

The Anatomy of Exposition: *Logos, Ethos, and Pathos*

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Introduction

Preaching has been the dominating passion of my life since the 1960s. George Carlin has a famous comedic line about that era: “If you remember the sixties, you weren’t there.” I remember the sixties because, instead of doing drugs, I was doing ministry. I was in southern California, wearing sandals, bellbottoms, and long side burns, teaching the Word to droves of eager students with their rabbitskin-covered Bibles opened to the text I was expounding.

Now after some 35 years in ministry, biblical exposition is my passion. “Preaching and preachers,” to borrow Lloyd-Jones’s term, and homiletical theory intrigue me. Not only do I collect books on preaching, but I spend about 20-25 hours each week preparing my sermons. While preaching is an interesting subject, it is more than that. It is God’s call on my life.

Abuses of Exposition

Because preaching is God’s call on my life, the contemporary slide toward what I call “dis-exposition” is a vital concern to me. Though the term is new, you have all experienced dis-exposition as a listener. You can easily recall a Sunday service in which the biblical text is announced and you settle back, Bible in hand for a good Sunday meal, only to find out that the text is departed from, never to return. Dis-exposition causes Sunday indigestion.

There are a variety of ways in which a pastor can practice dis-exposition. For example, some pastors preach the same content over and over again, regardless

of the text on which the sermon is supposedly based. There is no variety, no mining of the breadth and depth of the biblical material, only the same point made week after week. If you listen to this kind of preaching month after month and year after year, a kind of brain death takes place. You can sit under the preacher’s teaching for years and never recall anything you learned from the Bible. In another case, there is dis-exposition that parades as exposition. In this instance, the text is mentioned, but there is no engagement with the text and its content. There is no attempt to convey that passage’s true meaning.

Dis-exposition invites many abuses of the text. Peter Adam lists some of these in his book *Speaking God’s Words*,¹ and I have added to his list. First, there is the de-contexted sermon. This occurs when the Scripture is wrenched from its surrounding context and mistakenly applied. An example of this is the preacher who used Revelation 11:10 as a Christmas text: “And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another.” That preacher completely ignored the last part of the verse, which says, “because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.” Doesn’t that sound like a merry Christmas!

Second is the lensed sermon. The preacher sees every text through the lens of a favorite theme. That lens could be psychological, therapeutic, political, chauvinistic, social, or domestic, to name just

a few. No matter what the text, the preacher always ends up preaching a sermon on the home, the flag, or wholeness.

Third, the moralized sermon, in which every sermon has a moral. Take, for example, Paul's words in Philippians 3:13. The apostle's phrase "one thing I do" is stretched to teach the importance of having goals and goal-setting. Thus, personal and professional goals become the centerpiece of the sermon. Forget the next phrase in which Paul outlines his primary desire: "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The preacher would rather encourage his congregation to have a plan than to imitate Christ.

In the fourth type of dis-exposition, the doctrinalized sermon, the Scriptures are used as proof-texts for the doctrinal preferences of the preacher. Every sermon champions his particular theological leanings.

The fifth abuse comes from silenced sermons. The preacher actually preaches on details that the Scripture does not address. The sermon goes something like this: "Now the Bible does not tell us how Mary felt, but we can be sure she felt this way. Therefore, we ought to feel the same." I have even heard of sermons that have been preached from the animals' perspective at Jesus' birth.

While these five abuses are frightening, I think that the most common type of dis-exposition today occurs because of the "homiletics of consensus." In this type of preaching, the preacher determines the congregation's need from the pollsters' analysis of felt needs, and then bases his preaching agenda on those feelings. Certainly, all biblical exposition must be

informed by and be sensitive to perceived needs. But the problem with preaching to felt needs is that our deepest needs often go beyond our perceived needs. For example, most Christian couples feel the need for teaching on marriage and family, but they may have a far deeper need of understanding Romans 1-3, because a profound understanding of the human predicament will inform and give wisdom with regard to marriage and parenting.

