THE INFLUENCES OF THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM AND POSTMODERNISM ON CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL PREACHING, WITH A PROPOSAL FOR ITS CORRECTION BY THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A LECTIO CONTINUA, REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO SERMON PREPARATION AND DELIVERY

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To my wife Mollie,
without whose patience and encouragement this project would not have been possible,
and whose faithful companionship and Christ-like love has deeply blessed and enriched
my life.
“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.

— Amos 8:11 (ESV)
GLOSSARY

**Biblical Theology**: The term biblical theology, as used in this project, does not refer to the systematic study of Christian doctrine, or the emphasis on *orthodox* belief over against *unorthodox* belief, or to the study of particular theological emphases of certain books or authors of the Bible. Rather, biblical theology “is a technical term that refers to a particular way of doing theology” and most importantly, to a particular way of understanding the progress of God’s revelation in the Bible.

Geerhardus Vos, considered the father of modern biblical theology, defines this field of study further as “that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.”¹ “This involves the quest for a big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation,”² and the recognition that the Bible is “one unified word from God”³ that provides humanity with an explanation of the history of redemption and the calling of one elect people of God to Himself throughout history by the one way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Biblical theology, therefore, focuses one’s attention upon the importance of understanding this “big picture” or metanarrative of the Bible that is rooted in salvation history and the ultimate consummation of that history in the Lord’s return.⁴

**Christocentric, Christ-Centered, Gospel-Centered**: The terms Christocentric, Christ-centered, or gospel-centered, as used in this project, refer to an interpretive approach to the Bible that is closely related to the field of biblical theology defined above, and should not be confused with evangelistic preaching, although that could be a part of a Christ-centered approach at times.

A Christocentric approach to the Bible sees the gospel as “the hermeneutical key” to the Scriptures. This Christocentric hermeneutic further acknowledges that the “proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the person and work of Jesus” and to recognize that “no part [of the Bible] can be rightly understood without reference to him.”⁵ This interpretive


³ Ibid., 16.

⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵ Ibid., 84-85.
approach is an essential element in redemptive-historical preaching, without which Christ-centered, expository preaching could not occur.

**Conservative Evangelical:** The term conservative evangelical, as used in this project, refers to those within American Christendom typically considered more theologically conservative and orthodox in belief and practice than those within mainline Protestant denominations. Conservative evangelicals also tend to emphasize certain distinct beliefs, such as a high view of Scripture and an emphasis upon personal conversion by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, over and above social needs. Conservative evangelicalism, as defined for this project, would not include Roman Catholicism, the Greek or Eastern Orthodox, or any mainline Protestant denominations. 6

**Doctrines of Grace:** The term doctrines of grace, as used in this project, refers in one sense to the theological system commonly known as the Five Points of Calvinism, and often abbreviated by use of the acronym TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints). 7 However, as convenient as it may be to reduce the doctrines of grace to five identifying theological terms, these doctrines “testify to a far richer, deeper, and all-embracing faith in the God of the covenant” 8 that cannot be fully explained in only five points. 9 Therefore, the doctrines of grace refer in a far

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6 Mainline Protestant denominations would include those denominations that are generally more theologically liberal or non-committal on numerous doctrinal issues central to the Christian faith, and are often members of or in association with the National Council of Churches and/or World Council of Churches. Mainline Protestant denominations also tend to embrace the conclusions of biblical higher criticism, are usually supportive of the social gospel, and tend to be more sympathetic toward politically liberal social movements. Examples of mainline Protestant denominations include, but are not limited to the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Moravian Church, and numerous, smaller Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal groups. This explanation provides a broad and generalized description of these groups, with obvious exceptions present to varying degrees in specific churches or denominations. These denominations, however, are typically aligned with the above characteristics, and therefore, are excluded from consideration in this project due to the fact that the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery as addressed in this project would tend to be viewed by most within these groups as positive. Such groups would therefore, not be particularly concerned with eliminating these influences or interested in developing a more theologically conservative approach to sermon preparation and delivery, especially the *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach advocated in this project.

7 A more biblically accurate designation for the Five Points of Calvinism is to identify them in a slightly different manner than is done by the typical TULIP designation by using the terms *total inability*, *unconditional election*, *particular redemption*, *effectual calling*, and *perseverance of the saints*.


9 A full explanation and listing of Scriptural support for the Five Points of Calvinism goes beyond the scope of this project to address. For a list of Scriptural support for each of the Five Points of Calvinism, see Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and
greater sense to the entire scope of God’s redemptive plan in Jesus Christ, and the history of God’s calling of one elect people to Himself, through Jesus Christ, as emphasized within the field of study known as biblical theology. Thus, the doctrines of grace in their totality, serve as a strong foundation for redemptive-historical or Christ-centered preaching.

**Exegesis:** The term exegesis, as used in this project, refers to the process by which one discovers the meaning of a passage of Scripture by use of a specific interpretive system. This process involves in part, a translation of the passage, and an examination of the grammatical, historical, literary, cultural, and biblical-theological context of the passage on both a micro and macro level.

**Exposition:** The term exposition, as used in this project, refers to the uniting of application and exegesis in sermon preparation. This union of application and exegesis involves taking the meaning of a passage of Scripture discovered through exegesis and explaining both the timeless and contemporary significance of that meaning.

**Expository Preaching:** The term expository preaching, as used in the project, refers in a general sense to an explanation of the Word of God, to the people of God, in a setting of public, congregational worship. More specifically, expository preaching consists of a proclamation or “message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.” In other words, “expository preaching has a simple goal: to say what God says.”

Expository preaching stands in contrast to other forms of communication about the Bible, identified in this project as *Bible talks* or *lectures*. As defined for this project, a *Bible talk* is a presentation of biblical applications, biblical topics, or biblical themes, but apart from the exegesis of a specific biblical passage that clearly teaches the applications, topics, or themes presented. A *lecture*, on the other hand...

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other hand, does just the opposite, and presents only the information gleaned from the exegesis of a passage, but without application, and without drawing attention to the broader redemptive context of that passage within the overarching storyline of Scripture.

**Grammatical-Historical Method:** The term grammatical-historical method, as used in this project, refers to an approach to biblical interpretation commonly practiced among conservative evangelicals as a means of determining the meaning of Scripture. The grammatical-historical method gives considerable attention in the interpretive process to understanding the grammatical, historical, literary, and cultural context of a passage of Scripture, with the goal of determining the original authorial intent of that passage to the original recipients. Thus, the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation bears close relationship to exegesis. However, differences exist among conservative evangelicals about the proper use of the grammatical-historical method. These differences are usually concerned with several issues. Among these is the role of *antecedent* and *subsequent* Scripture in the interpretive process, the relationship of the New Testament to the Old Testament and an understanding of the New Testament’s use of the Old, the nature of promise and fulfillment, and the tension between divine intent and authorial intent in Scripture. 13 More detailed descriptions of some of the different uses of the grammatical-historical method can be given, but the following represents a brief description of some variations of this approach to biblical interpretation that exist among conservative evangelicals.

(1) Dispensational Use of the Grammatical-Historical Method: Most dispensationalists define the grammatical-historical method as an approach to biblical interpretation that is “literal interpretation” “that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage.” 14 “The principle might also be called normal interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated plain interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech, [emphasis in original].” 15 The dispensational use of the grammatical-historical method also places the original authorial intent of a passage of Scripture as “the final judge over everything else that is considered [emphasis added]” 16 and tends to emphasize the meaning of the immediate context of a passage over broader contextual considerations. 17 The dispensational use of the grammatical-historical method also places emphasis on the literal

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13 Further treatment of the issues mentioned here occurs throughout this project.


15 Ibid.


17 Ibid., 78.
fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and thus eschews typological interpretations of the Old Testament, and tends to place priority on the Old Testament as a reference point for understanding the whole of Scripture.

(2) The Progressive-Dispensational Use of the Grammatical-Historical Method: Most progressive-dispensationalists define the grammatical-historical method in much the same way as dispensationalists. However, progressive-dispensationalists differ, in that while still recognizing the importance of determining the original authorial intent of a passage also recognize, “the dimensions that dual authorship brings to the gradual unfolding of promise.” This means that a passage of Scripture may have an additional meaning progressively revealed over time that the human author of a particular portion of Scripture might not have fully known, and that receives partial fulfillment during the church age due to this progressively unfolding meaning. “According to this approach, the New Testament does introduce change and advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation.” Thus, the progressive-dispensational use of the grammatical-historical method involves a “complementary” hermeneutic that sees the New Testament as functioning in equal relation to the Old, rather than giving priority to the Old, as is done in the dispensational use of the grammatical-historical method. While also shying away from typological understandings of the Old Testament, the progressive-dispensationalist does see where there are additional spiritual realities connected to certain Old Testament prophecies that traditional dispensationalists see as finding fulfillment in only a literal manner. For example, most dispensationalists read texts referring to the reestablishment of Israel in such a way that allows for an application of those texts only in a literal millennial kingdom, whereas a progressive-dispensationalist might see from these same texts certain spiritual realities present in the church now that will have their full literal realization in the millennial kingdom. Thus, the progressive-dispensational use of the grammatical-historical method retains a belief in the original authorial intent of a passage, while also making “new, sometimes fresh, additional connections” not often done by traditional dispensationalist.

(3) The Covenantal Use of the Grammatical-Historical Method: The covenantal or redemptive-historical definition of the grammatical-historical method is much in keeping with the dispensational and progressive-dispensational definitions, and all of the same attention is given to the grammatical, historical,
literary, and cultural context of a passage of Scripture with the goal of determining the original authorial intent of that passage. The major difference between the covenantal understanding of the grammatical-historical method and other definitions comes primarily in the way one views the relationship between the Old and the New Testament and how to apply the principles of the grammatical-historical method to the Old Testament in light of New Testament revelation. According to the covenantal understanding, the redemptive work of Christ proclaimed in the New Testament is the guiding hermeneutical norm for understanding the Old Testament. As a result, the fuller divine intent of a passage of Scripture takes precedence, thus allowing the redemptive-activity of the triune Godhead to be the final judge of interpretation. From this perspective, one can see that “the redemptive events narrated in the Old Testament had a symbolic depth.” Therefore, in applying the principles of the grammatical-historical method one can “affirm the historical veracity of biblical historical narrative and at the same time confess that those real historical events were invested by God with symbolic significance, [emphasis in original].” As a result, the grammatical-historical method can legitimately embrace a “typological presentation of the gospel inherent in the Old Testament Scriptures” and conclude further that these “types are not empty shells in the Old Testament; they are rather the ordained means by which God communicated the gospel of Jesus Christ to the saints in the Old Testament.” Thus, a covenantal or redemptive historical use of the grammatical-historical method is

24 See, for example, Bryan Chapell’s definition of the grammatical-historical method, which agrees with the definition provided here and comes from one who holds to a covenantal or redemptive-historical understanding of Scripture; Bryan Chapell, Christ Centered Preaching, 76-77


26 Dennis E. Johnson, Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2007), 137.

27 Ibid., 137.


29 Tipton provides further details on the statement that “God communicated the gospel of Jesus Christ to the saints in the Old Testament” by explaining this as a spiritual communication whereby the Holy Spirit applies, “Christ’s true spiritual presence in the promises, types, and sacrifices” to the faith of the elect in the Old Testament. This is a concept known otherwise as redemptive intrusion. For further explanation of these concept see Lane G. Tipton, “The Gospel and Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutics,” 186-200.

30 Ibid., 195.
grammatical-historical and Christ-centered, and thus strives always “to discern how a text’s ideas function in the wider biblical message”31 while at the same time remaining true to the immediate contextual meaning of any given passage of Scripture.

**Hermeneutics:** The term hermeneutics, as used in this project, refers to the art and science of biblical interpretation, as commonly defined in conservative, evangelical circles.32 “It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation.”33 To state it differently, hermeneutics is the use of specific interpretive and intuitive biblical-theological principles to determine the meaning of passages of Scripture, in ways governed by the unique characteristics of the literary genres of Scripture and the place of a passage of Scripture within the redemptive-historical storyline of the Bible.

**Homiletics:** The term homiletics, as used in this project, refers to the development and delivery of an expository sermon, based upon the information gathered during the exegesis and exposition of a preaching text, which includes the construction of a sermon outline and sermon manuscript, or sermon brief. This homiletic development also involves the selection of appropriate illustrations, and other decisions, such as how and when to read the preaching text during the sermon, to what extent electronic media, or other visual aids will be used during the sermon, and consideration of speaking volume, delivery style, gestures, and other general aspects of pulpit decorum.

**Lectio Continua:** The term *lectio continua*, as used in this project, refers to a method of expository preaching that emphasizes preaching done consecutively, although not necessarily chronologically, through the Scriptures, book-by-book. *Lectio continua* preaching ensures that each sermon is kept within both its canonical context as well as the context of the passage or book of the preaching text.

**Metanarrative:** The term metanarrative, as used in this project, refers in a broad sense to “the all-encompassing principle which explains the whole of reality”34 and the purpose for existence. In reference to the Bible in particular, metanarrative refers

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to the “big picture” or overarching storyline of the Bible that is rooted in salvation history, and provides meaning to all else found in Scripture, as emphasized within the field of study known as biblical theology.

**Postmodern, Postmodernism:** The term postmodern or postmodernism, as used in this project, refers to “a new cultural movement…which extends certain principles and symbols central to the modern age, even as it denies others.”

Some of the common characteristics of this movement include a rejection of absolute truth, the denial of a method for determining truth, and an insistence upon deconstructing all truth claims in an effort to reduce such claims to mere social constructs.

Such beliefs about the nature of truth and truth claims have led advocates of postmodernism to reject “all grand and expansive accounts of truth, meaning, and existence” or “metanarratives.”

It is this rejection of metanarratives, or the denial of an overarching purpose of existence or universal principles of truth, that has formed the hallmark of postmodernism.

**Redemptive-Historical:** The term redemptive-historical, as used in this project refers to a method of sermon preparation and delivery that emphasizes the preaching of Christ from all the Scriptures. This manner of preaching endeavors to faithfully proclaim the meaning of each passage of Scripture within its immediate context, while also understanding that the full context of any passage of Scripture is Christ and God’s plan of redemption through Christ, as emphasized by the principles of Christocentric hermeneutics. Redemptive-historical preaching also “assumes that the Scriptures are not a collection of timeless principles in abstract but rather a coherent record of progressive revelation that tells the story of God redeeming a people for Himself through the person and work of Christ, His Son.”

**Sensus Plenior:** The term sensus plenior, as used in this project, refers to an understanding of biblical inspiration and interpretation that recognizes that while the human authors of the Old Testament knew much about the meaning of what God revealed to them, the full ramifications of what were given them was sometimes hidden from their view. These ramifications involve a divine meaning that transcends or expands upon the original authorial intent of the message, as made clear in later biblical revelation. The sensus plenior approach, therefore, is consistent with a view of biblical inspiration that recognizes both the human and

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36 Ibid., 117.

37 Ibid., 118.

divine origins of the Scriptural text. This approach, however, gives deference to the “the activity of the Bible’s divine Author, who knows exhaustively (even though the human author of a particular Old Testament text may not) how particular prophetic words or ancient typological-prophetic events will eventually fit into the larger pattern of the plan of redemption which culminates in Christ.”  

**Theological Liberalism:** The term theological liberalism, as used in this project, refers to “a way of understanding Christianity as essentially consisting of a particular moral framework, and of understanding Christ as essentially a great moral teacher.”  

In turn, theological liberalism has tended to downplay or ignore altogether the redemptive nature of Christianity and the overarching redemptive themes of Scripture in favor of a system of ethical teachings. This system is one *based upon the Bible*, and thus designed to help people live a better, more morally upstanding life, but fails to direct peoples’ attention to the *goal of the Bible*: the ‘glory of God’ as revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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41 The word ‘glory’ is an Anglicized form of the Latin word *gloria*, meaning fame, or renown, and is itself a translation of the Hebrew word *kabod* and the Greek word *doxa*. The Hebrew word *kabod* originally meant weight or heaviness. The Old Testament uses it in reference to God as a way to describe the presence of God. The Old Testament also uses it to emphasize the importance of God and to point out the honor, loyalty, and praise that belongs to God, and that God Himself expects to receive from His creatures, due to the impression made on them by virtue of God’s character and attributes. The word *doxa* conveys a similar meaning, originally used in reference to a judgment or opinion. The New Testament uses it with the meaning of a good reputation or honor, particularly in reference to God. Therefore, one should understand the phrases ‘glory of God,’ ‘glorify God,’ or ‘bring glory to God’ as used throughout this project in reference to the obligation that all people have as creations of God to reflect back to God and to others, in their thoughts, words, and deeds, the character and moral attributes of God. One achieves this in greatest measure through the exaltation and praise of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and by recognition of the central role that Christ’s person and work occupies in all of Scripture. Therefore, one should understand the phrases ‘glory of God,’ ‘glorify God,’ or ‘bring glory to God’ as used in this project in reference to the honor and exaltation due to Jesus Christ, who in His life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and reign fully reflects the nature and attributes of God.

ABSTRACT

This project examines the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons by pastors within conservative evangelical churches in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America. This examination demonstrates that a large portion of the pastoral preaching that takes place within these contexts is influenced methodologically by postmodern thought and liberal theology, due to the cultural and philosophical imprint of these movements on American society. These influences are observable through an analysis of the methods of sermon preparation used by conservative evangelicals. Such methods in turn influence the homiletic structure of sermons, the manner in which pastors make use of the text of Scripture during the sermon, and the way in which they apply the text of Scripture in light of the overall redemptive theme of Scripture. In response to these findings, this project will offer as a necessary corrective to this problem a proposal for the implementation of a lectio continuva, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery.
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INTRODUCTION

Research Purpose

The purpose of this project is to examine the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons by pastors within conservative evangelical churches in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America. An investigation such as this will demonstrate that much of the pastoral preaching that takes place within these contexts bears the methodological influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism. This reality is observable through an analysis of common, contemporary methods of sermon preparation and delivery. This serves to highlight the dangers associated with such methods and points out the subtle undermining of biblical, pastoral preaching that has taken place in many American churches in recent years as a result.

In response to the findings mentioned above, this project offers as a necessary corrective to the wedding of postmodern thought and liberal theology that has taken place within the pastoral preaching of conservative evangelical churches, a proposal for the implementation of a *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to expository sermon preparation and delivery.
Research Problem

An undermining of a biblical model of preaching is a continual problem faced in the American church due to the cultural and philosophical influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on sermon preparation and delivery. The problem that surfaces, therefore, more than the mere recognition of the presence of a postmodern and theologically liberal paradigm of pastoral preaching methods, is how to correct this malady of the American pulpit. This is necessary in order to bring about a renewed focus on biblical, expository, redemptive-historical preaching, and thus bring about greater spiritual growth and vitality, and love for Christ and obedience to His Word. Therefore, the research question that this project will seek to answer is, “Given the methodological influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons by pastors within conservative evangelical churches in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America, what approach to sermon preparation and delivery can correct this problem?”

Research Significance

The significance of this research project is manifold, for it touches upon issues that are applicable to the American church as a whole and to individual pastors on a variety of issues. In particular, the significance of this study comes from the fact that it proposes a methodology for the preparation and delivery of sermons designed to provide the most spiritual benefit to listeners, and to produce the greatest possible glory to God through a pattern of biblical, pastoral preaching employed in the manner suggested in this
research project. The significance of this study also comes from the challenge that it will present to those who regularly preach the Word of God in a congregational setting.

This challenge consists primarily in a call to return to biblical, expository, redemptive-historical, pastoral preaching, while at the same time recognizing what has transpired in the life of the American church that has so greatly hindered the faithful execution of this call. However, this is not the first such call to biblical preaching voiced from within the American church, nor perhaps, will it be the last. Merrill Unger, writing more than half a century ago issued a similar call when he observed that:

To an alarming extent the glory is departing from the pulpit of the twentieth century. The basic reason for this ominous condition is obvious. That which imparts the glory has been taken away from the center of so much of our modern preaching and placed on the periphery. The Word of God has been denied the throne and given a subordinate place. Human eloquence, men’s philosophies, Christian ethics, social betterment, cultural progress and many other subjects good and proper in their place have captured the center of interest and have been enthroned in the average pulpit in the place of the Word of God. 43

The challenge this project presents, therefore, is twofold. First, it is a challenge for pastors to examine their own practice of sermon preparation and delivery in an effort to discern what, if any of the negative influences discussed in this project may be present in their pulpit ministry. Secondly, it is a challenge to preachers to abandon any such negatively influenced practices in favor of a more biblical approach.

In light of the important contributions that a study such as this is able to offer, it is necessary to provide an answer to the previously stated research question. This project has several goals that an answer to the research question posed by this project seeks to accomplish. These goals are both ministerial, and professional and academic.

Ministry Goals

First, it is necessary to provide an answer to the research question for this project because the pulpit occupies one of the most public components of the worship of the church and in turn exerts some of the greatest influences on those within the church. Therefore, it is important on the larger scale of Christian thought and practice for believers today to be aware of the subtle influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism, especially in the realm of pastoral preaching. It is also needful for the church to be equipped with the skills necessary to discern such influences, as well as the knowledge to provide suggestions for the correction of the problems that arise from such influences, as well as the ability to work toward the dissolution of these influences.

It is also necessary to inform the church about the increasing dangers that such influences pose to the spiritual health and vitality of the church in order that the church can have at its disposal, solid biblical and historical justification for such concerns. Such information is also important in order to allow the church to defend against those who might seek to downplay the significance of these concerns. It is also necessary for the church to be aware of such influences in order that they might be on guard against allowing these influences to take further hold upon the American pulpit, as has been allowed to occur mostly unchecked within conservative evangelical churches for the last several decades. All of this, in turn, can serve as a helpful spiritual aid for the church and a beneficial guide for believers who desire to learn how to better discern the presence of error, and at the same time grow in a deeper knowledge of the truth and love of Jesus Christ.
Secondly, it is necessary to provide an answer to the research question for this project because it is important for pastors whose desire is to declare accurately and authoritatively the full counsel of God, to be aware of any postmodern or theologically liberal influences that are inadvertently shaping their exegetical and homiletic practices.

Even the most theologically conservative and spiritually conscientious churches can become susceptible to the subtle influences of the thoughts and beliefs of the surrounding culture, and these same cultural forces can at times influence even the most spiritually discerning and astute pastor in seemingly imperceptible ways. When such influences gain sway among a body of believers, the effects are often observable through changing worship patterns and ministry practice. When such influences take hold of a pastor, the effects are often observable through the models of sermon preparation and delivery used, and through the manner in which pastors apply the text of Scripture in light of the redemptive theme of Scripture.

Given the realities stated above, it is important for pastors to examine their pulpit ministries in light of the information presented in this project. This information will serve to inform pastors as to the subtle influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism and provide helpful information about the manner in which such influences exhibit themselves in preaching. This should in turn cause those who recognize such influences in their own pulpit ministries to abandon these practices in favor of the *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to expository sermon preparation and delivery presented in this project. Due to such recognition, and change of course in preaching practice, pastors will be better equipped to serve their congregations, and their congregations will in turn experience greater spiritual growth, knowledge of the
Scriptures, love of Christ, and zeal for proclaiming accurately and authoritatively the Word of Christ in their daily interactions with others.

Third, it is necessary to provide an answer to this project’s research question for the sake of the glory of God, and the exaltation of the name of Christ. In order to accomplish this important goal, however, it requires that a challenge be set forth for American pastors to return to a solidly biblical model of expository preaching. As is argued in this project, the model of sermon preparation and delivery presented in this project best achieves the above goals. This model also serves to convey a message that exalts God, focuses attention on Christ, and encourages believers to look away from themselves and instead fix their attention upon Christ, while learning to trust in the sufficiency of Christ and the power of his Spirit as revealed through the Scriptures.

Professional/Academic Goals

In addition to the significance of this project in accomplishing the above ministerial goals, this project is also significant in respect to certain professional and academic goals that it seeks to achieve. These goals, however, will be secondary to the ministerial goals of this project, and although important areas of consideration, will not constitute the primary goals of the research done for this project.

First, in answering the research question, it is the goal of this project to provide pastors and those in other fields of Christian ministry a greater understanding of the rise and subsequent influence of postmodernism and theological liberalism on American society in general and the church in particular. This goal is important for it provides for a more informed understanding of the present American cultural milieu, which in turn
allows leaders in ministerial and academic fields to be more conversant with the culture, and thus better equipped to influence the culture with the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. This goal also provides for a greater awareness and sensitivity to the ideas and movements that have helped to shape American culture and in turn provides a greater understanding of the proper, biblical relationship between the American church and the American culture.

