

# **Biblical Inerrancy and Bible Exposition: A Match Made In Heaven**

by

Daniel L. Akin  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

## Introduction

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 reads:

<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from who you learned it <sup>15</sup> and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

[Therefore, grounded and rooted in this theological conviction about the Bible]

<sup>1</sup> I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. <sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

In 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 Paul weds the issues of the Bible's inspiration and Scripture exposition. He addresses how the church should teach, preach, do evangelism and carry out faithful ministry. Drawing a contrast between us and the "evil people and imposters" who deceive and are being deceived (v.13), Paul makes clear his convictions concerning 1) the reality of truth, 2) the Bible's divine inspiration, (and as a necessary and logical corollary the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture) and 3) the necessity of biblical exposition.

Amazingly, the relationship of inerrancy and biblical exposition is receiving scant attention at this meeting. This, I believe, is a tell-tale sign of a serious problem for the

academy and the body of Christ. It is hard to believe this is where we are given the battles many of us have fought over the last 30 plus years.

Al Mohler correctly observes,

“Preaching has fallen on hard times. That’s the impression you would gain by listening to much of what passes for preaching in American pulpits. Something is clearly missing—and that missing element is the deep passion for biblical exposition that always characterizes the great preachers of an era.

Today, the church is still blessed by outstanding expositors, but they are too few. Many preachers lack adequate models and mentors, and they find themselves hungry for a homiletical model who can both inspire and instruct.” (*Charles Haddon Spurgeon – A Passion for Preaching*, Part One 9-20-04. Weblog)

My goal in this paper is to argue for a necessary relationship between inerrancy and exposition. I will begin by drawing from portions of the 2 Chicago Statements on Inerrancy and Hermeneutics. I will then conclude with necessary entailments of this synergistic relationship. I believe nothing less than the life of the church is at stake.

### **I. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and Biblical Exposition**

The Chicago Statement on Bible Inerrancy was drafted Oct. 26-28, 1978. In “A Short Statement” that proceeds the 19 “Articles of Affirmation and Denial” the issue of truth is addressed, and its relationship to the doctrine of the Christian God is established:

“God who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself. . . Holy Scripture is God’s witness to Himself.”

Article IV is also important at this point. It reads:

*“We affirm* that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

*We deny* that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God’s work of Inspiration.”

Rooted and grounded in nearly 2000 years of Christian history and tradition, these statements have several implications for the issue of **truth** in the context of evangelical confession and biblical exposition. I note 5:

- 1) God exists.
- 2) God is singular and a God of truth.
- 3) God is a talking God, He speaks.
- 4) The Bible is the unique, specific and crucial place where this talking God speaks.

God has not left Himself without a witness, a witness that is reliable and true because the ultimate source of this witness is God Himself, the God of truth.

- 5) Humans, as image-bearers of God, are fitted to receive this communication of truth by the speaking God. Can fallen, finite humanity know perfectly what this infinite God has said? No. Can humans know truly and genuinely what the infinite God has said? Yes. The nature of God as a truth-revealer and the nature of man as a truth-receiver would indicate that this is so.

What the Bible says the God of truth says. What the God of truth says humanity can receive, hear, understand, and obey. That which connects God and humanity is His Word faithfully and truly expounded by His equipped and prepared workmen who rightly divide his Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

## **II. True Truth and Its Relation to Biblical Inerrancy**

When I was a student at SWBTS in the early 1980's, I took OT Introduction from a doctoral student. It soon became evident that he was not committed to the full inerrancy of Scripture and that he had been significantly influenced, in a negative fashion, by historical critical methods. After debating inspiration issues on several

occasions early in the semester, he decided to set aside one specific class for the purpose of discussing the issues of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. In that class he noted that many persons argue deductively for inerrancy, and that they do so in the following manner:

MP) God is a God of truth.

mp) The Bible is God's Word.