William H. Willimon, Dean of the chapel at Duke University, wrote an article entitled "Been There, Preached That." In it he asked rhetorically,

Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than liberal mainliners? At the very time those of us in the mainline, old-line, sidelined were repenting of our pop psychological pap and rediscovering the joy of disciplined biblical preaching, these "biblical preachers" were becoming "user-friendly" and "inclusive," taking their homiletical cues from the "felt needs" of us "boomers" and "busters" rather than the excruciating demands of the Bible. I know why they do this. After all, we mainline-liberal-experiential-expressionists played this game before the conservative evangelical reformed got there.²

A few paragraphs later, after warning against allowing the world to set our homiletical agenda, Willimon concludes the section, saying, "The psychology of the gospel—reducing salvation to self-esteem, sin to maladjustment, church to group therapy, and Jesus to Dear Abby—is our chief means of perverting the biblical text."³

Dis-exposition as I have described is not a straw man that I can blithely torch. It is a serious problem that deserves care-

ful thought. At least in my part of the world, these abuses increasingly dominate the pulpits. These approaches to Scripture are not going to be replaced quietly and easily. Therefore, I think it is necessary to expound the true components of biblical preaching through the three classical rhetorical categories of *Logos*, *Ethos*, and *Pathos*. I will not be using those terms as they are strictly defined for two reasons. First, classical definitions play to classical hubris. Second, classical rhetoric is not a master discipline of which preaching is a subspecies. Rather, preaching is *sui generis* (one of a kind) because in preaching God speaks.⁴ Nevertheless, the categories, broadly understood and given Christian qualification, provide helpful headings through which to think about preaching.

Logos: The Preacher's Convictions about Scripture

It may be helpful to clarify from the beginning that I do not intend to address the craft of or preparation for preaching. There will be no talk of exegesis, making intercanonical connections, finding the main idea of a passage, or using proper illustrations and examples. Instead, what follows is a plea for biblical exposition. To do biblical exposition properly, I think a preacher must believe in the authority of Scripture and recognize the inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit.

The Authority of Scripture

The authority that you attach to Scripture will determine the weight and prominence that you give Scripture in your preaching. For a preacher to present expositional sermons, he must recognize the inerrancy, the sufficiency, and the potency of the Bible.

Inerrancy

I cannot think of any non-inerrantist who has done (or currently does) regular biblical exposition, Dr. Willimon notwithstanding. Admittedly, some liberal scholars have written helpful critical commentaries, and the recent application of the principles of literary criticism has provided refreshing insights. However, this has not produced liberal Bible expositors. Biblical exposition comes only from those with a high inerrantist view of Scripture.

Sufficiency

While a high view of Scripture is essential to biblical exposition, it is not enough by itself. The expositor must whole-heartedly believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, and embrace Scripture's own claims about this matter. He must personally own the conviction of Moses, who said, "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life" (Dt 32:46, 47; cf. 31:9-13; 32:1-45). Such a belief is essential to an expositional heart.

The preacher also must exemplify Jesus' meditation on the Word. As a pre-teen, Jesus' knowledge of the Scriptures astounded the teachers of the law (cf. Lk 2:47). At the beginning of His ministry when he was tempted by Satan, his encyclopedic knowledge of the Word enabled him to defeat the tempter with three deft quotations from Deuteronomy (Lk 4:1-13; cf. Dt 8:3; 6:13, 16). Jesus Christ, God incarnate, leaned on Scripture in his hour of need. Indeed, his summary response to the tempter was like a bookend to Moses' declaration that the Scriptures are "your life," for Jesus insisted that they are the

soul's essential food. He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (Mt 4:4; cf. Lk 4:4; Dt 8:3). The Scriptures were life to Moses and food to Jesus. Such dependence on the sufficiency of Scripture will mark the heart of the expositor.

Potency

Combined with a high view of Scripture and a belief in its sufficiency, you also need confidence in the Bible's potency. There is a passage in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* where the warrior heroes Mr. Great-heart and Mr. Valiant-for-truth converse during the respite after a battle. The two spiritual warriors sit to catch their breath following the fight. Mr. Great-heart gestures approvingly to Mr. Valiant-for-truth and says,

"Thou has worthily behaved thyself. Let me see thy sword." So he showed it to him. When he had taken it into his hand and looked thereon awhile, he said, "Ha! It is a right Jerusalem blade." Then said Mr. Valiant-for-truth, "It is so. Let a man have one of these blades, with a hand to wield it and skill to use it, and he may venture upon an angel with it.... Its edges will never blunt; it will cut flesh, and bones, and soul, and spirit, and all."⁵

This passage illustrates the unbridled potency of God's Word! The author of Hebrews writes, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:12,

13). God's Word cleaves through the hard-shelled souls of humanity like a hot knife through butter. His Word can penetrate the hearts of the greatest sinners of our age. It can cut away our own religious facade leaving us flayed, exposed, and convicted. His Word is so potent that when he wills it, it will pierce anyone!