Secondly, an answer to the research question posed by this project addresses important hermeneutical issues. Many significant interpretive issues have come to the fore throughout the research process for this project. It is partly the goal of this project to follow these matters through to their conclusion in order to come to at least a workable proposal for the proper hermeneutical stance one should take in presenting the truth of God’s Word in public discourse.
CHAPTER I
HISTORY OF THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM AND POSTMODERNISM

Introduction

The first step in discerning the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism in sermon preparation and delivery is to examine the development of postmodern thought and theological liberalism and to provide a brief survey of the history of these movements from their inceptions to the modern day. The following chapter provides such a survey, beginning with a section on theological liberalism, then moving to a section on postmodernism, and finally, concluding with a section that explains the manner in which these two systems have merged and the importance of understanding such movements in relation to sermon preparation and delivery.

A Brief History of Theological Liberalism

Alister McGrath, Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University, states that, “Liberal Protestantism is unquestionably one of the most important movements to have arisen within modern Christian thought.” While liberal Protestantism’s “origins are complex,” according to McGrath, theological liberalism seems to have “arisen in

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response to...the need to relate Christian faith to the human situation.”\(^{45}\) That is to
“interpret it in ways that made sense within the modern worldview” in order to meet the
needs of “modern culture.”\(^{46}\) These needs came about in part from the increasing desire
during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to reconstruct Christianity “in the light of
modern knowledge,” in order to allow Christianity, in the opinion of some, “to remain a
serious intellectual option in the modern world.”\(^{47}\)

One of the most prominent figures in the development of this move toward liberal
Christianity was Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German theologian considered by many as
the founder of modern liberal theology. While a detailed discussion of the beliefs of
Schleiermacher is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note the influence
Schleiermacher’s ideas had on later thought within Christianity.

Schleiermacher emphasized strongly “the role of ‘feeling’ in theology” in such a
way that elevated one’s experience of God to a level of greater importance than doctrinal
truth about God.\(^{48}\) In this sense, Christianity became for Schleiermacher, more about
one’s feelings of dependence upon God. Jesus Christ in turn came to serve, not as a
Savior from sin, but as an example of one who simply had “a greater consciousness of
God than we have” and whose life became divorced from its redemptive purpose and
became “a mere ideal to be imitated.”\(^{49}\)

\(^{45}\) Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 232.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 233.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 232

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 333-34.

In time, this focus within theological liberalism, begun by Schleiermacher, which placed such importance on the human experience of God rather than belief in specific truths about God resulted in numerous changes in traditional Christian belief and traditional manners of biblical interpretation, among those who held this theologically liberal system of thought. However, while this departure from orthodox Christian belief often represents one of the key features of theological liberalism, this is more the result of theological liberalism, rather than its starting point.

Ultimately, theological liberalism stemmed from the belief in humanity’s innate ability to rise above its current situation to make more of itself than current circumstances allow. This belief in such superior human ability, that would fuel theological liberalism, in turn grew out of the theory of evolution advocated most notably by individuals such as Charles Darwin, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Alfred Russell Wallace, among others. As McGrath points out, “liberalism was inspired by the vision of a humanity which was ascending upward into new realms of progress and prosperity. The doctrine of evolution gave new vitality to this belief.”50 As a result, “religion came increasingly to be seen as relating to the spiritual needs of modern humanity, and giving ethical guidance to society.”51 To this T. David Gordon concurs and explains theological liberalism further as “a way of understanding Christianity as essentially consisting of a particular moral framework, and of understanding Christ as essentially a great moral teacher.”52

50 Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 233.
51 Ibid.
This understanding of Jesus Christ would eventually develop into one of the dominant characteristics of theological liberalism, and give rise to what Earle E. Cairns describes as “the ethical message of a humanized Christ.” This would in turn lead to a trivialized view of the atonement that saw Christ’s death as more of an example to the faithful rather than an appeasement of divine wrath against sin, much in keeping with Schleiermacher’s earlier beliefs about Christ.

Because of this moralistic focus within theological liberalism, which emphasized the example of Christ more than His person and work, theological liberalism tended also to downplay the redemptive nature of Christianity and the overarching redemptive theme of Scripture. This move toward a rejection of Scripture’s redemptive theme is observable in the rise of biblical higher criticism.

Since theological liberalism placed strong focus upon the human experience of the divine, many came to see the Scriptures themselves as mere products of this same human experience, and not as the direct revelation of God. As Dennis Johnson points out,

The theological foundation for viewing Scripture as a unified divine revelation, progressively disclosed throughout the drama of redemptive history from promise to fulfillment was undermined. Instead of viewing the Bible as essentially one Book, written through many human authors but unified through the pervasive control of one divine Author, the God of truth, the Scriptures came to be regarded as a collection of diverse human documents that belonged to a unified but evolving religious and historical tradition and trajectory.

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54 Alister E. McGrath, Historical Theology, 236.


56 Dennis E. Johnson, Him We Proclaim, 115.
In time, this purely human, evolutionary view of the Scriptures gave rise to “historical critics [who] attacked the historicity of biblical narratives and the scientific credibility of biblical miracles.”\(^{57}\) This led to a rejection of many central doctrines of the Christian faith and resulted in what Johnson refers to as “disastrous implications for the use of the Bible in theology and preaching in general.”\(^{58}\) This also greatly affected the way in which one viewed the New Testament in light of the Old Testament and undermined the unity of the two testaments in favor of a view that emphasized more their diversity. A further discussion of this and other influences of theologically liberal, higher-critical methods of biblical interpretation occurs in chapter three. It is enough at this point, however, to simply note, that the influence of theological liberalism on Christian beliefs and practice has had a far reaching effect, that continues to be felt within Christendom, and conservative evangelical Christendom in particular, to this day.

A Brief History of Postmodernism

By the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, theological liberalism had developed into a movement characterized by an elevated view of human experience, a rejection of biblical authority, and a humanistic focus on social betterment.\(^{59}\) However, as the twentieth century progressed, theological liberalism faced increasing criticism, which formed the foundation for what would eventually develop into the movement known as postmodernism. This began in part with the recognition of the

\(^{57}\) Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 117.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

“patently unrealistic optimism about humanity’s social evolution” that dominated theological liberalism.60 As Stanley Grenz explains, “in eschewing the Enlightenment myth of inevitable progress, postmodernism replaces the optimism of the last century with a gnawing pessimism.”61

More significant, however, than postmodernism’s pessimistic stance toward societal development, are the questions that arose within postmodernism about the very nature of reality. This began with the development of the literary theory known as deconstructionism.62 According to deconstructionism, “meaning is not inherent in a text itself…but emerges only as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the text.”63 Grenz explains the manner in which postmodern philosophers appropriated this belief when he states that

Postmodern philosophers applied the theories of the literary deconstructionists to the world as a whole. Just as the meaning of a text depends on the reader, so also reality can be ‘read’ differently depending on the perspectives of the knowing selves that encounter it. This means that there is no one meaning of the world, no transcendent center to reality as a whole…Because nothing transcendent inheres in reality, all that emerges in the knowing process is the perspective of the self who interprets reality.64

Due to the deconstructionist approach to reality and its emphasis on “the perspective of the self who interprets reality,” postmodernism took the next step beyond Schleiermacher’s theology of feeling. In the thinking of Schleiermacher and other


62 Ibid., 195

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.
nineteenth and early twentieth century theological liberals, one’s current experience of reality, and particularly one’s experience of faith, is conditioned by the manner in which those in the past experienced faith. In turn, by looking to these experiences in history as a whole, and recognizing areas of shared experience, those in the present are able to understand how best to live a life of faith, and experience reality now.

In postmodern thought, however, all such appeal to history and shared human experience is irrelevant. Since meaning comes only from one’s present encounter with reality, any appeal to history, even a purely humanistic, experience based history, is meaningless. This led advocates of postmodernism to reject what Albert Mohler describes as “all grand and expansive accounts of truth, meaning, and existence,” or “metanarratives.”[^65] A metanarrative, as explained further by Graeme Goldsworthy, is “the all-encompassing principle which explains the whole of reality.”[^66] It is, in fact, this rejection of metanarratives, or the denial of an overarching purpose of existence or universal principles of truth, that has formed the hallmark of postmodernism. In describing the basic characteristics of postmodernism, Millard J. Erickson points out that, “one distinctive feature of postmodernism is the rather clear and universal rejection of metanarratives.”[^67]

Due to the postmodern rejection of metanarratives, postmodernism has also come to reject absolute truth, has denied that there is even a method for determining truth, and has insisted upon deconstructing all truth claims in an effort to reduce such claims to

[^65]: Albert R. Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 118.
mere social constructs. Grenz describes social constructs as “a community based understanding of truth.” In other words, truth is not something “‘out there,” waiting to be discovered and known.” Truth is relative to the communities and societies in which we live. Therefore, in postmodernism there are no absolute truths governed by overarching, universal laws, or divine principles, as Grenz explains, in pointing out that according to postmodernism, “truth is what fits within a specific community; truth consists in the ground rules that facilitates the well-being of the community in which one participates.”

In this way, postmodernism bears some similarity to theological liberalism, in that each movement places emphasis on shared human experience, one within history, the other within current social constructs. Yet, postmodernism also departs significantly from theological liberalism in its pessimistic view of human development and in its denial of history as objective reality. However, in spite of these differences, theological liberalism and postmodernism both share a common malady that Goldsworthy describes as “a revolt against the Lord of history, who has redeemed history through the incarnation and suffering of the Son.”

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68 Albert R. Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 117.


70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

Conclusion

In summarizing the history of theological liberalism and postmodernism, one should be especially careful to note the primary characteristics of each movement. These characteristics contribute significantly to a proper understanding of the influence theological liberalism and postmodernism have had on sermon preparation and delivery. Therefore, it is necessary to conclude this chapter with a recap of the dominant features of these movements

The Dominant Features of Theological Liberalism

One may best describe theological liberalism as “an understanding of Christianity that wished to embrace its ethical system without its redemptive system.” 73 This is perhaps the most important thing to understand about theological liberalism: theological liberalism is concerned first-and-foremost with ethics. While theological liberalism has more often than not, been identified by its denial of many central doctrinal tenets of orthodox Christian belief, such denials are merely the result of theological liberalism and not the sum and substance of it. Therefore, to miss the ethical/moralistic foundation from which these denials of doctrinal truth arise is to miss the meaning of theological liberalism entirely.

In addition to an emphasis on moralism and ethical behavior, theological liberalism was also concerned with human experience. Thus, in theological liberalism, one’s subjective encounter with God became more important than the Scriptural teachings about God, and an understanding of historical expressions of faith became

more important than actual historical events and the objective truths that such events proclaimed. Thus, for theological liberalism, Christianity is merely an experience and “a way of life in the modern sense” rather than “a way of life founded upon a message” “based not upon mere feeling…but upon an account of facts.”

The Dominant Features of Postmodernism

According to the postmodern thinker Jean-Francois Lyotard, one may best define postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives.” This is the foundational principle of postmodern belief. In postmodern thinking, “each society is bound together by a system of myths” or narratives which “embody the central core of a culture’s values and beliefs.” Yet, no one narrative is a legitimate “master narrative” that provides meaning to all other narratives. Thus, in the postmodern framework, one experiences the world only “within the context of the societies in which we live.”

Therefore, postmodernism denies the existence of one objective reality, and this in turn leads to a denial of absolute truth and an undermining of Christian belief, which finds its basis in absolute truth. Yet, just as one might view theological liberalism only in light of its rejection of certain doctrines of the Christian faith, one might also view postmodernism only in light of its rejection of absolute truth. However, this perception of postmodernism sees only the results of postmodernism and not the foundational principles of this philosophical movement. To understand postmodernism properly it

76 Ibid., 44.
77 Ibid., 163.
must be understood in light of its rejection of metanarratives, and only secondly in light of its denial of absolute truth.

Understanding the dominant features of theological liberalism and postmodernism helps one to recognize two characteristics that each movement shares in common. Each movement, to one degree or another, rejects objective reality in favor of subjective experience. Theological liberalism expresses this rejection through an emphasis on moralistic encounters with God. Postmodernism, on the other hand, does so through a denial of metanarratives, which leads ultimately to a rejection of absolute truth in favor of separate systems of truth or micro-narratives, governed by each person’s social community. Yet, in these separate expressions of one’s subjective experience of reality, the common thread that ties together both theological liberalism and postmodernism is an emphasis on the individual or individual communities as the determiners of meaning and existence, in rejection of the Word of God and in rejection of the one true and living God who inspired that Word.

In the next two chapters, the information above forms the basis for a consideration of the specific ways in which theological liberalism and postmodernism have influenced sermon preparation and delivery. This begins in chapter two with a brief survey of the broader areas of influence these movements have had on the church as a whole and concludes in chapter three with an examination of specific ways in which theological liberalism and postmodernism have influenced exegetical and homiletic methodologies among conservative evangelical preachers.
CHAPTER II
THE INFLUENCES OF THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM AND POSTMODERNISM
ON THE CHURCH

Introduction

Before examining the specific ways in which theological liberalism and postmodernism have influenced sermon preparation and delivery within conservative evangelical churches, it is important to survey briefly some of the broader areas of influence these movements have had on the church as a whole. The first part of this survey addresses the influences of theological liberalism, and the second part addresses the influences of postmodernism. The following chapter expands upon this information to present a specific analysis of major areas of influence that theological liberalism and postmodernism have had on sermon preparation and delivery.

Some Negative Influences of Theological Liberalism and Postmodernism

Negative Influences of Theological Liberalism on the Church

As the world moved into the twentieth century, one could greatly sense the influences of theological liberalism on the church. These influences gave rise to the “social gospel” that emphasized the improvement of society rather than the redemptive message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and “promoted an experience of Christianity that was not dependent upon any biblical verification.”78 As a result, within many of the mainline Protestant denominations that accepted the teachings of theological liberalism,

Christianity became a “human-centered rather than a God-centered affair.” 79 J. Gresham Machen, in his classic work *Christianity and Liberalism*, describes the situation further by explaining “this modern non-redemptive religion” as “a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology.” 80

As the world moved into the second half of the twentieth-century, however, much of the classic theological liberalism that had been exerting its influence on the church began to face increasing skepticism. Two world wars and numerous other problems that faced humanity during this period led many to question the basic assumptions of theological liberalism, especially in regards to the nature of humanity. After all, “liberal theology seemed to be about human values – and how could these be taken seriously, if they led to global conflicts on such massive scale?” 81 This led in the second half of the twentieth-century to the rise of Neo-orthodoxy.

As increasing pessimism developed about the human condition, Neo-orthodoxy emerged with a focus on the transcendence of God that emphasized God’s distinctiveness from humanity. Neo-orthodox theologians carried this emphasis to such extremes, however, that it led to a view of God as one “uninterested in human history or social salvation in it.” 82 As a result, the Bible came to be seen as “a human book subject to biblical criticism like any other book” and not containing any “objective, historical,  

80 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 2.
81 McGrath, 237.
82 Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 463.
propositional revelation in itself.”83 Therefore, in Neo-orthodoxy, Christianity as a whole involved a blind leap of faith. God and His Word were irrelevant until encountered existentially during moments of crisis or during one’s personal experience with the Bible.84 These experiences in turn became the central focus of Neo-orthodoxy, and from this developed the belief that only through such experiences could one defeat sin in their own life. As a result, and in spite of its pessimistic view of humanity, Neo-orthodoxy, like the theological liberalism that preceded it, rejected the redemptive themes of Scripture and the objective truths that such themes convey, and instead “made experience and ethics more important than doctrine.”85

The church as a whole felt greatly the effects of these developments within broader Christendom, especially due to the rise of Neo-orthodoxy. To begin with, Neo-orthodoxy’s emphasis on the complete humanness of the Bible undermined the very authority of the Bible. Without that authority, many came to see Christianity as no different from other religions, which led to the development of several movements that continue to have negative effects on the church as a whole. On the one hand, there was growing skepticism among Christians that led to the rise of feminism, Christian atheism, open theism and other similar movements. On the other hand, it also led to an increased focus on personal experience and subjective encounters with God that gave rise to the Charismatic Movement, the Word of Faith Movement, and the health wealth and prosperity teachings common among many televangelists. Eventually, however, these

83 Earle E. Cairns, Christianity through the Centuries, 463.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 465.
movements faced skepticism as well, which partly contributed to the development of post-liberalism and postmodernism.

Negative Influences of Postmodernism on the Church

While postmodernism shares certain things in common with theological liberalism, and even more with Neo-orthodoxy, in other ways it departs greatly from either movement. Most notable among the differences between postmodernism and theological liberalism is that unlike theological liberalism, postmodernism did not develop from within Christianity or have a direct association with it. Yet, in spite of these facts, postmodernism has had a notable influence upon Christian belief and practice in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

One of the most significant areas of influence pertains to the field of hermeneutics, or biblical interpretation. This is observable the most in the postmodern acceptance of the literary theory of deconstructionism, “the critical method which virtually declares that the identity and intentions of the author of a text are irrelevant to the interpretation of the text.” 86 As a result, “all interpretations are equally valid, or equally meaningless.” 87 This has led within some Christian circles to the development of a reader-response hermeneutic, which rejects “the notion that there is a meaning to a biblical text, [emphasis in original].” 88 This has resulted further in an undermining of the

86 Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 244.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 245.
authority of the biblical text and the meaningful correspondence to reality of any claims to truth or meaning made in that text. \(^{89}\)

In addition to the influence of postmodernism on biblical interpretation, an additional influence arose in the area of biblical history. As part of the postmodern rejection of metanarratives, many postmodern philosophers also rejected the traditional view of history in favor of a view that emphasizes history as the collection of myths that societies tell themselves. According to postmodernism, none of these histories possesses any correspondence to reality, and therefore the events described are irrelevant. What is important in these histories, according to postmodernism, is the telling of the events rather than the specific details of those events. \(^{90}\)

All of this has wide-ranging effects on the church as a whole. The postmodern rejection of metanarratives has led to not only an undermining of biblical authority, but also an undermining of the grand-narrative of Scripture that is so explicitly set forth in its pages, as well as the fragmenting of the text of Scripture, resulting in a decontextualized presentation of the Bible. This has also contributed to either an explicit rejection or at least an implicit denial of the overarching themes of the Bible in other areas of biblical studies such as hermeneutics, exegesis, exposition, and homiletics. This has resulted in the field of theology in the rise of post-liberalism, with its emphasis on narrative theology, \(^{91}\) and in the field of homiletics, specifically, to the practice of narrative preaching.

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\(^{90}\) Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel Centered Hermeneutics*, 152-54.

\(^{91}\) Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 248.
Some Positive Influences of Theological Liberalism and Postmodernism

The influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on the church as a whole have been widespread, and as a result, both movements have posed numerous challenges to a proper understanding and expression of reality in general and Christianity in particular. This is not to state, however, that all of the influences of these movements have been negative. While most of the contributions of theological liberalism and postmodernism have been detrimental to the church, each of these movements have also provided some positive influences, or at least effected in a positive direction Christian thinking about certain issues.

Positive Influences of Theological Liberalism on the Church

Theological liberalism has contributed positively to orthodox Christian belief and practice in a couple of notable ways. These contributions have come, not so much from what these movements have offered Christianity directly, but due to the way in which theological liberalism has challenged Christian belief and caused Christians to evaluate more closely the beliefs they hold and the manner in which they give expression to those beliefs.

The rise of higher criticism, for example, has challenged Christians to examine the Scriptures in light of its literary genres and overall literary structures, while at the same time rejecting the liberal view of the purely naturalistic origins of the Bible. The skepticism about the historicity of the gospels and the rejection of the deity of Jesus Christ has also challenged Christians to be careful to place emphasis not on personal experience or subjective human encounters with God, but in the very person and events
which make the gospel what it is. In the same vein, theological liberalism serves as an important reminder to Christians to never allow the life of Jesus Christ to serve as a mere example, but to see in the person and work of Jesus Christ the true, objective, redemptive means and message that His life served to proclaim. Theological liberalism also serves as a caution to preachers and teachers in the church against allowing the focus of their messages to be purely moralistic and laden with principles for ethical conduct, without reference to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

The unfortunate reality, however, as is shown in later chapters, is that conservative evangelicals have left these challenges largely unheeded. Over the course of the last century, many within conservative evangelicalism have unwittingly embraced, especially in the practice of sermon preparation and delivery, some of the same theologically liberal methodologies that conservative evangelical Christians a century ago would have rejected. As T. David Gordon points out, “the very orthodox and evangelical Christians who protested against Protestant liberalism in the early twentieth century are quite likely to promote its basic emphases from the pulpit today.”92 As a result, a study such as the one that is contained here is of great need today.

Positive Influences of Postmodernism on the Church

In addition to some of the positive influences of theological liberalism on the church as a whole, some positive influences have come from the realm of postmodernism as well. Most notable among the positive influences of postmodernism is what Grenz

refers to as the postmodern “rejection of the modern mind and its underlying
Enlightenment epistemology.” As Grenz explains further

Postmodernism questions the Enlightenment assumption that knowledge is certain
and that the criterion for certainty rests with our human rational capabilities.

In a similar manner, the Christian faith entails a denial that the rational,
scientific method is the sole measure of truth. We affirm that certain aspects of
truth lie beyond reason and cannot be fathomed by reason…

In addition, Christians take a cautious, even distrustful stance toward
human reason. We know because of the fall of humankind, sin can blind the
human mind. And we realize that following the intellect can sometimes lead us
away from God and truth.

The presence of an Enlightenment epistemology, such as that which Grenz describes
above, is evident within the hermeneutical and exegetical practices of many conservative
evangelicals, most notably those within the dispensational school of thought. Therefore,
what Grenz states is of particular importance to consider when thinking through the
various hermeneutical and exegetical steps involved in many contemporary models of
sermon preparation and delivery. This is particularly true when dealing with issues of
human versus divine intent in Scripture. For example, as Dennis Johnson notes, “scholars
influenced by Enlightenment naturalism are bound to be suspicious of approaches to
biblical interpretations that seek to relate every text to Christ and his work” when the
original authorial intent of a particular passage of Scripture does not directly convey such
ideas. Additional details about this issue of human versus divine intent come at a later
point in this project, along with a treatment of other related issues. However, it is
important to note here, in presenting some of the positive influences of postmodernism on

93 Stanley Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 165.
94 Ibid., 165-66.
95 Dennis E. Johnson, Him We Proclaim, 121.
Christianity, that one of the benefits of postmodern considerations comes at this point. In an effort to remain true to the text of Scripture and avoid reading into a passage, some interpreters of the Bible fall prey to a type of Enlightenment rationalism that clings to a “‘literal’ reading that might seem, in the abstract, to be more objectively verifiable. Yet, as is observed from the postmodern critique of objective knowledge, a purely rational explanation is not always the best, especially when dealing with the text of Scripture and taking into consideration the divine authorship of that text.

In addition to the postmodern rejection of Enlightenment epistemology, Christians “can affirm the postmodern rejection of the Enlightenment assumption that knowledge is inherently good.”96 Within modernity, it had long been the belief that all increases in knowledge and advances in science and technology were necessarily good, or even morally neutral. However, the postmodern skepticism of human advancement, and the pessimistic attitude it has held toward human nature as a whole argues against such ideas and recognizes instead the inability of knowledge and technological advancement alone to solve the ills of society. This recognition is especially true in regards to the recent explosion of technological advancements throughout the world and the proliferation of that technology within the church.

Unfortunately, postmodernism stops short of recognizing the true redemptive need of humanity in light and humanity’s inability to redeem itself through sheer knowledge and technological advancement. Christians can agree, however, with the postmodern rejection of the inherent goodness of knowledge, while going further to provide a biblical basis for such a rejection.

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96 Stanley Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 166.
It is also important to note, that agreement with the postmodern rejection of the inherent goodness of knowledge does not entail an agreement with the postmodern rejection of absolute truth, as the two concepts are not the same. A belief in absolute truth is fundamental to the Christian faith. Yet an important element of Christianity is the belief that an apprehension of the truths of the Christian faith cannot happen purely by the gathering of empirical knowledge apart from faith, (cf. First Timothy 4:3, for example, where belief or faith precedes knowledge). In this sense, objective knowledge is not inherently good, in that it does not provide salvific benefits in and of itself, (cf. Second Timothy 2:13, where the faithfulness of God remains an objective reality not conditioned on one’s recognition of such).

