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PREACHING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW
IN A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

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PREACHING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW
IN A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

Robert Craig Thompson

Read and Approved by:

Timothy K. Beougher (Chair)

Adam W. Greenway

Chad O. Brand

Date _____

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Angela, and our children without whose support this project could have never been completed. I am also thankful for Kevin and Jamie Bowers who have been models of Christian hospitality to me during my time in Louisville and made this process more beneficial than it otherwise would have been.

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PREFACE

The process of writing a dissertation is only part of its construction. This dissertation has taken the better part of a year to complete, but it has taken thirty-two years to shape me into the man that I am today. As this dissertation is an extension of me and my ministry, I am an extension of my family and of those who have ministered to me and taught me throughout a lifetime. This dissertation, then, is an extension of all who have poured into my life. I am grateful for Christian parents who set the course for my life early. My undergraduate education in a non-evangelical school served to open my eyes to the absolute need for adherence to the historical orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has now had a role in shaping my life for nearly eight years of education, and has opened my eyes to the need for preaching that is not only expositional, but evangelistic, apologetic, and incarnational. I am especially grateful for the investment of Dr. Timothy Beougher, my Ph. D. supervisor whose guidance and patience has been invaluable.

When all is said and done, my name will be attached to this dissertation, and anything that may be found wrong in it is my responsibility. Anything good and right that is found in this dissertation is not mine alone to claim. I am the result of the endeavors of many people, not least my own family who regularly sharpens my faith and wit. Finally, this dissertation is credited Malvern Hill Baptist, who has shown me how to live in Christian community and has allowed me to practice worldview preaching.

Robert Craig Thompson

Louisville, Kentucky

May, 2016

CHAPTER 1
PREACHING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW
IN A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

Worldview does not determine everything, but everything a person does is influenced to some degree by his or her worldview. If one understands worldviews to be presuppositions about the universe, then it can be argued and understood that those presuppositions are determinative for the conclusions that follow. Certain things must be believed before anything can be known. Those things that must be believed are presuppositions that guide knowledge and understanding like train tracks leading to a destination; “once a person commits himself to a certain set of presuppositions, his direction and destination are determined.”¹ Worldview may not determine everything, but worldview plays a part in every decision of one’s life. By adopting a naturalist worldview, one looks for natural explanations to the occurrences of life. Miracles are impossible according to the naturalist worldview because miracles require the invasion of the divine. Conversely, according to the Christian worldview, a virgin birth is believable because Christianity presupposes a God who is involved and interested in the world. According to the Christian worldview, miraculous healings and resurrections are possible. This presupposition allows for the invasion of the Divine Creator into his

¹Ronald Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 23.

creation.² Worldview does not determine whether a person gets cancer, but worldview can determine how a person with cancer will respond. A person's worldview composes the lenses through which one sees the world, and as a result the world is colored by one's worldview.

A worldview is the instrument that people use to make sense of and respond to the world around them. Ronald Nash explains that a worldview "is a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality."³ According to Arthur Holmes, worldview formation begins at the "prephilosophical level. It begins without either systematic planning or theoretical intentions."⁴ Worldview plays a part in the way that people interact with each other. In secular academia, Christians are often discriminated against because they are believers.⁵ Many secularists make use of such arguments as, "the research into intelligent design is not real science." Though there are no evidences to support these claims, the claims are propagated because a secular worldview opposes theistic arguments by default. For the secularist, intelligent design has to be wrong, not because it is erroneous science, but because the God of the Bible has no place within the

²Sire writes, "A Christian is first of all one who affirms the existence of an infinite-personal God, not one who takes the Bible as a revelation of God. A naturalist is first of all one who holds that matter (or matter plus energy in a complex relationship) is all there is, not one who holds to the autonomy of human reason or any other such epistemological notion." James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 58n8.

³Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, 16.

⁴Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 31.

⁵Jerry Bergman, *Slaughter of the Dissidents*, (Southworth, WA: Leafcutter, 2008), 1:1.

pagan presuppositions for secular scientists. Of course, secular bias against Christians is not limited to sciences or the academy. Even in popular culture and athletics, secular worldviews oppose the Christian worldview.

Tim Tebow has risen through college football and the National Football League to become a household name. Only time will tell whether or not Tebow will become a successful professional quarterback, but his outspoken Christian faith has put him at odds with many in the media. For instance, Brian Phillips is honest in his estimate of Tebow even if he is unfair:

I find myself half-consciously rooting for Tebow to fail, even though I have nothing against him, have lots of religious friends, am not especially tribal by nature, and wouldn't want to be responsible for the nacho-related deaths of any prominent evangelical leaders, even if I detest their politics. Doesn't matter. The part of me that wants to eat pork and not stone people just switches on and cheers for the blitzing linebacker.⁶

Phillips reveals the underlying principle behind his rejection of Tebow and the culture's rejection of Christians. Ultimately, Phillips does not reject Tebow; he rejects Tim Tebow's God. He desires to live in a world free of God's expectations and biblical directives. As a result, Phillips must reject Tim Tebow, intelligent design, and anything else that falls squarely under the purview of a biblical worldview. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis have recognized this reality in the culture at large and have addressed it in their book, *Total Church*, "Nietzsche recognizes with characteristic honesty, all philosophy, however rational, is ultimately a justification for the way we want to live our lives. And modern people want to live their lives without God. So they construct a worldview in

⁶Brian Phillips, "Tim Tebow, Converter of the Passes," accessed July 29, 2012, www.grantland.com/story/_/id/7147740/tim-tebow-converter-passes.

which God is either marginal (deism) or nonexistent (atheism).”⁷ Secularists want to live in a world free of moral constraints, and thus have constructed (though perhaps unconsciously) a worldview that allows for such a life. The Christian preacher must approach the task of delivering God’s Word with the realization that he is preaching into a world that opposes both his message and the God of his message. The gospel of Christ, whether delivered through a pastor’s sermon or through the witness of an accomplished athlete, speaks against the secular worldview that has ingrained itself in culture. Preaching and worldview are inextricably linked together.

Purpose

This dissertation argues that evangelistic preaching in a pluralistic culture must demonstrate the supreme value of the Christian worldview among competing worldviews. James Sire argues that “worldviews have both an objective referent and a deeply subjective character.”⁸ Christian Smith suggests that the predominant worldview of emerging adults is largely subjective and expressed in linguistic terms that revolve around personal feelings and happiness.⁹ According to Smith, many emerging adults do not even have a category for objective truth and ethics. Sire, however, argues that all worldviews are ultimately grounded in objective reality and expressed subjectively and linguistically. In other words, Smith merely speaks to the expression of worldviews whereas Sire explains the underlying presuppositions that create worldviews.

⁷Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 166.

⁸Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 47.

⁹Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 45-46.

This dissertation, then, will aim to show that preaching within culture requires aiming at the presuppositions engrained within the various worldviews of a particular culture. Richard Niebuhr points out, “Attention must be directed to the pluralism that is characteristic of all culture. The values a culture seeks to realize in any time or place are many in number. No society can even try to realize all its manifold possibilities; each is highly complex, made up of many institutions with many goals and interweaving interests.”¹⁰ The majority of this dissertation will focus on preaching within a twenty-first century Western context influenced by postmodernism and subjectivity. Though culture in general is aimed at what is best for the majority within the culture, there are always underlying currents, individual claims, and special interest groups.¹¹ No culture, regardless of how dominant or totalitarian can claim to have complete control over the worldviews of its entire population. As such, preaching in any culture must be done in such a way as to promote a Christian worldview at the ontological level so as to bring about change in epistemology and worldview, or, as Naugle suggests, the heart.¹²

Naugle’s suggestion is that worldview should be compared with the biblical concept of the heart as the center of one’s being. The Proverbs speak of the heart as the essence of a person, “As in water face reflects face, so the heart of a man reflects the man” (Proverbs 27:19). The Bible also refers to the heart as the psychological and spiritual center of one’s life and as the compass which directs life; it was Jesus who said,

¹⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1951), 38.

¹¹Ibid..

¹²David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 266-67.

“out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). Thus, in a biblical sense preaching a Christian worldview among competing worldviews must entail both head engagement and heart engagement—the whole person must be affected by the message of Christ and the worldview of the Bible as presented from the pulpit. The Christian preacher must preach messages that are heard and experienced. The message of Christ permeates all of life and the sermon about Christ must communicate that reality.

Definitions

In this dissertation it is necessary to set forth some definitions in the beginning that are integral in understanding the arguments set forth here. Primarily, the reader should have a confident understanding of the terms *culture*; *worldview*; *Christian worldview*; and *postmodernism*. Because various definitions of these words abound, definitions are provided below that set the standard for reading and applying this dissertation.

Richard Niebuhr defines culture as the “artificial, secondary environment which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.”¹³ He goes on to say that “culture, secondly, is human achievement. We distinguish it from nature by noting the evidences of human purposiveness and effort.”¹⁴ I have adapted Niebuhr’s definition slightly and have adopted the following definition of culture:

Culture is the artificial, man-made, secondary environment which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, values and religions.

¹³Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32.

¹⁴Ibid.

Culture represents human efforts to tame the wildness and understand the mystery of nature and the supernatural.

Many definitions for worldview are extant. Extensive definitions offered by James Sire, Nancy Pearcey, and David Naugle are helpful and will be used in aspects of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is the concise definition offered by Ronald Nash that has been adopted to structure this dissertation. Nash writes, “A worldview, then, is a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality.”¹⁵ Worldview is related to culture in that a worldview is the particular way that individuals perceive of, react to, and behave within a particular culture. Worldview is the way that a person makes sense of his or her culture.

For the purposes of this dissertation, it should be assumed that Christian worldview and biblical worldview are synonymous. One might argue that the biblical worldview is more objective and that a Christian worldview is the application of a biblical worldview to one’s life. Nevertheless, it is the position of the author that the application by Christians of the Bible’s truths and principles should be grounded in the objective reality of the Bible. Thus, the two terms will be used interchangeably. The definition adopted for *Christian worldview* comes from Greg Bahnsen who defines it thus, “committed to [Christ] at every point in life. Christianity is not concerned merely with a narrow range of human experiences . . . the biblical cry ‘Christ is Lord’ requires that you submit to Him in all areas of your life.”¹⁶ So, possessing and exercising a

¹⁵Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, 16.

¹⁶Greg Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007), 48.

Christian worldview means submitting one's entire self to Christ in every area and every decision of life.¹⁷ Submission to Christ is submission to his will, which is known only through God's revelation in the Bible; thus, a Christian worldview is synonymous with a biblical worldview.

Finally, the term *postmodern*, though difficult to define, must be defined for this dissertation to accomplish its purpose. Ted Kluck and Kevin DeYoung argue that one of the great problems with the postmodern approach to church and Christianity is that postmodernity "undermines the knowability of God."¹⁸ David Dockery writes,

Postmodernism began as a self-conscious reaction against the modernism of the Enlightenment, and especially against its unbounded confidence in reason, science, and progress. The postmodern mind rightly rejects this naive optimism; But it then goes further and questions the very validity of objective truth; suggesting that all so-called "truth" is purely subjective, being culturally conditioned; and therefore we all have our own truth, which has as much right to be respected as anybody else's.¹⁹

Authors are more comfortable describing and critiquing certain aspects of postmodernism than defining it because to define it objectively is to disregard the concept. Even in his book, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, Myron Penner writes, "The postmodern turn [Penner's preferred term for postmodernism] is best understood when one resists the

¹⁷D. A. Carson argues, "It must be said that a Christian worldview, a Christian theological vision, is more than a system of beliefs (though it is never less): it also includes the volition that self-consciously thinks and acts in line with such beliefs. The biblical story line, which finally centers on the gospel of Jesus Christ, establishes the *summum bonum*, the highest good, the thing we actively cherish and pursue." D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 96. Carson's description is certainly more involved than Bahnsen's definition, but conscious application of Bahnsen's concise statement should entail all that it spoken of by Carson.

¹⁸Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 35.

¹⁹David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 18.

temptation to define it categorically, as either a field of beliefs or a set of philosophical theses—except in a most general way.”²⁰ Nevertheless, in a dissertation relying so heavily upon an understanding of postmodernism, a definition must be attempted.

Penner, though he rejects an ironclad definition, does identify postmodernism as a “*Zeitgeist* or worldview.”²¹ The primary position of postmoderns, however, is to reject objective truth. Jean-Francois Lyotard defines postmodernism thus, “simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.”²² Because defining postmodernism is difficult, the following outline of the postmodern mood’s features as set forth by Albert Mohler will be used as descriptive of the term.

Postmodernism’s basic features include the following:

1. The deconstruction of truth. According to postmoderns, “truth is not universal, is not objective or absolute, and cannot be determined by a commonly accepted method.” Instead, postmodernists argue that truth is socially constructed, plural, and inaccessible to universal reason.
2. The death of metanarrative. As mentioned above, postmodernism carries with it the underlying concept that there are not universal systems. Because truth is relative, the truth offered in metanarratives must be rejected as overreaching attempts at gaining control.
3. The demise of the text. According to postmodern thought, the meaning of text is not found in the author’s intent, but in the experience of the reader. From a Christian perspective, then, the truth of the Bible is found, not in its authority as God’s Word, but only in as much as a reader finds it to be truthful.
4. The dominion of therapy. When truth is denied, therapy remains. The critical questions shift from “What is true?” to “What makes me feel good?” All issues eventually revolve around the self. In the name of “authenticity” we reject all

²⁰Myron B. Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 16.

²¹Ibid., 17.

²²Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

inconvenient moral standards and replace concern for *right* and *wrong* with the assertion of our *rights*.

5. The decline of authority. Since postmodernism is committed to a radical vision of liberation, all authorities must be overthrown. Among the dethroned authorities are texts, authors, traditions, metanarratives, the Bible, God and all powers on heaven and earth. Except, of course, for the authority of postmodern theorists and cultural figures, who wield their power in the name of oppressed peoples everywhere.
6. The displacement of morality. The god allowed by postmodernism is not the God of the Bible, but a vague idea of spirituality. There are no tablets of stone, no Ten Commandments . . . no rules. Morality is, along with other foundations of culture, discarded as oppressive and totalitarian. A pervasive moral relativism marks postmodern culture.²³

Background

Since the Lord called me into ministry, I have always had a passion for preaching. That passion was kindled through vocational ministry experiences and through my seminary training. When I began looking for a Ph.D. program, however, I quickly realized that there were no opportunities to pursue a Ph.D. in preaching without moving to a seminary. Feeling firmly rooted in the local church where God has called me, I began to pursue other programs and eventually found myself back where I started, applying to the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to pursue a Ph.D. in Evangelism and Church Growth in their modular format. From the beginning, I had a desire to connect evangelism, church growth, and preaching. That desire grew after reading Thom Rainer's research findings in *Effective Evangelistic Churches* that identified preaching as the primary catalyst in

²³Albert Mohler, "Ministry Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: The Challenge of Postmodernism," AlbertMohler.com, entry posted July 15, 2004, accessed August 27, 2012, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2004/07/15/ministry-is-stranger-than-it-used-to-be-the-challenge-of-postmodernism/>. Emphasis original.

growing evangelical churches.²⁴ Because, according to Rainer’s research, preaching is a primary catalyst for effective evangelistic churches, I knew that my desire to connect preaching, evangelism and church growth in a dissertation was a strong possibility.

As my studies continued, and the tide began to shift toward an emphasis on evangelism and a bit away from the term “church growth,” my reading and seminar work led me into apologetics. Though I perceived a disconnect between preaching and evangelism, the disconnect between preaching, evangelism, and apologetics was even more significant. Worldview studies and concerns dominated my thinking for some time, and I was particularly interested in presuppositional and Reformed apologetics. I began to realize that presuppositional apologetics lays a great groundwork for apologetics in preaching. Books that combine preaching and apologetics are nearly non-existent. Craig Loscalzo’s book *Apologetic Preaching* makes an attempt that seems more focused on needs driven preaching than apologetics, but beyond that work, little exists. Fortunately, the same cannot be said for contemporary literature on evangelism. An apologetic approach to evangelism is increasingly *en vogue* in light of the postmodern mindset of the twenty-first century. Randy Newman’s book, *Questioning Evangelism*, and Norman and David Geisler’s *Conversational Evangelism* serve as great resources for apologetic evangelism among postmodern generations. Even books whose primary purpose is apologetics have a strong evangelistic appeal; Greg Koukl’s *Tactics* and Sean McDowell’s *Apologetics for a New Generation* both fit the mold of apologetic books that focus on evangelism.

²⁴Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 49.

Though apologetics is seen as a necessary discipline for contemporary evangelism, preaching texts give very little emphasis to apologetics and apologetics texts give very little emphasis to preaching. True evangelism requires more than simply sharing the gospel, it requires clearly communicating the gospel so that it can be understood. David Wells writes, “We cannot claim that Christian faith has been communicated until it has been understood, and most secular people are no longer in a position to understand Christian truth if they hear only a minimal, packaged version of the gospel and are asked for immediate assent.”²⁵ The prevailing worldview of contemporary Western culture requires that evangelistic preaching emphasize the value of a Christian worldview against competing worldviews. H. Wayne House says, “Even in the West where Christianity was once held to be the accepted religion, a majority now have little knowledge of the biblical claims regarding Jesus the Messiah or of the need of salvation through him. A common division of faith and fact, the religious and the secular, and even the viability of objective truth claims pervades our culture.”²⁶ Further, the Christian worldview must be explained and demonstrated in contrast to the prevailing worldviews of hearers. Preaching books often deal with contextualization in preaching, but few give significant emphasis to worldview.

This realization encouraged me to pursue preaching, apologetics, and evangelism in my dissertation. I was further encouraged by my interaction with apologetics students and professors. In an Introduction to Christian Apologetics seminar

²⁵David F. Wells, *Turning to God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 143.

²⁶H. Wayne House, “A Biblical Argument for Balanced Apologetics: How the Apostle Paul Practiced Apologetics in the Acts,” in *Reasons for Faith*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 53-54.

with James Parker and a Worldview seminar with Dr. Mark Coppenger, I received a great deal of encouragement from my classmates and my professors to study the ways that apologetics and preaching can interact because many of them felt that apologetics was a neglected emphasis in preaching training and books on preaching. The professors in the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism had apprehension about the need for additional study in the areas of preaching and apologetics and about connecting this study with evangelism.

Timothy Beougher and Adam Greenway were concerned that though apologetics and preaching may be a good area of study, the idea was not significantly different from expository preaching. Beougher, who also has taught preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, feared that my concept of apologetical preaching was little more than good expository preaching. Having been chided sufficiently, I returned to my studies determined to find an intersection for apologetics, preaching, and evangelism. I found that intersection with the concept of worldview.

Many people are engaging in worldview studies across the evangelical landscape both in the academy and through publishing. Nancy Pearcey's book *Total Truth*, James Sire's *Naming the Elephant*, David Naugle's *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, Paul Hiebert's *Transforming Worldviews*, and Ronald Nash's *Worldviews in Conflict* have been beneficial to me in developing an understanding of worldview. Having developed a basic understanding of worldview, I then turned to other authors to help me understand the intersection of worldviews and their role within evangelism. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* helped me to understand the plurality that exists within culture and to begin synthesizing my understanding of the church's role within

culture, especially when encountering other worldviews. D. A. Carson's *Christ and Culture Revisited* served as an excellent resource showing the value of a Christian worldview to impact and transform culture and as a needed corrective to some of Niebuhr's conclusions. Carson shows both the impact of Christ on culture and the resistance to the Christian worldview by secular cultures. His work has helped me to understand the need for preaching to show not only the value of Christ and of a Christian worldview, but to show the deficiency of secular worldviews as well.

In addition to recognizing and understanding worldview as Christian and secular, I have looked for resources that helped me to better understand the secular worldview of our current culture. Of particular benefit to me have been Christian Smith's two books, *Soul Searching* and *Souls in Transition*. Smith explains the prevailing worldview of the younger postmodern generation present in contemporary America. Because this dissertation focuses primarily on ministry within the American context, Smith's research has proven to be very beneficial in understanding America's youth and emerging generations. Steve Wilkens and Mark Sanford's book, *Hidden Worldviews*, served to open my eyes to the worldviews that people often hold without realization. Even within the church, worldviews of materialism, consumerism, individualism, and moral relativism lurk within the hearts and minds of people. These worldviews are part of a larger overarching worldview of secularism that dominates American and most of Western culture. Because the secular western worldview values these smaller worldviews so highly, few people even recognize just how ingrained these worldviews are within their own system of belief.

Finally, it has been necessary for me to consult a variety of texts on preaching.

Preaching has fallen on hard times in many places. In his book *He Is Not Silent*, R.

Albert Mohler Jr. writes,

Many evangelicals have abandoned the text without recognizing that they have done so. These preachers may eventually get to the text in the course of the sermon, but the text does not set the agenda or establish the shape of the message. The sacred desk has become an advice center, and the pew has become the therapist's couch.²⁷

Mohler writes to bemoan the scarcity of expository preaching on the landscape of evangelicalism in the twenty-first century. But why has expository preaching fallen on such hard times in many places? In chapter 2 I will make the argument that preaching for the purpose of seeking the conversion of the lost in the current postmodern culture must be done with an eye toward presuppositional apologetics. Presuppositionalism asserts that the biblical worldview is the only worldview that provides ample footing for rational thought and that apologetics should be done by first dismantling the worldview of the unbeliever and then presenting the biblical worldview as the only worldview that satisfies all the human expectations of reality.

Secular worldviews lead pastors away from faithful apologetic and biblical preaching. Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford have shown that secular worldviews can successfully invade even the church of Christ and do damage to the people of God when they allow their culture to shape them more than the Word of God.²⁸ So too, a preacher may find himself wandering away from expositional preaching, not because he is opposed to the things of God necessarily, but because his culture has influenced him

²⁷R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 20.

²⁸Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

more than he realizes.

For instance, the pastor who has adopted a “felt-needs” style of preaching looks to the society around him for the culture’s “felt-needs” for direction in his preaching rather than to the Word of God primarily. This pastor, though often well intentioned, has adopted a “salvation by therapy” worldview that is more informed by psychology and therapy than by the Scriptures.²⁹ This “felt-needs” preaching focuses on Christ, but not the Christ of the Bible. In “felt-needs” preaching “he is the Jesus who wants to do good things for us . . . domesticated, marginalized and sanitized to serve our own narrow concerns and interests.”³⁰ Michael Horton critiques “felt-needs” preaching this way:

Real sins are really forgiven by a God who is intimately involved in our everyday lives. In a therapeutic worldview, there is no sin and guilt to be forgiven by God but only burdens and feelings of guilt for failing to live up to the expectations of oneself or other human beings. In other words, for Christianity there is objective guilt and justification; in moralistic therapy there is only subjective guilt and a cathartic release simply by telling someone else about it.³¹

The “felt-needs” preacher does not set out to diminish the gospel always, he sees pain, hurt, and disappointment in the world and turns to the Bible to find advice and answers to the many problems his people are facing. Preachers are doing what they are expected to do. They are working to offer answers and hope. Rather than seeing the Bible as the source of salvation, the “felt-needs” preacher uses the Bible as a sort of self-help textbook. Pray these prayers, do these things, and find *Your Best Life Now*,³² *Become a*

²⁹Wilkins and Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews*, 160.

³⁰Stephen Seamands, *Give Them Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 16-17.

³¹Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 43.

³²Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now* (New York: Warner Faith, 2004).

Better You,³³ or best yet, make *Every Day a Friday*.³⁴ The tragic irony with this style of preaching and the underlying worldview that leads to this form of preaching is that it presents salvation as a better life, but does not show us a better savior. Jim Shaddix writes,

“Felt need” preaching often addresses the questions of listeners but never introduces them to a holy God in Christ. Consequently, people frequently leave our services with practical help for their life situation but no better understanding of the powerful help that comes only through carrying their cross. They often leave understanding more about themselves but no more about a holy God.³⁵

“Felt-needs” focuses on human problems and human abilities but not on the transformative power of the gospel. Speaking to problems without providing a resolution may result in positive communication, but often, it does not result in transformation.

Tullian Tchividjian writes, “When preachers cave in to this pressure, moral renovation does not happen. To focus on how I’m doing, more than on what Christ has done, is Christian narcissism (an oxymoron if I ever heard one)—the poison of self-absorption which undermines the power of the gospel in our lives.”³⁶ The gospel is undermined when the focus is on the hearer rather than the divine speaker. The biblical view of salvation includes meeting many of the needs felt by people every day, but its primary goal is to meet man’s greatest need, salvation, and to reveal his gospel even when people are ignorant of their need for a Savior. In stark contrast, efforts by some preachers to reach postmoderns have resulted in redefining the task of preaching and the needs of

³³ Joel Osteen, *Become a Better You* (Philadelphia: Running, 2002).

³⁴ Joel Osteen, *Every Day a Friday* (New York: FaithWords, 2011).

³⁵ Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 23.

³⁶ Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus+Nothing=Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 117.

people.

Craig Loscalzo, in his book *Apologetic Preaching*, identifies the greatest felt need of postmoderns as the need for the preaching to be authentic and relevant.³⁷

Loscalzo argues, “It’s important not to reject the postmodern emphasis on the subjective in favor of the modern emphasis on the objective. Instead we can emphasize that in the Christian faith—in particular in Jesus—there is both. Our apologetic preaching to postmoderns must encompass both.”³⁸ From reading his book, one gets the feeling that Loscalzo has a genuine desire to reach out to the postmodern culture. Nevertheless, in his attempt to reach them, he seems willing at times to sacrifice the objective nature of the faith in favor of the subjective by arguing that objectivity is a result of modernism. Though the modern era gave rise to the scientific method and gloried in empiricism, it is a stretch to say that emphasizing objective truth is a child of the modern era. It was this emphasis on objective truth that set apart the orthodox from the heterodox as early as the first century, and certainly it is the objective nature of the gospel that has always led to salvation.

The “felt-needs” preacher is often unaware that he has slipped from expository preaching because he still believes in the power of the gospel and the Bible to change lives. He has looked to culture to determine how to preach and what to preach rather than to God’s Word to understand how he should proclaim the gospel shape his culture. He has lost sight of the fact that the gospel truly changes everything, not only one’s eternal state. He needs to be reminded of Tchividjian’s words, “The gospel alone empowers and

³⁷Craig Loscalzo, *Apologetic Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 22.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 109.

emboldens us to press on and strain forward with no anxiety over gaining other people's sanction or good opinion—even God's! All the care and love and value we most crave—full and final approval—we already have in Jesus.”³⁹ The “felt-needs” preacher needs to be reminded that true change is only possible through the power of the gospel.

Of greater concern than the Christian pastor influenced by the worldviews of secular culture is the pastor or scholar who has sold his sacred beliefs for a completely secular worldview that reduces the Bible to the work of man. Consider the words of John Shelby Spong,

I am now convinced that institutional Christianity has become so consumed by its quest for power and authority, most of which is rooted in the excessive claims for the Bible, that the authentic voice of God can no longer be heard within it.

So I want to invite people to a mountaintop where together we can watch the mighty wind, the earthquake and the fire destroy those idols of creed, scripture and church, all of which have been used to hide us from the reality of God.⁴⁰

There is little question why a man with Spong's belief system does not preach expository sermons. Without faith in the Bible as God's Word little is left to preach. For the preacher, it is not only he who suffers when his worldview is so terribly skewed. A worldview that does not value the Bible as the Word of God likely does not view sin, salvation, and sanctification as defined in the Bible.

The danger for the non-believer encountering Spong is that his message contains nothing of the historical gospel message. Without the gospel, preaching will not produce Christian converts. As Mark Dever has said, “False teaching creates false

³⁹Tchividjian, *Jesus+Nothing=Everything*, 92.

⁴⁰John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005), 25.

converts.”⁴¹ Without the Word of God, we have no record of Christ’s salvific sacrifice. In fact the danger for both the believer and the non-believer following Spong is that his conception of God is not rooted in anything objective. If God is not found on God’s own terms, then on whose terms is he found? Spong has created a god in his own image. According to the Bible, Spong’s religion is not Christianity, it is idolatry. Richard J. Foster defines idolatry as “the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.”⁴² G. K. Beale offers a more thorough and damning description of idolatry:

God accepts that humans have indeed breached the Creator-creature distinction. Not that humans have now become gods but that they have chosen to act as though they were-defining and deciding for themselves what they will regard as good and evil. Therein lies the root of all other forms of idolatry: we deify our own capacities, and thereby make gods of ourselves and our choices and all their implications. God then shrinks in horror from the prospect of human immortality and eternal life in such a fallen state and prevents access to the “tree of life.” God has a better way to bring humanity, redeemed and cleansed, to eternal life.

At the root, then, all idolatry is human rejection of the Godness of God and the finality of God’s moral authority. The fruit of that basic rebellion is to be seen in many other ways in which idolatry blurs the distinction between God and creation, to the detriment of both.⁴³

The pastor/preacher/scholar who still claims to follow the Christ but rejects Christ’s self-revelation—his Word—has adopted a worldview that is foreign to the things of God and in so doing has created a god to his or her own liking. The god of idolatry is not a god who saves, but a god who tolerates and satisfies the need for the idolater to have an object of worship.

⁴¹Mark Dever, “False Conversions: The Suicide of the Church,” (sermon from Together for the Gospel, Louisville, 2012), accessed May 28, 2012, <http://t4g.org/media/2012/04/false-conversions-the-suicide-of-the-church-2/>.

⁴²Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 159.

⁴³G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 135.

Thus, whether a worldview is secular by slow invasion, as in the case of the “felt-needs” pastor, or the worldview is overtly anti-Christian, as shown in the writings of Spong, a secular worldview has a negative effect on the preaching of God’s Word. In the case of the former, the Word is preached less effectively than it could be and as a result, people may not be called to repent of their sin if they do not “feel” lost. In the case of the latter, a worldview that continues to claim the title “Christian” yet rejects all forms of historical Christianity does not proclaim a gospel of salvation or of sanctification. Instead, it leads toward a false god constructed in the image of the preacher.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are several limitations within the scope of this dissertation. The first involves the voluminous material available for research into a dissertation that covers three different academic disciplines. It would be impossible for me to consider all of the resources available for preaching, evangelism, or apologetics, much less all of the resources available for all three areas of discipline. A second limitation will be the need to differentiate between expositional preaching and the apologetical preaching prescribed above. A third limitation will be the difficulty involved in connecting three separate streams of academia into one research project.

In terms of delimitation, apologetics will be limited to Presuppositional apologetics and Reformed apologetics and will spend very little time considering the history of apologetics. Further, rather than argue for the primacy of expository preaching, the primary assumption of this dissertation regarding preaching will be that the case for expository preaching has already been established in many other places and will be assumed to be the most faithful form of preaching. Finally, this dissertation will

not attempt any historical analysis of evangelism, but will instead assume that the biblical mandate for evangelism is sufficient and will assume that true evangelism involves the communication of gospel facts, and the understanding of those facts as well.

Methodology

The method of study for this dissertation involves consultation with apologetics, worldview, evangelism, and preaching texts. In addition to studying many books on each of the subjects listed above, I have sought out books that combine any of the above material, in particular books that combine evangelism and apologetics, evangelism and worldview, preaching and apologetics, or preaching and worldview because they are more rare. Books focused on evangelistic preaching are more readily available and they have been consulted to examine for similarities between the methodologies espoused in those books and the methodology espoused in this dissertation.

At the behest of Timothy Beougher, I have also interacted with *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest* by James Engel and Wilbert Norton.⁴⁴ Though this book was written in 1975, it has proven valuable as a tool to help direct the methodology of this project. Just as the authors asked in the 70's what must be done to see a greater evangelistic harvest, much of the inspiration for this dissertation is driven by a similar goal and question: How can more people be reached with the gospel? Though the conclusions drawn by Norton and Engel are different in many ways from the conclusions drawn in this dissertation, the suggestion that people come to Christ gradually over time

⁴⁴James F. Engel and H. Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

espoused by the Engel scale which first appears in the book above is a significant driver in the research methods for this dissertation.

If successful, this dissertation will show that apologetics and evangelism need to converge in preaching. The preaching event must never be less than exposition, but engagement with postmodern worldviews will drive preachers and pastors to use apologetics and worldview studies to leverage their preaching and application toward evangelism. Preachers will be more aware of the need to appeal to the postmodern mind rather than relying solely on modern approaches to preaching.

CHAPTER 2
APOLOGETICAL PREACHING: PREACHING THAT
DEFENDS THE FAITH

The modern era represented a time when preachers and other authority figures were often assumed to be trustworthy. That time has since passed. In the postmodern age of the twenty-first century, many people reject authority, no longer believe the preacher to be the man of God and they no longer take for granted that the Bible is the Word of God. Of postmodernity, David Dockery writes,

Postmodernism began as a self-conscious reaction against the modernism of the Enlightenment, and especially against its unbounded confidence in reason, science, and progress. The postmodern mind rightly rejects this naive optimism; But it then goes further and questions the very validity of objective truth; suggesting that all so-called “truth” is purely subjective, being culturally conditioned; and therefore we all have our own truth, which has as much right to be respected as anybody else’s.¹

The postmodern mindset has brought with it a variety of implications for the church, and none more important than the implications for preaching. The rejection of objective truth includes a rejection of the Bible as truth and as God’s Word. The pastor now stands before his people with the need to prove himself and the validity of the Word from which he preaches. Comedian Thor Ramsey writes that postmodernity is “hyper-individualism.”² Couched in Ramsey’s humor is a kernel of truth that is essential for preachers in the postmodern era to understand. Today’s hearers must be convinced that

¹David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 18.

²Thor Ramsey, *A Comedian’s Guide to Theology* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 175.

both the person delivering the message and the message itself are worthy of their trust. Because each person sees himself or herself as the ultimate arbiter of truth, trust must be earned person by person and encounter by encounter. Thus a pastor is often required to earn trust each time that he enters the pulpit to preach. As a result, the postmodern era calls for preachers to react by offering a kind of preaching different from the standard of recent history. Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck note, “In the postmodern world of spiritual journey, authenticity and sincerity have become the currency of authority, and dysfunction, inconsistency, and idiosyncrasy are worn as badges of honor.”³ Preaching that brings about changes must first be heard and believed, and preaching that is heard and believed will be preaching that is not only expositional and exegetical but is also authentic and apologetical. The purpose of this chapter is to define apologetical preaching and to defend its use by preachers in the twenty-first century.

