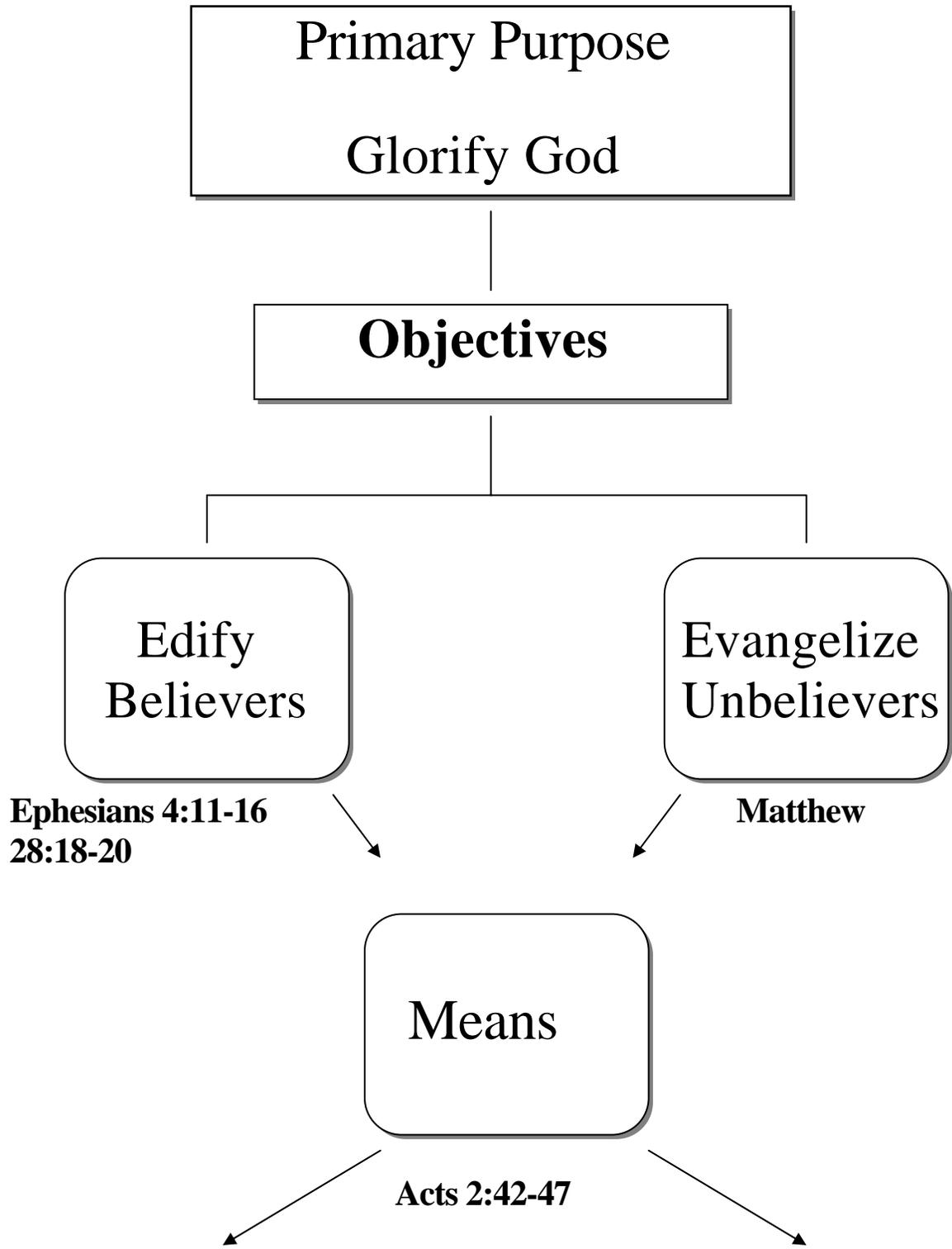


## **SECTION 4**

### **What is Christian Preaching?**

# A BIBLICAL VISION FOR THE CHURCH



## Session 2

### WHAT IS CHRISTIAN PREACHING?

*“What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason!  
Are these contradictions? Of course they are not”*

- Martin Lloyd-Jones

*“...the true idea of preaching is that the preacher should become a  
mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word from God  
to his hearers,... in order that the text may speak... and be heard making  
each point from his text in such a manner ‘that [his audience] may  
discern [the voice of God].’”*

- The Westminster Dictionary (1645)

D. A. Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School defines Christian preaching as that verbal, oral communication which at its best embraces...