Therefore, while arguing on clearly different grounds from postmodern philosophers, Christians can nonetheless recognize the validity in postmodernism’s skepticism toward the belief in the inherent goodness of objective knowledge. This skepticism involves simply the belief expressed in Hebrews 11:1 that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

**Conclusion**

Theological liberalism and postmodernism have both had widespread influence, not just on society in general, but on the church as a whole. However, not all of these influences have been negative. Each of these movements has contributed in certain ways to Christianity, while at the same time presenting many challenges to it. Yet, in spite of

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97 Unless otherwise noted, all “Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”
the few positive aspects of theological liberalism and postmodernism, each of these movements as a whole must be rejected in light of biblical revelation; a revelation that stands in sharp contrast to the central ideas inherent within theological liberalism and postmodernism. When these movements as a whole are not rejected the consequences for the church and for Christian belief and practice are devastating. Yet, while the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on Christian belief and practice in general pose many threats, even more harmful are the influences that these movements have had and continue to have on sermon preparation and delivery.

Due to the innate influence of pastoral preaching on Christian belief and practice, and the central role that such preaching occupies biblically in the worship of the church, no one area of Christianity possesses at the same time such great potential for both harm or benefit to individual Christians and the church as a whole. Therefore, no other area within Christianity needs more of a safeguard against it from dangerous, methodological influences than the ministry of the Word entrusted to pastors and other preachers and teachers of that Word.

Due to the need to protect the pulpit from various harmful, cultural, and philosophical influences, the next chapter will detail many of the effects that theological liberalism and postmodernism have had on sermon preparation and delivery, specifically within conservative evangelical practice in late twentieth to early twenty-first century America. Along with this information, an assessment of the current state of preaching in American serves as part of the conclusion of this chapter.
CHAPTER III
THE INFLUENCES OF THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM AND POSTMODERNISM ON SERMON PREPARATION AND DELIVERY

Introduction

Conservative evangelicals exerted a great deal of energy throughout the twentieth-century in an effort to distance themselves from theological liberalism and modernism. Yet in spite of this stand against the encroaching influence of theological liberalism and modernism on the church, much of conservative evangelicalism today has become thoroughly modern, and decidedly postmodern among certain groups within the broader body of Christendom. This transformation is most apparent in sermon preparation and delivery.

As the following pages show, much of the pastoral preaching that takes place in churches today is indistinguishable from the theologically liberal preaching that took place a century ago. This is a dangerous trend that has continued unabated in many churches, due in part to an ignorance of the presence of these influences to begin with, and due to a failure to take seriously the dangers that come from such influences when they are identified.

In the following sections, many of these influences receive identification and the dangers that such influences bring to bear upon the church come into focus. This occurs through an analysis of common, contemporary methods of sermon preparation and delivery that bear the methodological influence of theological liberalism and postmodernism.
The analysis presented here delves into several areas that roughly follow the typical order for sermon preparation and delivery as proposed in most theologically conservative exegesis and homiletics textbooks. This begins with an examination of such topics as the selection of a preaching text. Next, issues related to hermeneutics, exegesis, and exposition receive consideration. Then attention comes to bear upon the homiletic structure of sermons and the technique and style used to unfold this structure. This last area of focus includes a study of Scripture reading and the relationship of the Scripture reading to the sermon, and provides suggestions for the development of a method of Scripture reading. Lastly, at the end of this chapter a study of the manner in which the text of Scripture is applied, and the connection that application has to the overall redemptive theme of Scripture receives consideration.

**The Influences on Sermon Preparation**

**Selecting a Preaching Text**

It is an unfortunate reality that as important as sermon preparation and delivery is within conservative evangelical churches, many pastors give little attention to the development of skill in selecting a preaching text, or to the development of any specific biblical-theological rationale for the selection of a text. Part of this may be due to the perceived uselessness for such a skill for ministers in certain denominations. In some churches, where the denomination provides a lectionary of prescribed preaching passages for the minister, choosing a preaching text is a job done for the pastor. Yet in other churches, specifically within many conservative evangelical denominations, many pastors and churches see the art of choosing a preaching text or the need to develop a specific
biblical-theological rationale for such selections as an encroachment upon the autonomy of the local church and the autonomy of the pastor’s gauging of the spiritual needs of congregants.

One of the most common arguments against a more precise method of text selection is “that the needs of the church and the heart of the pastor will lead speakers to the right text.”98 In fact, in the classic work by John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, one of Broadus’ rules for the selection of a text is to take into consideration “the present condition of the congregation,”99 which is listed along with other similarly pragmatic guidelines for selecting a preaching text.100

However, as commendable as Broadus’ criteria may seem, it undermines the presentation of the redemptive-historical storyline of the Scriptures, when pragmatic considerations take precedence over concerns that are of greater importance. One such concern discussed in more detail at a later point in this project is preaching the Bible in a manner consistent with its original canonical order.

This is not to imply that pastors should not prayerfully select books from the Bible to preach through. Nor does this approach imply that no situations ever warrant a consideration of congregational needs when choosing a preaching text. Yet such needs should not come at the expense of preaching the whole counsel of God within its canonical context. Furthermore, to make subjective perceptions of congregational needs the normal method for choosing a preaching text, as much as it may seem to show

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100 Ibid., 18-23.
pastoral concern, is to exercise a theologically liberal method of sermon preparation. As Daniel Doriani explains, “To leave the matter [of selecting a sermon text] to the heart of the speaker is an open invitation to subjectivism.”¹¹ As noted in the discussion on the development of theological liberalism, one of the central characteristics of theological liberalism is an emphasis on subjectivism. Therefore, in order to avoid a theologically liberal methodology for selecting a preaching text, pastors must seek other more objective reasons for selecting a text in order to provide a biblical-theological rationale for one’s selection.

Furthermore, to determine one’s selection of a preaching text based primarily upon the felt needs of the congregation or the impulse of the preacher minimizes the fact that the congregation is full of sinful people who are often blind to their true spiritual needs.¹² Paul’s warning to Timothy in Second Timothy 4:3 is particularly applicable to such a situation, as the tendency is to allow the felt needs of people to suppress that which really needs to be heard most. As Bryan Chapell points out, “congregational concerns should also influence what pastors choose to preach.”¹³ Yet, at the same time, pastors “need to be careful that their pulpits are not simply captured by the currents of congregational desires. A ministry can be as warped by lending too much of an ear to what people want to hear as it can by giving too much weight to what the preacher wants to preach.”¹⁴ Therefore, rather than trusting the selection of a preaching text to either


¹² A more detailed discussion of this topic will follow later, along with a discussion of the importance of developing a model of sermon preparation and delivery that takes into consideration the total depravity of one’s listeners and the sovereign grace of God at work through the consistent exposition of biblical texts.

¹³ Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 63.

¹⁴ Ibid., 64-65.
approaches, it is far better to adhere to a *lectio continua* method of text selection that allows the word of God to make the determinations about text selection, based upon the canonical order, literary structure, and overall redemptive theme of the Bible. This and other related issues receive further treatment below.

It is also a common practice when selecting a sermon text based upon subjective perceptions of congregational needs or due to the personal desires of the preacher, to choose a topical approach to preaching rather than an expository method. This is not to imply that a topical message cannot also be expository in nature, but the unfortunate reality is that this is typically the exception and not the norm for topical sermons. In the process of developing most topical messages, the preacher often chooses several texts and those texts are typically connected together in a way that supports the preacher's predetermined outline or topical theme. This is not always the outcome, but in more cases than not is the result of topical preaching.

While such stringing together of Bible verses to add support to a sermon topic may seem to give biblical authority to a message, in reality it can achieve just the opposite effect, and is a dangerous method of text selection. As Rodney Decker points out in his article *Communicating the Text in the Postmodern Ethos of Cyberspace*,

Wrenching texts from their contexts and foisting artificial and illegitimate associations upon the gathered scraps has always been a problem, but this becomes an even greater problem in a postmodern context in which such associative jumps are considered normal, in which the reader creates the meaning. No longer do the author and the text determine meaning, but now the editor and reader deconstruct and rearrange verbal scraps to produce the desired effect or message, whether that was God’s intent or not.\(^{105}\)

An additional problem created by arbitrary selection of texts that are based upon felt needs or pastoral desire is that it can present “not a coherent, integrated message, but one in which we may dip in at any point.”106 This can result in a form of text selection that runs the risk of communicating a message divorced of its biblical context, through the presentation of decontextualized and deconstructed collection of biblical statements. This in turn can convey a view of Scripture that in its practical outworking takes shape under the subtle influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism.

This method of text selection can also convey a non-verbal, postmodern message by the way in which it tends to undermine a text’s meaning, presenting that text in isolation of the immediate context, and in disregard to the fuller redemptive metanarrative of the Scriptures. Such methods of sermon preparation and delivery treat the Bible as gathered pieces of independent data, brought together in a manner of the preacher’s own choosing. This is much in keeping with a liberal, higher critical methodology for presenting the text of Scripture, rather than a methodology that reflects an orthodox understanding of the Scriptures. Therefore, the use of an arbitrary selection of texts in sermon preparation can result in a message devoid of biblical authority, in spite of the impression that such sermons might give to the contrary, due to the many verses cited throughout. This leads to the next section of this project, which briefly examines the philosophical influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on the sermon preparation that takes place after the selection of a preaching.

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Preparing and Delivering the Sermon

The purpose of this project does not allow for a detailed examination of the many influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery, although some of these influences are given further treatment as this project unfolds. However, it is necessary at this point to point out at least some of the major areas of sermon preparation and delivery in which conservative evangelical pastors may recognize the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism. In doing so, it will be necessary to briefly touch upon certain key issues in preaching related to hermeneutics, exegesis, and exposition and to show how some of the common, contemporary methods of hermeneutics, exegesis, and exposition, as used by many conservative evangelical pastors, are actually theologically liberal and postmodern methods in their basic essence.

**Hermeneutical and Exegetical Concerns**

For those who take a more topical and less expository approach to preaching, hermeneutics, that is the art and science of biblical interpretation, and exegesis, the application of hermeneutical principles to specific passages of Scripture, is often not of much concern. For these preachers the sermon topic usually determines the meaning of the texts chosen, and they often give little attention to the actual meaning of the text and the proper exegesis of that same text. However, for those who pursue a more

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107 Again, this does not imply that a topical message cannot be both topical and expository at the same time, but unfortunately, this is seldom the case. It is also appropriate at times in certain settings to present a topical message on certain doctrinal themes or other topics pertinent to a particular occasion, but such messages should be the exception and not the norm. These messages are also not expository sermons in the strictest sense of the term and one should understand them more appropriately as Bible talks or lectures. For a definition of Bible talks and lectures and further explanation of the distinctions between these forms of address and expository sermons, see the glossary above, under the entry “Expository Preaching.”
expository method of preaching\textsuperscript{108} and desire to present accurately the meaning of the text of Scripture, hermeneutics, and exegesis are of concern. Yet in the hermeneutical and exegetical process, many additional challenges present themselves. Many of the subtle cultural and philosophical influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism can come to bear upon the methodologies used in sermon preparation. This can in turn negatively influence the manner by which pastors in conservative evangelical churches interpret passages of Scripture in preparation for the sermons delivered.

One area that presents the most subtle danger in the interpretative process of sermon preparation is also one of the most unlikely. The common practice of biblical interpretation done by most conservative evangelicals, known as the grammatical-historical method, can also pose some hidden problems for proper interpretation of Scripture when that method is applied in too rigid or ‘literalistic’ a manner, what has become known among some conservative evangelicals as a common, or plain-sense approach to biblical interpretation. When the principles of the grammatical-historical method receive application by use of this plain sense approach, problems can arise even while seeking to remain faithful to the God-inspired meaning of each biblical text. This can in turn lead to the presentation of a skewed picture of Scripture, influenced methodologically by the philosophical underpinnings of theological liberalism and postmodernism.

It is also important to note at this point that in providing a critique of some of the uses of the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation as potential avenues

\textsuperscript{108} In the next chapter, as part of the theological foundations for the method of sermon preparation and delivery proposed in this project, this project presents a biblical-theological rationale for expository preaching as the most appropriate form of pastoral preaching.
toward the adoption of theologically liberal and postmodern methodologies in sermon preparation, this does not imply that pastors should abandon a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. This project argues for quite the contrary. As Dennis Johnson notes, “this approach to textual meaning [the grammatical-historical method] offers an objective criterion for literary interpretation and therefore allows ancient texts to articulate meanings that genuinely challenge the modern and postmodern reader’s preunderstanding [sic].”\textsuperscript{109} In this way, the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation also provides a necessary safeguard against other forms of subjective interpretation, as Johnson further notes.\textsuperscript{110} In fact, most conservative evangelical works on Bible interpretation argue for a grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation, or a similarly defined methodology.\textsuperscript{111} Therefore, far from arguing against a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, this project advocates such an approach as the proper method of biblical interpretation, but with some necessary cautions. This will result in some variations from the commonly accepted methodologies, as practiced by many conservative evangelicals. An explanation of these variations, along with the biblical-theological rationale for such appears in the following chapters.

The primary issue to be pointed out at this point, however, is that when the principles of grammatical-historical interpretation are followed too rigidly, as in the common or plain sense approach, and without proper consideration to broader

\textsuperscript{109} Dennis Johnson, \textit{Him We Proclaim}, 138.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 134.

hermeneutical and biblical-theological concerns, the grammatical-historical method can cause serious problems for proper biblical interpretation, and thus for proper sermon preparation. This in turn can lead to an improper understanding of biblical revelation and can effectively undermine the very message that the conservative evangelical pastor seeks to proclaim. As Graeme Goldsworthy notes,

[W]e are told that if we do not interpret the Bible literally, the text can be made to mean anything we want it to mean. Hermeneutic chaos is predicted as the inevitable result. Yet literalism seldom proved to be much protection against such a tendency. Literalism raises all the questions about the hermeneutics of texts, questions about the locus of meaning, and so on. It is often assumed that the literal meaning of a text is self-evident. Yet the term dies the death of a thousand qualifications once we address the matter of imagery, poetic forms, metaphor, typology, and all the other non-literal linguistic devices.¹¹²

Moreover, “The New Testament clearly does not support such a simplistic hermeneutic.”¹¹³ As Goldsworthy explains further,

...The Jews of Jesus’ day entertained a certain kind of literalism. They also claimed their pedigree through Abraham and Moses, but Jesus refuted this claim because they did not believe in him. That the Old Testament Scriptures are, as he says, about him (John 5:39-47; 8:39-47, 56-58) must seriously qualify literalism, since Jesus (as Jesus) is not literally in the Old Testament…the apostolic preachers never varied from the new conviction that the hermeneutical principle was the gospel, not literalism.¹¹⁴

Therefore, as Goldsworthy concludes, “if the gospel is our hermeneutical norm, then while it is true that the interpretation of the New needs an understanding of the Old, the principal emphasis is on the way the gospel and the New Testament as a whole interpret everything, including the Old Testament, [emphasis added].”¹¹⁵

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¹¹² Graeme Goldsworthy, Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics, 169.
¹¹³ Ibid., 170.
¹¹⁴ Ibid.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 171.
The problem with many of the approaches to biblical interpretation done by conservative evangelicals, who make use of a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, is that they seldom take into consideration during sermon preparation the facts about the nature of the Scriptures mentioned above by Johnson and Goldsworthy.\textsuperscript{116} The result is the use of methodologies less influenced by the way Scripture interprets Scripture, and more influenced by the philosophical constructs of theological liberalism that arose within higher-critical fields of biblical studies. In most higher-critical approaches to biblical interpretation, there is a rejection of the divine authorship of the Bible, as well as a rejection of the belief in any truly unifying theme to the biblical narrative. As a result, among liberal, higher critics, there is no basis for reading the end of the Bible as a means for understanding the beginning, or for allowing New Testament revelation to form the basis for understanding Old Testament Scripture.\textsuperscript{117} As Johnson explains further,

\begin{quote}
The subtle influence of this shift in understanding revelation and history is that biblical interpreters come to assume that the only approach to interpreting the Old Testament that has integrity is one that stays independent of the New Testament writers and limits its interpretive context to that of the Old Testament author and his readers.
\end{quote}

Unlike the liberal higher-critical views of the Bible, however, most conservative evangelicals would affirm the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and would view the Bible as a unified whole. Yet, when a grammatical-historical hermeneutic is pushed to unjustifiable extremes, and applied by the use of a rigid literalism that ignores the New Testament’s often figurative and typological interpretation of the Old Testament, many problems can arise. The most notable problem with this is that it can result in sharp

\textsuperscript{116} The importance of a gospel-Centered or Christ-Centered understanding of Scripture as the basis for proper sermon preparation receives further explanation later in this project.

\textsuperscript{117} Dennis Johnson, \textit{Him We Proclaim}, 133.
distinctions between the Old and New Testaments and between the people of God described in those testaments. This in turn can lead to misunderstandings of the metanarrative of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and can lead to an implicit rejection of the gospel metanarrative as the lens through which to view all the Scriptures.

The grammatical-historical method of interpretation can also fall prey to the influences of Enlightenment naturalism, which is evident in the way many dispensational interpreters of past decades have used this method, often in a manner similar to how a scientist would approach a research hypothesis. Mark Sarver describes this problem, when he explains the tendency among some dispensational scholars to use the grammatical-historical method as a way to “divide and classify the details of the Bible.” As Sarver explains further,

The classifications are almost endless...The Scriptures are treated as though they are an encyclopedic puzzle: each piece of history or prophecy meant to be sorted out and arranged...Dispensationalism views the interpreter’s job to be much like that of the scientist: gather up the data, classify it and then come up with a conclusion. Each piece of data is considered in the same ‘common sense’ mode. Little attention is given to various types of literature, the progressive unity found in revelation, the precedence of the clear over the unclear...or the precedence of New Testament methods of interpreting Old Testament prophecies.

Thus, a common tendency among some proponents of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation is to place heavy emphasis on the deductive aspects of the Bible. These deductive qualities, in turn, can receive such strong emphasis at times that the danger arises of unintentionally treating the Bible as if it were merely a human work of literature, subject to identical interpretive processes as would be true of any piece of literature. This tendency is apparent, for example, in Charles Ryrie’s description and defense of dispensational hermeneutics, when he states that
If God is the originator of language...it must also follow that He would use language and expect people to understand it in its literal, normal, and plain sense...If one does not use the plain, normal or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost. What check would there be on the variety of interpretations that man’s imagination could produce if there were not an objective standard, which the literal principle provides? To try to see meaning other than the normal one would result in as many interpretations at there are people interpreting. Literalism is a logical rationale.\textsuperscript{118}

Much of Ryrie’s statements above are true, and even non-dispensational authors agree with the basic thrust of his statements here. Bryan Chapell, for example, who is a non-dispensational proponent of the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation, states that “our task as preachers is to discern what the original writers meant by analyzing the background and grammatical features of what they said.”\textsuperscript{119} Chapell goes on to explain, much in keeping with Ryrie’s statements that we must not “allow our imaginations to determine biblical meanings,” for “if Scripture does not determine meaning, ultimately Scripture has no meaning at all.”\textsuperscript{120}

The problem, therefore, with Ryrie’s statements, is not in his argument for use of the grammatical-historical method as a means of determining the Bible’s meaning. The problems arise from Ryrie’s insistence that the Bible must always be understood in the same way as other literature, and that a proper use of the grammatical-historical method must include the application of a literal, plain sense approach.”\textsuperscript{121} In response to such assertions from Ryrie and other advocates of a plain, normal, or common sense approach

\textsuperscript{118} Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 81-82.

\textsuperscript{119} Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching*, 77.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{121} Mal Couch, *The Fundamentals for the Twenty-First Century*, 78.
use of the grammatical-historical method, Dennis Johnson encourages Bible interpreters to consider

Whether the restriction of a biblical text’s meaning and interpretive accountability by means of hermeneutic criterion, ‘literal where possible,’ or the restriction of a biblical text’s meaning to the human author’s original historical horizon is consistent with the unique character of the Bible as a divine and human word. If these commonsense checks on interpretive innovation preclude aspects of later Scripture’s handling of earlier Scripture, they do not deserve status as a ruling norm, in the light of apostolic example of biblical interpretation, whether or not they are valid in the reading of other literature.

In fact, the approach espoused by Ryrie and other dispensational interpreters makes use of an interpretive methodology not unlike the methods practiced by the theological liberals of the nineteenth century, although with decidedly different outcomes due to the faith commitment among the former group and its absence in the latter, as noted below. However, in both the theologically liberal and dispensational approaches to biblical interpretation, “biblical statements were taken at face value and subjected to scientific analysis.”122 Sarver notes that due to these scientific analyses

Major anomalies seemed to appear. Among these were that many Old Testament prophecies did not seem to refer precisely to the church, that Jesus and his disciples seemed to expect his return and the establishment of the kingdom very shortly, and that much of the teaching of Jesus seemed to conflict with the theology of Paul. Liberals resolved such problems by greatly broadening the standards for interpreting Biblical language. Dispensationalists did the opposite. They held more strictly than ever to a literal interpretation but introduced a new historical scheme whose key was the interpretation of the church age as a parenthesis. Once the key step was accepted, the rest of Scripture could be fit into the scheme, and aspects that others viewed as inconsistencies could be explained as simply referring to different dispensations.123

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123 Ibid.
This information does not invalidate the interpretive methodologies of dispensationalism simply due to the similarities between theologically liberal methodologies and the dispensational approach, nor does it rule out a systematic collection and correlation of biblical material for the development of Bible doctrines. However, it does show that too rigid of an application of the principles of grammatical-historical interpretation by use of a strictly ‘literalistic’ or common sense approach can cause Bible interpreters to reach conclusions about the biblical data that is inconsistent with the methodologies employed and with the character of the Bible as a book not subject to purely scientific study. Therefore, while a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture “offers an objective criterion for literary interpretation,” one must take great care in applying such criterion, keeping in mind that a purely rational, empirically verifiable explanation of the Scriptural text is not always the best approach, or the best use of the grammatical-historical method. As Johnson explains further,

We need to be self-critical enough to entertain the possibility that our discomfort with apostolic hermeneutics is a signal that grammatical-historical exegesis falls short if it leads us to exclude or ignore the redemptive-historical setting of the fulfillment of God’s covenantal relation to his people in Jesus the Messiah.

To ignore these facts during sermon preparation can result not only in the adoption of theologically liberal methodologies for the interpretation of the Scriptures, but a theologically liberal application of the Scriptures, as is addressed in the next section.

Related to the hermeneutical and exegetical concerns already expressed, there are certain influences of postmodernism that also affect the manner in which conservative evangelicals tend to interpret Scripture in sermon preparation. The most notable of these


125 Ibid., 151.
influences is the rejection of metanarratives that is the hallmark of postmodernism. This characteristic of postmodern philosophy finds expression in much conservative evangelical hermeneutics in the same way that theological liberalism does.

By adhering too rigidly to the grammatical-historical method, as described above, conservative evangelical pastors can inadvertently develop emphases and patterns in their preaching that can over time paint for their congregation a postmodern picture of the Scriptures. This occurs when one ignores or minimizes the gospel-centered or Christ-centered focus of the Scriptures, or makes too great a distinction between the Old and New Testaments during sermon preparation, as described above. This can result in an implicit denial of the overarching metanarrative of Scripture, which is God’s plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This can in turn lead a pastor to present inadvertently to a congregation over time “a bifurcated perspective on God’s purpose in history”¹²⁶ that has negative ramifications for application of the Scriptures to believers’ daily lives, as well as negative implications for the ability of believers to study the Scriptures properly on their own. These and other points of concern regarding the methodological influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on the development of applications in sermons receive brief attention below.

**Application Concerns**

Due to the influence of liberal higher criticism within the hermeneutical methods of many conservative evangelicals, serious problems can arise in the development of proper applications of the biblical text during sermon preparation. This can in turn lead to

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¹²⁶ Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 134.
a rejection of Christ’s central role in all of Scripture by emphasizing a method of biblical interpretation that allows for only one forward-looking reading of the Bible, with sharp distinctions between the Old and New Testaments arising because of such a reading. Compounding this problem is the influence of the postmodern rejection of metanarratives, which denies the presence of a central idea or overarching theme for any aspect of reality in general, let alone the Scriptures. This in turn has exerted strong philosophical influences on American culture in general, and the church in particular. For that reason, many pastors, influenced in their thinking by these cultural and philosophical factors, sometimes find it difficult to develop sermons or sermon series that extend beyond small portions of Scripture or that follow a consistent pattern of exegesis and exposition through larger portions of Scripture. In addition, the influence of the ethical and moral focus of theological liberalism has led to a further compounding of the above problems, and can result in additional problems for the development of proper applications in sermons. Together, these influences often result in subjective, moralistic, anthropocentric applications of Scripture that provide an often disconnected, disjointed, and decontextualized presentation of the Scriptures, much to the disadvantage of believers who hear such applications presented on a regular basis.

