manner. As Stanley proceeded in this message, he emphasized the cultivation of character traits such as honesty, purity, and generosity.

In the sermon, Stanley only interacted with one passage of Scripture, Daniel 6:3-5, for less than five minutes. The passage describes Daniel’s resiliency in the transition under a new ruler, King Darius.

Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or *evidence of* corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was *to be* found in him. Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find *it* against him with regard to the law of his God.”

Even a cursory reading of this text reveals three prominent features: (1) Daniel’s “extraordinary spirit” of character and vitality, (2) Daniel’s great success under the new king, and (3) the high-level opposition that resulted from features one and two. With these features in view, I addressed the central concern for expository preaching on the evaluation form for Stanley’s sermon.

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical text or group of texts? Not really. Stanley incorporated Daniel 6:3-5 in order to show Daniel as an example of character, but explanation of the passage occupied only a very short part of his lengthy talk. The text was simply used to accent his main idea, but it appeared to have little influence upon his overall message. If the text had

¹⁵Andy Stanley, “A New You Resolution,” 3 January 2010 [on-line]; accessed 4 February 2010; available from <http://www.northpoint.org>; Internet.

been absent, the sermon would have simply been a few minutes shorter, but nothing substantive would have changed.

So the broad impression of the sermon was that the text exercised no legitimate governing influence over the development of the sermon. Upon closer inspection by way of the first and second distinctive element questions, the evaluator confirms that Stanley's main idea is only partially related to the text and that he neglects the actual features in the text.

1. Did the preacher shape a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author's main idea? Somewhat. The verses from Daniel do highlight his impeccable character, which was clearly Daniel's first priority. However, the text does not present a sequence as though Daniel first decided on his character and then decided on his aspirations. Daniel's success is rather a result of the blessing of God in accordance with Daniel 1:9, "Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion." Further, these verses especially highlight the opposition that arose against Daniel on account of his character, yet nothing was said in the entire sermon about the issue of persecution resulting from godliness.

2. Did the preacher incorporate supporting points that adequately covered the passage and were consistent with its logic? Not really. There was no attempt for the supporting points in the sermon to be influenced by the features of the text.

In the end, the sermon received the lowest label of "not expository."

In terms of feedback, if Stanley had allowed the text to inform and shape his main idea, his sermon could have become a sound demonstration of exposition, and he still would have been able to shape a main idea that effectively related to the modern situation of the New Year. Though there are many ways that the features in Daniel 6:3-5 may be articulated as a sermon's main idea, the following idea serves as a workable example: "The extraordinary spirit of the godly results in extraordinary renewal and extraordinary opposition."

As opposed to Stanley's main idea, the three obvious features of the text are captured in this statement. "Extraordinary spirit" uses the language of the text to highlight

Daniel's vitality and character. "Extraordinary renewal" relates to Daniel's context under the new king and captures God's blessing of success. "Extraordinary opposition" captures the persecution that arose against Daniel from the other commissioners and officials.

Because this main idea flows naturally from the text, the other distinctive elements of expository preaching would then be more readily incorporated into the sermon. The supporting development could explain the three features of the main idea. It could also highlight textual details such as the Aramaic רַנַּחַּ יְהִי־רָא בֵּיהּ, literally, "an extraordinary spirit was in him," and the logical sequence that resulted in opposition. It could highlight the historical context which readily relates to a New Year's focus on transition and renewal. It could explain principles, such as the reality that godly character often results in persecution, and offer applications, such as the need to prioritize godliness in times of transition and to trust in God's watch-care over those who trust in him.

Further, this main idea could also strengthen the doctrinal and Christ-centered foci which were also scored low in this sermon. With regard to doctrine, the idea is in propositional form and relates especially to the matter of being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. With regard to Christ-centeredness, there are several directions that the preacher could explore. He could emphasize God's grace in Daniel's life to preserve and bless in the midst of uncertain transitions. He could explore the analogy between Daniel's situation and Christ's in which impeccable character leads to deadly opposition.¹⁶ He could explore the parallel between Daniel's extraordinary spirit and the even better New

¹⁶For preaching Christ by the "way of analogy," see Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 262-66.

Testament promise of the Holy Spirit for those in Christ.¹⁷ He could also explain faith in terms of Daniel's example.

Upon final reflection, the main idea of Stanley's sermon is simply not worthy of governing his sermon. It is a practical and timely thought, but it does not afford the needed gravity for evangelical preaching. Perhaps the key oversight with regard to the sermon's gravity was his neglect of the first distinctive element of expository preaching. Had the sermon's main idea been truly shaped from the text, it could have still been timely for the New Year while also pointing the sermon in a direction that was weighty with expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered content.

“Religion and Its Victims”

In the sermon entitled “Religion and Its Victims,” MacArthur demonstrated a thorough exposition of Mark 12:38-44 in which Jesus cautions against false teachers and proclaims their condemnation.¹⁸ MacArthur focused on the Mark passage from beginning to end, and all of his supporting information was for the purpose of illuminating this passage. Further, he significantly fulfilled the distinctive elements of expository preaching, receiving 48 out of the possible 60 points. His expository merit label was “very expository.”

However, the sermon is not a strong demonstration of Christ-centeredness. My response to the central concern shows that the gospel was present as an undergirding

¹⁷This parallel fits Greidanus' category of “longitudinal themes” because it relates to the theme of God's presence in the Bible. See *Ibid.*, 266-68.

¹⁸John MacArthur, “Religion and Its Victims,” 20 March 2011 [on-line]; accessed 26 March 2011; available from <http://www.gty.org>; Internet.

reality but received little explicit attention.

Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ? A little. MacArthur did sprinkle some reminders throughout the sermon about God's grace toward the oppressed, about Jesus' gracious confrontation, and of being blessed to be in the true church. Still, the sermon was almost completely focused on that which is false. Very little was said about the nature of the true gospel.

Further, upon interacting with the distinctive element questions, only one of the elements was demonstrated significantly. Not surprisingly for a sermon focused on falsehood, it was the element that addresses the fallen human condition.

1. Did the preacher address deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition? Much. He certainly discussed the problem of false teachers in the world and their coming condemnation. However, he did not strongly relate the problem of being susceptible to false teachers which would apply more generally to all fallen men, teacher or not.

The evaluation process reveals that the sermon did not focus very much on God's character or the person and work of Christ. It mildly mentioned a couple of redemptive historical matters. It did not offer any gospel related promises, nor did it exhort the hearers concerning the nature of true faith. Therefore, the final evaluation label for this aspect was "not very Christ-centered."

This evaluation is especially notable because Christ himself is the speaker in the text. It confirms that it is possible to preach from the words of Christ without necessarily emphasizing God's grace in Christ. Though MacArthur does not say anything that would contradict the gospel, he also does not say very much that points to the gospel. I am not necessarily criticizing MacArthur for this reality because he preaches in a church context where the gospel is well emphasized. But it is important to recognize when a sermon is light on the redeeming grace of God in Christ.

If the preacher recognizes this issue before his sermon, he has the opportunity to modify his message so that more elements of Christ-centeredness are included. Perhaps in a sermon on false teachers, each point about false teachers could lead to a contrasting point about the true Teacher who is Christ. Perhaps an added emphasis upon God's grace to rescue his children from false teachers might be incorporated. Or perhaps the preacher may choose to go forward with the sermon as is but with the realization that his next sermon should focus more significantly on Christ.

“Jesus Rose From the Dead”

In a sermon entitled “Jesus Rose From the Dead,” Dever preached from Mark 15:42-16:8 to strongly hold forth the bodily resurrection of Christ as historical fact and the basis for the Christian hope.¹⁹ My final evaluation labeled this sermon “very expository,” “very doctrinal,” and “very Christ-centered.” The sermon is discussed here for two reasons.

First, Dever gave a clear example of the potential for a single sermon to be very weighty in all three aspects. My three central concern answers show how this potential became a reality in Dever's sermon emphases.

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage? Very much. Dever spent the first half of the sermon covering the details of the story from Mark. He explained every verse, and offered explanations and applications as he went. He then spent the second half of the sermon exploring the significance of the resurrection which is, of course, a legitimate focus on the significance of Mark's resurrection account.

Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma? Very much. Dever explained several important Christian dogmas as he

¹⁹Mark Dever, “Jesus Rose from the Dead,” 24 April 2011 [on-line]; accessed 7 May 2011; available from <http://www.chbcaudio.org>; Internet.

moved through the narrative in the first half of the sermon such as, the actual death and burial of Jesus' body, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the ability of Jesus to forgive sins. He then explained six specific reasons why the resurrection is significant in the second half of the sermon. Each reason was a dogmatic doctrinal principle.

Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ? Very much. The entire sermon focused on the world changing event of the resurrection. Dever strongly emphasized God's grace in Christ to win victory over death and offer forgiveness of sins. He also called his listeners to trust Christ for their future.

As should commonly happen, a strong demonstration of the central concerns corresponded to a strong demonstration of the distinctive elements. However, there was one notable exception which leads to the next reason why I include this sermon in the discussion.

Second, this sermon gives an example for how the evaluation method can provide constructive feedback in a very specific matter related to the three aspects even in a sermon that is weighty. In a weighty sermon, it may be tempting to simply affirm the sermon's strength and move to another evaluation. However, the distinctive element questions may reveal a specific area for constructive feedback. In the case of Dever's sermon, the second distinctive element of doctrinal preaching is noteworthy.

2. Did the preacher clarify a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms? A little. This answer is tricky because Dever gave much effort to explaining the doctrines that he presented. However, I have decided on this low rating because he spoke in such a fast and high intellectual manner and crammed so much information into his sermon that I believe many Christians, even mature and earnest ones, would have gotten quite lost. The sermon was not a good example of Dabney's principle of keeping the form "popular."²⁰ The frequent effect was that clarity was actually harmed by his efforts at explanation.

Even in a sermon that set forth dogmatic Christian truth plainly, offered a topical

²⁰Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric or a Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Carlisle, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1870), 51.

investigation, explored the broad biblical picture, demonstrated sound logic and solid exegesis, and applied the doctrinal truth to the hearers, it is a legitimate matter of concern that the popular accessibility of the doctrine was not a strength. Dever certainly gave much effort to explanation, but many of his efforts clouded rather than clarified. Considering the pace and length of this sermon (69 minutes), it likely covered three or four times the content of many typical sermons by evangelical pastors. I am certainly not an advocate of “sermonettes,” but perhaps this sermon is an example of too much information to the detriment of impact. It may be that Dever’s congregation is full of members who are adapted to such preaching, but it is difficult to envision young believers, visitors, or even some mature believers following this sermon without getting lost.

“The God Who Reconciles Sinners”

In a sermon entitled “The God Who Reconciles Sinners,” Keller preached from Hebrews 9:11-14 and explained the power of Christ to deal with the problem of human guilt.²¹ The sermon received a “very Christ-centered” label because it clearly focused on God’s grace in Christ to forgive sins. Keller discussed at length the fallen condition of human guilt and then presented the work of Christ as the remedy. The redemptive context was presented with regard to the meaning of Old Testament sacrifices as they point to the need for Christ’s sacrifice, and the promise of forgiveness was emphasized. In sum, the sermon held forth the gospel quite clearly.