The Neglect of Biblical Authority

There can be no exposition apart from an exalted view of Scripture. Exposition will flourish only when the preacher believes that Scripture is wholly inerrant, totally sufficient, and massively potent. If you believe this, you will countenance nothing less than the expository preaching of the Word. What you believe about the Scripture is everything in the matter of preaching.

Now, assuming that the gospel enterprise agrees with what I have said, a disconcerting question arises: Why the increasing instances of dis-exposition in many Bible-believing pulpits?

One possibility is that some Bible-wielding preachers do not really believe in the sufficiency and potency of the Word. They may think that they believe the Bible has those characteristics, but they really do not believe what they suppose they believe. Personally, I think this is the heart of the problem. Many preachers have mindlessly assented to the authority of Scripture. They agree with what their evangelical subculture demands. They do not consciously disbelieve in the sufficiency and potency of Scripture. But, alas, they do not truly believe, either.

Another possibility is that they have been poisoned hermeneutically by the "bogie" of postmodernism. They know that contemporary culture connects with inner-directed subjective experience and

that it finds reasoned discourse challenging, so they succumb to preaching only narratives and telling therapeutically-laced stories. In doing so they abandon not only the Scripture, but also the mind. A similar possibility is that they have been told so much about the impossibility of bringing the intellect and the emotion together that they do not even try. They have lost their hermeneutical nerve. They forget, among other things, that God is the author of Scripture, and that he had a future audience in mind when he caused Scripture to be written.⁶

A more prosaic possibility, and alas, an all too prevalent one, is that many Bible-believing preachers do not do biblical exposition because it is too much work. They are guilty of homiletical sloth! Possibly they believe that the homiletical “pay-off” does not merit the added work. Regardless of their reasons for not doing so, only those who believe that Scripture is authoritative will commit their lives to expositing the text.

The Inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit

In addition to recognizing that the Word has authority, it is also important to recognize that the Word and Spirit are one. In a 1995 *Festschrift* article in honor of British preacher R. C. Lucas, Australian Old Testament scholar John Woodhouse made a compelling argument for exposition based on the inseparability of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. He says, “In biblical thought, the Spirit of God is as closely connected to the word of God as breath is connected to speech.”⁷ He points out texts such as Genesis 1-3, Psalm 33:6, Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18, John 3:34, John 6:63, and 1 Timothy 3:16 to prove the inseparable connection between Word and

Spirit. Woodhouse concludes, “Precisely for this reason Scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness: it is in the Word that God Himself speaks today. Therefore, the surest way to recover the ‘living’ Word of God is to recover preaching that truly expounds the Scriptures.”⁸ When the Word of God is expounded, there the Spirit speaks. Exposition looses the manifold work of the Spirit.

The Historical Value of Exposition

I think it is very significant that apostolic preaching was expositional. One of the landmark texts in defining exposition as the major work of the pastor and the worship of the church is Paul’s charge to Timothy: “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (1 Ti 4:13). The public reading of Scripture was nothing new. It had naturally come into Christian worship from the Jewish synagogue (cf. Lk 4:16; Ac 15:21; 2 Co 3:14). Not only did Christian churches adopt the custom of the reading of the Old Testament, they added to it by reading from the apostolic letters and the Gospels (cf. 1 Th 5:27; Col 4:16).

This meant that the apostolic church put the apostles’ writings on the same level as the Old Testament. Justin Martyr wrote just after the close of the first century, “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then when the reader has finished, the president speaks, instructing and exhorting the people to imitate these good things.”⁹ The overall effect of this regular reading of the Old and New Testaments at worship was twofold. First, it emphasized the radical

continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Second, it meant that the authority of the preaching that followed was secondary to and derived from the reading of Scripture. According to Paul's directives to Timothy, the reading of Scripture was to be followed by Timothy's attention "to exhortation" and to "teaching" (i.e., doctrinal instruction).

Now comes the inescapable conclusion, voiced by John Stott: "It was taken for granted from the beginning that Christian preaching would be expository preaching, that is, that all Christian instruction and exhortation would be drawn out of the passage which had been read."¹⁰ Biblical exposition was the apostolic norm. Therefore, any other kind of preaching is an aberration from the apostolic practice.