The above influences are in large part the reason why, according to Albert Mohler “every Sunday, far too many preachers read a wee little text, apply it in wee little ways to their people’s lives, and then tell everyone to come back next week for another wee little story.”127 The problem this can create is that it allows only for applications in pastoral preaching that are merely moralistic. As Mohler explains further, “it is easy to pick out a

127 Albert Mohler, He is Not Silent, 89.
familiar story, make a few points from it about what people should and should not do, and then be done with it.”128 Application such as this, however, is anthropocentric, or human-centered, and thus theologically liberal at its basic core, in that it focuses attention primarily on human action, rather than the grace of God through Jesus Christ. This is perhaps one of the greatest problems facing conservative evangelical pastoral preaching today. Pastors, therefore, need to seriously address this issue and deal with it appropriately in sermon preparation, in order not to exclude Christ from the pulpit by such preaching practices.

The above problems are exasperated further by the fact that most preachers are unaware that they are even doing such things in their sermon preparation and delivery. Most pastors do not consciously try to exclude the grace of God through Jesus Christ from their sermons.129 However, in spite of one’s best intentions to the contrary, pastoral preaching that succumbs to the methodological influences described above is ultimately theologically liberal preaching in character and not biblical proclamation. As Bryan Chapell explains further,

[B]y consistently preaching messages on the order of ‘Five Steps to a Better Marriage,’ ‘How to Make God Answer Your Prayer,’ and ‘Achieving Holiness through the Power of Resolve,’ they present godliness entirely as the product of human endeavor. Although such preaching is intended for good, its exclusive focus on actuating or accessing divine blessing through human works carries the message, ‘It is the doing of these things that will get you right with God and/or your neighbor.’ No message is more damaging to true faith. By making human efforts alone the measure and the cause of godliness, evangelicals fall victim to the twin assaults of theological legalism and liberalism – which despite their

128 Albert Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 89.

perceived opposition are actually identical in making one’s relationship with God dependent on human goodness.\textsuperscript{130}

This focus on moralistic or behavioral application in pastoral preaching can in turn lead to one of two extremes among a congregation that is the recipient of such preaching on a regular basis. It can result, on the one hand, in demoralized believers who feel the weight of their responsibilities to do better before God, but who sense at the same time that they are without the ability to see it through on their own. On the other hand, it can result in arrogant believers, deceived into thinking that their own high moral standards and consistent patterns of good behavior are the sum and substance of the Christian life, without reference to what Christ has accomplished for them that forms the basis for true godliness and obedience.\textsuperscript{131}

This is not to imply that pastors should not teach on moral issues from the pulpit, or that pastors should avoid ethical instruction altogether, in the place of simply directing people’s attention to the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, the information presented here should help pastors to see that such moral instruction should not be the primary focus of the pulpit ministry. Yet, even when a pastor does provide moral or ethical instructions in sermons, this should not occur without an emphasis on the grace of God through Jesus Christ. It is this grace, after all, that makes it even possible for believers to follow the moral and ethical instructions of the Bible. As T. David Gordon explains further,

There is a place in the overall ministry of the church for instruction in moral behavior…There is also a place, especially in visitation and pastoral counseling,

\textsuperscript{130} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, 289-290.

\textsuperscript{131} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Worship}, 236.
for challenging the complacent to examine whether they have truly rested in Christ. And there is a place for theistic analysis of our culture...

But these occur as occasional secondary results of Christ-centered preaching; they are not its purpose…Along with Luther, Calvin, Dabney, and representatives from our own generation, I would suggest that nothing is more important for Christian proclamation than the central realities of the person, character, and work of Christ. When anything else predominates, the necessary inference of our hearers is that morality, or cultural improvement, or introspecting about our own spiritual health, is a more important consideration.¹³²

As a result, over time, these considerations will become dominate in the minds of believers and may result in greatly diminishing the importance of Christ and his finished work in the thinking of Christians. A Gordon explains further,

People know what they ought to do, but they are dispirited and lethargic, without the vision, drive, or impetus to live with and for Christ. And the reason for this dispirited condition is that the pulpit is largely silent about Christ. He is mentioned only as an afterthought or appendage to a sermon; in many churches, he is never proclaimed as the central point of a sermon.”¹³³

Therefore, rather than devoting most of one’s time in sermon preparation to developing moralistic applications, or ethical instructions, the careful preacher of God’s Word must strive instead to focus attention on the person and work of Jesus Christ. A goal like this in sermon preparation and delivery is borne out of the recognition that this is the greatest need of any congregation, in every situation and circumstance, regardless of what other felt or perceived needs may be present.¹³⁴ As Bryan Chapell explains further, in drawing to a close his discussion of Christ-centered preaching,

¹³³ Ibid., 89.
¹³⁴ For some pastors, the realization of the need for Christ-centered, rather than human-centered, or moralistic preaching, will require a greater apprehension and acceptance of the sovereign grace of God and the total depravity of humanity. This forms an important theological foundation for truly Christ-centered preaching that receives further treatment at the beginning of the next chapter, along with other related theological concepts that are necessary components of the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project.
Christ-centered preachers do not hesitate to present the moral imperatives the Lord demands, but neither do they deny him the position of honor in all that his Word says or in all that his creatures do. Challenges to holiness must be accompanied by a Christ focus or they will promote only human-centered, doomed-to-fail religion... We should not preach God's requirements in isolation from God’s grace because the holiness God requires he also must provide. If we neglect the means of grace, then we deny the possibility of obedience.\textsuperscript{135}

In addition to the above concerns expressed by Gordon, Chapell, and others, moralistic applications of Scripture developed without attention drawn to the person and work of Christ and God’s grace at work through Christ also do a great disservice to believers by creating in them an anemic understanding of the Bible. As Albert Mohler points out,

Our people can know so much, and yet know nothing, all at the same time. They can have a deep repository of biblical facts and stories, and yet know absolutely nothing about how any of it fits together, or why any of it matters beyond the wee little ‘moral of the story.’\textsuperscript{136}

This is a reason why the \textit{lectio continua}, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated below by this project is so vitally important, in that it provides for the spiritual growth and biblical understanding of believers in ways that other methods cannot provide.

In addition to the practical ramifications that moralistic applications in preaching can have, it also hints at certain theological ramifications. Most notable among these is an implicit denial of the finished work of Christ as well as an implicit denial of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ in the life of believers. By consistently developing in sermon preparation applications that deal only with moral behavior, often without reference to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, such implicit denials become apparent, and thus demonstrate the methodological influences of theological liberalism on pulpit practice.

\textsuperscript{135} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Worship}, 294.

\textsuperscript{136} Albert Mohler, \textit{He is Not Silent}, 95.
Therefore, in order to combat bare moralistic applications in preaching and to focus the attention of believers instead where it should be “it will also be necessary to recover an enduring commitment to Christ-centered, expository preaching, [emphasis added],”\textsuperscript{137} as will be discussed further beginning in the next chapter of this project.

In addition to concerns about the influence of theological liberalism and postmodernism on the development of applications in sermon preparation, the common homiletic structures of many sermons preached in conservative evangelical churches also raises concerns, and demonstrates another example of ways in which the methodologies of theological liberalism and postmodernism have found their way into sermon preparation and delivery. In the next section, some of these issues will be touched upon briefly.

**Homiletic Concerns**

In addition to the areas of concern already addressed, it is important to note briefly some of the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on the homiletic structure of many sermons delivered in conservative evangelical churches. This serves to establish further the need for the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project.

In 1964, the philosopher and communication theorist Marshall McLuhan addressed in a broad sense some of the areas of concern that are observable today in conservative evangelical preaching. In discussing the role that the medium of communication plays in relation to the message conveyed, McLuhan famously wrote,

“the medium is the message, [emphasis added].”138 In other words, the manner or means by which one communicates a message can often send an additional non-verbal message along with the actual verbal message. The non-verbal message in turn can serve to either support the verbal message, or undermine it completely. This can occur when the medium of communication embeds itself to such an extent in the message that it results in a change in one’s perception of that message. Additionally, one can display physical items, actions, or symbols in such a way as to communicate non-verbal messages, even when no accompanying verbal message is present. This is particularly true of worship practices in general. As Bryan Chappell explains,

In the Roman Catholic Mass, the priest stood between the altar and the people when dispensing the elements to symbolize his intercessory role. By contrast, many Protestant Reformers intentionally stood behind the Communion Table when administering the Lord’s Supper to demonstrate the people’s immediate access to Christ. The physical placement of the furniture, pastor, and people was designed to communicate a clear gospel message...Church leaders understood that if the message was inconsistent with the means by which it was communicated, then the message could easily get lost. 139

As true as Chapell’s words are in regards to worship practices in general, they are of particular importance in regards to pastoral preaching. Just as the structure of a worship service sends a clear message, either by design or by happenstance, so too does the structure of a sermon. The unfortunate reality, however, is that often little attention is given in sermon preparation to careful deliberation over the structure of one’s sermons, in order to ensure that each sermon is designed to communicate the Word of God accurately.


139 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Worship, 17.
on both the verbal and non-verbal level; that both the message and the medium maintain a consistent reflection of one another.

As has been intimated already, the gospel of the person and work of Jesus Christ should be the lens through which pastors and other Bible interpreters view all aspects of sermon preparation. Yet, the use of such a gospel lens should not stop with hermeneutics and exegesis, but should extend into exposition and homiletic structure. Therefore, in preaching, the medium and the message should be the same. This does not mean just allowing the preaching text to determine the structure of the sermon, although such an idea is included in this concept. To have the medium and the message of preaching be one-and-the-same means two things, primarily. It means ensuring that the homiletic structure of a sermon reflects the meaning of the preaching passage, but also ensuring that it reflects certain truths about the person and work of Jesus Christ, which are inherent in each passage of Scripture to various degrees. In this way, each sermon, even in its very structure, maintains consistency with the larger redemptive-context of every preaching text, while also remaining true to the immediate context of the same.140 When one does not do this throughout the interpretive process, a theologically liberal or postmodern sermon-structure can emerge.

One example of a failure to achieve the above goals is most noticeable, and ironically so, in many sermons preached from the gospels. As Graeme Goldsworthy notes, “passages such as the Sermon on the Mount are still taken and used in sermons as self-contained and self-explanatory texts, without any respect for the Gospel’s theological

140 A detailed explanation of steps for achieving this goal occurs in later chapters along with a more detailed description of the proper hermeneutical stance to take in sermon preparation.
concerns.”

As a result, “the sayings of Jesus are so frequently used merely as ethical guidelines.” Thus, in a sermon structured after this manner, the homiletic outline may be in keeping with the statements of the preaching text, but if divorced from the larger redemptive context, result again in mere theologically liberal moralism, and not biblical proclamation.

Another popular approach for sermon structures is to present sermons in a narrative or parabolic form, allowing the congregation to uncover the purpose of a message along the way and to apply that message in ways deemed most appropriate to the individual listener. While such sermon structures are not wrong in and of themselves, they have a tendency to encourage subjective experiences of the Scriptures and to result in human-centered applications that further exacerbate some of the problems explained in the previous section. Such approaches also fail to take into account the fact that preaching is primarily an act of corporate worship. Therefore, in developing the structure of a sermon, while pastors need to take into consideration the individuals present in their congregations, they need also to take into account that they are speaking primarily to the gathered community of believers and not on an individual basis to each person in the congregation in particular.

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141 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 42.

142 Ibid.

Some pastors also turn to a narrative or parabolic homiletic structure in an effort to achieve personal relevance in preaching or as a means of connecting with their congregation on a deeper emotional level. While such desires are not in and of themselves wrong, such practices can ultimately result in an undermining of the very authority of Scripture. Richard L. Mayhue has recognized this when he states that “Biblical preaching’s authenticity is significantly tarnished by contemporary communicators’ being more concerned with personal relevance than God's revelation.”

The above concerns also have ramifications for the role of persuasion in preaching. Calling people to give heed to the Word of God and to accept as truth the message contained in the Word of God is an important component of pastoral preaching. However, some pastors make use of sermon structures and delivery methods that place inordinate focus upon personal persuasion, or appeals to decision in response to the sermon. Such emphases, however, display in the very structure and delivery of the sermon, a disregard for the power of God’s grace at work through the gospel of Jesus Christ as the means to draw and woo sinners in salvation and to sanctify believers. This salvific and sanctifying power is contained in the very Word of God proclaimed, and in the very form of the message, apart from the persuasive speech of the pastor or a personal call to decision, (Romans 1:16). As Gregory E. Reynolds points out in his essay, “A Medium for the Message,”

The preaching of the gospel is a unique kind of public rhetoric formed by the message of the gospel. The word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 1:21 to describe his preaching (kerugmatos), refers to both the content and the form of the

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144 Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” The Master’s Seminary Journal 1, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 109.
communication – to both the message and the nature of the preaching itself as an act of public communication. 145

As Reynolds explains further, this means that

Unlike the orator, who is responsible to persuade the audience, the herald is only responsible to deliver the message of his master faithfully. ‘Unlike the orator, the herald was not results driven; he was obedience-driven.’…Paul understood that his task was to proclaim a God-given message whose power and effectiveness was in the hands of the sovereign giver (Rom. 1:16). He was to be faithful in proclaiming that message – period (1 Cor. 4:1). 146

Therefore, the homiletic structure of sermons should mirror this reality in order to maintain a consistent reflection of the message proclaimed in the medium used to convey that message. As Reynolds draws his essay to a close, he reflects this same thought when he states that, “Gospel rhetoric must be suited to the message of the crucified Savior. Because the medium is the message – or is inextricably connected with the message – then the method of proclamation must suit the message of the crucified and risen Lord.” 147

Concerns about the Presentation of the Scriptural Text

In addition to concerns about application and the homiletic structure of sermons, concerns arise about the use of the Scriptural text in preaching. It is an unfortunate reality that in many conservative evangelical churches today the public reading of Scripture has fallen out of practice, even though God expressly commands it through the apostle Paul


146 Ibid., 316-317.

147 Ibid., 320.
in First Timothy 4:13. Rarely, however, will one find in a worship service in many conservative evangelical denominations even one chapter of the Bible read without comment. Yet, “many of the theologically liberal churches have retained liturgies that are packed with Scripture” even though in many instances such churches do not believe the Scripture passages read.\textsuperscript{148} Therefore, how much more important should the public reading of Scripture be among those who do believe its words. The fact that it is so absent from conservative evangelical churches shows that on this issue in particular, many conservative evangelical churches are more theologically liberal than the theological liberals are themselves.

In addition to separate public readings of Scripture during corporate worship, the reading of the Scriptural text during the delivery of sermons is also of great importance. Unfortunately, pastors often treat it as somewhat of an unavoidable evil that allows the preacher to commence with his comments on the text. Yet, an important part of the preaching process is the reading of the preaching text. Pastors must understand that “reading, no less than preaching, is an exegetical task.”\textsuperscript{149}

Therefore, pastors who fail to read their preaching text in its full context, and to do so with deliberateness and thoughtfulness, or who fail to refer back to that text throughout their sermons are inadvertently sending a non-verbal message to their congregation that states that the pastor is more concerned about his own words than the Word of God. In addition to this, since the unadulterated reading of the Word of God is one of God’s means of conveying sanctifying grace to believers, the preacher who fails to


\textsuperscript{149} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Worship}, 226.
do this consistently before and during each sermon, is effectively robbing believers of a great spiritual benefit.150

**Concerns about the Use of Technology**

Concerns also arise about the extent to which pastors present the Scriptural text in a digital or electronic form or the extent to which pastors make use of other forms of media during sermon delivery, such as video clips or PowerPoint presentations. Technology is not wrong if used properly, and pastors should not abandon the use of technology in both sermon preparation and delivery. Technology can in fact be, in many ways, a wonderful blessing from God, and great benefit can come from a discerning use of technology, which is true for preaching as well. However, abuses can occur, and the presentation of the Word of God in a digital or electronic form during pastoral preaching, or the insertion of other media components can easily come to dominate a pastor’s pulpit ministry and thus undermine the very message he wishes to proclaim. This can in turn allow the subtle philosophical and cultural influences of postmodernism to have an effect on the way believers think and perceive of the Bible and the Christian faith. Albert Mohler notes this problem when he explains that

> For most of us, the use of these technologies comes with little attentiveness to how the technology reshapes the task and the experience. The same is true for preachers who have rushed to incorporate visual technology and media in the preaching event.

> The effort is no doubt well intended, driven by a missiological concern to reach persons whose primary form of ‘mental transport’ has become visual. Thus, preachers use clips from films, dynamic graphics, and other eye-catching technologies to gain and hold the congregation’s attention.

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150 More details on the importance of the public reading of Scripture as part of a *lectio continua* method of sermon preparation and delivery is provided in chapter five as well as additional information on the reading and preaching of the Word of God as a means of grace.
The danger of this approach is seen in the fact that the visual very quickly overcomes the verbal. Beyond this, the visual is often directed towards a very narrow slice of human experience, particularly focused on the affective and emotional aspects of our perception. Movies move us by the skillful manipulation of emotion, driven by soundtrack and manipulated by skillful directing techniques.

This is exactly where the preacher must not go. The power of the Word of God, spoken through the human voice, is seen in the Bible’s unique power to penetrate all dimensions of the human personality. As God made clear, even in the Ten Commandments, He has chosen to be heard and not seen. The use of visual technologies threatens to confuse this basic fact of biblical faith, [emphasis in original].

Therefore, much thought and care should be taken when determining what role technology should have in sermon delivery. This is particularly true when making determinations about the use of digital and electronic media in presenting the text of Scripture in public worship, whether this occurs during the sermon, or throughout the worship service. As Rodney Decker explains,

The book is linear. Its very nature affects how and what we understand...the communication medium employed shapes the message: “the medium is the message” is true, whether one accepts all the details of McLuhan’s communications theory or not. There are inherent characteristics in the very medium that do affect both what can be communicated and how it is communicated. Technology is not neutral.

Yet this raises an important question. In what ways might an overuse of an electronic or digital form of the Scriptures during sermon delivery adversely affect believers and change how the Word of God and the Christian faith is perceived by those in the pew? Decker begins to provide the answer to this question as he explains further that “The very


character of text encourages (indeed, demands) rationality and sequence.”

As Decker explains further, in quoting from Sven Birkerts’, *The Gutenberg Elegies*,

> The order of print is linear, and is bound to the logic of the imperatives of syntax. Syntax is the substance of discourse, a mapping of the ways that the mind makes sense through language. Print communication requires the active engagement of the reader’s attention, for reading is fundamentally an act of translation. Symbols are turned into their verbal referents and these in turn interpreted…Print also possesses a time axis; the turning of pages, not to mention the vertical descent down the page, is a forward-moving succession, with earlier contents at every point serving as a ground for what follows. Moreover the printed material is static—it is the reader, not the book, that moves forward.

Therefore, as Decker continues to explain,

> Is it any wonder, then, that the postmodern deconstructionist objects to the concept of the book? A book implies an author, unity, and closure—all anathema to modern literary critics who focus on empowering the reader…Christianity, as a religion of the Book, represents all that postmodernity despises, for the Book of Books implies an Author…The book, that stubbornly unelectric artifact of pure typography, possesses resources conducive to the flourishing of the soul. A thoughtful reading of the printed text orients one to a world of order, meaning, and the possibility of knowing truth.’ Indeed, the concept of the book is a theological concept.

As a result, an over emphasis in preaching upon the digital or electronic presentation of the Scriptural text can have a harmful effect on those whom the pastor is trying to minister to by the Word, and can result in the harmful influences of postmodern thought coming to effect the thinking of believers over time. This information also has ramifications for how those in the pew read the Scriptures. In light of the above concerns, pastors may also want to consider encouraging the members of their churches to avoid an

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154 Ibid.

155 Ibid, 54-55.
overreliance upon electronic devices, such as iPads or Kindle, or e-readers as a means of reading the Scriptural text. As Decker points out,

Although the new media incorporate verbal texts, no longer is the presentation linear, ‘bound to the logic of the imperatives of syntax.’ The reader no longer concentrates on text and logical argument. The temporal orientation is no longer forward-moving. The text is no longer static. The visual image has become primary…There is no substance to the text. It appears and disappears on the screen, suggesting its incorporeality [sic] and ephemeral nature… The primary danger of such technology is the loss of context and linear argument…Without a contextual framework it ‘may corrode a sense of coherence and meaning.’

Thus, believers who receive regular exposure in a worship setting to a digital or electronic presentation of the Scriptural text can have their thinking undermined about the very concept of absolute truth and the belief in either authorial or divine intent in Scripture.

**Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, part of the problem with pastoral preaching in conservative evangelical churches is the seemingly orthodox methodologies used in the development of the sermons preached in these churches. Many conservative evangelical churches are in fact, theologically conservative and espouse a system of belief that would reject postmodern thought and liberal belief. Therefore, it makes sense to assume that the methodologies used in sermon preparation and delivery by the pastors of these churches would reflect the beliefs they hold. Yet, while espousing orthodox beliefs, many pastors of conservative evangelical churches are being subtly influenced in sermon preparation and delivery by the methodologies present in the very movements they stand against, thus undermining the efforts of these pastors to accurately declare the Word of God to God’s

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people. Bryan Chapell in his work *Christ-Centered Worship* describes his own experience in this area, as he explains his life as a pastor caught up in a mindset that was orthodox in belief, yet liberal in practice. Chapell states that,

> The pattern of thought that I reinforced was not immediately apparent to me because I believed that my preaching was faithful to the commands of God's inerrant Word…So, I preached the whole counsel of God as I understood it. Week after week, I told the imperfect people in my church to “do better.” But this drumbeat for improvement, devoid of the encouragements and empowerments of grace, actually undermined the holiness that I was seeking to exhort…In particular I needed to learn to preach each text in its redemptive context…All Scripture has a redemptive purpose. No Scripture is so limited in purpose as to give us only moral instruction or lifestyle correction.”

157 Therefore, the next chapters present a method of sermon preparation and delivery designed to serve as a necessary corrective to the above problems that have arisen within conservative evangelical churches, due to the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism. This method of sermon preparation and delivery seeks to call preachers and teachers of God’s Word back to the biblical model of preaching that has been lost in many segments of the church today, and to equip pastors with the knowledge and skills to preach biblical, *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical, expository messages.

CHAPTER IV
THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A LECTIO CONTINUA, REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO SERMON PREPARATION AND DELIVERY

Introduction

Based upon the information from the previous chapters, one should be able to see that there is a strong methodological and philosophical influence from theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery in conservative evangelical churches. The following two chapters describe in detail the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated by this project as the necessary corrective to the above influences, as a means of regaining truly biblical proclamation in conservative evangelical churches in the twenty-first century.

The method of sermon preparation advocated in the following pages is defined as a lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery. In this chapter, the primary focus is to provide a description of the biblical-theological foundations for the above method, which will serve as the overall rationale for this approach. The next chapter provides a detailed definition of the specific elements of the above definition along with specific steps to take in implementing this approach in sermon preparation and delivery for pastoral preaching.

Theological Foundations

As explained, this project will propose a lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery. Certain theological foundations form the
basis for this approach, and therefore need further explanation. The following sections present four such theological foundations. These theological foundations are a Scriptural foundation, a Trinitarian foundation, a soteriological foundation, and a biblical theology foundation. In addition to these theological foundations, the last section of this chapter provides an explanation of the hermeneutical foundation for the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated here, which flows out of the biblical theology foundation of this approach.

