

PREACHING WITH POWER THE WORD
"CORRECTLY HANDLED"
TO TRANSFORM MAN AND HIS WORLD

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I can well remember when Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago first came to the city and gave his inaugural address. He began by discussing the kinds of impressions that E.T., the little visitor from outer space, would have of Chicago and Roman Catholics if he were sitting on the back row of Holy Name Cathedral while the address was given. I am wondering out loud—in a more Biblical context but with no less registered amazement—about the impressions some of the great cloud of witnesses would have if they should sit somewhere in the back row, listening to our papers and conversations.

I would hope, after almost two days of listening to papers and now with our stomachs full of succulent food, that it will not be too great a chore for you to listen to me share the burden of my heart. The theme of "Preaching and Biblical Exegesis" is important. It is a subject that has challenged me and, I would presume, some of you as well. But I realize that among the group of scholars represented here we also each have varied interests at this annual meeting. I have always felt, however, that after we have carefully examined the texts of our Bibles, checked the original languages, applied the rules of hermeneutics and carefully noted the principles of Biblical theology, then we should be able to guide the young men and women who sit in front of us in our classes to preach the texts.

When I entered seminary, coming straight out of a secular university, I hoped I would emerge as a knight in shining armor ready to do battle in the pulpit. As I was going through seminary I was exposed to many disciplines: surveys of OT and NT, Church history, exegesis of a number of the Biblical books, the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic languages, hermeneutics—even one whole year of systematic theology! Still the nagging question of whether or not I would finally reach my goal after all of this massive training (so I thought at the time) persisted.

Fortunately I had to take at least twelve hours of homiletics and preaching. The objective of this specialized work was to prepare us to preach, using all of the disciplines to which we had been exposed. Even then, in my first year in the pastorate, I ended up flogging the pews, and it was not until my second year that I finally realized that God had sent me to minister to the flock, preach the Word to them in power, and with it meet their needs.

I want to consider some of the ideas suggested in my title: first, the preacher as the messenger; second, what the preacher is supposed to be preaching—that is, the Word; third, the preacher who "correctly handles" this Word (2 Tim 2:15

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NIV), which includes Bible exegesis and a host of other significant disciplines; fourth, the work of the Holy Spirit in Biblical preaching; and fifth, preaching as it meets the needs of people.

I will not be so presumptuous as to declare that we will be able to handle all of these areas in depth or reach every necessary conclusion. Rather, all we can do is to identify areas of concern as well as note the task involved in preaching and Biblical exegesis.

I. THE CALL OF THE PREACHER

The preacher is a divinely appointed messenger. In the OT one of the functions of the prophet was to preach to the remnant of believers who sought to live godly lives in the midst of their generation, as well as to the unbelievers, calling them to repentance. The prophet was therefore one who had a call by God who gave to his servant a specific mandate to share a divine message. In the NT the preacher was the "apostle," "one sent from God" (*apostelmenos*). While in a sense every believer is today a "sent one," nevertheless some are especially called to be his messengers. The humble preacher can do no less than emulate the example of our Lord Jesus: "He has anointed me . . . to proclaim freedom" (Luke 4:18).

It goes without saying that the preacher's character has to be impeccable. He is called upon to be a clean vessel of the Lord (Isa 52:11). Nevertheless we also have to remember that in spite of a preacher's native ability, skill, gifts, and the amount of labor involved in the course of translating Biblical texts in the original language to the spoken word in the pulpit, it is still God who works to will and to act according to his good purpose (Phil 2:13).

What can be disheartening in our day is the general population's perceptions of the preacher. In 1982 a Gallup poll indicated that only 30% of the people polled said they had a "great deal" of confidence in organized religion, while 21% said "quite a lot," 25% stated "some" and 21% "very little." Very little difference existed in the poll between Protestants and Catholics, 32% of the former and 35% of the latter expressing a "great deal" of confidence in organized religion. The highest level of confidence was in the south (40%), followed by the midwest (32%), the east (26%) and the west (21%). While this disaffection can reflect a wide variety of reasons, one wonders if a good part of it is because the preacher is not preaching the Biblical text to meet the needs of the people. Therefore he is not regarded by the community as a special person with a unique message. Too often, as Robinson points out, the preacher's messages are drowned in an "over-communicated society," the "startling and unusual" in preaching actually takes the place of the Biblical message, and "social action" becomes the substitute for sound Biblical preaching that has to touch a wide range of needs in the lives of believers.¹

¹H. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 16-17.

II. PREACHING THE WORD

We have to have a solid conviction about what the preacher should be preaching: This is no less than the Word. Paul had told his protegee, Timothy, "Preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2), and in Paul's thinking this had only one frame of reference.

