

SPECIAL ISSUE

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The CALL for THEOLOGICAL PREACHING

STEVEN J. LAWSON



PREACHING • TEACHING • TRAINING

The THEOLOGICAL STRAIGHT *and* NARROW

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES



After my second year studying theology in seminary, I had to make an important decision regarding what my major would be. This was a strategic decision, as it would determine which elective courses I could take over the last two years. It would also determine what my thesis would be.

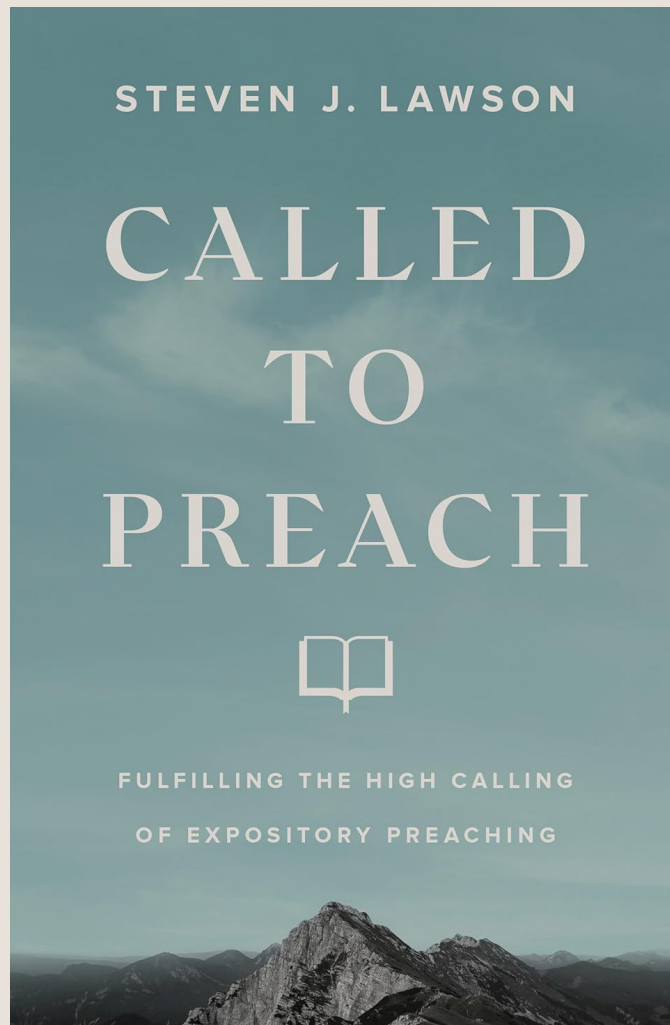
As I considered my options, I decided to major in systematic theology, even though I knew that I would be an expositor for the rest of my life. Despite the fact that I would be preaching sequentially verse by verse, through entire books in the Bible, I could clearly see how important theology is to the preacher. It helps to connect the entire Bible as he preaches the Word.

Systematic theology is like the guardrails on the side of the road. The preacher's understanding of theology keeps him on the straight and narrow path. It prevents him from veering off the highway and teaching

something that does not square with the rest of the Bible. It keeps him within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. It also helps him take his listeners deeper into the God's Word.

Every preacher must be a theological expositor. He must always be teaching the doctrine that is found in the passage in front of him. This issue of *Expositor* is designed to draw your focus upon the importance of theology in your pulpit ministry.

May God use the instruction found in these articles to further anchor you in your commitment to preach a robust theology that is marked by precision and power. ♦



When the pulpit is strong, the church is strengthened, and her witness to the world is fortified.

But when the pulpit is weak, the church languishes in spiritual listlessness, and society suffers for it. Nothing must be allowed to supplant the primacy of the pulpit—not if the church is to flourish.

Through in-depth biblical analysis and inspiring examples from church history, Steven J. Lawson paints a picture of God's glory magnified through faithful preaching, reclaiming the high ground of biblical preaching for the future generation.

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J.C. RYLE (1816-1900) was Bishop of Liverpool. Forgoing a political career for the pastorate, his ministry was characterized by outreach and steadfast commitment to the truth of God's Word.

EXPOSITOR

ONEPASSION



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The CALL for THEOLOGICAL PREACHING

STEVEN J. LAWSON

In his famous lectures on preaching given at Westminster Theological Seminary, Martyn Lloyd-Jones raised the probing question, “What is preaching?” He emphatically answered: “It is theology on fire. And a theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man’s understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.” The Doctor is absolutely right. Sound doctrine must be taught in every sermon and be delivered with fiery passion.

Lloyd-Jones added, “Preaching must always be theological, always based on a theological foundation.” A sermon must never be devoid of biblical doctrine. Otherwise, it lacks a sturdy foundation for the truth. He further stressed, “There is no type of preaching that should

be non-theological. The preacher should be well-versed in biblical theology, which, in turn, leads to systematic theology.” This requires that everyone who steps into a pulpit must be a careful student of theology. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Lloyd-Jones concludes: “This systematic theology, this body of truth which is derived from the Scripture, should always be present as a background and a controlling influence in his preaching. In other words, all preaching must be highly theological.” What Lloyd-Jones has stressed—the need for systematic theology in every sermon—is a necessary component of every exposition.

Scottish theologian Donald Macleod concurs: “Without theology, there is no preaching, at least not in the

New Testament sense. Sound doctrine is an essential element in every exposition of the word. Every sermon we preach should be rich in theology and full of doctrine. If there is no doctrine, there is no preaching. A message devoid of theology is merely devotional chatter.” The Scriptures affirm this to be true, both by instruction and example. If there is no doctrine, there is no preaching.

Tragically though, there exists a dearth of theological preaching today. The modern-day pulpit is filled with cultural commentary, positive thinking, and personal anecdotes. Rather than hearing an exposition of Scripture that is steeped in doctrine, the pulpit abounds with filler intended to increase the attendance in churches. The thrust of much preaching today is based more upon the personality of the preacher than the profundity of his message. Tragically, too many preachers consider theology to be harsh and unloving—even irrelevant. So they remain wading in the theological shallows, never willing to venture into the deeper waters of theology.

Why Is Doctrine So Absent?

Almost a century ago, A. W. Pink wrote an article entitled “Why Doctrinal Preaching Declines.” Here, Pink gave careful thought concerning why theology preaching was so absent in his day. Though written in 1939, these words are more relevant today than when they were first written.

Pink observed: “During the last two or three generations, the pulpit has given less and less prominence to doctrinal preaching, until today, with very rare exceptions, it has no place at all. In some quarters the cry from the pew was, we want living experience and not dry doctrine; in others, we need practical sermons and not metaphysical dogmas; and yet others, Give us Christ and not theology.” This sounds familiar, does it not?

Pink resisted such weak reasoning: “Sad to say, such senseless cries were generally heeded: ‘senseless’ we say, for there is no other safe way of testing experience, as there is no foundation for practicals to be built upon, if they be divorced from Scriptural doctrine; while Christ cannot be known unless He be preached (1 Cor. 1:23), and He certainly cannot be ‘preached’ if doctrine is shelved.” Pink then proceeds to give four specific reasons why doctrinal preaching is so absent in pulpits. Because of the present limitations of this article, the three most pertinent reasons will be explored below.

Laziness in Ministry

Pink first mentions the lack of discipline among many preachers who fail to be serious students of theology. “It is a far more exacting task, one which calls for much closer confinement in the study, to prepare a series of sermons on, say, the doctrine of justification.... It demands a far wider acquaintance with the Scriptures, a more rigid disciplining of the mind, and a more extensive perusal of the older writers. But this is too exacting for most of the ministers, and so they chose the line of least resistance and followed an easier course.” This effort to master theology requires more work by the preacher than most are willing to invest.

Desire for Popularity

Pink then reasons that too many preachers cave in to their desire for popularity with their listeners. In so doing, they sacrifice doctrinal fidelity on the altar of the approval of men. He writes, “It is natural that the preacher should wish to please his hearers, but it is spiritual for him to desire and aim at the approbation of God. No man can serve two masters. As the apostle expressly declared, ‘For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ’ (Gal. 1:10): solemn words are those! How they condemn them whose chief aim is to preach to crowded churches. What grace it requires to swim against the tide of public opinion and preach that which is unacceptable to the natural man.” Tragically, this compromise is all too common.

Superficial Evangelism

Pink next observes that the lack of doctrinal preaching can be traced to the root cause of a superficial evangelistic message. He notes, “Many of the pulpiteers of the past fifty years acted as though the first and last object of their calling was the salvation of souls, everything being made to bend to that aim. In consequence, the feeding of the sheep, the maintaining of discipline in the church, and the inculcation of practical piety was crowded out; and all sorts of worldly devices and fleshly methods were employed under the plea that the end justifies the means; and thus the churches were filled with unregenerate members. In reality, such men defeated their own aim.” Non-theological preaching, he states, inevitably results in an unconverted church.



“During the last two or three generations, the pulpit has given less and less prominence to doctrinal preaching, until today, with very rare exceptions, it has no place at all. In some quarters the cry from the pew was, we want living experience and not dry doctrine; in others, we need practical sermons and not metaphysical dogmas; and yet others, Give us Christ and not theology.”

A . W . P I N K

A sermon without theology is like a human body without a backbone; it simply cannot stand upright. A sermon without theology is like a tall building without steel girders; it cannot bear its own weight and will collapse. A sermon without theology is like a temple without pillars; it cannot stand up but will collapse. A sermon without theology is like a meal without meat; it lacks hearty substance. A sermon without theology is like a spineless jellyfish; it is a mushy mass with no structural support. But a sermon with doctrine is full of spiritual strength and stability—to save and sanctify.

Given the importance of theology in preaching, it is critical that every man who steps into a pulpit understands what it is and what is required of him. Stressing how vital it is, John Broadus succinctly states, “Doctrine is the preacher’s chief business.” He means that the man who stands in the pulpit must prioritize theology in his preaching. If he is to effectively preach with power, this requires that he be well versed in its many categories. Again, Broadus stresses, “The preacher’s one great task is to set forth the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Word of God.” This realization is the central focus of this article.

R. C. Sproul has said, “Everyone’s a theologian.” By this statement, he means that everyone believes something about God and the many doctrinal truths revealed


in the Bible. The only question is: what kind of a theologian is he? Is he accurate to the teaching of Scripture? Or is he faulty in handling the Word? The answers to these questions will be a large factor in the effectiveness of his preaching.

The Meaning Defined

A basic question first needs to be raised: What is theological preaching? The word “theology” is a very broad term that comes from two Greek words, *theos* and *logia*. *Theos* means God, and *logia* means a word, speech, or discourse. When these two words are combined, theology is the careful study of statements about God. It is the critical analysis of the self-revelation of God to His creatures. The truth about God is vaguely made known in general revelation in creation, history, and providence. But it is manifested in special revelation in the Scriptures and in Jesus Christ with a far greater disclosure.