The sermon was also “soundly doctrinal.” Keller clearly presented the subjective and objective dynamics of human guilt and then explained the atonement as the

²¹Timothy Keller, “The God Who Reconciles Sinners,” 17 April 2011 [on-line]; accessed 23 April 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com>; Internet.

answer. Keller's discussion had an apologetic edge in its heavy interaction with Freudian theories about guilt. Keller explained how Christianity agrees and disagrees with Freud's theories. There was a heavy logical development that complemented the significant doctrinal affirmations. It was not "very doctrinal" because he did not explore the broad biblical picture, and his use of Scripture was suspect, as I discuss below. Further, some of his discussion was perhaps too focused on Freudian explanations to the effect that the focus on Christian explanations was diminished. But in the end, the sermon's soundness of doctrinal essence was evident.

With respect to expository merit, the discussion of this sermon becomes quite interesting, especially due to exegetical considerations. In short, though Keller's entire discussion centered on Hebrews 9:11-14, I ultimately labeled the sermon "not very expository." The consideration of the central concern initially alerted me to the issue.

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage? Somewhat. Keller spent the entire sermon on Hebrews 9:11-14, so it would appear to the average listener that the sermon was very much involved with exposing the passage's meaning and significance. However, upon second thought, it is evident that the actual content of those four verses is not represented carefully. Keller simply used several points of reference in the verses to develop an apologetic that, though insightful, does not primarily come from this text.

The distinctive element questions forced me to clarify my reservations. I reasoned that the main idea of the sermon was basically consistent with the main idea of the text, the removal of human guilt by Christ. I also observed that Keller made mention of a significant textual observation, the *a fortiori* argument of verses 13-14. George H. Guthrie explains this logical characteristic.

These two verses form an "argument from lesser to greater," which reasons: "If something is true in a lesser situation, it is true to an even greater degree in a greater situation." Here the sacrifice of animals constitutes the lesser circumstance and the

offering of the blood of Christ the greater.²²

Though Keller acknowledged this argument, I struggled to affirm his subsequent explanation which essentially provided the construct for the entire sermon. The following is an excerpt from my second distinctive element answer.

Taking the passage in reverse, Keller first addressed the “lesser problem” of the subjective reality of the human guilty conscience (verse 14), then the “greater problem” of the objective reality of human guilt before God (verse 12-13), and then the “massively theological and powerfully personal” solution of Christ, the Great High Priest (verse 11).

Keller’s first two points appear to mistreat verses 13-14 in a couple of ways: (1) They flip the logical order of the author in which verse 13 is the lesser issue, the cleansing of the flesh, and verse 14 is the greater issue, the cleansing of the conscience. According to Keller, verse 14 is the lesser issue, the removal of subjective guilt, and verse 13 is the greater issue, the removal of objective guilt. (2) The distinction of the biblical author is not between objective and subjective guilt but rather between superficial, external cleansing and true, internal cleansing. The internal cleansing of Christ of verse 14 encompasses both subjective and objective guilt.²³

Further, I found that Keller did not really focus on the specific content of verses 11-12 concerning Christ as the Great High Priest. Rather, he offered a theological explanation of Christ’s identity as both God and man. The explanation was doctrinally sound but not clearly derived from the text.

In the end, Keller’s sermon could easily give the impression of being soundly expository to the average listener because Keller stays with the text throughout his sermon. But upon thoughtful consideration of the priorities of exposition, the sermon was

²²George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 311.

²³William Lane captures this subjective/objective reality of guilt removal in the phrases “decisive purgation of conscience” and “effective removal of every impediment to the worship of God.” William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 240.

actually “not very expository.” The actual content of the text is not explained very significantly or accurately. The message appears to have been much more directed by the interplay between Freudian and doctrinal categories than by the logic of the text. Keller is well known for his apologetic preaching style. This sermon may represent an instance when Keller’s apologetic priorities superceded expository priorities. Nevertheless, the sermon is still rather weighty due to its heavy fulfillment of doctrinal and Christ-centered priorities.

Conclusion about Specific Sermon Results

The above sermons offer a glimpse of some of the specific sermon insights that were gained from the evaluation process. They demonstrate that the method helps the evaluator to acknowledge the weighty dynamics of a sermon’s content and to identify areas of concern, suggestion, or improvement. They also demonstrate that the process of moving from central concerns to distinctive elements helps the evaluator to determine a broad frame of reference and then to specify more concrete feedback. Some of the issues are more readily diagnosed than others, but even in challenging cases, the evaluation questions provide parameters for quality dialogue. In addition to this section, Appendix 3 provides three complete evaluations for consideration.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates numerous possibilities associated with the evaluation method. The results may be examined from a variety of perspectives. Each evaluation provides twenty-one answers with three final labels, and all of these decisions have five possible degrees for fulfillment. These dynamics allow for extensive possibilities for

analysis.

The overall sample results allow for a comparison among various groups of sermons. The individual pastor results allow for pulpit ministry evaluation and comparisons among pastors. The specific results allow for a careful analysis of single sermons. In the concluding chapter, I suggest ways that these possibilities are potentially applicable among evangelicals with reference to academic studies, the local church, and personal development. If indeed the gravity of the three aspects calls for a substantive and well-balanced method of evaluation that weighs a sermon's degree regarding these matters, the method presented in this dissertation provides a legitimate answer that offers much potential.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Having come to the end of this dissertation, it is appropriate to reflect upon its value in several ways. First, I consider the evaluation method in light of established evaluation standards. Second, I offer possible applications of the evaluation method among evangelicals. Third, I consider contributions of this dissertation for the prescriptive angle of homiletics. Finally, I summarize the fulfillment of the thesis and the call afforded by the three aspects.

Evaluation Standards

Part of the value of this project concerns the standards for evaluation that I present. Evaluation methods must meet four basic standards: usefulness, practicality, ethicalness, and accuracy.¹ Accordingly, it is fitting to show how this dissertation addresses these standards.

First, an evaluation method should be useful to a particular audience.² If it does not offer desirable results that are useful for a field of concern, then further development is a waste of time. Concerning this standard, this dissertation demonstrates that there is indeed a place for the proposed method among evangelicals. Not only does any field that

¹Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 549-50.

²*Ibid.*, 550.

has a great amount of prescriptive emphasis need a balancing evaluation emphasis,³ but the lack of established sermon evaluation methods is explicitly noted by those within the field.⁴ Further, since the three aspects are the weightiest of all matters related to sermon content, the ability to measure their fulfillment in pastoral preaching is especially desirable. Finally, the results presented from actual evaluations demonstrate a broad range of desirable possibilities for interaction.

Second, an evaluation method should be practical. Not only the desired results, but the process of acquiring those results must be useful.⁵ There should be a pragmatic edge to evaluation. Unless a method is feasible to conduct for the specific purposes in view, it does not offer any benefit. Concerning this standard, this dissertation presents the evaluation of the three aspects in a manageable package. The central concerns and distinctive elements, while offering thoughtful substance about the three aspects, provide understandable categories for evaluation that do not cross the line of overkill. Further, the five steps of the method balance the desire for thoroughness with the needed aspect of efficiency. Admittedly, the full method is too involved for evaluation of live preaching, but its usefulness for interacting with recorded or printed sermons is evident. Some applications would require the full diligence and time commitments explained in this dissertation, but other applications could be less formal.⁶

³Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for the Rhetorical Appraisal* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948), 16, 21.

⁴William H. Roen, *The Inward Ear: A Sermon Evaluation Method for Preachers and Hearers of the Word* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1989), x. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21.

⁵Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 550.

⁶Formal and informal applications are explained in the next section.

Third, an evaluation method should be ethical. In other words, it must be conducted with integrity. Integrity occurs when the values that undergird the evaluation process are transparently presented, legitimately expected, and consistently applied.⁷ In this dissertation, I seek to be clear about my evangelical perspective and an operative understanding of the three aspects. I also explain that the central concerns and distinctive elements represent such common emphases among evangelicals that they are legitimate expectations for examining pastoral preaching. The importance of the evaluator operating with a high degree of preparation and diligence is also stressed. Further, he must seek a proper attitude that seeks the advancement of God's kingdom and constructive interaction with God's servants. Though no evaluation method can completely avoid the reality of human limitations with regard to integrity, I seek fairness throughout this dissertation.

Fourth, an evaluation method should be accurate. When the above three standards are met, a process for establishing technical accuracy must be established.⁸ Hence, the majority of this project involves understanding the nuances of the subject matter, developing a sufficiently thorough method, and demonstrating the general reliability of the method.

Addressing the standard of accuracy, Robert Weber explains that unreliability in content analysis can come from a variety of dynamics which include ambiguity in expectations, ambiguity in texts, simple errors, and cognitive changes within evaluators.⁹ This dissertation seeks to meet these concerns. I give carefully defined expectations with

⁷Ibid., 553.

⁸Ibid., 550.

⁹Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 1985), 17.

regard to the purpose of the method, the execution of the method, and the decision making process for each question. I anticipate textual ambiguity within the sermons both by addressing possible areas of overlap among the central concerns and distinctive elements and by providing guidelines for assessing degree. I seek to limit simple errors by requiring careful listening and notation, by requiring the central concerns to be evaluated together, and by providing the utility of evaluation tables (see Appendix 2).¹⁰ I address the potential for cognitive changes in the evaluator by not evaluating sermons until chapter 5 was completed, having fully established the method. Further, the sermons were evaluated in rounds to prevent the assessment of any one pastor from being unduly affected by slight cognitive changes on the part of the evaluator. With regard to changes of evaluator mood, the evaluator's prayer seeks divine help for a spirit of insight and fairness.

On the standard of accuracy, a final consideration is worthy of note. The primary benefit of the method is that it provides a substantive means for dialogue with regard to sermon content.¹¹ The dialogue itself is a means of accuracy accountability. Since evaluation is a subjective process, it is impossible to ensure perfect consistency, but as soon as the issues are "set on the table" for discussion, those involved serve as checks and balances unto each other. Whenever one individual disagrees with another's assessment, a necessary process of clarification takes place. In light of this effect, even the

¹⁰Chaps. 3-5 may be understood as a diligent attempt to clearly define expectations. In chap. 5, I address ambiguity in texts by explaining common scenarios where overlap may occur that might lead to confusion. I also address human error and forgetfulness by requiring detailed notes and providing tables for quick reference (see Appendix 2). In chap. 6, I address the possibility of cognitive changes in that I performed the evaluations in three rounds of twenty in order to limit the effect of inconsistency from affecting one pastor's sermons more than another.

¹¹See p. 7.

disagreements contribute to the basic goal of clarifying and promoting the preaching of the three aspects.

Possible Applications

Several specific applications are envisioned for the evaluation method. Some of the uses are formal and would require a fully qualified evaluator who is diligently equipped for the specific activity. Others are less formal but are grounded in the formal efforts of this dissertation.