Definitions for Preaching, Apologetics, and Apologetical Preaching

Before a definition of apologetical preaching can be arrived at, it is necessary first to identify definitions for preaching and for apologetics and then to synthesize these definitions into a working definition that adequately defines apologetical preaching.

Preaching is particularly Christian and can be said to define the Christian church.

Historian Stephen J. Nichols writes, “All of the Reformers agreed that the marks of the true church could be boiled down to one: the preaching of the Word. Luther said time

³Kevin Deyoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 35.

and time again, ‘We can spare everything, except the Word.’”⁴ Preaching has, since the New Testament, defined the church. John Broadus famously wrote, “Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No other religion has made the regular and frequent assembling of groups of people, to hear religious instruction and exhortation, an integral part of divine worship.”⁵ John Calvin said, “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached from the heart and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s instruction, there, it is not to be doubted, a Church of God exists.”⁶ P. T. Forsyth once declared, “It is, perhaps, an overbold beginning, but I will venture to say that with its preaching Christianity stands and falls.”⁷

John Piper has said that preaching should be “expository exultation.”⁸ In fleshing that out, Piper warns,

Expository means that preaching aims to exposit, or explain and apply, the meaning of the Bible. . . . Preaching is also *exultation*—expository *exultation*. This means that the preacher does not just explain what’s in the Bible, and the people do not simply understand what he explains, but the preacher and the people *exult* over what is in the Bible as it is being explained and applied.⁹

Along with Piper, many evangelicals argue today that all true preaching is expositional

⁴Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 105.

⁵John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870; repr., Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 1.

⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1023.

⁷Peter Taylor Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2009), 3.

⁸John Piper, “God So Loved The World Part 2” (sermon), accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-so-loved-the-world-part-2>.

⁹Ibid. Emphasis original.

preaching. Preaching that is not expository is not founded on the Bible primarily. A speech can be given about anything, but a speech is a sermon only if it has the Bible as its subject and it has the explanation and application of the Bible as the goal. If true preaching is expository preaching, then any definition of preaching must fall within the parameters of expository preaching. Many writers have endeavored to define preaching. Albert Mohler uses an entire paragraph in *He is Not Silent* to define expository preaching.¹⁰ At the other extreme Phillips Brooks famously wrote that preaching is “truth through personality.”¹¹ Both Mohler and Brooks, however, fall somewhat short of sufficiency in their definitions. Brooks has left out much that Mohler included about the necessity of the Bible being the grounding of truth and the focal point of the sermon, and Mohler has seemingly neglected the fact that all presentations of the Scripture are done through the medium of a preacher. John Stott seems to capture something of the grounding of the sermon and the medium of its presentation as he writes, “A true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both.”¹² However, even Stott does not seem to capture the full force of expositional preaching. The definition of preaching adopted for the purpose of this dissertation is, *Preaching is the careful and accurate heralding of a biblical text by a man filled with the sense of God’s greatness and majesty and holiness with the intention of seeing the Scriptures understood and applied in the life of its hearers to the glory of God.*¹³

¹⁰Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 65.

¹¹Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 26.

¹²John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10.

¹³This definition comes from much study and reflection in Mark Dever et al., *Preaching the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 104.

But of course, defining preaching is only half of the battle. Before one can arrive at a definition of apologetical preaching, it is necessary to define apologetics as well. A definition of apologetics is somewhat easier to arrive at for there is less tension in the church concerning this discipline. Apologetics derives its name from the Greek word, *apologia*, which means to make a verbal defense. According to Van Til, “In ancient Greece an *apologia* was the defense offered in a court of law in answer to an accusation.”¹⁴ In light of the original intention of the word and the situation in which the church finds itself today (and throughout its history), apologetics is an apt name to describe a ministry that aims to defend Christianity against attacks from the outside world.

Though the general definition of apologetics as “a ministry that aims to defend Christianity against attacks from the outside world” is relatively consistent across the Christian world, the details and application of that definition vary. Proponents of different kinds of apologetics take differing approaches to the way that they engage in the apologetics process.¹⁵ Cornelius Van Til, for instance, promoted presuppositional apologetics.¹⁶ Alvin Plantinga argues that faith is “rational.”¹⁷ Vern Poythress believes that science proves a creator.¹⁸ Classical apologists seek to prove God’s existence

¹⁴Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 27.

¹⁵For an excellent overview of the different systems of apologetics, see Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999).

¹⁶ Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 6.

¹⁷Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 90.

¹⁸Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

through natural theology.¹⁹ Still others, such as Josh McDowell and Lee Strobel argue using evidences for God’s existence.²⁰ For the purpose of this paper, the definition of apologetics given by Greg Bahnsen in *Van Til’s Apologetic* is more than sufficient: “Apologetics aims to defend the Christian faith by answering the variety of challenges leveled against it by unbelievers, thereby vindicating the Christian philosophy of life (worldview) over against all non-Christian philosophies of life (worldviews).”²¹ This definition is especially tilted toward presuppositional apologetics, but in the case of apologetical preaching, the preacher must work with certain presuppositions. Primarily, the preacher must engage in the preaching event with the presupposition that the Word of God is true and valid and that it is the ultimate authority in and for the world. Greg Bahnsen is very helpful here: “If you don’t start with God as your basic assumption, *you can’t prove anything*. The assumption of God’s existence is essential to *all* reasoning . . . believers must begin with biblical commitments.”²² Though preachers can and will incorporate other methods of apologetics into their preaching, they are all presuppositionalists to the extent that their sermons must be built upon the firm presupposition that the Bible is the infallible Word of God that is true for all peoples and all times.

¹⁹James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis, *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005)

²⁰For example, Joshua McDowell, *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1999), or Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

²¹Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 29.

²²Greg L. Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007), 7, 12; emphasis original.

Having now sufficiently established definitions for preaching and for apologetics, this chapter now focuses on the combination of the two. Any definition of apologetical preaching must be robust in its handling of both apologetics and preaching. For the purposes of this dissertation, the following definition will serve: *Apologetical preaching is the careful and accurate heralding of a biblical text by a man filled with the sense of God's greatness and majesty and holiness with the dual intention of defending the Christian faith and worldview and seeing the Scriptures understood and applied in the life of its hearers to the glory of God.*

Each portion of this definition is important and necessary. For apologetical preaching to be expositional and God-honoring it must be wed to the texts of Scripture and it must have as its goal life-change in its hearers and the glory of God. Further, for apologetical preaching to be apologetical, it must defend the faith. Robust defense of the faith does not negate careful exegesis and exposition. Rather, careful exposition of the text and the congregation will drive the preacher to deliver a message that remains true to the Scriptures while meeting people at the point of their actual need. The preacher will offer evidences that support the validity of the biblical text and will confront his hearers with the presupposition of God's Word as truth. Finally, any definition of apologetics or preaching must not neglect to keep in mind the apologist/preacher himself. The preacher is the medium through which the apologetic sermon will be delivered and he must be passionately involved in the process. Brian Chapell illustrates this well using the three elements of classical rhetoric: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.²³ It will be seen in what follows

²³Brian Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 34.

below that though the preacher is not equal with the Word, he is nearly as important as the Word in the delivery of a sermon. The message is affected by the medium, and as Stott has observed, “A congregation learns the seriousness of the gospel by the seriousness with which their pastors expound it.”²⁴ The preacher and his character are a central component in the sermon.

Scriptural Support for Apologetical Preaching

If the preacher/apologist is to be heard, more than preaching of the Word will be necessary. The preacher/apologist in the postmodern era will be judged alongside the message that he brings. His message will be accepted or rejected as truth based largely on his listeners’ acceptance or rejection of him as trustworthy and authentic. Authenticity in the process of apologetics is essential. Chapell shows that this three part component of gospel preaching, and even apologetical preaching, is founded not only in classic rhetoric, but in the very Word of God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul writes, “Our gospel came to you not simply with words [*logos*], but also with power, and with deep conviction [*pathos*]. You know how we lived [*ethos*] among you for your sake.”²⁵ Chapell goes on to write, “The Bible’s own emphases remind us that pastoral character remains the foundation of ministry.”²⁶ The right preaching of the Word that seeks to impact listeners must be seen by hearers as having impacted the preacher. Apologetical

²⁴ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 278.

²⁵ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 35. Bracketed italics are present in Chapell’s original. Chapell also gives a helpful figure on same page illustrating the three part process.

²⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 35.

preaching must be passionate. The preacher must actually believe what he preaches and he must project that belief to his people.

The biblical evidence for apologetical preaching is not exhausted in 1 Thessalonians. Paul's greatest recorded apologetical preaching event occurred on Mars Hill and is found written in Acts 17:22-34.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;
as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

The record of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill gives evidence of his willingness to engage his audience in a style that fit within their worldview and to defend the Christian faith in light of the perspective of his hearers. So distinct, in fact, is this sermon from his writings in Romans 1 that some have argued that Paul could not be the source of both passages. Darrell Bock points out that such arguments fail “to appreciate Paul's ability to

contextualize.”²⁷ In defense of Christ, Paul first seeks to establish the existence of a God and does so by pointing out the false gods of the Athenians as evidence of their ignorant groping for the divine. He also defends the Christian faith by pointing to creation. In this scheme, Paul defends God’s existence in two ways, as Creator of all and as a God who is not contained in a temple or reflected by an idol.²⁸ Though Paul does make reference to the Old Testament, his primary argument to his Athenian audience is from creation and from their own internal longing for the divine. Paul shows that in apologetical preaching, the preacher must engage heavily in understanding his audience and meeting the audience at their point of spiritual need.

In this passage of Acts Paul engages his hearers with all of the necessary components of an apologetical sermon. Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill may not at first appear to be expositional, but it is important to understand that at the time of Paul’s sermon, there was no carefully compiled New Testament as is extant today. What makes this sermon expositional is that Paul was careful to tie his message to the very Word of God, this time the Word of God incarnate in the flesh. This sermon was all about Jesus. It is also here evident that in addition to exegeting the Word of God, Paul had carefully exegeted his hearers. Paul was able to quote their own poets and to speak to their religious folklore. Further, Paul was presuppositional in his approach. Paul began his sermon with the presupposition that God’s Word is true and that God is the only true God. He then reasoned with the Athenians to show them the failures of their worldview, specifically, that if “we are indeed his offspring,” then “we ought not to think that the

²⁷Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 564.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 565.

divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art of imagination"

(Acts 17:28-29). Paul was a master at what Greg Bahnsen as follows:

Everybody thinks in terms of a broad and fundamental understanding of the nature of reality, of how we know what we know and of how we should live our lives. This philosophy or outlook is "presupposed" by everything the unbeliever (or believer) says; it is the implicit background that gives the meaning to the claims and inferences drawn by people. For this reason, every apologetical encounter is ultimately a conflict of worldviews or fundamental perspectives (whether this is explicitly mentioned or not).²⁹

On Mars Hill Paul's dilemma was not merely winning an argument; Paul sought to show his hearers the futility of their worldview and to give them instead a worldview filled with hope and life. Paul sought to clearly exposit the Word of God and to vindicate the "Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life."³⁰ J. Gresham Machen wrote, "Paul was convinced of the objective truth of the gospel message, and devotion to that truth as the great passion of his life. Christianity for Paul was not only a life, but also a doctrine, and logically the doctrine came first."³¹ Paul preached and lived as he believed, and when he stood to convince others of the truth of the gospel, Paul preached biblical doctrines in such a way as to connect with and change his hearers. Apologetical preaching is not merely a construct of the postmodern world, apologetical sermons have existed as long as the church has existed. When sermons speak to non-believers as well as believers, sermons are not somehow watered down, they are evangelistic and biblical.

²⁹Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 30.

³⁰Ibid., 34.

³¹J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 23.

Further, the apostle Paul was not the only preacher in the New Testament to engage in apologetical preaching. Jesus himself practiced apologetical preaching.

Zuckeran and Geisler speak specifically of Jesus' use of discourse in his seven "I Am" statements in the gospel of John:

1. I am the bread of life (6:35)
2. I am the light of the world (8:12)
3. I am the door (10:9)
4. I am the good shepherd (10:11)
5. I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
6. I am the way, and the truth, and the life (14:6)
7. I am the true vine (15:1)³²

Certainly, the "I Am" statements of Jesus are unique and direct application to contemporary preaching cannot be made because Jesus alone is the one true Son of God. However, his use of this method shows that Jesus saw apologetic preaching to be plausible and necessary. Just as Paul on Mars Hill, Jesus understood the culture into which he was speaking. Paul spoke at Mars Hill into a pluralistic society; Jesus spoke into a monotheistic Jewish culture. The people to whom Jesus spoke were well aware that there was only one true God; it was thus necessary for Jesus to identify himself with that one true God. Of this Zuckeran and Geisler write, "It is with this background that Jesus's unique claims to deity recorded in the gospel of John and elsewhere must be understood, for he asserts that he is Yahweh himself and he does what only Yahweh could do."³³ In the "I Am" statements of John, Jesus identifies himself specifically and not generically. It was to Moses that Yahweh identified himself in Exodus 3:14 as "I Am

³² Patrick Zuckeran and Norman L. Geisler, *The Apologetics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 95.

³²Ibid.

³³Zuckeran and Geisler, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, 95.

Who I Am.” Jewish hearers would not miss his point.³⁴ Jesus was claiming to be the God of the Old Testament and was offering to his hearers the opportunity to know the God of the Old Testament intimately and personally.

In addition to the examples listed above, multiple other examples of apologetic preaching can be identified in the New Testament. In Luke 4:16-20, Jesus appeals to Old Testament prophecy as proof of his Messianic nature. In Acts, on multiple occasions, the disciples do the same thing. In Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, Peter offers an apology based on the fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy (Acts 2:17-21, 25-28), personal testimony (Acts 2:32), miracles (Acts 2:22, 24, 29-32), and logic (Acts 2:29-35). Stephen offers an apology for Jesus that is founded in the history of the revelation of God (Acts 7:1-53). Peter, Paul, and Barnabas defended the coming of the Holy Spirit to the gentiles based on their experience and were affirmed in their defense by James and the whole counsel of Apostles (Acts 11:1; 18; 15:1-21). In the book of Hebrews, apology is offered by way of typology. In seeking to establish Jesus as the great high priest whose sacrifice was sufficient for the atonement of sin, the author of Hebrews draws a comparison between Jesus and the mysterious Melchizedek, “This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. . . . This makes Jesus a guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:15-17) Hebrews goes even further to assert that Jesus is not only a guarantor of a “better covenant,” but “he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues

³⁴Zuckeran and Geisler, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, 95.

forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him” (Heb. 7:24-25).

The blueprint for apologetical preaching is clearly laid out in the New Testament. In addition to the examples of Jesus and Paul, the above paragraphs show that in the preaching of Peter, Stephen, Barnabas, and James, apologetics played a central role. It is the responsibility of the preacher to clearly exposit the Word of God and a clear exposition includes providing clear evidence that the Bible is the true and trustworthy Word of God. The preacher who has confidence in God’s Word will have no doubts as to the ability of the Word of God to be defensible before a doubtful world.

Apologetical Preaching in History

Apologetical preaching had its beginning during biblical times, but in no way did it cease to exist in the centuries that followed. The ancient church fathers engaged often in apologetical preaching. The earliest apologists, in addition to defending against heresies that threatened the orthodoxy of the burgeoning church, also offered defenses for Christianity against powerful rulers and pagan authorities who sought to do damage to Christians and the church. To develop a good case for apologetical preaching, it is necessary to survey some examples of apologetical preaching and some who have practiced the trade throughout the history of the church. The earliest known apologist of this sort is Aristides. Edgar and Oliphant date the presentation of his *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* to the emperor somewhere between AD 125 and 147.³⁵ Edgar and Oliphant also point out that this text is unique among other apologetical writings

³⁵William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphant, eds., *Christian Apologetics Past & Present*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 1:29.

because of the “reasons for commending Christian faith.”³⁶ Aristides lays out a picture of God as eternal, perfect, and omnipotent. He lays out a case for the worship of God by appealing to the power and majesty of God, “He requires not sacrifice and libation, nor even one of the things visible; he requires not aught from any, but all living creatures stand in need of him.”³⁷

Following Aristides, Justin Martyr became one of the most well-known apologists in all of church history and, according to most, “the greatest apologist of the second century.”³⁸ For Justin and the early church, apologetics was no academic exercise; he addressed the emperor, “in behalf of all those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them.”³⁹ Justin appealed for the faith as a philosopher.⁴⁰ Though he was a Christian with his heart set among the Hebrew prophets, Justin was able to argue as a Greek philosopher.⁴¹ Most striking and important is the conclusion of Justin’s *First Apology*. As he pleads for his life and for the life of his brothers and sisters in the faith, he warns even the emperor that there is one greater than he. Justin alerts the emperor, “For we forewarn you, that you shall not escape the coming judgment of God, if you continue in your injustice.”⁴² Justin gave much to the church, but one of his greatest gifts was the reminder that apologetics should always have as its

³⁶Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:29.

³⁷Ibid., 1:30

³⁸Ibid., 1:35.

³⁹Ibid., 1:42.

⁴⁰Ted Cabal, “Notable Christian Apologist: Justin Martyr,” in *The Apologetics Study Bible*, ed. Ted Cabal et al. (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2007), 1900.

⁴¹Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:41.

⁴²Ibid., 1:63.

aim the glory of God through the conversion of sinners. Justin also serves as a constant reminder of the high cost associated with Christianity. He was beheaded in Rome for his faithfulness to Christ.⁴³

John Chrysostom is known more for his preaching than for his apologetics, but his *A Demonstration against the Pagans that Christ is God*, shows him to be well-qualified as both a preacher and an apologist.⁴⁴ In this work, Chrysostom sets out to defend the Christian faith to people of all stripes, “I shall speak in such a way that the house servant, the lady’s maid, the widow, the peddler, the sailor, and the farmer will find my arguments simple and easy to understand.”⁴⁵ Chrysostom understood his audience. He wrote and preached in such a way that those who heard his words would be changed and impacted with the message of the gospel. He studied his culture and it was his understanding of the culture that led him to his preferred type of communication. Knowing his audience, Chrysostom chose to write and speak in the way that was most likely to bring about conversion, “rather than argue from miracles, which the pagans would not believe, John centers all on the divinity of Christ and the benefits of that in the life of the believer.”⁴⁶

⁴³Cabal, “Notable Christian Apologist,” 1900.

⁴⁴There is debate as to whether or not this is a sermon from Chrysostom. John F. Donoghue argues against this being a sermon. However, the possibility of this being a “preached” text does exist based on Chrysostom’s own use of “logos” (discourse) in his first section and on the fact that he speaks of his “listeners” in the beginning of his work. See John F. Donoghue, *St. John Chrysostom: Apologist* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 163. See also Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:192.

⁴⁵John Chrysostom, “Demonstration against the Pagans That Christ is God,” trans. Paul W. Harkins, *The Fathers of the Church 73* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 187.

⁴⁶Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics* 1:191.

Thus, in *A Demonstration Against the Pagans that Christ is God*, Chrysostom argues for Christ's divinity first from Old Testament prophecy, "Isaiah did not say: 'it will come,' but: 'It will come to rest,' because after the Spirit came, he did not depart but remained."⁴⁷ He also argued for Christ's divinity based on "Christ's power proved by his own predictions" as he quoted Christ's emphatic statement, "upon this rock I shall build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."⁴⁸ Even in his argument from miracles, Chrysostom kept in mind his hearers and argued, not from the miracles of healing, but rather from the miracle of the spread of the gospel, "it was also marvelous that these few ignorant, poor, undistinguished, unlettered, worthless men of foreign tongue were entrusted with setting straight the whole world."⁴⁹ But the miracle, according to Chrysostom, was even greater than the fact of untrained men preaching and teaching publicly:

Even though the apostles told so harsh a story, they still won people over to believe. This is how they built up the church. How did they do it and by what means? They did it through the power of him who had commanded them to do it. He made ready the way; he made all the hard things easy. If it were not the power of God which accomplished this, the church would not have had a preface, but less a beginning. How could all this be done?⁵⁰

And they did a far more difficult thing than build a church from stones. They built all these churches out of souls and principles, not with stones. They took souls which demons had driven to frenzy for many years. They won those souls over to free themselves of the demons, to stand aloof from that madness, and to come over to a life of great temperance. And this is a far greater thing than putting together a wall from stones.⁵¹

⁴⁷Chrysostom, "Demonstration against the Pagans that Christ is God," 194.

⁴⁸Ibid., 172; Matt 16:18. (Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.)

⁴⁹Ibid., 242.

⁵⁰Ibid., 243.

⁵¹Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:202.

In a sermon from John 1, Chrysostom argues for the spirit-inspired nature of the Scriptures on the fact that John, an unlearned and “barbarous” man, could write with such precision and effect that even the Platonists and Sophists could not dispute.

This fisherman then, whose business was about lakes, and nets, and fish; this native of Bethsaida of Galilee; this son of a poor fisherman, yes, and poor to the last degree; this man ignorant, and to the last degree of ignorance too, who never learned letters either before or after he accompanied Christ; let us see what he utters, and on what matters he converses with us. Is it of things in the field? Is it of things in rivers? On the trade in fish? For these things, perhaps, one expects to hear from a fisherman. But fear ye not; we shall hear nought of these; but we shall hear of things in heaven, and what no one ever learned before this man. For, as might be expected of one who speaks from the very treasures of the Spirit, he is come bringing to us sublime doctrines, and the best way of life and wisdom, [as though just arrived from the very heavens; yea, rather such as it was not likely that all even there should know, as I said before. Do these things belong to a fisherman? Tell me. Do they belong to a rhetorician at all? To a sophist or philosopher? To every one trained in the wisdom of the Gentiles? By no means. The human soul is simply unable thus to philosophize on that pure and blessed nature; on the powers that come next to it; on immortality and endless life; on the nature of mortal bodies which shall hereafter be immortal; on punishment and the judgment to come; on the enquiries that shall be as to deeds and words, as to thoughts and imaginations.⁵²

A few significant lessons on apologetical preaching can be gleaned from Chrysostom’s texts here discussed. First, Chrysostom understood well that it is not necessary to share the entire Bible to defend the faith. Chrysostom had a deep appreciation for the Word of God, so great in fact that Edgar and Oliphant report he spent two years in a standing position memorizing the Bible.⁵³ However, he also knew that certain portions of Scripture were more likely to appeal to his hearers. As a result, he chose passages of Scripture and techniques of delivery that best fit his listeners and gave

⁵²John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1886), 19.

⁵³Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:189.

them the greatest opportunity to receive the gospel. Preachers who seek to be apologetical must follow Chrysostom by fitting their text, delivery, and application of that text to their audience. If preachers are to defend the faith adequately and see the conversion of doubtful souls, they must preach the Word of God as Chrysostom did, with an eye to the culture and an expectation that people would trust Christ. In encouraging pastors to build bridges between the Bible and contemporary culture, John Stott quotes C. S. Horne in writing, “We have two qualities in Chrysostom, which in their combination make him unique—*he is a man of the Word and a man of the world . . . as with all effective preachers his message had both a timeless and a timely element in it.*”⁵⁴ Chrysostom responded to rival claims by addressing his hearers with Biblical truth that would most easily cross the chasm of their unbelief. Preachers of the twenty-first century would do well to mimic Chrysostom on this point.

Finally, this chapter would be incomplete without a discussion of Augustine as an apologetical preacher. It has been said that Augustine stands throughout history as one of the greatest apologetical preachers.⁵⁵ His contributions lend much to this conversation. Edgar and Oliphant have said that “he [Augustine] was thus a theologian who used philosophical knowledge to establish the first full-orbed Christian worldview for the early church.”⁵⁶ In his introduction to Augustine’s *Harmony of the Gospels*, M. B. Riddle writes that there are essentially two approaches to harmonizing the gospels, that of the historical method of treatment and that of the apologetic type. Riddle goes on

⁵⁴Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 147; emphasis original.

⁵⁵Edgar and Oliphant, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:207-8.

⁵⁶Ibid., 205.

to write, “Augustine deals more largely with the latter [apologetic].”⁵⁷ Augustine’s apologetics are evident in his writings as well as his sermons. *The Confessions* contains vast amounts of apologetical material and his *City of God* is an apologetic work defending the Christian religion within the Roman culture. Of his sermons, Riddle writes, “in them, he who has furnished the mould for all the most thoughtful minds for fourteen hundred years, is seen forming with loving tenderness the babes in Christ. Very touching is the child-like simplicity, with which he gradually leads them through what to them were difficulties.”⁵⁸

One of Augustine’s great gifts to apologetical preaching is his sermon, “Of The Agreement of the Evangelists Matthew and Luke in the Generations of the Lord.” In this sermon, Augustine shows that Christ was indeed born of a woman. In a society where women were devalued, Augustine preached with the presupposition that the Bible is always true even when its message seems difficult to believe. Augustine preached, “But say they, ‘how are we to believe that Christ was born of a woman?’ I would answer, by the Gospel which hath been preached and is still preached to the entire world.”⁵⁹ Further in this same sermon, Augustine tackled the issue of disagreements among the gospel accounts. Augustine’s conclusion was one of complete and total confidence in the Word of God. Rather than giving a swift and complete answer, Augustine encouraged his people to search the Scriptures and to question them, but to do

⁵⁷M. B. Riddle introduction to “St. Augustine: Sermon on the Mount; Harmony of the Gospels; Homilies on the Gospels,” *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Father*, vol.6, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), loc. 2338-47, Kindle.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, loc. 9405-13.

⁵⁹Riddle, “Introduction to St. Augustine,” loc. 9519-27.

so in faith, praying that “he may Himself open to the faithful what is hidden in him . . . Honour in Him what as yet thou understandest not, and so much the more as the veils which thou seest are more in number; for the higher in honour any one is, the more veils are suspended in his palace.”⁶⁰ His presupposition in preaching was that God’s guidance was necessary to interpret the Word of God correctly.

As seen above, Augustine sought to answer objections before they were offered. In *On Christian Teaching*, he urges Christian teachers to take up the task “not just to reveal what is hidden and solve knotty problems but also, while doing this, to anticipate other questions which may arise, in case they undermine or refute what we are saying; provided, of course, that the solution also presents itself to us, so that we do not undermine our sure foundation.”⁶¹ He also urges Christian teachers and preachers to utilize culture to communicate the gospel, “A person who is good and a true Christian should realize that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found, gathering and acknowledging it even in pagan literature.”⁶²

Augustine appealed to his people to believe that the secret things belong to the Lord. He further encouraged them to trust the Scriptures to answer all of their questions. Augustine’s apologetic is summarized in two quotes from *The Confessions*, “I believe because you taught me. For your teaching is true.”⁶³ Further, Augustine prays, “You

⁶⁰Riddle, “Introduction to St. Augustine,” loc. 9544-952.

⁶¹Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 127.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 47.

⁶³ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image, 1960), 119.

have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it find rests in you.”⁶⁴ Just as Augustine trusted that his faith would give him a greater understanding of the things of the Lord, he encouraged his people to come to the Lord even if there were yet questions to be answered with the great confidence that God could and would grant answers in faith that Augustine’s hearers could never arrive at without God. Further, Augustine believed that the very fact of doubt and restlessness in one’s life is itself an apologetic for God’s existence and for his necessity in the lives of his creatures.

It was a restlessness of soul that led Martin Luther to discover the rest in God that Augustine had promoted. It was also Augustine whose work gave Luther the primary material for his upheaval against Rome. Luther is known primarily for his work in the Protestant Reformation, but one cannot forget that much of his drive to reform the church was born out of his study and was communicated in his preaching. For Luther, the preached Word was sufficient for salvation, “Whoever does not receive the Word for its own sake, will never receive it for the sake of the preacher, even if all the angels preached it to him.”⁶⁵ Luther sought to defend the true faith against its imposters, and though few authors are willing to classify Luther as a fideist, many of the integral ideas of fideism find their beginning in Luther.⁶⁶ Boa and Bowman add, “For Luther, forgiveness of sins is a gift of God through faith alone, a gift needed by all human beings because of their bondage to sin. This spiritual bondage is so radical that the human mind

⁶⁴Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, 43.

⁶⁵Martin Luther, *The Sermons of Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 162.

⁶⁶Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 340.

is simply incapable of knowing anything significant about God and his will or about understanding the liberating truth of the gospel apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁷

In typical Lutheran fashion in the Preface to his translation of Luther’s *Table Talks*, Henry Bell wrote that Luther was called by God to “preach Christ, and clearly to set forth the simplicity of the Gospel.”⁶⁸ Luther’s greatest defense of the faith was against the established church. Essentially, he fought to see the true religion of God’s Word proclaimed and the false religion of Rome removed. It is no surprise, then, that one who was striving against the establishment to reintroduce the Bible to Christians and to Christian worship would use the sacred text as the principle tool in his preaching, apologetics, and evangelism. Luther, as has been said of many others above, understood both the Word of God and the people to whom he was preaching. Luther’s hearers believed in God and generally trusted the priests, they simply had not heard the Word of God faithfully proclaimed. Luther faithfully preached God’s Word and trusted God to work through it.

Luther’s approach to apologetics in preaching is well summed up in a quote from his collected works, “Yes, I hear the sermon; but who is speaking? The minister? No indeed! You do not hear the minister. True, the voice is his; but my God is speaking the Word which he preaches or speaks. Therefore I should honor the Word of God that I may become a good pupil of the Word.”⁶⁹ His opinion of human reason was very low

⁶⁷Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 340.

⁶⁸Martin Luther, *Selections from the Table Talk of Martin Luther*, trans. Henry Bell (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), loc. 61, Kindle.

⁶⁹Martin Luther, *Luther’s Collected Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1968), vol. 47: 229.

because he viewed human reason as the source of the subversion of the gospel within the Catholic Church. According to Luther, “God is not subject to reason and syllogisms but to the Word of God and faith.”⁷⁰ Because Luther believed God to work through his Word, Luther’s apologetic was centered around the Bible. He reminds all preachers of the ability of God’s Word to work, “Let us not be anxious: the Gospel needs not our help; it is sufficiently strong of itself. God alone commends it.”⁷¹

The nineteenth century was rife with scientific discovery and challenges to Christianity. Many pastors took up the mantle of defending the faith through their sermons. Charles Spurgeon, for instance, stands as an example of apologetical preaching well into the twenty-first century. So great was his impact that Josh Moody of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois encourages pastors to read Spurgeon as a way to improve their apologetic preaching.⁷² J. C. Ryle found ways to intertwine apologetics in his preaching as well. In his exposition on John 19, Ryle points to the “frequent fulfillments of prophetic Scripture throughout every part of Christ’s crucifixion.”⁷³ Ryle goes on to say that we should regard “such fulfillments of prophecy as strong evidence of the divine

⁷⁰Luther, *The Disputation Concerning the Passage: “The Word Was Made Flesh”* (1539), in *Luther’s Works* 38:239-44, cited in “Fideist Apologetics: By Faith Alone, accessed November 15, 2010, http://bible.org/seriespage/fideist-apologetics-faith-alone#P46_17752.

⁷¹Luther, *Sermon on Faith and Good Works*, cited in J. K. S. Reid, *Christian Apologetics* (London: Hodder & Stoughton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 131, cited in “Fideist Apologetics: By Faith Alone, accessed November 15, 2010, http://bible.org/seriespage/fideist-apologetics-faith-alone#P46_17752.

⁷²Josh Moody, “5 Ways to Improve Your Apologetic Preaching,” [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/03/15/5-ways-pastors-can-improve-their-apologetic-preaching/), accessed March 25, 2013, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/03/15/5-ways-pastors-can-improve-their-apologetic-preaching/>.

⁷³J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 3, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012), 230.

authority of God's Word."⁷⁴ Ryle also sees the fulfillment of prophecy in the past as evidence to trust in prophecy about the future. Preaching from Matthew 21, Ryle urges, "From the fulfillment of God's Word in time past, we are surely intended to gather something as to the manner of its fulfillment in time to come. We have a right to expect that prophecies respecting the second advent of Christ will be as literally fulfilled as those respecting his first advent."⁷⁵

It was not only fulfilled prophecy to which Ryle appealed as he defended the truths of God's Word. Of the resurrection, Ryle points out that it has never been disproved,

The fact of our Lord's resurrection rests on evidence which no infidel can ever explain away. It is confirmed by testimony of every kind, sort, and description. The plain unvarnished story which the Gospel writers tell about it, is one that cannot be overthrown. The more the account they give is examined, the more inexplicable will the even appear, unless we accept it as true. If we choose to deny the truth of their account we may deny everything in the world. It is not so certain that Julius Caesar once lived, as it is that Christ rose again.⁷⁶

As evidence of the resurrection, Ryle cites the desire of enemies to disprove it and the unwillingness of even his closest friends to believe it, "Never was there a fact which the friends of God were so slow to believe, as the resurrection of Christ; never was there a fact which the enemies of God were so anxious to disprove: and yet, in spite of the unbelief of friends, and the enmity of foes, the fact was thoroughly established."⁷⁷

Though all of Ryle's preaching would not be characterized as apologetic, there is certainly a sampling of apologetics sprinkled throughout his preaching.

⁷⁴Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 3, 231.

⁷⁵Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*, 213.

⁷⁶Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke* vol. 2, 367.

⁷⁷Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*, 325.