Preaching Theology Proper

In its narrowest sense, theology means the study of God Himself. It is a diligent investigation of the truth about the being and works of God. It includes the analysis of who He is and how He relates to His creation. This is



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called theology proper--the study of specific aspects of God. It begins with investigating the existence, essence, and attributes of God. It includes considering the names of God and His sovereign works in creation, providence, salvation, and judgment. The study of God also requires observing His triunity and His eternal decree.

Theology proper is, arguably, the most important area of theology. How a preacher understands who God is defines how he understands every other area of theology. Along with an exegetical analysis of a text of Scripture, it becomes the most important interpretive lens to rightly understand this passage and the other major doctrines. If an expositor has a strategic grasp on the doctrine of God, he is well positioned to properly discern the other areas of theology. Every other truth of the theology flows from this knowledge of God.

Lloyd-Jones addresses the primary importance of preaching theology about God when he asks: "What is the chief end of preaching?" He answers, "I like to think it is this: It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence." He explains, "Preaching is first of all a proclamation of the being of God.... Preaching worthy of the name starts with God and with a declaration concerning His being and power and glory." In other words, all true preaching must prioritize the truth about God. It must be God-centered and God-focused.

Preaching Every Area of Theology

In the broadest sense, preaching theology concerns all the doctrines that are found in the Bible. More specifically, it relates to how each doctrine relates to God. It is the study of all the doctrines that are taught in the Scripture and their close connection to God Himself. This includes the study of theology on many different levels, including six important stratas: exegetical theology, biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, dogmatic theology, and practical theology. Each of these aspects of theology will be considered in this article.

Every area of theology is vitally connected to theology proper. Every sermon should be prepared with the study of God in view. *Bibliology* is the study of the Word of God. This category includes the specific attributes of the Bible, its divine inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, authority, sufficiency, perspicuity, immutability, and invincibility. *Christology* concerns the Son of God. This

comprises the main theological headings of His preexistence, deity, humanity, hypostatic union, names, works, death, resurrection, enthronement, present ministries, return, and eternal reign.

Pneumatology deals with the Spirit of God. This contains the theology surrounding the third person of the Trinity—His personhood, deity, procession, types, names, works, ministries, indwelling, baptism, sealing, and gifts. *Angelology* addresses the spirits of God. This covers both elect angels and fallen angels, including Satan and demons, as created spirit-beings possessing a mind, emotion, and will, who are highly organized with hierarchies and rankings. *Anthropology* teaches about man, who was made in the image of God. This entails the origin of humans, who possess an eternal soul, mind, emotion, and will.

Hamartiology teaches the doctrine of sin (in Greek, *hamartia*), which is rebellion against God. This involves the solidarity of the human race with Adam, his original sin, imputed sin, the sin nature, spiritual death, total depravity, moral inability, bondage of the will, divine curse, and the second death. *Soteriology* focuses upon the grace of God in salvation (in Greek, *sōteria*). This includes the doctrines of divine foreknowledge, election, predestination, conviction, drawing, regeneration, justification, adoption, sealing, sanctification, and glorification.

Ecclesiology gives instruction about the people of God. This covers the doctrinal aspects of the church, including its origin, nature, metaphors, mission, ministries, priorities, government, leaders, ordinances, and distinctions between the local church, universal church, and Israel. *Eschatology* considers the plan of God for the last days. This deals with what the Bible teaches about the end of the age, Christ's return, the tribulation, final judgment, His future reign, the new heavens, new earth, hell, and the eternal state.

As has been demonstrated here, every area of theology is related to theology proper. In order to be a capable expositor, you must have an efficient understanding in each of these areas of theology. Every sermon should be vitally connected to the study of God. Some aspects of doctrine will be of greater concern than others within a specific sermon, but each is critical to being precise in the pulpit and, therefore, powerful in expository preaching that spans the whole of Scripture.



The Biblical Mandate

Why must we be so committed to preaching sound doctrine in our sermons? Is this obligatory upon every preacher? Or merely optional? As we will see, it is necessary for every expositor of Scripture to be a teacher of the theology that is found in the passage that he is expounding. If there is no theology, there is no sermon. Doctrine is truly that non-negotiable for every preacher.

Charged by Christ to His Apostles

This emphasis on theology in preaching was established by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Great Commission. Jesus commanded His followers to go into all the world, make disciples, and baptize those converted to Him. Then,

they must be “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20). “Teaching” (*didaskō*) means to instruct every disciple in the truths that Jesus had taught them. This begins with sound doctrine.

This “teaching” included the theology of the kingdom of heaven. This involved the main doctrines found in the gospel—repentance and faith (Mark 1:16), regeneration (John 3:3–8), justification (Luke 18:11), redemption (Matt 20:28), sanctification (John 14:2–3), and others. Jesus had taught them about the holiness of God the Father (Matt 6:9), His forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:5), the resurrection of the body (John 5:29), the final judgment (Matt 25:32), the rewards of heaven (Matt 5:12), the torment of hell (Matt 8:12), and the recreation of the universe (Matt 19:28).

If a man is to preach like Jesus Christ, he must include



teaching theology. Every preacher must give instruction in sound doctrine as he proclaims the Word. This is as the Lord commanded His disciples to do. Even so, everyone who steps into a pulpit must include theological truth, as Paul instructed Timothy. Strong doctrinal teaching must be an essential part of every exposition of Scripture.

Prioritized by Paul in His Epistles

The New Testament epistles were written with a definite pattern. In these apostolic letters, doctrinal instruction precedes personal application. Indicatives must precede imperatives, for theological beliefs are the foundation of subsequent behavior. For example, this is how the book of Romans is written: first, there is the laying of a theological foundation, as Paul writes eleven chapters

about the doctrine of salvation (1:18–11:36), but he then addresses the responsibility that each believer has to live this truth in his daily life (12:1–15:13).

The book of Ephesians likewise unfolds the same. The first three chapters are filled with doctrinal instruction (1:3–3:21), followed by three chapters of personal application (4:1–6:24). The book of Colossians also begins with two chapters of doctrine (1:3–2:23), followed by two chapters of how it is to be put into practice (3:1–4:18). This is a timeless pattern for every preacher to follow. If he is to preach like the Epistles are written, he must first teach theology. Only then can he show the basis for the application to be made.

Commanded by Paul to Timothy

This is precisely how the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy—and every other preacher down through the centuries—in his preaching. Paul wrote, “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). These are the three indispensable parts of a sermon. Timothy must read the passage to be preached and explain its meaning. He then must exhort with the truth of the passage. Further, he must bring the “teaching” (*didaskalia*) that is found in the passage. This “teaching” refers to the sum of instruction from the Old Testament, Jesus Christ, and the apostles. Every preacher must be permanently grounded in this doctrinal instruction.

According to Paul, every passage has theology that must be extracted and delivered to the listener. Teaching the doctrine is a non-negotiable element in every sermon. In the pastoral epistles, this system of theological truth is referred to in many different ways. It is identified as “the truth” (1 Tim 3:15; 4:3; 2 Tim 2:18, 25; 3:7, 8; 4:4), “the faith” (1 Tim 4:1, 6; 2 Tim 3:8; 4:7), “sound doctrine” (1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 4:3), “your teaching” (1 Tim 4:16), “sound words” (1 Tim 6:3), “the doctrine” (1 Tim 6:3), “the standard of sound words” (2 Tim 1:13), “the treasure” (2 Tim 1:14), “my teaching” (2 Tim 3:10), and “our teaching” (2 Tim 4:15). Each of these designations refer to the whole body of doctrine that was taught and preached by Paul and the apostles.

Imposed by Paul upon Titus

Likewise, this is precisely how Paul charged Titus to carry out his ministry of preaching. The apostle stated,



*“Preaching must always be theological,
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MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

“Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). The word “doctrine” (*didaskalia*, translated in 1 Timothy 4:13 as “teaching,” see above) means instruction in specific truths taught in the Bible. This teaching is understood to be “doctrine,” which must be “sound” (*hugiainō*). This latter word means “healthy” or “that which promotes good health.” Doctrine that is understood and taught correctly cultivates spiritual health in the lives of those who receive its truth.

Every preacher must be “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). This stresses that all “sound doctrine” must come from “the faithful word,” a reference to the Scripture. The preacher must be “holding fast” to “the truth” (Titus 1:1, 14) and be gifted to “exhort” (preach) with it. Moreover, he must be ready to defend “correct doctrine” against all attacks against “the doctrine of God” (Titus 2:10). “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:15).

The Distinguishing Marks

The essence of theology must be approached properly in order for it to be rightly understood and preached accurately. There is only one source for sound doctrine and that is the Word of God. It is objectively true and perfectly united as one body of truth, categorically arranged by subjects.

Biblically Grounded

All theology must be rooted and grounded in the Word of God. The Scripture must be carefully studied and properly interpreted if theology is to be accurately preached. Doctrine is not to be based upon church tradition, human experience, or ecclesiastical creeds. Nor is it to be drawn from the reasoning of ancient Greek philosophers, nor from unconverted secular scholars. Theology must be drawn from *sola Scriptura*—that is, from the Scripture alone.

Theology is to be exclusively based upon the teaching of the Word of God. The preaching of the truth about God must be drawn from what He has revealed about Himself in the Bible. We can only know God, personally

and experientially, as He chooses to make Himself known to us in the pages of Scripture. The knowledge of God is manifested, most specifically, in the truths of theology. It can be said that the chief purpose of the Word of God is to make known the God of the Word.

Precisely Stated

Sound doctrine is stated in specific words that teach propositional truth. It is articulated in clearly defined words that have precise meaning. Such truth is based upon objective facts, not subjective feelings. Theology is stated in concrete terms that are black and white and can be narrowly defined. Biblical doctrine never blurs the lines of distinction. It never speaks in ambiguous terms. It is never vague or oblique. Theology is explicit, exact, and precise. It is factual and rational, not based upon intuition or imagination.

Perfectly Unified

All theology holds together perfectly to comprise one consistent body of truth. All its doctrinal truths are singular in what it teaches. This is because all the teachings, books, and sections of the Bible are interconnected and present one system of truth. Each part of the whole Bible fits perfectly together with every other part to form one cohesive system of truth. Theology never contradicts itself.

Theology teaches one whole system of truth that speaks with one voice from beginning to end. Theology presents one origin of the universe and one beginning of the human race. It presents one diagnosis of the world’s dilemma. It presents one plan of salvation that is accomplished by one Savior of sinners. It presents one consistent worldview, one pattern for the family, one way of personal holiness. It presents one end of the age and vision for eternity future. What theology teaches in any particular area aligns perfectly with every other area of sound doctrine because it is all interrelated.

Practically Applied

All theology is intensely practical. Every doctrine, in one way or another, is related to everyday life. Every truth connects with where a person finds himself. It is the role of the preacher to show how this particular teaching should direct how a person lives. No doctrine should

ever be seen as exclusively relegated to the ivory tower. Instead, every theological truth should be preached as being vitally relevant to daily life. Doctrine is never to be presented as a mere mental exercise with no practical value.