Academic Applications

In light of the helpful nature of evaluation in the formal study of an art,¹² the method may be applied to at least two broad areas of academic homiletical study. The first relates to the research potential associated with the method. The second relates to the classroom potential.

Preaching studies. First, a variety of preaching studies may be performed which utilize the evaluation method. In the previous chapter, I demonstrate a variety of results from sample evaluations. Building from these ideas, a researcher may explore his own selection of sermons. The effort in this dissertation is primarily toward the development of the method. A future researcher could now utilize this foundation for an in-depth study of a category of interest.

A glimpse of such a category is provided in my brief comments about the seeker-sensitive pastors in chapter 6. Taking this category for example, an evaluator or

¹²Thonssen and Baird, *Speech Criticism*, 16, 21.

team of evaluators could establish a clear set of criteria for being seeker-sensitive, appropriate selection guidelines for the pastors, and a compelling sample of sermons. The evaluation method could be used to provide compelling insights concerning the substance of the preaching. Indeed, many categories for study may be specified. As one considers the variety of denominations, philosophies, and commitments, the categorical possibilities are many. For each one, the method has the potential to provide significant discussion concerning the gravity of the category's preaching.

A researcher could also use the evaluation method to examine further initial tendencies that surfaced in my evaluation results. The following are examples of research questions that may be developed from the initial findings of this dissertation: Is Old Testament preaching among evangelicals typically less weighty in the three aspects than New Testament preaching? Do sermons tend to be polarized with regard to Christ-centeredness? What distinctive elements of expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching are most regularly fulfilled or unfulfilled? Answers to such questions could then lead to a thoughtful discussion of the related reasons.

Rather than exploring categorical matters, a researcher may wish to study the preaching of an individual pastor in order to assess the content tendencies of his pulpit ministry. In the previous chapter, I demonstrate the type of analysis possible for such a study by sharing the individual pastor results. Though my findings are tentative, a more in-depth study could provide strong conclusions about the gravity of a particular pulpit ministry. Such research may yield results that would strongly affirm the substance of a particular pastor's preaching, or it may lead to caution about a pastor's preaching. Either effect would be helpful information for the church. The degree of awareness of such

studies would also correlate with a sense of accountability among pastors.¹³

An individual pastor study may also reveal specific tendencies with regard to content that could either be affirmed or challenged. For example, in light of my interaction with his sermon, “The God Who Reconciles Sinners,” it could be fascinating to further examine the preaching of Tim Keller. In the evaluation, I both affirm his doctrinal presentation of Christ and challenge his interpretation of the text. Perhaps further study would show that Keller, who is notable for his emphasis upon apologetics,¹⁴ regularly displays a tension between apologetic and expository commitments or perhaps not. In a similar way, a study of Andy Stanley’s preaching might examine the harmony between his one point sermons, which he strongly promotes,¹⁵ and the main ideas of his preaching texts.

Preaching instruction. The evaluation method could also be used for preaching instruction in a seminary setting. A series of lessons could develop much like the methodology of this project.¹⁶ After a theological presentation of the gravity of God’s Word, truth, and gospel, the professor could present the central concerns and distinctive

¹³In this respect, this dissertation moves toward a solution to the accountability problem articulated by Haddon Robinson referenced in the introduction. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21.

¹⁴See Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

¹⁵Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communication for a Change* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 101-16.

¹⁶The content of this project could readily translate into a semester long class. The class could simply be titled “Expository, Doctrinal, Christ-Centered Preaching” and would move more methodically through the steps suggested here. It would cover theological foundations, theoretical convictions, evaluation, and personal application to one’s own preaching.

elements of the three aspects. As the class gains a unified perspective of the issues, the professor could move toward more interactive instruction by means of directed evaluations.

The professor could select a sample sermon that the entire class would watch together while taking individual notes. He could then lead the class through a discussion of the central concerns and distinctive elements and have the class make a corporate decision on each answer. Depending on the efficiency of the interaction, the process could require several days to complete, but in the end, the class would have provided a label for all three aspects. As a further dynamic, if the professor has multiple classes, he could then share the results of other classes and discuss the similarities and differences among them. The ultimate benefit would not necessarily be a conclusive assessment of a particular sermon, but the instilled awareness of the content priorities in the students.

The professor may then assign a sermon for outside evaluation. It may be especially fruitful to assign pairs or small groups to the same sermon with the instructions to evaluate separately and then to discuss the results together. The professor could require a written report of the interaction that came from the process. Again, the main value would not be the labeling of a sermon, but the dialogue that flowed from the evaluation process. The students would be learning how to think critically and responsibly about the substantive issues of sermon content.

Local Church Applications

In addition to academic applications, the method may also be applied for the edification of the local church. The inter-personal dynamics of a church body require much

sensitivity, so the evaluation of the senior pastor from any of the church members is not necessarily recommended, even a member who is highly qualified. Because of the potential tension, objectivity would be difficult to achieve in such an attempt. Setting this possibility aside, there are other ways that this method could benefit the local church.

Outside consultations. Since evaluation from within the church body has interpersonal drawbacks, perhaps a better means for a pastor to receive feedback concerning his preaching is from an outside consultant. More specific than a “ministry consultant,” who attempts to offer overall insight concerning the various facets of a local church ministry,¹⁷ a “preaching consultant” may develop an edifying process for sermon interaction that is grounded on the convictions of this paper. Ultimately, the process might examine other dynamics of preaching too, but a major point of emphasis would be the evaluation of sermon substance.

Of course, it would be a deep statement of humility for a pastor to subject himself to such consultation, but in such a case, a local church would do well to sponsor such interaction. As in the seminary classroom, the final labels would not be the primary benefit but, rather, the dialogue and growth that would come from the process. Even a consultation that involved only a handful of sermons could have a significant impact upon a preacher and prove tremendously fruitful for his future years of service. When the potential influence upon a single pulpit ministry is considered, the potential kingdom impact for a ministry of consultation is shown to be exponential.

¹⁷An example of such a consultant ministry is “The Malphurs Group” founded by Dallas Theological Seminary faculty member, Aubrey Malphurs. See <http://www.malphursgroup.com>; Internet.

Search committees. Though it might not be practical to expect members of a pastor search committee to perform the evaluation method in the formal manner required for academic or consultation purposes, the principles presented in this dissertation can nevertheless provide insightful categories for listening and discussion among search committee members. Search committees are regularly comprised of lay persons who listen to sermons with a variety of preferences, but the importance of their role demands that they understand the criteria for truly weighty preaching. Chris Brauns explains the sobering reality of being a member of a pastor search committee.

If you are serving on a search committee, you have probably appreciated and benefited [*sic*] from preaching for many years. However, you must understand that you are about to move from being an appreciative person in the pew each week to the role of sitting in a judge's chair. Evaluating sermons requires a much deeper understanding of preaching. Many search committees are not equipped in this way; and, as a result, they do not accomplish their goal of calling an effective preacher.¹⁸

In light of this reality, the priorities expressed in this paper may significantly contribute to an effective search for the man who is to proclaim God's message on a weekly basis.

At the very least, the search committee could take time at the beginning of the process to educate themselves about the combined gravity of God's Word, his truth, and his gospel in preaching and then to examine the central concerns and distinctive elements of the three aspects. Then upon listening to sermons by prospective pastors, they would be aware of these priorities. They could even have the evaluation form in hand for shorthand notation of significant observations. These notes would provide for meaningful discussion whenever the committee reconvenes. Even if the committee does not discuss every question, the method provides substantive guidelines for the discussion as opposed to

¹⁸Chris Brauns, *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search: Biblical Principles & Practices to Guide Your Search* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 98.

general, undefined feelings.¹⁹ The final result may be that the committee moves in a direction they otherwise would not have moved and bring weightier preaching into their church's midst.

Personal Application

In addition to the above applications, the method may also be used for personal evaluation of one's own preaching. As a pastor embraces the combined gravity of the three aspects and understands how they are manifested in a sermon, he becomes increasingly capable of examining his own preaching in light of these priorities. In the end, this application is of utmost importance because personal accountability, on the part of individual pastors, is the greatest means for ensuring the proclamation of the three aspects in the church today. Pastors who hold themselves accountable before the Lord concerning their content provide the church with the best scenario for the faithful proclamation of weighty sermons. With this desire in view, there are at least two ways that a pastor may personally apply the method to his own preaching.

Formal personal evaluation. As part of a yearly evaluation process, an elder board, personnel committee, or the pastor himself may require the pastor to conduct a substance evaluation of his own preaching. The pastor would need to study the method in order to understand the concepts. Then he could perform it upon some of his own sermons. He would then report his own findings to a select group, discuss his own

¹⁹Brauns offers a sermon evaluation form and scoring method for use by a pastoral search committee. It is helpful but also addresses aspects of delivery and *pathos* that I am not attempting to address in this project. Its guidelines for content consideration are more general than my categories. I discuss the form toward the end of chap. 2 on pp. 64-65. *Ibid.*, 128-31.

perceived strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for the future.

Like the idea for outside consultation, this idea provides another option than inside consultation from other church members. Because the evaluations would be personal, any criticisms about the pastor's preaching would be from the pastor himself. This reality solves the relational tension of being evaluated by others within the church. Because it would be formally reported, the pastor would be compelled toward truthfulness and balance in his efforts. This reality helps solve the bias dilemma of being overly benevolent toward one's own preaching. Even though his own bias could never be completely removed, the pastor would be forced to think carefully about his sermon content before others. It is difficult to imagine that such a process would not benefit both him and his church.

Informal personal evaluation. The most desirable scenario is that a pastor learn to evaluate his every sermon with regard to the three aspects. Such evaluation goes beyond formalities to the penetrating of every thought process concerning the construction of sermons. In this respect, every stage of the sermon process from construction to delivery is subject to thoughtful reflection.

By construction, the entire process leading up to the delivery of the sermon is intended. The pastor who understands and embraces the process presented in this dissertation would not only begin his study with clearly defined priorities but would also be equipped to reflect periodically on his direction and development. For example, a pastor's typical method of construction may follow the expository process and lead to a sermon outline. Upon evaluation, he may realize that there is a significant doctrinal matter

at the center of his main idea. He would then be able to shape his sermon in such a way that it provides significant doctrinal instruction via the priorities of doctrinal preaching, even as it relates the meaning and significance of the biblical text via the priorities of expository preaching. Or perhaps a pastor is preparing to preach from an Old Testament passage and upon reflection he realizes that his sermon is strongly expository and doctrinal but also runs the danger of communicating legalism. He may then consider how the priorities of Christ-centered preaching might be included into his sermon so that the gospel rings clearly.

After delivery, a preacher may be able to observe dynamics that the pressures of preparation caused him to overlook. Whether reviewing an outline, a manuscript, or a recording, he would be wise to think through the categories presented in this dissertation. If an aspect were particularly weak, he would then be prepared for a stronger presentation the next time. Such regular reflection would help him become more proficient in the construction process and ensure that the substance of his ministry over time reflects a healthy balance of the three aspects.