F. W. Robertson, the nineteenth century British pastor, serves as another example of a man who preached many sermons which relied heavily upon apologetics and cultural engagement to expound the Word of God. In an Advent sermon, Robertson takes up the issue of Hinduism and pronounces, “The god whom a man worships is but the reflection of himself.”⁷⁸ In contrast, he pronounces that the true God is to be worshiped, not in the image of other men, but in exclusively in the image of Jesus Christ.⁷⁹ Writing in the early twentieth century, Hensley Henson suggests that Robertson’s desire to win converts and to defend the true faith before them was so great that he was willing even to despair faithful zealots to reach the lost.⁸⁰ Robertson was not impressed or soothed with many religious institutions of his day and spent his efforts often criticizing them for their phariseeism and expounding the true faith. This tactics endeared him to those outside of the church and gave him a hearing, but “Such a handling of current beliefs may be extremely helpful to disinterested or distressed inquirers, but to eager devotees it must needs appear little better than a blend of insolence and profaneness.”⁸¹

In a sermon reflecting upon the visit of the Magi, Robertson points out that it was a desire for religion that led men to first look to the stars, “astronomy is a science

⁷⁸F. W. Robertson, “Christianity and Hindooism,” www.fwrobertson.com, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://www.fwrobertson.com/sermons/ser88.htm>.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Hensley Henson, *Robertson of Brighton* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1916), 88.

⁸¹Ibid., 89.

that arises from man's need of religion."⁸² After suggesting that it was a need for meaning that first led men and women to look to the heavens, Robertson goes on to argue that learning and science are not antithetical to religion. According to Robertson's argument, Christianity and science are compatible primarily because science is the study of natural or created things and God is the creator. To argue that science and religion are incompatible is to argue that "the God of nature is not the God of grace."⁸³ Unwilling to merely show science as a partner of religion, Robertson draws a unique conclusion by contending that science and philosophy become Christian when they reach maturity,

They forget, too, another thing. Philosophy has become Christian; science has knelt to Christ. There is a deep significance in that homage of the Magians. For it in fact was but a specimen and type of that which science has been doing ever since. The mind of Christ has not only entered into the Temple, and made it the house of prayer, it has entered into the temple of science, and purified the spirit of philosophy. This is its spirit now, as, expounded by its chief interpreter, "Man, the interpreter of Nature, knows nothing, and can do nothing, except that which Nature teaches him." What is this but science bending before the Child, becoming childlike, and, instead of projecting its own fancies upon God's world, listening reverently to hear what It has to teach him? In a similar spirit, too, spoke the greatest of philosophers, in words quoted in every child's book: "I am but a child, picking up pebbles on the shore of the great sea of truth."

Oh, be sure all the universe tells of Christ and leads to Christ. Rightly those ancient Magians deemed, in believing that God was worshipped truly in that august temple. The stars preach the mind of Christ. Not as of old, when a mystic star guided their feet to Bethlehem, but now, to the mind of the astronomer, they tell of eternal order and harmony; they speak of changeless law, where no caprice reigns. You may calculate the star's return: and to the day, and hour, and minute it will be there. This is the fidelity of God. These mute masses obey the law impressed upon them by their Creator's hand, unconsciously: and that law is the law of their own nature. To understand the laws of our nature, and consciously and reverently to obey them, that is the mind of Christ, the sublimest spirit of the Gospel.

I remark again, this universe may be studied in an irreverent spirit. In Dan. ii. 48, we find the reverence which was paid to science. Daniel among the

⁸²F. W. Robertson, "The Star in the East," www.fwrobertson.com, accessed march 25, 2013, <http://www.fwrobertson.com/sermons/ser23.htm>.

⁸³Ibid.

Chaldees was made chief of the wise men; that is, the first of the Magians: and King Nebuchadnezzar bowed before him, with incense and oblations. In later days we find that spirit changed. Another king, Herod, commands the wise men to use their science for the purpose of letting him know where the Child was. In earlier times they honored the priest of Nature: in later times they made use of him.⁸⁴

Science is no enemy of Christ, instead science points to Christ. The logical conclusion of natural studies is the God of nature. The Magi set out to understand the stars, but the very stars led to the feet of Christ.

In one final example, Robertson uses the Christian virtue of love (charity) as a defense of its divine origins and sustenance. Using as examples Peter, Paul, and John, Robertson takes care to point out the peculiarities in the personalities and character of each man. Through these, he shows the variant strengths of each man's character, but then points out that each man maintains charity as chief among the virtues.

Now I take that unanimity as a proof that the Gospel comes from one Living Source. How came St. Peter and St. John, so different from each other, and St. Paul, who had had almost no communion with either of them, to agree, and agree so enthusiastically, in this doctrine-love is over all and above all; above intellect, freedom, courage-unless there had streamed into the mind and heart of each one of them light from One Source, even from Him the deepest principle of whose being, and the law of whose life and death, were love?⁸⁵

Were the Scriptures written only through the inspiration of various men, one would assume to find the varying character traits and theological emphases to alter the primary perspective. If, on the other hand, the Bible is indeed inspired of God, one should expect to see a thread of conformity running through the hands of its human authors. Robertson points to the virtue of love as this common thread.

⁸⁴Robertson, "The Star in the East."

⁸⁵F. W. Robertson, "The Pre-Eminence of Charity," www.fwrobertson.com, accessed March 25, 2013, <http://www.fwrobertson.com/sermons/ser85.htm>.

The last historical example of apologetical preaching examined in this chapter is Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon has been heralded as the Prince of Preachers and is widely believed to have been one of the greatest preachers of the nineteenth century. Much like Luther, Spurgeon believed strongly in the power of God's Word to transform lives. In his sermon, "How to Win Souls for Christ," Spurgeon admonished, "O preacher, if thou art about to stand up to see what thou canst do, it will be thy wisdom to sit down speedily; but if thou standest up to prove what thine almighty Lord and Master can do through thee, then infinite possibilities lie about thee!"⁸⁶ He rested, not in his ability as a preacher, but in the ability of God's Word to speak through him. Spurgeon, like the other examples cited, cannot be described unilaterally as an apologetical preacher, but apologetical preaching was a significant part of his preaching ministry. However, Spurgeon represents something of a transitional person in the history of apologetical preaching. He was one of the first prominent preachers to address head on the challenges of modern science.

One could rightly argue that Spurgeon was presuppositional in his approach to Darwinism, evolution, and other attacks on the Christian faith. Spurgeon's approach was similar to the later work of Greg Bahnsen, who "called his students to . . . force the unbeliever to live consistently with his rationalistic and materialistic presuppositions that underlie and seemingly support his worldview."⁸⁷ Spurgeon recognized that many objections to the faith are weak, but yet are not always easy to argue against, "Most of the objections against the articles of our holy faith are contemptible, yet none the less

⁸⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2007), 175.

⁸⁷Gary DeMar foreword to Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, xv.

difficult to answer because contemptible, for an argument is not always apparently strong in proportion to its reasonableness.”⁸⁸ The goal then, for Spurgeon was to challenge his hearers with reason and the gospel. For instance, in challenging evolutionists, Spurgeon remarked, “If those who believed in evolution said their prayers rightly, they would begin them with, ‘Our Father, which art up a tree.’”⁸⁹ Spurgeon’s sermons challenged his listeners to consistently live out their worldview. In a sermon titled, “The Planter of the Ear Must Hear,” Spurgeon once adjured his congregation “Though it be veiled in the language of philosophy, the scientific jargon which makes God into insensible force is covert atheism.”⁹⁰ Spurgeon left no room in his sermons for his hearers to feign belief without practice.

For Spurgeon, apologetics seemed to be more of a necessary task than a joy. It appears that apologetics may have been a struggle for his experience of salvation had so convinced him of God’s existence and goodness; it was difficult to conceive of doubt:

I confess that when I have to argue about the truth of divine things it is a dreary task to me. I am so sure of these things myself, by living and actual test, that I wonder other people are not sure too; and while they are wanting me to argue about this point or that it seems to me like asking a man to prove that there is a sun in yonder sky. I bask in his beams, I swoon under his heat, I see by his light; and yet they ask me to prove his existence! Are the men mad? What do they want me to prove? That God hears prayer? I pray and receive answers every day. That God pardons sin? I was in my own esteem the blackest of sinners, and sunk in the depths of despair, yet I believed, and by that faith I leaped into a fullness of light and liberty at once. Why do they not try it themselves?⁹¹

⁸⁸Spurgeon, “Motives for Steadfastness,” accessed November 19, 2010, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1111.htm>.

⁸⁹C. H. Spurgeon, “Idols Found Wanting, but Jehovah Found Faithful,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (London: Banner of Truth, 1970), 34: 661.

⁹⁰Spurgeon, “The Planter of the Ear Must Hear,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 35:661.

⁹¹Spurgeon, “The True Position of the Witness Within,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 24:445.

So Spurgeon engaged in apologetics, but there was little doubt that Spurgeon's main goal was to see sinners converted by bringing them around to his way of thinking. In the introduction to *The Soul Winner*, Spurgeon wrote, "Soul-winning is the chief business of the Christian minister; indeed, it should be the main pursuit of every true believer."⁹² Still, apologetical as Spurgeon was and with a great desire to rightly preach the true Word and the true doctrines of God's Word, Spurgeon admonished his readers, "Our grand object is not the revision of opinions, but the regeneration of natures."⁹³ Nevertheless, as he sought to defend the faith and see sinners converted, Spurgeon knew no other weapon than the Word of God.

Spurgeon was confident to stand completely upon the Word of God and to allow the Word to speak for itself. To a gathered audience one Sunday morning, Spurgeon shared his beliefs in the power of the gospel against its enemies:

A great many learned men are defending the gospel; no doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that, when there are most books of that kind, it is because the gospel itself is not being preached. Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, a full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best "apology" for the gospel is to let the gospel out.⁹⁴

For Spurgeon, the surest way of defending the faith was to preach the clear gospel of Jesus Christ and to allow the gospel to speak for itself. His preaching, in a time when

⁹²Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner*, 11.

⁹³Ibid., 12.

⁹⁴Spurgeon, "Christ and his Co-Workers," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 42:253.

conservative views of Scripture were falling out of vogue in London, serves as a lasting example of faithfulness to the Word of God.

The list of preachers and pastors considered above does not account for men who practiced only or even primarily apologetic sermons. To suggest so is to read the thesis of this chapter into the lives of past historical figures. Nevertheless, what is seen in the examples cited above is that there are historical examples of apologetical preaching. It is these historical examples that lay the groundwork for more robust apologetic encounters from the pulpit in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Application of Apologetical Preaching in the Twenty-first Century

In the twenty-first century, there is no greater proponent of apologetical preaching that stands in the way of the men discussed in the paragraphs above than Tim Keller. Keller is the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in the heart of New York City. In a time when most churches in urban centers have retreated from conservatism, embraced liberalism, and died, Keller is leading his church to continue to grow by tackling the tough issues of the faith head on. In the introduction to his best-selling book, *The Reason for God*, Keller suggests a new path for Christianity in the twenty-first century that collides with apologetical preaching as has been defined and illustrated in this paper. Keller writes,

Believers should acknowledge and wrestle with doubts—not only their own but their friends' and neighbors'. It is no longer sufficient to hold beliefs just because you inherited them. Only if you struggle long and hard with objections to your faith will you be able to provide grounds for your beliefs to skeptics, including yourself, that are plausible rather than ridiculous or offensive.⁹⁵

⁹⁵Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead, 2009), xvii.

In an age where politics and religious preferences have often been melded into one, Keller argues for a Christianity that is neither Republican nor Democrat, but is biblical. He warns of the dangers of politics, “We can look upon our political leaders as ‘messiahs,’ our political policies as saving doctrine, and turn our political activism into a kind of religion.”⁹⁶ Instead of a pithy politically driven religion, Keller calls for a robust faith that asks and answers the hard questions instead of running from them and that engages opponents instead of attacking. He warns, “People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic.”⁹⁷ Keller’s preaching represents this kind of robust apologetical ministry and it is making an impact on young professionals in the twenty-first century.

The New York Times once described Keller’s preaching as “cogent and literary.”⁹⁸ “Cogent and literary” is an apt title for one who weaves scholarship, literary appreciation, biblical orthodoxy, and passionate Missiology into his messages. Aaron Coe, who has partnered with Keller’s Redeemer Presbyterian Church for church planting, writes,

It would be safe to say that Keller found his preaching voice (a way of connecting with people) in New York City. While certainly rooted in gospel orthodoxy, Keller’s voice is not that which often characterizes evangelical preaching. In a recent *New*

⁹⁶Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 98.

⁹⁷Keller, *The Reason for God*, xvii.

⁹⁸Michael Luo, “Preaching the Word and Quoting the Voice” in the New York Times, February 26, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/26/nyregion/26evangelist.html?_r=1&hp&ex=1141016400&en=428b37fc7298f74c&ei=5094&partner=homepage. accessed November 19, 2010, cited in Aaron Coe, “Timothy Keller: A New Kind of Evangelist for the Urban World” (paper presented at Methods and Influences of American Evangelists, Ph.D. Seminar, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, June, 2010.)

York Magazine article the author noted this about Keller’s approach, ‘for those expecting hellfire and brimstone, the first surprise is the voice. Keller doesn’t speak in theatrical, over-the-top tones but in a soft, conversational manner, as if he’s sharing a confidence with a friend.’”⁹⁹

Notice that Keller’s voice is noted for its “conversational manner.” Certainly, the way one speaks is not the only driving force behind his success as a preacher (think of Mark Driscoll and John Piper for instance, their preaching voices can hardly be characterized as “soft”), but this conversational tone does speak to something else that is important in apologetical preaching, namely the *pathos* of the preacher. His passion must be twofold—passion for God and for the people to whom he preaches. Writing in the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Peter Gentry comments, “If there is any way to summarize in just a few words the instructions for behavior and conduct in the new creation community, it is speaking the truth in love.”¹⁰⁰ Speaking the truth in love means, at least in part, meeting people at the point of their intellectual need as well as their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs.

This intellectual approach to gospel orthodoxy presents a paradigm shift for much of evangelicalism. The shift is toward missiology in the pulpit. But why would Keller, a man with rural roots choose to preach in an urban way? Because for Keller, the gospel is the message and conversion is the goal. Just as the apologetical preachers of the past have done, Keller harps on the gospel. Of Keller’s preaching, Coe writes,

⁹⁹Aaron Coe, “Timothy Keller: A New Kind of Evangelist for the Urban World” (paper presented in *Methods and Influences of American Evangelists*, Ph.D. Seminar, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, June 2010), quoting Joseph Hooper, accessed April 6, 2010, “Tim Keller Wants to Save Your Yuppie Soul,” *New York Magazine*, available from <http://nymag.com/news/features/62374>.

¹⁰⁰Peter J. Gentry, “Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph. 4:15): Life in the New Covenant Community,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10 (Summer 2006): 73.

He asserts that in most biblical preaching, pastors point out that there are essentially two ways to live: either moral and religious or immoral and irreligious. Their preaching then tries to convert people from the irreligious way to the religious way. Keller states, “A key for thinking out the implications of the gospel is to consider the gospel a third way between two mistaken opposites. However, we must realize that the gospel is not a halfway compromise between these two poles—it produces not something in the middle but something different from both.”¹⁰¹

Keller’s “third way” calls his listeners to be engaged in the message of the gospel and to be changed by the gospel. The gospel is not conservative or liberal, it is biblical.

In the twenty-first century, preachers will do well to model their ministries after Tim Keller. Note that Keller’s model is not necessarily urban and sophisticated, but that it is gospel centered and culturally appropriate. In his preaching ministry, Keller preaches the gospel and answers the questions of the people to whom he preaches. Apologetical Preaching focuses on the Word of God and on the people to whom that Word will be preached. In the twenty-first century, the preacher is not immediately respected because of his office and the Bible is not held by the world to be the Word of God. Pastors and preachers must face this reality with a new approach to gospel ministry. That approach will answer hard questions with timeless truths for the salvation of sinners and the glory of God.

¹⁰¹Coe, “Timothy Keller,” 2.

CHAPTER 3

WORLDVIEW PREACHING AS SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Paul Hiebert was beneficial to the church by helping the church to understand the flaw of the excluded middle. In the West, most people view the world in two categories; that which is eternal and spiritual (religion) and that which is physical and temporal (science). The majority of the world, however, does not stop with only two categories, they also include a third, middle category. This category, which Hiebert describes as “supernatural but this-worldly,” is the place where much spiritual warfare is experienced.¹ One cannot actively consider what spiritual warfare is and how it should be engaged without the realization that the spirit world does in fact affect the physical world. Hiebert’s work is beneficial in helping the church to realize that the battles of which Paul wrote in Ephesians 6 are real and alive today.

Spiritual warfare is a topic that has grown in popularity in recent years, yet it is not a new phenomenon. Obviously, many passages in both the Old and New Testaments make the spiritual struggle apparent. Daniel speaks of a kind of territorial spiritual battle, Elijah was involved with power encounters, Jesus faced Satan in the wilderness, Paul wrote about spiritual armor in Ephesians, and the Apostle John gives a vivid description of the age old battle between God and Satan in the book of Revelation with a look to the

¹Paul Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology* 10, no.1 (January 1982): 35-47.

future victory of YHWH over his foe. So obvious is the spiritual tension in the Christian Scriptures that Clinton Arnold argues that “One cannot engage in a biblical study of the power of God without simultaneously exploring the opposing sphere of power—Satan and his principalities and powers.”²

Moving forward in history, a leading Reformation scholar has observed of that era, “Belief in the devil’s opposition to Christ and the gospel is such an integral part of the Reformation discovery that if the reality of the powers inimical to God is not grasped, the incarnation of Christ, as well as the justification and temptation of the sinner are reduced to ideas of the mind rather than experiences of the faith.”³ Spiritual warfare has been recognized as a reality within the church and the world throughout the history of the church. Modern thinking may have diminished its role in theory, but the reality of spiritual battle and the necessity for being prepared in the battle has remained.

The most encouraging reality in spiritual warfare is that the Bible shows us the final outcome. Regardless of what this world may bring in the present or even if Satan appears to be winning, the eternal results have already been secured in the mind and will of God. His children will not be lost and his will shall not be thwarted. Sinclair Ferguson, writing about Spiritual warfare in Paul’s writings sums up the reality of God’s ultimate victory and man’s responsibility well this way:

The real question for Paul—and for us—is not, “is God able to keep His people secure?” It is, “How is God going to keep me secure?” Not, “do I know what God’s

²Clinton Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 30.

³Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 104-5.

plan is? But, “What practical difference does it make to my life to know that God has a plan?” Not “What do I know?” but, “How do I put into action what I know?”⁴

To a large degree, spiritual warfare is claiming the victory that Christ has already won.

The realization that the believer is engaged in a battle, but that the battle—and the believer—are ultimately and eternally secure in the hands of a God who has already won the victory at Calvary.

Zack Eswine pointedly writes, “Preaching is an act of spiritual war.”⁵ The purpose of this chapter is to examine spiritual warfare and its relationship to worldview preaching. The chapter will be divided into three main sections along the lines suggested for spiritual warfare by Clinton Arnold. In his book, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, Arnold argues that a biblical perspective on spiritual warfare is balanced between three areas, the flesh, the world, and the devil.⁶ He defines the three areas this way:

The flesh is the inner propensity or inclination to do evil. It is the part of our creatureliness tainted by the fall that remains with us until the day we die. It is our continuing connection to this present evil age.

The world is the unhealthy social environment in which we live. This includes the ungodly aspects of culture, peer pressure, values, traditions, “what is in,” “what is uncool,” customs, philosophies, and attitudes. The world represents the prevailing worldview assumptions of the day that stand contrary to the biblical understanding of reality and biblical values.

The devil is an intelligent, powerful spirit-being that is thoroughly evil and is directly involved in perpetrating evil in the lives of individuals as well as on a much larger scale. He is not an abstraction, either as a personification of the inner corrupt self or in the sense of a symbolic representation of organized social evil.⁷

⁴Sinclair B. Ferguson, *By Grace Alone* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2010), 68.

⁵Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 244.

⁶Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 34.

⁷*Ibid.*, 34-35.

Though these three areas represent a good starting point for examining spiritual warfare and offer a good outline for understanding and engaging in spiritual warfare, one should not see these delineations as concrete dividers.

Several passages in the General Epistles show just how interrelated each of these three areas are to each other. For instance, in James 4:1-10 we read,

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

In this one passage, James encourages his readers to avoid sin (the flesh) because it causes quarrels and divisions. He also warns that “friendship with the world is enmity with God,” and that he who makes himself a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Finally, James exhorts his readers to resist the devil. In this passage, there is no clear distinction between battles with the flesh, the world, and the devil; all three are related and dealing with one requires dealing with the others. At the same time, in this passage, there are some specific ways that James encourages believers to engage particular areas of spiritual warfare. When the devil attacks, James urges believers to resist him and draw near to God. For those battling against their own sinful desires, James exhorts his readers to “cleanse your hands . . . and purify your hearts.”

Alexander Ross provides some help in understanding James' words, writing that the language in 4:4 is best understood as describing the church as an adulteress. Thus, the church has "broken your marriage vows to God, if you are a friend of the world."⁸ In other words, the church, when engaged in sinful activity that gratifies the flesh shows itself to be like the world. Further, to be like the world or even of the world is to be likened unto the sphere of Satan who is seen as the prince of the world.⁹ Just as an unfaithful husband shows himself to be guilty of indulging in his own sins as well as sinning against his wife and family, so too, when the church or individual Christian indulges fleshly desires, he or she is revealed to be influenced by the world and potentially by Satan as well, to whom one panders even as while indulging her own desires.

The spill-over between categories is seen again in 1 John 5:19, "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Though the world, as defined by Arnold, represents the culture which is opposed to God and which can draw people away from God, here it is even that world, which is one of the major fronts in spiritual warfare, is under the influence of the evil one. Thus, although this chapter is developed along certain topical lines, one would be wise to keep in mind that these lines are often blurred in the midst of the battle. Arnold explains this by referring to the three categories as three distinct strands in a braided rope.

Satan works in harmony with the flesh. For instance, if a person struggles with lustful thoughts, Satan will take advantage of this and exploit this tendency. As the

⁸Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 74.

⁹John 12:31, 14:30; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2.

tempter (1 Thess 3:5), he will stimulate the natural inclination and introduce new thoughts and ideas. He will nudge the person into acting on the fantasies.

The activity of the devil is also closely connected to the world. His primary concern is people, but if he can focus his energies on people of status and power, he can thereby exert a significant impact on the course of culture.¹⁰

By its very nature, worldview preaching is an act of spiritual warfare. First, the preacher must engage the darkness with the light of the gospel. The very act of preaching is warfare. John Piper writes, “You wake up on Sunday morning and you can smell the smoke of hell on one side and feel the crisp breezes of heaven on the other.”¹¹ Preachers stand in the gap between life and death as they proclaim the gospel message (John 5:24). Worldview preachers, in particular, engage the enemy in all three strategic areas as outlined above. It is necessary to preach against the desires of the flesh. The non-believer and the believer needs to hear the gospel call to “deny himself and follow me” (Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). Worldview preachers are also called to preach against the temptations of the world, calling their hearers out of their secular worldviews and into a biblical worldview. The spirit of the world has blinded hearers to their need for the gospel; preachers must engage in battle with secular worldviews to open eyes and hearts to understand and receive the gospel (2 Cor 4:4). Finally, preachers must regularly do battle with Satan and his demons as well. Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:12 ring true for the preacher whose struggle is not “against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

¹⁰Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 36.

¹¹John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 41.

Preachers engage in spiritual warfare publicly and privately. There is an element of evil that opposes pastors and preachers in their private study as well as in their public proclamation. Eswine explains that spiritual conflict is often present in both sermon preparation and delivery,

Sermon preparation and delivery sometimes feels like warfare because it is. Ministers of the Word do not merit more favor with God than those in other vocations, but the nature of their vocation brings preachers into a kind of warfare that is often more intense than in other vocations. The reason is that the preacher has moved more toward the front lines of the battle.¹²

The battle must be won so that time can be set aside for sermon preparation, so that the pastor's holiness can be maintained, and so that he will have the character of life necessary to proclaim the gospel with power and conviction. The battle must also be engaged during public proclamation of the Word of God. Paul clearly states that the Word of God is a sword used to actively oppose the forces of evil in the world. The faithful preacher engages in spiritual warfare every time he proclaims God's Word. The preacher engages in public battles against the flesh when he preaches against sins known and practiced among the people to whom he preaches and when he preaches against sins which he himself struggles with. The pastor engages the world when he speaks to politics that enable and enshrine sinful practices and worldviews that lead people away from Christ. He battles against Satan in a variety of ways. Preachers experience technical difficulties, unruly listeners, and even personal ailments that believers outside of the West routinely attribute to the demonic.¹³ Warfare preaching must not be equated with power encounters (though they may occur), instead, it must be seen as a regular part

¹²Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 258.

¹³ Paul Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 35-47.

of one's preaching ministry. Faithful worldview preaching is an engagement with the enemy, and preachers must be prepared to engage the battle biblically.

Battle with the Flesh

Most spiritual warfare beliefs at the popular level are geared toward defeating Satan and other spirit beings. The biblical reality, however, is that Satan is content to leave people alone if he need not engage them personally. His engagement is not necessary if people are willing to surrender to their fleshly desires. Chuck Lawless acknowledges that “we primarily battle against flesh and blood (Eph 2:1-3)” and “Our greatest enemy is the flesh.”¹⁴ There is no contradiction in terms between Ephesians 2 and Ephesians 6:12. In the latter passage, Paul warns that the battle is not with flesh and blood. The difference is that Paul is writing in Ephesians 2:1-3 about the battle with one's own flesh. In Ephesians 6:12, the battle being described is not internal conflict against the sinful passions of the flesh, but an external conflict with the powers of darkness. Nevertheless, the flesh is the first front in spiritual warfare because it is indeed a fight for the very souls of men. C. S. Lewis characterizes it this way in *The Screwtape Letters*,

Much of the modern resistance to chastity comes from men's belief that they 'own' their bodies—those vast and perilous estates, pulsating with the energy that made the worlds, in which they find themselves without their consent and from which they are ejected at the pleasure of Another!¹⁵

¹⁴Charles Lawless, *Discipled Warriors* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 18.

¹⁵C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Harper Collins, 1942), 113.

There is no spiritual neutrality. Everyone serves someone and everyone belongs to someone—to God or to Satan.¹⁶ Indulgence in the flesh is ultimately accomplishing the will of the devil without his intentional involvement in one’s life. Lawless is again helpful as he points out, “Satan often wins because we are easy prey,” gratifying the desires of the flesh to our own detriment and his victory.¹⁷

In James 1:19-21, the brother of Jesus exhorts his readers to “Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save your souls” (James 1:19-21). Here, James contrasts fleshly desires with Godly accomplishments and points out that one can never achieve godly goals through fleshly means. Darian Lockett shows that human anger cannot accomplish God’s righteousness and that the “correct use of the tongue” is directly associated with growing in righteousness.¹⁸ Specifically here, James contrasts anger with meekness. Martin Dibelius points out that “‘meekness’ is no doubt an empathetic antithesis to ‘anger,’ and therefore what the passage is talking about is a meek, or good-tempered life in general.”¹⁹ Thus it is seen that James is concerned with both negative and positive instructions concerning war with the flesh. The believer must

¹⁶In John 8:44, Jesus warns the Pharisees that “If God were your father, you would love me,” but because they do not love him they belong to “your father, the devil.”

¹⁷Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 18.

¹⁸Darian Lockett, *Purity and Worldview in the Epistle of James* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 91.

¹⁹Martin Dibelius, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, trans. Michael A. William, Hermenia, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 112.

simultaneously rid herself of sinful behaviors and take up godly behaviors as replacements.

In Peter's first epistle, he makes several references to war with the flesh. The first of these references is found in 1 Peter 1:13-16. Here he reverses James's order and encourages positive action before the negative, writing,

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'you shall be holy for I am holy.'

It is easy to see that Peter views war with the flesh as being begun by setting one's hope on Christ. Guy Woods, however, sees more to this passage as he connects it with verse six, writing, "Notwithstanding the fact that you are now called upon to suffer a variety of trials because of your faithfulness to Christ and fidelity to his cause, and in view of the glorious and unfading inheritance which awaits, being reserved in heaven for you, gird up 'the loins of your mind.'"²⁰ Woods believes that Peter's admonition to prepare is in light of the trials and tests that are to come. When the storm comes is no time to stake down the tent. Peter encourages his readers to stake the tent ahead of time so that their faith will be able to stand up under the pressures of the testing and under temptations. By pursuing holiness and knowing God's Word, believers will be prepared to handle fleshly temptations when they arrive (1 Cor 10:13).

In 1 Peter 2:1-12, Peter reverses his order to one that resembles James's order by encouraging negative action prior to the positive action. This serves to show that the

²⁰Guy Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1976), 38.

order is interchangeable and should be adapted depending upon timing and situation. In this particular situation, Peter exhorts his readers to “put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander” (1 Pet 2:1). It is only after putting all of these things off that they are encouraged to take up the “pure spiritual milk” and grow up into salvation (1 Pet 2:2). Here the encouragement to turn from sin and toward the pure things of God is urged in light of God’s marvelous work in the lives of the elect.²¹ Davids goes on to point out that Peter admonishes the church put off the more gross vices of paganism as well as “community-destroying vices that are often tolerated by the modern church.”²² Those sins, which are often not viewed as major, must be uprooted to disarm sin from maturing into something greater.

Peter seems intent on cutting off sin at its root in the lives of believers. One is reminded of the admonition from Paul to “put to death therefore what is earthly in you,” where the literal translation is to “amputate your earthly members.”²³ James is in agreement as he points out the progression of sin, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (Jas 1:14-15). The five vices listed by Peter here “cut the ground from any practice other than open truth and love among members of the Christian community.”²⁴ Rather than desiring to deceive and mistreat one another, Peter encourages believers to desire “spiritual milk” so that he may grow up.

²¹Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 79.

²²Ibid., 80.

²³For more on this concept, see N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

²⁴Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 81.

Their goal is salvation, but in this sense it appears that salvation carries the connotation of sanctification as well. This is an understanding of salvation that is more robust than merely conversion. The believer is to put behind him the desires of his flesh that lead to division and strife within the church and is instead to desire growth in his own life that will lead to a mature Christianity, thus strengthening both himself and the church.

In 1 Peter 4:1-6, the final passage from 1 Peter to be discussed in this section, Peter uses stronger words to steer believers away from more egregious sins. He reminds them that they should cease to gratify the desires of the flesh because they are no longer of the flesh, instead, as they have been raised with Christ they are called to live in the spirit. Peter reminds his readers that “Christ shared a fate both exemplary for, and, because it was human suffering, comparable to the kind of suffering they are to undergo.”²⁵ Achtemeier shows a very important reality here. The believer is empowered to live for Christ because of Christ’s vicarious suffering—his propitiatory sacrifice on the cross. Not only is the believer empowered; she is given Christ as the ultimate example to emulate.

The Savior’s suffering on the cross serves as an encouragement to believers as they suffer; it also serves as motivation to cease from sin. According to Wayne Grudem, Peter’s admonition to his believers is to continue to resist sin so as to live the rest of their lives on this earth for God, and not for the sins of the flesh.²⁶ Further, Grudem shows that Peter’s intention is to warn believers from sliding back into a habit of sin, even for a

²⁵Paul Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermenia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 276.

²⁶Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 167.

time. Some may argue that they desire to experience the life of sin because they did not experience enough of it in the past, but Grudem counters,

Peter does not just encourage them to ‘let the time that is past’ be sufficient experience of sin; he tells them bluntly that their past experience of sin is sufficient! They should not want to live any longer the kind of life which was given to following sinful human desires. To the Christian who wonders whether ever in the future he or she might indulge in one more unrestrained time of sin, one more time of *doing what the Gentiles like to do*, Peter’s answer is clear: The ‘time that is past’ is ‘sufficient’, is ‘enough’ of living that way. Indeed, those who live that way will someday have to give an account to God (v.5).²⁷

Peter’s first epistle makes it clear that life in the Spirit means death to the flesh.

In his second epistle, Peter returns to his concerns about the flesh. Writing in 3:1-11, Peter shows that by controlling the flesh, one can experience victory. Writing in verses 1 through 10 about the coming day of the Lord, Peter then poses a rhetorical question, “Since all of these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?” (2 Pet 3:11). In light of the coming day of the Lord, Peter exhorts his readers to live lives of holiness. This verse and Peter’s admonition are reminiscent of his words in 1 Peter 1:15 as he urges the believers to be holy in their conduct. Peter gives positive admonition concerning the flesh. The believer is to strive, not only to avoid ungodly behavior, but to engage in godly behavior.

Moving from the writings of Peter, we also see that the Johannine epistles are concerned with battle against the flesh. In 1 John 2:1-2 the apostle writes, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” One should not

²⁷Grudem, *1 Peter*, 167.

view John's words as a lenient disregard for sin; on the contrary, he writes "that you may not sin." Instead, the aged and affectionate author writes with a tenderness that holds two important realities in tension—the absolute forgiveness of all sins by Christ and the need to grow in Christ-likeness by avoiding sin. John Stott explains this tension thus,

The author's purpose is "to prevent sin, not to condone it" (Brooke). So instead of adding 'if' as on the two previous occasions, John begins a new sentence in order to enlarge on the subject of sin in the Christian. He does this first negatively (*so that you will not sin*) and then positively (*But if anybody does sin*). It is important to hold these two statements in balance. It is possible to be either too lenient or too severe towards sin. Too great a lenience almost encourages sin in the Christian by stressing God's provision for the sinner. An exaggerated severity, on the other hand, either denies the possibility of a Christian sinning or refuses him forgiveness and restoration if he falls. Both extreme positions are contradicted by John.²⁸

John's words serve a dual purpose. Not only is the believer exhorted to avoid sin, but she is also strengthened by the realization that it is possible to be victorious.

Clinton Arnold writes, "Because Jesus was victorious over the powers of evil on the cross, he assumed a place of ruling prominence over them through his exaltation . . .

Believers are linked to this powerful and loving Lord in a vital and real relationship. We share in Jesus' authority over the demons and unclean spirits.²⁹ Because Jesus died in our place and has overcome death, hell, and the grave, the believer can live victoriously through Christ (1 Cor 15:54-5).

In 1 John 3:4-9, John deals with the flesh again. Here, John equates continual practices of sin with lawlessness, warning, "You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him (1 John 3:5-6). The words of John

²⁸John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 84.