The Supreme Goal

The highest goal of all theology is the glory of God. The grandest aim of doctrine is doxology. Therefore, the higher the theology that is preached, the higher may be the doxology from the listener. The magnification of the name of God is the loftiest goal and strongest passion of His own heart. He does all things for His own glory. God is most focused on the exaltation of His own name. The preacher must be consciously aware of each of the aspects of His glory. There are three fundamental elements of the glory of God:

Proclaiming God's Glory

The intrinsic glory of God is the sum and substance of all that He is. It is the whole of His holiness. It is the sum total of all of the divine attributes as centered in His perfect holiness. The intrinsic glory of God is unchanging from eternity past to eternity future. His divine being and majestic splendor are never increasing, nor decreasing. Man cannot give intrinsic glory to God, because God is who He is, unchanging from age to age. From eternity past to eternity future, His glory is forever the same. All study of theology begins at this point, with the intrinsic glory of God.

God has chosen to make His glory known to His creatures, especially through preaching. The pulpit is to be where the greatness of God is to be showcased. He desires that they behold the beauty of His holiness. The glory of God is revealed in creation, as the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1). His perfect glory is seen in the administration of His providence over the affairs of this world. The glory of God is seen in His saving grace that rescues perishing sinners from eternal destruction. Most fully, His glory is unveiled in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. This divine glory is further seen in His final judgments and in the recreated universe in the new heavens and new earth.

Directing Glory to God

When God's creatures behold His intrinsic glory revealed to them, they should be moved to ascribe glory to Him. The glory to be rendered to God is the praise and worship that is due His all-glorious name. The aim of theology is doxology. It is that God's creatures would delight in Him and bless His name. The purpose of theology is not merely the acquiring of information about God, but the giving of adoration to Him. It is not simply to know about God, but to personally know Him in a saving relationship.

Applying God's Glory to Lives

Theology is also intended to grow believers into the image of Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Here, the purpose of teaching theology is to grow believers in "the grace and knowledge of ... Christ" (2 Pet 3:18). Doctrine involves both the milk and the meat of the Word (Heb 5:12-14). The "milk" is the elementary teaching about Christ (Heb 6:1), which is entry-level doctrine about Him. The meat is deeper doctrinal teachings about Christ that are more advanced.


Without theology in preaching, the believer is left stagnated in his faith and remains immature. Growing deeper in the understanding of theology is necessary to grow deeper in one's walk with the Lord. A shallow understanding of doctrine results in shallow Christian living. But a more profound knowledge of theology produces more prolific growth into Christlikeness.

The Specific Categories

There are various layers of theology in which every preacher must be equipped as he preaches sound doctrine. This includes six major areas of theology in which the expositor should be well grounded.

Exegetical Theology

The foundation for all theology must be the exegesis of individual passages of Scripture. The study of theology must begin with the micro view of isolated biblical texts. A right understanding of doctrine must arise, first and foremost, out of the careful analysis and correct



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interpretation of single texts. The noted theologian John Murray writes: "The task of exegesis is the exposition of particular [individual] passages." Murray is recognizing that everything begins at ground zero with the careful study of specific texts of Scripture. The underlying bedrock of theology starts with specific passages rightly understood.

This level of in-depth study of biblical texts involves the science of exegesis, which is the detailed study of a verse or cluster of verses in the original language. This requires performing keyword studies and parsing of verbs in the passage. It involves investigating the grammar and syntax of the sentence. This demands researching the historical background, cultural practices, and geographical setting of the text. The exegetical study of key passages necessitates identifying its literary genre and the unique features of that style of writing.

This further mandates surveying the larger and immediate context. It also entails having a keen awareness of figures of speech and rhetorical devices. It then requires following the laws of interpretation in rightly handling the Scripture.

Sinclair Ferguson explains the need for exegesis: "All preaching that is truly Christian preaching is exegetical in nature. Exegesis is the explanation, or exposition, of a sentence, a word, an idea." Making observations and arriving at their proper interpretation is ground zero in beginning the pursuit of sound doctrine. Ferguson elaborates, "Whether he preaches a topical, doctrinal, or textual sermon; whether he deals with a passage, or preaches systematically through a book, the exegetical principle will always be present: he is explaining and expounding the message he has been given."

Ferguson concludes, making this assessment,

“Exegetical preaching sees as its fundamental task the explanation of the text in its context.” This is where the study of theology begins. It starts with exegeting individual verses and extracting the doctrine that is taught in it.

Biblical Theology

Biblical theology is the progressive view of theology that traces the unfolding of doctrines as they are presented in the Bible (that is, as we “progress” through the Bible). This is the study of theology as taught by an individual author or multiple authors of Scripture. It can also be the study of theology within designated sections of the Bible, whether it be one particular book or a select portion of the whole Scripture. Biblical theology can also follow the unfolding of a doctrine as it is traced throughout the Word of God. R. C. Sproul notes that it focuses upon “how God has revealed Himself at various points over time.” This recognizes that some truths are faintly taught in the early stages of the Bible but are increasingly brought to light in the latter portions of the Scripture. In this sense, biblical theology is dynamic, as it follows the progressive unveiling of specific truths and themes of Scripture.

Another aspect of biblical theology is Old and New Testament theology. Old Testament theology analyzes the doctrines taught in the first thirty-nine books of the Bible. This involves studying the doctrines taught in Mosaic theology (the doctrines taught by Moses), Early Prophetic theology (Elijah, Elisha, and others), Davidic Theology (David), Wisdom theology (Job, Psalmists, Proverbs, Solomon), and Late Prophetic theology (Isaiah to Malachi). This can be further subdivided into the theology taught in one Old Testament book (such as the Psalms), one portion of a book (e.g., the moral Law in Exodus), or one portion of the Law and the prophets (e.g., Hebrew poetry).

Biblical theology also involves New Testament theology, which includes the study of doctrines taught in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Specific works of biblical theology may analyze only one part of the New Testament (such as the synoptic Gospels). Biblical theology can also involve studying what is called Matthean theology (the doctrines of Matthew), Markan theology (Mark), Lukan theology (Luke), Johannine theology (John), Pauline theology (Paul), and/

or Petrine theology (Peter). Again, it can be subdivided into even smaller units, such as the theology of only one New Testament book (such as Romans) or of only parts of certain books, such as investigating the theology of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer (John 17) or Paul’s prison prayers (Eph 1, 3; Phil 1:1; Col 1)

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is the macro view of doctrine that takes into account all the truths of exegetical and biblical theology. This vantage point forms one comprehensive theology that draws from the entire Bible. Systematics is the all-inclusive approach to theology that draws upon every verse, every book, and every part of the Bible. It is what R. C. Sproul calls “an orderly, coherent study of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith.” Ferguson explains that systematic theology “is expounded and expressed in a systematic, coherent form ... and arranges itself into an integrated whole in a topical fashion.” Simply stated, it incorporates all the doctrinal teaching of the entire Bible and organizes these truths under major headings.

Murray defines this discipline as follows: “Systematic theology must coordinate the teaching of particular passages and systematize this teaching under the appropriate topics. There is thus a synthesis that belongs to systematics.” Systematic theology organizes the teaching of Scripture into well-defined categories of truth. Murray adds that systematics “is dependent upon the science of exegesis. It cannot coordinate and relate the teaching of particular passages without knowing what the teaching is.” Thus, systematic theology stands upon the shoulders of exegetical and biblical theology and has a yet higher vantage point.

This overarching nature of systematic theology is recognized by Macleod when he writes, “Systematic theology is more comprehensive than either biblical or historical theology. It seeks for the over-all biblical and historical view, collating all the relevant biblical passages.” This well-recognized theologian notes that systematic theology encompasses the whole span of Scripture. It takes into account every text and portion of Scripture and arranges them all into orderly divisions.

Lloyd-Jones underscores the extreme importance of systematic theology when he writes: “There is nothing more important than that he knows [systematic



B. B. WARFIELD

“The indispensableness of systematic theology to the preacher is obvious. What should we do with a ministry which is absolutely and blankly ignorant of the whole compass of Christian truth? Obviously, it would not be a Christian ministry at all. We cannot preach at all without preaching doctrine; and the type of religious life which grows up under our preaching will be determined by the nature of the doctrines which we preach.”

theology] and is well grounded in it.” To this end, he warns, “We must not deal with any text in isolation; all our preparation of a sermon should be controlled by this background of systematic theology.” Therefore, he concludes, “Our primary call is to deliver this whole message, this whole counsel of God.” A knowledge of systematic theology is absolutely essential for any preacher.

The venerable theologian B. B. Warfield notes, “The indispensableness of systematic theology to the preacher is obvious.” He asks, “What should we do with a ministry which is absolutely and blankly ignorant of the whole compass of Christian truth?” He answers with strong words, “Obviously, it would not be a Christian ministry at all.” Warfield reasons, “We cannot preach at all without preaching doctrine; and the type of religious life which grows up under our preaching will be determined by the nature of the doctrines which we preach.” This is how important systematic theology is to any preacher.

Historical Theology

Historical theology is the view of systematic theology that is divided up by the different eras of church history. It is vital to have a working knowledge of how these unique eras have addressed and understood theological issues. Further, grasping theology is enhanced by being

aware how the key figures of history have navigated critical issues in order to teach and guard the truth. The study of theology can be divided into various historical eras as follows:

Patristic Theology

This initial period of church history is known as the Patristic Era. It took place in the early development of the church in the second through the fifth centuries. These first leaders were called “church fathers” because of their strong leadership in the church. These influential men contended for the faith on the most essential doctrinal truths that were fundamental to the Christian faith. Further, there were early ecclesiastical councils that addressed doctrinal matters of extreme importance. Foremost among these councils were the Councils of Nicaea (AD 325), Constantinople (381), and Chalcedon (AD 451).

These church fathers deliberated over essential matters such as the nature of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the hypostatic union of the sinless humanity and eternal deity of Christ, and the deity of the Holy Spirit. To be right about these doctrinal matters is critical to Christian orthodoxy. But to be wrong on these truths is to be heretical and to be outside the Christian faith. Further, these men deliberated over which divinely inspired books are included in the canon of Scripture and which

books are to be rejected. These church fathers (the term “patristics” is based on the Latin word for “father”) addressed these most basic issues of the Christian faith. In so doing, they laid the foundation for future generations of believers.

Medieval Theology

The next thousand years witnessed the decline of the sound theology of the church fathers with the emergence of the Roman Catholic system. Especially from the sixth century onward, Rome departed from the truth of the gospel and embraced a sacerdotal system of salvation based upon priestly functions and human works. As time progressed, additional means of grace not found in Scripture were increasingly adopted by Rome. These ways of receiving grace included baptism in the church, church membership, marriage in the church, prayers to saints, treasury of merit, last rites, and more.

This millennium was known as the Dark Ages, rightly named for its spiritual ignorance. God nevertheless always has His remnant in every age, a people who remain true to the Christian faith. This prolonged era was

no exception. In the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the pre-Reformers battled against many years of aberrant Roman Catholic tradition and toxic papal authority. A few European priests, Oxford professors, the Lollards, and a Bohemian preacher were among a small remnant who kept the gospel burning brightly during those spiritually dark days. Admittedly, however, the development in theology was minimal as men sought to reestablish the authority of Scripture.