In the OT the Word was considered the Torah, held in high esteem by at least the believers in Israel. Not only are the five books of Moses the Torah, but the entire OT, the Hebrew Scriptures, is also designated the Written Torah. Paul's quotations from the Prophets (1 Cor 14:21 = Isa 28:11-12) and the quotations by Jesus from the Psalms are all designated Torah. The OT prophets, godly men, and even Jesus, in their preaching of Torah actually reflected what God himself provided. He is the divine Teacher, the *môreh* responsible for his divine instruction. The Word is to be regarded a high level indeed.

In the NT the Word is the Logos (2 Tim 4:2), which in Paul's mind was the OT. Yet this Word also reflects the gospels in the NT, "the story of the life, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Christ, together with their bearing on human life and destiny."² The apostles of the NT and others who preached in the context of Israel as well as among the nations had the highest regard for the Word. In time the entire NT was considered on no less a plane than the way the OT was regarded.

When we talk about the Word, we not only face the words on the page but this very Word itself also brings us to the edge of time and the beginning of eternity to face the God who gave it. As such, the Bible exegete who wishes to be a faithful preacher recognizes an authority in the Word that God said (*'āmar*, the mode of revelation) and spoke (*dābar*, the substance of revelation). The divine *môreh* unfolded the revelation of himself *in the records* as he intervened in history, in nature, and among people. In time, in the incarnation came the God-man, called "the Word," the living Word, as an embodiment of the written Word. Jesus Christ, the living Word, lends the greatest weight of authority to the written Word. With a high view therefore of the text as the Word, the preacher can proclaim it without hesitation or fear because God designed his divine instruction to meet the needs of men.

III. "CORRECTLY HANDLING" THE WORD

We need to consider what is involved in the preacher's "correctly handling" the text, as Paul instructed Timothy. One dimension of this process is Biblical exegesis, but this involvement will bring to the fore some areas for concern that could keep the preacher from attaining his goal. A few will be enumerated.

1. *Inerrancy an historic position.* Paul declared that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). Schaeffer declares his understanding of this term: "The Bible is God's Word, without error in all the areas of which it speaks. 'All areas,'

²R. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint of 1897) 205-206.

and not just religious matters!"³ This means therefore that "God-breathed" somehow includes not only the concepts or thoughts but also the very words themselves. If this is not the case, the Biblical preacher will be under a cloud in his Bible exposition if he has to constantly wrestle with what is inerrant and what is errant, depending on who is going to decide where the boundary should be drawn.

Through the centuries an inerrant Word has been the historic position of the Church. In spite of a number of modern assertions to the contrary, Woodbridge demonstrated quite cogently that factual inerrancy is an established, long-standing position.⁴ Furthermore William Nix has, in the examination of the formal expressions of the doctrine of inspiration held by various denominations and Church bodies, demonstrated quite well that in the basic doctrines held since the Reformation a strong position was voiced concerning inspiration, inerrancy and the authority of Scripture. In spite of disagreements between Reformers and counter-Reformers, "both groups persevered in receiving the Bible as a compendium of inerrant oracles dictated by the Holy Spirit."⁵

Yet a perusal of the scholarly efforts in the earlier *BETS* as well as in *JETS* has demonstrated that over the past 25 years the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture has been the object of a great deal of scholarly effort. Views and counter-views have engaged our interests, and some of our scholars have given their best efforts to wrestle with this issue. It appears to me, however, that given the historical undergirding and the epistemological issues of this doctrine we come to a crucial dividing line where, if we falter and enter into the process of minimizing the doctrine, the way in which theology is done will be greatly affected. Obviously, sound Biblical preaching will also suffer.

2. *The issue of inerrancy.* What is the real reason for the concern over inerrancy? Montgomery has suggested that the issue centers on the "character and extent of inspiration . . . not denying the existence of inspiration . . . but merely defining more closely what is meant by inspiration, and how far such inspiration extends in Holy Writ."⁶ What is the difficulty that some have when they accept only part of the Scriptures as inspired and reject the rest as the same? That is, why is it that a self-proclaimed evangelical can believe in an inerrant Word but still has a problem in saying that the entire Scriptures are inerrant, including areas of historical and scientific materials that seem difficult to reconcile with all that inerrancy entails? One comment is to the point:

³F. A. Schaeffer, "God Gives His People a Second Opportunity," in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (ed. J. M. Boice; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 16.

⁴J. D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), has analyzed the conclusions of J. Rogers and D. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 1979), who attempted to demonstrate that factual inerrancy is only a recent construction and that one has to distinguish between what was inerrant in matters of faith and practice and errant in matters of science and history.