²⁹Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 40.

here are very clear, the Christian must engage in battle with his flesh to honor Christ. Some have made efforts to tame down this passage of Scripture by interpreting it more lightly, but Stott argues that the “plain words of the Apostle must not be tamed down to suit our convenience.”³⁰ The Christian life is a battle. The person not engaged in conflict with his flesh over control is not living in submission to Christ and may not belong to Christ. According to John, just the opposite is true, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

The New Testament shows the battle with the flesh to be integral. The true believer in Christ will be engaged in the battle. The one who is not engaged in the battle is not of Christ, but is of the devil and does in fact stand in danger of condemnation from Christ who appeared to “destroy the works of the devil.” The book of Jude concludes with good news for the believer engaged in struggle with the flesh. Jude closes his book with these words, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority forever. Amen” (Jude 24-25). Sinclair Ferguson issues this encouragement to believers, “Sin has no authority over anyone who is in Christ. You are no longer under its dominion. You have received a new identity. You have died out of that old kingdom. You have been raised through Christ into the new kingdom where he—not sin—reigns.”³¹ Though one would be wrong to read into this passage the promise of perfection in this life, the

³⁰Stott, *The Letters of John*, 134.

³¹Ferguson, *By Grace Alone*, 108.

believer should be encouraged to know that it is God who infuses her with the strength to overcome the flesh. Just as Jahaziel encouraged Jehoshaphat, “the battle is not yours but God’s” (2 Chr 20:15).

In worldview preaching, one needs to be regularly reminded that the flesh is the frontline in spiritual warfare. Preachers should not shy away from preaching against the dangers of the flesh. Jesus was bold in preaching against the desires of the flesh and proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:27-30,

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Preachers who would imitate Jesus in their proclamation must imitate him in his warfare with the flesh. The same Jesus who did battle with Satan face to face in the wilderness focused much of his earthly attention toward battle with the flesh. The Sermon on the Mount alone is filled with admonitions to deny the flesh its sinful desires. Do not lust (Matt 5:28). Do not be angry (Matt 5:22). Do not retaliate (Matt 5:39). Love your enemies (Matt 5:44). Do not be self-righteous (Matt 6:1, 16). Lay up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:20). Even in his warnings against satanic influence, Jesus warns that the works of the flesh reveal the desires of the heart (Matt 12:34; Luke 6:45; Prov 16:23). John Owen understood this emphasis of Christ and wrote, “When the heart begins secretly to

enjoy the matter of temptation, and is willing to feed and to increase it in any way it can without outright sin, the soul is entering into temptation.”³²

Flirting with temptation in the flesh opens wide the door for Satan to gain a foothold and lead a person to blatant sin. The preacher must guard his own heart against enjoying temptations and must warn his hearers against it. Faithful proclamation of the Bible must engage in battle against the flesh; the flesh of the preacher who often would desire the praise of men rather than of God to gratify the desires of his flesh. William Perkins warns the pastor especially to guard his heart against sin for “a small fault in other men is a great one in ministers” that may lead others astray.³³ But the pastor cannot be satisfied only to battle his own flesh. Faithful proclamation of the Bible is also an engagement with the flesh of those who are listening. The preacher must exhort his hearers to flee from their fleshly desires just as Jesus did. The flesh is the first front in a war for the souls of men and women.

Battle with The World

The second area of spiritual warfare identified by Arnold is the world, which characterizes the entirety of the cultural influences experienced by the believer. Battles with the flesh often arise from within; battles with the world are normally presented from the outside. Of course, the battle with the world and its prevailing culture is not always as personal as the battles of the flesh. Chuck Lawless points out in *Discipled Warriors* that evangelism is engagement with the world in spiritual struggle. In this sense,

³²John Owen, *Temptation Resisted and Repulsed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007), 54.

³³William Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 126.

evangelism is the offensive war that Christians wage against their culture. Lawless also shows, however, that the struggle with the world is not always completely separate from struggles with the devil. Lawless points out three ways in which the prince of the air works through the world to fight against the Word and will of God. First, “the enemy blinds unbelievers to the Gospel.”³⁴ The world does not see its need for the gospel because Satan has blinded people to their need for Christ. Satan has filled the world with idols to be pursued and worshipped, and G. K. Beale and others have pointed out that people tend to become what they worship.³⁵ The idols of the world, when worshipped, will ultimately form people into their image rather than into the image of God. Lawless shows that Satan also thwarts evangelistic efforts by discouraging and defeating believers directly and indirectly through the world and culture.³⁶ Finally, the enemy attacks churches by encouraging them to be inwardly focused, thus killing any desire they may have to change the world through evangelism.³⁷

War with the world in the General Epistles could also be conceived of as a war against idolatry and false gods. In fact, John even closes his first epistle with these words, “little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Peter appears to have some of this in mind as he writes, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks

³⁴Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 85.

³⁵G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); see also Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009).

³⁶Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 88.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 90.

you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:14-15). Tim Keller writes, “The Bible uses three basic metaphors to describe how people relate to the idols of their hearts. They love idols, trust idols, and obey idols.”³⁸ Throughout the General Epistles, the story seems to be the same and the admonition from the biblical writers is to avoid the temptation to worship the things of the world, even if that temptation comes through persecution. In the passage from 1 Peter cited above, Peter warns his readers in light of the suffering that he expects they have endured or will be enduring. Persecution from the world could drive a believer into despair. In the face of such temptation, however, Peter encourages his readers to not succumb to fear, but instead to trust in faith. To “regard Christ the Lord as holy” stands in stark contrast to fearing the world and giving it power. One could easily believe that Peter had in mind Jesus’ words to the twelve as he wrote to the dispersed church,

So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt 10:26-8).

Jesus’ words to his disciples leave no room for ambiguity. One either fears the world or God. Likewise, one either trusts in the world or in God. Grudem writes, “The alternative to fear is to focus attention on someone else.”³⁹ Temptation from the world is strong because the world is often that which can be seen with physical eyes, while Christ may often appear to be far away. The writer of Hebrews thought worldliness to be so dangerous that he admonished believers to not avoid regular fellowship with the church

³⁸Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, xxi.

³⁹Grudem, *1 Peter*, 152.

even if it brought on persecution (Heb 10:25). Preachers must boldly urge their hearers to turn from idolatry and worldliness and turn to Christ.

The admonition to trust in Christ in 1 Peter 3:14-15 is double sided. Not only is the believer strengthened in his faith, but by trusting in Christ and setting his attention completely upon Christ, the believer is given the opportunity to glorify God through an apology of his faith. Davids writes it this way, “Rather than fear unbelievers around them, Christians, out of reverence to Christ, should be prepared to respond fully to their often hostile questions about the faith.”⁴⁰ Peter even goes so far as to instruct believers how to respond in verse 16; “with gentleness and respect . . . so that those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

Preachers must learn from Peter’s pastoral encouragement as he continues in 1 Peter 4:12-19 and in 2 Peter 3:17-18. In each of these passages, Peter admonishes his reader to behave like Christ in the face of an unbelieving world. In the first passage, his instruction is to be as Christ even when the “fiery trial” comes. In the second passage, he counsels the church to not “be carried away with lawless people.” Two great temptations face the church, the temptation to fear the world during persecution and the temptation to chase after the trappings of the world when the culture is at peace with the church. Regardless of the temptation, Peter’s words are seemingly the same—pursue Christ above all else. Preachers defending the biblical worldview against the paganism and worldliness of the twenty-first century must share the same admonition with their hearers.

In light of the dark and depraved world in which Christians find themselves, John’s first command to them in 1 John 1:5-7 is that they are to walk in the light,

⁴⁰Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 132.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

John Stott writes, “Of the statements about the essential being of God, none is more comprehensive that *God is light*.”⁴¹ It is within the nature of God to “reveal himself, as it is the property of light to shine; and the revelation is of perfect purity and unutterable majesty” just as light is pure and dispels the darkness.⁴² The believer is to be found in the light just as God is in the light, walking in his ways rather than in the dark ways of the world. The contrast between dark and light is a constant theme throughout John’s writings and serves as a great example for how the Christian life is to be lived.

John’s writings leave little to the imagination concerning the things of the world. In 2:15, he bluntly writes, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Alexander Ross writes that the “world” here “means all that is alienated from and opposed to God, the world which lies in the evil one.”⁴³ After writing of the evils of the world, John then writes, “the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17). You become what you worship. The worldly man passes away with the evil and sin of the world, but the godly man lives in eternity with and like the Savior he worships.

⁴¹Stott, *The Letters of John*, 75.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, 164.

Keeping with the theme of worship, Stott has identified three tests for Christianity present throughout the first epistle of John which are all present in 1 John 5:1-5. In these five verses “we meet the three (obedience, love, and belief) together” and we see John showing that “they are so closely woven together into a single, coherent fabric that it is difficult to unpick and disentangle the threads.”⁴⁴ The Christian is called to obey Christ, love Christ, and believe in Christ for salvation. This is worship, to love Christ supremely, to obey him, and to believe in him, and this worship brings with it great rewards, the least of which is not that it is evidence of one’s relationship to God and that these acts of worship conform one into the image of the only begotten of the Father.

As has been shown above, much of the attention in the General Epistles given to the battle against the world could be classified as a battle against idolatry. Of course, the dangers of idolatry did not cease in the first century. Tim Keller shows how pervasive this worldly influence continues to be even into the twenty-first century:

Earnest Becker wrote that in a society that has lost the reality of God, many people will look to romantic love to give them the fulfillment they once found in religious experience. Nietzsche, however, believed it would be money that would replace God. But there is another candidate to fill this spiritual vacuum. We can also look to politics. We can look upon our political leaders as “messiahs,” our political policies as saving doctrine, and turn our political activism into a kind of religion.⁴⁵

Believers, like non-believers, are a part of the culture in which they live. As a result, they will be tempted to worship the world and its trappings and to turn from worship of the one true God. However, the promise for him who pursues God and perseveres to the end is that he “overcomes the world” through the victory of Christ (1 John 5:5).

⁴⁴Stott, *The Letters of John*, 174.

⁴⁵Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 98.

Keller, as will be shown in a later chapter, is a great example for pastors to follow. He is an active practitioner of worldview preaching and recognizes that this type of preaching must engage in spiritual warfare against worldliness. In places where the church is persecuted, temptation exists for Christians to abandon Christ in order to survive in a Christless culture. In the affluent West, the postmodern mindset that views Christianity as one truth among many drives Christians to be tempted to chase after all that the world has to offer and abandon the self-denying gospel of Christ. The world represents a formidable foe to Christianity and in proclaiming the gospel to a postmodern culture; preachers must not only preach against the world, they must show the failings of a non-Christian worldview and the benefit of accepting Christ and adopting a worldview that holds him at the center. Preachers must be known, not only for what they are against, but for that which they hold to be of great value. Preachers must clearly present the compelling case for Christ in a world that reduces truth to opinion and views all truth claims with suspicion.

Battle with Satan and Demons

When spiritual warfare is mentioned, it is typically understood to be direct confrontation with “the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). Even though, as shown above, the primary fields for spiritual battle are with the flesh and with the world, battle against the evil one is certainly a major aspect of spiritual warfare and should not be ignored in any treatment of the subject, especially when preaching is emphasized. Christians must avoid the error of ignoring the existence of Satan and the reality of spiritual battle. Spurgeon warns, “There is no believer in Christ, no follower of

that which is true and lovely and of good repute, who will not find himself, at some season or other, attacked by this foul fiend and the legions enlisted in his service.”⁴⁶

Chuck Lawless also urges believers to avoid the other extreme of giving Satan too much attention and decreasing the focus from God, who defeated Satan on the cross and who will one day defeat him for all of eternity.⁴⁷

The battle between believers and the devil⁴⁸ is very apparent in the General Epistles. Peter speaks of the battle against demonic forces in two places. First, in 1 Peter 5:6-11 he warns his readers,

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

In a sermon on the passage above, Charles Spurgeon warned his hearers at the Metropolitan Tabernacle that Satan is no mere figment of man’s imagination; he is a real enemy that really opposes the people of God.

Though you cannot see his face and detect his form, believe that such a foe withstands you. He is not a myth, nor a dream, nor a superstitious imagination. He is as real a being as ourselves. Though a spirit, he has as much real power over hearts as we have over the hearts of others, nay, in many cases far more. This is no vision of the night, no phantom of a disordered brain. That wicked one is as sternly real this day as when Christ met him in deadly conflict in the wilderness of temptation.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Charles Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in the Believer’s Life* (Lynwood, WA: Emerald, 1993), 100.

⁴⁷Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 16.

⁴⁸The terms devil, Satan, and demons will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. The author acknowledges the reality of a real “Satan” and the existence of demons other than Satan, but it is next to impossible (and probably unhelpful) to determine when an encounter is with Satan or another demon.

⁴⁹Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in the Believer’s Life*, 100.

In his commentary, Davids points out that Peter is concerned not only with the existence of the devil, but with the Christian's preparation for the coming encounter with him, "Christians must be clear-headed and alert," concerning the attacks of Satan.⁵⁰

However, Christians are not called to only be aware that the attack is coming; Peter wants Christians to be prepared when the enemy engages. A Christian's engagement with Satan is not to be as full-frontal as one might imagine. It begins, not with Satan, but with submission to God himself (vv.6-7). It is from communion with God that the believer is strengthened for the battle. Even when the attack comes, the believer is not commanded to take the offensive, but "Like good soldiers the Christians are not to fear or flee the enemy, but to 'Resist him firm in the faith.'"⁵¹ This admonition is similar to Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians in 6:13, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm." Of this passage, David Powlison points out that Ephesians 6:10-20 is not introducing the topic of spiritual warfare, but serves as a summary of Ephesians, "this paragraph pulls together everything that Paul has already been saying and puts a sharp point on it: 'Ok, here's the bottom line. Here's what you need to do right now.'"⁵² The armor, or "complete weaponry" of God not something fit only for the moment of attack, but is a picture of the devoted Christian life.⁵³ Preachers must encourage their hearers to be disciplined and mature in the faith in preparation for the attack to come. The goal for

⁵⁰Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 188.

⁵¹Ibid., 191.

⁵²David Powlison, "The Classical Model," in *Understanding Spiritual Warfare*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 92.

⁵³Powlison, "The Classical Model," 94.

the believer engaged in battle with Satan is survival. Stand firm, do not be driven back. Christ has already accomplished the victory; believers are called to stand in his victory. Preachers would do well to engage Satan by declaring Christ's victory and urging believers to take up Christ as Savior.

Peter also references warfare with Satan in 2 Peter 2. Here, Peter shows that confrontations with Satan often involve people who have been influenced by the ways of the evil one. Specifically, he mentions false prophets who he compares to the angels who were not spared by God when they sinned (2 Pet 2:4). False prophets are particularly dangerous weapons in the arsenal of Satan as he attacks God's church. Ferguson writes, "But ultimately, the most sinister thoughts that Satan insinuates into our minds are not enticements to sin but suspicions about God Himself. He always plots to cause us to 'exchange the truth of God for a lie.'"⁵⁴ When Satan can work through a teacher, he can infect an entire church. The responsibility for the believer in light of this kind of attack is to stand firm in the faith as once delivered by the saints. Further, the responsibility for the preacher is to work to ensure that his teaching is in accord with God's Word so that he does not become an instrument in the hands of Satan to lead the church astray.

It is on this note that the book of Jude picks up. In Jude 3, Jude encourages the church to "contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." The counsel is to contend against those who "long ago were designated for this condemnation" (Jude 4). The testimony of the General Epistles and of the New Testament is that those who are designated for condemnation belong to Satan. Thus, those in the church to whom Jude is writing are opposing the faith as emissaries of Satan. Woods points out that the

⁵⁴Ferguson, *By Grace Alone*, 84.

appearance of these false teachers was not wholly unanticipated; nevertheless, their arrival precipitated the effort of Jude to oppose them.⁵⁵ Here we see also the nature of Satan as the roaming lion of 1 Peter, for these men “crept in unnoticed” (Jude 4).

In 1 John, the apostle warns of similar people who will desire to creep into the church to which he writes. In John’s context, he speaks of them as “antichrist.”⁵⁶ Stott shows that “early commentators understood the word to signify an ‘adversary’ of Christ.”⁵⁷ This “antichrist” is described by John as “he who denies that he is the Christ.” In 2 John 7, John expands his definition of “antichrist” to include “those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.” These who denied the incarnation were not of God and must be opposed as enemies of Christ. His encouragement to the believers, is to wage war by letting “what you heard from the beginning abide in you” (1 John 2:24) and by warning “whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Similar to the guidance of Peter and Paul, John seems to be saying to his readers, “stand firm in what you know to be true.”

In a comparable passage, John warns the church in 1 John 4:1 to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” Again, we see John warning about the many false prophets proclaiming a false gospel. The encouragement from John in this passage is a bit different than in the passages above, however. John encourages his readers by pointing out, “you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). John Stott suggests that this passage is actually

⁵⁵Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude*, 386.

⁵⁶ See 1 John 2:18-27.

⁵⁷ Stott, *The Letters of John*, 108.

a congratulatory statement, “The false teachers have not succeeded . . . you have tested them and found them wanting . . . you have conquered them.”⁵⁸ Thus, we have John congratulating the church for their careful consideration of leadership and encouraging them to keep up the good work. On the backside of spiritual battle, believers need to be encouraged and built up—prepared to do it all over again. Pastors must correct, rebuke, and encourage their people (2 Tim 4:2). Correct their thinking about the world, rebuke the sins of their flesh, and encourage them when Satan comes upon them. Pastors and preachers must engage the battle for the sake of the souls under their care and the glory of Christ.

Conclusion

Spiritual warfare is more than direct conflict with Satan and his demons.

Spiritual warfare is a reality of the Christian life that can meet the believer around any corner. In his book, *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller writes,

We usually read the Bible as a series of disconnected stories, each with a “moral” for how we should live our lives. It is not. Rather, it comprises a single story, telling us how the human race got into its present condition, and how God through Jesus Christ has come and will come to put things right. In other words, the Bible doesn’t give us a god at the top of a moral ladder saying, “If you try hard to summon up your strength and live right, you can make it up!” Instead, the Bible repeatedly shows us weak people who don’t deserve God’s grace, don’t seek it, don’t appreciate it even after they have received it.⁵⁹

As one has considered many of the Bible’s teachings on spiritual warfare and their relationship to preaching, it is important to view them, not as disconnected stories, but as a part of an overall picture of the Christian life. The Bible shows believers, not only how

⁵⁸Stott, *The Letters of John*, 160.

⁵⁹Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 37.

to live, but the God for whom they should live. Ultimately, spiritual warfare must be grounded in the Word of God. Lawless writes, “The healthy church must first have a theological foundation based upon knowing God and who they are individually and corporately in Christ.”⁶⁰

An intimate knowledge of God is important in spiritual warfare because Satan’s primary goal will be to distort one’s understanding of God. According to Sinclair Ferguson, “The Lord is absolutely good, true, faithful, and gracious. But the enjoyment of him is in large measure dependent upon what we think he is really like. That is why deceiving us about the character of God is central to Satan’s strategy against us.”⁶¹ When people are deceived about the absolute goodness of God, they begin to believe that they can satisfy themselves much more effectively than God. Preachers must focus their messages and ministry upon God’s goodness and his glory.

For these reasons, the believer must fight against his own flesh and live the life that God intends for him. The church must test the spirits as John encourages. The church and the individual must battle against the world with renewed minds that pursue godliness and holiness above worldliness. And above all else believers must, abide in Christ and pursue holiness. The victorious Christian can say with John, “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:13-14).

⁶⁰Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 28.

⁶¹Ferguson, *By Grace Alone*, 96-7.

Finally, the pastor/preacher must be ready to engage in spiritual warfare as he labors to see the gospel go forth. The pastor is engaged in spiritual warfare, not only for his own soul, but even for the souls of those to whom he preaches. In the modern age he competes with many forces to gain the attention of people and once their attention is gained, he is forced to contend for the truth in the face of many postmoderns who reject biblical truth outright. John Stott presented the case for preaching this way, “While the current mood prevails, both those making a reckless bid for anarchy and those seeking true freedom tend to view the pulpit as a symbol of authority against which they are rebelling.”⁶² The preacher must engage in warfare, not only against his own flesh to maintain purity and godly character, but against the flesh of those to whom he is preaching that cause them to choose the idolatry of self-worship that leads them to reject God’s authority. The preacher will engage in warfare against the spirit of the age that has blinded the eyes of his hearers to the true freedom experienced in the gospel and so must pray that the Holy Spirit will work through his preaching. The preacher has to consider the world that creates a culture that makes anarchy and uninhibited freedom appear attractive.

As seen above, spiritual warfare in preaching will often be difficult to separate into battles with the flesh, the world, or the devil himself. John Owen described temptation as “anything that, for any reason, exerts a force or influence to seduce and draw the mind and heart of man from the obedience, which God requires of him to any kind of sin.”⁶³ Whether the temptation then comes from the flesh, the world, or the devil,

⁶²Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 52.

⁶³Owen, *Temptation Resisted and Repulsed*, 11.

the goal is the same. Temptation, of any kind, attempts to draw people from or drive them away from God. Zack Eswine warns, “The preacher must remember; however, that the present temptation is not the time to resign. Present temptation evidences that an ambush has just taken place; the preacher must take cover and fight back. The presence of temptation does not call for a retreat; it sounds the alarm for battle.”⁶⁴ The pastor must, through the proclamation of God’s Word and through regular prayer, engage in spiritual warfare in private and public. His study will often be the battleground where the war is waged, but so too will be the pulpit itself. Regardless of the temptation, the tempter is working to draw people away from the gospel. The pastor must keep as his goal, the victory of Christ on the cross of Calvary and the proclamation of that victory for all to hear. The battle in the pulpit is won when the gospel is proclaimed, understood, and applied. When the pastor has done all else, he will have won the victory if in the end he has proclaimed the gospel and is still standing fast in the confidence of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal 6:13).

⁶⁴Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 258.

CHAPTER 4

SERMON-DRIVEN DISCIPLESHIP

In contemporary church culture bigger and better worship services are popular and expected. Churches are celebrated for the thousands of people who attend weekly services and for the numbers of people who go through the waters of baptism, but the data on discipleship in many churches is sadly lacking or even non-existent. Many mega-churches aim for weekly small-group attendance at 50 percent of their worship attendance and a recent check of the discipleship material offered at a large new church plant shows it to have an inadequate number of small groups to service its large attendance.¹ A conversation with a member of a large church in South Carolina revealed that the church leadership had grown so disillusioned with attempting to create discipleship groups within the church that it had stopped trying and had decided to equip only those groups who approached leadership with a plan.²

¹<http://www.elevationchurch.org/groups/directory>. The total number of groups at the time of access was listed at 242. Assuming that the person to group on a ratio should be no greater than 12:1, Elevation Church is equipped to service less than 50 percent of its average weekly attendance through small groups ministries.

²Conversation with member of Newspring Community Church in Anderson, SC. He lamented that, though he loved his church and was personally active in the leadership of a small group, the church leadership had abandoned efforts to create new groups.

Though it seems that the contemporary church in many places has settled to preach to and worship with large crowds without investing heavily in discipleship ministries, many also argue that discipleship is the backbone of the Christian life. In his book, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, Bill Hull writes, “Without discipleship, Christianity doesn’t exist, because following Jesus activates the Christian faith.”³ This chapter is written under the assumption that Hull is correct in asserting that discipleship is not optional, but is a necessary and integral part of Christianity and the church. Based on that assumption, it is the purpose of this chapter to argue that the best method for creating a vibrant and lasting discipleship structure within the local church is to use the weekly sermon as the launching pad for the discipleship ministry of the church and in so doing to integrate the pulpit ministry with the discipleship ministry.

Further, it is the purpose of this chapter to argue that sermon-driven discipleship is particularly important for worldview preaching. Creating a Christian worldview may begin with a weekly sermon, but it requires much more than a weekly sermon. Sermon-driven discipleship gives the congregation multiple opportunities to hear the same message in a variety of ways. Of Christian worldview, Nancy Pearcey writes, “The first step in forming a Christian worldview is to overcome this sharp divide between ‘heart’ and ‘brain.’ We have to reject the division of life into a sacred realm, limited to things like worship and personal morality, over against a secular realm that includes science, politics, economics, and the rest of the public arena.”⁴ Through accountable discipleship groups that emphasize the weekly sermon in a discussable

³Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 15, Kindle.

⁴Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), loc. 543, Kindle.

format, congregants are better equipped to approach the world “Christianly.” Sermon driven discipleship can uniquely position worldview preaching to build a Christian worldview into its hearers because congregants are encouraged to live out the sermon throughout the week through regular personal devotions and group learning that focuses on applying the preached message. When a preacher focuses on sermons that undermine secular worldviews and build a Christian worldview, the natural application that comes through discipleship groups is the formation of a Christian worldview.

Repentance and Conversion

Before one can really appreciate the value of sermon driven discipleship or of any other form of discipleship within the local church, it is necessary to define the term disciple. In its most basic form, a disciple is a follower. Thus, a disciple of Christ is a follower of Christ. As central as this concept is to Christianity, it was still a source for controversy in the latter part of the twentieth century as Christian leaders worked to understand the implications of discipleship upon conversion. The controversy, known commonly as the Lordship Controversy, revolved around the question of whether or not Jesus could be one’s savior without also being her Lord.

The proliferation of articles and books on this subject in the 1980s spilled over into popular preaching and teaching on radio and television. Proponents of Lordship salvation, such as John MacArthur and Michael Horton, argued that accepting Christ as savior also meant accepting him as Lord. They cite Scriptures that reference Christ’s call to die to self and passages such as Romans 10:9, where Paul writes, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The message of these verses, Lordship proponents argue, is

that the call to discipleship is costly and the command of Christ is to accept him as Lord and savior. They warn that so-called “free grace” proponents are teaching what Bonhoeffer referred to as cheap grace: “Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord’s Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ.”⁵ This “cheap” gospel, Lordship proponents warn, is not the true gospel of Christ and may very well lead many to hell on false hopes from a false gospel.

Proponents of “free grace” or simply, non-lordship salvation during the late part of the twentieth century included Charles Ryrie and Zane Hodges. It was argued by the non-lordship camp that those emphasizing Lordship salvation were adding to the gospel of Christ. Non-lordship proponents argued that it was possible for people to be Christians and not follow Christ actively. These teachers emphasized that the call to salvation was different from the call to discipleship. Favorite passages of Scripture for non-lordship advocates include Acts 16:9 and Romans 10:9 where they interpret the word “Lord” to simply mean God rather than as a reference for “master” or “boss.” In this process of thought, what matters most is giving Jesus credit for his divinity and recognizing who Jesus is rather than committing one’s life to Christ.

Non-lordship proponents also appeal to Paul’s references to carnal or fleshly Christians in 1 Corinthians 3:1, “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.” Paul classifies Christians into two

⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 44. Note that this is the academic unedited version of the more popular *The Cost of Discipleship*.

camps, those who are living for Christ and those who are living to gratify their fleshly desires. Accordingly, non-lordship proponents argue that persons may be truly saved and still live according to the flesh. As a result, Christians should feel comfortable affirming salvation in others who show no outward signs of the Spirit's work in their lives.

The very brief overview of the Lordship controversy above shows that both sides of the argument have valid concerns. If Lordship proponents feel free-grace proponents to be offering a cheap gospel, non-lordship proponents can also make the argument that some in the lordship camp are heaping extra requirements on the gospel of Jesus. The gospel call is often summarized simply as "repent and believe." Proponents on both sides of this debate can rest comfortably in that summary, but each side would qualify their acquiescence with careful explanations of their understandings of repentance and belief. The church must labor to find a biblical definition for conversion. An honest appraisal of both perspectives must emphasize that each side offers truths that fit well within the Scriptures. The thief on the cross was saved and yet there was never any fruit in his life; at the same time, there will be many who stand before Christ at the end of days believing themselves to have belonged to him only to be told, "I never knew you; depart from me" (Matt 7:23). Peter denied Christ and yet was still welcomed by his savior (John 21). Paul speaks of fleshly Christians (1 Cor 3). And, at the same time, Jesus declared that following after him meant taking up the cross and dying to self (Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). The concept is more complex, perhaps, than the two sides would care to admit.

The reality is that Christ's grace is free. On the cross he accomplished what sinful human beings could not do on their own; he atoned for the sins of the world (1

John 2:2). He became the righteousness that sinners needed and freely bestows it upon them (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Cor 2:12). His grace is both free and costly. The free aspect of Christ's salvation is seen in the fact that he gave the world something the world could not earn and could not pay for. He has invited sinners to eat and drink freely from the table of his righteousness (Isa 52:3, 55:1). He has performed what some have called the great exchange, taking the blame that was not his and giving to sinners the righteousness that was not theirs (Rom 4:5).

In essence, much of the controversy could be resolved by a closer look at sanctification. The reason that carnal Christians existed in the Corinthian church was not because it was acceptable to be saved and be sinful; it was because those who had been saved were still being sanctified. Christ was indeed their Lord and savior, but just as a military operation takes time, the rule of the Lord in some areas of life is not seen immediately upon conversion. Instead, the spiritual war taking place within the life of the believer is slowly won through the process of sanctification.⁶ Though radical conversions do occur and bring rapid sanctification, the Bible also gives evidence to suggest that it is the case for many believers that the process of sanctification is an arduous task.⁷ The primary question is not whether or not a person submits all of himself to Christ upon conversion, but whether or not Christ is continuing to conquer more of the convert's life over time. Conversion is the beginning of the Christian life, the process of

⁶John Piper, "The Danger of Being Merely Human," www.desiringgod.org, (sermon), accessed March 29, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-danger-of-being-merely-human>.

⁷It could be argued that Paul's radical conversion seemed to change him rapidly, whereas the people to whom Paul wrote in the Corinthian church seemed to struggle for quite some time under the yoke of sin as they attempted to live into the redemption of Christ in their lives.

sanctification makes a converted person look and live more like Christ over time. David Wells writes it this way, “Conversion is important, necessary, and indispensable to our being part of God’s redeemed family. The point about conversion, though, is that it is the way into Christian faith; it is not the entirety of Christian faith.”⁸

Like conversion, the process of sanctification varies in the lives of individual believers. The previous life and experiences of a believer can affect the way and even the speed at which he or she in his or her understanding of and submission to Christ. David Wells is very helpful here:

From God’s perspective, all humanity is separated from him because of sin. As stubborn rebels bent upon the elevation of ourselves and the repudiation of God and his truth, we are all far from God. Moral, religious people do not elude God’s judgment—there is no alternative path, such that proposed by the ecumenical, interreligious theology of the WCC. To be in sin is to be estranged from God, and that estrangement may be overcome only by belief in Christ’s reconciling work. Spiritually speaking, there are only two categories: one is either saved or lost, a believer or a nonbeliever, in Christ’s kingdom or in the kingdom of darkness.

From the sinner’s perspective, however, some are nearer to the kingdom because they already believe in sin, the Trinity, and the divine nature of Christ. What they lack is an understanding that salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ who bore our sin on the cross and died in our stead. When such people take this final step, it gives vivid meaning to their earlier beliefs in God as triune, Christ as divine, and people as sinners. Their mental journey to Christ was short.

For others, the trip is quite long and involved. For an affluent, eastern secularist to become a Christian, he or she must adopt Christianity’s worldview, including its normative values, the ultimate distinction between right and wrong, a God who preserves that distinction in judgment, and a moral and spiritual order that is part of the fabric of everyday life. Such a secularist must jettison the idea that God is lost beyond the faraway cosmic background and that the self, with its felt needs and desires is the fulcrum of life and its source of meaning. The secularists’ mental outlook must be changed rapidly before he or she will be “close to the kingdom of God.” The rapidity of conversion, however, cannot be equated with the length of the mental distance. Sometimes “insiders” are slow to take the final step in the conversion process, where outsiders readily jettison their old beliefs and practices. Both the distance and the speed involved in the journey of conversion

⁸David Wells, *Turning to God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 22.

may well affect the level of crisis and drama that attend the act of turning to and trusting in Christ.⁹

Though Wells's emphasis above is on the process and time involved in conversion, the same concepts hold true for the process of sanctification. The apostle Paul was a theologian before he was converted. As a result of his understanding of the God through the Old Testament, certain areas of sanctification in Paul's life occurred more rapidly. His life outside of Christ laid the groundwork for the work of Christ. Essentially, Paul had all the pieces to the puzzle of his life except for Christ. Paul understood sin and the Old Testament prophecies. For the pagan, however, conversion represents a much more substantial life-change. The pagan does not have the same puzzle pieces to life as does he who is converted from a Judeo-Christian background.

When one is saved, Christ takes over as Lord of his life, and as Lord, Christ is engaged in the process of drawing the believer unto himself. It is wrong to suggest that one needs to fully understand sanctification prior to conversion. A pagan can be converted if she knows nothing except for Christ and him crucified and responds in repentance and belief. But, this conversion will look different than the conversion of a teenager with committed Christian parents and an active background in church involvement. The former idolater may appear to progress more slowly than the teenager raised in a Christian home, but that may be primarily the result of past experiences. Conversion is the beginning of the Christian life and it must be followed by intentional growth in Christ. This growth, or sanctification, is brought about through discipleship—a necessary component in the Christian life, “Just as there is no discipleship without

⁹Wells, *Turning to God*, 30-31.

conversion, so there also can be no conversion without discipleship. The two belong together.”¹⁰

John 5:24 makes it clear that coming to Christ means crossing from death to life. This movement is precipitated by the work of God on the cross and results in the Holy Spirit taking up residence in one’s life. Christ’s nature as God is to assert himself as Lord by conforming people into his image, regardless of whether or not the convert initially desires for Christ to be Lord of his life. Thus, Christ the Lord will eventually assert himself as Lord over the lives of those who belong to him. This process of growth will come about through discipleship as the Holy Spirit teaches through God’s Word and as the believer is guided in his spiritual formation through his or her local church and through other believers. A disciple, as mentioned above, is a follower of Jesus, and one who is following Christ cannot help but conform more and more into the image of Christ. We become what we worship and the believer worshipping Christ will indeed begin to reflect Christ in his everyday life.¹¹ Is it necessary that one make Christ Lord and savior to be converted? Perhaps the answer is that Christ is already Lord and savior regardless of our definition. As Lord, he will establish his influence over those who are his. The process of discipleship, then, is more than information accumulation about Jesus, it is the process of being overwhelmed by a King who is actively asserting control over his territory.