Reformation Theology

In the sixteenth century, the Reformation witnessed the recovery of the exclusive authority of Scripture. This conviction was grounded in *ad fontes*—meaning “back to the fountain”—which brought about the return to the Scriptures as the sole source for gospel truth. It restored the saving message that had been largely lost for centuries. In coming back to the Bible, the Reformers also restored fidelity to the truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. The Reformers purposed to return the church to its original design as first established by Christ. After Jesus and His apostles *formed* the church,



the church fathers *conformed* it to this standard. But the Roman Catholic Church *deformed* it. The Reformers then *reformed* the church back to the pattern of Christ.

The doctrinal landmarks recovered in the Reformation are largely stated in what came to be known as the five *solas*. The Reformers re-laid the doctrinal foundation of *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *solus Christus*. These principles teach that salvation is based exclusively upon the testimony of Scripture apart from the church's tradition or the pope's decrees. The result is that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from any human merit or works. These truths alone lead to *soli Deo gloria* or to the glory of God alone.

Puritan Theology

In the latter half of the sixteenth century and through the seventeenth century, the Puritan Age followed the Protestant Reformation. The Puritans were within the Church of England and their Non-Conformist allies were outside her walls. Together, they built upon the work of the Reformers and continued to refine it. They addressed matters like the *ordo salutis*, specifying the theological, chronological, and logical unfolding of the different divine acts of saving grace. They were also "physicians of the soul" who joined exegetical theology with practical application at a higher level of pastoral effectiveness.

The Puritans carefully distinguished the saving works of each person of the Trinity. Other theologians before them had seen this division of persons. But the Puritans further clarified the church's understanding of how each person works together to accomplish the salvation of the same sinners. They taught that God the Father chose His elect in eternity past, designed the gospel, and commissioned His Son to be the elect's Redeemer. They identified that God the Son came into this world to redeem these same elect by His sinless life and definite atonement. They spelled out that God the Spirit came to convict, call, regenerate, grant repentance and faith, indwell, gift, and seal the elect in Christ forever.

Awakening Theology

In the eighteenth century, the Evangelical Awakening occurred in England and Scotland under the preaching


of a new wave of Spirit-empowered preachers. At the same time, the Great Awakening was also transpiring across the Atlantic in the American colonies. Bold pastors and evangelists placed a new emphasis upon the doctrine of the regeneration. Previously, the Reformers had focused upon the cornerstone truth of justification by faith alone. However, the doctrinal aim of these Awakening preachers was upon the reception of the gospel in regeneration. Their theological emphasis was the necessity and nature of the new birth.

Primarily, three theological truths stood out in this Awakening period. First, these men stressed that all mankind is ruined by the original sin of Adam. The result is the total depravity of the human condition and man's helplessness to save himself. Second, they magnified the Lord Jesus, who died to rescue lost sinners at the price of His own life. Third, they emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit to regenerate those who are spiritually dead, raising them to life in Christ. The resurrection of spiritual corpses in the grave of sin became the hallmark of this period.

Fundamentalist Theology

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the rise of the Fundamentalist movement to resist the influx of spiritual liberalism into the church. German higher criticism made significant inroads into Christian institutions of higher learning. This infiltration invaded mainline denominations and led to the dismantling of the inerrancy and authority of Scripture by many. An agnosticism began to erode the Reformed and Puritan theology that had given stability to the church in previous centuries. In this vacuum, the teaching of secular humanism and evolution swept into the church like a flood.

This devastating worldview prompted the Fundamentalist movement to emerge in defense of the divine inspiration of Scripture. On both sides of the Atlantic, biblically orthodox theologians, professors, and pastors mounted their best defense of the veracity of the Bible. This became a time when strong emphasis was marshaled against the forces of darkness that sought to undermine the absolute purity of Scripture. The five fundamental doctrines they upheld were: (1) the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ, (4)



In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Evangelical movement launched a concerted effort to refocus upon spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

the bodily resurrection of Christ, and (5) the historicity of the biblical miracles.

Evangelical Theology

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Evangelical movement launched a concerted effort to refocus upon spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. This new focus of theology became riveted upon the doctrine of conversion and the many doctrines of the cross. Major evangelistic efforts were begun to reach the unconverted for Christ. This outreach took various forms, such as radio and television broadcasts, stadium-filled rallies, gospel tracts, mega churches, mass marketing campaigns, and training in witnessing. But in the attempt to reach more people, the message was often compromised, resulting in easy-believeism that led to a non-saving faith.

As a doctrinal corrective, there emerged the Reformed Resurgence in the latter half of the twentieth century. This brought back the doctrines of grace to the forefront of the church to purify evangelistic efforts. The sovereignty of God in conversion became a necessary counterbalance to the new methods of evangelism that were giving to many a false assurance of salvation. The doctrine that regeneration precedes

faith was rediscovered. Also, the necessity of repentance and submission to the lordship of Christ in conversion was brought back into the church. The stress upon a man-centered, decisional regeneration was countered with the doctrines of grace. Though other truths were addressed, these doctrines proved to be pivotal ones.

Dogmatic Theology

Dogmatic Theology examines doctrine in view of statements of faith in the form of creeds, confessions, and catechisms throughout church history. These statements became the doctrinal standard for the beliefs of the church not only in their day, but in many cases, for subsequent generations. These confessions were the plumbline by which theological fidelity was measured, orthodoxy was identified, and heresy was detected. Ryle is outspoken when he says, “Christianity without dogma is a powerless thing.” In reality, these statements of faith were pledges to faithful systematic theology.

Early Confessions

The first confessions of faith were written during the second through sixth centuries. These were landmark creeds that became foundational for the church in the

centuries to come through the present day. These include the doctrinal teaching in the Didache (ca. 150), The Apostles' Creed (fourth century), First Nicene Creed (325), Niceno-Constantinopolitan (381), Council of Carthage (397), Council of Ephesus (431), Chalcedonian Creed (451), and Athanasian Creed (500).

Reformation Confessions

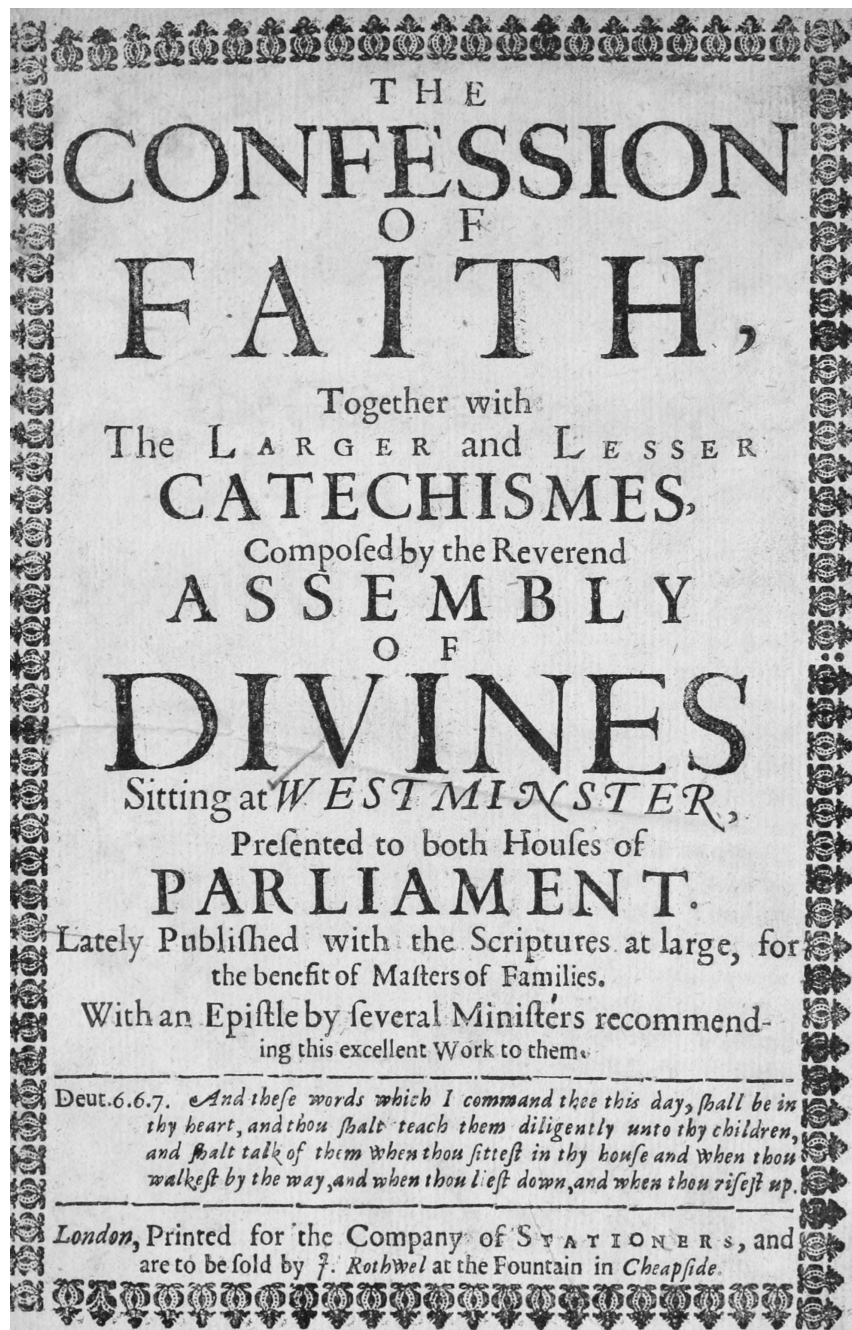
After a thousand years of spiritual darkness, the Reformation witnessed the light of doctrine being reignited. The slogan of Geneva was "after darkness, light." This restored gospel light was recorded in various confessions that were written. Among them are: Sixty-Seven Articles (1523), Ten Theses of Berne (1528), Luther's Small Catechism (1529), Augsburg Confession (1530), Berne Synod (1532), First Confession of Basel (1534), Lausanne Articles (1536), Geneva Confession (1536–1537), First Helvetic Confession (1536), Geneva Catechism (1537–1542), French Confession of Faith (1559), Scots Confession (1560), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Thirty-Nine Articles (1563, 1571), and Second Helvetic Confession (1566).

Puritan Confessions

The Puritan Era followed the Reformation, and more statements of faith were adopted. The main confessions during this period were: Synod of Dort (1618–1619), London Baptist Confession of Faith (1644), Westminster Confession of Faith (1646–1647), Savoy Declaration (1658), Second London Baptist Confession (1689).

Subsequent Confessions

Since the Puritan age, there have been a few more confessions of faith written that are worthy of note. Most of these are Baptist or baptistic statements. There is



the Philadelphia Baptist Confession (1742), which was a slight modification of the Second London Baptist Confession, the New Hampshire Confession (1833), the Abstract of Principles (1858), and the Baptist Faith and Message (1963, 1998, 2000).