⁵W. E. Nix, "The Doctrine of Inspiration Since the Reformation," *JETS* 25/4 (December 1982) 454.

⁶J. W. Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1970) 315.

Most of my liberal friends apparently don't care to become involved in debates over inerrancy. My own diagnosis is this: What leads them to liberalism, apart from cultural and personal issues, is their acceptance of certain philosophical or scientific assumptions that are inimical to evangelical theology.⁷

A real difficulty is apparent with this assessment in that "it is unwittingly self-descriptive,"⁸ because Davis himself declares that "the Bible contains historical and scientific errors . . . and I agree that such errors have no serious theological or apologetic consequences."⁹

Perhaps one major influence on the Church that has brought inerrancy into the arena of conflict is adverse philosophical views that posit non-Biblical positions concerning theism, the nature of truth, possibility of knowledge, language use, and so on. The nineteenth century became a battleground on which was strewn the wreckage of a supernatural revelation in many quarters. For many philosophers reason reigned supreme, and their view of history did not include the element of transcendence. No matter which groups of philosophers we examine—be they skeptic, rationalistic, or those who misuse the inductive method—their influences can be traced in the writings of so-called evangelicals today who draw a line somewhere between what concerns revelatory matters and what is defined as historic, scientific, and whatever else is merely human. What suffers is the traditional view of the Scriptures, which have come to us in "a perfect form."¹⁰

Factual inerrancy of the Scriptures will not come out well through the influence of existential movements either. When Kierkegaard declared that "the New Testament cannot absolutely . . . be normative for us," his focus was primarily on the "meeting between God and man" instead of an encounter with God by reading and exegeting the recorded Word of God.¹¹ If the Scriptures are not propositional, and if all that counts in Biblical proclamation is the existential relationship of God and man, then certainly factual inerrancy of the Scriptures will suffer greatly. We can understand the reason for Kierkegaard's riding Hegel's antithesis, attempting to stir life into the Church of his origins, but it seems to me that this was kicking the pendulum too far in order to correct a deficiency. Inerrancy suffers if it can be said that propositions in the NT are not to be accepted as true, even if they can affirm that "Christ is the Savior."¹²

Kierkegaard's successor, Barth, continued to express various tenets of existentialism. What was more important for him was the experience between man and God, which cannot be communicated propositionally. Of course Barth put great emphasis upon the Bible, but the radical humanity of Scripture is apparent

⁷S. T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 139.

⁸N. L. Geisler, ed., "Inductivism, Materialism, and Rationalism: Bacon, Hobbes, Spinoza," in *Biblical Errancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 20.

⁹Davis, *Debate* 44.

¹⁰Geisler, ed., *Errancy* 235.

¹¹E. H. Nygren, "Existentialism: Kierkegaard," in Geisler, ed., *Errancy* 128.

¹²*Ibid.*

everywhere in his thought, so much so that in his view the Biblical text contains many errors, both historical and scientific, as well as what is regarded as theological. Other existentialists follow, exhibiting an increasing skepticism, until finally (with Bultmann) we can well ask whether the dehistoricization of the NT could also be carried one step further and even deny that Jesus lived. It would seem to me that the end of the line for extreme existentialism is subjectivity, culminating in skepticism.

The evangelical distinctive concerning the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture will guard us from the various philosophical influences that can only lead to a truncated Scripture or no Scripture at all. For me, inspiration and inerrancy are positions worth guarding. Even for the religious Jew the Scriptures are from Heaven—i.e., from God. For Calvin the truth and divine authority of the Scriptures are founded on the “inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit,” an epistemology of the Holy Spirit.¹³ For Warfield it was the “credibility and trustworthiness of the Bible as a guide to truth . . . that we accept its doctrine of inspiration.”¹⁴ Montgomery’s methodology of linguistic analysis and its principle of verifiability demonstrates an inductive approach that shows that we need not draw a line between the theological and what is regarded as nontheological. Montgomery declares that “fundamental to the entire biblical revelation are the twin convictions that subjective truth is grounded in and verifiable through objective truth, and that the eternal has been made manifest in the temporal,”¹⁵ and that furthermore “theological validity is preserved from meaninglessness by its verifiability in the empirical domains it touches.”¹⁶ These methodologies and others used to demonstrate the inerrancy of Scripture can differ. Whichever methodology an evangelical uses, however, there is a unity regarding the importance of the Scriptures.¹⁷

We need to assure students who sit in front of us and who are looking forward to a lifetime of ministry that the overpowering figure of the Messiah and his authority extends to his Word and should prevail over destructive philosophical influences.