-Therefore-

Conclusion) The Bible is true (e.g. inerrant and infallible)

Surprisingly, he did not attempt to analyze or refute the argument but simply moved on to address portions of Scripture (problem texts) that he believed were problematic for the doctrine of inerrancy. This trend continues today as we all know, although nothing new has been forthcoming. He did not examine the Bible's own witness to itself, especially the testimony of Jesus (Matthew 5:17-18; John 10:35; 17:17), Paul (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and Peter (2 Peter 1:20-21). He equated classic inerrancy with "mechanical dictation" (or what some have called "absolute inerrancy"). He then moved to argue for what certain scholars have called "limited inerrancy or functional inerrancy," that is the Bible is inerrant in matters of faith and practice, but it may contain errors of fact, particularly in the areas of science or history. However, Scripture did secure truthful teaching about belief and behavior. The Bible is faithful to bring people to salvation and growth in grace. The Bible accomplishes its PURPOSE without fail. It is faithfully true, but we go too far to say it is factually true.

My professor did not offer as an option the view represented in the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy, what some have called “Critical or Natural Inerrancy.” This view, as summarized by David Dockery:

- Makes cautious use of critical methodologies such as source, form, redaction, genre and literary criticism. And, I might add, it rejoices in the great gains made in textual criticism.
- Affirms the truth of everything in the Bible to the degree of precision intended by the authors.
- Often recognizes biblical references to scientific matters as phenomenal (how they appeared to the writer).
- Does not seek to harmonize every detail of Scripture because it recognizes that the author wrote for different purposes.

Going to the Chicago Statement itself we find the following reasoning for this position.

From the Short Statement we read:

- 1) Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches; it is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; as God’s pledge, in all that it promise.
- 2) The Holy Spirit, Scripture’s Divine Author, both authenticates it to us by his inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
- 3) Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.
- 4) The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

Then in the Articles of Affirmation and Denial, the Short Statement is carefully fleshed out. The theological vision, clarity and precision is a piece of healthy doctrinal reflection worthy of our most careful consideration. Note the following 9 articles in the context of this paper:

## Article III

“**We affirm** that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

**We deny** that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.”

## Article VI

“**We affirm** that the whole Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original were given by divine inspiration.

**We deny** that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.”

## Article IX

“**We affirm** that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

**We deny** that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God’s Word.”

## Article XI

“**We affirm** that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

**We deny** that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.”

## Article XII

“**We affirm** that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

**We deny** that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.”

### Article XIII

“**We affirm** the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

**We deny** that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational description of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, and topical arrangement of materials, variant selections of material in parallel accounts or the use of free citations.”

### Article XV

“**We affirm** that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

**We deny** that Jesus’ teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.”

- (The Christological connection to inerrancy and its importance should not be overlooked, underestimated or misrepresented!)

### Article XVI

“**We affirm** that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church’s faith throughout its history.

**We deny** that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.”

### Article XVII

“**We affirm** that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God’s written Word.

**We deny** that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.”

In November 1982 “A Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics” was formulated and added by the ICBI. A number of these statements are particularly important in relation to Biblical Exposition. The framers understood that, “while we recognize that belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is basic to maintaining its authority, the values of the commitment

are only as real as one's understanding of the meaning of Scripture." Important for our purposes are the following 9 statements of affirmation and denial.

#### Article VI

**"We affirm** that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that Biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts.

**We deny** that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, Biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function. We further deny that error should be defined as that which willfully deceives."

#### Article VII

**"We affirm** that the meaning expressed in each Biblical text is single, definite and fixed.

**We deny** that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application."

#### Article X

**"We affirm** that Scripture communicates God's truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms.

**We deny** that any of the limits of human language render Scripture inadequate to convey God's message."

#### Article XIV

**"We affirm** that the Biblical record of events, discourses and sayings, though presented in a variety of appropriate literary forms, corresponds to historical fact.

**We deny** that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the Biblical writers and by the traditions they incorporated."

#### Article XV

**"We affirm** the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text.

**We deny** the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.”

#### Article XVII

“**We affirm** the unity, harmony and consistency of Scripture and declare that it is its own best interpreter.

**We deny** that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that one passage corrects or militates against another. We deny that later writers of Scripture misinterpreted earlier passages of Scripture when quoting from or referring to them.”