Contributions for Prescriptive Texts

Though this dissertation is from the angle of evaluation, it may contribute to the angle of prescription in several notable ways. First, the equal approach to the three aspects that I present is not the typical direction of prescriptive texts. Yet in chapter 2, I demonstrate that a sermon's substance is based on the inter-related nature of the three aspects. Of course, works on sermon development tend to address all three aspects in one way or another, but most of them particularly emphasize only one of the aspects,

especially expository preaching. Others explicitly blend two of the aspects.²⁰ But works on preaching do not typically express an equal emphasis upon all three aspects. If it is legitimate to view the three aspects as the three primary, inter-dependent contributors to the gravity of a sermon's content, the field would benefit from a prescriptive text that emphasizes this notion.

Further, since I explicitly treat all three aspects, I am forced in this dissertation to clarify the specific emphasis of each one and relate them to one another. Chapters 3 and 4 represent my effort to distinguish the three aspects clearly even as I acknowledge the possibility for overlap among them at the beginning of chapter 5. Notably, I do not seek to capture each aspect with a single definition. Such attempts can tend toward either imprecision or wordiness in the tension between conciseness and comprehensiveness.²¹ Rather, my approach offers a concise central concern for each aspect followed by distinctive elements that expand a fuller perspective. Though all prescriptive works necessarily operate with something like "central concerns" and "distinctive elements," they do not necessarily acknowledge two levels of priorities in the explicit manner of this

²⁰For example, Bryan Chapell's work is specifically intended to harmonize expository and Christ-centered preaching. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994). Also for example, Joel Breidenbaugh's dissertation is specifically intended to harmonize expository and doctrinal preaching. Joel Breidenbaugh, "Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching: A Proposal and an Analysis for the Twenty-First Century" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

²¹As discussed in chap. 2, Donald Miller's attempt to define expository preaching is quite broad. His attempt to be concise serves as an example of imprecision. Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 21. On the other hand, Breidenbaugh's definition of "doctrinal expository preaching" represents an attempt at a comprehensive definition that is quite wordy: "the Spirit-empowered communication of a biblical doctrine derived from at least a paragraph of Scripture (or its literary equivalent) with regard to the text's historical, grammatical, syntactical, and contextual significance interpreted through the larger Christological-redemptive theme of the Bible, first experienced by and applied to the preacher and, then, to his hearers with the goal of obedient behavior in light of the theological truth of the text." Breidenbaugh, "Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching," 57.

dissertation. Such acknowledgment may lead to definitional and operational clarity in the development of sermons.

Further, the presentation of the central concerns and distinctive elements naturally leads to an acknowledgment of the issue of degree because it is clear that any given sermon may demonstrate various mixtures of these priorities. Prescriptive works on preaching may do well to acknowledge the weekly difficulty of incorporating all of the desirable matters of sermon content. Recognition and honesty with regard to the various dynamics of desirable sermon content help the growing preacher to learn balance in his pulpit ministry. In this respect, the central concerns and distinctive elements certainly provide a foundation for considering such a balance. When homileticians demand certain expectations of every sermon, from the strict exposition of a single text to the broad presentation of biblical theology, they sometimes fail to acknowledge various content considerations that accompany a healthy diet of preaching. Concerning this reality, perhaps my project sheds light on the development of realistic expectations for an overall pulpit ministry.

Answering the Call

In the introductory chapter, I present a call for a substantive and well-balanced evaluation method that weighs a sermon's degree of expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness. Chapter 2 demonstrates the legitimacy of the call by exploring the gravity of expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching, the necessity of evaluating sermons in terms of degree, and the lack of established methods for measuring the three aspects in a substantive and well-balanced manner. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a

theoretical foundation for answering the call by determining central concerns and delineating distinctive elements for the three aspects. Chapter 5 provides a practical means for answering the call by developing a substantive and well-balanced evaluation method that is based upon the theoretical foundation. Finally, chapter 6 demonstrates the potential for answering the call by exploring the results of actual sermon evaluations. In the end, the call is both legitimated and addressed by this dissertation.

The call to evaluate a sermon's expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness derives from the higher call to proclaim God's Word, his truth, and his gospel. Certainly, this call was Charles Spurgeon's priority when he exhorted his fellow ministers: "Brethren, weigh your sermons."²² Certainly, it was the apostle Paul's priority when he exhorted Timothy: "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*." (2 Tim 1:13-14). This dissertation is intended to facilitate these exhortations. A minister in Christ's church is "entrusted" with a "standard of sound words." The gravity of his calling derives from the gravity of the standard, and the standard is nothing less than faithfulness to weighty words. Whether any other benefit comes from this dissertation, I pray that it promotes this standard. May God's servants be faithful to proclaim God's message.

²²C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 71.

APPENDIX 1

SUBSTANCE EVALUATION FORM

General Information

(Throughout form, spaces expand to needed size as typing is added.)

Preacher:

Church:

Sermon Title:

Sermon Length:

Date:

Text:

Availability:

Evaluated:

Sermon Notes

Expository Merit

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage?

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher shape a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author's main idea?
2. Did the preacher incorporate supporting points that adequately covered the passage and were consistent with its logic?
3. Did the preacher explain key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage?
4. Did the preacher explain the message within its literary and/or historical context?
5. Did the preacher derive and explain legitimate timeless principles from the passage?
6. Did the preacher offer thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage?

Results

Central concern score: + Distinctive elements score: = Overall score:

Evaluation label:

Doctrinal Essence

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma?

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher proclaim a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth?
2. Did the preacher clarify a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms?
3. Did the preacher offer a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines?
4. Did the preacher explore the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines?
5. Did the preacher ground a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic?
6. Did the preacher explain the power and importance of applying a doctrine or set of doctrines individually and/or corporately?

Results

Central concern score: + Distinctive elements score: = Overall score:

Evaluation label:

Christ-Centered

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ?

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher address deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition?
2. Did the preacher explain and magnify the good and sovereign character of God?
3. Did the preacher explain and magnify aspects of Christ's person and/or work?
4. Did the preacher explain the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ?
5. Did the preacher hold forth gospel-related promises concerning the present and/or future state of believers?
6. Did the preacher emphasize the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith?

Results

Central concern score: + Distinctive elements score: = Overall score:

Evaluation label:

Final Comments

APPENDIX 2

EVALUATION TABLES

Table A1. Evaluating the Central Concerns

	Not Really (0)	A Little (10)	Somewhat (20)	Much (30)	Very Much (40)
Question 1: Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical text?	no legitimate concern for interacting with any texts, or texts were mishandled badly	some texts contributed to the sermon in some helpful ways but sermon direction not really influenced by exegesis	some thoughtful interaction with one or more passages that influenced the direction of sermon	at least one passage received diligent attention and was interpreted thoughtfully and accurately	whole sermon focused on a passage that was explained carefully and accurately and shown to be significant
Question 2: Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma?	no legitimate effort to explain doctrine or emphasize importance, or doctrine presented is unsound or simply not truly Christian	some doctrine discussed without much explanation and not significant to main direction of sermon	some of sermon devoted to doctrinal matters but doctrines discussed not central to the main direction of the sermon	significant emphasis on Christian doctrine and the sermon was heavily influenced by the dogma presented	whole sermon focused on dogmatic Christian matters in which a position was clearly embraced and shown to be significant
Question 3: Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ?	no legitimate effort to explain or emphasize aspects of the gospel or whole of sermon was legalistic, oppressive, or against the true Gospel	some gospel reminders or brief discussion of God's grace in Christ or brief appeal to Christ at the end of sermon	helpful gospel reminders sprinkled throughout sermon or quality appeal to Christ at the end of sermon	significant emphasis on Christ and correct gospel understandings but not comprehensive throughout entire sermon	sermon explicitly presented aspects of God's grace in Christ or was clearly developed to culminate in God's grace in Christ while avoiding legalism

Table A2. Evaluating the Distinctive Elements of Expository Preaching

	Not Really (0)	A Little (3)	Somewhat (5)	Much (8)	Very Much (10)
Question 1: Did the preacher shape a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author's main idea?	meandered with no apparent direction, or main idea not derived from passage	main idea only mildly discernable or mildly related to rest of sermon or passage	main idea discernable but not obvious, pervasive, or derived from main idea of passage	clear idea related to that of passage but not over entire sermon, or pervasive but not explicit	clear main idea consistent with that of author and governing entire sermon
Question 2: Did the preacher incorporate supporting points that adequately covered the passage and were consistent with its logic?	biblical author's content and logic basically absent	some reflection on ideas from passage but not a significant factor	some significant points based on the passage	represented much of passage but not thoroughly	thorough presentation of author's content and logic
Question 3: Did the preacher explain key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage?	grammatical/syntactical details basically absent	a couple grammatical/syntactical details but not very relevant	some relevant grammatical/syntactical details	some truly insightful grammatical/syntactical details	rich with insightful grammatical/syntactical details
Question 4: Did the preacher explain the passage within its literary and/or historical context?	no discussion of literary/historical context	literary/historical explanation in a passing comment or two	literary/historical explanation brief or mildly relevant	literary/historical explanation intentional and relevant	literary/historical explanation intentional and truly insightful
Question 5: Did the preacher derive and explain legitimate timeless principles from the passage?	principles absent, muddled, or not clearly derived from passage	some passing principles related to passage	some clear principles that related to passage	prominent principles related to passage	prominent and clear principles grounded firmly in the main ideas of passage
Question 6: Did the preacher offer thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage?	application absent or unrelated to passage	some brief or passing application or general discussion of modern significance of passage	some specific points of application but not very prominent	intentional, thoughtful, specific application based on passage	pervasive, thoughtful, specific application that relates the modern significance of passage

Table A3. Evaluating the Distinctive Elements of Doctrinal Preaching

	Not Really (0)	A Little (3)	Somewhat (5)	Much (8)	Very Much (10)
Question 1: Did the preacher proclaim a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth?	no recognizable or established doctrine/s presented	some vague or brief doctrinal mention but no strong position	doctrine/s discussed or presented but not prominent	doctrine/s prominently presented but not necessarily central	clear, central doctrine/s prominently presented as truth proposition
Question 2: Did the preacher clarify a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms?	doctrine/s remain abstract, unexplained and largely inaccessible to layman	short, passing explanation of doctrine/s with little effect	some intentional explanation of doctrine/s with mild effect	intentional explanation of doctrine/s with positive effect	excellent explanation of doctrine/s through various means
Question 3: Did the preacher offer a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines?	no topical organization concerning doctrinal matters	topic presented but not carefully organized or obviously doctrinal	doctrinal topic with some discernable organization but not pervasive	doctrinal topic that influenced much of the content	clear, topical organization with regard to doctrinal matters
Question 4: Did the preacher explore the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines?	no input from other Scriptures concerning doctrine/s	some other Scriptures briefly considered without much insight	some other Scriptures consulted providing some good insight	enlightening presentation of other key Scriptures concerning doctrine/s	in-depth, enlightening presentation of other key Scriptures concerning doctrine/s
Question 5: Did the preacher ground a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic?	doctrine/s presented with no legitimate biblical, logical support	doctrine/s presented with a little biblical, logical support	doctrine/s presented with some key Scriptures for support	doctrine/s supported with sound exegesis and sound reasoning	doctrine/s thoroughly supported from sound exegesis and sound reasoning
Question 6: Did the preacher explain the power and importance of applying a doctrine or set of doctrines individually and/or corporately?	application absent or unrelated to doctrine/s	some brief or passing application or general discussion of significance of doctrine/s	some specific points of application but not very prominent	intentional, thoughtful, specific application based on doctrine/s	pervasive, thoughtful, specific application that relates significance of doctrine/s