1. as its context God's gracious and special self disclosure,
2. Biblical truth mediated through human personality,
3. as its immediate purpose to inform, persuade, appeal, invite response, encourage, rebuke, instruct in righteousness and elicit so far as we are able by God's grace an appropriate human response to the God whose revelation is the content of the preaching,
4. as its ultimate goal the glory of God and the calling forth and edification of the Church.

Peter Adam in *Speaking God's Words* (pgs. 70-71) writes...

1. Preaching is of course addressed to the congregation.
2. Preaching, in our definition, is a public presentation of the truth.
3. Preaching is a formal monologue.

As to a definition, he says preaching is...

***“the explanation and application of the Word to the congregation of Christ in order to produce corporate preparation for service, unity of faith, maturity, growth and upbuilding.”***

However, not all modern pulpiteers believe the text of Holy Scripture is essential to the contemporary church.

Note the judgments of Professors Edward Farley and David Buttrick of Vanderbilt Divinity School:

*“We must pose a question. Given a rejection of biblical inerrancy and the acceptance of historical-critical methods, what is the basis of the claim that something preachable is necessarily in the text?... Why is a word or truth of God necessarily present in a passage of the Bible chosen by a lectionarist or by the preacher? Such an assumption seems more arbitrary and more incoherent than the fundamentalist view.”*

*“But why would someone who thinks that the Bible originated historically, contextually, and editorially, thus reflecting the human and even corrupted perspectives of its writers, that any passage one happens to select must contain something in or about it that is proclaimable?”*

(Edward Farley, “Preaching the Bible and Preaching the Gospel,” *Theology Today*. 51 (1994): 100.)

***“For the better part of the twentieth century, preaching and the Bible have been wrapped up in a kind of incestuous relationship.”***

(David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* [Westminster/John Knox 1994], 171.)

In contrast to this anti-Christian perspective, a commitment to the Bible's verbal, plenary inspiration logically demands a commitment to Biblical preaching, to expository preaching. Such preaching takes on certain characteristics and pursues certain goals which are rooted in Holy Scripture itself.

1. It seeks to impart the whole counsel of God in sections small enough to comprehend and obey. (Acts 20:26-27)
2. It permits the personality of the preacher to become the channel for imparting the mind of God. (1 Cor. 2:13)
3. It awakens the response of hearers to seize and possess for themselves the promises of God. (Heb. 4:12)
4. It repatterns the minds of the entire congregation to view life biblically, and therefore realistically. (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:6-8)
5. It translates the theological words of the Scripture into contemporary language without destroying or distorting meaning. (1 Thess. 2:13)
6. It exposes the secular illusions of the day and reveals the destructive ends to which they lead. (2 Cor. 11:3)
7. It unfolds balanced aspects of truth, preventing extremism and distortion. (Isa. 28:9-10)
8. It deals with the uncomfortable concepts of Scripture as well as the popular ones. (Gal. 4:16)
9. It opposes the stranglehold of tradition and corrects it with the authority of God. (Mark 2:22)
10. It discovers in Scripture the timeless principles of life and identifies their expression in modern culture. (1 Cor. 9:9-10)
11. It confronts the paradoxes of revelation without seeking to remove all mystery. (Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 9:19-20)
12. It unfolds the meaning of our humanity and clarifies the way it functions. (Psa. 139)
13. It unfolds the majesty and mercy of God in terms of His own self-disclosure. (Rom. 11:33-36)

14. It arouses in its hearers a sense of worship, grounded in the Spirit and truth. (1 Tim. 6:14-16)
15. It enables each hearer to feel that he has heard the voice of God speaking personally to his heart and conscience. (Jer. 15:16)
16. It motivates hearers to think and live Christianly in the modern world. (Isa. 55:10-11)

### **DEFINING KEY TERMS**

As one considers the discipline of Christian preaching, certain key terms need to be defined. The following terms are important for the student of preaching.