Scriptural Foundation

In establishing the Scriptural foundation of a *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery, it is important to recognize that preaching is not simply the words of the preacher, or the skill of an orator. Preaching, in fact, transcends such ideas to convey the very Words of God. One cannot do this, however, without reference to those words. Therefore, preaching must involve the text of Scripture, and should give careful and close attention to that text. As a result, one of the primary theological foundations of the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated here is a high view of Scripture that holds the text of the Bible in the highest regard and understands the Bible to be the Word of God. This means that the Bible not only contains and conveys a message from God as would be argued by those taking a Neo-orthodox understanding of Scripture, but is the very word of God, and represents the final and absolute rule and authority for all faith, practice, and belief. This view further holds that the Bible is an inspired, inerrant, and infallible record of God’s special revelation to humankind. This means that the Bible is free from error, contradiction,
falsehood, fraud, or deceit in all that it states, all subjects that it touches, or in any area addressed, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Trinitarian Foundation

A God-Exalting Foundation

An additional theological foundation that serves as the basis for the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project is what this researcher has chosen to identify as a Trinitarian foundation. This represents the belief held by this author that the Bible teaches the existence of only one true and living God, eternally existing as three equal, yet distinct persons, who is a perfect, infinite, eternal, self-existent, omniscient, omnipotent Spirit who sovereignly rules with unending authority and absolute determination and dominion over all things.

God chose to create the physical universe and all that is in it, making humanity in His own image, and creating them for the purpose of bringing glory to God and enjoying fellowship with God forever. Because of the end for which God created the world, and the responsibility God gave individuals to bring glory to Him, it becomes necessary that in the proclamation of God’s message to humanity, as found in the Bible, that the end result in all instances be the glory or exaltation of God. Therefore, in order to begin moving toward the elimination of the negative influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery, it is necessary that all sermon

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158 Some of the information from this section is adapted from a research paper presented by this student for the class DMIN 8323: Preaching and Teaching the New Testament, and used with permission.

159 For a definition of ‘glory’ as well as an explanation of how humanity brings glory to God see footnote 38 on page xv.
preparation and delivery include this element, of the glory and exaltation of God in preaching as one of its chief theological foundations.

John Piper points out the importance of such an ideal for preaching when he states that “the dominant note [emphasis in original]” and “the unifying theme [emphasis in original]” of preaching is “the zeal that God has for his own glory.” Therefore,

The Lord sends preachers into the world to cry out that God reigns, that he will not suffer his glory to be scorned indefinitely, that he will vindicate his name in great and terrible wrath, but that for now a full and free amnesty is offered to all the rebel subjects who will turn from their rebellion, call on him for mercy, bow before his throne, and swear allegiance and fealty to him forever.

An emphasis such as this in preaching finds its support in numerous passages of Scripture as well. In his article on “Expository Exaltation,” John Piper cites several passages to this end. Most notable among them is First Corinthians 10:31, where the apostle Paul states, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” That is, to do everything in a way that reflects back to God and others the character and moral attributes of God. Later, in Colossians 3:17, Paul makes a similar statement as the one found in First Corinthians 10:31, but there ties the glory of God to Jesus Christ when he states, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Here Paul links the preaching of the Word of God to the glory of God in Christ. That is, the reflection of the character of God through praise of the redemptive work He has accomplished through the life and ministry of His Son, in whom is the greatest demonstration of the nature and attributes of God. These and other similar passages make it clear that in all areas of life, the glory of God as

161 Ibid., 24.
revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ should be one of the primary focuses. If this is true, than certainly this ought to be the focus in pastoral preaching as well. Therefore, in considering the Trinitarian foundation to the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project, it must be conceded that not only should preaching bring glory to God or be God exalting, but it must also be Christ-centered. That is, exalting God in preaching primarily by drawing attention to the characteristics and attributes of God demonstrated through the person and work of Jesus Christ, as highlighted in each preaching text.

A Christ-Centered Foundation

A Christ-centered focus is at the heart of the redemptive-historical aspect of the model for sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project. This Christ-centered focus is also one of the most neglected components of truly biblical preaching among conservative evangelicals in the church today. Much misunderstanding arises here as well in discussing the importance of a Christ-centered focus to ministry, or preparing and delivering Christ-centered sermons. Simply stated, preaching that is Christ-centered consists of the proclamation of the person and work of Jesus Christ, in particular, his sinless life and his substitutionary death, burial and resurrection for the remission of sins.

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162 Some of the information from this section is adapted from a research paper presented by this student for the class DMIN 8323: Preaching and Teaching the New Testament, and used with permission.

163 A fuller definition and explanation of Christ-centered preaching appears in the next chapter. The definition given here is only a brief summary of Christ-centered preaching that serves the purpose of establishing this as a theological foundation for the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project.
The apostle Paul provides the biblical teaching on Christ-centered preaching in several places, (Galatians 6:14; Colossians 1:28; First Corinthians 1:23). However, Paul’s strongest statements in support of this idea occur in First Corinthians 2:1-2. There, Paul states “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”¹⁶⁴ Paul’s statements in these verses, however, do not imply that all preaching should consist of nothing other than an evangelistic, gospel presentation, and it is obvious from Paul’s other writings that he did not speak exclusively on the message of the cross, but addressed a whole host of issues pertinent to believers. Therefore, in using the term Christ-centered preaching, one should not think that this implies evangelistic preaching, although that could be a part of Christ-centered preaching at times. Truly Christ-centered preaching, as taught by the apostle Paul and elsewhere by the apostles throughout the New Testament, has as its foundation the cross of Jesus Christ and the message of His death and resurrection, regardless of the topic addressed in the sermon.

Graeme Goldsworthy explains this concept further when he argues that the gospel of Jesus Christ is to form the lens through which Christians are to view all Scripture.¹⁶⁵ As Goldsworthy explains, “the meaning of all the Scriptures is unlocked by the death and resurrection of Jesus.”¹⁶⁶ Therefore, Goldsworthy concludes, in line with the sentiments of the apostle Paul, that preachers cannot “truly or faithfully expound any text of

¹⁶⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, 54.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 54.
Scripture apart from this heart of the gospel event." To this Bryan Chapell concurs, stating that

The entire Bible is Christ-centered because his redemptive work in all its…dimensions is the capstone of all of God’s revelation of his dealings with his people. Thus, no aspect of revelation can be thoroughly understood or explained in isolation from some aspect of Christ’s redeeming work. As a result, any truly biblical, expository sermon will be Christ-centered, or redemptive-historical.

A Spirit-Empowered Foundation

In addition to a God exalting and Christ-centered foundation, the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project also includes a Spirit-empowered foundation. However, by stating that preaching should be Spirit empowered is not to imply that preaching should be full of emotionalism or result in dramatic, public responses to preaching. As Jim Shaddix explains, “the effectiveness of pastoral preaching cannot and should not be gauged by what happens at the altar on Sunday morning…the effectiveness of pastoral preaching must be gauged by whether or not we who listen to preaching look more like Jesus this year than we did this time last year.” Therefore, if preaching is truly Spirit empowered, it will achieve the gradual transformation of individual lives and entire congregations over time, but may not result in instant spiritual change or overtly visible responses to pastoral preaching.

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167 Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, 55.

168 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 276.

One of the methodological influences of theological liberalism on sermon preparation and delivery that is observable in many conservative evangelical churches is what some describe as evangelical decisionism. Decisionism often pushes for an immediate response to preaching or for some visible sign of conviction. As Graeme Goldsworthy explains, however, part of the problem with decisionism “is not the call for a decision. The error of decisionism is to de-historicize the gospel to make the decision the saving event. To that extent it expresses an existential hermeneutic” and thus gives rise to pastoral preaching that exhibits the same, subjective, existential focus on human experience, rather than the historical reality of who Jesus is and what He accomplished on the behalf of sinners in His life and ministry.

Truly Spirit-empowered preaching lies in close connection to the exaltation of God the Father through Jesus Christ. As Shaddix states, “it is through spiritual transformation that God glorifies Himself in the preaching event” and “through the truth of God’s Word, we are being made to look more and more like Jesus.”

Therefore, in order to ensure that preaching is Spirit empowered, “both preacher and people must simply let the Bible be what it was intended to be and do what it was intended to do - transform us into the image of Jesus Christ.” This kind of gradual spiritual transformation and almost imperceptible spiritual growth may not be that instantly exciting at times. It also may not produce the immediate outward displays or public responses that are so often craved by pastors and preachers, but it is the Spirit-empowered work that God has designed to accomplish through preaching, which comes

171 Ibid., 98.
about as a result of the careful and consistent exposition of the Word of God in a redemptive-historical, or Christ-centered manner.

Soteriological Foundation

A third theological foundation that serves as an important basis for the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project is a soteriological foundation. This foundation represents the belief in the biblical doctrines of grace. This belief refers in one sense to the sovereign rule of God over all things, and carries with it ramifications for a proper understanding of human nature and the function and role of the church as the spiritual body of Christ. As used in this project, however, it refers more specifically to God’s sovereignty in salvation, and the corresponding role of God’s sovereign grace in personal sanctification, which comes in large part from a consistent exposure to redemptive-historical, expository preaching. In fact, the redemptive-historical model of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project bears such close ties to the biblical doctrines of grace that one cannot implement this model in its entirety without an acceptance of these and other related theological concepts.172

172 The other related theological concepts referred to here are the three biblical covenants of redemption, works, and grace. These covenants serve as the overarching framework through which God’s redemptive plan unfolds and bear an intrinsic relationship to the doctrines of grace. This relationship is observable in the emphasis placed in the covenant of redemption on God’s eternal election in Christ of one people to Himself out of humanity, which forms the basis for a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture. This relationship is observable also in the emphasis placed in the covenant of works on Christ’s perfect obedience to God’s covenant stipulations given first to Adam and later to Israel, which forms a further basis for a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture, as well as the basis for grounding all Scriptural imperatives in the indicatives of Christ’s finished work. Therefore, an acceptance of the doctrines of grace, specifically the doctrines of unconditional election, particular redemption, and effectual calling, are necessary if one is to implement in its entirety the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project. For further information on the relationship between the doctrines of grace and the covenants of redemption, works, and grace, as well as the foundation these doctrines lay for a redemptive-historical or Christ-centered approach to Scripture see, Michael Horton, “From Scripture to System: The Heart of Covenant Theology,” in Introducing Covenant Theology, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 77-110.
An understanding of and acceptance of the doctrines of grace also plays an important role in the preaching of God’s Word, for it provides for the spiritual growth that is so often lacking in the American church, due to the methodological patterns in sermon preparation and delivery that have developed from the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism. This is due in large part to the biblical framework that the doctrines of grace provide for the proper understanding of the Word of God and a proper realization of the spiritual growth and sanctification that comes to believers because of the preaching of that Word.

A biblical model for the preparation and delivery of sermons should therefore have as a part of its underlying theological foundation an acceptance of at least certain aspects of the doctrines of grace. An acceptance of such biblical truths helps pastors to possess a proper, biblical understanding of God’s role, their own role, the role of those sitting in the pew, and the manner by which those roles inform the preparation and delivery of sermons. Due to an acceptance of such truths, pastors will also be better equipped to carry out the task of proclaiming the message of the Bible in the most God honoring and spiritually beneficial manner.

Others also emphasize this idea and point to the importance of the doctrines of grace as a necessary component to proper biblical preaching.173 Bryan Chapell, for example notes that one of the most crucial things for preachers to recognize is that “the Holy Spirit uses our words, but his work, not ours, affects the hidden recesses of the

173 See for example, Paul T. Furhmann, “Calvin, the Expositor of Scripture,” Interpretation 6, no. 2 (April 1952), 188-209.
human will, [emphasis added].” Joel Beeke also notes “how freeing and reassuring it is for ministers to know that what God blesses in the ministry is not their ingenuity, intellect, insight, or persuasiveness…rather, God blesses the proclamation of His Son in His own Word to His glory and the salvation of sinners.”

J. Mark Beach emphasizes this theme as well when he states that “it is particularly through the preaching of the Word that God bestows the gift of faith upon those whom he has chosen for eternal life.” Beach then goes on to explain further the importance of this concept by adding that “only God calls sinners to himself; only God speaks to sinners—repentant and unrepentant—the Word of blessing unto life or of curse unto death; only God is Savior and Judge. And God performs his redemptive work through his Word preached.” Understanding these truths is a crucial part of sermon preparation and delivery. It allows pastors to rest in the sovereignty of God and sufficiency of Jesus Christ through the entire process of sermon preparation and delivery, with the knowledge that the ultimate goal of such preparation is to glorify God through the preaching of the Word, regardless of the outcome.

Acknowledging the doctrines of grace as a foundation for sermon preparation and delivery can also help the preacher of God’s Word to have confidence in the success of his preaching, while at the same time entrusting the results of that preaching to the sovereign will of God. Charles M. Blake makes this point when explaining the practical

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177 Ibid., 121.
benefits of the doctrine of election, in particular, in sermon delivery. Blake states that “the doctrine of election assures the preacher of ‘success’...he knows that the elect will respond with faith and repentance.” Yet, on the other hand, the preacher who rejects the doctrines of grace and does not allow these doctrines to guide his sermon preparation and delivery has no assurance of the effectiveness of their preaching apart from their own human ability. As Blake explains further, “without election, who would dare preach?” “Under such a misunderstanding, the preacher would never have any confidence in the efficacy of the truth he was sent to proclaim.”

It is an unfortunate reality, however, that much of the contemporary models of sermon preparation and delivery that have gained in popularity in the American church came about in large part from a rejection of the doctrines of grace, and developed under the influence of Arminian theology, which bears close relationship to theological liberalism. Therefore, in standing against the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism in sermon preparation and delivery one must consequently stand against the theology of Arminianism and its related subsets that have, along with theological liberalism and postmodernism, helped to inspire many of the contemporary trends in American preaching that exist today.

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179 Ibid.

180 Ibid., 16.

Biblical Theology Foundation

The most important theological foundation, and the one that in many ways guides the rest of the theological foundations for the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project, is that of biblical theology. It is important to note that the term biblical theology as used in this project does not refer to the study of Christian doctrine, or the emphasis on orthodox belief over against unorthodox belief. Biblical theology also does not refer to the study of the particular theological emphases of certain books or authors of the Bible, (although the latter is at times included as part of biblical theology). Rather, biblical theology “is a technical term that refers to a particular way of doing theology” and a particular way of understanding the progress of God’s revelation in the Bible as a means of developing that theology. Geerhardus Vos, considered the father of modern biblical theology, defines this field of study as “that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.”182 As Graeme Goldsworthy explains, “this involves the quest for a big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation.”183 A quest such as this stands in contrast to the postmodern rejection of metanarratives. It also stands in contrast to the theologically liberal moralism that inevitably arises in pastoral preaching when too sharp of a distinction is drawn between the Old and New Testaments, or between the people of God present in both testaments, which results from a rejection of a biblical-theological approach to understanding the Scriptures.


183 Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, 22.
Unfortunately, the field of biblical theology has suffered great neglect in the church in recent decades, and such neglect is one of the reasons for the ease by which theological liberalism and postmodernism have been able to influence so strongly the preaching methodologies of the American church. Sidney Greidanus explains this drift away from a focus on biblical theology when he notes that

The Biblical Theology Movement was influential particularly in the 1940s and 1950s when it formed a wholesome alternative to critical scholarship which had lost itself ‘in the minutiae of literary, philological, and historical problems. As a result the Bible had been hopelessly fragmented and the essential unity of the gospel was distorted and forgotten.’ In contrast to these atomistic approaches, biblical theology offered a holistic perspective.\(^{184}\)

This holistic perspective helped biblical interpreters to understand better the historical, theological, and literary unity of the Bible, and thus to have a better recognition of the redemptive-historical storyline of the Scriptures.\(^{185}\) According to Goldsworthy, this understanding of the unity of the Bible was an important counter to the Enlightenment empiricism that had come to influence many conservative evangelical communities.\(^{186}\)

Under the influences of such empiricism, many conservative evangelicals had adopted an approach to biblical studies that emphasized more the diversity of the Bible, and thus undermined the ability of pastors and teachers of the Bible to see the Scriptures as one redemptive story, rather than a collection of “timeless principles” set in abstract.\(^{187}\)

The popularity of biblical theology waned, however, after the 1950s. In conjunction with this movement away from a serious study of biblical theology, and


\(^{185}\) Ibid., 68.

\(^{186}\) Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 22-23.

\(^{187}\) Ibid., 22-23.
because of criticism that arose against biblical theology at the same time, many theological and philosophical systems developed that challenged the basic presuppositions of biblical theology. Some of these movements were the offspring of the theologically liberal systems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Neo-orthodoxy, for example, which began to exert a strong influence at this time, and led to a fragmented presentation of the biblical storyline among those who held to this position.188

Also in conjunction with the decline in the study and application of biblical theology arose other movements, such as liberation theology, feminist theology, and other radical theological and philosophical movements.189 As a result, much of conservative evangelicalism became susceptible to the philosophical influences of these movements, and began to develop approaches to sermon preparation and delivery that mirrored in many ways the methodologies of these movements, although unintentionally and unknowingly.

In recent years, however, biblical theology has been re-discovered, and interest in the overarching redemptive-historical context of Scripture that is emphasized as a result of this important field of biblical studies has ignited a renewed interest in truly biblical, redemptive-historical, expository preaching. This renewed interest in biblical theology has at the same time led to a greater concern for and desire to correct the malady of the American pulpit that has developed in part from an ignorance of a full-orbed biblical theology. Since the area of biblical theology has a significant role to play in the method

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188 Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, 22-23.

of sermon preparation and delivery discussed in the next chapter, it is important to explain this field in more detail and to provide a rationale for the importance of such a field of study for pastoral preaching.

**A Christocentric Hermeneutic**

In understanding further the hermeneutical implications of biblical theology, it is necessary to recognize something of the nature of Scripture itself. As Graeme Goldsworthy explains, the Bible declares, “that there is one God who has revealed himself to us by his word.” Furthermore, the Bible is “one unified word from God,” and provides us with one way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Goldsworthy concludes, the entire Bible is about Christ.

With this understanding of the Christocentric nature of the Scriptures, the Bible can be seen as God intended it, and as emphasized by the field of biblical theology; that is, primarily an explanation of the history of redemption and the calling of one elect people of God to himself throughout that history. Biblical theology, therefore, focuses one’s attention upon the importance of understanding this “big picture” or metanarrative of the Bible that is rooted in salvation history and the ultimate consummation of that history in the Lord’s return. From this understanding of the Christocentric nature of the

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191 Ibid., 16.

192 Ibid., 18-19.

193 Ibid., 22.
Scriptures, pastors can be better equipped to emphasize the redemptive aspect of any biblical text.\textsuperscript{194}

In order to aid students of the Scriptures in properly discerning these redemptive aspects, Goldsworthy points out various principles for interpreting and preaching Scripture through this redemptive lens. According to Goldsworthy, this can be done by examining the way Jesus Himself viewed Scripture, how that view was reflected in Jesus’ own life and ministry, and how that view continued to be reflected in the teachings of the apostles who followed after Jesus, (see especially Matthew 5:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 24:13-49).\textsuperscript{195} As a result of these reflections, Goldsworthy concludes that “the Bible is first and foremost about God as he reveals himself in Jesus Christ,” and due to this reality “the preacher must be absolutely scrupulous in making this clear”\textsuperscript{196} in preaching.

This understanding of the Christocentric nature of the Scriptures should also challenge pastors on a hermeneutical level to see the role of the gospel as “the hermeneutical key” that unlocks the pages of the Bible. As Goldsworthy states, the “proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the person and work of Jesus” and to recognize that “Christ is revealed as the meaning of the Scriptures so that no part can be rightly understood without reference to him.”\textsuperscript{197} This is what Sidney Greidanus refers to as Christocentric interpretation. Christocentric interpretation is an interpretive approach infused with the insights of biblical theology and serves as an

\textsuperscript{194} Graeme Goldsworthy, \textit{Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture}, 29.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 46-47, 56.

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 61.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 84-85.
essential element in the redemptive-historical component of the method of sermon preparation and delivery detailed in the next chapter.

Greidanus explains further the Christocentric or redemptive-historical approach to the Scriptures, and the implications of this approach for preaching, when he states that “Christocentric interpretation moves from the fullness of revelation in the New Testament to a new understanding of God’s revelation in the Old Testament.” 198 Therefore, “the essence of Christocentric preaching lies not in the lines drawn from the Old Testament to the New Testament but in the prior move in the opposite direction – the move from the fullness of New Testament revelation to a new understanding of the Old Testament passage.” 199 This means that under the influence of biblical theology and through the lens of a Christocentric hermeneutic, one can rightly see the Bible as a flowering of redemptive ideas, begun in Genesis and progressively developing to their ultimate fulfillment in Christ’s first coming, and final consummation at His return. Those who emphasize this overarching redemptive storyline of the Bible typically mark the development of this theme throughout Scripture by noting the unfolding of such in three or sometimes four “great movements” of redemptive history, identified commonly as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. 200

The problem with much of the pastoral preaching that takes place in conservative evangelical churches today is that pastors rarely utilize insights from biblical theology in

199 Ibid.
sermon preparation. As a result, Christ does not become the central focus of every passage of Scripture. This leads to a failure to draw proper redemptive lines during preaching marking a Scripture passage’s relation to Christ. This leaves pastors with no other alternative than to turn each passage of Scripture preached into a moral lesson. This is especially true when dealing with passages from the Old Testament.

In preaching from Old Testament passages pastors often show the influences of theological liberalism on their methods of sermon preparation in the most pronounced ways as Old Testament passages become the source of moralistic sermons. Such sermons are often driven by a desire (albeit a sincere and good intentioned desire) to provide principles for daily living or social betterment. As a result, pastors can inadvertently take attention away from God’s redemptive plan in Jesus Christ. Yet, as Bryan Chapell explains, in order for sermons to be truly biblical, expository sermons “Christ must be the beginning, middle, and end of every sermon…Preaching must exalt Christ for awakening, justifying, sanctifying, and comforting sinners.” “To preach what people should be and do and yet not mention him who enables their accomplishment warps the biblical message. God’s redemptive work is integral to every biblical passage’s proper exposition.”

An understanding of this reality makes a Christocentric reading of Scripture essential to truly biblical, expository preaching. Such a reading of Scripture can come only from a proper understanding of biblical theology and the redemptive theme of Scripture made clear from this field of study. It is also necessary for the spiritual benefit

201 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 277.
of believers that pastors proclaim the Scriptures in this manner. As Albert Mohler explains,

Many of our people are dying of spiritual starvation because they do not know the Bible’s whole story, and thus they do not find themselves in the story. True, they know many little stories. They have a bag of facts. But a little bit of knowledge is not a big picture. As we preach, we need to bring every text into accountability with the big story of Scripture. When you preach, help your people to know the beginning, the middle, and the end – creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. In doing so, you will show your people who they are and where they are going. You will help them to incorporate their little stories into God’s grand metanarrative, and you will help them press on with burning hearts toward maturity and completeness in Christ.\(^{202}\)

**A Sensus Plenior Understanding of Scripture**

The importance of biblical theology and the need for a Christocentric reading of Scripture also brings to light further issues of hermeneutical consideration. These issues address questions about the manner in which Scripture finds fulfillment or the way in which the Old Testament finds fulfillment in the New Testament, as well as the level to which the authors of the Old Testament were aware of this fulfillment when they wrote. An answer to these questions is crucial for the proper understanding of the nature of Scripture and the proper relating of that nature to the model of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project.

It is this researcher’s belief that while the authors of Old Testament Scripture knew much about the meaning of what God revealed to them as they recorded Scripture, the full ramifications of what they wrote were not always made clear to them. This is why, in many instances throughout the New Testament, interpretations are given of certain Old Testament passages that expand upon the original meaning of those passages.

\(^{202}\) Albert R. Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 102.
Therefore, it is clear from such New Testament examples that the fuller divine meanings of the Old Testament passages referenced were unknown to the authors of these texts and involved a meaning that transcended or expanded upon the original, authorial intent of the message. This concept, of the expanded, divine intent of Scripture, known as the sensus plenior view of biblical interpretation, is the hermeneutical position that this project affirms.

Some might react to this view by arguing that such an understanding of promise and fulfillment allows for multiple understandings of a single passage of Scripture. Some might also argue that the sensus plenior approach to understanding the Scriptures undermines the text of Scripture by presenting more than one correct interpretation, and thus undermines the very presuppositions of this project, by encouraging a subjective understanding of Scripture not based in a historical context. However, in answering such objections it should be noted, “Scripture presents one, consistent, organic message. It tells us how we must seek Christ, who alone is our Savior and source of strength, to be and do what God requires.”

Therefore, while “the redemptive dimension of a particular Scripture passage may not seem to dominate the text’s landscape because the redemptive features of a passage sometimes appear only in seed form. Still, exposing the revelation properly requires understanding a passage’s redemptive content and context,” which may be a context unavailable or not immediately understandable to the human author of that particular passage of Scripture.

203 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 277.