Table A4. Evaluating the Distinctive Elements of Christ-Centered Preaching

	Not Really (0)	A Little (3)	Somewhat (5)	Much (8)	Very Much (10)
Question 1: Did the preacher address deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition?	no mention of aspects related to humanity's fallen condition	some general remarks but not very specific or insightful	some brief discussion of humanity's fallen condition but not very insightful	some good discussion of humanity's fallen condition	insightful aspects of humanity's fallen condition intentionally and clearly explained
Question 2: Did the preacher explain and magnify the good and sovereign character of God?	no focus on God's character	some brief comments about God's character	God's character receives some good explanation	intentional focus on aspects of God's character	aspects of God's character powerfully explained and magnified
Question 3: Did the preacher explain and magnify aspects of Christ's person and/or work?	no focus on Christ's person/ work	some brief comments about Christ's person/ work	some brief discussion about Christ's person/ work	intentional focus on Christ's person/ work	Christ's person/ work powerfully explained and magnified
Question 4: Did the preacher explain the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ?	no comments concerning redemptive-historical context	some brief comments about redemptive-historical context	some brief explanation of redemptive-historical context	some good discussion of redemptive-historical context	redemptive-historical context presented clearly and insightfully
Question 5: Did the preacher explain and magnify gospel-related promises?	no mention of gospel promises	some promises briefly mentioned	some promises briefly explained	gospel promises explained with some emphasis	gospel promises essential to message and receive diligent focus
Question 6: Did the preacher emphasize the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith?	no comments about the response of saving faith	response of saving faith briefly mentioned	some good statements about the response of saving faith	some good explanation concerning the response of saving faith	response of saving faith receives diligent attention and emphasis

APPENDIX 3

SAMPLE EVALUATIONS

Sample Sermon 1

General Information

Preacher: Jim Cymbala

Church: The Brooklyn Tabernacle, New York, New York

Sermon Title: "The Happy Pilgrim"

Sermon Length: 27 minutes

Date: April 3, 2011

Text: Psalm 84:5-7

Availability: <http://www.brooklyntabernacle.org>

Evaluated: April 8, 2011

Notes

Introduction

Case going on in the news: A Muslim teacher is asking for a 6-9 month leave so that she can make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Christians don't go on pilgrimages because there are no sacred sights.

The NT never mentions sights that you might think should be mentioned: The manger, the cross, the tomb, the upper room.

This is because no geographical location is sacred.

Jesus said that the location does not matter. Quote from John 4: "Spirit and truth."

What provoked the Protestant Reformation was Luther's pilgrimage to Rome.

The indulgences really got to him.

The other thing that got him was relics.

But of course, in the NT we don't find anything like that.

God is no more here than he is on the number 3 train right now.

But the OT was very much focused on Jerusalem. The worship involved going to the Temple and, before that, the Tabernacle which used to have the cloud of the presence.

Every worship connection was about Jerusalem and the Temple.

They would travel several times a year to celebrate the feasts.

The Psalms of ascents were written for this very thing.
But now, remember there are no sacred places.
You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. God lives in you.

This Psalm that we are about to read was not written by David. It was written by the sons of Korah. Korah was a worship leader. No one can place when it was written. We just know this, that this man wants to get to God's house. But he can't get there. He is remembering the pilgrimages there.

Reading of Psalm 84: "How lovely are your dwelling places . . ." (Reading accompanied by some brief explanations along the way.)

Re-reading of verses 5-7: "How blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; In whose heart are the highways *to Zion!* Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring, The early rain also covers it with blessings. They go from strength to strength, *Every one of them* appears before God in Zion."

This psalmist is the real deal. He is so sincere.

He says, "I only want to go to the temple because God is there."

Application: I only want to go to church because God's presence is there.

I want God. You can know about God and not know God. Only God's presence within us, communion with God, changes us.

Illus: Pastors complain that people walk out if they go barely over. Yet those same people will watch a ball game for three hours.

I'm not a legalist, but why would God punish people who act like that and send them to heaven. In heaven, there is no entertainment, just God.

How many people are longing for God? What are we doing this for?

"If they don't want to be with God now, why would they want to be with him forever?"

Psalm 34 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

But about Israel he says: "Their lips honor me, but their hearts are far from me."

Advice to pastors: If you think people are going to come because they are supposed to, forget about it. They will only come because they want to.

Application: The pilgrimage for us is to see his face. We won't have blessings from him. We will have him.

You can have God, but the more you have him, the more you want him.

Are you satisfied or hungry? You are both. It is the paradox of the faith.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst." They are blessed, but they are hungry.

Jesus blesses, and you want him more.

List of examples.

One of the signs of a sick person is they don't want to eat.
With the world, you get sick of whatever it has to offer. Then you have to get a new high, but with Jesus, you never overdose. You can never get too much of prayer and Jesus.

So this guy is sincere. He has enjoyed God's presence, and now he wants more.
When God blesses us, there is a joy and fulfillment.
So who is this blessed person? The person who is on pilgrimage to God.

Verse 6: "Baca" means "weeping."

The verse says that when they get to the Valley of Weeping, springs of joy overflow.
You might be in a Valley of Weeping.

But the person who wants God has sudden springs of living water.

Joseph said, "What the Devil intended for evil, God meant for good."

In the very spot, where the Devil said, "I'll kill you," God brings a spring.

Also the rains come down and form pools of blessing.

God will pour blessings on your head.

They will go from strength to strength until they appear before God in Jerusalem.

Because God will never forsake anybody who wants him.

Expository Merit

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage? Very much. Cymbala focused on Psalm 84 from beginning to end and heavily focused in verses 5-7 which provided a short but sensible expository unit. Every phrase in this unit was incorporated into the sermon. He gave much attention to both the passage's explanation and application.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher shape a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author's main idea? Very much. The main point of the sermon was to long for God's presence as though on a pilgrimage. This idea fit perfectly with that of the psalm.
2. Did the preacher incorporate supporting points that adequately covered the passage and were consistent with its logic? Very much. Though he did not cover the entire psalm, the three verses that he explained were covered quite well. He did not have clear sub-points, but his explanations covered the verses in a seamless manner.
3. Did the preacher explain key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage? A little. He captured the meaning of the word "Baca" (weeping) and explained it. It supported a significant emphasis toward the end of the sermon on suffering. But this was the only grammatical/syntactical element of the sermon.
4. Did the preacher explain the message within its literary and/or historical context? Very much. He not only explained the background of the psalm, but he also discussed the significance of the temple and the pilgrimage in Old Testament religion. The discussion

was very insightful.

5. Did the preacher derive and explain legitimate timeless principles from the passage? Very much. He derived several key principles about the value of seeking God's presence that are supported from the passage.

6. Did the preacher offer thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage? Very much. Cymbala offered several thoughtful applications about seeking God even in a difficult place. He spoke of God's blessing in the place where the Devil threatens to kill. The applications were profound and moving.

Results

Central concern score: 40 + Distinctive elements score: 53 = Overall score: 93

Evaluation label: Very Expository

Doctrinal Essence

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma? Somewhat. Cymbala spoke much about the satisfying presence of the Lord which is full of doctrinal significance, but the sermon was not developed for explaining a proper understanding of God's presence or for teaching about any particular matters of dogma.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher proclaim a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth? Somewhat. He spoke about the importance of God's presence, but he made no clear central doctrinal proposition or set of propositions concerning the subject.
2. Did the preacher clarify a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms? Somewhat. Cymbala clarified some misconceptions that pertain to God's presence, especially with regard to the misconception that there are sacred locations for worship. However, he did not really explain why there is no longer a sacred location, such as the Temple, he mainly just explained that it was so.
3. Did the preacher offer a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines? Not really. There was not any topical organization to this sermon. The sermon most prominently focused on God's presence and the desire to experience it, but Cymbala did not organize the subject into any recognizable set of truths.
4. Did the preacher explore the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines? Not really. After briefly grounding the new situation of God's presence with John 4:21-24 (see the next question), Cymbala made no significant attempt to explore other verses that would illuminate the New Testament picture of God's presence.
5. Did the preacher ground a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic? Somewhat. Cymbala used a reference to John 4:21-24 to support the truth that Christians have no sacred places on this earth. Further, Psalm 84 supported the claims about the satisfying nature of God's presence. But since there was no overt doctrinal focus, the grounding of doctrine with these verses was only partially recognizable.
6. Did the preacher explain the power and importance of applying a doctrine or set of

doctrines individually and/or corporately? Much. Cymbala's applications were very good; however, their doctrinal connections were not abundantly clear in the sermon. Nevertheless, he heavily focused on applications that do flow from the New Testament realities of God's available presence.

Results

Central concern score: 20 + Distinctive elements score: 23 = Overall score: 43

Evaluation label: Somewhat Doctrinal

Christ-Centered

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ? A little. Cymbala certainly held forth the desirableness of God's presence and the impact that God can have on a person who begins to experience him. He also mentioned that God would never reject a person who sought after him. However, hardly anything was said about Christ or the gospel in this sermon, or even about God's redeeming grace.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher address deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition? Somewhat. He spoke briefly about the emptiness of the world and its inability to satisfy. He also spoke briefly about people's sinful resistance to seek God's presence.
2. Did the preacher explain and magnify the good and sovereign character of God? Much. He dwelled much on the satisfying nature of God's presence, but beyond God's ability to sustain people, he did not explain much about God's character that make his so satisfying. The listener could walk away from the sermon wondering why God should be so desirable.
3. Did the preacher explain and magnify aspects of Christ's person and/or work? Not really. Virtually nothing was said about Christ in this sermon.
4. Did the preacher explain the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ? Somewhat. He had a very good explanation of the historical context of Israel and their pilgrimages and the new situation of the New Testament. But he missed an opportunity to explain clearly why the New Testament situation is different or how the New Testament believer is to seek after God. He certainly called his hearers to seek God in a personal way, but he never made the redemptive bridge very clear.
5. Did the preacher hold forth gospel-related promises concerning the present and/or future state of believers? Somewhat. He spoke several times of heaven and of seeing God's face. He also spoke much of God's satisfying and sustaining grace and joy in the midst of trials. These are all clear gospel promises; however, their relationship to the gospel was never explained. So their status, as "gospel related" was unclear.
6. Did the preacher emphasize the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith? Somewhat. The whole sermon addressed the matter of biblical faith because it was about the desires of people's hearts. However, Cymbala did not offer any direct

explanations of the dynamics of faith, and there was not much in terms of direct exhortations to faith.