1. **HOMILETICS** - Homiletics is the science of sermon construction. It is the systematic setting forth of the body of laws and principles on which the art must rest (Lloyd Perry as cited by Hamilton, 1992, 19).

Jerry Vines says, "Homiletics is the art and science of saying the same thing that the text of Scripture says. Homiletics is the application of general and specific principles of Bible interpretation that are necessary to understand the Bible text."

2. **PREACHING** - Preaching is the proclamation of God's message by a chosen personality to meet the needs of humanity (Broadus, 1979, 3.) It is the total task of preparing and delivering sermons (Hamilton, 1992, 19.)
3. **MAIN IDEA (Main Theme of the Text - MTT)** - A single sentence which expresses the central truth of the Biblical text. It is comprised of a subject and complement.
4. **SERMON IDEA (Main Theme of the Sermon - MTS)** - It is the statement of the central idea of the sermon in the most exact, concise, and memorable statement possible. It is derived from the Biblical text but stated so that it is meaningful to the audience. Like the main idea, it has a subject and a complement.
5. **SUBJECT** - The complete, definite answer to the question, "What am I talking about?" (Robinson, 1980, 45.)
6. **COMPLEMENT** - The answer to the question, "What exactly am I saying about what I am talking about?" (Robinson, 1980, 45)

7. **TEXT** - Any passage taken from the Scriptures. The text serves as the source for the sermon.
8. **INDUCTIVE SERMON STRUCTURE** - The sermon develops by moving from the particulars or specific instances to the general truth. The sermon idea is not introduced until the conclusion.
9. **DEDUCTIVE SERMON STRUCTURE** -The sermon develops by moving from the general truth to the particulars. The sermon idea is generally introduced in the early stages of the sermon.
10. **SERMON DESIGN** - Sermon design is the selection and arrangement of the materials to be presented in the sermon (McDill, 1994, 159)
11. **EXEGESIS** - Exegesis is the procedure one follows for drawing out and discovering the intended meaning of a Bible passage. Eisegesis, which is reading into the text what the interpreter would like it to say, must be avoided.
12. **HERMENEUTICS** - Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpreting what a passage of Scripture means.

### **KINDS OF SERMONS**

A sermon is the product of the processes of homiletics, exegesis, and hermeneutics.

1. **TOPICAL SERMON** - The topical sermon is built around some particular subject or idea, which may be taken from the Bible or outside of the Bible.
  - \* Usually the preacher gathers what the Bible teaches about the particular subject, organizes the passages into a logical presentation, and delivers a topical sermon.
  - \* Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. says the preacher should preach a topical sermon only once every five years, and then immediately repent and ask for God's forgiveness!
2. **TEXTUAL SERMON** - The textual sermon is based on one or two verses of the Bible, which provide the main theme and major divisions of the sermon. (However, the preacher may use the text only as a starting point to express an idea he is fond of or as a peg on which to hang something he wishes to say.)
3. **ETHICAL DISCOURSE** - The ethical discourse is taken from a specific Bible passage that directs an ethical message to the believer. The purpose is to build morality in the congregation.

4. **ALLEGORICAL SERMON** - The allegorical sermon takes certain Bible narratives and gives them a symbolic, representative (allegorical) meaning.
5. **BIOGRAPHICAL SERMON** - The biographical sermon presents a study of the life of a particular Bible character. Facts about the person form the basis of the message that has a modern application.
6. **DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE** - The dramatic monologue is a sermon where the preacher becomes the character he is seeking to present.