Practical Theology

This is the area of theology that deals with Christian ministry. Once again, theology must be the driving force

and guiding light in all our service for God. At the heart of this matter is what is known as the regulative principle. During the Reformation, the Protestant church affirmed that the Scripture must regulate, or govern, our ministry for God. At that time, Luther believed there was freedom to do whatever is not forbidden in Scripture. But Calvin was more precise and stated that the church must do only what is commanded or practiced in the Bible or is reasonably implied from the Word.

Doxology in Corporate Worship

Theology should always guide the church's corporate worship. The regulative principle applies to the gathered church in public worship. The Reformed church asserted that a true church is found where the Scripture is preached, where baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered, and where church discipline is practiced. This also includes the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, along with the fellowship of the saints. Further, the pastors or elders should lead in offering prayers in the worship service. Beyond this, the church should restrict itself to what is laid out in Scripture.

Shepherdology in Pastoral Ministry

Theology should also guide the spiritual leaders and their designated responsibilities in church. The pastors and elders are to shepherd the flock of God and nurture the people. They are to counsel them in private with the Word and preach it to them in public. These spiritual leaders must be biblically qualified men, for they are entrusted with the care of souls. They will give an account to the Lord on the last day for their teaching and oversight. Theology dictates not only how ministry is to be conducted, but also who may do so, restricting these visible roles to those qualified men only.

Evangelology in Gospel Outreach

Further, theology must direct how the church carries out its evangelism. The church is entrusted with the gospel and must spread its message as far and wide as the doors that God opens will allow. The good news of salvation must be proclaimed, corporately and privately. The full counsel of God must be made known. This includes announcing the person and work of Christ, offering the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ. It

also necessitates clarifying the eternal realities of heaven and hell and calling for the response of repentance and faith. The church must be faithful to extend this message while trust is placed in the Holy Spirit to save perishing souls.

Missionology in Global Outreach

Theology, likewise, must be the bedrock for any missionary endeavors. The church must also reach out to the world to be involved in supporting churches abroad with prayers and financial support. In addition, each local congregation must be seeking to raise laborers for the harvest. This work around the world involves planting churches and helping appoint pastors and elders to carry out the spiritual oversight needed for each newly established church to prosper and thrive. Though the cultures may be different, the gospel truth and church structure remain the same.

The Different Branches

There are various approaches to theology within professing Christendom. An expositor will want to have an awareness of these different approaches to theology. He will also need to have an awareness concerning where he fits into the larger theological landscape. This will also affect the commentaries and theological terms that he chooses to use in his sermon preparation. Not all branches of theology can be covered here. But these are the most prominent ones, both good and bad:

Covenant Theology

This approach to theology sees the Bible through three covenants. These binding agreements are the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. The covenant of redemption involves the solemn oath between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in eternity past to work together to accomplish the salvation of the elect. This covenant defines the roles of each person of the Trinity in electing, sending, redeeming, and regenerating those who are chosen.

In the covenant of works, life was promised to Adam and to his posterity, conditioned upon his perfect obedience. The slightest infraction results in death in its every form—namely, physical, spiritual, and the second

death. The covenant of grace states that an agreement is made between God and sinners to save those ruined by the fall of Adam. This covenant is manifest in individual covenants made with Abraham, Moses, and David by which salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Here the nation of Israel becomes the church in the New Testament.

For many who hold this position, the church started in the garden of Eden, not on the day of Pentecost. Likewise, circumcision in the Old Testament became infant baptism in the New Testament. A smaller group of adherents are followers of the Sabbath in the present day, with many of the Old Testament restrictions carried forward and applied to New Testament believers.

Calvinistic Theology

Within covenant theology, there is a subcategory known as Calvinistic theology. This understanding of biblical doctrine also exists in many portions of Baptist and pre-millennial circles. It is centered on the teaching of the doctrines of grace. This is the truth of what is sometimes described as “the five points of Calvinism.” These five headings stress the sovereign will of God in salvation. These truths concern salvation from eternity past to eternity future. Here, saving grace is monergistic, not

synergistic, which means that salvation is accomplished by the supreme authority of the will of God alone, not by God and man working in cooperation with each other.

There is, ultimately, only one point to the five points of Calvinism. This one dominant truth is that God saves sinners. God the Father saves, God the Son saves, and God the Spirit saves. The Father chose His elect before time began, the Son redeems these chosen ones, and the Spirit regenerates them and preserves them to glory into eternity future. This division of saving efforts within the Trinity shows how each divine person works in perfect unity to rescue the same sinners.

Arminian Theology

As discussed earlier in this article, Arminian theology is a contrary approach to the doctrine of salvation that stresses the free will of man. It involves a synergistic understanding of man’s rescue from eternal destruction—in other words, it sees salvation as dependent upon both the will of God and the will of man. These two must work together in harmony, though each is able to cancel out the other. This theological framework teaches that Adam’s sin only significantly debilitated mankind but did not render them spiritually dead. Man’s power to choose to believe is hindered, but a person remains able

*“Doctrine is the preacher’s
chief business. The preacher’s
one great task is to set forth
the doctrinal and moral
teachings of the Word of God.”*



JOHN BROADUS

to believe the gospel.

According to this theological framework, divine election is dependent upon divine foresight. Christ came to die for all men, making salvation possible for all mankind. Men must believe the gospel, and then they are born again. Once converted, a believer may fall away from grace and lose the salvation he once possessed. Salvation is a joint effort between God and man, so both parties must cooperate with the other in order for salvation to begin and to reach its final consummation. Both God and man are co-saviors in rescuing the fallen human race from eternal destruction. God has done all He can do. The final outcome depends upon the choice and determination of man.

Eschatological Theology

In the area of eschatology, there are four prevalent views concerning the millennium and the return of Christ. *Amillennialism* sees the thousand-year reign of Christ as having a present spiritual fulfillment in the church age. The middle chapters of the book of Revelation are said to be symbolic of the struggle between good and evil between the two comings of Christ. Most who hold to covenant theology hold to this position. Here, Satan is presently bound, though wreaking havoc on the earth.

The *postmillennial* position sees middle chapters of Revelation in the same way, as representing the ages-long struggle of good against evil during the time between the two comings of Christ. However, the church through the preaching of the gospel around the world will usher in the kingdom of God on the earth. Once the kingdom of heaven is established on earth, then Jesus Christ will return to reign. Most who hold to this position are covenantal in their theology.

The *preterist* position sees the Mount Olivet discourse concerning the coming of Christ as fulfilled in AD 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The end-time prophecies have either been already partially or entirely fulfilled. This view interprets the book of Daniel as referring to events that took place from the seventh century BC until the first century AD. This position also sees the prophecies of the book of Revelation as what took place in the first century AD. It also holds that Israel of the past finds its fulfillment in the church today.

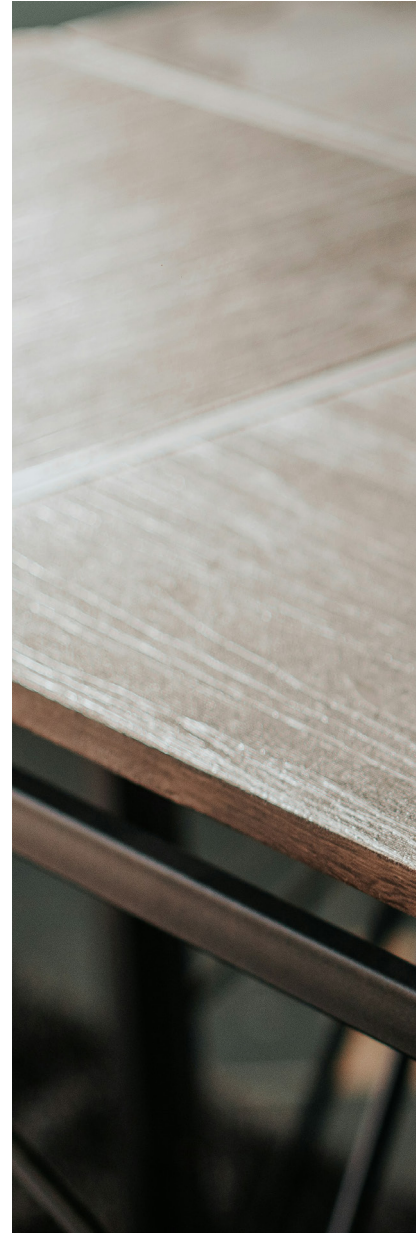
Premillennialism takes a futuristic view of the prophecies in the book of Revelation. Through the use of

symbolic language, future events during the coming tribulation are interpreted in a more literal way. This position expects an actual thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth that will follow His second coming. There are two sub-positions in premillennialism. One is a historic position, which sees only one return of Christ. The other is a dispensational position, which sees a rapture, a tribulation, then the second coming.

Dispensational Theology

This understanding of theology maintains a distinction between ethnic Israel and the church in the New Testament. Thus, the church started on the day of Pentecost. This theological approach stresses a literal interpretation of the Abrahamic Covenant concerning national Israel and asserts that the land promises to them will be fulfilled forever. Here, Israel does not become the church, nor replace it.

This approach takes a futuristic view of the book of Revelation. The middle chapters depict the seven-year tribulation of the earth. The church is mysteriously absent from this portion of the book, allowing for the rapture of the church before this great day of God's wrath. Following the second coming of Christ, He will establish His millennial kingdom upon the earth in fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies. Then, there will be the Great White Throne judgment and the verdict of "guilty" declared upon all unbelievers and their sentencing to eternal hell. This will be followed by a new heaven and a new earth in the eternal state.





Charismatic Theology

In this view, the sign gifts of the first century are still operative today. The gifts of speaking in tongues and miracles are especially believed to be operative at this present time. The foretelling aspect of prophecy is also to be expected. This can be accomplished by a word of knowledge and a word of wisdom. These sign gifts are to be sought as true manifestations of the Spirit.

This approach has especially provided avenues for many doctrinal aberrations. Not the least of these is the prosperity gospel movement. This is a brand of theology that has bred many false teachers and produced

countless distortions of the gospel. Here the focus is shifted away from the Giver to the gifts He provides. The pursuit is not upon God Himself, but upon what He can give. The believer must simply name these blessings and claim them. It is vital to be aware of this false teaching.

Classical Theism

There are many other theological issues that are being discussed in the church today. Some are new matters; others are old matters that have re-emerged, sometimes in a different guise. Among these are Classical Theism,

which emphasizes one divine will from eternity past with the three persons of the Trinity, the eternal generation of the Son of God, and the impassibility of God. This way of thinking finds its origin with the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, was taught by some of the church fathers, and was later reinforced and developed by Thomas Aquinas. Likewise, this was taught by the Puritans and has made a strong comeback today.

Liberation Theology

This form of theology emphasizes the liberation of the oppressed in society. It stresses a concern for the poor and for those who are not succeeding financially and socially in life. It seeks to set free the impoverished through preaching on justice and through government entitlements. It has excelled in Catholic churches in Latin America and in African-American churches in America. It attempts to redistribute wealth from those who have to those who do not have. It cries out against those who have advantages because of being born into certain levels of society. This teaching can elevate liberation above other crucial matters of theology.