Results

Central concern score: 10 + Distinctive elements score: 28 = Overall score: 38

Evaluation label: Not Very Christ-Centered

Final Comments

This sermon is a good example of the gravity of exposition, even in a case where doctrinal and Christ-centered aspects are not very prominent. Since Psalm 84 was so clearly explained, the listener received a powerful message about the need for God's presence and was given the opportunity to feed on the Word.

This sermon may be an example of the limitations of time upon the fulfillment of all three aspects. Since the sermon was only twenty-seven minutes long and was so committed to exposition, Cymbala did not have much time to incorporate such things as an exploration of the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or the clear explanation of gospel dynamics. So there may be a practical relationship between the length of a sermon and its ability to be weighty in all three aspects.

The focus of the sermon was primarily "theocentric," and in a church context that is saturated in the gospel, it would provide a healthy emphasis. However, this sermon gives an example of how easy it is to preach from the Old Testament without ever focusing on Christ. In a context where listeners are not well educated in the exclusivity of Christ, they could easily get the impression from this sermon that one may approach God without going through Christ.

Sample Sermon 2

Basic Information

Preacher John Piper
Church: Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Sermon Title: "Out of Your Heart Will Flow Rivers of Living Water"
Sermon Length: 48 minutes
Date: February 19, 2011
Text: John 7:25-39
Availability: <http://www.desiringgod.org>
Evaluated: May 23, 2011

Notes

Jesus is in Jerusalem teaching a divided crowd.

Some wanted him arrested. (Verse 27)

Some thought that the Messiah would appear suddenly, but everyone knew where Jesus was from.

Others thought he was the Messiah. "Will the Messiah do more signs than him?"

The reason for the opposition was intense because he was saying things about himself and them that were very offensive.

Verse 28-29 - Jesus said that they do not know the Father who sent him.

"Him you do not know."

They were the most religious, privileged, and well-taught people in the world.

That's why they want to kill him.

Jesus said, "I know God, and you don't so therefore you can't recognize me."

This is said over and over again in the Gospel of John. This is why John is such an offensive book to liberals. It presents Christ as the exclusive way to God.

John 5:23

John 5:42

John 6:45

John 8:19

John 8:42

These comments are outrageous in a pluralistic world.

If you want to help someone today to know if his claim to know God is true, then show him Christ.

Perfect, crucified, raised, and reigning.

If they receive him, then they know God.

This will make you very unpopular, if you simply speak what Jesus spoke. You don't need to raise your voice.

The Pharisees got wind that there were positive responses and they took action.

Verse 32 - They sent officers to arrest him.

We don't know what happened until verse 45.

But we are told in verse 33-34 what Jesus said: "I will be with you a little longer.

Where I am you cannot come." In other words, you may try to arrest me, but I will go wherever I want to go.

"I came to do my Father's will and it will be done . . . and there is nothing that you can do to stop it."

Verse 36 - They are clueless.

So the situation is that they have been told that they don't know God and that they are powerless to stop him from doing his Father's will. What will he do next?

The Feast is almost over. What will he say?

Perhaps the Pharisees are standing right in front of him.

In verse 45, the officers explain, "No one ever spoke like this man."

What did he say?

Verses 37-39 - "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink . . ."

Last week we learned about how to know that Jesus is true.

This week the question is "Why should you care even if it is true?"

So you should ask, not only, "Is he true?" but also, "Would I want him if he were true?"

A part of the answer is realizing to whom he is speaking these words.

He is speaking to his enemies. He is giving a totally open invitation.

The only qualification that he is making is this: "If anyone thirsts . . ."

And he says, "Come to me."

The fact that he is making this offer to his adversaries is part of what should make you want him.

Jesus has said, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often I would have gathered you."

This is one of those times.

Application: How often has he stretched out his hands to you and said that?

When he has spoken to you from a book or sermon or radio and said, "If you are thirsty come."

Maybe its been eighteen years since you ever drank.

So I want to walk through these precious words.

Five things about Jesus' words.

1. What does it mean "thirst"?

A. The water is free. It is a gift. The only condition that is mentioned is need.

B. The human soul has thirst. The soul has something like physical thirst.

"When you go without water your body gets thirsty, when you go without God

your soul gets thirsty.”

This is the most important thing to know about yourself.

All theology, all study, all biblical learning, all preaching, is designed to feed the soul.

Everything Jesus said was aimed at this, that you might drink and be satisfied.

C. Jesus is what satisfies the soul. What Jesus offers in himself is satisfying to the soul.

I'm after drinking not thinking. All I want to do is drink.

“Ideas are cooking, not drinking.”

2. What does coming to Jesus to drink mean?

A. Jesus is what we drink.

John 6:35 - “I am the bread of life.”

Your soul was made for Jesus.

So many people don't have a clue what they are? They are taught in school that they are just an animal.

B. The soul can drink.

“How Great Thou Art” - “Then sings my soul”

Your body might not be moving a single muscle, and your soul at that very moment might be drinking deeply.

C. Coming and drinking are what it means to believe on Jesus.

Verse 38 - “Whoever believes in me”

John 6:35 - “Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

This should put away the notion that saving faith is a decision to believe facts.

Faith is a coming of the soul to receive from Christ.

3. The rivers flow from the soul.

Verse 38 - “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

Literally it is out of his “belly.”

It means you are more than your body.

When you come to Jesus to drink, you don't just get a single drink, you get a spring.

“Because the river maker is in your soul.”

“You will never ever have to look anywhere else ever.”

“You are home. He is not a stepping stone. He is not a means to anything. He is an end.

4. The Spirit

Verse 39 - “The Spirit whom those who believed in him would later receive.”

There was an experience of the Spirit that could not be enjoyed until Jesus died, was raised, and ascended. “It is the experience of the fellowship with the risen and glorified Christ.”

This is for everyone who believes.

Jesus is going to ask the Father to send the Spirit. And he speaks about the Spirit in

such a way that he is really talking about himself coming by the Spirit.

John 14

“What God gives you is Christ by his Spirit.”

Romans 8:9 - “Anyone who doesn’t have the Spirit of Christ doesn’t belong to him.”

You have him or you are not a believer.

When we come to Jesus to drink, we don’t have a body to come to.

5. The witness of Scripture

“As the Scripture has say . . .”

Isaiah 58:11 - “You shall be like a watered garden. Like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”

God planned this for you. God had you in mind a long time ago. God had this moment in mind a long time ago.

God planned that you would have a soul and that the Son of God would come into the world, and he planned that you would be awakened by this sermon . . . or not.

So I say to all of you: “If anyone in this room is thirsty, let him come to Jesus and drink.”

Expository Merit

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage? Very much. The entire sermon was spent on exploring John 7:25-39. Piper explained all of the key aspects of the passage and labored over its significance.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher shape a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author’s main idea? Much. The sermon was certainly focused upon the theme of drinking from Christ though Piper did not present a crystal clear unifier.
2. Did the preacher incorporate supporting points that adequately covered the passage and were consistent with its logic? Very much. Piper covered the passage diligently through a discussion of the situation and through five explorations concerning the exhortation of Christ to drink.
3. Did the preacher explain key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage? Much. He had several notable observations that were quite significant. He observed that Christ is the object to be consumed. Jesus does not say to drink “from” him but just to come to him and drink. This was a major point of emphasis. He also observed that the living water would flow from the “belly” of those who come to Christ. He explained the spiritual significance of the idea: “Because the river maker is in your soul . . . You will never ever have to look anywhere else ever.”
4. Did the preacher explain the message within its literary and/or historical context? Much. Piper explained the situational things happening in the chapter quite well though he did not explain anything about the Feast of Booths nor the literary development of John.
5. Did the preacher derive and explain legitimate timeless principles from the passage?

Much. Derived several key principles from the text such as, "Faith is a coming of the soul to receive from Christ." But his main outline points were simply topics not prominently articulated principles.

6. Did the preacher offer thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage? Somewhat. Especially at the end of the sermon, Piper applied Jesus' invitation to his hearers. However, so much of the sermon was explanation, that there was not a great amount of application throughout the sermon.

Results

Central concern score: 40 + Distinctive elements score: 47 = Overall score: 87

Evaluation label: Very Expository

Doctrinal Essence

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma? Very much. Piper addressed multiple areas of Christian importance. The sermon was full of dogmatic claims about the nature of Christ's salvation. He addressed the exclusivity of Christ, the nature of the soul, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher proclaim a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth? Much. Piper did not set forth a central doctrine or set of doctrines in his sermon, but he did make several large points from doctrinal positions. For example, he clearly defined belief in Jesus as coming to him and drinking deeply within the soul.

2. Did the preacher clarify a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms? Much. Piper contrasted his definition of belief in Jesus with the view that believing in Jesus is simply making a decision based on facts. He spoke clearly about the non-physical nature of the soul's need.

3. Did the preacher offer a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines? Somewhat. Though Piper did not set forth a clear doctrinal topic for inquiry, much of the body of his message was about the topic of spiritually thirsting and drinking. His five main points all related to this metaphor.

4. Did the preacher explore the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines? Very much. Piper explored several passages beyond his immediate text concerning two doctrinal issues. First, he explored five other passages in John that point to the exclusivity of Christ. Second, he explored several other biblical references concerning the matter of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

5. Did the preacher ground a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic? Very much. The doctrinal statements that Piper did make throughout the sermon were consistently derived from sound interpretation of the passage.

6. Did the preacher explain the power and importance of applying a doctrine or set of doctrines individually and/or corporately? Somewhat. So much of the sermon was explanation that the main application did not come until the end. However, it was a very

clear call to respond to Jesus' invitation and to participate in everything that Piper had been explaining.

Results

Central concern score: 40 + Distinctive elements score: 46 = Overall score: 86

Evaluation label: Very Doctrinal

Christ-Centered

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the redeeming grace of God found exclusively in Christ? Very much. The sermon was focused on the exclusivity of Christ's salvation and the free invitation of Christ for salvation.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher address deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition? Much. Piper especially explained the thirst in the human soul for Christ that comes from not knowing him.
2. Did the preacher explain and magnify the good and sovereign character of God? A little. Piper did not devote much energy to theology proper in this sermon. He did speak to the united mentality of the Father and the Son which results in the free invitation given by Christ. In the end, the sermon was mainly strictly about Christ. The explanations of the Holy Spirit were also with direct reference to the Spirit's relationship to the ministry of Christ.
3. Did the preacher explain and magnify aspects of Christ's person and/or work? Very much. The entire sermon was focused upon the words of Christ and how they reveal his character and ability to satisfy the soul.
4. Did the preacher explain the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ? A little. I was somewhat surprised that Piper did not explain the context of the Feast of Tabernacles and how it adds significance to Christ's words. He only had one brief point that looked back at the testimony of the Old Testament in general concerning the passage.
5. Did the preacher hold forth gospel-related promises concerning the present and/or future state of believers? Very much. Piper clearly set forth Christ's ability to satisfy all those who would come to him.
6. Did the preacher emphasize the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith? Very much. Piper clearly articulated a definition of saving faith in terms of spiritually coming and drinking from Christ and then clearly called his hearers to respond to Christ's invitation by faith.