Not only was apostolic preaching expositional, but the Reformers' return to Scripture was accompanied by a revival of exposition. Take, for example, Martin Luther, who pounded on the text of Romans 1 until the "gates of paradise were opened." Luther's fifty-plus volumes bear monumental testimony to this commitment to exposition, as does his conviction that when the Word is preached, God speaks. He writes, "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."¹¹

When John Calvin preached on the dramatic institution of the old covenant in Exodus 24, he referred forward to Christ's words of institution of the new covenant in his own blood—"this cup is the new covenant in my blood"—and reasoned that we ought to view the new covenant Scriptures (the New Testament) "as if" written in Christ's blood. Calvin said, "For

this reason Christ in the Holy Supper commands His blood as the seal of the New Covenant; nay, whenever we take the sacred book into our hands, the blood of Christ ought to occur to our minds as if the whole of the sacred instruction were written therewith."¹²

The "as if" dominated Calvin's life. He revered the Scriptures as if they were penned in the scarlet of Christ's blood. T. H. L. Parker, translator and biographer, writes of Calvin, "On Sunday he took always the New Testament, except for a few Psalms on Sunday afternoon. During the week ... it was always the Old Testament."¹³ He took five years to complete the Book of Acts. He preached 46 sermons on Thessalonians, 186 on Corinthians, 86 on the Pastorals, 43 on Galatians, 48 on Ephesians. He spent five years on his *Harmony of the Gospels*. That was just his Sunday work! During the weekdays in those five years he preached 159 sermons on Job, 200 on Deuteronomy, 353 on Isaiah, and 123 on Genesis.¹⁴

All this work was done because of what Calvin believed about the Scripture. He believed that the whole of Scripture was the Word of God and must be mined by exposition. "We must not pick and cull the Scriptures to please our own fancy, but must receive the whole without exception," wrote Calvin.¹⁵ So profound was Calvin's conviction and commitment to Scripture that two years after Calvin's death, the Second Helvetic Confession included the famous statement, "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God."¹⁶

Although this is a grand statement, it is a statement that can invite abuse because some preachers think that whenever they preach they are preaching God's word. Only an apostle could say that, as

Paul certainly did in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: “We also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.” At the same time, it is gloriously true that when a preacher is faithful to the text and does careful exposition, insofar as it is true to the Word of God, God speaks, and very often his preaching is the very Word of God. When he speaks he fulfills Peter’s charge that “whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God” (1 Pe 4:11).

The Advantages of Exposition

I concur with David Bast’s bold conclusion:

The nature of preaching is plainly indicated. There are not strictly speaking several kinds of preaching (topical, expository, textual) or many kinds of sermons (doctrinal, lectionary, life situation, relational); there is only one, expository. The only kind of preaching worthy of the name is that in which the truth of a Scripture text is explained and applied to the lives of the hearers.... The task of preaching is clearly defined. The single most important thing the preacher must say to himself each week as he contemplates the sermon lying in front of him is “What am I supposed to be doing?” and the single most specific answer he must repeat is “I am supposed to explain and apply what Scripture says.”...What we who preach need most of all is a commitment to the biblical text. We must not be afraid of the text as if it might spoil our sermon if we spend too much time on it. Let us study it until we can understand and preach what it says, instead of shrinking from it because it doesn’t say what we want it to say, or says more than we want it to say. Let us preach the text, not the idea that brought us to the text.¹⁷

Bast is correct in his charge that the weekly sermon should be expository. I want to commend to you the regular preaching of God’s Word when God’s church is assembled on the Lord’s day. I have found that there are strong benefits for the pastor who practices expository preaching.

First, a major strength of this approach is that when you preach sequentially, you will preach texts that you would never voluntarily preach, and would, perhaps, even purposefully avoid. For example, my commitment to sequential serial exposition means that I have worked through Matthew’s text on divorce carefully. As a result, I have a thoughtfully worded position paper on the subject, as well as on how it relates to church membership and leadership. When I preached through Joshua I was forced to deal with divinely-directed genocide in the destruction of Ai. I had to address the nineteenth and twentieth century rejection of the Old Testament as too crude and primitive, as well as the Marcionite tendencies of many modern evangelicals. The lesson for my people? God’s glory and honor outweigh all human life. Most recently, I preached on 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and the text, “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (v. 12). As a traditional complementarian in a university setting, I spent over a hundred hours in preparation during the preceding weeks. It was good for me and good for the church.

Second, I have discovered that I never have to fret about what to preach on Sunday. I never have had the Saturday night agony of Charles Spurgeon, who would sometimes wander around his house and ask his wife, “Mother, I have no text. What am I to preach?”

Third, you grow as a theologian because of systematic biblical exposition. Every pastor ought to assume that he is a theologian. We may be good theologians, bad theologians, ignorant theologians, or learned theologians, but we are all theologians. When you plow new ground biblically, you continually grow. That growth does not result in accumulating cold, atemporal definitions of theological things, but rather in understanding of the rich texture of Scripture. That means that you get better with age!