¹⁰Wells, *Turning to God*, 23.

¹¹For a more robust understanding of the phrase “we become what we worship,” see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

Information Accumulation or Application

The twenty-first century is a world of information overload. Illustrative of this fact is Howard Gardner's remark, "The amount of accumulated knowledge is reportedly doubling every two or three years."¹² Information is always available through smartphones on people's hips and at their fingertips. No longer do people have to sit at a computer to access the World Wide Web or sit in front of televisions to view twenty-four hour news. Now, all of that is available on smart phones, iPads, and electronic reading devices. As a result, people in the twenty-first century have access to more information on any given day that others in history had in the entirety of their lives. Churches have sought to imitate this buffet style approach to Christian information by offering many different kinds of teaching and discipleship opportunities each week to its members. Dave Ferguson and his team at the Community Christian Church in Chicago believe that this smorgasbord of ministerial opportunities has crippled the church, "We have bombarded our people with too many competing little ideas, and the result is a church with more information and less clarity than perhaps ever before."¹³ Haddon Robinson sees much of the same problem in the sermons of many pastors, "Sermons seldom fail because they have too many ideas; more often they fail because they deal with too many unrelated ideas."¹⁴ Rather than creating sold out disciples of Christ with this form of ministry, Ferguson and others argue that churches are creating confused Christians who

¹²Howard Gardner, *Five Minds for the Future* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2006), loc. 491, Kindle.

¹³Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett, *The Big Idea* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 19.

¹⁴Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), loc. 454, Kindle.

are watering down their faith with a shotgun approach to discipleship. As a result, Community Christian Church and many others have adopted an approach to discipleship that focuses on application of information rather than accumulation of information.¹⁵

Andy Stanley and Bill Willits agree with the logic of Ferguson and argue that churches must clarify their goal and answer the question, “What do we want people to become?”¹⁶ By clarifying and clearly stating their vision, churches can align their discipleship process around their stated goals. Stanley and Willits suggest that churches have traditionally oriented themselves toward being either skill-based or Bible-knowledge based. In these models members are directed toward more knowledge of the Bible or toward attaining certain sets of specific skills. Another option, one that Stanley and Willits advocate is geared more toward application of biblical knowledge and of the skills that the church has taught or is teaching. This may seem counter-intuitive to some, but even preaching advocate Michael Fabarez notes, “What most Christians need is more biblical *application* of what they already know.”¹⁷

As one seeks a guiding principle for discipleship in the local church, a better question to guide the discipleship process would be “What does God want his people to become?” The evangelical church focuses on orthodox teaching. The controversy and splits in denominations over the past twenty to thirty years reveals that the driving force

¹⁵Community Christian Church has integrated their “Big Idea” concept into the basic DNA of their church. A brief explanation of this concept is found on their website. Accessed February 1, 2013, <http://communitychristian.org/#>.

¹⁶Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 54.

¹⁷Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 184.

has been orthodoxy—what is proper and appropriate teaching. Even in the early church, it was the question of orthodoxy that drove the church councils. However, it was never the intention of Christ or the church to advocate orthodoxy over orthopraxy. Right understandings of Scripture should be held, not merely to have a proper understanding, but to have right actions that accord with Scripture. The Bible is rich with admonitions to apply the teachings of Scripture to the lives of its hearers.¹⁸ As such, it is important that the process of discipleship give equal attention to orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

In the contemporary American church most believers are not short on information about Christ and his commandments. In fact, the availability of the Bible and Bible study tools coupled with historically high literacy rates make it inexcusable for any believer to not be growing in their knowledge of the Word of God. Additionally, the preaching of the Word of God to the gathered church should convey significant amounts of information to Christ’s people every week. This being the case and in light of the question, “What does God want his people to become?” the church must begin to focus its discipleship efforts on application of distilled information. This method is well illustrated in the story of the old pastor who was asked by a church member when he would stop preaching the same sermon over and over. The pastor answered, “When y’all start living it out.”¹⁹ Information overload can lead Christians to believe that gathering information is sufficient for discipleship and can hamper efforts for application in the lives of believers.

¹⁸Deut 28:1; John 15:14; Jas 1:22.

¹⁹This story comes from a church member who has actually advocated this approach to me by saying in a Caribbean accent, “Keep bringing the same message until we all get it and start applying it.”

The Role of the Sermon in Sermon-Driven Discipleship

In churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, the emphasis for discipleship has been on Sunday School, taught with LifeWay (or another publishing company) produced literature that prioritizes information over application, and views Sunday School as essentially the driving force for education and evangelism within the church. In *The Book of Church Growth*, Thom Rainer explains that the Sunday School movement began as a social reform movement to educate poor children in England in the late 1700s.²⁰ Through the early 1800s, “the purpose of Sunday School expanded to both education and evangelism.”²¹ By 1900, the purpose of Sunday School had expanded to become the “teaching, nurturing, and evangelizing arm of the church for all ages . . . [and] about eighty percent of new church members first came to the church through Sunday School.”²²

Unfortunately, though many churches continue to practice Sunday School in the same way as they have in the past, culture is shifting. No longer is Sunday School the front door to church membership. Instead, most people will visit a church’s worship service before they visit a Sunday School class.²³ As a result, Rainer advocates a change to Sunday School structure that focuses on closing the back door of the church instead of

²⁰Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 290.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 291.

opening the front door. Rainer suggests that the Sunday School should be the place for Christian education and community within the church.²⁴

In stark contrast to a model that emphasizes only the accumulation of knowledge, Paul Alexander and Mark Dever—whose Capitol Hill Baptist Church is known for its scholarly approach to ministry and discipleship even through their Sunday School—advocate a form of discipleship that focuses on application over information:

This is why you as the pastor will be wise to publicly encourage members to get together for a meal during the week with an older or younger member and have spiritual conversations over books on Christian theology and living. Members need to know that spiritual maturity is not simply about their quiet times, but about their love for other believers, and their concrete expressions of that love.²⁵

Many have bought into the lie that a pastor can either be a strong preacher or a strong disciple-maker and that churches, likewise, can focus in only one area. This argument has been refuted historically by the likes of such men as Charles Spurgeon and John Broadus. In *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, Broadus instructs, “The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion, or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done.” Spurgeon goes so far as to write, “Where the application begins, there the sermon begins.”²⁶ Ministries like Capitol Hill Baptist Church and preachers like Broadus and Spurgeon above show that a strong preaching ministry can and should co-exist with a strong discipleship ministry.

²⁴Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 292.

²⁵Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 38.

²⁶John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870; repr., Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 197.

But what does it mean to disciple members within the local church? Rick Warren, in *The Purpose Driven Church* writes about developing mature members and points to several imperatives to spiritual maturity. Here, Warren advocates gathering biblical information, but points out that learning the Bible is only one part of the process. In addition, he advocates commitment on behalf of believers and intentional discipleship on the part of church leadership.²⁷ Warren also goes on to argue that Spiritual “maturity is demonstrated more by behavior than beliefs.”²⁸

Since information overload and lack of application seem to be one of the great discipleship problems faced by the contemporary church, one answer advocated by some is to simplify the information stream with sermon-driven discipleship. Sermon-driven discipleship is that form of discipleship that uses the church’s weekly sermon as the basis for its study within small groups and maintains application of that sermon and accountability of its members as its main goal each week. Many contemporary authors and pastors advocate this type of discipleship. Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church refer to this method using the metaphors of an air war (the sermon) and a ground war (the application of the sermon in small groups).²⁹ Ferguson and company argue for reducing the church’s weekly messages to one rather than many and through that one message provide maximal impact and application—to “focus less on information and more on

²⁷Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 333-35.

²⁸Ibid., 337.

²⁹Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 261.

action.”³⁰ Michael Fabarez writes, “We ought to create groups in our churches that seek to apply what has already been preached.”³¹

It is not only contemporary authors and pastors who advocate this method of application. Suggesting that application is incredibly important, Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter wrote, “that a preacher must be oft upon the same things, because the matters of necessity are few.”³² Michael Fabarez recounts that shortly after the Protestant Reformation, Philip Spener encouraged application groups:

Spener sought a way to renew the church from the inside out. In his thinking, one could begin in a small way and with a few people and watch the “practice of theology” bear fruit. What emerged was . . . a small group of people who met to discuss the Sunday sermon and to make application to their lives.³³

In a similar vein, John Stott records that the famed American preacher Cotton Mather was not only a great preacher, but that he “encouraged a house-to-house ministry and a catechizing of converts.”³⁴ This “house-to-house” ministry was common among the Puritans and those who followed their example seeking to see life-change in the lives of their parishioners.

Lance Quinn also points out that discipleship of this sort is evident in the church culture, and in both Testaments of the Bible. Of the Old Testament, Quinn writes,

³⁰Ferguson, Ferguson, and Bramlett, *The Big Idea*, 11.

³¹Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives*, 185.

³²Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 114.

³³John Weborg, “Reborn in Order to Renew,” *Pietism: A Much-Maligned Movement Re-examined: Christian History*, no. 10 (Carol Stream, IL.: Christianity Today, 1997), cited in Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives*, 218.

³⁴John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 31.

“Discipling, whether called that or not, is the heartbeat of wise counsel in the Old Testament: ‘Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another’ (Prov.27:17).”³⁵ Quinn goes further to show that in the Scriptures, discipleship is a task of leaders as well as followers. Moses and Jesus both raised up disciples who in turn raised up more disciples. Their discipleship was built off of their leadership with an emphasis on orthopraxy as well as orthodoxy. Quinn emphasizes, “God has called pastors to the indispensable task of making disciples. Both the Old and the New Testaments mark out discipling as a requirement of ministry . . . The Scripture never refers to a non-discipling shepherd; it commends only reproducing pastors.”³⁶

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne argue that a strong preaching ministry not only can co-exist with strong discipleship, but that the two should co-exist and that they should be mutually dependent upon one-another as Spirit-inspired information and Spirit-driven application, “in this way of thinking, the pastor is a prayerful preacher who shapes and drives the entire ministry through his biblical, expositional preaching.”³⁷ In their model for ministry, the sermon is not diminished and discipleship elevated. Instead, the sermon becomes more important as discipleship is emphasized to a greater degree. The sermon drives the discipleship, but the sermon alone is not enough to drive the people of God to accomplish the mission of God:

Sermons are needed, yes, but they are not *all* that is needed. Let’s be absolutely clear: the preaching of powerful, faithful, compelling biblical expositions is absolutely vital and necessary to the life and growth of our congregations. Weak

³⁵Lance Quinn, “Discipling,” in John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How To Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 262.

³⁶MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*, 261.

³⁷Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 99.

and inadequate preaching weakens our churches . . . clear strong powerful public preaching is the bedrock and foundation upon which all other ministry in the congregation is built. The sermon is a rallying call. It is where the whole congregation can together feed on God’s word and be challenged, comforted and edified.³⁸

Pastors often focus on what they are teaching and gauge the spiritual growth and maturity of their church by the sermons that have been preached. Marshall and Payne caution church leaders to “focus not only on what [they] are teaching, but also on what the people are learning and applying.”³⁹

The Emphasis on Application in Sermon-Driven Discipleship

With so much attention given to the sermon above, one may be led to believe that the actual discipleship process in this style of ministry is merely an afterthought, but nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than relegating discipleship to the backburner of a church’s ministry, this form of discipleship elevates its importance by emphasizing discipleship not only in small group settings, but each time the congregation gathers for worship as well. Further, sermon-driven discipleship focuses not only on application, but on action as well. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson list eight characteristics that must be present in the lives of maturing Christians,

1. Worship regularly
2. Guide friends and family to follow Christ
3. Identify with church goals
4. Tithe regularly
5. Identify seven new friends in the church
6. Identify their own spiritual gifts
7. Participate in at least one role or task in the church

³⁸Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 102.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 107.

8. Participate in a small group⁴⁰

Of the eight items listed by Stetzer and Dodson, only one, “identify their own spiritual gift,” is likely to be classified as an academic exercise. The others are clearly action and application oriented.

Sermon-driven discipleship focuses on action—on response to a message and on living out that message within a community of believers. Sermon-driven discipleship also unifies the church body with one central discipleship strategy. Each member of the church will be able to hold one-another accountable because everyone is focusing on accomplishing the same discipleship goals. The discipleship strategy of any church will be strengthened when its members become active in holding one another accountable for doing the things of God.

Of course, for some, a method of discipleship that focuses on sermon application seems to water down the preaching ministry of the church. For those with such concerns, it is worthwhile to consider statements on application from some leading advocates of preaching. Spurgeon realized that the greatest function of any sermon was the application of the gospel to the life of the unconverted and so urged pastors to plead for conversion at the close of every sermon; “Do not close a single sermon without addressing the ungodly, but at the same time set yourself seasons for a determined and continuous assault upon them, and proceed with all our soul to the conflict.”⁴¹ He further encouraged his students,

⁴⁰Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 130.

⁴¹C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 343.

There is a such thing as having too much to say and saying it till hearers are sent home loathing rather than longing . . . You should make your sermons like a loaf of bread, fit for eating and in convenient form . . . One thought fixed on the mind will be better than fifty thoughts made to flit across the ear. One tenpenny nail driven home and clenched will be more useful than a score of tin-tacks loosely fixed, to be pulled out again in an hour.⁴²

Concerning sermon conclusions, John Stott writes,

A true conclusion, however, goes beyond recapitulation to personal application. Not that all application should be left to the end, for our text needs to be applied as we go along. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to disclose too soon the conclusion to which we are going to come. If we do, we lose people's sense of expectation. It is better to keep something up our sleeve. Then we can leave it to the end that persuading which, by the Holy Spirit's power, will prevail on people to take action . . . Our expectation, then, as the sermon comes to an end, is not merely that people will understand or remember or enjoy our teaching, but that they will do something about it.⁴³

John Broadus goes even further,

But the chief part of what we commonly call application is *persuasion*. It is not enough to convince men of truth, nor enough to make them see how it applies to themselves, and how it might be practicable for them to act it out—but we must “persuade men.” . . . Do we not well know, from observation and from experience, that a man may see his duty and still neglect it? Have we not often been led by persuasion to do something, good or bad, from which we were shrinking? It is proper, then, to persuade, to exhort, even to entreat.⁴⁴

Bryan Chapell views application as tantamount to everything else that takes place within sermon writing, “An informed preacher uses every aspect of a sermon as leverage to move the message's application based on sound exposition.”⁴⁵

Certainly, if the pastor ceases to preach expositional and expository sermons for the intent purpose of making the sermons more applicable to the discipleship process,

⁴²Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, 77.

⁴³Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 246.

⁴⁴Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 198.

⁴⁵Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 211.

then this method would be detrimental to the preaching ministry. However, there is no reason why pastors could not or should not continue to preach through books of the Bible and big themes of the Bible even with the knowledge that their sermons will be used within the discipleship groups of the church. Knowing that the sermons will be given more time for application and study throughout the week, the pastor should be driven to work even harder to deliver sermons that bring glory to God, stay true to his Word, and edify the body of Christ. Every pastor should preach with the expectation that his sermons will be discussed and applied in the lives of his hearers. To suggest that this method of discipleship will have a negative effect on the preaching of the local church is to suggest that pastors are not currently preaching with a view toward application.

Additionally, some will argue that this method of discipleship will negatively affect the discipleship ministry of the church. By focusing on only one major lesson per week, some may argue that the church will be starved of depth in the discipleship process. Though this may seem at first to be a valid concern, Dave Ferguson notes that “The average Christian is educated to at least three years beyond their level of obedience.”⁴⁶ In their book, *Comeback Churches*, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson write, “There are many things that people want to learn (end times, spiritual warfare, ad infinitum), but there are some things they need to learn—basic doctrines and habits of the Christian life.”⁴⁷

Though the church can inundate people with loads of information, individuals need to be able to make application of this information if they are to be viewed as

⁴⁶Ferguson, Ferguson, and Bramlett, *The Big Idea*, 48

⁴⁷Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 127.

“disciples.” In *Five Minds for the Future*, Howard Gardner writes, “An individual is disciplined to the extent that she has acquired the habits that allow her to make steady and essentially unending progress in the mastery of a skill, craft, or body of knowledge.”⁴⁸ If one understands Christian discipleship as the process of becoming disciplined in the Christian life, then simply acquiring knowledge about the Bible or the Christian life is not the equivalent of being disciplined. If churches are going to produce disciples that embody a Christian worldview and make a difference in the world for Christ, churches will have to focus on doing more than conveying information, churches will have to facilitate and encourage life change through the application of biblical information.

One final objection to sermon-driven discipleship may be that by elevating the sermon to the central focus of all of the church’s discipleship activity, the church may become completely pastor-driven. This may seem like a complaint from an ornery old deacon, but some pastors have expressed concern over the possibility of a church becoming too closely aligned with the personality of the pastor. Mark Dever, for instance, has noted that he reads from his sermon manuscript when he preaches because he fears that his strong personality may hold sway over the Word of God in his sermon.⁴⁹ A church should never be built around the personality of a pastor; doing so runs the risk of ruining the church if the pastor should leave the church or otherwise become unfit for ministry. Further, personality driven churches run a large risk of robbing God of glory for the sake of glorifying their pastors.

⁴⁸Gardner, *Five Minds for the Future*, loc. 430.

⁴⁹Message I heard Dever deliver on pastoral leadership as a part of IX Marks at 9:00 panel discussion at the Southern Baptist Convention, Louisville, 2009.

Nevertheless, as diligently as a pastor may work to isolate his personality, over time a church will reflect the leadership and personality of its pastor. In *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, John Maxwell writes, “Who you get is not determined by what you *want*. It’s determined by who you *are*.”⁵⁰ Maxwell refers to this as “The Law of Magnetism,” meaning simply that you attract people who are like you.⁵¹ Fight it as they may, the personality of a pastor will have a bearing on the way the church is formed. Nevertheless, sermon-driven discipleship does not guarantee that the church will suddenly look more like the pastor or even that the pastor will have more power in the church. Mark Dever writes in *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* that a group of people can be created “around the personality of a preacher . . . But in the final analysis, the people of God, the church of God, can only be created around the Word of God.”⁵² With this realization firmly in his grasp, the committed preacher of God’s Word will seek to lead the church, not in the direction that he desires, but in a direction guided by and guarded with God’s Word. Just as the possibility exists that the pastor will have more power in the church; the possibility also exists that a faithful preacher of God’s Word will lead the church to experience more of the Holy Spirit’s power by leading them in a strong discipleship ministry.

⁵⁰John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 90.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 89.

⁵²Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 50.

Creating People of the Book

In his well-researched work on discipleship, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Brad Waggoner declares the following about discipleship strategies within the local church: “Our discipleship strategies should include a consistent emphasis on getting our people into God’s Word and God’s Word into them.”⁵³ Essentially, that is what sermon-driven discipleship is all about, getting people into God’s Word and out into the world living out what God commands. Sermon-driven discipleship engenders Christian worldview formation and encourages believers to approach the entire world through the lens of God’s expectations for life. Sermon-driven discipleship in churches that practice worldview preaching should be churches with Bible-saturated discipleship practices. Of course there is more than one way to organize this kind of discipleship in the local church. Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church create elaborate and extensive study materials and church-produced commentaries to assist in the small group and discipleship process led by their sermons. Michael Fabarez, on the other hand, advocates for a much simpler approach devised of a simple hand out with a sermon outline on one side and a study guide on the other side with other resource suggestions for further study.⁵⁴ LifeWay Christian Resources, recognizing the value of sermon-driven discipleship, is offering a service called Discipleship in Context that serves churches by creating small group curriculum based on the church’s own discipleship plan and preaching calendar.⁵⁵

⁵³Brad Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 70.

⁵⁴Samples of Fabarez’s worksheets can be found in Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives*, 177, 182.

⁵⁵Discipleship in Context, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://discipleshipincontext.com/>.

Another potential for creating this kind of discipleship within the local church would be for the pastor to incorporate existing small group study materials into his sermon preparation.

Creating a “people of the book” involves more than simply conveying biblical knowledge, people must apply their biblical knowledge through the lens of a Christian worldview. G. K. Beale points out that the Israelites of the Old Testament had plenty of knowledge, but they were guilty of idolatry because they did not apply that knowledge to their worship practices,

Preference for human glory instead of God’s glory is an idolatrous concept that we have seen repeatedly already in the Old Testament. Recall that Isaiah beheld God’s holy glory and then became conformed to his glorious holiness, which was symbolized by the angel’s purity ritual of burning his lips and mouth (Is 6:1-7). On the other hand, the majority of Israel chose not to reflect God’s holy glory but instead loved the inglorious nature and likeness of their idols, and they reflected their idols.⁵⁶

Likewise, much of the American church is pregnant with knowledge about God, his Word, and his church, and yet its members live lives that reflect the culture around them more than the culture of Christ. Churches that emphasize discipleship in any form have often emphasized it as an accumulation of knowledge, and in so doing have not encouraged the application of such knowledge. The sermon is not enough and neither is traditional Sunday School. What churches need are sermons that inform and challenge their people along with discipleship strategies that encourage their people to apply the knowledge that is imparted to them on a regular basis from the pulpit.

Though the context is different, Paul warns the Corinthians that knowledge “puffs up” (1 Cor 8:1). The accumulation of knowledge within the church, even about

⁵⁶Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 181.

biblical things, may lead to the “puffing up” of church members. Knowledge without wisdom is useless. The Bible takes care to point out that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10). Notice that the beginning of wisdom is actually the application of knowledge. One fears the Lord because of what he or she knows of the Lord. Knowledge that puffs up is knowledge unapplied. Knowledge about God that does not lead to an appropriate fear shows that the possessor of the knowledge has not applied his or her knowledge of God to his or her own life. As a result, this person is not growing in grace or discipleship.

The “smart” Christian may garner the respect of the outside world or the Christian community and may continue to increase in knowledge for the prestige it brings. However, the accumulation of knowledge only for the sake of having more knowledge is the pursuit of an idol that does not glorify God and will never satisfy.⁵⁷ In *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller writes, “Rather than accept our finitude and dependence on God, we desperately seek ways to assure ourselves that we still have power over our own lives.”⁵⁸ The assertion of such power is evident even in the church and in discipleship strategies. Some reject large-scale discipleship strategies because they want to control their own discipleship methods. They long to control their learning and teaching. Some

⁵⁷This form of temptation is specifically mentioned by John Owen who warns, “So it is with many scholars, they come to be esteemed and favoured for their learning. This then takes the pride and ambition of their hearts. They determine to set themselves to study with all diligence day and night; a good thing in itself, but they do it to satisfy the thoughts and words of men in which they delight. In all they do, they are making provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.” John Owen, *Temptation: Resisted and Repulsed* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2007), 55.

⁵⁸Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 101.

long to control their Christianity and in so doing seek to glean as much information as possible while neglecting the application of that information.

Sermon-Driven discipleship is threatening to many because the discipleship strategy is based not on the Bible trivia with which one can wow her small group members, but rather on the way she lives out the teachings of Christ both as the church is gathered and when it is scattered. Sermon-driven discipleship is threatening because it focuses on the application and accountability that can create and cultivate a Christian worldview. But, threatening as it may seem to some, others see application based discipleship as a necessary discipline of the future. Brad Waggoner believes that the pulpit ministry of the church has a significant role to play in the future of the church:

Churches will become equipping centers. The preaching ministry of the church will be an essential part of the training strategy, but not the only part. A variety of classes will be aimed at equipping people to serve and guiding them into involvement. It is not enough to preach at people, seeking to make them feel guilty for being mere pew sitters. We need to raise the bar of expectation, provide opportunities for our members to discover how God has wired them, and then move them to some appropriate form of involvement.⁵⁹

Certainly, there are many ways in which people could move to “some appropriate form of involvement,” but the first level of significant involvement should be in a small group within the church. It is within that small group that the bar of expectation can be raised not merely to provide opportunities, but to empower and encourage church members to embrace opportunities to live out their faith—to display a Christian worldview. Further, the small group provides accountability within the group for Christian living and practical application of biblical information.

⁵⁹Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 73-74.

Continuing with Waggoner's suggestions, sermon-driven discipleship emphasizes preaching as an essential part of the training strategy. Per Waggoner's advice, preaching becomes the driving force in a comprehensive discipleship strategy that is approachable by all the people. Advanced training is not required to lead small groups built around weekly sermons and extended study is not a necessity. Instead, one needs only to be able to grasp the week's sermon and find ways to make application of that sermon in their own life and then be willing to provide accountability for others who are seeking to live out a Christian worldview. The sermon is the central point for information, but the small group is the engine that drives them into involvement, not merely in the church, but in the mission of God.

After all, discipleship that emphasizes only involvement in the local church and ignores the overall mission of God to the world is shortsighted. Per the discussion on idolatry of knowledge above, even the local church can become an idol in one's life. The purpose of discipleship in the church must be larger than the local church. The church is God's instrument for impacting the world with the life-changing and life-giving power of the gospel. Small groups that emphasize living life together and applying biblical wisdom and knowledge should drive participants into the world to live out the gospel and share its message of love, hope, and salvation with a lost and dying world.

Conclusion

For some, this method of discipleship is nothing extravagant; it may constitute only a small shift in the life of a local congregation. For others steeped in traditionalism, the concept that discipleship could be both so easy and so hard at the same time is daunting. For the many who have seen discipleship, not as something you do and live,

but merely as something you attend, this seems incredibly difficult. To conceive that Christ actually expects more than a couple of hours of time on Sundays and to understand that his desire is to have total control over the lives of his people is invasive and seems even oppressive and impossible.

On the other hand, for those who have spent years teaching Sunday School investing hours each week preparing to teach from “canned” curriculum, this process seems overly simplistic. Those steeped in this tradition see sermon-driven discipleship as anemic and without teeth. These people have been taught to value the accumulation of knowledge above all other aspects of discipleship. For them, disciple is something you do, not someone you become.

The beauty of Christian discipleship is that Christ’s burden is easy and his load is light (Matt 11:30). His invitation is not merely to live by a set of commandments, but to live with him walking step by step with him each day. Sermon-driven discipleship emphasizes application of a central and single message, but it need not emphasize works. Applying the truths of God’s Word daily and weekly to one’s life should result in a new person, not merely a person of obedience. This new person is rightly called a disciple, not because of all she knows, but because of who she knows and who she is becoming. She is a disciple of Christ because her life reflects the life of Christ in a way reminiscent of his original disciples. The Twelve became more like Christ as he constantly called them to obedience through simple, easy to follow instructions. They were his apostles, not because they initially held a thorough and orthodox belief system, but because they applied the knowledge they possessed and continued to grow in their devotion to him.

Christ's disciples today should be known in the same way as his original apostles . . . as those who have applied the things he has taught and is continuing to teach them.

The construction of a Christian worldview requires discipline on the part of the believer. According to Nancy Pearcey, "To talk about a Christian worldview is simply another way of saying that when we are redeemed, our entire outlook on life is re-centered on God and re-built on His revealed truth."⁶⁰ Sermon-driven discipleship helps believers to develop a redeemed outlook on life that focuses on God and his truth. Consequently, this form of discipleship is especially important for creating disciples in the twenty-first century who possess and live out a Christian worldview. First, it is important because science has given preachers and pastors a greater understanding of the brain and the way that the brain processes memory. Richard H. Cox writes, "The human learning process is one of listening, memory, and integration. We receive information within the context of previous knowledge and process it through the filter of memory; then we decide what to do with it."⁶¹ The brain is an intricate organ, but science shows that the integrative processes of the brain take place most rapidly when the learning is approached in multiple ways and when repetition is introduced. These understandings of the brain and of learning brought about by modern science should drive pastors and churches to engage in forms of discipleship that have the greatest opportunity to effect change in the lives of believers. Sermon-driven discipleship certainly accomplishes that

⁶⁰ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), loc. 1080, Kindle.

⁶¹ Richard H. Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 25.

goal as it provides different environments and contexts for the same message to be taught in different ways and it provides repetition, which is necessary for mastery.⁶²

Neuroscience has also shown that language is learned in relation to meaning.⁶³ In other words, children learn what “mommy” means because they have a mother who relates to them. Words are not learned in a vacuum, they are learned through relationships. Memory is tied to objects and relationships. Because the rule of love is one of the greatest commandments given to the disciples of Christ and since loving one another in a community of faith is a requirement of Christians, then much learning should take place within relationships that model Christ’s covenant community. When the sermon is taken from the corporate gathering into smaller more intimate settings to be discussed and applied, the opportunity presents itself for the meaning of the sermon to attach itself to people’s memory through relationships and application.

If we are to shape the worldviews of emerging generations, discipleship must change. Sermon-driven discipleship presents a form of ministry that is appealing to postmoderns. The church tends to put the message before ministry. Reaching adults in the twenty-first century will require a different approach. Mike Glenn writes, “When I first started as a minister, the message came before the ministry. Now the ministry comes before the message. That is, people have to see the love of Christ in action before they will take your witness seriously.”⁶⁴ Sermon-driven discipleship encourages believers to see the teaching of the church applied to real life and to make application themselves.

⁶²Daniel Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music* (New York: Plume, 2007), 197.

⁶³Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching*, 39-40.

⁶⁴Mike Glenn, *In Real Time* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 37.

Sermon-driven discipleship also opens the door for evangelism as non-believers are invited not only to hear a message of hope, but to see that message lived out in small groups who hear and actually apply the message that is being preached. Sermon-driven discipleship is not the only way that a church can train up believers, but it does create a unified discipleship strategy that focuses on applying God's Word and living it out as the people of God among a lost world. In short, sermon-driven discipleship creates and cultivates a church with members whose worldviews have been redeemed.

CHAPTER 5

EXAMPLES OF WORLDVIEW PREACHING

A worldview is more than a way of thinking; it is a way of living. Our worldview constructs the way we think, and what we think. James Sire writes it this way, “At the base of all our thought—all our ruminations about God, ourselves, and the world around us—is a worldview.”¹ Douglas Wilson writes, “A Christian worldview is therefore a framework of assumptions about reality, all of which are in submission to Christ. A Christian worldview is not defined as a worldview held by someone who is a Christian.”² A worldview constructs the way people think, therefore a Christian or biblical worldview is a worldview that constructs people’s thoughts about life and reality around the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Worldviews are formative, and as a result, a Christian worldview should and will be regularly shaping its adherents into people who look and think more like Christ.

Preachers must be shaped by a Christian or biblical worldview. Phillips Brooks famously said that preaching is “truth through personality.”³ If that is the case, then for the preacher to be believable and effective, he must actually believe what he preaches. The Bible must be real to him, living and active, and actively transforming his

¹James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 18.

²Douglas Wilson, *Future Men* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001), 46.

³Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 8.

life. The preacher must be convinced that what he is preaching is the truth. The preacher must have a biblical worldview that comes through clearly and authentically in his preaching. However, just as Christian worldview cannot be defined simply as the worldview held by a Christian, so too, worldview preaching cannot be defined as preaching by someone who has adopted a biblical worldview.

The preacher must hold a biblical worldview and believe that the proclamation of biblical truth is effective, but he must also integrate this worldview into his preaching. Arthur Holmes writes, “Moreover, I am convinced . . . that the most persuasive case for Christianity lies in the overall coherence and human relevance of its world-view.”⁴ However, with Holmes, the preacher must also believe that what he preaches—not only one particular sermon—but also the entire counsel of God’s Word and the worldview that it prescribes is conducive to life. The preacher that seeks to change the hearts and lives of his people must convince his people that his message—God’s message is worth hearing and worth giving up all that they have to obey it. He must also present this worldview for all to consider. The preacher must proclaim the big picture story of God’s Word in creation, fall, redemption, and glorification. He must not only hold to a biblical worldview, he must preach and teach the biblical worldview.

Of course, worldview preaching is not a new idea. Collin Hansen sees Jonathan Edwards as an adequate role model for worldview preaching. Hansen writes,

People can appropriate Edwards for all sorts of things because he holds together what most people hold apart—doctrine and experience, preaching and revival. If Edwards has one thing, it’s an integrated worldview. And if there’s one-thing

⁴Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Christian World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), viii.

evangelicals of the early twenty-first century-people spun out of seeker-friendly churches-are looking for, it's an integrated worldview.⁵

An integrated worldview, as mentioned above is effective, not only because it gives credibility to the preacher, but because it also affects the way that the preacher delivers his message. When one has been changed in the whole person by an encounter with God, this same preacher seeks not only to communicate intellectual truths, but to communicate the life-transforming power of the gospel. Of course, others have seen the necessity of integration long before the twenty-first century. Charles Spurgeon was once quoted as saying,

I am persuaded that one reason why our working-men so universally keep clear of ministers is because they abhor their artificial and unmanly ways. If they saw us, in the pulpit and out of it, acting like real men, and speaking naturally, like honest men, they would come around us. . . . We must have humanity along with our divinity if we would win the masses. Everybody can see through affectations, and people are not likely to be taken in by them.⁶

In the nineteenth century, the need for a holistic approach to preaching was evident, and others have seen evidence of its effectiveness in eighteenth century America. Writing on the rise of evangelicalism, Mark Noll writes that the power of Edwards' preaching was that "it sought not simply intellectual communication but also the responsive engagement of the whole person. The power of evangelical preaching lay in its depiction of a severe divine law and a capacious divine gospel."⁷

⁵Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 58.

⁶Larry J. Michael, *Spurgeon on Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 123-24.

⁷Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 100.

Thus, an integrated biblical worldview is actually contagious through the communication of the gospel that changes persons. It was Jesus, after all, who taught that the gospel brings about a re-birth. Paul writes that believers were dead in their trespasses and sins, but in Christ they have been made alive. Salvation is certainly about intellectual assent, but it is more than a decision. Salvation is holistic. This holistic salvation should necessitate whole-person transformation. Paul writes in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed any longer to the ways of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The Christian preacher must be the first to experience this transformation of worldview, and once this transformation has taken place in the life of the preacher, then the message that he communicates can be one of a God who saves to the uttermost and who actually, literally makes a difference in every aspect of one’s life.