#### Article XVIII

“**We affirm** that the Bible’s own interpretation of itself is always correct, never deviating from, but rather elucidating, the single meaning of the inspired text. The single meaning of a prophet’s words includes, but is not restricted to, the understanding of those words by the prophet and necessarily involves the intention of God evidenced in the fulfillment of those words.

**We deny** that the writers of Scripture always understood the full implications of their own words.”

#### Article XX

“**We affirm** that since God is the author of all truth, all truths, Biblical and extrabiblical, are consistent and cohere, and that the Bible speaks truth when it touches on matters pertaining to nature, history or anything else. We further affirm that in some cases extrabiblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations.

**We deny** that extrabiblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.”

#### Article XXV

“**We affirm** that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God.

**We deny** that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture.”

We see clearly that the doctrine of inerrancy is related to the issue of truth on the one hand, and the issues of hermeneutics and homiletics on the other. Further, an expositional model for biblical proclamation is the natural and necessary companion to a view of scripture that affirms its plenary, verbal inspiration resulting in an infallible and inerrant Bible. John MacArthur is correct, “The only logical response to inerrant Scripture...is to preach it expositionally. By expositionally, I mean preaching in such a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented entirely and exactly as it was intended by God” (*Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 35). It is indeed a match made in heaven.

### III. Biblical Exposition

In *Engaging Exposition*, I provide my own definition of exposition. It developed over time out of my personal conviction concerning the Bible’s infallibility and inerrancy. It is, to be honest, more of a description than a definition. It reads:

“Expository preaching is text driven preaching that honors **the truth** of Scripture as it was given by the Holy Spirit. Its goal is to discover the **God-inspired meaning** through historical-grammatical-theological investigation and interpretation. By means of engaging and compelling proclamation, it explains, illustrates and applies the meaning of the biblical text in submission to and in the power of the Holy Spirit, preaching Christ for a verdict of changed lives.”

From this description of exposition, 5 important and essential components of expository preaching can be highlighted. My list is not close to being exhaustive, and I will be all too brief. Hopefully, I will make clear the complementary nature of biblical inerrancy and biblical exposition.

## 1. Expository Preaching is Text-Driven Preaching

Mark Dever writes, “The first mark of a healthy church is expository preaching. It is not only the first mark; it is far and away the most important of them all, because if you get this one right, all of the others should follow” (*9 Marks of a Healthy Church*, p 39).

Expository preaching allows the inerrant Scripture text to set the agenda, and it does so because it recognizes the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God. It, therefore, allows the inerrant text to determine both the substance and the structure of the message. Sidney Greidanus reminds us that,

“Biblical preaching is ‘a Bible shaped word imparted in a Bible-like way.’” “In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.” - (*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 11).

Unfortunately, in our therapeutic, modernistic culture, where felt needs and how to sermons are dominant and deemed essential, even by some evangelicals, text-driven preaching is viewed as simply inadequate for the day. I have heard too many times, “You cannot build a church doing expository preaching.” Some years ago the Independent Baptist Fundamentalist preacher Jack Hyles preached a sermon entitled, “The Science of Calling a Pastor.” In that message he stated, “Choose someone who is not a Bible expositor. There is not one expository sermon in the Bible. All of them are topical. I am not fighting expository preaching, but that kind of preaching will destroy a great church. Do not be swayed by their suave teaching. The great soul-winning churches have been pastored by topical preaching. I am not talking about an evangelistic church; I mean soul-winning church! If you want a soul-winning church, you must call a pastor who preaches topical sermons.” “Many of our once great soul-

winning churches fell prey to the popular notion of expository preaching. They decided that they wanted more Bible, but when they got it, it cost them their effective soul winning.” (The Jack Hyles Home Page). While they may not have affinity with this particular movement, the perspective of many today is expressed well in an article entitled, “What Is The Matter With Preaching?” The author writes,