Fourth, expository preaching keeps you subject to the text. Topical preaching and doctrinal preaching by nature impose an external theme and structure on disparate texts in order to produce an overarching topic. Exposition forces you to look to the Scripture for both your theme and your structure. This will steel you against eccentricities and novelties endemic to topical preaching.

Fifth, expository preaching gives you the confidence to preach with a “Thus saith the Lord” conviction as no other style does. When I have done my work and know that I am preaching God’s Word accurately, compassion, conviction, and passion inevitably result.

Sixth, there is a strength that I have already expounded. You can have confidence that when the Word is opened the Spirit speaks. Biblical exposition of the Word invites God to breathe life on his people.

For the sustenance it gives the church and the growth it gives the preacher, Scriptural exposition must be the constant diet of the church. We must affirm the Scriptures’ own testimony that they are the inerrant, sufficient, and potent Word of God. We must believe that the preaching of the Word and the Work of the Spirit are

inseparable. We must remember that apostolic preaching was expositional, and that Reformation preaching (and thus the Protestant tradition) was fed on exposition.

Before we can proceed to the *Ethos* and *Pathos*, we must presume that the *Logos* is in order—that the Scriptural prolegomena is a part of the preacher’s heart, and that he has prepared his exposition. Now we are ready to deal with the actual preaching act, which invites our consideration of the *Ethos* and *Pathos* essential to biblical exposition.

Ethos: An Expositor’s Integrity

Now *Ethos*, as I am defining it, is simply what you are. It is your character. It is who you are as a person. *Ethos* has to do with the condition of your inner life and with the work of the Spirit within you, especially as it relates to your preaching. Biblical exposition is enhanced when the preacher invites the Holy Spirit to apply the text to his own soul and ethical conduct.

The Preacher’s Character

Phillips Brooks, the famous Episcopal bishop of Boston and the author of “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” touched on this subject when he gave his famous definition of preaching in the 1877 *Yale Lectures on Preaching*. He said, “[P]reaching is the bringing of truth through personality.”¹⁸ He then elaborated, “Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching. The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him.”¹⁹

In the early 1900s, William Quail car-

ried the idea further by asking a rhetorical question: “‘Preaching is the art of making a sermon and delivering it?’ He answered, ‘Why no, that’s not preaching. Preaching is the art of making a preacher and delivering that.’”²⁰

Brooks’s and Quail’s observations were helpful, ground-breaking observations when qualified and not taken too far. Quail went to an extreme when he concluded:

Therefore the elemental business in preaching is not with the preaching, but with the preacher. It is no trouble to preach, but a vast trouble to construct a preacher. What then, in the light of this, is the task of the preacher? Mainly this, the amassing of a great soul as to have something worthwhile to give—the sermon is the preacher up to date.²¹

The bishop seems to have forgotten in his enthusiasm Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:5: “For we do not preach ourselves.” Indeed, many modern preachers do preach themselves, and it is a cult of the personality with their endless personal anecdotes and inner therapeutic explanations and confessions.

The Preacher’s Peril

There is a sense in which Brooks is right, however. The truth of God’s Word “must come through the preacher’s character, his affections, his whole intellectual, moral being. It must come genuinely through him.” Here is a great professional danger, because it is possible for us preachers to imagine that we have been to places spiritually we have never visited. Brooks observed that in the repeated loud proclamation of the grand truths of the faith we can become like railroad conductors who imagine by saying, “All aboard for Albany,” “All aboard for

Chicago,” that they have actually been to those places. We can implore people to repent week after week and grow so familiar with the whole doctrine of repentance, that we are dull to the fact that we ourselves have not repented.²²

C. S. Lewis saw the same thing when he said,

Those, like myself, whose imagination far exceeds their obedience are subject to a just penalty; we easily imagine conditions far higher than we have actually reached. If we describe what we have imagined we may make others, and make ourselves, believe that we have actually been there—and so fool both them and ourselves.²³

Richard Baxter warned, “Lest they offer the bread of life to others which they themselves have not eaten.”²⁴

In the light of these realities, Lewis once advised a friend who was considering theological studies to forego them, observing, “None are so unholy as those whose hands are cauterized with holy things; sacred things may become profane by becoming matters of the job.... I’ve always been glad myself that Theology is not the thing I earn my living by. On the whole, I’d advise you to get on with your tent-making.”²⁵ So let us all be warned as we live our days amid the wonders of God’s Word and the immensities of the great truths that what we preach must come through our souls. As John Owen said, preaching must flow from “an experience of the power of truth in our souls. If it does not dwell in power in us, it will not pass in power from us.”²⁶