3. *Hermeneutical concerns.* “Correctly handling” the text will also bring up a whole host of hermeneutical concerns in the attempt to do Biblical exegesis. We recognize that we have problem areas—e.g., the use of approximations in expressions and in numbers, the use of the language of appearance particularly in areas of scientific categories, instances of statements consisting of inerrant records of

¹³J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957 reprint), 1. 1.8.13.

¹⁴B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970 reprint) 214.

¹⁵Montgomery, *Suicide* 342-343.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 347—although Montgomery very carefully indicates that empirical verifiability does not automatically bring about a subjective commitment. Yet his approach does help to distinguish between a blind faith and a genuine faith.

¹⁷For a discussion on methodologies and inerrancy see P. D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy* (ed. N. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 269-276.

speeches with difficulties or even errors, the use of materials from pseudepigraphic literature, and so on. We attempt to ascertain the intent of the Scripture writer, but what happens when we face the above-mentioned problems and wonder where some will want to draw the line between what is inerrant and what is errant?

Still another issue evangelicals face is what to do with apparent discrepancies in the Scriptures, particularly those in the gospels. Some may want to talk in terms of harmonization, but even here we have our problems because of subjective answers, depending on the number of people working with specific areas. In one assessment, five other possibilities besides harmonizations are suggested to handle the discrepancies: "Sometimes one will work, sometimes another, sometimes a combination of approaches, and sometimes a precise solution will not be found."¹⁸ At times, however, no solution seems apparent, and in these cases I myself would tend to hold in abeyance any judgment. But in these circumstances the question of inerrancy will arise. In particular, those who hold to a tighter definition for inerrancy will be accused of not attempting to find a solution, and those who do attempt it may end up backing away from inerrancy or redefining it so that the term will fall short of its full intended meaning.

Evangelicals have applied the process of "grammatico-historical exegesis" to their work in hermeneutics and exegesis, and many have tended to look with suspicion on historical criticism, tradition and redaction. In fact some have indicated that the use of even a moderate tradition criticism can only open the door to a movement that would detract from a factual inerrancy:

[Historical-critical] conclusions necessarily leave the objective life and words of Jesus in darkness and obscurity, since one can never be sure when the text is representing Jesus Himself. . . .

[The historical-critical] method, by its very nature, generates unwarranted doubt concerning the objective reliability of the biblical records.¹⁹

Others in the Society, however, maintain that the historical-critical method can be modified so as to use this approach as a tool to provide insight into Scripture passages that might otherwise pose a tension in understanding them. Osborne indicates that

redaction criticism is not a divisive tool that dichotomizes . . . into authentic and inauthentic categories. That only accrues when one accepts the negative presuppositions of the radical critics. It is not only possible but necessary to separate the tools from the a priori of certain scholars, for the one does not depend on the other. In fact, the denotation of the positive value of the tools illustrates its place in the scholar's arsenal of exegetical weaponry. . . . Its methodology . . . adds scientific precision to their attempts to delineate the "single intent" of the individual evangelists.²⁰

¹⁸M. A. Inch and C. Hassell Bullock, eds., *The Literature and Meaning of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 141-142.

¹⁹J. W. Montgomery, "Why Has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?", in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (ed. K. S. Kantzer and S. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 63, 65.

²⁰G. R. Osborne, "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology," *JETS* (December 1979) 315, in handling parallel passages in the gospels.

Osborne has also, in two additional articles in *JETS*, written that tradition and redaction criticism can be a tool that the evangelical can use, provided Biblical distinctives are kept in line, including normative inerrancy.²¹

A test case of the use of redaction criticism now faces the Society with the publishing of a recent commentary on Matthew²² in which the gospel writer is considered to be motivated in theological reconstruction and in which a liberal use is made of a midrash-type genre to account for many of the historical materials. The difficulties of this methodology begin to surface when, as it appears to me, the text is not allowed to speak on its own terms and make its own claims.

Since the ETS is a debating Society, the question now concerning historical criticism is whether we want total freedom in our academic pursuits or some limits on our investigation of evidences and conclusions, particularly with regard to historical criticism, in order to safeguard our doctrinal basis of inerrancy. We have at least three options before us: (1) We impose no limitations on our work in historical criticism. We keep on with our academic investigations through papers and panels as we have always done. (2) We can suggest guidelines as to how we can conduct our research in historical criticism so that the greatest care should be taken to insure the autonomy of the text, highly regarding its integrity in both revelatory and nonrevelatory materials. Two contributions in historical criticism alone that have been of great help are reflected in the consideration of the covenant in Deuteronomy and other texts in the OT by Kline and Kitchen and of the apology of David in 1 Samuel 15 to 2 Samuel 8 by Wolf.²³ (3) We can proscribe the use of historical criticism altogether and, instead, continue to make use of the more acceptable procedures in doing our hermeneutics and Biblical exegesis.