Christian Nationalism

This is a form of theology that emphasizes fusing Christianity into political and civic life. The intent is to spread the moral standards of Christianity into society on a local and national level. It involves a strategy to legislate civil and criminal laws that directly reflect the Law of God. It seeks to promote a Christian state to the exclusion of a pluralistic religious society. It desires to firmly establish the Ten Commandments in the public square, observe Christian holidays, and practice prayer in the schools. This method can focus more on promoting Christian influence in society than the work of God in sanctifying His church.

The Practical Value

Theology is meant to be not merely studied and learned, but preached. The Bible commands every preacher to proclaim sound doctrine. All truths taught the whole purpose of God are to be expounded from the pulpit. No doctrine is to be withheld from the congregation,

no matter how controversial it may be. There are many compelling reasons that the church should teach theology as we preach the Word.

It Gives the Knowledge of God

If theology is the study of God about His person and work, there is no knowledge of God apart from teaching sound doctrine concerning who He is and what He has done to save souls (Ps. 96:10; Isa. 40:9). The knowledge of God never takes place in a theological vacuum. It only occurs when the truth about Him is preached (John 4:24). No one can know an unknown god. Nor can know a god of their own vain imagination. There is no subject more necessary than the true knowledge of God. This is the heat of theological preaching.

After Lloyd-Jones retired from his long-standing pastorate at Westminster Chapel, London, he heard many village preachers on Sundays. He said: "I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Savior, and the magnificence of the gospel." This magnification of God lies at the heart of what preaching is to be.

John Piper calls for this kind of preaching: "My burden is to plead for the supremacy of God in preaching—that the dominant note of preaching be the freedom of God's sovereign grace, the unifying theme be the zeal that God has for His own glory, the grand object of preaching be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God, and the pervasive atmosphere be the holiness of God." All true preaching is riveted on the exaltation of the greatness of God.

It Confronts the Lost

The preaching of doctrine is absolutely necessary to expose the lost condition of sinners. This begins with expounding the doctrine of the holiness of God. The preaching of His moral perfection reveals man's utter unholiness. The doctrine of original sin must be taught. The theology of total depravity must be expounded.

Divine holiness is seen in preaching of the Law of

If the gospel is to be rightly proclaimed, the preaching of theology is absolutely necessary. If the good news of salvation is to be made known from the pulpit, there are certain theological truths that must be taught.

God. It is seen in expositing the Scripture about the sacrificial system. The preacher must show that man is too sinful to enter the presence of holy God without a priest interceding and bringing the sacrifice prescribed by Him. Then he must teach that Christ bore the sins of His people at the cross and took them far away.

It Teaches the Gospel

If the gospel is to be rightly proclaimed, the preaching of theology is absolutely necessary. If the good news of salvation is to be made known from the pulpit, there are certain theological truths that must be taught. The gospel is the person and work of Christ, and this necessitates preaching the doctrine surrounding Him. If there is no doctrine of Christ, there is no gospel. These landmark truths include the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, and the necessity of repentance and swing faith (Rom 1:14–17; 2 Cor 5:20–21).

Preaching the gospel starts with the declaration of its saving truths. J. Gresham Machen famously said: “Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative ... Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God.” The gospel begins with the announcement of sound doctrine concerning the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, what Christ has done, and the truth about heaven, hell, and the final judgment. Only once these truths are pronounced may the preacher proceed to the imperative command concerning what the unbelieving sinner must do in order to receive this saving grace.

It Saves Perishing Sinners

Sound doctrine must be preached if lost sinners are to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They must be taught who God is, who they are, and what He requires. They must be instructed in who they are, what sin is, and what are its consequences in a person’s life. They must be told who Jesus is, why He came, and

what He did to save sinners. They must be educated in what repentance and faith is. They must be trained in the glories of heaven and be warned of the agonies of hell.

The basic doctrines of these areas must be preached if souls are to be converted to Christ. Ryle rightly states, “There never has been any spread of the gospel, any conversion of nations or countries, any successful, evangelistic work, except by the ‘enunciation of distinct doctrine.’” This is to say, no one will ever be saved if they do not know essential theological truths. If there is no doctrine preached, no one will turn to Jesus Christ to receive His salvation. Every preacher must explain the lordship of Christ and what it requires. He must expound the truths of self-denial and cross-bearing in order to follow Christ. All evangelistic preaching must be a solidly doctrinal exposition.

It Produces Strong Believers

Theological preaching is also necessary to produce strong believers once they are converted. Only when they are grounded in strong doctrine can they stand strong in their faith and withstand the attacks of the evil one. Strong theology is a critically important component in producing mature believers. Strong convictions in doctrine nail the believer’s feet to the floor when others untaught in theology will falter under spiritual attack. Deep convictions in theology embolden followers of Christ to stand strong for the truth (1 John 2:13–14).

J. Gresham Machen writes in his classic work *Christianity and Liberalism*: “Indifference about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith.” He is saying that strong biblical convictions produce strong witnesses for Christ. Those who have strong beliefs in the doctrines stand the strongest for the truth. They did not burn indifferent people at the stake. Only those with deep convictions in the truth proved themselves to be true believers by being willing to die for it.

It Builds Healthy Churches

Strong churches are unwavering in their fundamental commitment to teaching and preaching sound doctrine. Jesus said that He would build His church upon the solid rock of what Peter had confessed, that Christ is the Son of God (Matt 16:18). This necessitates teaching

the theology of the perfect deity of Jesus Christ. He then charged His disciples to preach this same fundamental truth to all (Matt 28:19). In the first church, “the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42), which included right doctrine, was their priority. As this congregation was grounded in these essential truths, they grew strong in the very city where Jesus had been crucified.

The Apostle Paul teaches that the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). This does not mean that the church is built upon His disciples as individuals, but upon the divine revelation they taught. Christ then gave spiritually gifted “pastors and teachers” to instruct the church in “the faith” and in “the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man” (Eph 4:11, 13). Only then will the church not “be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (v. 14). The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), teaching the essentials of strong doctrine.

It Refutes False Teaching

Preaching theology is also necessary to guard against “the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph 4:14). Such preaching preserves against heresy and the resulting apostasy within the church. The greatest danger to the church is always from polluted teaching within her midst, not from the persecution of the world outside her walls. Doctrinal preaching is necessary to protect against the infiltration of false doctrine that harms the soul. Every preacher must preach sound doctrine and refute what is false (Titus 1:9).

When a Christian institution departs from sound doctrine, it is inevitably headed toward the abandonment of the faith. This has been true of Christian denominations, Bible colleges, seminaries, and even churches. The historical landscape is marked by such doctrinal falls—Harvard, Yale, Princeton, General Baptists, Baptist Union, YMCA, United Methodist Church, PCUSA, Church of England, and more. Preaching on sound doctrine is necessary to prevent—or at least slow down—this descent.

Whenever the doctrinal high ground that is rooted in Reformed truth is yielded, it inevitably leads downward, onto the slippery slope of Arminianism. From there, it cascades down to liberalism, then to ecumenism, to



*“Indifference about
doctrine makes no heroes
of the faith.”*



J. GRESHMAN MACHEN

universalism, to agnosticism, and finally to atheism. Doctrinal preaching that is emphatic and dogmatic is needed to hold the church's position on the high ground of Reformed theology.

A Lifelong Pursuit


We have seen the importance of theology to the preacher and to his pulpit ministry. If there is no doctrine, there is no sermon. Theology is not incidental to the effectiveness of the sermon, but fundamentally critical to its success. This requires that the expositor be a lifelong student of theology. He must always be deepening his understanding of sound doctrine that is taught in the Bible.

We began this article quoting Lloyd-Jones on the relationship between preaching and theology. Let us conclude by hearing him again as he challenges us to be always reading and learning theology. Lloyd-Jones says, "There is no greater mistake than to think that you finish

with theology when you leave a seminary. The preacher should continue to read theology as long as he is alive. The more he reads the better." This applies to each one of us who step into a pulpit to herald the Word. We must be always reading and sharpening our grasp of the vast network of theology in the Bible.

Lloyd-Jones concludes, "I have known men in the ministry, and men in various other walks of life, who stop reading when they finish their training. They think they have acquired all they need; they have their lecture notes, and nothing further is necessary. The result is that they vegetate and become quite useless. Keep on reading; and read the big works." Let us be men who are ever striving to excel in our calling to preach the Word by advancing to the next level of theological proficiency and profundity.

We must never be content to remain where we are in our knowledge of theology. We must always be striving to master this crucial subject that is so central to the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Read. Study. Learn. Preach. ♦



Let us be men who are ever striving to excel in our calling to preach the Word by advancing to the next level of theological proficiency and profundity.



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The
PREACHER
AND HIS BIBLE


JOHN MACARTHUR

Direct, personal study of the biblical text is the one step in sermon preparation where the faithful preacher can least afford to cut corners. It is the starting place for me. Before I ever consult anyone else's outline or commentary, I read the biblical text, consult my Greek New Testament, note any significant grammatical features and nuances of meaning that come out in the original language, meditate on what I've read, read the text again, note my own thoughts and observations, and ponder the connections between this text and other passages of Scripture. When I am preaching sequentially through whole books of Scripture (my preferred approach), I come to the text with the context of the previous passage in mind. I also read far enough beyond my text to get the gist of the subsequent passage. With all of that in

mind, I meditate on the passage some more, re-read the text, outline the passage, and then, as time permits, read the text several more times.

Throughout that whole process, I am asking questions, seeking understanding, looking for the central point of the passage, and tracing the flow of logic built into the text and its context. By the time I turn to commentaries, the words of the text are firmly fixed in my mind. Commentaries might suggest additional insights, help untangle difficulties, affirm (or challenge) my thinking about the passage, or suggest connections that hadn't occurred to me. But my fundamental understanding of the text comes first of all from my own direct study of the passage.

If I tried to handle Scripture any other way, I would not be doing my main duty as a shepherd of the flock of



No discipline is more sorely needed in the contemporary church than expositional biblical teaching. Too many have bought the lie that doctrine is something abstract and threatening, unrelated to daily life.

God. People sometimes ask if the process has become monotonous or wearisome after more than forty-five years of ministry. My answer is that it is not burdensome at all; it is the most delightful and rewarding aspect of all my pastoral work.

Preach the Word

I was in college when I became convinced that God was calling me to pastoral ministry. Up to that point in my academic career, I had devoted most of my time and energy to athletics. Running track and playing football had taught me the importance of discipline and perseverance. But frankly, all those extra hours devoted to physical workouts had probably stunted my study skills. My father and grandfather were both pastors, and I understood that to preach well demands careful study and preparation. I knew I had some catching up to do, and

because of the weightiness of the preacher's task, I knew I needed to approach the study of God's Word with even more devotion, diligence, and determination than I had brought to football practice.

My dad gave me a Bible inscribed with a quotation from 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the Word." That charge, the centerpiece of Paul's dying words to his primary protégé, became and has remained my driving passion throughout all the years of my ministry. It is, I believe, the primary duty of every pastor.

No one can preach the Word well without studying it carefully, hiding it in one's own heart, and receiving its truth obediently.