The Preacher’s Affections

However, nothing is more powerful than God’s Word when it is expounded by one whose heart has been harrowed and

sanctified by the Word he is preaching. Puritan Williams Ames said it exactly:

Next to the evidence of truth, and the will of God drawn out of the Scriptures, nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation. To this purpose it is very profitable, if besides the daily practice of piety we use serious meditation and fervent prayer to work those things upon our own hearts, which we would persuade others of.²⁷

Every appropriation of the truth preached will strengthen the preacher for preaching. Every repentance occasioned in his soul by the Word preached will give conviction to his voice. Then it will be said of him, "His sermon was like thunder because his life was like lightning."²⁸

Theologically, Jonathan Edwards in his *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* has given us the best explanation of what must take place within us. Edwards did not use the word "affections" as we do to describe a moderate feeling or emotion, or a tender attachment. By affections, Edwards meant one's heart, one's inclination, and one's will.²⁹ Edwards said, "For who will deny that true religion consists in a great measure in vigorous and lively actings and the inclination and will of the soul or the fervent exercises of the heart?"³⁰ Edwards then goes on to demonstrate from a cascade of Scriptures that real Christianity so impacts the affections that it shapes one's fears, one's hopes, one's loves, one's hatreds, one's desires, one's joys, one's sorrows, one's gratitudes, one's compassions, and one's zeals.³¹

This is what I believe needs to happen routinely to the preacher as he prepares God's Word so that the message comes through his whole intellectual and moral

being. When this happens he is ready to preach. I have said many times that sermon preparation is twenty hours of prayer. It is humble, holy, critical thinking. It allows the truth you exposit to harrow your soul. It is repeatedly asking the Holy Spirit for insight. It is ongoing repentance. It is utter dependence. It is then a singing heart.

Pathos: A Pastor's Passion

The preaching event must also be an exercise in Spirit-directed *Pathos*, or passion, as I am using the word. Of course, there is a lot of bogus passion in today's pulpits. I have actually known a preacher who would go into his vestry, run in place, do jumping jacks, and swing his arms so that he could affect a passion when he stepped into the pulpit. I heard of another who stood on his head before he came out to the chancel. Hollywood has a word for it: "method-acting."

A false passion can have much subtler roots. As Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones observed,

A man prepares a message and, having prepared it, he may be pleased and satisfied with the arrangement and order of the thoughts and certain forms of expression. If he is of an energetic, fervent nature, he may well be excited and moved by that and especially when he preaches the sermon. But it may be entirely of the flesh and have nothing at all to do with spiritual matters. Every preacher knows exactly what this means.... You can be carried away by your own eloquence and by the very thing you yourself are doing and not by the truth at all.³²

So, sinners that we preachers are, we must be wary of ourselves and the source of our homiletic passion. There can be no marginal annotations saying, "Weak point, raise voice, pound pulpit." That is

not a passion worthy of the expounding of God's Word.

Godly Passion

Despite abuses, the Scriptures know of and enjoin a godly passion for preachers of the Word. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul told the Thessalonians, "[O]ur gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." Paul was not referring to conviction among his hearers, but rather his own conviction, his own earnestness and passion. For Paul, preaching and weeping went together. For example, read Acts 20:31, in which Paul says, "[N]ight and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." That was Jesus' way on occasion. You cannot image that Jesus said dispassionately, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Mt 23:37; cf. Lk 13:34). No, instead this was a loud, passionate lament from Jesus.

Scriptural preaching demands a passion that flows from the conviction that what you are saying is true. When George Whitefield was getting the people of Edinburgh out of their beds at 5:00 a.m. to come and hear his preaching, a man on his way to the tabernacle met David Hume, the Scottish skeptic and philosopher. Surprised at seeing Hume on his way to hear Whitefield, the man said, "I thought you did not believe in the gospel?" Hume replied, "I don't, but he does."³³ That is precisely the point. Whitefield's famous passion bore substantial and convincing testimony to the authentic burden of the gospel he

preached. That is how it will always be. When there is no passion there is no preaching.

Passion and Personality

At the same time, you must realize that the display of passion must be requisite with your personality. There are some people who are by nature very subdued, like the nineteenth century Scottish elder, who if he raised his left eyebrow and one corner of his mouth twitched, the congregation was rolling in the aisles. Passion can be demonstrated when a preacher raises his voice and flails his arms as if he is going to fly, but it can be equally present when the preacher talks quietly and slowly, calmly and measurably.