It seems to me that, as scholars, we need to be open with our studies, using whatever we have at our disposal that will give us a better means to understand the Biblical text. Yet it would also appear that some guidelines in the use of historical criticism, under the direction and authority of inerrancy, might be necessary in order to preserve the integrity of the Society in its commitment to its doctrinal basis. The experiences of this past year have been indeed trying. On the one hand we are committed to our doctrinal basis. On the other hand, however, in the already mentioned commentary on Matthew the author, while committed to inerrancy, only raises formidable questions among us as his colleagues when in structuring Matthew's theology he "swallows up considerations of source, history, geography, timing, literary style."²⁴ While it is entirely possible to use the contributions of historical criticism to enable us to best understand the Biblical text, yet suggested guidelines would strengthen our stance on inerrancy without

²¹G. R. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission," *JETS* 19/2 (Spring 1976) 73-85; "The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*," 21/2 (June 1978) 117-130.

²²R. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

²³M. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 196 ff.; H. Wolf, "Implications of Form Criticism for Old Testament Studies," *BSac* 127 (1970) 299-307. See also N. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Eerdmans, 1962), who also applied the principles of historical criticism to his work in the gospels.

²⁴D. A. Carson, "Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review," *Trinity Journal* 3, NS (1982) 85.

undue limit on freedom of scholarship. Carl Henry has already given ten suggestions on how we can use or proscribe the use of the historical-critical method.²⁵ But the process of establishing these guidelines as we interact with each other should be accomplished with gentleness and humility, regarding highly the dignity of the individual.

We turn now to consider the areas of concern for "correctly handling" the text relating to the theme of our conference—in particular, Biblical exegesis.

4. *Biblical exegesis in relation to preaching.* As a preliminary to considering Biblical exegesis in relation to preaching, 1979-1983 catalogues of sixteen seminaries were surveyed to see how many semester hours were required in hermeneutics, Biblical theology, homiletics and preaching in the Master of Divinity program. Concerning hermeneutics: 1.75 hours is the average required for the sixteen seminaries; 7 hours is the highest required by one school, while seven seminaries did not require any hours. For Biblical theology: The average required number of hours is 5; one seminary requires 18 hours, two require 12 hours, and four schools did not require anything at all. Homiletics and preaching fare better: 5.8 hours is the average required for the sixteen seminaries; two schools require 12 hours, seven require 6 hours, three require 3 hours, while one seminary only requires 2 hours. The research is still inconclusive. It is assumed that the seminarians will be exposed to good Bible exegesis in the Bible courses, and it is to be hoped that students will take additional hours in all three areas of hermeneutics, Biblical theology and homiletics-preaching to help them further in these areas. Yet it seems to me that there exists a glaring problem for training preachers to best communicate the fruits of a good Bible exegesis.

Perhaps this is why Kaiser has pointed out the problem we face: "Who has mapped out the route between these two points" whereby we can move from the text of Scripture to where there is a proclamation of that text?²⁶ Most of us have been exposed to many preaching situations in our churches in which the preacher can give us an excellent exposition of the historical, cultural and word study of a text in its ancient settings without at all trying to relate it to the person sitting in the pew with all of his burdens and problems of life. On the other hand, we have also been exposed to the other extreme where messages attempt to tackle the issues of the day and relate them to the needs of the average church member without accurately reflecting the Biblical text the preacher has chosen for the occasion.

One of the issues in Biblical exegesis is, again, that of hermeneutics, which in particular deals with the question, "How is it possible to say what constitutes *the* valid meaning of a text?"²⁷ I am not going into the history of hermeneutics since

²⁵C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word, 1979), 4. 403. In particular, the tenth suggestion is quite apropos: "Biblical events acquire their meaning from the divinely inspired Scriptures; since there could be *no meaning of events without the events*, an inspired record carries its own intrinsic testimony to the factuality of those events."

²⁶W. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 18. See also Robinson, *Preaching* 77-104, where the concern is how to go from the text to the sermon.