“Every sermon should have for its main business the solving of some problem- a vital, important problem puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives... And if any preacher is not doing this, even though he have at his disposal both erudition and oratory, he is not functioning at all. Many, preachers, for example, indulge habitually in what they call expository sermons. They take a passage from Scripture and, proceeding on the assumption that the people attending church that morning are deeply concerned about what the passage means, they spend their half hour or more on historical exposition of the verse or chapter, ending with some appended practical application to the auditors. Could any procedure be more surely predestined to dullness and futility? Who seriously supposes that, as a matter of fact, one in a hundred of the congregation cares, to start with, what Moses, Isaiah, Paul or John meant in those special verses, or came to church deeply concerned about it? Nobody else who talks to the public so assumes that the vial interests of the people are located in the meaning of words spoken two thousand years ago. The advertisers of any goods, from a five foot shelf of classic books to the latest life insurance policy, plunge as directly as possible after the contemporary wants, felt needs, actual interests and concerns... Preachers who pick out texts from the Bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in the theology of the writer, are grossly misusing the Bible. Let them not end but start with thinking of the audience’s vital needs, and then let the whole sermon be organized around their endeavor to meet those needs. This is all good sense and good psychology.” -“What is the Matter with Preaching?” in *Harper’s Magazine*, July, 1928, 135.

Interestingly, this statement is not the musings of a contemporary pulpiteer. Its author is Harry Emerson Fosdick, who penned these words in 1928! Contemporary evangelicals need to be careful from whose homiletical trough they drink. They may discover the water is poisoned! I believe John Piper provides wiser counsel at this point when he says, “It is not the job of the Christian preacher to give people moral or

psychological pep talks about how to get along in the world' someone else can do that...most of our people have no one in the world to tell them, week in and week out, about the supreme beauty and majesty of God." (John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 12).

2. Expository preaching honors the principle of authorial intent, recognizing that the ultimate author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit, God Himself.

The faithful expositor is humbled, even haunted, by the realization that when he stands to preach he stands to preach what has been given by the Holy Spirit of God. Why is he haunted? Because he understands that what is before his eyes was divinely inspired by God, and he trembles at the very thought of abusing, neglecting or altering what God Himself wrote. Yes, the Bible is best described as the Word of God written in the words of men. However, it is ultimately the Word of God, and the divine author's intended meaning as deposited in the text must be honored. The faithful expositor should be a mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word from God to his hearers. His goal is to let the text speak so that his people may hear and recognize the voice of God. Ultimately it is God's voice that they need to hear, not his!

3. Historical-grammatical-theological interpretation will best discover both the truth of the text and the theology of the text, recognizing the Christocentric nature of the whole Bible.

Biblical theology is prior to systematic theology, but biblical theology must always proceed to systematic theology. Affirming the priority of biblical/exegetical theology will result in a more faithful and honest interpretation and it will also demand more tension in one's theological system. We need to learn to be comfortable with this.

Walt Kaiser reminds us that, “the discipline of Biblical theology must be a twin of exegesis. Exegetical theology will remain incomplete and virtually barren in its results, as far as the church is concerned, without a proper input of “informing theology” (Kaiser, 139).

It is impossible to preach without preaching some type of theology or doctrine. An unhealthy allegiance to a particular theological system will give you a nice, tight, clean theological system, but it will also lead you to squeeze and twist certain texts of Scripture in order to force them into your theological mold or grid. I believe a better way is to let your exegesis drive your theology. Let your theological system be shaped by Scripture and not the other way around. You will most certainly have more tension, more mystery, but your will be more true to the text of Holy Scripture, and you will embrace and cultivate a more healthy and robust theology.

In this context, I would encourage us to always ask of every text 5 questions, and to ask them in this order: 1) What does this text teach us about God; 2) What does this text teach us about fallen humanity (Note here the insight of Bryan Chappell and his Fallen Condition Focus (FCF)); 3) How does this text point to Christ; 4) What do I want my people to know?; and 5) What do I want my people to do? These questions, asked in this order, will guide us in having a Theocentric/Christocentric hermeneutic, homiletic, and theology. It will make sure that the real hero of the Bible is always on display: the Lord Jesus Christ. It will serve as an effective vaccine to so much of the psychological, therapeutic, feel-good sermons that have infected and diseased the Church. It will focus of God, keep Jesus preeminent and locate the gospel front and center.