### **DEFINITIONS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING**

Expository preaching is unfortunately much discussed but badly misunderstood. Many who claim to be expositors neither do it nor understand what it is. The reality of this claim is supported by the multitude of definitions in the marketplace of homiletical discourse. Note that a survey of practitioners of preaching yields twenty-five-plus definitions of expository preaching. There is a common theme and there are common elements that run throughout most of these definitions. Other definitions, however, demonstrate that what some identify as expository preaching is nothing of the sort.

### **DEFINITIONS**

“Expository preaching is that method of proclaiming the Scriptures that takes as a minimum one paragraph of Biblical text (in prose narrative or its equivalent in other literary genre) and derives from that text both the shape (i.e., the main points and subpoints of the sermon) and the content (i.e., the substance, ideas, and principles) of the message itself.”

- Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Crisis in Expository Preaching Today,” *Preaching II* (1995-1996): 4.

“An expository discourse may be defined as one which is occupied mainly, or at any rate very largely, with the exposition of Scripture. It by no means excludes argument and exhortation as to the doctrines or lessons which this exposition develops. It may be devoted to a long passage, or to a very short one, even part of a sentence. It may be one of a series, or may stand by itself. We at once perceive that there is no broad line of distinction between expository preaching and common methods, but that one may pass almost insensible gradations from textual to expository sermons.”

- John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 7th ed. (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1891), 303.

“Expository preaching is the consecutive treatment of some book or extended portion of Scripture on which the preacher has concentrated head and heart, brain and brawn, over which he has thought and wept and prayed, until it has yielded up its inner secret, and the spirit of it has passed into his spirit.”

- F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching Plans and Methods* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1912), 29.

[The expository sermon derives] "its main points or the leading subhead under each main point from the particular paragraph or chapter or book of the Bible with which it deals."

- Charles W. Koller, *Expository Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 21.

“The expository sermon secures its major and first subpoints primarily from the text.”

- H. C. Brown, Jr., H. Gordon Clinard, and Jess J. Northcutt, *Steps to the Sermon: A Plan for Sermon Preparation* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 54.

“An expository sermon is generally based upon a passage or unit of Scripture, and the theme with its divisions and development come from that passage.”

- Nolan Howington, “Expository Preaching,” *Review and Expositor* 56 (January 1959): 58.

“An expository sermon is based on a Bible passage, usually longer than a verse or two; the theme, the thesis and the major and minor divisions coming from the passage; the whole sermon being an honest attempt to unfold the true grammatical-historical--contextual meaning of the passage, making it relevant to life today by proper organization, argument, illustrations, application, and appeal.”

- Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1967), vi-vii.

Expository preaching is “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”

- Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 19.

“Biblical preaching occurs when listeners are enabled to see how their world, like the biblical world, is addressed by the word of God and are enabled to respond to the word.”

- William D. Thompson, *Preaching Biblically: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 9-10.

“Preaching is biblical when a) the Bible governs the content of the sermon and when b) the function of the sermon is analogous to the text.”

- Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 26.

“A sermon is biblical when the original meaning of the text intersects with the contemporary meaning of the text, when what the text meant becomes what the text means, when the `now' of the text coincides with the `then.' Assigning a length of text and a manner of treatment in order to label the sermon biblical or expository is a homiletical myth.”

- Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 29.

“Expository preaching is the art of preaching a series of sermons, either consecutive or selective, from a Bible book.”

- Bryson, 39.

“Expository preaching is an act wherein the living truth of some portion of Holy Scripture, understood in the light of solid exegetical and historical study, and made a living reality to the preacher by the Holy Spirit, comes alive to the hearer as he is confronted by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in judgment and redemption.”

- Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 26.

“The expository sermon is an effort to explain, illustrate, and apply the Scripture to life .... Its purpose is to help the hearers to find in the sacred writings the true interpretation of life.”

- Harold E. Knott, *How to Prepare an Expository Sermon* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1930), 11.

“In a sermon the theme or the doctrine is something that arises out of the text and its context, it is something which is illustrated by the text and context.”

- D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 72.

The best way to preach is the “grammatical-historical way, the expository method. It is proclaiming the message as it is in the Holy Scriptures.”