²⁷H. A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 22.

the Middle Ages. A number of people have provided this overview for us.²⁸ But such a study demonstrates the gamut of assertions from "What does the text really mean to say?" to "What does the text mean to me?" or "How does the text interpret the reader?"²⁹

In the attempt to obviate the existential approach to any text we face today, Hirsch has tried to rescue the importance of "meaning":

For if the meaning of a text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to *the* meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or determinable meaning.³⁰

But unfortunately this was an earlier Hirsch, because the later Hirsch, under extreme pressure, moved away from locating meaning in the text, although he was reluctant to give up on the written text since this represents the author's truth-intention. As evangelicals we can surely recognize that from a secular source we have a contribution that can aid our belief in the importance of the text—i.e., the Biblical text.

Once we let the text speak for itself we face the task of going from the "there" (the ancient Biblical world) to the "here" (the modern world). Yet we face some rough questions on how we can be gap bridgers between there and here in an evangelical sense. with regard to the Biblical text located in the there, the disciplines of contextual analysis (which examines the circles of context of the immediate passage, the surrounding verses, the chapter, the book), the historical-cultural dimension (which examines the history and cultural milieu), the meaning of individual words, the syntactical analysis (the way the words are put together in a sentence and paragraph)—all are a part of the task with which the preacher as the interpreter must be involved in order to return to the there. We also make use of the principle of the "analogy of faith"³¹ where we derive facets of theological meaning in the text under examination, in the Biblical book being considered, or in previous books. For example, if we are researching a text in Isaiah we examine the grid in Isaiah before us. It would not be fair to read into that particular text a further revelation derived from the NT to assess the meaning of the Isaiah passage set in its own place and time. The antecedent texts, however, will throw further light on the passage under consideration. The same is true when dealing with the sin offering in Leviticus 4. We can discover that Moses has a lot to say on how an ancient Israelite could be a believer without having to read back into the OT the NT doctrine of soteriology.

In addition there is also the necessity of having a good grasp of Biblical theology, which helps us to get at the theological meaning of the text. But what does this entail? Imposing an entire theological system on some OT passage? No. Besides discovering the meaning of the text as indicated in the previous paragraph,

²⁸A. B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 20-79; J. J. Scott, "Some Problems in Hermeneutics for Contemporary Evangelicals," *JETS* 22 (March 1979) 67-70; Kaiser, *Exegetical* 51-66; Virkler, *Hermeneutics* 47-74.

²⁹E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967) 3.

³⁰Quoted by Kaiser, *Exegetical* 134.

³¹Virkler, *Hermeneutics* 117-153.

we also need to organize all this mass of material into particular historical groupings relating to specific periods: patriarchal, Mosaic, judges, kings, and so on. An underlying principle of unity that holds together all of the theological themes of the Biblical writers is seen in the flow of history where there is the context of divine revelation.³² By carefully guarding ourselves we can derive our Biblical theology from words with theological implications that can refer to covenants, institutions, preachments by which God is revealed in his person, and a whole host of other significant experiences.

The preacher as the interpreter also has the task of determining the meaning and intention of the Bible writer, factors that can only be determined in exegesis as we examine the text in an objective sense. We cannot cloud the issue of building "on another foundation, i.e., the intention of the human author,"³³ which can only lead to a subjective interpretation. There was no doubt a lot going on in the mind of an author as the Spirit of God provided and led in the God-breathed message,³⁴ but the only way we are going to know anything about what God has revealed is to examine the Biblical text. Do we look at a text and say that it has a fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) than what was intended by the human author? This has been a debate for a long while, and it is still with us. But if we are to be faithful to the text and understand it, we still have to ask what it means and how the language of the text is being used for its single meaning. If some are going to insist that there is a fuller meaning, something in addition to the text, that somehow the human writer was unable to comprehend it, particularly in the prophetic texts, then the only way we are going to be able to determine the text's meaning is to see how later revelation provides fuller meaning.³⁵ But if we seek answers concerning the fuller meaning by some speculative scheme, then we do violate the limits of Biblical theology and revelation. Yet the preacher as the interpreter has to honestly make an attempt to enter into the world of the ancient Bible writer.

Not only is it necessary to recreate the ancient scene of the there. It is also necessary to cross the gap to the here, bringing back principles for application to our world of high technology, to the social arena of human need with its deprivation and degradation, to the world of political structures to combat amorality and

³²See also Kaiser, *Exegetical* 138-139, who also points out another possibility: to have a canonical center of theology not imposed on the text but one that derives from it. He suggests two words that suggest such a center: blessing (in the pre-Abrahamic materials), or promise (which summarizes the contents of the OT in the NT). He feels that this better binds together in an inner unity what had been produced by the writers of Scripture.