Results

Central concern score: 40 + Distinctive elements score: 44 = Overall score: 84

Evaluation label: Very Christ-Centered

Final Comments

This sermon is a fine illustration of doctrinal exposition though it may have been an even stronger demonstration had Piper clearly articulated his five points of discussion as timeless principles. Solid principles were in the sermon, but they were not necessarily prominently presented as such. Nevertheless, the doctrinal significance of the presentation was obvious.

Further, Piper's doctrinal, expository focus was on the satisfying nature of Christ. Piper did not just use the passage to glean a theme about Jesus and then develop his sermon from doctrinal categories. Rather, he gleaned the theme and then shaped his discussion points from the text. The effect was that the sermon was very expository even while it focused on doctrinal, Christ-centered subject matter.

Sample Sermon 3

Basic Information

Preacher: Mark Driscoll
Church: Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington
Sermon Title: "Jesus and Anxiety"
Sermon Length: 66 minutes
Date: November 14, 2010
Text: Luke 12:22-34
Availability: <http://www.marshillchurch.org>
Evaluated: December 29, 2010

Notes

"We believe the Bible." That it is true and practical. We receive it as truth and look for it to be helpful and practical. But the only way to do that is to know Jesus. The Lord God entered history. Jesus is our example, instructor, and our Savior. He died for us and sent his Spirit to enable us to live for God. We don't come to the Bible just to learn good principles. We come to get to know Jesus.

Question 1: "What does your mind fear?"

Jesus says, "Fear not."

This is the most frequent command in the entire Bible. This must be a perennial issue. Jesus doesn't say, "Don't plan and prepare." It is immature to be irresponsible in the name of trusting the Lord.

So plan, but don't freak out about it.

"What is fear?" "Our response to danger that is real or perceived."

Everyone fears. What do you fear? "Many of us fear many things."

You can hear Jesus' command a couple of ways: as command or as invitation.

Illustration: Guy with a tattoo that says "Fear not."

Illustration: Another guy who has a performance mind set with God. When he hears "Fear not" it just makes him more afraid. But God is saying it as a loving invitation.

Let me unpack fear for you.

Fear is vision without optimism.

Fear seems reasonable to the person fearing even when it is irrational.

Examples: Fear of clowns, peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth, Germans, sermons, or laughter

Fear can be about not getting what we want.

Fear can be about getting what we want and losing it.

Fear can be about getting what we don't want.

Fear reveals our values, our loves, our priorities, and our longings.
Fear turns us into false prophets.
Fear is not always sinful. You're kind of silly if you don't have any fears.
But every fear is an opportunity to trust in God.
Fear manifests itself through anxiety.

Question 2: "When does your body manifest anxiety?"

Jesus says, "Do not be anxious about your life. Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his life?" "Jesus is saying that you are actually going to shorten your life-span."

Fight or Flight

Physical signs of fear based anxiety.

(My story is that God saved me at 19 and then got married and in college and starting a church, I was very fearful. I decide to be tough. But then I just "tapped out." I had a sinus infection, heart burn. I couldn't sleep. I was maybe clinically depressed. I didn't want to see anybody.)

Scientific explanation of physical anxiety. Lots of medical terms and chemical explanations. Also, lots of behavioral observations.

"Jesus says if you have anxiousness, you are reducing the quality of your life."

The Bible says that Jesus can sympathize with our anxiety. (Heb 2)

He knows what it is like to have family think he's crazy, to be single and alone, to have friends betray him.

Isn't it nice that Jesus isn't just giving us principles that he has no need of.

"Don't you love this Jesus?"

Jesus goes a completely different direction from all the books on fear and anxiety. They all point you to yourself. But Jesus directs us completely outside of yourself.

Question 3: "Where is your treasure?"

Jesus goes to your stuff. He's not trying to take your stuff. He is trying to take your stress.

V. 23a - "Life is more than food." Our stomach becomes our God. Food is an indicator of where we're running with our fears and anxieties.

V. 23b - "Life is not about clothing."

V. 24 - "Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. . . But God feeds them."

Here's the point. "If God is gonna feed a raven . . . he is willing and glad to help us."

V. 25 - When we freak out we are acting like heretics. My anxiety reflects a desire to be sovereign, to have control over the future. If you are trying to control the future, you are trying to be God.

"What are you worried about that really is in the hands of God?"

V. 27 - "Consider the lilies." "Your dad's a good dad. He'll take care of you."

V. 30 - Your Father knows your needs. Instead seek his kingdom.

V. 32 - "Fear not. For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

“Your theology, results in biography, culminates in doxology.”

“My dad is much bigger than my enemies.” God is a King. He is generous. He loves us in our big brother, Jesus.

“Faith is an internal conviction that leads to an external action.”

Jesus is saying, “Give.” Don’t give junk. Give good things. Take something that actually pains you to lose, and give it away.

John 3:16 - The gift that God gives to us is none other than his Son. We need to give our best.

It is such a joy to give.

Ultimately, your heart follows your money.

Combat fear by knowing the Father.

1. Your Father is a rich and generous King.
2. Your Father’s Kingdom has nothing to fear.
3. Your Father has proven faithful.
4. Your Father asks you to be generous as an act of faith.

When the government decides that it can’t give anymore, the church is really needed. Some comments and figures about the church budget and the offering.

Expository Merit

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly involved with exposing the meaning and significance of a biblical passage? Much. The entire sermon focused on Jesus’ command to “fear not” from Luke 12:22-34. By the end of the sermon, Driscoll had basically covered the entire passage. However, much of his sermon was developed without reference to the passage. Most of the first half of the sermon was a psychological discussion of fear that could have been developed completely apart from the passage.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher shape a main idea that is consistent with the biblical author’s main idea? Very much. In this passage, the main idea is very simple, “Do not fear.” Driscoll began with this thought and dwelled on it throughout his sermon.
2. Did the preacher incorporate supporting points that adequately covered the passage and were consistent with its logic? Somewhat. His three main divisions were a blend of subject divisions and textual divisions. They were the three questions: What does your mind fear? When does your body manifest anxiety? Where is your treasure? He did move through the text verse-by-verse toward the end of his sermon so that the entire text was discussed, but Driscoll’s supporting ideas were only partially influenced by the logic of the text.
3. Did the preacher explain key grammatical and/or syntactical aspects of the passage? Not really. The commentary was simply in the form of reading statements from Jesus and then talking about them. There was no discussion of specific words or their syntactical

connections.

4. Did the preacher explain the message within its literary and/or historical context? Not really. There was no effort to explain the original context either with reference to Luke's Gospel or to Jesus' historical situation.

5. Did the preacher derive and explain legitimate timeless principles from the passage? Much. He drew several timeless statements from the text. "God doesn't want to take your stuff. He wants to take your stress." "Your heart follows your money." "Combat fear by knowing the Father." "Anxiety will shorten your life-span." It is questionable whether this last principle is legitimately derived from the passage since Jesus only addresses the impossibility of adding to life-span with anxiety, not necessarily taking away from it.

6. Did the preacher offer thoughtful application to the hearers from the implications of the passage? Very much. Driscoll's main idea was an application: "Do not fear." But he also had several more specific applications that came from the text, especially toward the end when he was exhorting his hearers to give to others.

Results

Central concern score: 30 + Distinctive elements score: 33 = Overall score: 63

Evaluation label: Soundly Expository

Doctrinal Essence

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly committed to teaching matters of established Christian dogma? A little. The sermon had some doctrinal/dogmatic features, including a brief doctrinal claim about the Bible at the very beginning, a brief four point list about God's character, and a few other scattered statements about God and Christ, but the sermon also included so much discussion of things that are not matters of established Christian belief that the overall doctrinal impression is rather low.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher proclaim a central doctrine or set of doctrines as propositional truth? Somewhat. He did make some propositional statements about the Bible, Jesus, and the Father. But none of them served as a central doctrine for propositional examination.

2. Did the preacher clarify a doctrine or set of doctrines with sufficient definition in understandable terms? A little. He spoke very clearly and accessibly, but it was not abundantly evident that he was intentionally explaining the meaning of any particular doctrine. Much of his explanation was spent on explaining psychological distinctions rather than biblical ones.

3. Did the preacher offer a topical organization of a doctrine or set of doctrines? Somewhat. The sermon was organized around the subject of fear, which is an important teaching topic, but the points were not intentionally doctrinal. Driscoll also had a brief sub-topic on the character of God as Father.

4. Did the preacher explore the broad biblical picture of a doctrine or set of doctrines? Not really. Driscoll made very few comments about other portions of Scripture.

5. Did the preacher ground a doctrine or set of doctrines in solid exegesis and sound logic? Much. The doctrinal statements that Driscoll did make were well grounded. His statement about God's generous, loving character was especially well grounded in the passage (see verse 28).

6. Did the preacher explain the power and importance of applying a doctrine or set of doctrines individually and/or corporately? Much. Driscoll did exhort his hearers to apply God's character to their fears. He explained that the key to combating anxiety is to embrace the character of God.

Results

Central concern score: 10 + Distinctive elements score: 29 = Overall score: 39

Evaluation label: Not Very Doctrinal

Christ-Centered

Central Concern

Was the sermon thoroughly developed to point to the grace of God in Christ? Somewhat. Driscoll addressed that God's love in Christ should be the foundation for our combat with fear. He did this at several places in his sermon. However, much of the sermon simply focused on psychological and physiological descriptions of fear and the practical affects of being less anxious, so that it is difficult to say that the development was "thoroughly" pointed toward the way that Christ's salvation enables us to receive God's grace in this area.

Distinctive Elements

1. Did the preacher address deficiencies and/or consequences related to the fallen human condition? Very much. He thoughtfully addressed the human tendency to be anxious, and he confronted human inability to deal with anxiety apart from God. He also confronted the tendency to be self-centered in attempted solutions.

2. Did the preacher explain and magnify the good and sovereign character of God? Very much. Some of his strongest thoughts in the sermon were about God's generous, loving character as a Father.

3. Did the preacher explain and magnify aspects of Christ's person and/or work? Somewhat. He did make a brief reference to the atonement. He made a larger point of Christ being able to sympathize with human weakness, but he did not attempt any significant explanation of Christ's person or work.

4. Did the preacher explain the redemptive-historical context of his message in light of Christ? Not really. Driscoll made no clear comments of a redemptive-historical nature.

5. Did the preacher hold forth gospel-related promises concerning the present and/or future state of believers? Somewhat. He certainly held forth Jesus' promise that God would take care of the needs of his people. However, there was not much in the way of eternal promises that would point beyond the temporal concerns of life..