204 Ibid., 276.
A *sensus plenior* approach to biblical interpretation argues, therefore, that the author need not know fully the ramifications of what he is writing as long as later biblical revelation makes clear those ramifications. Therefore, whenever we interpret Scripture we need to take into consideration “the activity of the Bible’s divine Author, who knows exhaustively (even though the human author of a particular Old Testament text may not) how particular prophetic words or ancient typological-prophetic events will eventually fit into the larger pattern of the plan of redemption which culminates in Christ.”\(^{205}\)

Additional information in defense of the *sensus plenior* approach to biblical interpretation comes in chapter five, under the heading “The Redemptive-Historical Process,” under the section entitled “Determining the Redemptive Context.” In addition to specific examples of the New Testament’s use of Old Testament statements, that section also provides information on how Old Testament people, events, offices, and institutions are interpreted by the New Testament, in order to show that the method of *sensus plenior* interpretation discussed here is the proper hermeneutical approach to take.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explained in detail certain theological foundations that form the basis for the approach to sermon preparation and delivery set forth in this project. In this chapter, the theological foundations presented are a Scriptural foundation, a Trinitarian foundation, a soteriological foundation, and a biblical theology foundation. In addition to these theological foundations, an explanation of the hermeneutical foundation that flows out of these theological foundations has received attention. In light of the theological

\(^{205}\) Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 138-39.
foundations explained in this chapter, the next chapter provides specific steps for developing *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical, expository sermons.
CHAPTER V
A LECTIO CONTINUA, REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO SERMON
PREPARATION AND DELIVERY

Introduction

This chapter presents a *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to sermon
preparation and delivery. The following sections begin with an explanation of the saving
and sanctifying power of the Word of God, which continues some of the themes
introduced earlier in this project, and serves to establish further the important role of the
Word of God in general, and in public worship in particular, as the central component of
pastoral preaching. The next section provides a brief defense of expository preaching as
the most appropriate means of truly biblical proclamation and concludes with systematic
instructions for preparing and delivering *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical sermons.

The instructions given in the final section of this chapter begin with an
explanation and defense of *lectio continua* preaching. A description of the exegetical
process follows. The final section provides details on transitioning from the exegetical
process into the biblical-theological or redemptive-historical process. This includes a
description of the necessary steps to take in that process. These steps will aid in the
development and delivery of truly biblical, redemptive-historical sermons that both
communicate accurately God’s truth and apply that truth to people’s lives in a way that
exalts God and His grace, magnifies the person and work of Jesus Christ, and avoids
many of the methodological and philosophical trappings of theological liberalism and
postmodernism.
The Saving and Sanctifying Power of the Word of God

A basic presupposition advocated in chapter four, as a foundation for this project, is the belief that the Bible is the Word of God. This means that the Bible is an inspired, inerrant, and infallible record of God’s special revelation to humankind. This revelation, according to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* contains the “whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life,” and according to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* exists for that express purpose, so that people might glorify God and enjoy Him forever through adherence to His Word.

Given the above convictions about the Bible, the message contained in its pages, and the goal of that message, it is the responsibility of every believer to spiritually digest the Word of God and dispense the Word to others in a way that most exalts God and proclaims His glories. Yet, greater even than the responsibility of individual believers to take in God’s Word for themselves and make God’s truth known to others in a clear and accurate manner, is the responsibility of those men called by God to public, pastoral ministry. In corporate worship especially, as God’s elect people gather to worship Him, and as those outside the covenant community come to observe, there is no greater opportunity and obligation for pastors to present God’s Word, for the edifying of the saints, and the wooing of those lost whom God has chosen for Himself.

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206 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 1, paragraph 6, public domain.

207 *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question and answer 1, 2, and 3, conflated, public domain.

The Power in the Word

Surprisingly, however, the Word of God, that is designed to save the lost and sanctify the saints, is often present in small measure in many churches, and those pastors entrusted with the responsibility of disseminating that Word among their congregations, are often negligent in this task to one degree or another. In fact, as noted in chapter three, in many conservative evangelical churches, the public reading of Scripture has fallen out of practice altogether, even though this important element of corporate worship is expressly commanded by God through the apostle Paul in First Timothy 4:13. There Paul exhorts Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” Yet, rarely will one find in a worship service in many conservative evangelical denominations where a pastor or other church member reads even as much as one chapter of the Bible without comment. As Jon D. Payne observes, “If the Word of God is read at all, it is read at the beginning of the sermon, often never to be referred to again.”

Payne then asks, “What is wrong with this picture?”

One thing in particular that is wrong with the above scenario, apart from the failure it demonstrates to adequately obey God’s command to read Scripture publicly, is that it can rob the people of God of the great spiritual benefit that the Word of God is designed to bring. There is an inherent power contained within the Word of God, which God has chosen to work through in a particularly efficacious manner. Therefore, in the development of the model for sermon preparation and delivery presented in this project, it

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210 Ibid.
is important to understand more thoroughly the crucial role of the Word of God in public worship.

To begin with, one must understand that corporate reading and particularly audible reading, has long been the norm throughout human history, and remained such until the eighteenth century.\(^{211}\) This is why in Acts 8:27 that “Philip knew the Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah before joining him in his chariot.”\(^{212}\) This was the norm in the ancient world, and according to Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “literature in the ancient world was spoken, not read silently, even when reading privately.”\(^{213}\) *Augustine’s Confessions* give further attestation to this fact when one notes the events recorded there by Augustine. In one such situation, for example, Augustine recounts how he and his companions were drawn by curiosity to observe Saint Ambrose reading silently, and were perplexed as to the reasons why, offering several ideas as possible explanations for such unusual behavior.\(^{214}\)

Yet, not only has literature in general long been designed for audible, public reading, but also the Bible in particular was designed to be read in a corporate setting. As Arthurs explains,

> When we read the Bible publicly, we do what the people of God have always done… In earliest times God communicated by voice and visions. Then a critical shift came when Israel left Egypt. The Word of God was written down.


\(^{212}\) Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “Devote Yourself to the Public Reading: Enhancing the Role of Scripture Reading in Worship,” *Evangelical Homiletics Society* (October 2010 Conference Papers), 5.

\(^{213}\) Ibid.

\(^{214}\) *Augustine’s Confessions*, Book 6, 3, public domain.
Ephemeral sound was calcified in script, and oral repetition of that script became the center of worship as Israel regularly renewed its covenant with God.\textsuperscript{215}

In fact, throughout the Bible a pattern develops which emphasizes not only the fact that believers are to read the Word of God publicly, but also that God’s declaration of the Word was not to individuals primarily, but specifically to God’s covenant community, a practice that remained consistent throughout both the Old and New Testaments. As Arthurs notes,

Even epistles, the genre that might seem to be most coupled to writing, were prepared orally in community, then orally dictated to a scribe, and then orally delivered to the intended audience through public reading. Thus Col 4:16 states, ‘After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans.’\textsuperscript{216}

A personal letter, like Paul’s epistle to Philemon, for example, also emphasizes the above realities. Although a correspondence between two friends, Paul intended that his letter to Philemon receive a public reading, which is evident from the use of plural, personal pronouns throughout the letter, and the fact that Paul addresses it not only to Philemon, but also to the church in Philemon’s house, (Philemon 2).

All of the above information highlights the important role of the public reading of the Word of God as a communal event, and particularly so in corporate worship. Therefore, when considering the spiritual benefits of the Word of God, such considerations cannot be based solely on the benefits provided to the individual, but must be considered also in light of the spiritual benefits offered to the body of Christ as a whole, in the corporate assembly of God’s people.

\textsuperscript{215} Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “Devote Yourself to the Public Reading.” 2.

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 5.
However, before addressing the specific spiritual benefits of the Word of God, it is important to note some of the statements of Scripture about the power inherent in the Word in a general sense. While space does not allow for a full treatment of the Scriptural statements that address the power of the Word of God, the following represents some of the clearest examples.

The first such example occurs in the opening verses of the Bible, where one can see that by the power of God’s spoken Word the universe and all that is in the universe was brought into existence. Moses tells us in Genesis 1:3 that “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Later, in Psalm 33:6, 9 this same truth is reiterated when the psalmist states that “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host…For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”

In addition to the power of God’s Word to create the universe, God’s Word is also capable of controlling and sustaining the universe. The controlling ability of God’s Word can be seen from Psalm 147:15-18, where the Psalmist states,

He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.

In the New Testament, mention is made of the power of the Word of God to sustain the universe in the first half of Hebrews 1:3, with specific reference to Jesus Christ as the member of the Godhead in view. The author of Hebrews states that “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” God’s word also accomplishes whatever else God desires and fulfills all of God’s plans. Isaiah 55:10-11 speaks to this affect, when God declares,
For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

God’s Word also convicts the guilty and judges against sin. In Jeremiah 23:28-29, God addresses those who had forgotten His name and turned to worship Baal, and asks them “‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces’?” Later, in Revelation, the apostle John describes this same reality of the Word of God executing divine judgment against unbelievers, again with specific reference to Jesus Christ as the member of the Godhead performing this action. Revelation 19:13-15 identifies Jesus as “The Word of God” and “from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.”

The above examples demonstrate the power of the spoken Word of God to achieve a host of different objectives. However, as the Word was given by God to the biblical authors, and recorded in ink and parchment, the same power of the spoken Word became manifest in the inspired Scriptures. Now, through the written Word “Christ’s redemptive power and the power of his Word coalesce…becoming so reflexive as to form a conceptual identity.”²¹⁷ It is for this reason that the author of Hebrews can state in Hebrews 4:12-13 that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his [i.e. the Word of God] sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Thus, “Christ remains active in his Word, performing divine

²¹⁷ Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 28.
tasks that one presenting the Word has no right or ability personally to assume.”

These divine tasks include the giving of spiritual life in salvation, and the nurture and growth of that life through sanctification.

In addition to the power of the Word of God to create and sustain the universe, as well as the power to accomplish whatever God wills, the written Word of God also contains specific salvific benefits. As Michael Horton observes, “Just as creation begins with a command, ‘Let there be…And there was…,’ so too does the new creation originate in the womb of the Word.” Numerous passages of Scripture address this reality and highlight the important role of the Word of God in giving faith to its hearers and bringing about spiritual life to those chosen by God. Romans 10:17 states this clearly when Paul explains there that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ.” Other examples abound, including Ephesians 1:17, where Paul explains that salvation and the sealing of the believer by the Holy Spirit comes from the hearing of “the word of truth.” Later, in James 1:18 this truth is addressed again as James explains that “of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.” Also, in First Peter 1:23, the same idea is reiterated when Peter states that we “have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” Yet, not only does the Word of God result in the giving of individual salvation, but it also forms the basis for the establishment and continued growth of the church as a whole. As Michael Horton explains,

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Repeatedly in Acts, the growth of the church is attributed to the fact that ‘the word of God spread’ and ‘prevailed’ (Ac 6:7; 13:49; 19:20)...In fact, the spreading of the Word is treated as synonymous with the spreading of the kingdom of God. By the Word we are legally adopted and by the Spirit we receive the inner witness that we are children of God (Ro 8:12-17). Through the Word of Christ the Spirit creates faith in Christ, and where this is present, there is the church, [emphasis in original].

The statements above from Horton also emphasize once more the important role of the Word of God in corporate worship. What Horton addresses also demonstrates that the grace of God given through the Word, which creates faith in the lost and spiritual growth in the saved, bears close relationship to body of Christ as a whole. This highlights again the importance of the public reading of Scripture and the proclamation of the Word of God in pastoral preaching. This is also clear from the numerous Scriptural examples where the spiritual benefits of the Word bear direct relationship to the hearing of the Word, which would have undoubtedly taken place during public worship or in some other corporate setting. In Revelation 1:3, for example, John addresses this truth directly when he states, “blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear [emphasis added],” thus assuming the presence of more than one person whenever the Word of God is read. Many of the verses cited above point to this reality as well, as do several others not cited here, but limits of space prevent further elaboration on this particular point.

In addition to the salvific benefits conveyed through the public reading of the Word of God, God conveys sanctifying grace through it as well. The basis of this

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221 The following New Testament verses specifically link the salvific benefits of the Word of God to the hearing of the Word, (Acts 4:4; 10:44; 18:8; Romans 10:14, 17; Galatians 3:2; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5-6, 23; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).
sanctifying grace comes in large degree from the spiritual union of believers as one body in Christ, as indicated above by Michael Horton, which allows the Word of God to function in a particular efficacious manner during times when the covenant community gathers in worship. J. V. Fesko explains this truth further as he states that “When the individual takes up the word and reads it, by the power of the Spirit, it is a means of grace, [emphasis added].”\(^{222}\) However, as Fesko continues to explain,

> We are not sanctified merely as individuals. Rather, we are united to Christ our head, and sanctified as individuals who are part of a corporate body, the church… Therefore, the center of gravity for the individual’s sanctification lies not in his daily personal devotions (as important as they are), but rather in corporate worship. The communion of the saints is where God’s eschatological temple gathers and those preachers and evangelists whom the Spirit has sovereignly gifted to herald the performative [sic] word of God unleash the all-powerful creative word upon the covenant community.\(^{223}\)

In several additional places throughout the Bible this truth is brought to light, that by the reading and resultant hearing of the Word, sanctifying grace comes to believers, and the Word of God comes to bear upon God’s gathered covenant community in such a way as to produce within them spiritual growth not attainable on an individual basis. Jesus’ own words in John 17 are one such example of this reality. In John 17:17 Jesus asks that the Father would sanctify believers in the truth. Then, in order to show the means of this sanctifying power, Jesus states that “your word is truth.” Later, in Ephesians 5:25-26 this same idea of the sanctifying power of the Word is made clear by Paul’s statements that “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” Also in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul

\(^{222}\) J. V. Fesko, “Preaching as a Means of Grace and the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Reformed Perspective,” *American Theological Inquiry* 3, no. 1 (January 2010), 41

\(^{223}\) Ibid., 42-43.
reminds the Thessalonians “that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers, [emphasis added].”

The author of Hebrews also points out the importance of giving heed to the audible Word of God as a means of sanctification, when he reminds the recipients of his letter that “we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it, [emphasis added].” Therefore, in light of the above information, pastors should not neglect the public reading of Scripture in corporate worship. Public Scripture reading is a simple yet powerful means by which God often seeks to accomplish great things by His grace, in the granting of the faith necessary for salvation to the lost, and the sanctifying of believers through the hearing of the Word.

**The Power in the Word Preached**

The proclamation of the Word exists in its clearest and most obvious form, however, through the medium of preaching. The apostle Paul commands this very thing to Timothy in Second Timothy 4:2 when he explains that one of the primary responsibilities of a pastor is to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” In numerous additional places throughout the Scriptures this fact is made abundantly clear that “the preaching of the Word is central, irreducible, and nonnegotiable to authentic worship that pleases God”\(^{224}\) Furthermore, it is the preaching of the Word even more so than the reading of the Word that God uses as His primary vehicle to bring about spiritual conversion. In 1 Peter 1:23 and 25 Peter tells us that we “have been born again, not of

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\(^{224}\) Albert R. Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 49.
perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God…and this word is the good news that was preached to you, [emphasis added].” To this the Westminster Larger Catechism concurs, when it states that

The Spirit of God makes the reading, *but especially the preaching of the word*, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them to Christ; of conforming them to His image, and subduing them to His will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith to salvation, [emphasis added].

Romans 10 also points to the importance of preaching as a means of redemption. Michael Horton explains this further when he states that

This is Paul’s point in Romans 10, when he says that we do not have to ascend to heaven to pull God down to us or descend into the depths to raise Christ from the dead. Rather ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)’.

Therefore, when we preach, and preach in Christ’s name “it is Christ’s voice” that is heard. “The preached Word is neither God’s essence nor merely a human witness but God’s energetic activity of judging and justifying,“ as is clear from Hebrews 4:12, cited above.

Additional spiritual benefits also come from the preaching of the Word that makes this an important and powerful mode of communication for relaying God’s message to people. The apostle Paul sums up many of these benefits in Second Timothy 3:16-17 where he states that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly

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225 Westminster Larger Catechism, question and answer 155, public domain.


227 Ibid.

228 Ibid.
equipped for every good work.” Albert Mohler explains this further by stating that “as Christians, we live by the Word of God…We know who God is only through the Scriptures, and we know who we are in Christ only through the Scriptures. Preaching is therefore always a matter of life and death. People in our churches depend for their very lives on the ministry of the Word.” Titus 1:3 also touches upon the above truth when Paul there

Describes the historical reality of the revelation of grace in Christ as a ‘bringing to light of God’s Word in the proclamation’…The salvation of God in Christ comes to the world in this mode, even as Christ’s resurrection is brought to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). Whoever desires to find Christ must and can find him in the proclamation, [emphasis in original].

The Second Helvetic Confession also affirms this idea by declaring that

The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven.

Thus, great spiritual benefits proceed from Christ Himself as found in and conveyed through the Word of God. However, such truths should not lead to negligence in personal piety or in sermon preparation and delivery. J. V. Fesko issues an important caution in this regard when he reminds his readers that in spite of the gracious work of God through Christ that is present in the Word,

This does not mean that the preaching of the word functions ex opere operato. In other words, a preacher cannot simply offer up a homiletical slop and expect to automatically (and apart from faith) bring forth the creative and redemptive power of God in Christ through the Spirit. To be sure, the triune God is free to redeem

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229 Albert R. Mohler, He is Not Silent, 63.


231 Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 1, par. 1, public domain.
and sanctify through whatever means he deems fit or necessary. One must assert the sovereignty of God in all things. At the same time, however, this does not mean that ministers of the gospel or even those who read the Scriptures have no responsibility whatsoever to read or preach the Scriptures according to their divine intention. In this respect it is important to stipulate that ministers must aim for the right preaching of the word of God. Hence there are several key interpretive principles that must be guarded, not only for proper interpretation but also for proper hearing, [emphasis in original].

The “proper interpretive principles” that Fesko mentions are explained in detail in the following sections of this chapter. The significance of Fesko’s statements at this point, however, show that while pastors must take great care in presenting the Word of God in the proper manner, God is still at work in the Word, regardless of the successes or failures of his servants in this area.

Other benefits also come from the reading and preaching of God’s Word. However, the nature of this project does not allow for a full treatment of each of these practical and spiritual benefits, but those already mentioned should be sufficient to show that the reading, and much more, the preaching of the Word of God is of vital importance for all who hear it.

The Importance of Expository Preaching

Given the truth of the above statements a question remains. Since preaching is so important for the salvation of the lost and the spiritual growth and vitality of believers,

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232 J. V. Fesko, “Preaching as a Means of Grace,” 44.

what method of preaching does the bible teach, or if it does not teach one particular
test method directly, what manner of proclamation can we derive from the Word as that
which is most biblical? Albert Mohler answers this question by stating, “…the preaching
that is central to Christian worship is expository preaching, [emphasis added],”

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix define expository preaching as “a discourse that
expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions
which issue forth from the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the
listeners.” Bryan Chapell explains expository preaching further by stating that “an
expository sermon may be defined as a message whose structure and thought are derived
from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and
context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living,
and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.” In other words, as Chapell
states elsewhere, “expository preaching has a simple goal: to say what God says.”

The importance of the above reality cannot be overstated, and underestimating
this reality is what tends to cause other methods of preaching to fail. Sometimes a pastor
chooses a non-expository method of preaching in an effort to present whatever topic he
has chosen to address. Such non-expository sermons may even include a certain amount
of true statements or ideas about the Bible. However, when non-expository messages
become the regular diet for believers in a congregational setting, it can lead in time, to a

234 J. V. Fesko, “Preaching as a Means of Grace,” 44.

235 Jim Shaddix and Jerry Vines, Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons,
(Chicago: Moody, 1999), 29.

236 Bryan Chapell, Christ Centered Preaching, 31.

237 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Worship, 234.
superficial and subjective understanding of the Bible. This is especially true if verses or
passages of Scripture used in sermon delivery are consistently divorced from their overall
redemptive contexts. When this occurs it can inculcate within believers, over time, a
decontextualized perception of the Bible that undermines an understanding of the Bible’s
one grand redemptive metanarrative. Therefore, when the presentation of non-expository
sermons becomes the norm in pulpit ministry, it demonstrates that the philosophical and
cultural influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism have taken hold of a
pastor’s methodologies for sermon preparation and delivery. Expository preaching on the
other hand is a necessary counter to the influences of theological liberalism and
postmodernism. Expository preaching “makes a congregation more theologically
knowledgeable and spiritually discerning so that: (1) They will not be as susceptible to
false teaching; (2) They will be better equipped for personal Bible reading; and (3) They
will be more capable of training their own children in the home.”

As shown, the benefits of preaching in general and expository preaching in
particular are many. Additional benefits could receive attention as well, but the purpose
of this project does not allow for a full treatment of these benefits here. The most
important aspect of expository preaching, however, beyond the many practical benefits it
provides, is that the Bible itself teaches that expository preaching is the most consistently
biblical manner of pastoral preaching. The purpose of this project does not allow for an
examination of the passages that address this topic, but much is available on this topic for
those interested in examining this issue further.

238 Jon D. Payne, In the Splendor of Holiness, 87.

239 See especially the following articles by Steven J. Lawson: “The Passion of Biblical Preaching: An
Expository Study of 1 Timothy 4:13-16,” Bibliotheca Sacra 159, no. 633 (January-March 2002), 79-95;
It is important to note, however, in considering the information above, that this is not meant to imply that topical sermons, biographical sermons, narrative sermons, or other forms of sermon delivery should not be utilized, (although the times when they are used should be rare, and they should be avoided during regular worship especially). Yet, even if pastors preach such sermons on rare occasions, the development of these sermons should still be through an expository manner in order to maintain an accurate use of the Scriptural text. As Irvin Busenitz points out, “to be effective, all topical preaching and teaching, whether the topic be thematic, theological, historical, or biographical, must be consumed with expounding the Word.” However, as will be shown in the next section, the most biblical use of the Scriptural text in sermon preparation and delivery is not only that which makes us of the text in an expository manner, but that which does so by following a lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery.

The Importance of Lectio Continua Preaching

As noted previously, one of the central characteristics of postmodernism is its denial of metanarratives, that is, a denial of a grand theme or storyline that provides meaning to all else. This denial of an overarching storyline or unifying grand theme has


It is also important to note here that the primary concern of this project is to address preaching in public worship. Thus, the statements made throughout this project are primarily in reference to pastoral preaching directed to believers, in a setting of corporate worship.

For more information on this issue see Irvin A. Busenitz, “Must Expository Preaching Always Be Book Studies? Some Alternatives,” The Master’s Seminary Journal, 2, no. 2 (Fall 1991), 139-156.

Irvin A. Busenitz, “Must Expository Preaching Always Be Book Studies?,” 139.
been common in biblical studies as well, and is particularly observable within the higher-critical methods of theological liberalism. Among higher-critical scholars, the Bible was seen as consisting not of one unified message, with a single overarching theme, but as gathered scraps of independent data, brought together by later redactors in order to support that redactor’s beliefs, the beliefs of the redactor’s community, or some other agenda. The conservative evangelical pastor, however, who holds to the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, would reject such ideas about the development of the Bible and would recognize the many errors inherent in the higher-critical view of Scripture. Yet, many of these same conservative evangelical pastors, who would vocally reject the higher-critical methods of theological liberalism, and the postmodern denial of metanarratives, allow themselves to be influenced in their sermon preparation and delivery by these same movements whenever they preach from passages taken out of their redemptive contexts and taught in isolation of the overarching storyline of Scripture. In doing so, such pastors become in a sense their congregation’s own redactors of the Bible, as they bring together bits and pieces of the Scriptural text in order to fulfill their purpose for a chosen topic or theme, to meet the needs of their faith community, or to support some other sermon idea.

Even when topical or thematic preaching is done with the goal of meeting the perceived needs of those in the congregation it still runs the risk of instilling in believers a postmodern, social-constructionist view of truth that can undermine the overarching metanarratives of reality in general, and Scripture in particular. The result can be a pulpit ministry that presents (albeit inadvertently) a postmodern view of truth, where the value of truth claims are based upon the ability that such claims possess to meet the needs of a
particular social community and facilitate that community’s general well-being. Therefore, to preach in a consistently topical or thematic manner, while not wrong necessarily, in and of itself, can prevent the overarching storyline of Scripture from being properly taught from the pulpit, and can also gradually erode any philosophical basis a pastor has to lay claim to the existence of absolute truth. Thus, topical, or thematic preaching, if done consistently, can serve to undermine the authority of the Bible and the validity of its teachings.