Donald Bloesch says, "...the church that does not take theology seriously is unwittingly encouraging understandings of the faith that are warped or unbalanced." (*Crumbling Foundations: Death And Rebirth In An Age Of Upheaval*, 107). A steady diet of exegetical theology fleshed out in expository preaching is a certain cure for the spiritual anemia and theological ignorance that afflicts too many of our churches.

4. The task of the expositor is incomplete without the necessary component of exhortation.

Exhortation must be an essential aspect of Biblical proclamation. Proclamation of God's divine Word demands a human response. This element addresses the mind, but even more, it addresses the will. We must challenge our people to action, raise the bar and charge them to reach for it. On the day of the Pentecost Peter "strongly urged them" (Acts 2:40). When Paul was at Corinth he "tried to persuade both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). In his final words to his son in the ministry, Paul wrote to Timothy, "rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). Exhortation is not optional in a comprehensive job description for the faithful expositor and shepherd of the Savior's sheep. It is an essential ingredient. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was exactly right when he said, "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. A true understanding and experience of the Truth must lead to this. I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one." (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, 97). We are not lecturers of a stale and sterile theological discourse. We are gospel heralds calling on men and women, boys and girls, to repent of sin and

believe in the gospel of King Jesus. As shepherds of their souls, we are to call them to respond in both thought and action. Anything less is ministerial malpractice. Better to resign your post than continue in such a shameful and impotent ministry of preaching.

5. From beginning to end, from the study to the pulpit, the entire process of biblical exposition must take place in absolute and complete submission to the Holy Spirit.

J. H. Jowett captured the essence of what we are after when we stand to proclaim the Word of God. There is a sobering and piercing nature to what he says: “What we are after is not that folks shall say at the end of it all, ‘What an excellent sermon!’ That is a measured failure. You are there to have them say when it is over, ‘What a great God!’ It is something for men not to have been in your presence but in His.”

-(J.H. Jowett, quoted in *Context*, Dec. 1, 1997, p. 2).

All that we do in preparation and proclamation of this inerrant Bible should take place in humble submission to the Holy Spirit who inspired the inerrant Word. In the study as we analyze the text, study the grammar, parse the verbs, consult commentaries, and gather the raw materials for the message, we should seek His guidance and confess our dependence on Him. After all, it is His Word we are expounding.

When we stand to preach, to minister the Word to our people, again we must plead for His filling and direction. Word and Spirit was a hallmark of the Reformers, and it must be the same with us. Submission to the Spirit is no substitute and no excuse for avoiding the hard work of the study. Still, a homiletical masterpiece will be of little value without the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

One final word on this point is instructive, and it builds on an earlier observation that was too quickly addressed. Jesus said in John 15:26, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father- the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father- He will testify about Me.” And again in John 16:14, Jesus said, “He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify Me.” Call it what you will, preaching that does not exalt, magnify and glorify the Lord Jesus is not Christian Preaching. Preaching that does not present the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and call men and women to repent of sin and place their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not gospel preaching. We are not Jewish rabbis or scribes, and this truth should guide us in how we handle the Old Testament. Jesus, Himself, provides the hermeneutical key in John 5 and Luke 24. Pastor Tim Keller helps us flesh this out when he reminds us, “Jesus is the true and better Adam who passed the test in the wilderness not the garden, and whose obedience is imputed to us. Jesus is the true and better Abel who, though innocently slain by wicked hands, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for our acquittal. Jesus is the better Ark of Noah who carries us safely thru the wrath of God revealed from heaven and delivers us to a new earth. Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call of God to leave all that is comfortable and familiar and go out into the world not knowing where he went to create a new people of God. Jesus is the true and better Isaac who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, “Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me,” now we can look at God taking his Son up the mountain of Calvary and sacrificing him and say, “Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your Son, your only Son, whom you love, from us.” Jesus is the true and

better Jacob who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us. Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed him and sold him, and uses his new power to save them. Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant. Jesus is the true and better Rock of Moses who, struck with the rod of God's justice, now gives us living water in the desert. Jesus is the true and better Joshua, who leads us into a land of eternal rest and heavenly blessing. Jesus is the better Ark of the Covenant who topples and disarms the idols of this world, going Himself into enemy territory, and making an open spectacle of them all. Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends. Jesus is the true and better David whose victory becomes his people's victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves. Jesus is the true and better Esther who didn't just risk leaving an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people. Jesus is the true and better Daniel, having been lowered into a lion's den of death, emerges early the next morning alive and vindicated by His God. Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm so that we safely could be brought in. Jesus is the real Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain, so the angel of death will pass over us. He's the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, and the true bread. The Bible really is not about you is it? – It really is all about Him (*Theology and Quotes*, 12-4-06 slightly revised).