According to John Piper, Sereno Dwight asked a man who had heard Jonathan Edwards preach if Edwards was an eloquent preacher. The reply was,

He had no studied varieties of the voice, and no strong emphasis. He scarcely gestured, or even moved; and he made no attempt by the elegance of his style, or the beauty of his pictures, to gratify the taste, and fascinate the imagination. But, if you mean by eloquence, the power of presenting an important truth before an audience, with overwhelming weight of argument, and with such intenseness of feeling, that the whole soul of the speaker is thrown into every part of the conception and delivery; so that the solemn attention of the whole audience is riveted, from the beginning to the close, and impressions are left that cannot be effaced; Mr. Edwards was the most eloquent man I ever heard speak.³⁴

Edwards was an immensely passionate man who displayed it through his own personality. Piper concludes, "By precept and example Edwards calls us to (quoting Edwards) 'an exceeding affectionate way of preaching about the great things

of religion and to flee from a moderate, dull, indifferent way of speaking.”³⁵

To make the point even further, Thomas Chalmers, the celebrated Scottish preacher, was described by James Stewart as preaching “with a disconcertingly provincial accent, with an almost total lack of gesture, tied rigidly to his manuscript, with his finger following the written lines as he read.”³⁶ Chalmers’ secret, according to one who heard him, was his “blood earnestness.”³⁷ A universe of homiletical wisdom is contained in that phrase. However we preach, we must have a blood earnestness.

Spurgeon answered a rhetorical question, saying, “What in a Christian minister is the most essential quality for securing success and winning souls for Christ?” I should reply ‘Earnestness’; and if I were asked a second or third time, I would not vary the answer, for personal observation drives me to the conclusion that, as a rule, real success is proportionate to the preacher’s earnestness.”³⁸

An example of a preacher with such earnestness was Charles Simeon, who almost single-handedly brought evangelical revival to the Church of England. A fellow of King’s College Cambridge, he secured the pulpit of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, where he preached for over 50 years. For the first ten years of his ministry, his unhappy parishioners chained their pews closed so that all listeners had to sit in the aisles. Simeon persevered, however. His twenty-one volumes of sermons, *Horae Homileticae* (*Hours of Homilies*),³⁹ set the standard for preaching in the following generations. He held a Friday night tea that was used to disciple a generation of preachers and missionaries, one of whom was Henry Martyn.

Hugh Evan Hopkins records the state-

ment of one contemporary, who wrote, “I have been at Trinity church thrice today. In the morning a very good sermon by Simeon, a decent one by Thomason, and in the evening to a crowded congregation, a superlative discourse by Simeon (on Acts 4:12), vital, evangelical, powerful, and impressive in his animated matter.” Hopkins continues:

John Stoughton has a similar recollection. He felt that Simeon’s sermons far from having the slow penetrating force of the dew, came down like “hailstones and coals of fire.” “I was struck with the preacher’s force, even vehemence. He spoke as one who had a burden from the Lord to deliver—as one who, like Paul, felt ‘Woe unto me if I do not preach the gospel.’”⁴⁰

Another of Simeon’s curates, Charles Carus, said, “The intense fervour of his feelings he cared not to restrain; his whole soul was in his subject and he spoke and acted exactly as he felt.”⁴¹ One of Simeon’s obituaries said,

And after having urged all his hearers to accept the proffered mercy, he reminded them that there were those present to whom he had preached Christ for more than thirty years, but they continued indifferent to the Saviour’s love; and pursuing this train of expostulation for some time, he at length became quite overpowered by his feeling, and he sank down in the pulpit and burst into a flood of tears.⁴²

For preachers with a heart alive with God’s Word, this type of passion and fervor will come naturally. It is not falsely created or misdirected, but rather comes prompted by the Spirit to one who has a strong desire to see his people rejoicing in the Lord and in their salvation.

Conclusion

Logos, Ethos, and Pathos are the key elements of exposition. What you believe about the Word is everything. As a preacher, if you believe the Scripture is wholly inerrant, totally sufficient, and massively potent, you will give yourself to the hard work of biblical exposition. Such belief and hard work are not enough, however. You must let the Word of God course through your being, inviting the Holy Spirit to winnow your soul in order to conform your life to the truth you are preaching. God's Word must come out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation. When you stand to preach, you must be drenched in an authentic passion that causes you to speak with the utmost earnestness. When you gather the *Logos*, the *Ethos*, and the *Pathos*, you are preaching the Word, and the wind of the Holy Spirit is in your sails. God's name is lifted up, and God is glorified.