In order to correct this erosion of biblical authority and undermining of biblical truth that is so widespread in the American pulpit, the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project is one that proposes the implementation of a *lectio continua* method of sermon preparation and delivery. This project advocates this manner of preaching in part as a means to ensure that each sermon preached maintains consistency with both its canonical context as well as the context of the passage or book of the preaching text. Such preaching also maintains greater acknowledgment of the continuity of the Scriptural text and the relationship of each text to the overarching theme of the Scriptures as a whole. *Lectio continua* preaching, therefore, stands in contrast to the postmodern rejection of metanarratives and support for social-constructionist views of truth, and militates against the higher-critical methods of theological liberalism.

Therefore, in developing a *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery, the first step in the process is quite simple. The preacher

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243 Irvin A. Busenitz, “Must Expository Preaching Always Be Book Studies?,” 139.

needs merely to start a preaching series at the beginning of the Scriptures, moving
carefully and methodically through the Word of God in this manner. This does not mean
that every verse of a particular book of the Bible needs to be preached, as this would be
far too atomistic an approach, and would actually serve more to undermine than support a
truly *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery.

As Hughes Oliphant Old explains,

> Planning sermons according to the *lectio continua* approach, then, does not imply...plodding through a book three to six verses at a time without ever looking
at the book as a whole. The approach has often been misused in this way, to be sure—but doesn’t have to be."245

Instead, pastors must give attention in sermon preparation, especially when preaching
from the Old Testament, to the overall narrative structure of larger passages of Scripture.
In this way, several chapters of a particular book may be preached through in one sermon
and allow the preacher to maintain integrity to both the immediate context and the fuller
redemptive-historical context of these chapters.246

*Lectio continua* preaching also does not mean to imply complete insensitivity to
the needs of the congregation in choosing a preaching text or developing the themes of a
particular book, as long as such decisions are made within the framework of a *lectio
continua* method. *Lectio continua* preaching also does not mean that one must skip over
important Christian holidays without preaching a somewhat more topical message on
those holidays. However, in general, such breaks away from a regular *lectio continua*
preaching schedule should be kept to a bare minimum, keeping in mind that the best way

245 Hughes Oliphant Old, *Preaching by the Book Using the Lectio Continua Approach in Sermon
Planning*, 2.

246 Ibid., 1.
to meet the needs of any congregation, at any time of the year, is as the redemptive narrative of Scripture is unfolded before them week after week, from Genesis to Revelation. As Michael G. Brown explains,

Many people who hear the Bible preached and explained this way for the first time will begin to develop a healthy and voracious appetite for God’s Word. They become excited about learning how the Bible fits together and testifies of Christ in all of its genres. A thrilled sense of expectancy in the preached Word is cultivated in them.247

This project also advocates that preachers carry out *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical preaching according to the original canonical order of the Hebrew Bible and not according to the order contained in the LXX or subsequent English translations. The reason for this suggestion is quite simple. Since the original Hebrew canon organized the books of the Old Testament in a narrative, rather than a chronological framework, one maintains best the overarching redemptive theme of Scripture by following this order. As Brevard S. Childs explains further, “Scripture became the vehicle by which the original historical events were faithfully remembered, but also theologically interpreted to function as revelation for the generations yet unborn.”248

The Hebrew canon was also the form of the Scriptures that Jesus and the disciples would have used, and numerous places throughout the New Testament refer to the original Hebrew divisions, which gives credence to this order as that which best conveys God’s redemptive plan to humanity. Therefore, when preaching through books of the Bible, especially from the Old Testament, the order followed would not be chronological,


248 Brevard Childs, as cited by Sidney Greidanus in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 76.
primarily, but would be theological, in keeping with the theological narrative structure of the Old Testament as set forth in the Hebrew canon.

The same principle can receive application in the New Testament as well. Brevard Childs notes this when he observes that the New Testament writings, “were preserved, not because of interesting historical, religious, or sociological data, but solely for their theological role in speaking of God’s redemption in Jesus Christ.”249 G. K. Beale also discusses in depth the presence of an overarching storyline or theological narrative structure to the New Testament that weaves its way conceptually through each of the literary genres of the New Testament to present a storyline of “eschatological already-not yet new-creational reign” and kingdom expansion established on the foundation of Christ’s life and death for sinners.250 Thus, in preaching from both the Old and New Testament in a *lectio continua* manner, it is possible to develop a fuller understanding of the theological framework governing both testaments by maintaining consistency in preaching to the original canonical order of the Bible.251

Several practical benefits also come from adhering to a *lectio continua* method of preaching. To begin with, by following this strategy for the choice of a Scriptural text the preacher, who is often busy with many other pastoral responsibilities in a given week, is freed from the unnecessary burden of wondering from week to week what topic or passage of Scripture to preach on next. With a *lectio continua* approach a pastor always knows what to preach, weeks, months, and even years in advance, and even knows the

249 Brevard Childs, as cited by Sidney Greidanus in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 105.


precise order in which to preach each sermon. In addition to these benefits, this method for the choice of a preaching text keeps pastors from neglecting certain portions of Scripture or addressing only favorite topics or themes. Most importantly, it ensures that the full, redemptive-historical message of God is conveyed to the people of God in its complete narrative context, and as a result, allows the people of God to become better acquainted with the Scriptures in both a general and specific manner.

Far more important, however, than the practical benefits of lectio continua preaching, is that this method of preaching finds its basis in Scripture. According to Nehemiah 8:7-8 the priests in the temple of Israel “…helped the people to understand the Law while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” While this passage does not itself form the basis for lectio continua preaching, it does establish the basis for expository preaching in general, and is the earliest example of such in the Bible. The priests were the preachers of Israel, and as such were responsible for explaining the Law of God to the people. In doing so, they developed the pattern of presenting God’s truth in an expository manner.

However, coupled with the idea of expository preaching as stated in Nehemiah 8 and as developed among Israel’s priests, is the additional statement of the apostle Paul in First Timothy 4:13, where he instructs Timothy, his son in the faith, to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” The significance of this verse as it pertains to the choice of a Scriptural text for preaching and the pattern that one develops in preaching due to that choice cannot be overemphasized. This verse, therefore, together with the concepts established in Nehemiah 8 builds a strong case for a lectio
continua approach to preaching while at the same time highlighting the importance of preaching in general.

Within this command of Paul to Timothy, three central elements are noticeable that are crucial to any proclamation of the Word of God. As Steven J. Lawson points out, “These three components—reading, exhortation, and teaching—are the strong and sturdy pillars on which all biblical preaching should rest.” Of these three, the first obligation is to “public reading.” This was a common practice in the synagogues of Paul’s day, and the word translated as “public reading” has an important meaning in connection to the synagogue worship that points to the strong biblical basis for lectio continua preaching. In fact, the choice of a passage for reading and teaching in the temple and synagogue was often in accord with the contextual and canonical order of the books of the Bible, following the Hebrew canon.

Out of this practice of the public reading and expository explanation of Scripture that was common within the synagogues of the Jews, grew the early Christian pattern of lectio continua preaching that has been the standard throughout church history.

Christopher K. Lensch notes this truth, as he explains that

In matters of church government and worship, the New Testament church followed the general pattern of the synagogue. The synagogue grew out of the Old Testament church and developed during the intertestamental period. In place of the immature worship of the temple system, it served as the transition to new


253 For a detailed study of the public reading of Scripture in the synagogue and early church and the role it serves in establishing a basis for lectio continua preaching see the following articles. Michael Graves, “The Public Reading of Scripture in Early Judaism,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 50, no. 3 (September 2007), 467-87; Philip H. Towner, “The Function of the Public Reading of Scripture in 1 Timothy 4:13 and in the Biblical Tradition,” Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 70, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 44-53.
covenant worship ‘in spirit and in truth.’ The synagogue of the apostolic church [James 2:2] discarded sacerdotalism’s visual crutches of sacrifices and symbolic ornamentation. Instead, through the synagogue’s systematic reading and exposition of God’s mercy and truth found in His inscripturated revelation, God’s people met in God’s presence, heard His Word for themselves, and returned the spiritual responses of prayer and praise.”

Although at times throughout church history other approaches to Scripture reading and preaching gained in popularity, *lectio continua* reading and most importantly, *lectio continua* preaching has always resurfaced among those most devoted to truly expository preaching.

In the early centuries of the church, apart from the apostles themselves, the first notable example of *lectio continua*, expository preaching, comes from the ministry of John Chrysostom. John Chrysostom served as Archbishop of Constantinople in the late fourth to early fifth century. Some regard Chrysostom as the greatest preacher of the Greek Church. During Chrysostom’s ministry, he preached hundreds of sermons, delivering, for example, sixty-seven sermons on the book of Genesis, fifty-nine on the Psalms, and later preaching through much of the New Testament, including ninety sermons on Matthew and eighty-eight on John.

Unfortunately, during much of the centuries after the time of Chrysostom, expository preaching remained relatively non-existent in the church. This changed, however, during the Protestant Reformation in the fifteenth century, at which time many

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rediscovered *lectio continua* preaching. Chief among those during this period to preach in a *lectio continua* manner were Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin. Zwingli, following the lead of those like Chrysostom, developed a practice of *lectio continua*, expository preaching that according to Hughes Oliphant Old, he followed “throughout his entire ministry,” departing from it only on the rarest of occasions.\(^{258}\) It was this type of preaching that Old credits as the driving force behind the acceptance of the teachings of the Protestant Reformation in Southern Germany and Switzerland.\(^{259}\)

John Calvin was much the same in his preaching ministry, following a consistently *lectio continua* approach that saw him preach through much of the Bible throughout his ministry. This included such feats as preaching one-hundred twenty-three sermons on Genesis, three-hundred and fifty-three sermons on Isaiah, and two-hundred sermons on Ezekiel, just to name a few examples.\(^{260}\) Calvin, in fact, was so dedicated to this approach that even when he was banished from Geneva for three years, when he was finally able to return, “Calvin reentered his Geneva pulpit and resumed his exposition exactly where he had stopped three years earlier, on the next verse!, [emphasis in original].”\(^{261}\)

Other prominent preachers in subsequent years who followed a similar approach to preaching were the Puritans William Perkins, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, John

\(^{258}\) Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, 46-47.

\(^{259}\) Ibid.


\(^{261}\) Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, 33.
Owen, and John Gill, to name a few. Unfortunately, after the time of the Protestant Reformation and the early American Colonial period, the practice of *lectio continua* preaching fell out of use, in favor of topical or thematic preaching. Only in recent decades has a revival in expository preaching taken shape again, and in even smaller circles has that resurgence involved a *lectio continua* approach as well. Yet many pastors and theologians today continue to remind the church of its heritage of *lectio continua* preaching and to call pastors back to this most biblical approach. Most importantly, however, is that many are also calling pastors to reclaim biblical, *lectio continua* preaching, along with a commitment to the apostolic model of redemptive-historical, expository preaching, which is discussed in more detail below.

In the preceding section, a foundation for *lectio continua* preaching has been set forth. This foundation consists of the Scriptural teachings in support of *lectio continua* preaching, as well as hermeneutical, theological, philosophical, and practical reasons for its use. In addition to this foundation, there is a record of the practice of *lectio continua* preaching throughout the history of the church. Therefore, there is no reason for pastors today not to implement an approach to sermon preparation and delivery that makes use of this method. Therefore, in developing a strategy for the choice of a Scriptural text, the choice is simple: preach the Word, starting at the beginning of the Word and continuing from there in a *lectio continua* manner.

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Preparing *Lectio Continua*, Redemptive-Historical Sermons

Introduction

In order to preach truly biblical, expository messages that remain faithful to the text of Scripture and the overarching redemptive theme of Scripture, while at the same time avoiding all the negative, methodological influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism, it is necessary to prepare *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical, expository sermons. A description of the process for doing this occurs below, beginning with an explanation of the exegetical process, and then proceeding to a description of the redemptive-historical process.

It is important to note, however, that while the exegetical process and the redemptive-historical process are presented here as two different processes, they should not be thought of as truly separate. The information presented in the following sections is conceptual more than sequential, except when the text specifically notes otherwise. For example, one can and should implement many of the steps described in the redemptive-historical process in conjunction with the steps in the exegetical process.

It is also the goal of the following sections, especially the section on the redemptive-historical process, to show how pastors can apply a Christocentric hermeneutic and *sensus plenior* interpretation of the Bible in sermon preparation and delivery, and the significance of such application in solving the research problem presented in this project. The following section also provides an explanation of how the use of a Christocentric hermeneutic can provide for the most appropriate application of any Scriptural text, and in turn offer the greatest potential for spiritual growth among those exposed to redemptive-historical preaching.
The Exegetical Process

The first step to take in preparing *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical sermons consists of many parts within a larger whole defined by some as the exegetical process. In preparing sermons, the first steps in this process must involve the exegesis of the text of Scripture under consideration. This examination has typically taken the form of several specific steps in which the careful exegete seeks to determine the precise meaning of a text in light of its original, grammatical-historical context.

This student assumes that those following this exegetical process will hold certain presuppositions about the text of Scripture in common with this writer, including its inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility, and consequently its divine authority, and its ability to provide knowable and discernible meaning. This student also assumes at this point that in order for one to carry out the exegetical process described below in the best manner that the preacher implementing this model will adhere to the *lectio continua* method of sermon preparation. Therefore, in most instances, the selection of the sermon text will be an easy task, as it will typically be the next pericope, chapter, or chapters from the particular book of the Bible the pastor is preaching through at the time.

After the selection of the preaching text, the first step in the preparation of an expository sermon is the reading of the preaching text. This writer recommends that

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263 Some of the information from this section is adapted from a research paper presented by this student for the class DMIN 8343: Developing Relevant Expository Messages, and used with permission.

pastors read the preaching text several times, in several different modern translations, in order to thoroughly acquaint and immerse oneself in the Scriptural text and to get a greater feel for the various nuances of meaning conveyed by modern translations of the text.

The next step is to develop one’s own translation of the text from the original languages. In the event that one is not able to work from the original languages, one should consult a good interlinear translation to aid in this process, or a good Bible software program such as Logos Bible Software, Bible Works, PC Study Bible, or another similar program. In translating, one should also give attention to critical problems and significant textual variants.

After translating the text from the original languages, one should diagram the various phrases and parts of speech and lay out these parts in a visual manner. With this diagram as a guide, one should then outline the text in as detailed a manner as possible. The next step is to begin studying the text in a more detailed manner than has already been done up to this point. During this phase of the preparation process, the initial study that takes place should consist only of one’s own personal observations about the text, in order to avoid an unnecessary bias toward one interpretation or another of the particular passage under consideration. After the text has been thoroughly exhausted and every pertinent question asked about the text, one should look to outside sources.

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265 For more information on these programs, see Bible Works, (Norfolk, VA: Bible Works, LLC, 1992-2012), available from http://www.bibleworks.com; Logos Bible Software, Libronix Digital Library System, (Bellingham, WA: Libronix Corporation, 1999-2012), available from http://www.logos.com; PC Study Bible, (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1988-2012), available from http://www.biblesoft.com/new. If using Logos Bible Software it is recommended that for exegetical studies the Scholar’s Library Silver edition or higher be used. If using the PC Study Bible it is recommended that the Advanced Reference Library edition or higher be used.
As outside sources are consulted this should begin with an examination of the historical, cultural, literary, and theological background of the preaching text, along with a study of issues pertaining to the date, authorship, recipients, and purpose of writing for the book in which the sermon text is found. In doing so, one should consult good exegetical and expository commentaries on the particular book or portion of Scripture under consideration. This student also recommends that one consult the works of certain notable figures throughout church history for additional information on one’s preaching text.

The next step in the exegetical process is one of the most crucial. It is the current tendency among many within conservative evangelical churches, to stop the process of exegesis after all the work of translating and studying the historical, cultural, literary, and grammatical background is complete. However, as Bryan Chapell points out, while exegesis offers sound analysis of the words, grammar, syntax, and historical setting of Scripture…a minister who presents only the grammatical-historical meaning of God’s Word may be lecturing or discoursing, but he is not preaching. The word must be applied spiritually. Spiritual preaching is thus Christological. Through Christ it will also be theological, bringing all glory to the triune God.

One of the weaknesses of the commonly accepted exegetical process, as practiced in many conservative evangelical churches, is the tendency to develop a reductionistic approach to biblical interpretation and application of Scripture. This is evident in the way some Bible interpreters, and in turn, some pastors and preachers, tend to reduce the meaning of a Scriptural text to its lowest common denominator, or to focus considerable attention on the smallest, most isolated contextual meaning that can be observed, without consideration to larger contextual and redemptive-historical issues. Often this happens

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through a well-meaning attempt to avoid reading into a passage of Scripture, but instead succeeds in either reading too little out of it, or drawing so much out of every detail of the text that the sermon becomes nothing more than an exegetical commentary. When this occurs, a sermon can cease to be a sermon and easily turn into either a moral lesson or an academic lecture.

An example of the former tendency, where too little is brought out of the text of Scripture, has already been noted in chapter three. There it was seen how under the influences of Enlightenment naturalism, some Bible expositors place too rigid a reliance upon the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation through use of a plain or common sense approach to biblical interpretation. Such a rigid reliance upon empirical investigation of every detail of a preaching text can actually lead to an undermining of the biblical message by preventing one from taking into consideration broader hermeneutical and redemptive-historical concerns. Thus, such an approach can keep the overarching redemptive storyline of Scripture, as displayed in a particular passage of Scripture, from coming into clearer focus for the preacher, and in turn for the congregation. This in turn can result in mere moralism in preaching.

An example of the latter tendency, where too many details are extracted from a portion of Scripture, is given by Daniel Doriani as he explains listening to a pastor speak on Luke 1:5-7. As Doriani describes it,

That night’s sermon identified Herod and explained the convoluted history of the Herod clan. It described the system of priestly divisions in Jerusalem. It defined key terms such as “upright,” “observe,” and “blameless.” The preacher explained that the barrenness of Zechariah and Elizabeth was tragic since children were so important in that culture. Finally, he showed that even righteous people endure disappointments; but they prove their faith by persevering when God withholds their hearts’ desires.
Though the sermon was thirty-five minutes old, its conclusion seemed to take the congregation by surprise and a wave of whispers broke out. Why? The pastor spent his time introducing the prophecy of John the Baptist's birth and missed the central events: the angel’s joyful message to Zechariah (1:11-17), his doubts and striking punishment (1:18-22), and the beginnings of Elizabeth’s pregnancy (1:23-25). Like a sportscaster that introduces the players and strategic issues in a contest only to cancel coverage of the game itself, the speaker gave the context for the announcement of John’s birth, but missed the event itself. Consequently, the “sermon” was actually a history lecture with a sub-Christian moralism at the end.  

Thus, with both of the above tendencies, a moralistic sermon is the result. There are numerous other ways as well that the weaknesses of the exegetical process display themselves in sermon preparation and delivery, but these problems are most noticeable in how preachers tend to deal with the Old Testament. Often, when preaching an Old Testament passage, a pastor will treat the details of the passage as merely illustrative or prescriptive, thus leading again to a kind of moralism in preaching. Other times when preaching an Old Testament passage, a pastor may simply present the details of the passage as bare, historical facts, in isolation of their full redemptive context, much like the examples already given. However, as Bryan Chapell explains,

No text exists in isolation from other texts or from the overarching biblical message. Just as historic-grammatical exegesis requires a preacher to consider a text’s terms in context, correct theological interpretation requires an expositor to discern how a text’s ideas function in the wider biblical message.

Clearly, it is important to implement sound principles of exegesis in sermon preparation, and to pay careful attention to the grammatical-historical context of any given passage of Scripture, in order to develop truly biblical, redemptive-historical sermons. However, in

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269 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 275.
order to avoid the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism, the exegetical process must not stop after the steps in the process are complete. Therefore, in proposing a *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery, it is necessary that the commonly accepted exegetical process, as practiced by many conservative evangelicals, be expanded to include theological exegesis, or a redemptive-historical process of sermon preparation. This will require pastors to go further in the exegetical process than is normally done by developing a redemptive-historical exegesis of the passage, using the overarching redemptive theme of Scripture and its fruition in the person and work of Jesus Christ as the guide in that process. Pastors can accomplish this by seeking to recognize the redemptive elements of the preaching text and the manner by which the redemptive markers within that text make a display of God’s grace and glory through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Pastors must then apply these aspects of the text must in sermon delivery.\(^{270}\) A detailed description of the steps involved in this process occurs in the next section below.

After the steps described above are complete, the final step in the preparation of a redemptive-historical sermon is to develop a sermon manuscript, or at least a detailed homiletic outline known as a sermon brief. By doing this, the preacher is able to spend time constructing his words, in order to safeguard against careless or poorly thought out statements. A sermon manuscript also adds the benefit of allowing the preacher to make sure that his words accurately and appropriately express the ideas of the Scriptural text. After this final step is complete, one should give attention to the delivery of the

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expository sermon, and should develop a strategy that forms the basis for the form, style and other elements of the sermon itself.

The Redemptive-Historical Process

As indicated already, it is necessary for the preparation and delivery of *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical sermons that preachers expand upon the normal exegetical process, as commonly practiced among many conservative evangelicals, to include theological exegesis. Theological exegesis is a redemptive-historical process that requires the exegete to go beyond a mere grammatical-historical method of interpretation to a biblical-theological consideration of the overarching redemptive theme or storyline of the Bible. This process seeks to find the relationship between the Bible’s storyline and any given preaching text, and then makes specific application of that text based upon such redemptive-historical foundations.

It is important to note at this point that theological exegesis or the implementing of a redemptive-historical process as part of exegesis does not involve a movement away from the literary context of a passage of Scripture or the imposition of a theological context on a passage that is not already inherent in that passage. Rather, theological exegesis involves the recognition that an “evangelical view of the unity of Scripture demands that we see the whole Bible as the context of any one part.” 271 Theological exegesis also involves the realization that the literary dimensions of each passage of Scripture go beyond mere historical interpretation to include theological interpretation,

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consistent with the theological narrative structure of the Bible. Therefore, theological exegesis helps the Bible student who endeavors to adhere to Paul’s command to Timothy to “preach the Word” (Second Timothy 4:2) to remember that the Word cannot be preached properly unless each text is preached within its redemptive-historical context. Therefore, the remaining sections of this chapter are devoted to a detailed description of the manner by which one can carry out the redemptive-historical process, and relies heavily upon the work of Bryan Chapell, Graeme Goldsworthy, Sidney Greidanus, Dennis Johnson, and others who have already developed lengthy treatments of such approaches in their own writings.

Reiterating the Need for Redemptive-Historical Preaching

While not directly addressing the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery, Michael C. Brown’s comments about preaching touch upon the results of such influences in conservative evangelical churches. Brown notes that much of the sermons heard in such churches consist of “watered-down messages of moralism and therapy, which turn the gospel into good advice rather than good news.” As a result, many Christians find themselves “weary from their continual failure to live up to the so-called victorious Christian life, sick of

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narcissistic and anti-intellectual drivel, and often close to abandoning the church altogether.”

In response to this malady that exists in so many churches and among so many believers today, it is necessary to offer a biblical corrective, which one can find through redemptive-historical preaching. As Brown concludes, we “do not need another topical series on how to be a better husband, father, or employee,” but rather, we “need to learn the Bible as God gave it to us, hearing the redemptive work of Christ preached from all the Scriptures.”

To accomplish this task, this writer suggests the following steps as part of the exegetical process.

**Determining the Redemptive Context**

One of the most important parts of any exegetical process is to determine the context of the particular preaching passage. The typical grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation provides many helpful steps for doing this by aiding pastors in uncovering a Scriptural text’s immediate contextual meaning. Yet, this does not complete the task of exegesis. The fuller redemptive-context of a passage must be determined as well. As Bryan Chapell explains, “a primary approach to discerning the redemptive nature of biblical texts is identifying how the passage predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results from the person and work of Christ.”

A more detailed description of these four areas, as explained by Chapell, is included below.

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276 Ibid., 159.

277 It is important to note again that the steps presented in this section are conceptual more than sequential and therefore do not necessarily need to be done in the same order as listed here.