Greg Heisler, in his book *Spirit-Led Preaching* writes that “preaching is not so much about you preparing a sermon to preach; preaching is about God preparing you—his vessel—to preach.”⁸ He goes even further to say, “We need to be who God called us to be before we do what God calls us to do. Preachers who desire to see God’s hand on their preaching must first desire to see God’s hand shape their character.”⁹ According to Heisler, then, even the sermon is not primarily about the nuts and bolts construction, but about the overall construction of the man delivering the sermon.

⁸ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

C. S. Lewis on Appropriate Views of the World

Part of the allure of C.S. Lewis was his honesty about the world, Christianity, and his personal faith. In *A Grief Observed*, for instance, the reader is invited to struggle alongside Lewis, who at times appears to nearly lose his faith. He understood that Christianity was life-changing, but that it was not life-making or perfecting. For Lewis, becoming a Christian did not mean that a person would be immediately delivered from the pains and difficulties of this world. Of Lewis, Michael Horton writes, “C.S. Lewis once observed, ‘I haven’t always been a Christian. I didn’t go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don’t recommend Christianity.’”¹⁰ Worldview preaching requires pastors to adopt the kind of worldview honesty exhibited by Lewis. The Christian worldview—and the Christian faith for that matter—does not make one’s life perfect or easy, but it does make sense of the world God created.

Lewis understood that an appropriate view of God’s world was one that was shaped by God himself. In *Mere Christianity* Lewis makes the argument that the problem with people’s perception of the world is not that their appetites are too great to be satisfied by God’s designs, but rather that people are too easily satisfied by the things of the world.¹¹ According to Lewis’s view of the world, God created human beings to experience more than the temporal sins the world has to offer. Lewis believed that God’s

¹⁰Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 97.

¹¹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 94-115.

world was to be experienced. He understood the gospel as more than an abstract argument, but as an experience with a living God. In *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis wrote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun is risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.”¹² In worldview preaching, preachers and pastors must endeavor to so communicate the Word of God that the light of Christ shines through the darkness and reveals God’s good world to their hearers. Preaching to postmoderns in the twenty first century requires preachers to espouse an experiential form of Christianity that was exhibited by Lewis.

Often, the subjective and experiential nature of Christianity is downplayed in more Reformed circles out of fear that the objective truths of God’s Word will be jettisoned or minimized in favor of experience. Worldview preaching need not downplay the objective nature of God’s Word and Christ’s sacrifice, however, to highlight the role of experience in the Christian life. Instead, preachers must show themselves to be practitioners—experiencers—of all that they teach, and to invite others to join with them in experiencing Christ as he has been revealed in the Bible. In this way, experience with Christ is informed by the Scriptures. The objective Word of God is experienced and lived out in faith. Faith without deeds is dead (Jas 2:17). Postmoderns will respond to preaching that does something—preaching that shapes its hearers into people who act more like Jesus as a result of their encounters with him through his Word.

¹²C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 92.

God-Honoring Preaching Must Aim at the Whole Person with the Whole View of the Bible

It is not only important for the preacher to be shaped and molded by a biblical worldview, it is also important that this holistic worldview be integral in his preaching ministry. G. K. Beale has pointed out that secular worldviews are held by many who occupy the chairs and pews of American churches,

Many Christians watch television, and many watch it when they want to sit back and relax and not have to use their minds much. This can certainly be a form of relaxation, but it can also become an uncritical openness to the media's worldview. Subtly, unconsciously, we absorb this worldview by a kind of mental osmosis. And what is the typical TV worldview? It is a worldview with little to no awareness of, or sensitivity to, God's working in everyday life, in the details of our life.

This absence of God in mainstream media should alert us to the fact that when we uncritically leave ourselves open to the perspective of the media's worldview, then, slowly but surely, it leads us to cease thinking of the things of the Lord in the details of our everyday life.¹³

Secular worldviews are problematic, not only for non-believers, but for Christians as well. As Beale points out above, one of the greatest problems for Christians is the slow infusion of a "TV worldview" into the lives of believers who uncritically engage in entertainment options with little regard for the long-term results of such activities. Preachers must engage this culture with messages that challenge them holistically, not only for mental assent, but for total surrender and life change. The challenge for preachers today is to present the gospel of Christ and demand the things that Christ demanded of his followers, death to self and life in Christ. This kind of preaching requires more than a Sunday sermon, it requires a lifetime of servitude and a lifestyle of commitment that gives authenticity to the authoritative Word as it is delivered.

¹³G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 299.

Robert Smith, Jr. advocates a holistic preaching that aims at both the head and the heart, “Preaching that avoids head engagement will lead to blindness, and preaching that ignores heart engagement—the emotive realm of the believer’s existence—does so at the cost of boredom and dullness, which prevents the result of an engaged hearing for a transformed life.”¹⁴ Smith’s holistic preaching aims at underlying presumptions and presuppositions. Not only the emotions, but the head as well with the intention of bringing about changed lives. The picture of discipleship in the New Testament was not one of shaking a preacher’s hand, getting baptized, and then engaging in sporadic church attendance. Instead, New Testament discipleship was characterized by life-changing encounters with Christ that led his disciples to follow him even unto their own deaths.

For this kind of discipleship to take place, Christ must take the center. Michael Horton describes it this way,

When our churches assume the gospel, reduce it to slogans, or confuse it with moralism and hype, it is not surprising that the type of spirituality we fall back on is moralistic, therapeutic deism. In a therapeutic worldview, the self is always sovereign. Accommodating this false religion is not love—either of God or neighbor—but sloth, depriving human beings of genuine liberation and depriving God of the glory that is his due. The self must be dethroned. That’s the only way out.¹⁵

Here we see that the worldview transformation that pastors need to be preaching is a refutation of the self in favor of Christ. At their core, secular worldviews are often selfish worldviews. Dooyeweerd explained this by arguing that there are only two basic

¹⁴Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 2.

¹⁵Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 247.

conditions of life, “man converted to God” and “man averted from God.”¹⁶ Of course, these are not new realities. Writing in 1923, Machen saw

modern preachers are trying to bring men into the church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin. The preacher gets up into the pulpit, opens the Bible, and addresses the congregation somewhat as follows: ‘You people are very good,’ he says; ‘you respond to every appeal that looks toward the welfare of the community. Now we have in the Bible—especially in the life of Jesus something so good that we believe it is good enough even for you good people.’ Such is modern preaching.¹⁷

Paul warned Timothy that such times were coming when people would desire to have their ears tickled rather than to endure sound doctrine. However, as people sinfully long to have their own prideful ears satisfied, the role of the pastor is to reject these selfish worldviews in favor of a message that proclaims death to self and life in Christ.

In light of this holistic ideal of preaching, it is important for the preacher to understand that worldview preaching is more than applying culturally appropriate sermon illustrations. Holistic worldview preaching is preaching that is contextually appropriate. Culturally appropriate illustrations focus on the sermon and its delivery.

Contextualization focuses more on the messenger and the message he is to deliver. Biblically, God chose to contextualize his message when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). According to David Dockery, “Contextualization, rightfully understood in a manner faithful to historic Christianity, begins with the truth that God has revealed Himself in space and time and that revelation is accessible to

¹⁶Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 35.

¹⁷J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 68.

believers today through Holy Scripture.”¹⁸ Because revelation is possible and necessary for salvation, pastors and preachers must labor to make the gospel—the ultimate revelation of God—accessible to others. The process of contextualization makes the message more accessible than it otherwise would be.

The process of contextualization is more involved than attaching good illustrations to a sermon. It includes careful exegesis of the Scriptures as well as of one’s culture.

Keith Whitfield has explained contextualization this way:

A culture is a group of people with shared social and linguistic identity. This identity is shaped by beliefs about what it means to be human, assessment of what is wrong in their world, possible solutions, and views on how to appropriate the solutions. A culture's prevailing worldview affects logic, prejudices what evidence one considers, and dictates what types of solutions are viable options. The task of contextualization is to use what is good, just, and beautiful in a culture to establish a clear communication of the gospel, in order to overcome obstacles to understanding and to confront idols that oppose the truth. By contextualizing our communication, the hope is to see people and cultures redeemed and restored with the gospel, that they may "turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1Th 1:9).¹⁹

Contextualization has been a staple of international missions for many years, but its necessity for ministry among one’s own nationality is becoming increasingly important. Pastors must contextualize because the gospel matters, but it can only be understood when it is clearly communicated. Ed Stetzer writes, “Contextualization matters because clear gospel communication matters.”²⁰ Contextualization does not mean watering down

¹⁸David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 43.

¹⁹Keith Whitfield, “Contextualization and the Mission of God,” in *The Mission of God Study Bible*, ed. Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2012), 1204.

²⁰Ed Stetzer, Monday Is for Missions: Some Thoughts on Contextualization,” www.edstetzer.com, posted September 12, 2011, accessed April 26, 2013, “<http://www.edstetzer.com/2011/09/contextualization-and-the-miss.html>.”

the message of the gospel. Instead, through contextualization, a preacher should be able to present the gospel message in a more robust way.

A pastor or preacher who has sought to contextualize the medium (himself) and the message of his ministry is better able to communicate the gospel message. Holistic, worldview preaching to postmoderns in the twenty-first century is preaching that will affect and impact whole persons with the whole gospel. Because postmoderns are experiential, they will view and experience the holistic life-changing experience of the gospel only to the degree that they see it holistically affecting the preacher communicating the gospel message.

God created man from the dust of the ground. When God acted to redeem and recreate mankind, he did so by taking on flesh and coming down among his people. He died for his children so that they might have life. If preachers are to be a part of God's work of recreating men and women around the gospel in the twenty-first century, they will have to get their hands dirty as well. Laboring to see the gospel take root is hard work that requires preachers to be among their people, just as Jesus was, clearly communicating the gospel message in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.

Objections to Preaching Against Postmodern Worldviews

Of course, some object to preaching against secular worldviews. The Emergent church is known for seeking to adapt to cultural norms and postmodern worldviews. In *The Emerging Church*, Brian McLaren, a leader in the emergent movement writes, "Our understandings of the gospel constantly change as we engage in mission in our complex, dynamic world, as we discover that the gospel has a real kaleidoscope of meaning to offer, yielding unexplored layers of depth, revealing uncounted facets of insight and

relevance.”²¹ For McLaren and others in the Emergent Church Movement, the goal is not to transform culture, but to adapt the gospel to fit the culture. McLaren goes on to explain that he doesn’t believe that coming to Christ necessitates leaving a non-Christian religion. In *A Generous Orthodoxy*, he writes,

I must add, though, that I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts.²²

Others in this movement base their adherence to cultural norms in their beliefs that the orthodox understanding of Scripture is fatally flawed. Recently, Rob Bell has argued that Hell is not the place of eternal punishment that orthodox Christians have understood it to be for the last two thousand years and that God’s love necessitates forgiveness for all people. According to Bell, our world needs to hear about a God that accepts them where they are without requiring them to change,

A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. . . . This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus’ message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear.²³

Doug Pagitt, another leader in the emergent movement, does not see the value in preaching against cultural norms, largely because he does not believe that there has been significant separation between God and mankind as a result of sin. Writing in *A*

²¹Brian McLaren, preface to *The Emerging Church*, by Dan Kimball (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 9.

²²Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 260.

²³Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), loc. 43, Kindle.

Christianity Worth Believing, Pagitt writes, “the story of the gospel is so much better than the legal model suggests. It tells us that we are created as God’s partners, not God’s enemies. Sin does a lot of damage to that partnership—it disables us, it discourages us, it disturbs us—but it never destroys the bond that exists between God and humanity.”²⁴ If there is not significant distinction between God and secular culture, then there is really little need to preach against the prevailing worldview of the culture.

The emergent movement is also not without its detractors. Mark Driscoll refers to Pagitt as a pagan because he “does not see the crucial distinction between God the Creator and the rest of his creation.”²⁵ Others see the Emergent movement as simply a new form of liberalism that embraces postmodernity rather than the modernity of the twentieth century.²⁶ Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck describe the emergent movement this way,

Emergent leaders want to move away from seeing Scripture as a battleground. They don’t want to use the traditional terms—authority, infallibility, inerrancy, revelation, objective, absolute, literal—terms they believe are unbiblical. They would rather use phrases like “deep love of” and “respect for”. And they bemoan the fact that evangelicals, as they see it, employ the Bible as an answer book, scouring it like a phone book or encyclopedia or legal Constitution for rules, regulations, and timeless truths.²⁷

Classic liberalism was an outright denial of classic biblical doctrines; this new form of liberalism is softer; it questions the certainty of religious dogma rather than solidly

²⁴Doug Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 153.

²⁵Mark Driscoll, *Religion Saves* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 227.

²⁶Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 16.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 70.

denying it. But whether one denies the historicity of the death of Jesus or the salvific nature of his death, the result is still the same. J. Gresham Machen had this to say about liberal thinking and teaching, “‘Christ died’—that is history; ‘Christ died for our sins’—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.”²⁸ Whether liberalism or emergent, the resistance to preaching a biblical worldview in the face of secularism falls short of traditional orthodox Christianity and must be resisted. Again, DeYoung and Kluck are helpful as they point out, “Much of the emergent disdain for preaching is really an uneasiness about authority and control.”²⁹ This discomfort with authority and control is rooted in pride that rejects God’s rightful control and authority. Preaching that adheres to a biblical worldview flies in the face of prideful prejudice against God’s authority. Appropriate contextualization of the Christian message protects gospel from being distorted because the gospel is properly understood and communicated.

Preaching a Biblical Worldview

Much has been said above about the need to engage other worldviews with a biblical worldview. It is important to realize, however, that preaching is not done in vacuum. John Stott famously pointed out that “A true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both.”³⁰ Stott helps preachers to understand that they have a responsibility to be true to the text of Scripture even as they have a responsibility to clearly communicate that text in a culture that is

²⁸Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 27.

²⁹DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent*, 159.

³⁰Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 10.

vastly different than the culture in which it was originally written. Preaching within a culture, however, is not the same thing as preaching that adapts to the prevailing culture and worldview. Stott makes this abundantly clear as he writes,

Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God. No attempt to understand Christianity can succeed which overlooks or denies the truth that the living God has taken the initiative to reveal himself savingly to fallen humanity; or that this self-revelation has been given by the most straightforward means of communication known to us, namely by a word and words; or that he calls upon those who have heard his Word to speak it to others.

And it is God's speech which makes our speech necessary. We must speak what he has spoken. Hence the paramount obligation to preach.³¹

Speaking what "he has spoken" means communicating a worldview that is created and determined by the mind of God. Speaking what God has spoken and expecting others, not merely to hear it, but to obey it is preaching a message that, though it must communicate within a culture, is markedly counter-cultural. God's words—God's message—calls upon people to love him first, their neighbors second and to put their own personal welfare later.

Preaching a biblical worldview necessitates preaching with authority, but not because the preacher has any particular power in himself. On the contrary, "the authority of the preacher lies solely in the authority of his message."³² This biblical authority gives birth to correct doctrine and right doctrine, opens the door of faith to non-believers, and strengthens the faith of believers. Biblical authority and its accompanying worldview are unchanging. Greg Bahnsen reduces the definition of a Christian worldview to being "committed to [Christ] at every point in life. Christianity is not concerned merely with a

³¹Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 15.

³²Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 29.

narrow range of human experiences . . . the biblical cry “Christ is Lord” requires that you submit to Him in all areas of your life.”³³ The culture in which preaching takes place may change, but the Christian worldview does not change because the God of the Bible does not change.

Preaching a biblical worldview, however, necessitates that the pastor preach gospel informed and Bible-driven messages that speak to the whole person and to a person’s total responsibility within the world. Nancy Pearcey writes,

The first step in forming a Christian worldview is to overcome this sharp divide between “heart” and “brain.” We have to reject the division of life into a sacred realm, limited to things like worship and personal morality, over against a secular realm that includes science, politics, economics, and the rest of the public arena.³⁴

The pastor, then, must reject the prevailing winds of culture that deny the authority of the Bible in the sacred. The pastor must also reject the prevailing winds of culture that seek to push the Bible and its accompanying worldview out of public life. As has been noted above by G. K. Beale, people become that which they worship. Christians who do not seek to worship God in every area of their lives tend to look less and less like the person God would have them to be and more like the culture in which they live.

Preaching a Christian worldview means presenting the gospel and the truths of Scripture as necessary not only for salvation, but for right living in the world that God has created. As the creator of the world, only God has the authority and ability to direct what right living in this world looks like. Pastors must reject felt-needs in favor of real needs. They must reject the secularism of society that seeks to relegate Christian

³³Greg Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007), 48.

³⁴Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 20.

teachings only to the church and they must reject the emergent push to fit Christ's teachings into the prevailing culture. Pastors must instead demand submission to the things of Christ. Only through submission to Christ do people become true followers. As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, the self belongs emphatically to God.³⁵ If a preacher is to preach a message that is relevant and true to the teachings of the Bible, it must be a message that beckons men and women to surrender their whole self to the God who created them.

Michael Horton is critical of much of contemporary American evangelicalism, but his words ring true concerning the transmission of a biblical worldview across the American cultural landscape,

Secularism cannot be blamed on the secularists, many of whom were raised in the church. We are the problem. If most churchgoers cannot tell us anything specific about the God they consider meaningful or explain basic doctrines of creation in God's image, original sin, the atonement, justification, sanctification, the means of grace, or the hope of glory, then the blame can hardly be placed at the feet of secular humanists. If, for example, privatization entails "the transfer of truth claims from the objective world to the subjectivity of the individual, then American Protestants have not only adapted to a secular culture but are part of a revivalistic heritage that helped to create it."³⁶

The church is responsible for the lack of believers who think and act "Christianly" and pastors are responsible for not teaching church members to hold a Christian worldview.³⁷ If the culture is to be transformed, and if God's command in Genesis to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth is to be obeyed, it will only happen as pastors preach worldview infused messages and as Christians hear these messages and apply them in

³⁵C. S. Lewis, *Fernseed and Elephants* (Glasgow: William Collins and Sons, 1975), 31.

³⁶Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 243-44.

³⁷Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 34.

their lives. The responsibility for communicating God's truths and seeing God's world transformed with his truth lies on the church and on her pastors. God is honored when his Word is rightly preached, and the holistic preaching of God's Word leads to the conversion of the lost and to the sanctification and edification of the saved.

Pastors Who Have Adopted Secular Worldviews

It is imperative that the church would raise up pastors and preachers who would proclaim the value of the Christian worldview over against secular worldviews. However, culture has shown that many preachers have adopted secular worldviews rather than combating them. The postmodern west is a "can-do" culture. To some degree, this can-do attitude is not that bad. It is a good thing for people to have drive and determination. Michael Horton writes, "Rules, steps, formulas, advice, exhortations, suggestions for managing our life better: these are not wrong in themselves. We just need to know the difference. First we need to know the difference between God's commands and human wisdom. . . . Second, we need to know the more basic difference between commands and promises; law and gospel."³⁸ Many preachers, rather than focusing on the grace of God given to combat sin in the world, have molded their preaching ministries to focus more on law. Certainly these preachers use Christian language in their ministries, but the perspective preached is more in line with the "can-do" attitude of twenty-first century culture than with the "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," imperative of Paul (Rom 3:23). This section will examine contemporary pastors whose ministries have adopted the worldview of the culture rather

³⁸Michael Horton, *The Gospel Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 131.

than preaching against secular worldviews with the gospel and its accompanying worldview.

Joel Osteen is one of the most well-known and popular preachers in the world today. His preaching is seen in over 100 nations and tens of millions of homes around the world. His preaching is filled with Christian language and many references to God. He famously begins his sermons by holding up his Bible and quoting, “This is my Bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do. Today I will be taught the Word of God. I boldly confess my mind is alert, my heart is receptive; I’ll never be the same. In Jesus name, God bless you.” Osteen attempts to masquerade his teaching as gospel preaching. Unfortunately for the millions of people who follow him regularly, the worldview of Joel Osteen is not biblical.

Space does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the totality of Osteen’s ministry. Instead, a few examples below will be used to show the ways that Osteen’s ministry is serving to detract from the gospel of Christ and to emphasize secular worldviews. First and foremost in the ministry of Osteen is the legalistic worldview of self-help and prosperity. In his sermon, “Speak to Your Mountains,” Osteen says,

Some of you today are praying about things you should be speaking to. You don’t need to pray about that fear any more. You need to say “Fear, I command you to leave. I will not allow you in my life.” Instead of begging God to heal you, you need to start talking to that sickness. “Sickness, you have no right in my body. I’m a child of the Most High God. You are not welcome here. And I’m not asking you to leave. . . I’m not saying pretty please do me a favor. No, I’m commanding you to leave my body.

“If you’re going to have mountain moving faith, you gotta SPEAK to your mountains. I’ve learned, if you don’t talk to your mountains, your mountains will talk to you. All through the day. . . those negative thoughts. . .” You’re never going to get well.” “You’re never going to get out of debt.” “Your business is going to go under.” That’s your mountains talking to you. Either you can sit back and believe those lies or you can rise up and say “Hey, wait a minute. I’m in control here. I’m

not going to let my mountain talk to me. Mountain, I'm saying to you 'Be Removed.' You will not defeat me.”³⁹

In the English Standard Version, the exact words of Jesus from Mark 11:23 are, “Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believe that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.” Thus, in light of this particular verse it could be argued that Osteen’s words above do not miss the mark by much. However, individual verses should not be taken out of context.

Context is the starting point for proper exegesis of a biblical text.⁴⁰ The context of this particular verse includes the chapter of which it is a part and the verses that surround it, as well as the overall teaching ministry of Jesus. This verse is found in the context of Jesus’ cursing of a fig tree that was not bearing fruit, even though it gave the appearance of being fruitful. When the disciples find the tree withered the next day, they point it out to Jesus, and his response is found as quoted above in Mark 11:23. In the context of this miracle, Jesus’ teaching focuses on the disciples’ prayer lives. Their prayers are to be filled with faith and are to be offered with a forgiving heart. Jesus’ focus is on prayer, and on the ability of God to respond to our prayers, even when our prayers seem to be impossible.

Rather than focusing on God’s ability, Osteen’s message begins to focus on man’s ability to command his own destiny. Notice in the above passage, Osteen urges his listeners to stop praying about obstacles, and begin speaking to them. He builds his

³⁹Joel Osteen, “Speak to Your Mountain,” www.resources4us.net, (sermon), accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.resource4us.net/docs/SpeakToYourMountains.pdf>.

⁴⁰Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996), 11.

argument by removing Mark 11:23 from its larger context within chapter eleven and from the larger context of Jesus' teaching ministry and the Bible's teaching on prayer. Further, his argument is flawed by appropriating to Christians the same powers possessed by Jesus himself. Since Jesus spoke to the fig tree and it withered and died, Osteen deduces, "In the same way, the moment you speak to your mountains, in the unseen realm the forces of heaven go to work. God begins to dispatch angels. He begins to fight your battles. He begins to release favor. He begins to move the wrong people out of the way. Sending healing, sending breakthroughs, sending victory."⁴¹ This logic is flawed, however, because as the Word of God incarnate, Jesus possessed certain powers in and of himself which we as believers must rely upon God to receive. Those things that Jesus could accomplish by speaking must be accomplished through believers by prayer and faith, which is the teaching of Jesus in Mark 11:20-26. Jesus, as the Word of God, is the very agent of creation; through him all things were made that have been made (John 1:1-3). His Word is powerful because it is God's Word. Osteen's message is flawed because he equates man's words with God's words.

Finally, Osteen's message is flawed because he encourages believers to engage in practices which have no grounding in the Scriptures. The idea that believers are to proclaim "God's favor" over particular situations to find victory is not found in Mark 11, or in any passage of Scripture for that matter. Interestingly, Osteen attempts to base this proclamation of God's favor on the story of Zerubbabel in Zechariah four. Osteen, however, misquotes the scriptures terribly. Zechariah 4:6-7 reads, "Then he said to me, 'This is the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my

⁴¹Osteen, "Speak to Your Mountain."

Spirit says the Lord of hosts. Who are you O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of Grace, grace to it.” Osteen credits this quote to Zerubbabel, but the “he” in verse six is not Zerubbabel, but an angel sent to the prophet Zechariah with a vision from the Lord. It was God’s Word that declared success for Zerubbabel. The idea that Zerubbabel commanded his mountain to move and he found success is not scriptural at all. Instead, God pronounced success and God brought it about.

The teachings of Joel Osteen are filled with references to the Bible, but his teachings are not in line with historic Christianity. His teachings fit well into the ideas of New Age religions which emphasize healing from within and the recognition of one’s inner divinity.⁴² Even the opening theme song used for Osteen’s broadcast is wrought with New Age ideology, proclaiming, “Unleash the champion in you.” Oprah Winfrey, who is an open proponent of New Age ideologies, has pointed to Joel Osteen’s sermon, “The Power of I Am,” as the sermon that changed the way she sees her life. In this sermon, Osteen claims that Sarah was healed of her barrenness because she began to believe that she was a princess, and this belief ultimately led to the healing of her womb.⁴³ Sarah heard from God, but according to Osteen, her healing came from within herself.

The idea that our help is found within us is contrary to the Scriptures, and

⁴²Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2009), 121.

⁴³Joel Osteen, “The Power of I Am,” (sermon), accessed May 2, 2013, http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-lifeclass/Pastor-Joel-Osteens-Full-Sermon-on-The-Power-of-I-Am-Video_1.

especially to the doctrine of the incarnation.⁴⁴ The Bible teaches that God became a man, and that he did so because the only rescue for humanity was for a Savior to come. Humanity could not save itself. In one sermon, Osteen encourages his hearers to remove negative labels and instead to accept God's labels, "God labels you strong, valuable, talented, more than a conqueror."⁴⁵ Though much of what Osteen says about God is true, it is what he says about humanity in this sermon that is especially troubling. A person can change his destiny simply by rejecting one label and taking on another. This is problematic because it negates the necessity of atonement. The truth is that certain negative comments are valid, people are sinful, they are bad, and they are in need of a savior. Simply rejecting these statements does not make them untrue. What is needed is an intercessor, a savior who can make the truths of sin untrue. According to Hebrews 9:22, only the blood of Jesus can accomplish this feat, words are not enough, blood was necessary.

Osteen encourages goodness in people.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, goodness is not enough for salvation. Further, the message of Osteen is one of selfishness, not one of self-sacrifice. In his sermon, "Be Good to People" Osteen references Galatians 6:10a, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone," and proclaims, "When you are good to people, you are sowing a seed for God to be good to you."⁴⁷ Goodness

⁴⁴Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 219.

⁴⁵Joel Osteen, "Remove Bad Thoughts," (sermon), accessed May 1, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jITqgomQwMw>.

⁴⁶Joel Osteen, "Be Good to People," (sermon), accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xG33H_AamXc.

⁴⁷Joel Osteen, "Be Good to People."

shown to others should be seen as a way to receive blessings for yourself, according to the teachings of Osteen. Osteen's worldview is not in line with a biblical worldview. Instead, he has adapted his message to fit the itching ears of a watching world (2 Tim 4:3). He has adapted the message of the Bible to fit nicely into the prevailing materialistic, self-centered perspective of the western world. Of course his message of health and wealth is easily packaged and exported because it appeals to the selfish sin-nature of fallen men and women. Joel Osteen's message is popular, but it bears little resemblance to the message of Jesus Christ. Osteen serves as an example of a preacher who has adopted the prevailing worldviews of the culture rather than adapting the method of gospel proclamation to speak biblical truths into a lost world.

Another contemporary example is John Shelby Spong. As mentioned in chapter one, Spong is a preacher who has given up his biblical worldview for a secular worldview. In his book, *The Sins of Scripture*, Spong attempts to free Christianity from its traditional perspectives on the Bible. In so doing, he does nothing revolutionary, however. Rather than creating a new form of Christianity, Spong merely jettisons historical Christianity and its worldview for the contemporary worldview of secular culture. In step with culture, Spong accuses the Bible of being anti-women, anti-environment, homophobic, and abusive toward children. In so doing, he has taken the prevailing worldviews of culture and superimposed them over the Scriptures, thus following a different religion. For Spong, authority is found, not in a divinely revealed Bible, but in the prevailing worldviews of modern culture.

Spong has adopted a secular worldview. According to this worldview, God is as he is perceived by humans, not as he has revealed himself in the Scriptures. In a

sermon from 2011, Spong writes, “there are some concepts of God in the scriptures that you do not want to attribute to the God you know.”⁴⁸ The prevailing worldview of the twenty-first century is comfortable with a concept of God; it is the biblical concept of a God with authority that ruffles feathers. Spong bridges the divide by presenting the God of the Bible without appealing to the biblical texts. For Spong, this God is knowable outside of the Scriptures, and this outside knowledge enables people to determine which parts of the Bible are true and accurate. At the end of the day, however, in Spong’s approach, God is different for each person and, according to his own words in the above sermon, God is actually changeable by the will of his people.

In addition to the above mentioned preachers, other prominent men can be shown to be those who have capitulated to modern or postmodern worldviews rather than adhering to the biblical worldview. John Dominic Crossan, for instance, has made much of his living as a professor of biblical studies by attempting to destroy the validity of the Bible. In *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography*, Crossan assumes that the biblical story of Jesus must be inaccurate because it does not fit well within his preconceived notions of what is right and possible. Since a virgin birth does not make sense to a postmodern worldview, Crossan assumes that the virgin birth was simply the creation of Matthew and Luke to better build the case for Jesus as the anticipated Christ of the Old Testament.⁴⁹ In like manner, because Crossan is convinced that resurrection could never take place, he also has contrived an elaborate response as to what must surely have happened to Jesus’

⁴⁸John Shelby Spong, “Sunday Sermon 2-27-2011,” (sermon), accessed May 2, 2013, <http://vimeo.com/20446108>.

⁴⁹John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 16-18.

body. According to Crossan, Jesus' body was certainly eaten by wild beasts or simply disposed of in a haphazard way by the soldiers who were responsible for his death.⁵⁰ Rather than accepting the Bible as reliable and authoritative, Crossan approaches the Bible with the presupposition that his opinions and the prevailing worldviews of his contemporaries must certainly carry more weight than the Bible itself.

Of course, this is a short list of those who have adopted secular worldviews rather than adhering to the worldviews of the Bible. Others, like Brian McLaren, Bart Ehrman, and Doug Pagitt could be mentioned. Interestingly most of the preachers and teachers listed above would claim to be faithful to the Scriptures. Many would claim that their efforts are intended to save Christianity from itself. Unfortunately, the messages that they proclaim do not resemble historic orthodox Christianity. Further, their messages are rooted in the arrogance of ego-centrism, ethno-centrism, and chronocentrism. They believe their way to be the right way, their culture to be the correct culture, and their time-period to be the only one in history truly capable of understanding what the Bible was supposed to mean. Such perspectives cast scorn on Christians of the past two thousand years who have understood the Bible to be authoritative and accurate. Trading the biblical worldview for secular worldviews does not preserve Christianity and the Bible for generations to come. Instead, it creates a new religion, one that syncretistically combines some of the Bible's teachings with the teachings of modern culture that tickles the ears of its adherents but does not honor or glorify the God of the Bible.

⁵⁰Crossan, *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography*, 123-58.

Pastors Who Have Adapted the Biblical Message to Speak into Secular Worldviews

In contrast to those who have adopted secular worldviews are those preachers who have adhered to the biblical worldview while adapting their ministries to better speak into a Western, postmodern culture. First to be examined is Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. Keller's book, *The Reason for God* has been referred to as *Mere Christianity* for the twenty-first century. He has a unique ability to proclaim biblical truths in culturally appropriate ways. According to Travis Freeman, one of Keller's greatest gifts in speaking into postmodern culture is found in his ability to learn the questions people have about their life and their situations and then to show how a biblical worldview gives satisfying answers to those questions.⁵¹ Another aspect of Keller's ministry that enhances his ability to speak into people of other worldviews with biblical truth is his understanding of religion. In *The Reason for God* Keller writes, "What is religion then? It is the set of beliefs that explain what life is all about, who we are, and the most important things that human beings should spend their time doing."⁵² Keller understands that worldview and religion are largely synonymous terms. Thus, adherents to a naturalistic worldview, for instance, are worshippers of a false god and need to be introduced to the true God of the Bible. Keller's messages speak into the prevailing worldviews of his culture by presenting the gospel as holistic and life-changing.

Keller understands that everyone operates with some overarching worldview or

⁵¹Travis Allen Freeman, "Preaching to Provoke a Worldview Change: Tim Keller's use of Presuppositional Apologetics in Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 49.

⁵²Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead, 2008), 15.

religion.⁵³ With this understanding in hand, he is then equipped to show the postmoderns of his New York culture that whether they consciously understand or believe it, they are controlled by a worldview (or religion) of some sort. Once this ground has been established, Keller is then able to present the worldview of Scripture against the competing worldviews of culture. It is important to note, however, that Keller's cultural engagement does not lead to a minimization of sin. His book, *Counterfeit Gods* reveals how idolatry (often rooted in secular worldviews) leads to eternal death, and how repentance and faith lead to eternal life.⁵⁴ Keller shows how a pastor can hold firmly to biblical truths while remaining relevant to his culture.

Mark Driscoll serves as another example of a pastor who has sought to remain faithful to Scripture while adapting his methods to better fit his culture. Driscoll is the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington. Driscoll's adaptations are different than Keller's, in part because his context is different. Ministering in Seattle, Driscoll presents biblical messages that are edgy and direct. The music coming from Mars Hill is distinct, and even the décor is representative of the darker culture that produced grunge in the 1990s. In his book, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, Driscoll writes, "Churches must also evaluate what their culture will look like in the future and how their church can best prepare to reach that emerging culture. They must then become the church that their future culture will need, if they are not already."⁵⁵ Notice, Driscoll puts the emphasis on the church to change with the culture so that the culture can be reached. However,

⁵³Keller, *The Reason for God*, 16.

⁵⁴Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 101, 172.

⁵⁵Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 21.

Driscoll's ministry is also characterized by his commitment to the truths of the Bible.