ENDNOTES

¹ Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 102-103.

² William H. Willimon, "Been there, Preached that," *Leadership Magazine* (Fall 1995) 75-76.

³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴ Ian Pitt Watson, "What Comes First," *Theology News and Notes* (1985) 10-11.

⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974) 283.

⁶ Adam, 101-102. As he explains, "The problem of 'the pastness of the past' is often put to the preacher in terms of the 'two horizons,' one of the original author, and the other of the modern reader. I think the problem can be overstated, with paralyzing results. I try to work on the problem with the following

correctives in mind. First, I assume that my common humanity with the Bible writers will result in some instinctive resonance of understanding. Second, I recognize that a 'horizon' is of course subjectively determined, and try to reduce the limitations of my horizon by study and imagination, and by my understanding of their horizon as well. Third, I believe that in some cases at least, the human authors of Scripture had a future audience in mind (see, e.g., 1 Pe 1:10-11). Fourth, I recognize that to speak of human authors is to give only half the picture. If God is in some sense the author of Scripture, was his horizon limited? Fifth, I believe that God had a future audience in mind when he caused Scripture to be written—or better, we are the same audience, the one people of God, the one household and temple of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles, fellow heirs of God's promises to Israel, members of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:19-3:6). Sixth, although we emphasize the real gap between ourselves and the first century A.D., from God's point of view we live in the same age, the 'last days' between the first and second comings of Christ. Seventh, God, the author, is still alive, and can still use his words by his Spirit. Eighth, I am not an individual reader, but part of a community of faith—and together we hear the words of God. Finally, words and ideas can be culturally expressed without being culturally limited.

⁷ John Woodhouse, "The Preacher and the Living Word: Preaching and the Holy Spirit," in *When God's Voice is Heard* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1995) 55.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹John Stott, *Guard the Truth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 121, who quotes Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, translated by A. W. F. Blunt, *Cambridge Patristic Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1911) I:67.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 122.

¹¹Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says* (St Louis: Concordia, 1959) 1125.

¹²Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953) 104, which references Calvin's commentary on Exodus 24:5.

¹³T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of John Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955) 82.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁵Wallace, 105, which references Calvin's sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

¹⁶The entire section on preaching in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) reads as follows: "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned nor to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good.

0 "Neither do we think that therefore the outward preaching is to be thought as fruitless because the instruction in true religion depends

on the inward illumination of the Spirit, or because it is written 'And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour ... for they shall all know me' (Jer. xxxi. 34), and 'Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth,' (1 Cor. iii. 7). For albeit 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him' (John vi. 44), and unless he is inwardly lightened by the Holy Spirit, yet we know undoubtedly that it is the will of God that his word should be preached even outwardly. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, 'He shall tell you what you ought to do' (Acts x.6)" (*Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith, 3rd ed. [Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1982] 133-134).

¹⁷As cited in Adam, 119.

¹⁸Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Manchester, VT: James Robinson, 1899) 5.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰Quoted in Paul Sangster, *Doctor Sangster* (London: Epsworth Press, 1962) 271.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Brooks, 25.

²³C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960) 192.

²⁴This quotation is attributed to the great Baxter, though I have not been able to locate the source of the origi-

nal words. The closest I have come is Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1862 abridgement; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994) 54-55.

²⁵Quoted in Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 104-105.

²⁶John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols., ed. William H. Goold (1850-1853; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965-1968) n.p.

²⁷Quoted in Art Lindsley, "Profiles in Faith, William Ames; Practical Theologian," *Tabletalk* 7:3 (June 1983) 14.

²⁸Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Harper, 1960) 161 who quotes Cornelius A. Lapide, *The Great Commentary of Cornelius A. Lapide*, trans. Thomas W. Mossman (London: John Hodges, 1876) I:317.

²⁹Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1746; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994) 24, where he explains: "This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the inclination; and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will; and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart." Cf. 24-27.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 27.

³¹*Ibid.*, 31. Cf. 31-35.

³²D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959-60) II:266.

³³As cited in Clarence Edward Macartney, *Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 183.

³⁴As cited in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 49-50.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 104.

³⁶As cited in *ibid.*, 50.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 51.

³⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954) 305.

³⁹Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, 21 vols. (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832-1833).

⁴⁰Hugh Evan Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977) 64.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 65.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 66.