Read the Word

Since the Word of God comes to us in written form, it ought to be self-evident that Bible study must begin

with reading. But I'm convinced many preachers think they can safely skip that step. They may read commentaries or listen to other preachers' sermons, but they don't spend enough time reading the Bible itself—and it shows in their preaching. At best, they nibble at the text. Often, they totally ignore the context. I've heard countless preachers quote a partial verse of Scripture only to use it as a springboard for a topical message. They don't explain the text itself. And after quoting whatever snippet of a phrase they want to hang their message on, they don't even return to the verse that launched them. This is a sure sign that they have not carefully read whatever passage they are dealing with—because Scripture is a rich, measureless well of truth. So, when a man fills his message with ideas imported into the text (*eisegesis*), it's instantly obvious that he has not made any serious effort to sound the depths of the passage he is preaching on.

Some sermons are built on a wobbly scaffold of illustrations. The impression the listener gets is that the preacher had some intriguing anecdotes to tell, and he used a passage of Scripture to try to lash all his stories together. This approach treats the Bible as an afterthought. No matter how compelling the oratory or how

captivating the stories, it is clear when preachers do this that they have not done their homework.

Reading is the simplest, yet most rewarding, aspect of Bible study. It does not require advanced skill or post-graduate instruction. What it does require is focus, concentration, and careful, single-minded thinking. That can be a challenge in this media-driven, fast-paced era. But the rewards are immense. If you have ever thought reading Scripture and meditating on its truth could be tedious, it's only because you haven't been doing it right. Find a way to block out the distractions of life, get alone with your Bible, and immerse yourself in the Word of God. What you'll find is the polar opposite of tedium. It will revolutionize both your study and your preaching.

Interpret It Correctly

The true meaning of Scripture is not terribly difficult to comprehend. Most people who insist they cannot understand God's Word simply don't want to hear what it has to say. Jesus made that point after His authority had



been challenged repeatedly by some hostile religious leaders: “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word” (John 8:43).

Scripture is sufficiently clear so that all who apply themselves faithfully to the task of learning its basic truths can do so with relative ease. “Those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray” (Isa 35:8). It doesn’t take a special skill set or secret knowledge to get the gist of what Scripture is teaching. God did not give us a puzzle to decipher. He gave us revelation, which, by definition, means truth is being disclosed to us in Scripture, not concealed from us.

Nevertheless, there are, as we all know, “some things [in the Bible] hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16). The point Peter makes in that passing remark is as relevant today as it ever was. There is no shortage of self-appointed teachers who are spiritually ignorant and unstable, and they seem drawn to anything obscure or ambiguous in the Bible. Beginning with those difficult passages, they twist Scripture to their own destruction—just what Peter was describing.

But even if we take the hardest passages into consideration, the Bible is not a cryptic riddle. Still, it does require diligence, persistence, prayerfulness, and careful study to handle the Word of truth rightly (2 Tim 2:15).

Without an accurate understanding of the truth Scripture means to convey, we might as well not have the Bible at all. I’ve frequently said that the meaning of the Bible is the Bible. What I mean is that while the very words of Scripture are inspired (Mark 13:31; 1 Cor 2:13), what’s crucial is not the sounds and syllables of the words but the truth they convey. The Bible is not a magical incantation or abracadabra. It is indeed powerful, but the power lies in the truth its words communicate, not in the physical appearance of the book or its typography.

Therefore, getting the true meaning of Scripture is paramount. Nehemiah 8:8 underscores the vital importance of proper interpretation. It was the task of the priests and Levites to proclaim the truth of God to the multitudes who had returned from captivity: “They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.”

If every preacher faithfully did that, it would remedy most of what ails contemporary evangelicalism. Notice that the stress is on clarity, coherence, and understanding. In other words, the reading of the Scripture was no

mindless ritual or recitation. The point was to explain the meaning of God’s Word to the common people. The priests were simply doing biblical exposition. And the people of Nehemiah’s time, starved for truth, eagerly responded and begged for more.

That’s precisely what happens today when the Word of God is faithfully and accurately taught.

By the way, the liturgy of the early apostolic church was an echo of that passage in Nehemiah 8. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul tells Timothy, “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” Notice, the words of Scripture are spoken aloud (“reading”); people are urged to obey the Word of God (“exhortation”); and the truth of the text is carefully and thoroughly explained (“teaching”). Those are the core elements of good expository preaching.

It is significant that whenever Scripture gives instructions to preachers, the theme is always the same. We are to preach the sure Word of God, and nothing else (not our opinions, pop culture, political agendas, dreams, personal visions, or other speculative notions). We are to preach scripture faithfully in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2); whether it’s easy or hard; whether people respond enthusiastically or not. The Bible is the only message we are authorized to preach in Christ’s name. Anything and everything else is a corruption of the preacher’s high calling.

Stay with the Text

That means when you start a sermon by asking people to turn in their Bibles to a specific chapter and verse, you need to stay with that passage until you have thoroughly explained the sense of it. Let the text speak without trying to soften it or deflect its authority under the rubric of political correctness. Don’t try to make the Bible conform to your preconceived notions. Be careful not to interpret the Bible at the cost of its true meaning.

I’m ashamed to admit it, but the first sermon I ever preached was a deplorable example of what not to do with Scripture. I’m glad there is no recording of it. My text was, “The angel rolled the stone away” from Matthew 28. I entitled my sermon, “Rolling Away the Stones in Your Life.” I talked about the stone of doubt, the stone of fear, and the stone of anger. Doubt, fear, and anger are all legitimate topics, but they have nothing to do with

that verse! I cringe when I think of it, and I still cringe today when I hear preachers handle the text that way. Sadly, that sort of preaching has become so common that the average church member thinks that is what all preaching should be like.


Evangelicals have been courting and encouraging trite preaching for decades. The vast majority of sermons today are so superficial that it seems as if the preacher is laboring to avoid challenging anything his listeners already believe. And what's particularly stunning is how quickly preachers move away from the text into storytelling, allegory, far-fetched applications, and other nonsense. (You have to do that, of course, if you are determined not to teach any truths that might be at odds with our culture's values and belief systems.)

One of the most troubling trends in today's pulpits is the popular practice of personalizing and over-contextualizing Scripture so that every text is ultimately about the preacher himself. If he deals with the story of Goliath, he will illustrate it by describing how he conquered some Goliath-sized conflict in his own life. If he teaches on Moses and his confrontation of Pharaoh, he will have a story about some symbolic pharaoh he outlasted and overcame. My dad used to say, "Beware the preacher

who is the hero of his own illustrations." Today, we need to be warned against the narcissists who want to make themselves the subject of every biblical text.

Be faithful to the text. It is, after all, the Word of God, not a script for men to revise and amuse themselves with. In the words of the apostle, "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God" (2 Cor 2:17). The word translated "peddling" is a verb in the original text—*kapēleuō*, a derivative of *kapelos*, the Greek word for "huckster." It has a clear connotation of insincerity, deceit. It signifies a shady vendor of shoddy goods whose aim is only to make a quick profit.

No preacher who truly loves Christ wants to be the evangelical equivalent of a snake oil salesman. But let's face this squarely: the tendencies of our fallen flesh make us too prone to be careless, shallow, inattentive, and lazy in the study. The pressures of life and ministry tempt us to take shortcuts we shouldn't take. We must mortify those tendencies, and we must remain constantly diligent, remembering that we are handling the Word of God and that there is no excuse for handling it carelessly. ♦



Be faithful to the text. It is, after all, the Word of God, not a script for men to revise and amuse themselves with.



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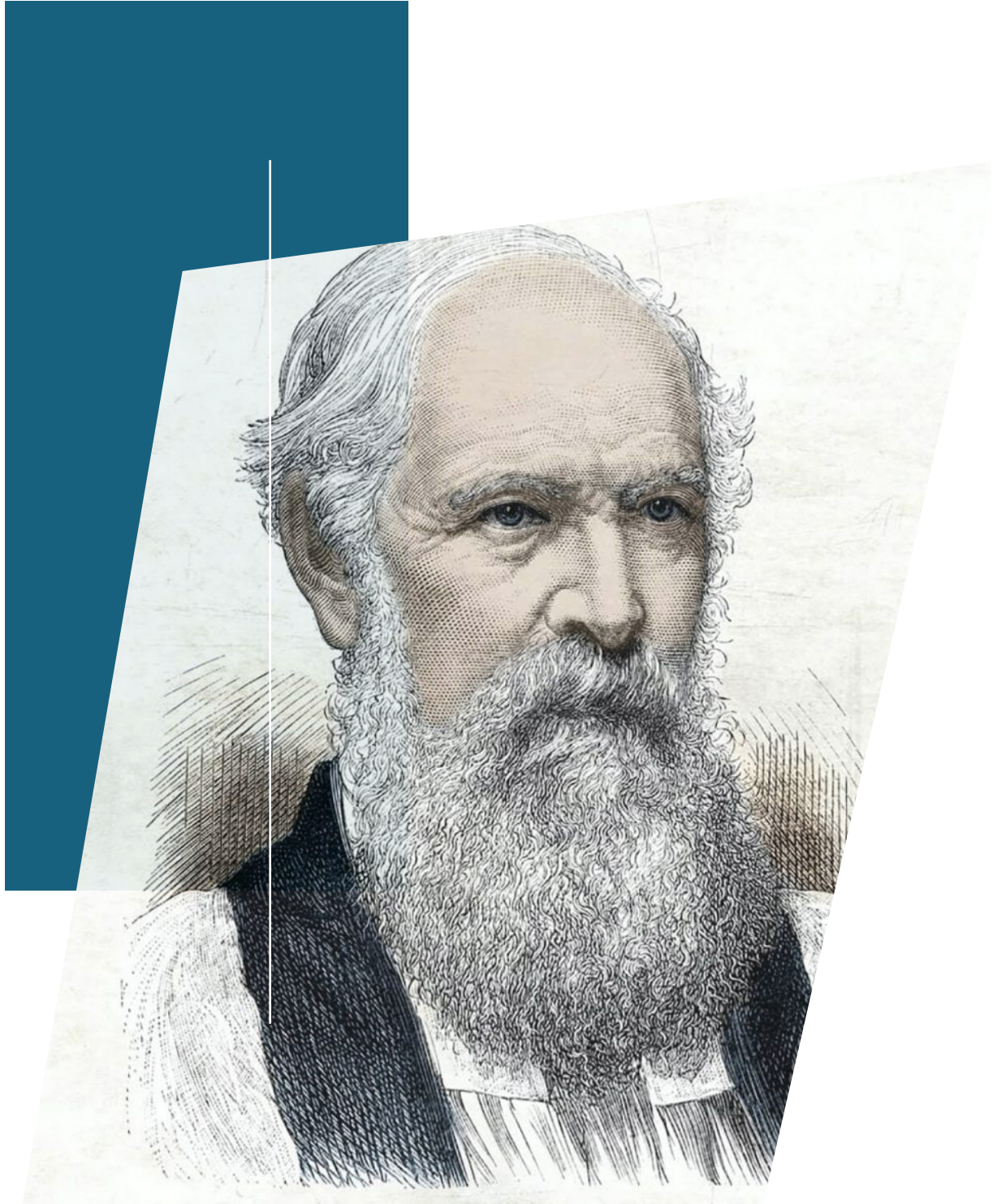
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Avoid

JELLY-FISH
PREACHING

J.C. RYLE

Let the clever advocates of a broad and undogmatic theology,—the preachers of the gospel of earnestness, and sincerity and cold morality,—let them, I say, show us at this day any English village or parish, or city, or town, or district, which has been evangelized without ‘dogma,’ by their principles.