Driscoll sees the Bible as the story of God and believes God's story to be "perfect."⁵⁶ He teaches at his church through entire books of the Bible and uses the Bible as a guide to counseling.⁵⁷ It is his commitment to the Bible and his understanding of its missional purposes that drives him to practice worldview preaching. In *Vintage Church*, Driscoll writes this about preaching and preachers,

The real fight begins at this point, and a preacher needs to come out from behind his pulpit with his hands up and chin down like a boxer looking for an opening while deflecting jabs sent his way. The issue here is uncovering the idols that people have and breaking their resistance to the truth of the gospel. This is also accomplished by co-opting their cultural hopes and presenting the gospel as the only answer to their deepest longing. Thus, they see their yearning for freedom is found only in Jesus, their yearning for pleasure is found only in holiness, and their yearning for greatness is found only in humanity.⁵⁸

The above quote comes in a section titled, "The apologetical question: why do we resist this truth?" Without this question, "People may find you funny, clever, nice, or even smart but not compelling. They will become indifferent to your teaching because of their 'good' objections that you have failed to demolish. You must follow the example of Moses, who kindly smashed the golden calf."⁵⁹

According to Driscoll, the presentation of the biblical worldview must be accompanied by the demolition of pagan worldviews that oppose Christ and his Word. Throughout his writings Driscoll regularly upholds the importance and primacy of

⁵⁶Driscoll and Breshears, *Doctrine*, 9.

⁵⁷For an example of Driscoll's approach to biblical counseling, Mark Driscoll, *Death by Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁵⁸Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 100.

⁵⁹Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 100.

preaching. He is clear, however, to point out that preaching should be God-honoring and transformative. It should change lives, and this comes about only as the Word of God is proclaimed with authority and as ungodly worldviews are defeated from the pulpit.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Worldview preaching is not an option in the twenty-first century. If preachers and pastors are going to proclaim the gospel and call for repentance as the appropriate response to the gospel, they must come to terms with the reality that they speak into a culture that holds to a worldview that is foreign to the Bible. Postmodernism rejects metanarrative, and though many people are not familiar with the term “postmodern” the culture of the twenty-first century is largely defined with it. Western culture no longer respects authority, believes in absolute truth, or by default affirms the existence of the Judeo-Christian God. As a result, preachers must be prepared to present the biblical worldview as the solution to the questions that contemporary culture leaves unanswered. Preachers and pastors must be ready and able to show the weaknesses in contemporary worldviews and must search for opportunities to show how the message of Christ satisfactorily organizes the pieces of life that construct a coherent worldview.

⁶⁰Driscoll and Breshears, *Doctrine*, 325.

CHAPTER 6
THE DEFICIENCY OF WORLDVIEW EMPHASIS
IN PREACHING LITERATURE

It has been argued in this dissertation that worldview preaching is necessary to reach people in a post-Christian culture. No longer can the preacher assume that his hearers share a Judeo-Christian worldview. Instead, the preacher must proclaim the Christian worldview in contrast to the secular worldviews of postmodern culture. In part because worldview studies and emphasis are relatively new on the Christian landscape, preaching literature has not historically given significant emphasis to worldview and worldview preaching.

Nevertheless, even though worldview has not been a primary emphasis in preaching literature, not all preachers and preaching texts have been silent on the issue. In his well-known work *Between Two Worlds*, John Stott recognized thirty years ago that it was necessary for the preacher to bridge the gap between the biblical world and the world of his hearers. In the introduction to that book, Stott wrote, “A true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both.”¹ A sermon must be more than a lecture. It is not sufficient for a sermon to live its entirety in the world of the Bible. In so doing, the preacher can never make application.

¹John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10.

If, on the other hand, the sermon is grounded only in the world of its hearers, it ceases to be a sermon. The sermon must be both.

John Stott: Bridging the Gap Between Two Worlds

Stott wrote, in large part, to defend preaching as historical and indispensable to Christianity. In the opening lines of the first chapter, Stott defends preaching this way,

Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching, a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God. No attempt to understand Christianity can succeed which overlooks or denies the truth that the living God has taken the initiative to reveal himself savingly to fallen humanity; or that his self-revelation has been given by the most straightforward means of communication known to us, namely by a word and words; or that he calls upon those who have heard his Word to speak it to others.²

Preaching is indispensable to the church, according to Stott, because God has prescribed it and has practiced it himself: “We must speak what he has spoken. Hence the paramount obligation to preach.”³ Preaching matters to the church because preaching matters to God.

Not only does preaching matter to God, the way that the preacher perceives of God and his Word affects the way that the preacher views preaching. According to Stott, “The kind of God we believe in determines the kind of sermons we preach.”⁴ If the preacher believes that God is a saving God who wants people to know his salvation, a preacher is more likely to preach with confidence in the message’s ability to communicate saving truths and to see people saved. Further, if the preacher believes God

²Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 15.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 93.

still saves, he will be more inclined to work to see the words of Scripture understood and applied in the world of the hearer. He will be eager to see the gap between the two worlds bridged.

Further, if the preacher believes the Word of God to be true, he is much more inclined to preach with passion and conviction. The worldview of the preacher will fall more in line with the Bible when the preacher is convinced that the Bible more than a book, that it is indeed the living and active Word of a living God. Confidence in preaching is born out of confidence in the Word, “How dare we speak, if God has not spoken? By ourselves we have nothing to say. To address a congregation without any assurance that we are bearers of a divine message would be the height of arrogance and folly.”⁵ With this conviction firmly implanted in the heart and mind of the preacher, his duty begins to become clear. According to Stott, “The true preacher is both a faithful steward of God’s mysteries (1 Cor. 4:1, 2) and a fervent herald of the good news.”⁶

But still, the conviction about God and the conviction about the Scriptures may do little to encourage or enable a pastor to bridge the gap between the biblical world and the world of his hearers. In fact, even with these convictions, some contend that preaching is no longer a requirement or even a good idea of the Christian church. Even faithful pastors wonder about the effectiveness of weekly sermons.⁷ Effective sermons are the hope of every pastor. Richard Cox believes that the results of preaching are predicated in large part on the worshiper’s ability to connect cognitively with the

⁵Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 96.

⁶Ibid., 100.

⁷Richard H. Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 7.

message being proclaimed.⁸ In fact, he believes so strongly that he has written a book that examines the relationship between the brain and the sermon.

Stott makes much of the same case without the appeal to neuroscience and with much more emphasis upon the Scriptures. Stott bases his convictions upon the necessity of preaching and its effectiveness upon certain theological convictions, “In a world which seems either unwilling or unable to listen, how can we be persuaded to go on preaching, and learn to do so effectively? The essential secret is not mastering certain techniques but being mastered by certain convictions.”⁹ These theological convictions, mainly right and orthodox convictions about God and his Word, lead to a clear understanding of the preacher’s duty. According to Stott,

Our responsibility as preachers now begins to emerge. This is not primarily to give our twentieth-century testimony to Jesus (most Western preaching today tends to be too subjective), but rather to relay with faithfulness to the twentieth century (and endorse from our own experience) the only authoritative witness there is, namely God’s own witness to Christ through the first-century apostolic eye-witness.¹⁰

Thus, for Stott, bridging the gap between the world of the Bible and the modern (or postmodern) world is both objective and subjective.

The preacher and his sermon is the bridge between the ancient world and the modern world. The objective truths of God’s Word are told with confidence and clarity and are applied to the world of the preacher and his hearers. The objective truth is relayed with authority, but also experientially. Speech is the primary mode of communication between God and man; he has revealed himself in words that have been

⁸Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching*, 23.

⁹Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 92.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 98.

recorded for the good of all generations. Speech was the primary mode of communication in antiquity. Speech continues to be the primary mode of communication today. Even in a world saturated with television and computer technology, speech is still dominant. As such, preaching (which is speaking) is fully capable of bridging the gap between the two worlds of which Stott writes.¹¹ He sums up his point this way, “The preacher’s task is faithfully to translate the Word of God into modern language and thought-categories, and to make it present in our day.”¹²

The Need to Close the Gap

John Stott is a giant in evangelical Christianity and *Between Two Worlds* is a book on preaching that has stood as a standard in the field. His insistence on bridging the world of the Bible and the modern world has encouraged thousands of preachers to faithfully communicate the Bible. Nevertheless, as the twenty-first century wanes on, there is a need to close the gap between Stott’s work and the worldview of persons who live in a post-Christian culture. Stott emphasizes the preacher’s role as one of clear communication and faithful exposition. He even emphasizes the necessity to proclaim a Christian worldview. He encourages preachers to “open up the biblical principles which relate to the problems of contemporary society, in such a way as to help everybody to develop a Christian judgment about them.”¹³ This is an exhortation toward preaching and developing a Christian worldview.

¹¹Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 68.

¹²Ibid., 149.

¹³Ibid., 167.

His emphasis to communicate both the Word of God and a biblical worldview is commendable, but it does not go far enough. Stott goes further than many writers in commending preachers to proclaim a biblical worldview, but he does not answer what Driscoll refers to as the “apologetical question.”¹⁴ Stott acknowledges that preaching has fallen on hard times and that much of the reason for preaching’s fall from prominence is found in prevailing worldviews, “While the current mood prevails, both those making a reckless bid for anarchy and those seeking true freedom tend to view the pulpit as a symbol of authority against which they are rebelling.”¹⁵ However, Stott fails to encourage preachers to engage such anti-authoritarian worldviews.

While acknowledging that secular worldviews exist and that those worldviews create an unfriendly culture for preaching and promoting a Biblical worldview in preaching, Stott neglects to encourage preachers to dismantle these secular worldviews. In a postmodern world, the preacher must bridge the gap between the world of the Bible and the world of his hearers, but he must also work to dismantle the secular worldviews of his hearers. In addition to showing the continuity of a Christian worldview, the faithful worldview preacher must also “predict their objections so that we can answer them and remove their resistance to get them to embrace God’s truth for their life.”¹⁶ The pastor must be willing to be confrontational, demolishing the gods of secularism by showing their failures and replacing those faulty worldviews with a biblical worldview.

¹⁴Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 100.

¹⁵Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 52.

¹⁶Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 100.

Stott does not fail to encourage pastors to seek conversion nor does he fail to encourage pastors to courageously and faithfully confront sin through preaching. In fact, chapter eight of *Between Two Worlds* addresses the history of courageous preaching and the need for courageous preaching that comforts and disturbs.¹⁷ Stott's words must be heeded if pastors are to be faithful, but preaching to postmoderns requires more than condemning sin; sinful strongholds must be overcome. The worldviews that enshrine sin must be laid bare and destroyed so that the gospel can go forth with power. For instance, Alex McLellan encourages Christians to consider seeing the world through secular eyes and then to use that perspective to help non-Christians recognize the failure of their worldview and come to Christ, "Seeing the world without God's glasses means seeing reality as a random array of broken bits and pieces and, as a consequence, our lives as insignificant pieces of a meaningless puzzle. This worldview has special prominence in our world."¹⁸ The appeal to sin is necessarily an appeal to authority. For those who reject authority, as Stott acknowledges are prominent, their worldviews must be upended before they can begin to acknowledge the authority of God and the existence of sin in their lives.

Finally, Stott's book shows a deficiency when considering postmoderns because it does not emphasize the role that the preacher's life outside of the pulpit plays in the communication of the gospel. Worldview preachers recognize that they preach with their lives as well as with their mouths. The preacher's words must be backed up by action. Spurgeon understood this and lectured his students, "So it is with the minister; he

¹⁷Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 300-15.

¹⁸Alex McLellan, *A Jigsaw Guide to Making Sense of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 27.

is the parish-clock, many take their time from him, and if he be incorrect, then they all go wrongly, more or less, and he is in a great measure accountable for all the sin which he occasions.”¹⁹ The pastor’s life speaks volumes for his ministry. This is especially true in ministry to postmoderns. Postmoderns reject meta-narrative and objective truth. They do, however, appreciate and respond to experience and sincerity. As a result, the preacher who would upend the secular worldviews of postmoderns must demonstrate that his sermons are a reflection of his worldview and his life. Spurgeon wrote, “An ill life will effectually drown the voice of the most eloquent minister.”²⁰ This is especially true for postmoderns who reject the authority of the Bible outright. They must be shown that the Bible has authority in the life of the man who is preaching the Bible.

Stott gives little attention to the life of the minister outside of his preaching and the careful study for and preparation of his sermons. Stott does not emphasize the role that the preacher plays in the proclamation of God’s Word and yet the Bible pays much more mind to the formation of the preacher than to the formation of a sermon. For worldview preaching to be coherent and convincing, it must be preached in the pulpit and out of it as well. Much of the opposition to the gospel is not rooted in logic and sound arguments, after all, but in simple opposition to authority and morality. Steve Timmis and Tim Chester describe the prevailing worldview of atheism this way:

The movement is not from metaphysics to morality, from atheism to human autonomy. It is not that we reluctantly concluded that there is no God and then worked out how we should live in such a world. No, the movement is from morality to metaphysics. We want to be free from God’s rule, and so we construct a

¹⁹C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 15.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

worldview in which God is absent. As Nietzsche puts it, “God is dead . . . and we have killed him.”²¹

According to the perspective of Timmis and Chester, the great issue to be overcome in the current generation is emotional and relational, not logical. People decide what they want to believe and then seek out arguments to support their position. According to this perspective, preachers would do well to focus not only on what they say, but on what they model to the world around them. The people to whom they preach need to be convinced that the secular worldview is filled with holes and that a lifestyle and worldview that accords with the Bible is desirable. Timmis and Chester go on to say, “The problem is not that we cannot know God. The problem is that we will not know God. It is a problem of the heart rather than the head.”²² Preachers must aim at the heart, and that will be done, not only in sermons, but through lives that consistently demonstrate the complete change wrought by the gospel.

Stott should be read and treasured by preachers. *Between Two Worlds* is and will continue to be a classic in preaching literature. However, for preachers to make the most use of Stott’s work in the twenty-first century, they must do more than bridge the gap between the world of the Bible and the twenty-first century. Preachers must work to close the gap, as they stand with a foot in both worlds, they must draw people into their lives to show that the gospel can be experienced. Preachers must emphasize the desirability of the biblical worldview against other worldviews, and this will be done as

²¹Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 167.

²²*Ibid.*

they dismantle other worldviews from the pulpit and as they consistently model the Christian worldview outside of the pulpit.

Survey of Deficiency of Worldview Emphasis in Preaching Literature

The need to emphasize worldview in preaching is great, not only because of the necessity of this practice in the twenty-first century, but because of its stark deficiency in preaching literature. Worldview and apologetics is a growing discipline in Christian studies, but by and large worldview and apologetics do not intersect with preaching literature. This section will examine a variety of popular preaching texts and consider their strengths and weaknesses regarding worldview preaching. Some of the books to be examined are concerned with sermon construction, some with preaching to particular groups of people, and others focus on correcting deficiencies within the discipline of preaching.

Bryan Chapell's book, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, claims to be a book that redeems the expository sermon. Chapell's book is a preaching textbook. It looks like a textbook, feels like a textbook, and reads like a textbook. He covers a variety of topics in this book including, the obligations of the sermon, the priority of the text, the practice of application, and the development of sermons. The Appendix has a number of helpful aids including suggestions for how to dress, how to prepare, and how to preach sermons on special occasions. This is a very beneficial book for a young preacher trying to wrap his mind around how he will ever prepare and execute weekly sermons.

Chapell's greatest strength is his overwhelming emphasis upon Christ. In the preface to the first edition, Chapell writes, "The two words around which the whole of

this work could be wrapped are *authority* and *redemption*.”²³ He goes on to explain that his conviction for preaching is built up around the authority of the Bible and the redemption that is offered through Christ. One thing that is not missed in all of Chapell’s teaching on preaching is the main point of preaching—Jesus Christ. He reminds his readers that “The Word preached, rather than the *preaching* of the Word, accomplishes heaven’s purposes.”²⁴ In other words, it is the Word of God that accomplishes God’s purposes, not the presentation of the preacher.

In chapter two, titled, “The Obligations of the Sermon,” Chapell emphasizes that truth is not a sermon. One of the reasons that truth alone is not a sermon is that a sermon must have application, “Without application, a sermon offers people no incentive to heed a message.”²⁵ That application matters is certainly not a new concept in preaching literature. Broadus seemed to believe that application was paramount in a sermon.²⁶ Unfortunately, Chapell falls short in his description of application by not emphasizing worldview. Chapell urges pastors to think about the “so what” of a sermon as a way of focusing on application.²⁷ The “so what” question matters because it reminds preachers that application does not happen by accident; listeners do not automatically know how to apply God’s Word. However, the “so what” question seems to assume that

²³Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 18.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

²⁶John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870; repr., Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 97.

²⁷Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 52.

people actually want to apply God's Word. The "so what" is not confrontational, it does not expose false religions and failing worldviews for the imposters that they are.

If a preacher is always preaching to people who walk into a sermon asking, "So what does the preacher want me to do today?" then the so what question is sufficient for application. If, on the other hand, the audience is filled with individuals whose "so what" is more like, "So what gives this guy the right to tell me what to do," then Chapell's brand of application is not sufficient. Chapell encourages preachers to give "specific guidance for their everyday lives,"²⁸ through application. However, he does not answer the question of how a pastor could persuade his hearers to actually care about the sermon or its application. In Appendix 8, Chapell provides an outline for evangelistic sermons. In that outline, he suggests that evangelistic sermons should be biblical, positive, clear, brief, and should communicate urgency.²⁹ At no point, however, does he urge preachers to confront the pagan worldviews and religions of his hearers. In the only place where he urges preachers to confront hearers with their inconsistencies, he is referencing those who are leaning on "unbiblical matters they are trusting for salvation that are sure to fail, such as baptism, family, background, etc."³⁰

Chapell's book, it seems, focuses on preaching to an audience that is open to the gospel and the things of God. Chapell neglects to give attention to the reality of a post-Christian culture filled with competing worldviews that hold no respect for the authority of God's Word or of the office of preacher. Preachers will learn much from

²⁸Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 54.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 359-61.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 361.

Chapell, but if they stop with the “so what” of Chapell’s application, they will abandon preaching to a large number of postmoderns who are asking “so what makes the Bible worthy of my time or consideration.” Preachers must engage in pre-evangelism and apologetics in their sermon. The presuppositional apologetics of worldview preaching ground the preacher in the Word of God, but also equip him to disarm the arguments of those who are separated from Christ so that they may be given life in Christ. Only after a person has given up on the hope of their false religions and hopeless worldviews can they respond to an evangelistic sermon and “Believe in the Lord Jesus” for salvation (Acts 16:31).

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ book, *Preaching and Preachers* is so popular and worthwhile that it was printed in a fortieth anniversary edition with essays from a number of well-known preachers and authors in 2012. For Lloyd-Jones, the time of decision was of great importance. It is significant to note that what Lloyd-Jones terms “decision” is better understood as “application” in contemporary parlance as he never practiced an altar call or special decision time.³¹ It is also important to recognize that the majority of his chapter on the call to decision serves as a protracted argument against altar calls. The opposition to an altar call by Lloyd-Jones should not be perceived as an opposition to application or decision. In fact, he believed the call for decision to be so important that he dedicated an entire chapter to that very subject in *Preaching and Preachers*. Rather than limiting application, Lloyd-Jones argues “that the preaching of the Word and the call

³¹D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 287.

for decision should not be separated.”³² In other words, Lloyd-Jones believed that true preaching necessarily called for a response.

Lloyd-Jones also illustrates a dedication to lasting application. He believes that the gospel applied should produce life-long change, but that the change can only be wrought when sin is shown in all of its ugliness and Christ is shown in his entire splendor. A superficial view of sin will lead to a superficial view of salvation.³³ He spends an entire chapter arguing against the altar call as an appropriate method to bring about decisions, but he fills his book with admonitions for the preacher to bring about response through his preaching.

Application mattered for Lloyd-Jones and as a result, one should not be surprised to discover that he encouraged some of the kinds of worldview preaching that are being advocated in this dissertation. For instance, Lloyd-Jones wrote, “Preaching is that which deals with the total person, the hearer becomes involved and knows that he has been dealt with and addressed by God through this preacher.”³⁴ This holistic form of preaching is necessary in worldview preaching. The preacher must get at the whole person with the whole gospel of Jesus. The gospel must be preached completely, the personal side, the social side, and the cosmic side.³⁵ Lloyd-Jones emphasizes the preaching of the objective gospel and the subjective results in people’s lives. He also

³²Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 288.

³³Ibid., 287.

³⁴Ibid., 66-67.

³⁵Ibid., 287.

warns preachers, “if people can listen to us without becoming anxious about themselves or reflecting on themselves we have not been preaching.”³⁶

Without a doubt it seems that Lloyd-Jones desired for his sermons to have effect on people, but as with Chapell, one is left with the feeling that Lloyd-Jones was thinking primarily of an audience that had some degree of respect for the preacher and the Word of God. There is no consideration for what must be done when preaching to that one possessed by a worldview that abhors the gospel. The truths of the scripture are extolled in *Preaching and Preachers* but preachers must be encouraged to attack the idols of their hearers that keep them from accepting the gospel and to undergird the false presuppositions of hearers who reject the authority of the Word of God.

The chief end of preaching, according to Lloyd-Jones is “to give men and women a sense of God and His presence.”³⁷ Students of Lloyd-Jones would do well to preach with such an end in mind. However, with that end in mind it is worthwhile to remember that throughout the Scriptures, human sinners are undone in the presence of God. Job had heard of God, but he had misjudged God (Job 42:5). In the presence of God, he gave up his preconceived notions and his pride. One is not surprised to discover that Lloyd-Jones’ work is of great benefit to the preacher. However, the passage of time dates some of his arguments. The primary drawback of this book is the fact that it was written during a time when the prevailing worldview was heavily influenced by Judeo-Christian mindsets. The prevailing worldview of the twenty-first century requires the preacher to contemplate the ways that apologetics can be incorporated into the

³⁶Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 66.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 110.

exhortations of Lloyd Jones. Preachers in the twenty-first century must seek to see their hearers “undone” as their worldviews are laid bare at the most rudimentary level so that a biblical worldview can take root.

A book on preaching that has not had time to reach anything close to “classic” status but that still deserves attention from any preacher desiring to communicate in a postmodern world is Albert Mohler’s, *He is Not Silent*. When considering the postmodern mind of the twenty-first century, this book is especially important as it is geared toward preaching to a postmodern world. There is much in this book to commend itself to preachers. First, the very high view of preaching taken by Mohler should characterize the perspective of all preachers regarding their calling, “The preached Word, applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, is the essential instrumentality through which God shapes His people. As the Reformers remind us, it is through preaching that Christ is present among his people.”³⁸ Preaching matters to Mohler because it matters to God and has mattered to the church throughout her history. Preachers are not only heralds, however, they are also “stewards of sound words and the guardians of doctrinal treasure that has been entrusted to us at the very core of our calling as pastors.”³⁹

In addition to his high view of preaching, Mohler also helps preachers by identifying six contemporary factors leading to the decline of preaching. His list is as follows, contemporary preaching suffers from: a loss of confidence in the power of the Word, an infatuation with technology, embarrassment before the biblical text, an

³⁸R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 69.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 114.

emptying of biblical content, a focus on felt needs, and an absence of the gospel.⁴⁰ The factors identified by Mohler are symptomatic of postmodern worldviews. When people refuse to accept authority, words become meaningless because they represent authority. Technology is enticing to postmoderns because the technology of the twenty-first century is very self-focused and easily manipulated. Of course, when one rejects authority the Bible is rejected outright and the focus on felt needs comes about as preachers seek to connect with hearers who refuse to accept authority—it is an effort to give people what they want in a sermon, to allow people to exercise their own authority even in the sermon preparation and delivery.

The factors listed above that lead to the weakening of preaching are important for preachers to understand and Mohler's words regarding them are to be heeded:

The preacher must stand up and speak with confidence, declaring the Word of God to a congregation that is bombarded with hundreds of thousands of words each week, many of them delivered with a sound track or moving images. The audacious claim of Christian preaching is that the faithful declaration of the Word of God, spoken through the preacher's voice, is even more powerful than anything music or image can deliver.⁴¹

Regardless of the cultural appreciation for or understanding of preaching, preachers are called to preach. The call to preach is the call to do so with confidence and power (2 Tim 1:7). Mohler is helpful in reminding preachers of their calling and in helping them to diagnose the mood of the culture regarding preaching.

Mohler's book also offers a unique addition to preaching literature in that he has an entire chapter devoted to preaching to a postmodern culture. Mohler recognizes the need for a distinctive form of teaching to reach postmoderns. At the center of this

⁴⁰Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 16-21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

postmodern preaching, Mohler identifies the need for apologetics that begin in “spiritual concern, not in intellectual snobbery or scorn.”⁴² Postmoderns will be changed, not merely through intellectual arguments, but from arguments that begin with a “provoked spirit” and a heart of care and concern.⁴³ According to Mohler, postmoderns also need to hear messages that are focused on the gospel in an age of spiritual confusion and spiritual hunger. The gospel answers the deepest longings of the soul that are left wanting with false spiritualities.

Mohler also emphasizes the need for preachers and pastors to confront error from the pulpit as a part of their apologetic preaching to postmoderns, “In this sense, preaching, apologetics, and polemics are all related.”⁴⁴ Though Mohler goes further than many authors in his emphasis upon apologetic engagement from the pulpit, he stops short of encouraging worldview preaching. Mohler recognizes that postmodernity is less a discipline than a mood. The postmodern mood is characterized by the deconstruction of truth, the death of the metanarrative, the demise of the text, the dominion of therapy, the decline of authority, and the displacement of morality.⁴⁵ In recognizing this mood, Mohler encourages apologetic engagement and adherence to the biblical text, but he does little to show how the apologetics or polemics of a preacher can actually engage hearers, displace their worldviews, and open their hearts for the gospel to overthrow their sinful self-government and replace it with a God’s reign.

⁴²Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 124.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., 129.

⁴⁵Ibid., 116-23.

Finally, Mohler does little—if anything—to speak into the relational nature of postmoderns. What must pastors and preachers do to convince lost postmoderns that their “radical relativism” fails as a worldview?⁴⁶ How can preachers convince those who reject authority, truth, and objectivity that the claims of Christ are not only plausible, but satisfactorily answer the questions of their lives? Mohler does not answer these questions. Mohler does not show how the experiential nature of the gospel can be used to leverage the objective truths of the gospel into the lives of postmoderns who value personal experience over ancient truths. Readers of *He is Not Silent* will walk away with a supreme conviction about preaching and about God’s purpose, power, and presence in preaching. But they will be left unequipped to actually undermine postmodern worldviews and replace them with the Christian worldview. In short, Mohler’s book is of great benefit in telling preachers how to preach in a postmodern world, but it fails to show preachers how to change the postmodern world with the gospel.

If Mohler is right in asserting that postmodernism is more mood than movement, then it is surely right that postmodernism must be supplanted at the emotional, subjective, and experiential level. Objective truth matters, but postmoderns need to experience the results of this objective truth before they are willing to consider it for themselves. Mohler has rightly diagnosed the underlying problem of postmodernism—most people do not become postmodern because they are convinced of its claims, they become postmodern because they want to reject authority. Their arguments against objective truth, authority, and morality are born out of their mood of self-worship. The underlying worldview for postmoderns is not academic, it is emotional

⁴⁶Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 117.

and experiential. Mohler's diagnosis is right, but his prescription is insufficient. Arguments are not enough to unseat worldviews that are rooted in emotions. A disease that begins with mood must be combated at the place where it began. Postmoderns will be convinced of the value of the Christian worldview as their preachers consistently model a Christian worldview in and out of the pulpit. Consistency provides the lever for preachers to unseat secular worldviews through the use of polemics and apologetics.

In the introduction to *The Passion Driven Sermon*, Jim Shaddix recounts a lecture where preachers were rebuked, "The problem with modern preaching is that we are not answering the questions that people are asking."⁴⁷ Shaddix expresses discontent with this statement, arguing that the Bible does provide guidance to all of the possible questions of today and that preachers must resist the temptation to focus their preaching on the questions people are asking and must instead redirect the conversation toward the questions people ought to be asking.⁴⁸ According to Shaddix, "preaching should not be driven by a preference, a program, or even a purpose, especially that of answering all the questions people ask. Instead, preaching should be driven by a passion for the glory of God."⁴⁹ Thus, the question people should ask is "how do we preach and listen to preaching in such a way as to bring glory to God, in each individual sermon and in the larger preaching ministry of our church?"⁵⁰

⁴⁷Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 1.

⁴⁸Ibid., 3.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 4.

Though Shaddix' book is very beneficial and it overcomes its initial weakness, one should be concerned that Shaddix so quickly separates preaching that brings God glory from preaching that answers the questions of the sermon's hearers. In a culture that enshrines felt-needs preaching, expository preachers are tempted to overreact to this form of preaching by presenting expository preaching as the only form of preaching that glorifies God. God's glory should be the focus of every sermon, but it must be remembered that God was most glorified in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus which brought about the salvation of sinners. God is a revelatory God and much of God's revelation is given in response to the questions of his people. The Ten Commandments answer questions of how the people of Israel are to live as a stand-alone nation. Jesus answered the Pharisees and sinners directly.

Much of Jesus' ministry was geared toward answering underlying worldview questions, but he also answered the questions people asked. Preaching that honors God focuses on his Word and on the clear communication of his Word to people. The big questions of life must be answered by the preacher. As people wrestle with questions of their existence, of evil, of truth and authority, the faithful preacher must connect the eternal truths of God's Word with the temporal questions of men and women.

Postmoderns will be reached with the gospel as preachers work to answer their questions with eternal truths and to respond to their doubts with consistent faithfulness.

Shaddix is concerned to show that application must be driven by exegesis:

While preaching may have once erred on the side of weighty exegesis with no connection to the real world, its contemporary crime is in reverse. Today, application is the sermon and exegesis is the servant. This tragic reversal, which short-circuits preaching's supernatural power begs us to reconsider the issue. Actually, what is needed is for Christian preachers and listeners to reform this

element from the humanism that invaded the pulpit in the last century.⁵¹

There are certainly many preachers who need to be rebuked and corrected for their over-emphasis upon humanistic application, but one is forced to wonder whether or not this is a straw-man argument when one considers the evangelical audience that is most likely to read Shaddix' book. Shaddix sees a problem in the preaching of some and makes broad sweeping statements about the nature of preaching as a whole, and as a result overemphasizes exegesis at the expense of making sermons relational and approachable by people who do not share a biblical worldview. As with many of the other authors discussed already, Shaddix seems to completely disregard those hearing the sermon who reject the authority of God's Word and of the preacher who delivers it.

Shaddix has written a book for the modern world with very little concern for preaching into the contemporary postmodern age. He is right in asserting, "Application, then, is not primarily about addressing perceived needs with practical advice but addressing real needs by restoring right relationship."⁵² However, he fails to show how such application happens to those who have little trust in the preacher. For instance, Shaddix argues that the first stage in application should be the theological question, "What does the given biblical text teach us about God and His relationship with people?"⁵³ From there he encourages pastors to consider the universal truth in the text, the generational application, the cultural application, the communal application, and finally the individual application.⁵⁴ At no point in his directions for application, however,

⁵¹Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 101.

⁵²Ibid., 103.

⁵³Ibid., 109.

⁵⁴Ibid., 110-11.

does Shaddix consider negative application that may be introduced in the form of polemics that show the failure of secular worldviews as an answer the application questions he offers.

In the postmodern mindset, the idea that universal truths exist is suspect. Thus, even the theological question that the pastor is tasked with answering must be grounded in apologetics and worldview. Though the preacher begins with the presupposition that the truths of God's Word are universal and absolute, many in the congregation will neither agree that God's Word is universally true nor that there are universal needs that are expressed across all cultures and times. Further, the preacher could be preaching to audience members who believe that multiple answers exist to all of the application questions that he presupposes. The preacher is tasked with showing the failures of competing worldviews while elevating the Christian worldview as salvific and providing satisfactory answers to the questions offered from a postmodern worldview.

In *Power in the Pulpit*, Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix have written an extensive textbook on preaching. The book covers a wide range of subjects and does not neglect to emphasize the development of the preacher himself.⁵⁵ The authors emphasize, "The call to preach is the call to prepare," and have written a book to "help fellow preachers."⁵⁶ The authors should be commended for their desire to uphold the primacy of preaching and the Word of God.

Power in the Pulpit emphasizes application in the sermon, "a good expository sermon makes plain what the Bible says and gives clear application to the lives of the

⁵⁵Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 71-90.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 13-14.

hearers.”⁵⁷ The authors even encourage in their “Expository Sermon Checklist” that “Every possible method to apply the truths must be utilized.”⁵⁸ However, as has been argued in other books discussed above, application does not go far enough in sermon preparation and delivery. The authors fail to account for the existence of opposing worldviews. Vines and Shaddix argue that the preaching event should be driven by a desire to see people positively respond to God’s message—“persuading people to say yes to the message.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the authors do not account for hearers whose worldviews reject the basic grounding of Christian preaching. One can only respond to sin when she has been convinced that sin actually exists. The model of preaching advocated by Vines and Shaddix is beneficial for a modern audience who accept the existence of absolute truths. For a postmodern audience, however, such absolutes are not a given expectation. As a result, preachers must not only seek to apply the truths of God’s Word, they must also utilize every possible method to reveal the idolatry of secular postmodern worldviews and help their hearers to accept the possibility of the Christian worldview.

Preachers must remember that postmoderns are averse to authority and absolutes. As a result, the preaching event is very unpopular because of the necessary authority with which it is attended to. The preacher must speak with bold confidence because the words he proclaims are God’s words. Nevertheless, God’s Word can be powerfully proclaimed in many different ways. Vines and Shaddix emphasize that the

⁵⁷Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 30.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 26.

preaching event “is not a place to ask a lot of questions but to give a lot of answers.”⁶⁰ It is easy to understand the authors’ point, but for a generation that is averse to authority, questions can serve to break down walls for communicating the gospel. Randy Newman encourages evangelists to “dialogue the gospel.”⁶¹ To dialogue the gospel means to engage in a form of “give and take,” apologetically defending the gospel by answering questions and asking questions.