6. Did the preacher emphasize the response of repentant, obedient, and/or persevering faith? Very much. He explained that trusting God's generous, loving character is the key to combating anxiety. He also exhorted his hearers to give away their possessions while

trusting that God would take care of them.

Results

Central concern score: 20 + Distinctive elements score: 40 = Overall score: 60

Evaluation label: Soundly Christ-Centered

Final Comments

From a doctrinal standpoint, this sermon was somewhat difficult to evaluate. The subject of anxiety is an appropriate matter for Christian teaching, and it could easily be addressed through the presentation of clear Christian dogma. The preacher could present Christian principles about anxiety and also relate the subject to other theological matters. In this sermon, Driscoll uses some of these means, but the majority of his sermon was so focused on psychological or physiological issues that the doctrinal aspects were largely overshadowed. So I was torn about how much credit the sermon should receive for the central concern. I ultimately scored it on the low side, but I could understand another evaluator scoring it more in the middle. Had Driscoll focused more on clear Christian teachings about anxiety or more on theological principles that apply to the subject, rather than so much psychological and physiological discussion, his sermon would have been a weightier demonstration of doctrinal preaching.

APPENDIX 4

MASTER EVALUATION TABLE

Table A5. Master Evaluation Table

Preacher Title / Text / Time	Not (0)	Not Very (1)	Somewhat (2)	Soundly (3)	Very (4)	Combined Weight
Begg "Case Closed" Rom 8:33-36 / 37 min.				Exp.	Doc. C-C	11
Begg "Here Is Your God" Isa 40:9-11 / 37 min.				Exp. Doc.	C-C	10
Begg "No Ordinary Child" Luke 2:25-35 / 41 min.					Exp. Doc. C-C	12
Cymbala "Passover" Exod 12 / 33 min.				Exp. Doc.	C-C	10
Cymbala "The Happy Pilgrim" Ps 84:1-12 / 27 min.		C-C	Doc.		Exp.	7
Cymbala "The Other Easter Message" Matt 28 / 30 min.			Exp. Doc.		C-C	8
Dever "Believing Is Seeing" Mark 10:46-52 / 56 min.				Doc.	Exp. C-C	11
Dever "Jesus Rose From the Dead" Mark 15:42-6:8 / 69 min.					Exp. Doc. C-C	12
Dever "The King's Life" 2 Sam 13-20 / 65 min.		Doc.		Exp.	C-C	8
Driscoll "Creation: God Makes" Gen 1:1-2 / 59 min.		Exp.	C-C		Doc.	7

Table A5–Continued. Master Evaluation Table

Preacher Title / Text / Time	Not (0)	Not Very (1)	Somewhat (2)	Soundly (3)	Very (4)	Combined Weight
Driscoll “Jesus and Anxiety” Luke 12:22-34 / 66 min.		Doc.		Exp. C-C		7
Driscoll “Coming of the Kingdom” Luke 17:20-37 / 57 min.				Exp.	Doc. C-C	11
Evans “Identification of the Cross” Gal 2:20-21 / 36 min.					Exp. Doc. C-C	12
Evans “Loving Your Woman” Eph 5:25; 1 Pet 3:7 / 29 min.		C-C			Exp. Doc.	9
Evans “Moses: The Murderer God Used” Exod 2:11-3:10 / 27 min.	Doc. C-C		Exp.			2
Fabarez “Post-Christmas” Ps 145 / 53 min.			Doc. C-C		Exp.	8
Fabarez “The King of Kings” Judg 6-7 / 54 min.			Doc.	Exp.	C-C	9
Fabarez “Working to Rest” Rom 12:17-18 / 56 min.			C-C	Exp.	Doc.	9
Franklin “How to Ensure Success” Josh 4:4-9 / 23 min.	Exp. Doc. C-C					0
Franklin “Lost Language” Neh 13:24 / 27 min.	Doc. C-C	Exp.				1
Franklin “The Quit Option” Heb 12:2-3 / 24 min.		Exp. Doc. C-C				3
Gaines “Share Jesus” John 1:35-42 / 32 min.				C-C	Exp. Doc.	11

Table A5–Continued. Master Evaluation Table

Preacher Title / Text / Time	Not (0)	Not Very (1)	Somewhat (2)	Soundly (3)	Very (4)	Combined Weight
Gaines “The Gospel” 1 Cor 15:1-8 / 30 min.				C-C	Exp. Doc.	11
Gaines “The Power of Choices” Deut 30:1-20 / 44 min.	C-C		Doc.	Exp.		5
Hybels “Absolutely” Rom 8:14-16 / 32 min.		C-C	Exp. Doc.			5
Hybels “He Shall Be Called” Isaiah 9:6 / 32 min.	Exp.		Doc.	C-C		5
Hybels “Unlimited Power” Selected texts / 30 min.	Exp.	C-C			Doc.	5
Keller “Hope, Race, and Power” Rom 14:1-15:7 / 34 min.			Doc.		Exp. C-C	10
Keller “The God Who Reconciles” Heb 9:11-14 / 36 min.		Exp.		Doc.	C-C	8
Keller “The Shepherd King” Ezek 34:11-29 / 37 min.				Exp. C-C	Doc.	10
MacArthur “A Vision of God” Isa 5-6 / 59 min.			Doc. C-C		Exp.	8
MacArthur “Paul’s Philosophy” Col 1:24-29 / 57 min.					Exp. Doc. C-C	12
MacArthur “Religion and Its Victims” Mark 12:38-44 / 50 min.		C-C	Doc.		Exp.	7
Osteen “Hedge of Protection” Ps 121:5-8 / 27 min.		Exp. Doc. C-C				3
Osteen “Help Others Win” Acts 9:26-27 / 28 min.	Exp. Doc. C-C					0

Table A5–Continued. Master Evaluation Table

Preacher Title / Text / Time	Not (0)	Not Very (1)	Somewhat (2)	Soundly (3)	Very (4)	Combined Weight
Osteen “Leave a Legacy of Faith” Selected texts / 27 min.	Exp. Doc. C-C					0
Piper “Consider Your Calling” 1 Cor 1:26-31 / 41 min.					Exp. Doc. C-C	12
Piper “Out of Your Heart” John 7:25-39 / 48 min.					Exp. Doc. C-C	12
Piper “Parenting” Mic 7:1-20 / 52 min.			Doc.		Exp. C-C	10
Platt “Epilogue - Re-Creation” Rev 21-22 / 57 min.				Exp.	Doc. C-C	11
Platt “Fasting” Acts 13-14 / 49 min.				Exp. Doc. C-C		9
Platt “Redemption Promised” Gen 12, 15, 17 / 56 min.			Exp.	Doc.	C-C	9
A. Stanley “A New You Resolution” Dan 6:3-5 / 38 min.	Exp. Doc. C-C					0
A. Stanley “Nick and Joe Save Easter” John 3:1-15 / 48 min.			Exp. Doc.	C-C		7
A. Stanley “One, Not Everyone” Gal 6:9-10 / 39 min.	Doc. C-C	Exp.				1
C. Stanley “Baptism” Matt 3:15-17 / 47 min.			Exp.	C-C	Doc.	9
C. Stanley “Wise Decisions” Dan 1 / 47 min.		Exp. Doc. C-C				3
C. Stanley “Why the Cross?” Selected texts / 46 min.			Exp.	C-C	Doc.	9

Table A5–Continued. Master Evaluation Table

Preacher Title / Text / Time	Not (0)	Not Very (1)	Somewhat (2)	Soundly (3)	Very (4)	Combined Weight	
Stone “Deepen Followers” 1 Tim 4 / 31 min.	C-C	Exp.	Doc.			3	
Stone “Gift Received” John 1:11-13 / 31 min.			Exp.	Doc. C-C		8	
Stone “On the Job” Selected Proverbs / 30 min.		Exp. C-C			Doc.	6	
Warren “God Wants to Talk” Luke 8:4-8; 11-15 / 49 min.	C-C	Exp. Doc.				2	
Warren “Possessing My Destiny” Josh 1:1-11 / 58 min.	Doc. C-C		Exp.			2	
Warren “Successful Children” Matt 6:9-13 / 62 min.			C-C		Exp. Doc.	10	
West “Available and Obedient” Luke 1:38; John 2:5 / 46 min.	Doc. C-C	Exp.				1	
West “It’s Time to Take a Risk” Acts 10:9-23 / 33 min.		Doc. C-C	Exp.			4	
West “Recalculating Your Route” Exod 14:10-20 / 37 min.	Doc.	C-C	Exp.			3	
Young “God-Ops” Neh 4 and 6 / 24 min.	Exp. Doc. C-C					0	
Young “Mob Madness” Dan 6 / 26 min.	Doc. C-C	Exp.				1	
Young “The Track” Selected texts / 25 min.	Exp.	Doc.	C-C			3	
Totals	Exp. Doc. C-C	8 12 14	12 8 11	11 13 6	12 7 9	17 20 20	315 out of possible 720

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ABSTRACT

WEIGHING SERMON SUBSTANCE: EVALUATING A SERMON'S DEGREE OF EXPOSITORY MERIT, DOCTRINAL ESSENCE, AND CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS

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This dissertation develops and demonstrates a method for evaluating a sermon's degree of three aspects: expository merit, doctrinal essence, and Christ-centeredness. The work argues that the gravity of expository, doctrinal, and Christ-centered preaching calls for a substantive and well-balanced method that weighs a sermon's degree regarding these matters.

Chapter 1 clarifies the thesis and frames the project in relation to several academic fields. After the methodology is presented, the chapter concludes with a relevant caution concerning the spirit of sermon evaluation.

Chapter 2 demonstrates the place for such a project in the field of homiletics. The "combined gravity" of the three aspects is presented through a biblical and theological consideration. The need to speak in terms of degree with regard to evaluation is also presented. Finally, the chapter considers the current state of sermon evaluation in order to show the void in the field of homiletics regarding a substantive and well-balanced method for evaluating the three aspects.

Chapters 3 and 4 interact with evangelical scholarship in order to define a

substantive foundation for evaluation. Chapter 3 discerns a central concern for each of the three aspects and discusses pertinent matters of clarification. Chapter 4 delineates six distinctive elements for each aspect which are more specific matters of consideration than the broader central concerns.

Chapter 5 develops the evaluation method itself. It begins with a discussion of overlapping dynamics among the three aspects. Then a “substance evaluation form” is presented which is followed by the five step method: prayer, listening and notation, evaluation of the central concerns, evaluation of the distinctive elements, and labeling and reflection.

Chapter 6 demonstrates the potential for the proposed method through a discussion of the evaluation results from sixty sermons. Three sermons each from twenty evangelical pastors were selected and evaluated. Overall sermon results, individual pastor results, and specific sermon results are presented.

Chapter 7 concludes the project with a discussion of its value. It’s value is presented in terms of evaluation standards, possible applications of the method, and insights for prescriptive texts.

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