On the other hand, we are not self-helpers, positive thinkers, or liberal or conservative commentators, parroting the wisdom of the world, true though it sometimes may be. We are gospel preachers, Jesus-intoxicated, Spirit-led heralds by virtue of the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit. Submission to the Word and the Spirit will always lead to the exaltation of the Son.

Conclusion:

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

“What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! Are these contradictions? Of course they are not...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...I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one.” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, pg. 97)

William Willimon, former Dean of the chapel at Duke University, said some years ago, “today’s conservatives sound like yesterday’s liberals.” In a fascinating article titled “Been there, preached that,” (Leadership, Fall 1995), Willimon sounds a prophetic warning to evangelicals that they might not be seduced by the sirens of modernity and follow the tragic path of insignificance which mainline denominations have trod and now experience in 2013.

*“I’m a mainline-liberal-Protestant-Methodist-type Christian. I know we are soft on Scripture. Norman Vincent Peale has exercised a more powerful effect on our Preaching than St. Paul...*

*I know we play fast and loose with Scripture. But I’ve always had this fantasy that somewhere, like in Texas, there were preachers who preached it all, Genesis to Revelation without blinking an eye...*

*I took great comfort in knowing that, even while I preached a pitifully compromised, “Pealed” – down gospel, that somewhere, good ole Bible-believing preachers were offering their congregations the unadulterated Word, straight up. Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than liberal mainliners? At the very time those of us in the mainline, oldline, sidelined were repenting of our pop*

*psychological pap and rediscovering the joy of disciplined biblical preaching, these “biblical preachers” were becoming “user friendly” and “inclusive,” taking their homiletical cues from the “felt needs” of us “boomers” and “busters” rather than the excruciating demands of the Bible.*

*I know why they do this...It all starts with American Christians wanting to be helpful to the present order, to be relevant (as the present order defines relevance). We so want to be invited to lunch at the White House or at least be interviewed on ‘Good Morning America.’ So we adjust our language to the demands of the market, begin with the world and its current infatuations rather than the Word and its peculiar judgments on our infatuations. If you listen to much of our preaching, you get the impression that Jesus was some sort of itinerant therapist who, for free, traveled about helping people feel better. Ever since Fosdick, we mainline liberals have been bad about this. Start with some human problem like depression; then rummage the Bible for a relevant answer.*

*Last fall, as I was preparing in my office for the Sunday service, the telephone rang. ‘Who’s preaching in Duke Chapel today?’ asked a nasal, Yankee-sounding voice. I cleared my throat and answered, ‘Reverence Doctor William Willimon. ‘Who’s that?’ asked the voice. ‘The Dean of the Chapel,’ I answered in a sonorous tone. ‘I hope he won’t be preaching politics. I’ve had a rough week and I need to hear about God. My Baptist church is so eaten up with politics, I’ve got to hear a sermon!’ When you have to come to a Methodist for a biblical sermon, that’s pitiful.”*

Luther, in a different day to be sure, saw the church in a somewhat similar condition.

However he did not despair, for he saw, as we must see, the antidote that will cure the patient. In his “A Treatise on Christian Liberty” he throws down the gauntlet and gives us final words to guide us and inspire us:

*“Let us then consider it certain and conclusively established that the soul can do without all things except the Word of God, and that where this is not there is no help for the soul in anything else whatever. But if it has the Word it is rich and lacks nothing, since this Word is the Word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of righteousness, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of power, of grace, of glory, and of every blessing beyond our power to estimate.”*

-Martin Luther, “A Treatise on Christian Liberty.” *Three Treatises*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1947, 23

To Luther’s word I say, “Amen, and amen.”