³³P. B. Payne, "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention," *JETS* 20/3 (September 1977) 251.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 244-245, where Payne indicates that there are many levels in an author's thought complex and changing mental states and that we cannot know today all his intentions since he lived so long ago but that the only way we know anything about the intentions is by examining what is revealed in the text.

³⁵J. B. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (New York: Harper, 1973) 4-5, where he discussed situations where there was an ignorance of time fulfillment but certainly not the meaning of understanding—e.g., 1 Pet 1:10-12—and where there was a lack of understanding of the essence of a prophecy (Dan 12:8).

insensitivity. Bridging the gap between the there and the here is difficult to say the least. Many preachers today bring the there into the here and make only a half-hearted attempt, or none at all, to find the equivalence of the here today with the there in the Semitic culture of the second and first millennia B.C. or the Hellenistic culture of the first century A.D. Rather, the interpreter needs to continually raise questions as he studies the there: What does the Biblical text say about God? What are the universal and eternal principles operating in the particular situation? How did the man of God apply them to himself? Today we still have the same God working in history, and universal and eternal principles can be applied to the people of God who seek to relate to their world. It is necessary to distinguish between eternal and abiding transcultural principles, operative in every generation, and temporary culture-bound customs. It is going to take a great deal of effort to draw the line between the transcultural principles and culture-bound customs in the there³⁶ in order with a knowledgeable spiritual insight and a grasp of the needs of our world today to be able to apply the transcultural principles to our here in the midst of our particular social and cultural settings. One possibility that might be explored is Tillich's and Bultmann's studies of the meaning of "being" and human understanding. Obviously we cannot lend approval to their work in interpretation of the text, but why can we not explore this approach further to see how the listener can relate to the application of Biblical exegesis that seeks to bridge the gap from the there to the here?³⁷

In the person of the apostle Paul, who can be considered duocultural, we possibly have one of the best examples of this technique of bridging the gap. His task was to take Biblical truths in an Israel-Semitic setting and transfer these truths to the Greek and Roman world of his day. His background was admirably suited for the task. He was reared in a Roman city and exposed to Greek culture, and at the same time he was trained in the Israelite scene. He therefore was well-equipped to bridge the there and his here. This is the task set before us, and it calls for our best in training our students to prepare them for ministry in their world.

I would like to suggest a number of areas of special concern regarding the preacher and Biblical exegesis that I feel deserve greater emphasis in our day. I will merely enumerate them briefly:

(1) The need for more preaching from the OT. My concern is that so few people in the churches actually hear series of messages from the OT. I became very conscious of this soon after taking my first pastorate, and I determined then that at least two-thirds of my preaching would be from what constitutes at least 75% of the Word of God. True, we run the problem of how to bridge the gap between the there and the here for this project. The messages of Moses, the Prophets, and those in the Writings are for the most part directed to a particular people, in a particular place, for a particular time. Nevertheless we can make the attempt because of the universal and eternal principles that apply to common humanity in both the there and the here, the common heritage between Israel and the Church that has many points of contact, particularly the holidays and

³⁶Essay by P. Nevin, Moody Bible Institute, "How To Distinguish Permanent (Transcultural) Principles From Temporary, Culture-Bound Customs," in his class on hermeneutics/Bible study methods.

³⁷Scott, "Problems," suggests this as a possible area for more research.

their implications for the ministry of the Messiah, and great Biblical theological themes such as God, covenant, redemption, which have important links to the NT. The effort involves a study of genre: literature, poetry, wisdom, parables and allegories, apocalyptic, and prophecy. But in spite of the problems the Hebrew Scriptures have a lot to instruct and guide today's believer.

(2) Another specific area of concern in OT preaching is the morality of the ten commandments. These constituted the moral element of the Mosaic constitution. The establishment of the new covenant includes the commandments, with the exception of the Sabbath. While the principle of one day of rest is maintained for each week, freedom of choice on a Scriptural basis was allowed within the body of Christ concerning which day will be the day of rest. It would appear therefore that both OT and NT have common concerns regarding the commandments. Nevertheless, in spite of some Christians insisting that we should have nothing to do with the "Law," I feel it is a distinct necessity to do Biblical exegesis of the commandments and assess their reflection of a God who is holy. We need to consider the impact of these moral absolutes upon the people of Israel and see how they had to relate to them. Because these are transcultural principles I feel we need to emphasize the commandments today more than ever. We as believers live among a people for whom morals are either existentially or pragmatically discerned, and into this milieu we need to project the element of the holiness of God as exemplified by an absolute morality. Luther's emphasis is still apropos today: "The theological use of the Law and Gospel is soteriological and functional: Law reveals sin and drives one to the Gospel; Gospel frees one from the bondage of sin and gives him the power to fulfill the Law."³⁸

(3) Still another concern is our presentation of Jesus as the Son of man. In numerous classes across the years I have polled students, asking if they have ever heard their pastors give a series of messages on the humanity of the Messiah. The response has been minimal. The great thrust is to present and protect the divine nature of Jesus as the badge for orthodoxy. I would not detract one iota from the proclamation of Jesus as divine, but if we lessen the humanity of Jesus the Messiah we will lose some of the great, precious Biblical truths reflected in his manhood, his experience in suffering, disappointment and rejection. All these are ingredients with which the common man can identify. Furthermore we see Christ as the example for morality in his obedience for service. We also see him as our high priest representing us before God.