- W. A. Criswell, *Why I Preach That The Bible is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 197.

Expository preaching is “the method of selecting a large portion (a paragraph or more) of the Bible and expounding its meaning and applying the message before the people.”

- W. A. Criswell, *Criswell's Guidebook For Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1980), 42.

“The first and foundational criterion is that sermons must be biblical, that is, they must pass on the meaning and intent of Scripture. A second criterion, implied in the first, is that sermons must be God-centered (or Christ-centered) rather than human centered. If the Bible can indeed be characterized as God's self-revelation, then any biblical sermon will have to manifest that same quality by being God-centered and not human-centered. A third criterion is that sermons must be good news. If one of the main New Testament words for preaching is ‘to announce good news’ (*euangelizomai*), and if one may characterize as ‘good news’ not only the Gospels but the entire Bible, then our sermons ought also to measure up to this standard so that they are indeed *good news*.”

- Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 15.

“The discourse [sermon] should spring out of the text as a rule, and the more evidently it does so the better.... A sermon, moreover, comes with far greater power to the consciences of the hearers when it is plainly the very word of God - not a lecture about the Scripture, but Scripture itself opened up and enforced.”

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), 72-73.

“The expository sermon is a sermon which faithfully brings a message out of Scripture and makes that message accessible to contemporary hearers.... The great strength of expository preaching is that it reinforces the authority and centrality of Scripture in the life of the church. It is a homiletical method that teaches Scripture and enhances the knowledge and understanding of the Bible for both preacher and congregation. More than any other genre of preaching, expository preaching honors the desire of the hearer to understand and claim the meaning of the Scriptures for life in today's world.”

- *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 1st ed., s.v. "Expository Preaching," by John S. McClure, 134.

Advantages of expository preaching:

- 1) [Expository preaching] saves the preacher from getting into ruts.
- 2) Continuous exposition compels the preacher to handle big themes.
- 3) The expositor will be led to handle subjects which would not otherwise occur to him.
- 4) Continuous exposition ... creates a well instructed congregation.
- 5) It gives immense force to the ministry that is based upon [the Word of God].

- F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching. Plans and Methods* (New York: Hodden & Stoughton, 1910), 49-58.

“Expository preaching is the explanation, illustration and application of a passage of Scripture deriving its *central theme* and *main points* from the passage itself with the truths applied to the lives of the hearers.”

- James Merritt

“Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching which takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible. All other issues and concerns are subordinated to the central task of presenting the biblical text. As the Word of God, the text of Scripture has the right to establish both the substance and the structure of the sermon. Genuine exposition takes place when the preacher sets forth the meaning and message of the biblical text, and makes clear how the Word of God establishes the identity and worldview of the Church as the people of God.”

- R. Albert Mohler, Jr., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God’s Word with due regard to the historical, contextual, grammatical, and doctrinal significance of the given passage, with the specific object of invoking a Christ-transforming response.”

- Stephen F. Olford with David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Broadman & Holman, 1998), 69.

“Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness.”

- Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture* (Baker, 1995).

“Christian Preaching is the event of God, Himself, bringing to an audience a Bible based, Christ related, life impacting message of instruction and direction through the words of a spokesman.”

-J. I. Packer

“Expository preaching is preaching that enables people to read the Bible better and with greater understanding for themselves.”

-Paige Patterson

“Expository preaching is ‘text-driven’ preaching that honors the truth of Scripture as it was given by the Holy Spirit. Discovering the God-inspired meaning through historical-grammatical-theological investigation and interpretation, the preacher explains, illustrates, and applies that meaning to his audience in submission to and in the power of the Holy Spirit, preaching for a verdict of changed lives.”

- Daniel L. Akin, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

## **WHY EXPOSITION?**

*“The Bible is what God has made;  
sermons are what we make with what God has made.”*

- Ramesh Richard

**THE NEED FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING** is greater today than perhaps ever before because:

1. Some preachers do not believe that the Bible is what God has made.
2. Other preachers believe that sermons may be made without the Bible (e.g. David Buttrick of Vanderbilt.)
3. Other preachers do not believe that preachers must prepare for a sermon.
4. There are preachers who ignore preaching as the central thrust of their ministry.