The preaching event does not lend itself well to dialogue, per say, but by anticipating the questions and objections of his hearers, the preacher can engage the audience with questions aimed at overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of their conversion. Questions, according to Newman, “pave the way for a concept that the questioner might not otherwise consider.”⁶² This kind of dialogical preaching does not necessitate a time of public question and answer from the pulpit, but of the kind advocated by Stott, who refers to the “silent dialogue that should be developing between the preacher and his hearers.”⁶³ Questions should be a stable weapon of the preacher’s arsenal, not because the gospel is intrinsic, but because by asking questions, people can be brought to a point of despair as they see their faulty worldviews unravel. They can come “to the painful realization that their notion of how people get to heaven doesn’t work.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 93.

⁶¹Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 15.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 61.

⁶⁴Newman, *Questioning Evangelism*, 15.

Vines and Shaddix miss the opportunity to speak into postmodern culture because as they emphasize the truth of God's Word, they neglect to encourage pre-evangelism that can take place through dialogue in preaching. Much can be learned from Vines and Shaddix, but students must remember that pre-evangelism is necessary from the pulpit just as it is in personal evangelism. Engel and Norton understood this in 1975 as they encouraged preachers to change their communication strategies and engage in preaching techniques that aimed not only at conversion, but also at moving people closer to conversion with each gospel encounter.⁶⁵ The absolute truth of God's Word is not somehow diluted when preachers are willing to engage in dialogical preaching that asks questions and encourages debate. *Power in the Pulpit* does teach its readers how to prepare and deliver expository sermons, but it does not teach its readers how to deliver worldview sermons that aim at undercutting the prevailing worldviews of the twenty-first century and replacing them with Christ.

Conclusion

Postmoderns do not share in the Judeo-Christian worldview, and as a result, their path toward conversion may be markedly longer than similar people in Western culture in previous generations.⁶⁶ Many in mainstream evangelicalism still do not recognize the vast difference that exists between the Christian worldview and the worldview of the prevailing culture. And, as discouraging as this reality is, even more discouraging is the fact that preaching literature has neglected the reality of this

⁶⁵James F. Engel and H. William Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 48.

⁶⁶David Wells, *Turning to God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 143.

worldview shift and the need for different kinds of preaching. This worldview shift has been written about for more than thirty years in well-known evangelical literature, but has been overlooked in preaching. One can hardly argue that James Engel has been insignificant.⁶⁷ His scale for the process of conversion has been widely used by evangelists and evangelism teachers since the end of the twentieth century and yet, it is not utilized in preaching literature.

There seems to be an assumption in much preaching literature that the communication of the gospel is all that is necessary for immediate conversion. To some degree, this is true and some people will be saved immediately upon hearing the gospel proclaimed. For many, however, the process of conversion is a process that begins with an aversion to the gospel rooted in a postmodern worldview. Preaching the gospel is not necessarily the same thing as communicating the gospel. David Wells puts it this way, “We cannot claim that Christian faith has been communicated until it has been understood, and most secular people are no longer in a position to understand Christian truth if they hear only a minimal, packaged version of the gospel and are asked for immediate assent.”⁶⁸ Non-believers must be engaged at the point of their unbelief and have their eyes opened to their need for a savior. Preachers must dismantle idolatrous worldviews and work to clearly communicate the holistic nature of the gospel.

When preachers assume that words like sin and salvation will be readily accepted they neglect to accurately assess the mood of Western culture. A belief in sin

⁶⁷Engel and Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?*, 45.

⁶⁸Wells, *Turning to God*, 143.

requires a belief in absolute right and wrong, which is rarely held by non-believers in postmodern contexts. David Wells is again helpful as he explains,

Sin is a theological concept, and a reality to be defined in relation to God. We are sinners because we have rebelled against God, abandoned his truth, refused his law, defied his Christ, and placed ourselves in our Creator's place. WE have become our own law, truth, and Christ. Sin is not primarily about breaking rules, although it results in that; it is not at bottom about self-centeredness, although it always is that. It is at bottom a refusal to let God be God over life, to give him the center, the focus, the glory that are his.⁶⁹

The postmodern worldview refuses to accept a God outside of oneself who has authority and right to govern humanity. As a result, the proclamation of sin rings hollow for hearers who define sin on their own terms.

Preaching literature must change if it is to remain relevant. Efforts are being made by authors, like Zack Eswine, who recognize that the culture is changing and preaching must change as well, but changes in preaching are happening too slowly.⁷⁰

Preachers must look outside of their discipline and into the disciplines of evangelism and apologetics to understand not only the needs of the age, but the appropriate methods to meet the need. Spiritual needs have not changed, people are still sinners in need of a Savior, but preachers are going to have to do more than preach Jesus, they are also going to have to model the efforts of the apostle Paul in Athens as he challenged the prevailing worldviews of his hearers that created obstacles to gospel acquiescence.

Preachers must learn what many evangelists and apologists have been saying for more than thirty years—the culture is changing and the church's approach to the culture must change as well. Some have argued that the time for preaching has passed

⁶⁹Wells, *Turning to God*, 145.

⁷⁰Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 11-12.

and that the church must find other ways to communicate the gospel. However, preaching is not an option, it is a biblical command. There will be a necessity to preach God's Word at least until Christ returns. Preaching was indispensable to the church in the first century and continues to be so in the twenty-first century, but preachers must change. Preachers must be willing to meet their hearers at the pre-philosophical level of their postmodern worldview, and challenge their secular preconceptions.

Preachers must proclaim the objective Word of God, but must not neglect to engage the experiential, emotional, and subjective nature of God's interaction with people as well. The apologetic question cannot be neglected and sinners cannot be overlooked because their worldview does not fit nicely within the preacher's preferred style of preaching.⁷¹ Instead, preachers must proclaim a robust worldview that answers the deepest longings of a lost culture while showing the failures of all other worldviews to answer the big questions of life. Preachers must work to predict the questions that are being asked by their hearers who are rejecting the gospel and provide answers that make conversion more likely.⁷² Preaching can be expositional, polemical, transformational, evangelistic, and apologetic. Worldview preaching is not easy, but it is possible and it is necessary if postmoderns are to be reached with the gospel. Preaching literature in the past has fallen short of encouraging worldview engagement from the pulpit, but it need not continue to be deficient in this area. The necessary task of training up a generation of pastors requires that the hard work of teaching preachers to engage in worldview preaching must be accomplished.

⁷¹Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 100.

⁷²Ibid.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Preaching has existed since the dawn of time. God spoke, and creation came into being. Preachers preach because God has spoken and they preach the words God has spoken. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, preachers are tasked with the responsibility to speak, “Thus says the Lord.” Faithful preachers communicate God’s Word. The message of preaching never changes. Since the dawn of time, the content has been God’s Word. The preacher is always called to be faithful to the text and to his audience. As a result, the message never changes, but the delivery of that message must evolve with each passing generation.

It has been argued throughout this dissertation that evangelistic preaching in a pluralistic culture must demonstrate the supreme value of the Christian worldview among competing worldviews. Worldview preaching, as has been advocated throughout this dissertation, should not be viewed as being in competition with expository preaching. Instead, worldview preaching should be seen as a corrective to expository preaching. Faithful expositors have long held to the supremacy of God’s Word and its power to change lives. Unfortunately, preachers have not always seen the value of apologetics, worldview, and evangelism studies in the preaching process. The hope of the author is that this dissertation will serve to awaken preachers to the need for elevating the role and importance of worldview in their preaching so that evangelistic preaching can be more effective among postmodern cultures.

Demonstrating the supreme value of a Christian worldview among competing worldviews requires a certain set of presuppositions. Primarily, the preacher himself must hold to the ultimate value of the Christian worldview. He must begin the preaching process—preparation and delivery—with the absolute conviction that the Word of God is true and trustworthy and that the worldview advocated by the Bible is far more valuable than all competing worldviews. The preacher must be convinced that absolute authority actually exists and that it resides in the revealed Word of God. Without these convictions, the preacher will fail to preach truth, truthfully.

Second, the preacher must preach with the firm conviction that competing worldviews are damning. Only with the conviction that Christ is the only way and that all other ways are failures, can the preacher engage in the arduous task of dislodging secular worldviews and seeking to supplant them with Christ. Worldview preaching is bold. Bold not only to proclaim the truths of God’s Word, but bold enough to proclaim the failures of false worldviews as well. Greg Heisler has written, “The Holy Spirit of God is confrontational, and his conviction is powerful. He will not empower non-confrontational preaching that waters down the gospel, compromises the Word and takes sin lightly.”¹ At their core, postmodern worldviews represent sinful self-worship. Worldview preaching must confront these worldviews in the power of the Spirit.

By denying absolute authority, postmoderns do not reject all authority. Instead, they reject outside authority. For the postmodern, the self is the only authority that matters. Worldview preaching aims at sinful strongholds present at the most basic worldview level. For those who hold to postmodern worldviews, their very

¹Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 60.

presuppositions about reality and truth, disqualify the idea that an authority outside of themselves exists. The existence of absolute authority is contrary to their preconceptions about life and reality. The preacher aiming at secular worldviews seeks to kill not only the worldviews, but the pride with which people cling to their worldviews. Worldview preaching must be confrontational and it must be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit enables confrontation with worldviews that results in Christian conversion.

The Necessity of the Holy Spirit in Worldview Preaching

Just as worldview preaching should not be seen as being opposed to expository preaching, neither should it be set against Spirit-led preaching as though the two were opposing enemies. Rather, worldview preaching must be Spirit-led and Spirit-filled. The preacher's only hope of unseating secular worldviews and replacing them with Christ is for the Holy Spirit to work through the Word of God to bring about life-change. Greg Heisler explains the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching this way:

The prime reason for wedding the Holy Spirit to a ministry of exposition is that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical text will minister through that same text when it is rightly divided and passionately proclaimed to our contemporary audience. The doctrine of inspiration demands exposition because God the Holy Spirit inscripturated his truth in words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Therefore, a Spirit-led approach to preaching is naturally linked with the expository understanding of preaching because exposition at its core is testifying to what has been deposited already by the Holy Spirit in the Bible.²

The same Spirit-led approach should not stop, however, with exposition, it must continue toward worldview preaching. The preacher must engage in pre-evangelism and dialogical preaching. He must trust in the Spirit to reveal to him the questions of the

²Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 22.

people to whom he preaches and to provide biblical answers. Further, the preacher must regularly fall on his face before the Lord, begging for the Holy Spirit to show his hearers the failures of their false idols and pagan worldviews and to make their hearts receptive to the life-changing gospel.

The preacher must also depend upon the Holy Spirit to bring about worldview change. Paul's words to the Colossians should serve as a model for preachers, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work" (Colossians 1:9-10). Paul longed to see the Colossians growing in their faith, fully rooted in a Christian worldview, but he recognized that such change would require the work of the Holy Spirit.

Modern readers may not recognize the worldview emphasis in Paul's writings if they are not aware of the biblical understanding of knowledge and wisdom. Psalm 14:1 declares, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Like many postmoderns who reject the notion of God presumptively, the fool of the Bible rejects God in their heart. The fool, then, is the one who refuses to accept and acknowledge God. The fool's refusal does not mean God does not exist, merely that his existence is not acknowledged. The wise person, on the other hand, is the one who fears the Lord (Proverbs 9:10). Each of these characterizations relates to cognitive activity, and yet, according to correct understanding of Scripture, they are much more than mere cognitive assent. According

to Bruce Waltke, wisdom in Proverbs involves lifestyle and life-choices.³ True wisdom is shown in a wise life, not the accumulation of knowledge. F. F. Bruce points out that the knowledge and wisdom of which Paul spoke “is the essence of heart religion.”⁴ Thus, what Paul prayed for in the lives of the Colossians was not the mere attainment of knowledge, but growth in godliness and godly living. Paul prayed for the Colossians to attain a Christian worldview.

Further, the Spirit is important in worldview preaching because biblical wisdom is not available through mere human revelation. Derek Kidner points out, “Wisdom comes by revelation.”⁵ The Proverbs bear out this same truth, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Prov 2:6). Without the work of the Holy Spirit, preaching fails. Worldview preaching necessitates the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Postmoderns will not be changed by mere words, but they can be changed through spirit-empowered preaching that undermines their worldviews and presents the holistic saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for suggesting a new preaching paradigm is the temptation to believe that the right kind of preparation, the right kind of preaching, the right kind of application, the right kind of illustration, and the right kind of worldview engagement will necessarily result in powerful preaching. In short, there is a temptation

³Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 93-106.

⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 46.

⁵Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1964), 35.

to believe that a preacher can handle the ministry on his own if he will only follow the proper template. Relying on one's own strength, however, falls far short of the Christian worldview. The Christian worldview is one that is consumed with honoring God in all things. Paul urged the Galatians to "Walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16). According to the Great Commission, the Holy Spirit plays a key role in the salvation of sinners (Matthew 28:19). Thus, to neglect the Spirit is to dishonor Christ.

Likewise, Christ is dishonored when the Spirit is neglected in preaching. In *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, Zack Eswine warns, "The potential of doing ministry without or contrary to God's Spirit is real."⁶ Neglecting the Spirit is a danger of which the preacher must be constantly aware. This is especially true for worldview preaching that seeks to engage postmoderns with the gospel. Eswine goes on to write, "A post-everything environment exposes the limits of our homiletics and forces us back to what we most need—the Holy Spirit of God."⁷ Worldview preaching seeks to reveal pagan worldviews for the failures that they are and to replace them with Christ, but the Spirit of God is necessary to see this conversion take place. When preachers conceive of the true challenge of worldview preaching, they will recognize the necessity of depending upon the Holy Spirit.

Further, the Spirit of God is necessary because there are times when the opposition to the gospel comes about, not because one does not clearly understand the gospel, but precisely because one does. In preaching to postmoderns, sometimes that which needs to be undone is not one's worldview, but rather one's heart. Eswine puts it

⁶Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 246.

⁷Ibid.

this way, “Preaching intends to establish Christ’s provision and overcome the idolatry and devilry of people and places. Sometimes people do not respond to the sermon because they understand very clearly what is being asked of them. There is no homiletic skill that can overcome this kind of resistance.”⁸ In other words, worldviews can be challenged and idols can be revealed, but without the movement of the Holy Spirit, sinners will continue to cling to their sin.

As was argued in chapter six, postmodern worldviews that enshrine sin are often constructed from emotions rather than cogent arguments. Worldviews are heart issues, not academic arguments. As a result, what is needed is heart change, and such change can only be brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for conversion, and it is not limited to inner change. David Wells points out, “the Holy Spirit, though himself hidden and invisible, manifests himself in the lives and behavior of Christians.”⁹ The Holy Spirit is necessary to bring about conversion and ultimately to lead believers toward a Christian Worldview. The presence of a Christian worldview is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s activity in a person’s life.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity in worldview preaching because the filling of the Spirit is necessary for modeling a Christian worldview. According to Paul, sanctification and Christian living are dependent upon the indwelling of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-26). If the message must be preached utilizing the objective nature of the gospel and its subjective work in the lives of believers, then the preacher must model the Christian life before his hearers. He must provide the experience factor as well

⁸Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World.*, 247.

⁹David F. Wells, *Turning to God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 48.

as the objective truth factor. Postmoderns want to see the evidence of the Christian worldview before they will consider its value or validity for their own lives. The message will be judged based on the perceived character of the messenger. Heisler writes, “Spirit-led preaching approaches the Spirit holistically because the Spirit penetrates every aspect of our lives. Therefore, Spirit-filled living is God’s prerequisite for Spirit-led preaching.”¹⁰ Before a pastor can preach Spirit-filled messages that challenge prevailing worldviews, he himself must be Spirit-filled.

Summary

Robert Coleman once wrote, “Evangelism is the reason for the Bible.”¹¹ For some, this statement may seem to take away from God’s glory in the Scriptures. However, it is important to remember that evangelism and the glory of God do not stand in opposition to one-another. In fact, God is glorified in the salvation of sinners, and it is a desire for God’s glory that should serve as the primary factor in driving Christians to engage in evangelism.¹² This dissertation has argued that evangelistic preaching in a pluralistic culture must demonstrate the supreme value of the Christian worldview among competing worldviews. The impetus behind this dissertation has been the desire to see souls saved—to see preaching that is truly evangelistic proliferate in the churches of the West.

¹⁰Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 68.

¹¹Robert Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 39.

¹²J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1961), 73.

The emphasis has not been upon evangelistic preaching, but upon preaching that is evangelistic. Worldview preaching has as its aim the glory of God and the conversion of sinners, but its focus moves beyond traditional evangelistic sermons. Worldview preaching presents the gospel in a holistic way showing how the gospel weaves a coherent worldview and reveals how secular worldviews fail to satisfy the soul's deepest longings. It is not the intention of the author to presume that postmodern culture is uniform; instead it is assumed that postmodern culture is very pluralistic because postmoderns are self-focused. Because culture is pluralistic, the preacher must focus on the value of a Christian worldview apologetically rather than leaning primarily upon polemics.

If this dissertation has been successful, the reader will walk away convinced that traditional expository preaching does not go far enough in its applications of the text. Rather, what is needed is worldview engagement that begins at the pre-philosophical level and continues into worldview conversion. Postmoderns are experiential and if they will be converted, it will be because they hear the gospel from Christians who model a consistent biblical worldview and faithfully share the gospel.

Worldview preaching must be apologetical as well. Pre-suppositional apologetics are based upon the premise and reality that the Bible is true and foundational and is the starting point for apologetics. The effective worldview preacher will certainly engage in multiple apologetical disciplines, but his primary apologetic will be rooted in presuppositionalism because he is preaching, and preaching is based upon the presupposition that the Bible is God's Word. His text for preaching is the Bible and his assumption is that the Bible is authoritative. He will confidently declare, "Thus says the

Lord,” but he will not end there. He will show how the Bible pieces together life.

Everyone has a certain set of presuppositions, “The problem with presuppositions is not that they exist, but that all too often they are allowed to go unquestioned.”¹³ The worldview preacher’s apologetics must call into question the secular presuppositions of his hearers and demonstrate the intrinsic value of trusting the Bible to be foundational. The preacher must challenge secular presuppositions and show the consistency of the biblical worldview to explain life.

As the preacher seeks to engage enemy territory with the message of the gospel through worldview preaching, he must be aware that preaching is spiritual warfare.

Mohler writes,

Thus, the church is always mounting a counterrevolution to the spirit of the age, and preaching is the God-ordained means whereby the saints are armed and equipped for this battle and confrontation. The preached Word, applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, is the essential instrumentality through God shapes His people. As the Reformers remind us, it is through preaching that Christ is present among His people.¹⁴

Because preaching is so important to the church, it will be attended to by the enemy with special cunning and attack. Preachers engage in spiritual warfare in sermon preparation as well as delivery. Preachers must guard against personal attack as much as possible, and must be prepared to protect their flock when Satan attacks the church of Christ.

Worldview preaching also serves as a platform upon which the discipleship ministry of the local church can be built. If the preaching ministry of the local church aims at creating a Christian worldview in its members, the discipleship ministries of the church form a natural partner for personal spiritual development that results in holistic adherence to the gospel. Preachers must remember that preaching is a significant part of

¹³David R. Hall, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990), 114.

¹⁴R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 69.

the church, but it is not the entirety of the church. Christians need to hear the Word of God preached faithfully, but they also need to be involved in accountable discipleship relationships that foster Christian community and character development.

Application

What is being argued for in this dissertation, then, is not a seismic shift in preaching, but rather a foundational adjustment. Preachers who will impact postmodern cultures must be personally involved and invested in the messages they preach. Their sermons must be more than expositions of Scripture, they must be expositions of their lives as well. Postmodern hearers need to know how the message that is being preached has actually affected the one doing the preaching and they must be shown that their worldviews are faulty. In the twenty-first century, preachers are going to have to be more personal in their sermons than ever before. Contrary to some popular wisdom on preaching, pastors who reach postmoderns are going to have to use personal illustrations, testimonies of how God has affected their lives and stories of their own failures.

Postmoderns are skeptical of authority and as such preachers are going to need to endear themselves to postmoderns in more personal ways than preachers of previous generations. The goal of the pastor, after all, is not to flex his own authority, but to proclaim the authority of God's Word. As Paul became all things to all people, the pastor must become colloquial so that he can proclaim the life-altering message of the gospel. Colloquial does not mean stupid or ignorant, but culturally appropriate and personal. The pastor is going to have to invite his hearers into his life so that they can see how his sinful worldviews fail him and how the gospel is the answer for his life.

Postmoderns need to see that the gospel infiltrates all aspects of the pastor's life so as to break down their suspicions of hypocrisy.

In reality, this shift is nothing new; instead it is a return to a previous age. The Old Testament prophets often used their own lives as an illustration of God's work. Hosea's message was intrinsically linked with his marriage. Isaiah's message was tied closely with the lifestyle to which God had called him. Jeremiah's life was nearly ruined as a result of the message that God called him to deliver, and without a doubt, Jonah's ministry was characterized by three nights in a fish. Certainly, Jonah told often of the dangers of fleeing God to pursue one's own desires, of trusting in one's own worldview, and of the goodness of God and the life found in serving God alone.

Pastors have long shied away from speaking too much of themselves from the pulpit out of fear of seeming showy, but in so doing have often come across as robotic and impersonal. The unapproachable preacher is perceived by a skeptical culture to be hiding something. Couple this with pastoral scandals and the excess of many celebrity pastors as well as the pluralistic worldview postmodern culture and preachers have a formidable task before them to communicate the gospel effectively. As written above, much of what is needed can only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, so worldview preachers must be prayer warriors constantly interceding on behalf of those to whom they preach. Preachers must also work on their part to supplant the worldviews of their hearers, and that will be done as they endear themselves to their hearers with stories of failure and success and with personal transparency that shows the value of the gospel.

Preachers must understand their audience and the Scripture. They must preach the Word and clearly exposit their audience, but they must also show the audience that

the message of the gospel has been effective in their own lives. Polished illustrations have their place in preaching and will continue to be necessary, but postmodern listeners will be constantly questioning the honesty of the preacher, and must be shown that the message he preaches is for him as well as them. His goal is to tear down and build up, but his hearers will not trust him to destroy their worldviews and give them a new worldview until they have seen the results of such activity, and ultimately he is the illustration. No one wants a doctor who cannot heal himself, and postmodern hearers will reject the message of a man who cannot show its effectiveness in his own life.

If Nancy Pearcey is right in her assertion that creating a Christian worldview is primarily about erasing the divide between the brain and the heart as well as between the sacred and the secular, then the preaching to bring about worldview change must give emphasis to both the head and the heart and it must connect with the sacred as well as the secular.¹⁵ Worldview preaching must aim at the emotions and experiences through the objective truth of the gospel and the subjective experience of the gospel. Worldview preaching must focus on application, and some of the application must precede information. Preachers are going to have to show how the Christian worldview works itself out before they proclaim the truths of Christ.

Driscoll advocates for asking the apologetic question, but preachers must be willing to ask the question and provide answers to that question before, during, and after the proclamation of the gospel.¹⁶ Worldview shift is not easy, “We should expect the

¹⁵Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), loc. 543, Kindle.

¹⁶Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 100.

process of developing a Christian worldview to be a difficult and painful struggle—first inwardly, as we uproot the idols in our own thought life, and then outwardly, as we face the hostility of a fallen and unbelieving world.”¹⁷ If worldview change is that difficult inwardly for believers who desire to develop a Christian worldview, it is even more difficult to preach the necessity of worldview change to hearers that are potentially hostile to the gospel.

Traditionally, preaching has focused on application during a sermon or at the end of a sermon. Worldview preachers must consider application in a different way than their predecessors. The preacher must work to regularly establish his authority as a messenger to his hearers by sharing his personal application of the gospel and the results of living out his Christian worldview. Because his hearers do not assume the authority of the Bible and the minister, the pastor must work to establish a base from which he can proclaim the truth of the gospel. The preacher must never shirk away from confidence in the objective truth of God’s Word, but for a postmodern culture, he will need to show his hearers how he and others have experienced the truths of the gospel through personal testimony and personal illustrations of gospel oriented living. Rather than leading from objective truths to applicational experiences, worldview sermons will be structured with a three-tiered approach: experiences that establish a ground for authority, truth that is rooted in the objective nature of God and his Word but that is also lived out in the life of the preacher and other believers, and finally application for how this objective and experiential truth can be experienced and applied in the lives of his hearers.

¹⁷Pearcey, *Total Truth*, loc. 1177.

The Three Tiers of Worldview Preaching

In each of the three tiers discussed above, the preacher can and must proclaim the ultimate value of the Christian worldview and the failures of secular worldviews. His proclamation must be built around the objective truths of the gospel and experiences of finding fulfillment in the Christian worldview and disappointment in secular worldviews. Hearers will have to be taught that truth is objective. Until they can accept this reality however, preachers must focus on presenting the subjective and experiential results of truth that can pave the way for a more robust understanding of the gospel. Worldview preachers cannot grow satisfied without conversions, but they must accept the fact that conversion for postmoderns may be a long process. As a result, their goals in preaching must be not only to see immediate application, but to see the process of application and conversion take place over a long period of time. Reaching postmoderns requires a presupposition that the Bible is true on the part of the preacher, but he must be willing to allow his hearers to come to the understanding that the Bible is true as he guides them through experiences of the gospel and the process of discovering the validity of the Christian worldview.

The three-tiered approach allows and encourages preachers to focus on the emotional and subjective arguments that serve as barriers to the gospel. In this approach, application is not an add-on at the end of the sermon, but is a part of the entire body of the sermon. The three tiers of worldview sermons do not serve as a skeleton for the sermon outline, but serve as a guide to direct the construction of the entire sermon. Rather than seeing the sermon as divided into the three distinct divisions of experience,

truth, and application, these three tiers should be the basis for the construction of the entire sermon and for each part of the sermon.

Sermons are generally built around one major point with sub points helping to build the case for the main point. In the three-tiered approach, the sermon seeks to answer a question rather than assert a point. Questions are important for postmoderns because they reject authority. They value questioning. The role of the preacher is to understand their questions and answer them with the truths of the gospel. Each point of the sermon serves to develop the answer more fully and to answer it in three ways: through experience to establish a ground for authority of God's Word, through truth from God's objective Word, and with application that shows how to apply God's truth and personal experiences.

For instance, a sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 could be constructed according to the three-tiered approach this way. The primary question to be answered may be "What is the gospel?" By asking this question, the preacher invites his hearers not only to experience God's Word, but to journey with him towards an answer. The preacher puts his own authority aside and instead asserts the Bible's authority. The question, "What is the gospel?" may be answered in three ways: "The gospel is an historical event," "The gospel is a theological reality," and "The gospel is of first importance." These three answers form the sub-points of the sermon. Under each sub-point the pastor will make use of each of the three tiers. Under sub-point one he may share a personal experience of becoming convinced of the gospel as historical fact. This can be done by quoting from books or other academic sources, but rather than simply quoting from scholars, the pastor needs to show how he was impacted by the research.

Phrases used in this context may include, “I was convinced of the historical nature of the gospel when . . .” or “I was once skeptical of the historical nature of the gospel myself, but . . .” In so doing, the pastor shows how these truths have impacted him. Postmoderns are experiential. They want to experience what others have experienced. Pastors need to share their experiences to establish a ground for authority as they move toward God’s Word.

Next the pastor must focus on the truths of God’s Word. It is important to note that at no point should the pastor’s presuppositions of God’s Word change, he is always convinced of the absolute truth and value of God’s Word. However, he is also aware that the audience to whom he preaches does not share the same conviction. As a result, he uses his experience to build credibility among his hearers for the Bible. The Bible is then presented as the Word of God that does not change, but that has had an impact on the preacher himself. Faithful exposition of the text is absolutely essential, but the pastor must show not only the meaning of the text and its application to today, he must also show how the Scripture has impacted and changed his life. In so doing, the pastor shows that the Bible is not an archaic book, it is the living and active Word of God that is still experienced today (Heb. 4:12).

Finally, the pastor must show his hearers how they can apply the truths of God’s Word. Application in the three-tiered approach must incorporate personal experience as well as objective truth. The preacher can encourage his hearers to apply the message in ways that he has applied the message himself. He might even issue the same challenge to himself as he does to his audience with phrases like, “Join with me with me this week in seeking to put the gospel first and to live in light of its historical and

theological reality.” The application can become experiential and can support the message even as it gives practical function to the message.

It is important to note that the tiers discussed need not always flow in a particular order. It may be that the application is stated in the beginning as a part of the pastor’s experience and the case for that application is built throughout the message. It could also be the case that the experiential aspects and the objective aspects will be integrated with one another. For many postmoderns, their arguments are rooted in emotion rather than intellectual or academic argument. Nevertheless, facts can sometimes be used as a lever to unseat secular worldviews. In the sermon above, the pastor can share from his experiences to begin to unseat emotional resistance, but it may be that his experience with extra-biblical material supporting the Bible’s truths are the key to demolishing the secular worldview of his hearers and opening the door for a biblical worldview grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The three-tiered approach need not supplant the expository sermon or traditional sermon outlines. Small changes in sermon approach and delivery of an expository sermon can open wide doors to postmoderns. By asking questions and inviting hearers to journey toward the answer, the pastor does not take away from the objective truth of the Bible. Sharing personal experiences need not water down the presentation of the gospel. Instead, the preacher is working to better speak into a culture that does not value the Bible or the office of pastor. Ultimately, the preacher’s job is to faithfully communicate the Word of God, and unless it is heard and understood by his hearers, the preacher has not faithfully communicated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, preachers must remember that the Bible is not bound by culture and is not controlled by the prevailing winds of popular opinion. J. Mack Stiles encourages preachers to “Remember the Bible critiques culture, not the other way around.”¹⁸ Preaching is not captive to the culture because preaching is not dependent upon the culture. Preaching depends upon the Bible for its message and that message is spoken into culture with the intention of changing culture. If culture is to be changed, however, it will be changed in small increments, one person and one worldview at a time. Preachers must speak with confidence into the sins of their culture, not because they have authority in their own right, but because the Bible has authority.

The culture may reject objective authority, but God’s authority exists regardless of whether or not it is recognized. The goal of worldview preaching is to lead people to the realization that they have a need for God and then to introduce them to the gospel that leads them into a saving relationship with God through Christ. Preachers should endeavor to proclaim a biblical worldview even when such a worldview is unpopular in the secular culture or even in particular church cultures. It is possible even for committed Christians to embrace worldviews that are contrary to the Scriptures. The preacher should “Be humble about the way your particular culture may have blended with the message of the gospel, causing you to hold worldviews that Jesus would have never required.”¹⁹ This modesty is not capitulation to the world, but humility before the Lord.

¹⁸J. Mack Stiles, *The Marks of the Messenger* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 45.

¹⁹Stiles, *The Marks of the Messenger*, 45.

God commands his people to humble themselves before him (1 Pet 5:6, Jas 4:10). Humility in preaching need not lead to a loss of authority. A spirit of humbleness is not timidity (2 Tim 1:7), rather it is recognition of the fact that true authority resides in the God whose words are being preached. After all, if the preacher bases his message on his own words, he has become as postmodern as his hearers. The preacher must display humility by regularly turning the focus of the sermon toward the cross of Christ. True humility is shown not through self-deprecation in preaching, but through self-removal. Christ is the centerpiece. The worldview preacher must show how the truths of Christ affect him experientially and subjectively so as to gain a hearing from his listeners. However, the focus of the sermon must never be the experience of the preacher, but rather the experience of Christ. The Christian faith is experiential, not only in the lives of its adherents, but even in the life of Christ who experienced death on the cross for his people. As preachers humble themselves before God and show authenticity in their preaching, they can demonstrate the supreme value of a Christian worldview by proclaiming its objective truths and its experiential results that speak persuasively into a pluralistic culture and can lead postmoderns to Christ.

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW IN A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

Robert Craig Thompson, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
Chair: Dr. Timothy K. Beougher

This dissertation examines worldview preaching in a post-Christian culture.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of worldview preaching and its necessity for evangelism within the church of the twenty-first century. This chapter also defines terms used throughout and establishes the methodology for the research.

Chapter 2 takes a more in-depth look at presuppositional “apologetical preaching” and its application to the study of worldview in evangelistic preaching. This chapter also shows the difference between apologetical preaching and expositional preaching and suggests apologetical preaching as a needed corrective.

Chapter 3 argues that worldview preaching is a form of spiritual warfare. This chapter also outlines the ways that preaching is spiritual warfare in three areas: battle with the flesh, battle with the world, and battle with Satan.

Chapter 4 introduces the concept of sermon-driven discipleship. It is argued in this chapter that evangelism cannot be separated from discipleship and that evangelistic preaching necessarily focuses on discipleship as well. This chapter also shows how worldview preaching can direct the discipleship ministries of the church.

Chapter 5 investigates examples of worldview preaching. It is argued in this chapter that some preachers from the past and present practice the form of worldview preaching advocated in this dissertation without having applied the particular terms associated with this research project. This chapter critiques those who have adopted secular worldviews in their preaching as well as those who have adapted their message delivery to fit the secular world.

Chapter 6 examines the deficiency of worldview emphasis in preaching literature. It commends John Stott's approach, but also shows that bridging the two worlds doesn't go far enough. This chapter then surveys a number of preaching texts for their emphasis on worldview and presuppositional apologetics in their treatment of preaching.

Chapter 7 answers the question of how these findings can be applied to contemporary churches. It concludes by emphasizing the need for preachers to engage with the world around them and to challenge the worldview of their secular hearers and challenges church leaders and educators to adapt their approach to preaching and preaching education to include presuppositional apologetics as a necessary component.

VITA

Robert Craig Thompson

EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Broome High School, Spartanburg, South Carolina
B.A. Presbyterian College, 2003
M.Div. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007

MINISTERIAL

Youth Pastor, Zion Hill Baptist Church, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 2000-2003
Associate Pastor, Oak Grove Baptist Church, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 2003-2007
Senior Pastor, Malvern Hill Baptist Church, Camden, South Carolina, 2007-