They cannot do it, and they never will. Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing. It may be beautiful to some minds, but it is childless and barren.

Depend on it, if we want to ‘do good’ and shake the world, we must fight with the old apostolic weapons, and stick to ‘dogma.’ No dogma, no fruits! No positive Evangelical doctrine, no evangelization!


Myriads of professing Christians now-a-days seem utterly unable to distinguish things that differ. Like peo-

ple afflicted with color-blindness, they are incapable of discerning what is true and what is false, what is sound and what is unsound.

If a preacher of religion is only clever and eloquent and earnest, they appear to think he is all right, however strange and heterogeneous his sermons may be. They are destitute of spiritual sense, apparently, and cannot detect error.

Popery or Protestantism, an atonement or no atonement, a personal Holy Ghost or no Holy Ghost, future punishment or no future punishment, Trinitarianism, Arianism, or Unitarianism, nothing comes amiss to them: they can swallow all, if they cannot digest it!

They seem to think everybody is right and nobody is wrong, every clergyman is sound and none are un-



*For your own soul's sake
dare to make up your
mind what you believe,
and dare to have
positive distinct views of
truth and error.*

sound, everybody is going to be saved and nobody going to be lost.

They dislike distinctness, and think all extreme and decided and positive views are very naughty and very wrong! These people live in a kind of mist or fog. They see nothing clearly, and do not know what they believe. They have not made up their minds about any great point in the gospel, and seem content to be honorary members of all schools of thought.

For their lives they could not tell you what they think is truth about justification, or regeneration, or sanctification, or the Lord's Supper, or baptism, or faith, or conversion, or inspiration, or the future state.

They really cannot define what they mean by these phrases. The only point you can make out is that they admire earnestness and cleverness and charity, and cannot believe that any clever, earnest, charitable man can ever be in the wrong.

They lize on undecided; and too often undecided they drift down to the grave, without comfort in their

religion, and, I am afraid, often without hope.

The explanation of this boneless, nerveless, jelly-fish condition of soul is not difficult to find.

To begin with, the heart of man is naturally in the dark about religion,—has no intuitive sense of truth,—and really NEEDS instruction and illumination.

The whole result is that a kind of broad religious “agnosticism” just suits an immense number of people.

They are content to shovel aside all disputed points as rubbish.

Who does not know that such people swarm and abound everywhere?

Beware of this undecided state of mind in religion. It is a pestilence which walks in darkness, and a destruction that kills in noon-day. It is a lazy, idle frame of soul, which, doubtless, saves men the trouble of thought and investigation.

For your own soul's sake dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive distinct views of truth and error.

Let no fear of man and no morbid dread of being thought party-spirited, narrow, or controversial, make you rest contented with a bloodless, boneless, tasteless, colorless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity.

Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing.

The victories of Christianity, wherever they have

been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology: by telling men roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and His precious blood by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Savior by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit by lifting up the brazen serpent by telling men to look and live,—to believe, repent, and be converted. ♦





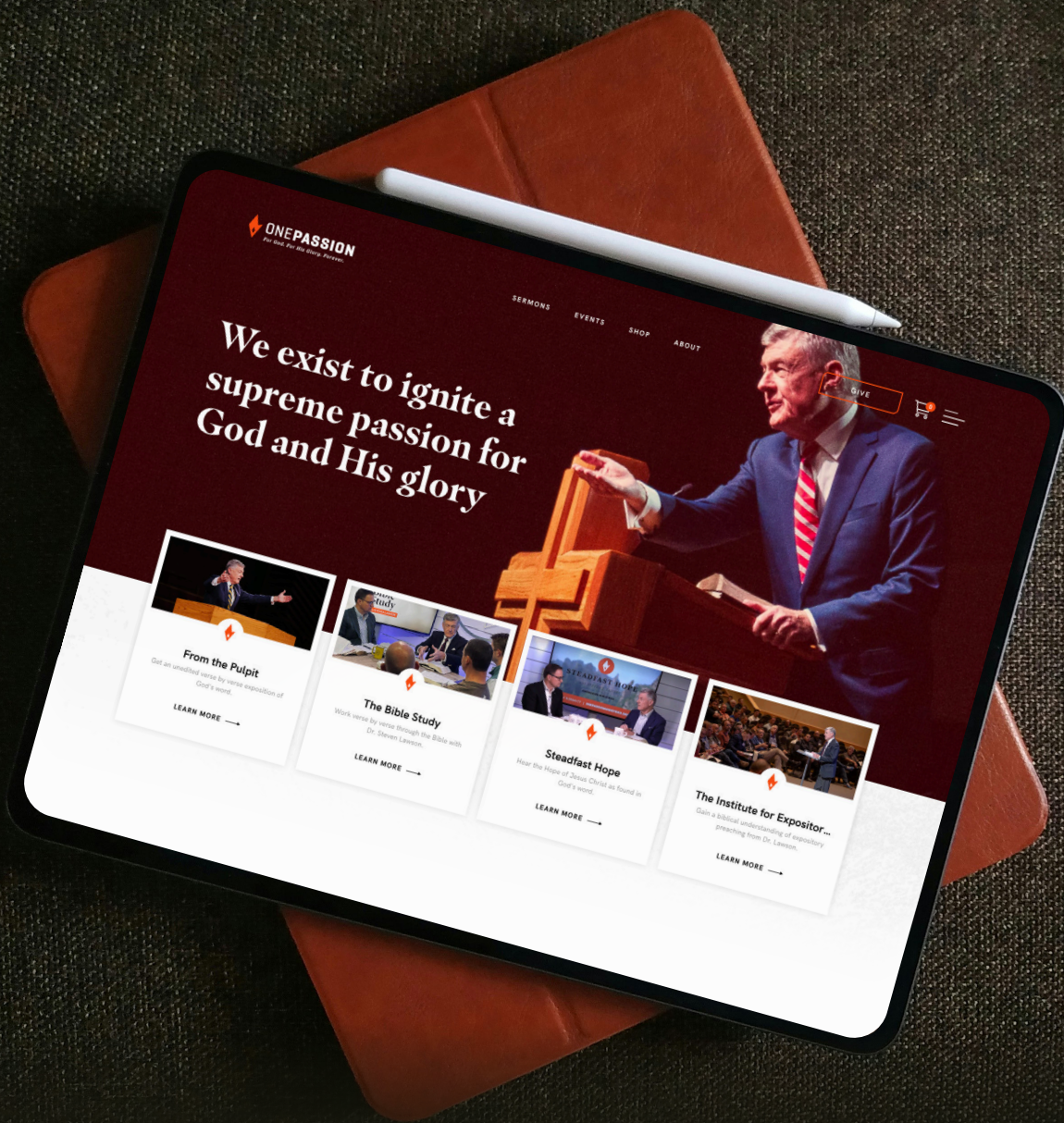
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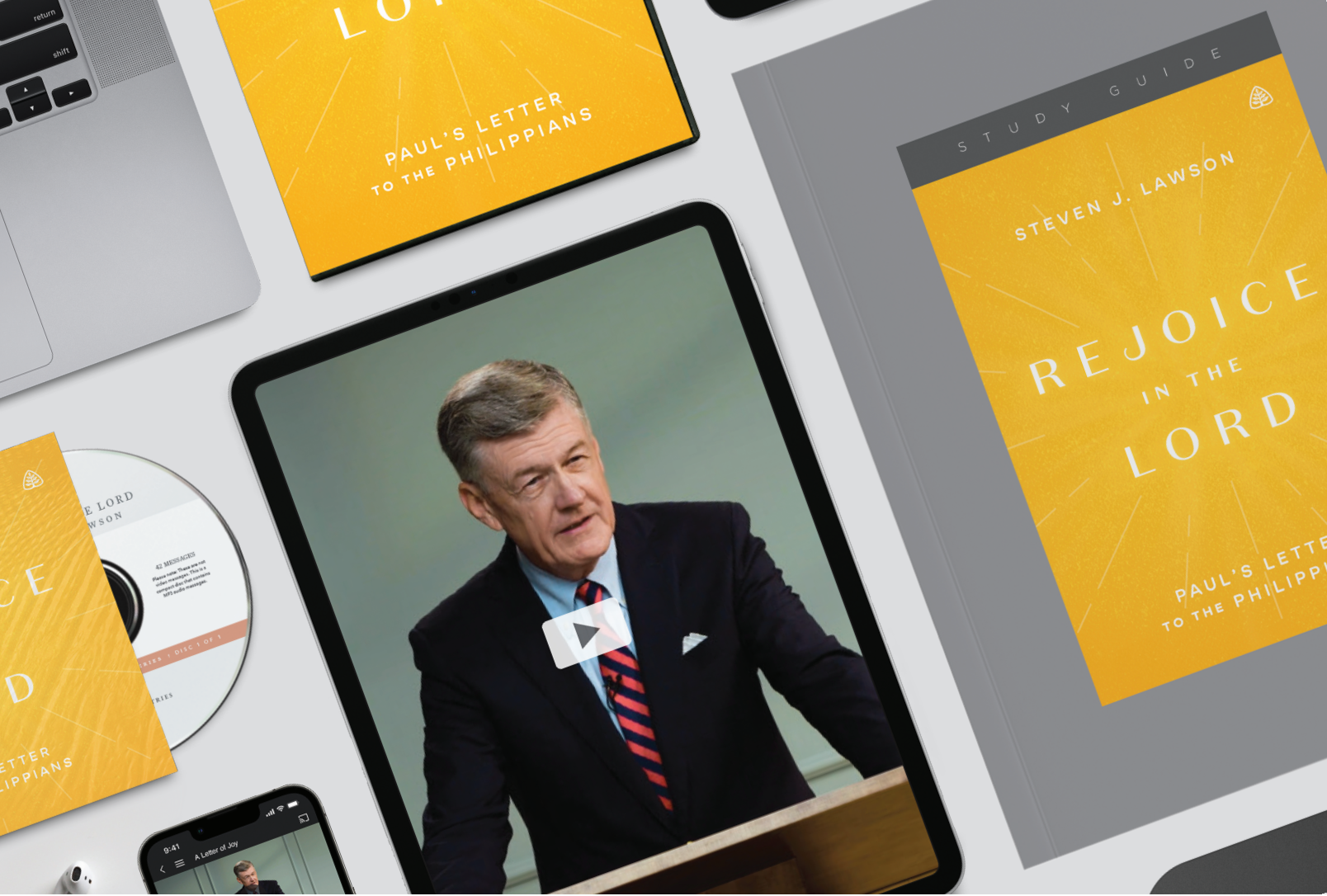
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