## **WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING?**

1. **Expository preaching will impact your life.** It can help you...
  - a. grow personally in knowledge and obedience by your disciplined exposure to God's Word.
  - b. conserve time and energy in choosing a sermon for each week.
  - c. balance your area of "expertise and preferred topics with the breadth of God's thoughts in the Bible.
2. **Expository preaching will impact your congregation** because it helps you...
  - a. be faithful to the text and be relevant to your context in regular ministry.
  - b. implement a strategy for equipping and energizing your people for long-term faithfulness to God and the ministry.
  - c. overcome your tendency to target a sermon to a particular person or group and be protected from that charge.

- d. avoid skipping over what does not suit your taste or temperament on any given day.
- e. carry on a cohesive ministry in the middle of multiple dimensions and demands on you as a pastor.
- f. enhance the dignity of the pastoral work since you stand under the authority of God's Word as you preach.
- g. integrate the conversation of the church around the message of the week.
- h. communicate the intentions of God for your congregation as seen by its human leaders.
- i. orient people around a common vision thus helping you surface the voluntary labor force needed to achieve the vision.
- j. motivate people to action in implementing the program of the church with God's sanction.
- k. garner the credibility needed to lead the church to change.
- l. model effective ministry to present and future teachers and preachers.
- m. outline the agenda for corporate spirituality.
- n. make your congregation Biblically literate.

(Ramesh Richard)

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

*“It is no secret that Christ's Church is not at all in good health in many places of the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, “junk food;” all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes have been served up to her. As a result, theological and Biblical malnutrition has afflicted the very generation that has taken such giant steps to make sure its physical health is not damaged by using foods or products that are carcinogenic or otherwise harmful to their bodies. Simultaneously, a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publication of the Word of God continues to run wild and almost unabated in most quarters of the Church.”*

(Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 7-8. Kaiser's diagnosis is both accurate and troubling. Evangelicals and Baptists suffer today for lack of faithful, systematic instruction from the Word of God. What is the solution?

We must, as Stanley Hauerwas has written,

*“...stand under the Word because we know we are told what we otherwise could not know. We stand under the Word because we know we need to be told what to do. We stand under the Word because we do not believe we have minds worth making up on our own”*

(*First Things*, May 1995, p. 481.)

Kent Hughes says it even more pointedly:

*“The preaching enterprise is a grand event when we are refreshed to its essentials.”*

- **WORD.** *God's Word is a mighty, life-giving blade. It steels the soul, it penetrates the heart; it cuts; it heals. And those who preach are to be master swordsmen who correctly handle the Word of Truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)*
- **SPIRIT.** *The mighty sword is to be wielded in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to seek it. We are to long for it. We are to pray for it so that our preaching is “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.” (1 Cor. 2:4)*
- **JESUS.** *Both Word and Spirit are to coalesce in one great task - the exaltation of Jesus Christ: To "Get Him up! "*
- **HEARERS.** *But the preacher must have hearers – ‘He who has ears, let him hear.’ (Matt. 13:9)*  
*When a church sits under the authority of God's Word preached in the power of the Spirit and lives it out in substantive glory to Christ, the only explanation becomes that God is real. Thus, people with entirely different worldviews - subjectivists, anti-rationalists - can be ineluctably drawn to the gospel. God's Word, preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, is invasive. There is no heart beyond its hurt; there is no heart beyond its grace.”*  
*(“Preaching God's Word to the Church Today” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 101-102.)*

***“What will preaching be in postmodernity? I have hunches (in postmodernity, final statements of fact are suspect) it will be preaching which is less troubled over submitting itself to the now discredited canons of modernity (reason, objectivity, universality, scientism historicism and the others) and more open to the claims which originated in a time other than our own among a people other than ourselves (that is, Scripture).”***

--William Willimon, quoted in *Context* (July 15, 1998): 3.