(4) Another area is our preparation of missionaries for cross-cultural communication of Biblical texts. More than once, missionaries have indicated to me that they learned to do their preaching in cultures of the third world after having arrived on the fields of ministry and going through the painful process of learning how to bridge the gap of the there with their here. It would seem to me that there is great value in considering a cross-fertilization of ideas between the theologian, the Biblical exegete, the missionary and the homiletician for the purpose of preparing the missionary, helping in some measure the missionary candidate before he arrives on the field.³⁹

³⁸Cf. Luther's sermon on "Two Kinds of Righteousness."

³⁹See D. Hesselgrave, ed., *Theology and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), and D. McGowan and A. Glasser, eds., *Contemporary Theology of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), for contribution in this concern.

IV. PREACHING WITH POWER

We turn now to consider what preaching with power means. We could only wish that our students could take a course on how to have power with God. Shall we say that three units should be sufficient for such a course? No. This is a factor that every person called of God must work out between himself or herself and God alone. Some suggestions will be noted whereby we can have a ministry empowered by God, but we often realize that our preaching and our teaching will be dry and barren unless we are men and women through whom God can work in power.

The title of my address begins with "Preaching with Power the Word," and this perhaps can be a clue to one of the facets for power in the pulpit: the relationship of the Word and power (*dynamis*). Thirteen times in the NT we see this connection. Paul declared to the church at Rome that his chief interest in ministry was to fully preach the gospel of Christ in the power of the Spirit. To the church at Corinth likewise, with all of its friction and strife, Paul proclaimed that he was not going to enter into rational argumentation with them. Rather, his message would be in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor 2:4).

There are any number of volumes dealing with the many varied ministries of the Spirit as the different Biblical passages are considered. We are not asked to sacrifice our reasoning power, but at the same time the Spirit of God imparts wisdom (Isa 11:2; 1 Cor 12:7-8). It goes without saying that while we use the knowledge God has given to us we are also dependent upon the wisdom the Holy Spirit imparts for counsel with people in general, for counsel with believers, but in particular for our understanding and use of his Word. Along with the wisdom and power of the Spirit we also need the filling of the Spirit to live godly lives.

One more point needs to be made about our need to be obedient to the Spirit. He is holy, and he expects us to yield total obedience that we might experience his holiness to the full. If the Spirit of God is the absolute Master of our lives it certainly will make a difference in how we live, pray and preach.

V. PREACHING THAT TRANSFORMS MAN AND HIS WORLD

Through our preaching we must relate to man and his world. We have already mentioned many facets of how we can apply the Word of God, going from the there to the here so that there will be an impact upon our own communities and the mission field. Preaching, however, not only should relate but should also persuade people to make decisions. Lloyd Perry gently reminds us that preaching must not regard itself simply as a reservoir but also as a channel.⁴⁰ It is a sober reminder that after going through Biblical exegesis, bridging the gap from the there to the here, presenting the material in a crisp and live message, the preacher must always be aware that the Word seeks to transform people who in turn will have an impact upon the community. We need to give ourselves to the task of training our students to not only preach effectively but also to be reproducers.

⁴⁰L. Perry, *Biblical Preaching for Today's World* (Chicago: Moody, 1973) 152.

Remember that the task before us as evangelicals in today's world is an awesome one as we seek to do our hermeneutics, exegesis, theology, textual analysis, and the myriad of other disciplines with which we are involved, with a semblance of harmony and unity within the Society. But we need to constantly remember that the possibility for preaching with authority, communication, power and practicality will be greatly diminished if there is uncertainty regarding the Biblical text. Therefore one overarching concern comes before all of us. No matter what our field of investigation we are reminded of our responsibility as evangelicals: to honor and serve Jesus as Messiah, who is the Lord, and his Word, the Biblical text. We must ever remember that as we work with the Biblical text we are never to sit in judgment on it. Rather, we must realize that it is the text that continually judges us and is ever our guide, directing us in our work.