278 Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 238.
Contexts that Predict Christ

As Chapell explains,

Some passages predict God’s redemptive work in Christ by making specific mention of his coming person or work. Messianic Psalms and passages from prophetic and apocalyptic literature provide many examples...Other texts reveal what Christ will do or be without making specific reference to him. Examples include those passages relating to the Old Testament sacraments, the exodus, the purification codes, and so on. The predictive nature of these passages may be apparent only in New Testament light...[but] we are New Testament believers and have both the right and the responsibility to view God’s earlier revelation from the full perspective that his Word grants us.279

Chapell’s last statement in the above quote is particularly important to observe in understanding how one might recognize the predictive quality of a passage of Scripture that seems to bear no direct reference to Jesus Christ. This is what Chapell refers to as “type disclosure,” or biblical typology.280 Graeme Goldsworthy further defines this biblical concept as “the principle that people, events, and institutions in the Old Testament correspond to, and foreshadow, other people, events, or institutions that come later.”281 However, due to the influences of Enlightenment rationalism on Christian thought, many within the conservative evangelical community are wary of applying biblical typology on a broad scale in sermon preparation and delivery, fearing that such typological interpretation will lead to wild allegorizing and spiritualizing of Scripture. Such is not the case, however, as Thomas Schreiner points out when he explains that

Such an approach is fundamental to biblical theology, for it is a category employed by the biblical writers themselves. Nor is typology limited to the NT,

279 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 283.

280 Ibid., 281.

281 Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, 109.
for the OT itself employs the exodus theme typologically, for both Isaiah and Hosea, among others, predict a new exodus that is patterned after the first exodus. In the same way, the OT expects a new David who is even greater than the first David. We see in the OT itself, then, an escalation in typology, so that the fulfillment of the type is always greater than the type itself.\textsuperscript{282}

Therefore, while typological correlations are observable in the Old Testament’s use of the Old Testament, this escalation in typological language reaches its zenith in the New Testament. Thus, it is particularly the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament in a typological manner that is of primary concern for this project. Therefore, the following represents some of the clearest examples from the New Testament where people, events, offices, and institutions of the Old Testament, or other general Old Testament statements receive a typological interpretation in the New Testament, and form the basis for a fuller understanding of the historical events themselves as they unfolded in the Old Testament period.

Robert L. Thomas, while disagreeing with the New Testament use of the Old Testament as a hermeneutical norm, and while holding to the principle of a single meaning for each Old Testament passage, nevertheless acknowledges the existence of what he refers to as “inspired sensus plenior applications of the OT words.”\textsuperscript{283} As Thomas explains,

In such uses NT writers took words from the OT and applied them to situations entirely different from what was envisioned in corresponding OT contexts. They disregarded the main thrust of the grammatical-historical meanings of the OT passages and applied those passages in different ways to suit the different points they were putting across.\textsuperscript{284}

\textsuperscript{282} Thomas Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” \textit{Southern Baptist Journal of Theology} 10, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 23.


\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 83.
While one could argue with Thomas’ definition, especially his assertion that the writers of the New Testament disregarded “the grammatical-historical meanings of the OT passages,” that goes beyond the goal of this project to address. What is significant about Thomas’ statements, however, is that it shows at least an acknowledgment of a fuller, divine meaning for certain Old Testament passages, even if that meaning, in Thomas’ view, is something that only the apostles were able to understand by use of what Thomas refers to as their “charismatic exegesis.” Thomas also provides several examples of where a New Testament quotation provides a fuller meaning to an Old Testament verse. While not all of these quotations serve as examples of typological interpretation, per se, they do at least establish that the New Testament writers often recognized a fuller meaning inherent in Old Testament texts.

The following is a brief summary of the explanations provided by Thomas’ of the New Testament’s *sensus plenior* use of the Old Testament, with some slight variations to Thomas’ list. In Isaiah 8:14-15, for example, Isaiah refers to those who opposed him and his ministry. Luke cites these verses in Luke 20:17-18 in reference to those who opposed Jesus and His ministry. In Isaiah 8:17, Isaiah declares his trust in God. The author of Hebrews cites this verse in Hebrews 2:13a in reference to Christ’s trust in God. In Isaiah 8:18, Isaiah mentions himself and his two sons. The author of Hebrews cites Isaiah’s statements in Hebrews 2:13b in reference to Christ and all believers given by God the Father to Christ. In Isaiah 9:1-2, Isaiah provides statements of promise about the end of the Assyrian domination of Israel. Matthew cites these statements in Matthew 4:12-16 in reference to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 12:3 records Isaiah’s words of promised

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deliverance for the Israelites. In John 4:10 and 14 Jesus Himself cites this verse in speaking to the woman at the well about “living water.” In Isaiah 25:7-8, Isaiah provides a description of the Messiah’s rule over all nations and the end of death and suffering that will come with that rule. In First Corinthians 15:54 Paul cites this verse in reference to the future resurrection of believers that is based on the resurrection of Christ. In Isaiah 28:11-12, Isaiah gives a message of judgment that describes the instructions of the Assyrians that would come to the captives of Ephraim and Jerusalem. In First Corinthians 14:21-22 Paul cites these verses in reference to God’s gift of tongues to early New Testament believers that served as a sign to unbelievers. In both Isaiah 29:18 and 35:5, Isaiah provides statements about the healing of Israel. Matthew cites these verses in Matthew 11:5 in reference to the physical healing accomplished by Jesus during His earthly ministry. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, Jeremiah provides statements of promise about God’s establishment of a new covenant with Israel and Judah. The author of Hebrews cites Isaiah’s words of promise in Hebrews 8:8-11 in reference to the New Covenant that God the Father has established through Christ with New Testament believers. In Isaiah 61:1-2, Isaiah provides a statement of promised healing and restoration for Israel. Luke cites Isaiah’s statements in Luke 4:18 in reference to the healing and restoration that comes to all believers in Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah makes statements about the future kingdom of God. Luke cites these statements in Acts 13:47 in reference to the spread of the gospel among gentile believers. In Isaiah 53:4 Isaiah provides statements about the healing accomplished by the Messiah for the people of Israel. Matthew cites these statements in Matthew 8:17 in reference to the healings that Jesus performed during His earthly ministry. In Isaiah 54:13, Isaiah provides statements about the restoration of
Israel and God’s establishment of everlasting peace among them. John cites these statements in John 6:45 in reference to the spiritual peace and restoration that comes to New Testament believers in Christ. Isaiah makes statements about the reestablishment of God’s relationship with Israel in Isaiah 65:1. Paul cites these statements in Romans 10:20 in reference to the church and God’s establishment of a relationship with gentile believers in the church. Hosea describes God’s calling of Israel out of Egypt in Hosea 11:1. Matthew cites this verse in Matthew 2:15 in reference to God’s calling of Jesus out of Egypt.\(^{286}\) Finally, Psalm 5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 36:1; 53:1-3; 140:3; Proverbs 1:16; 3:15-17; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 59:7-8 provide numerous statements that discuss the sinfulness of the wicked only. Paul cites each of these verses, however, in Romans 3:10b-18 in reference to the sinfulness of all humanity.\(^ {287}\)

In addition to the many passages cited by Thomas, where specific Old Testament verses are given a new or fuller meaning in the New Testament citation of them, numerous other New Testament citations of Old Testament people, events, offices, and institutions provide an even clearer picture of the prevalence of biblical typology in the New Testament. Dennis Johnson, in his work *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures\(^ {288}\)* provides his readers with a host of such examples, divided by different levels of typological correlation.

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\(^{288}\) Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 200-230.
Johnson begins with those passages that specifically state something is a type of Christ, either by using the word “type” (typus) exactly, or by developing a typological correlation. Johnson lists five such instances of direct typological use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. For example, in Romans 5:14, Adam is presented as a type of Christ. First Corinthians 15 draws parallels between Adam and Christ as “covenental representatives.” First Corinthians 10:6-11 develops a typological correlation between Israel’s trials in the wilderness and the trials experienced by the church. In First Peter 3:21 the waters of baptism are developed as an “antitype” of the salvation and judgment that came through the flood of Noah’s day. Lastly, the entire book of Hebrews develops the typological relationship between the earthly tabernacle and the redemptive realities accomplished by God the Father through Jesus Christ.

Next, Johnson lists specific Old Testament quotations applied to Christ, which are far too extensive to repeat here. In addition to these verses, Johnson goes on to describe typological allusions to Old Testament events that find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, such as Jesus’ “comparison of his impending death to the lifting up of the bronze serpent by Moses,” (John 3:14-15 citing Numbers 21:4-9). Johnson also mentions “the typological significance of the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha” in connection to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ as developed in Luke 7-9, as well as John’s typological correlation between Jesus and the temple of Israel and the Jewish feast days.

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289 Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 202-203.
290 Ibid., 202-207.
291 Ibid., 210
292 Ibid., 210.
in John chapters 2, 6, 7, 10, and 15.293 Johnson also draws attention to Old Testament patterns fulfilled in Christ. Johnson notes, for example, that one can view the behavior of each covenantal representative in the Old Testament by the level to which it reflects the perfect obedience rendered by Jesus Christ in the New Testament.294

These examples of the New Testament’s typological use of the Old Testament cannot be ignored, and when taken together such as has been done here, build a strong case for the use of such typological disclosure as a normal hermeneutical practice.295 For this reason, Johnson argues that preachers today must reclaim this apostolic hermeneutic for preparation of sermons and learn to look for typological markers as the apostles did, as a means of determining the redemptive context of any given passage of Scripture.296

With this, Scott A. Swanson concurs when he states that the

NT writers do not see themselves as only ‘using’ or ‘applying’ or ‘appropriating’ the separate meaning of the OT for their new circumstances. They proclaimed what it meant. That meaning was what the Lord himself had explained to them (Luke 24:27) and opened their minds to understand (v. 45) concerning himself. It was the meaning which was in all the Scriptures (v. 27), and which must find its fulfillment in him (v. 44).297

Therefore, Bible pastors today have a responsibility to study the Scriptures through the same lens that Christ expected the apostles, and in turn, all Christians to use. This does

293 Dennis Johnson, Him We Proclaim, 211.

294 Ibid., 216.


296 See Dennis Johnson, Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ From All the Scriptures.

not give one the right to allegorize the Scriptures in an attempt to find anything in the Bible, or to read into passages of Scripture things that clearly are not there. However, neither does this allow one to remove a Christ-centered lens from the exegetical process, if one desires to produce truly biblical, redemptive-historical, expository sermons. It is important to reiterate again, however, that an interpretative model such as the one described above does not involve an allegorizing of Scripture in an attempt to find Christ in every Old Testament word or statement. As J. V. Fesko points out,

There is a profound difference…between the typological and allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Allegorical interpretation uses words or ideas in the biblical text as a springboard for presenting supposed truths that cannot be found in the literal sense of the text. Allegorical exegesis, therefore, is unconcerned with the truthfulness or historicity of the interpretation that is gleaned from the text. Typological interpretation, on the other hand, counts the literal sense and the events described as absolutely crucial to the interpretive process. The typical interpretation of a text is not a different or higher sense, but locates the particular passage within the broader canonical context, understood in the relationship between type and antitype. Hence the link between type and antitype is found in the progressive unfolding of redemptive history, God’s progressive self-disclosure in Christ. Ultimately, interpreters must locate a particular text within the broader context of redemptive history. Hence, not only must an interpreter account for the grammatico-historical context but also the broader redemptive-historical horizon. Typological interpretation goes far beyond the antiphonal interchange of predictive prophecy—prophecy given and fulfilled. Rather, it seeks to understand the typical revelation of the OT in terms of its own patterns and events as the NT interprets it.⁴⁹⁸

In addition to Fesko’s statements above, Graeme Goldsworthy provides a simple and helpful summary of the typological significance of Old Testament promises, events, and institutions, in order that modern Bible interpreters might see how one could use such interpretive models during the exegetical process in determining redemptive contexts that predict Christ. As Goldsworthy explains,

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Against the backdrop of the complexity of the history and prophetic expectations of the Old Testament, Jesus proclaims himself to be the goal of all the purposes and promises of God. Where the Old Testament describes the goal of God’s work in terms of a remnant of the chosen people, the promised land, the temple, the Davidic prince, and a whole range of images and metaphors, the New Testament claims simply that the death and resurrection of Jesus fulfills them all.²⁹⁹

Related to the above area is the next category that Bryan Chapell presents for determining the redemptive context of Scripture, and that is looking for redemptive contexts that prepare for Christ.

Contexts that Prepare for Christ

In passages of Scripture that predict Christ, the person and work of Christ is present either in the form of direct predictions about Christ or through typological foreshadowing of His future work. In other contexts, like those of a typological nature, that make no direct reference to Christ, the goal is “to prepare the people of God to understand aspects of the person and/or work of Christ, [emphasis in original].”³⁰⁰ As Chapell explains further,

Old Testament believers were to understand their need of faith in the Redeemer based on their inability to keep any divine imperative perfectly…God prepared for Christ’s work by planting the perception for need in the hearts of Old Testament saints. He also prepared them (and us) by helping them to understand how the need would be satisfied…Exposition fair to this grand purpose of all Scripture excavates Old Testament texts to expose implicit spiritual, experiential, or theological preparations that enable us to embrace redemptive truths, even where there is no explicit statement of them.³⁰¹


³⁰⁰ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 283.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 283-84.
In addition to contexts that predict Christ and prepare for Christ, additional passages of Scripture emphasize the results of the work of Christ, and discerning the redemptive contexts of these passages is one of the most crucial steps in the exegetical process, and one that avoids best the moralism of theological liberalism that tends to influence sermon preparation delivery.

Contexts that Point to the Result of Christ’s Work

That much of the Bible consists of exhortations and commands is a truth that one cannot deny. In order to remain faithful to the proclamation of the whole counsel of God, pastors must endeavor to present these statements of Scripture as they come to them in the process of their pulpit ministry, as they preach through particular books of the Bible. However, the manner by which one presents such commands and exhortations in preaching is of utmost importance. As Graeme Goldsworthy explains, Christians “are legalists at heart,” and “we would love to be able to say that we have fulfilled all kinds of conditions, be they tarrying, surrendering fully, or getting rid of every known sin, so that God might truly bless us.” Yet, such ideas run contrary to the gospel message and the teachings of the Bible about our standing before God that comes because of the person and work of Christ. As Chapell explains,

Divine love made conditional upon obedience is mere legalism, even if the actions commended have biblical precedent. The only obedience approved by God is that which he himself enables and sanctifies through the union which he himself provides.

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302 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 118.

303 Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 287.
Understanding this fact is vitally important, for out of zeal to motivate believers to godly living a pastor can actually encourage people toward legalism and away from an understanding of the completeness of the finished work of Christ, if a pastor declares the imperatives designed to promote godly living without reference to the work of Christ. As Goldsworthy explains,

> If we constantly tell people what they should do in order to get their lives in order, we place a terrible legalistic burden on them. Of course we should obey God; of course we should love him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. The Bible tells us so, But if we ever give the impression that it is possible to do this on our own, not only do we make the gospel irrelevant, but we suggest that the law is in fact a lot weaker in its demands that it really is.

> In practical terms, if we as preachers lay down the marks of the spiritual Christian, or the mature church, or the godly parent, or the obedient child, or the caring pastor, or the responsible elder, or the wise church leader, and if we do this in a way that implies that conformity is simply a matter of understanding and being obedient, then we are being legalists and we risk undoing the very thing we want to build up.\textsuperscript{304}

To this Bryan Chapell concurs when he states that “to preach matters of faith or practice without rooting their foundation or fruit in what God would do, has done, or will do through the ministry of Christ creates a human-centered (anthropocentric) faith without Christian distinctions.”\textsuperscript{305}

Therefore, in order to determine the redemptive context of a passage of Scripture when that passage contains primarily commands, instructions, warnings, or exhortations, one must see the context by way of the manner in which the passage under consideration relates back to the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is the redemptive context of such passages, and pastors must be clear in communicating this context in their preaching by focusing attention on the imputed obedience of Christ that forms the basis for the

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{304} Graeme Goldsworthy, } \textit{Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture} \textit{ 119.} \]

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{305} Bryan Chapell, } \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching} \textit{ 287.} \]
believer’s obedience. This is the only way to prevent pastoral preaching succumbing to the influences of legalism, or the moralism of theological liberalism. These truths also bear close connection with the last redemptive context explained by Chapell. That is, passages of Scripture that do not predict Christ, prepare for Christ, or emphasize the result of Christ’s work, but instead reflect the work of Christ.

Contexts that Reflect the Grace of God that Leads to Christ

Chapell describes redemptive contexts that reflect Christ as “implicit aspects of the gospel of grace that are imbedded in every biblical passage, [emphasis added].” In order to determine how a given text reflects such aspects, one needs simply to ask how that text reveals “God’s nature that provides redemption” and what the passage reflects “of human nature that requires redemption.” The discoveries that are made in response to these questions leads to what Bryan Chapell refers to as the “Fallen Condition Focus” of a passage, which will be discussed in more detail below.

By asking such questions of a preaching text, it can also help one to avoid using certain passages of Scripture as merely illustrative of proper behavior, and it can further serve to prevent one from focusing too much on character studies, or presenting principles for life living from the examples of biblical figures. As Bryan Chapell notes, “there are certainly commendable aspects of character in many biblical figures, but Scripture seems to take great care to demonstrate how deeply flawed the entire human race is so that all will acknowledge dependence on the Savior for justification,

306 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 284.
sanctification, and all spiritual blessings.”

Grounding believers further in such truths is the goal of the next part of the redemptive-historical process, looking for the “fallen condition focus.”

**Looking for the “Fallen Condition Focus”**

Closely connected to the above step of the redemptive-historical process of determining the redemptive contexts of passages in light of the grace of God imbedded in those passages, is the goal of determining the “Fallen Condition Focus” of a passage. “Fallen Condition Focus” is a phrase coined by Bryan Chapell. According to Chapell, “the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) refers to the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God’s people to glorify and enjoy him.” As Chapell explains further,

> Since God designed the Bible to complete us for the purpose of his glory, the necessary implication is that in some sense we are incomplete. We lack the equipment required for every good work. Our lack of wholeness is a consequence of the fallen condition in which we live…The corrupted state of our world and our being cries for God’s aid. He responds with the truths of Scripture and gives us hope by focusing his grace on a facet of our fallen condition in every portion of his Word, [emphasis added].

Key in the above statements is the fact that every portion of Scripture, according to Chapell, contains such focal points of God’s grace in light of human fallen-ness, and as a result, it is the job of preachers to discover what these focal points, or “fallen condition focuses” are when preparing sermons. In doing so, one is able to determine what the

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308 Ibid., 50.

309 Ibid., 49-50.
redemptive-purpose of a passage is, and thus what the main idea or proposition of the sermon itself should be. The preacher can then prepare for delivering each sermon by focusing attention on this idea and using “the text’s features to explain how the Holy Spirit addresses that concern then and now.”310 This redemptive proposition also helps in developing the overall structure of a sermon, as any subdivisions or sub-points of the sermon should naturally flow out of and relate back to the overarching redemptive purpose of the passage.

In determining a text’s fallen condition focus, Chapell offers additional guidelines that preachers should be careful to take into consideration during the exegetical process. To begin with, one should examine the preaching text to see if there are specific sins mentioned. Any specific sins listed could be a passage’s “fallen condition focus.” However, things that are not sins could also be the “fallen condition focus” of a passage. Chapell explains that “grief, illness, longing for the Lord’s return, the need to know how to share the gospel, and the desire to be a better parent are not sins, but they are needs that our fallen condition imposes and that Scripture addresses.”311 Therefore, in determining a passage’s “fallen condition focus” Chapell urges preachers to look for “an aspect or problem of the human condition that requires the instruction, admonition, and/or comfort of Scripture. Thus, an FCF always occurs in negative terms. It is something wrong (though not necessarily a moral evil) that needs correction or encouragement from Scripture.” Additional information on how this “correction and

310 Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 50.
311 Ibid., 52.
encouragement” can be further developed and properly applied in sermons is the purpose of the next section.

**Grounding All Imperatives in the Indicatives of the Gospel**

Once the redemptive context and fallen condition focus of a passage of Scripture are determined, and the overall structure of the sermon developed in light of these findings, one additional step remains. In developing truly biblical, redemptive-historical sermons, it is also necessary to make sure that in the process of determining applications for one’s congregation, and in the process of conveying those applications in sermon delivery, that one *grounds all imperatives of Scripture in the indicatives of the gospel*. What this means is to be consciously Christ-centered and grace focused in every application developed in sermon preparation. This should involve a high apprehension of the sovereign grace of God through Jesus Christ that provides by faith alone what is necessary for salvation and subsequent sanctification throughout one’s Christian life. The reason that this step of the redemptive-historical process is so important in sermon preparation and delivery is because so often “preachers approach the text with only one question in mind: What does this text instruct me to tell my people to do?”

However, when pastors come to a preaching text in this way it can lead to what Chapell refers to as “the deadly be’s.” The deadly “be’s” are sermons that focus attention on being or doing something in order to experience greater love or blessing from God. Such sermons may encourage believers to be like certain biblical characters,

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312 Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 245.

or to avoid some specific sin. These sermons may also attempt to motivate believers to develop better some specific godly behavior trait, or to enhance their spiritual life and improve their relationship with God by implementing certain practices, principles, or disciplines. Sermons like these are well intentioned, but spiritually deadly, for they “communicate (although usually unintentionally) that we make our own path to grace and that our works earn and/or secure our acceptance with God.”\textsuperscript{314} This type of “preaching that seeks to issue imperatives (what to do) from a biblical text without identifying the indicatives of the gospel (who we are by grace alone) to which the text points robs listeners of their only source of power to do what God requires.”\textsuperscript{315} Sermons such as these, that focus on the imperatives of Scripture without reference to the indicatives of the gospel, creates what Michael G. Brown refers to as a compromised blend of law and gospel, “a sort of ‘go-law-spel’ that is neither law nor gospel but rather a moralistic ‘law-lite’ devoid of spiritual nutrients.\textsuperscript{316} 

Therefore, in order to develop proper applications in preaching, pastors must always keep in mind the fact that everything we do as Christians is the result of the work of Jesus Christ (the indicatives of the gospel). In turn, the grace that flows into our lives on the basis of Christ’s active obedience in life and passive obedience in death, imputed to us at salvation on the basis of the work of Christ, is what makes doing and being (the imperatives of the Bible) a Christian even possible. J. V. Fesko describes further the important distinction between biblical indicatives and imperatives when he states that,

\textsuperscript{314} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, 294.

\textsuperscript{315} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Worship}, 245.

\textsuperscript{316} Michael G. Brown, “How’s the Food? The Church Plant’s Most Important Ingredient,” 161.
Generally speaking, ‘mood is the feature of the verb that presents the verbal action or state with reference to its actuality or potentiality.’ The indicative mood is the mood of assertion or presentation of certainty. By way of contrast, the imperative mood is used to convey intention and is most commonly employed for commands. Broadly speaking, when these terms are employed vis-à-vis our soteriology, the indicative tells us who we are in Christ, and the imperatives tell us how we are to live. The indicative and imperative surface throughout the Scriptures but are easily observable in Paul’s epistles. Paul tells the church at Rome: ‘Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death’ (Rom 6.3)? This is an indicative statement—the believer is baptized into Christ through the outpouring of the Spirit, which is symbolically portrayed in water baptism. Paul makes this assertion or presents this certainty. Based upon who the believer is in Christ, Paul then issues an imperative: ‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions’ (Rom 6.12). This same pattern emerges elsewhere: ‘For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. . . . Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry’ (Col 3.3–5), Respecting the indicatives and imperatives in Scripture is a key to sound reading, interpretation, and preaching. An understanding of this distinction between indicatives and imperatives is also one of the best ways for pastors to guard against the fostering among believers of spiritually unhealthy, personal introspection. Instead of focusing attention always inward, believers ought to focus their attention on the reality of what Christ has done for them in history and the spiritual union they share with Christ due to such historical realities.

The spiritual union believers share with Christ is an important truth for pastors to keep in mind while developing sermon applications as a way of remembering to ground all imperatives of Scripture in the indicatives of the gospel. The biblical teaching about the believer’s spiritual union with Christ is declared in such passages as Romans 6:5, where Paul states that “if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Then in Romans 12:5 Paul again touches upon this truth when he states that believers “are one body in Christ.” In addition

317 J. V. Fesko, “Preaching as a Means of Grace,” 49.
to these verses, numerous other passages throughout the New Testament point to the fact that believers are spiritually “in Christ” or have “put on Christ,” but limits of space do not allow for further discussion of these verses here. Based on the this union believers share with Christ, Paul tells the Colossians in Colossians 3:1-3 that

If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

This concept has powerful ramifications for the way Christians live on a daily basis. Since believers lives are hid with Christ in God, the perfect obedience that Christ achieved in His earthly life becomes the possession of believers. Paul in Romans 5:12-21 alludes to this idea when he ascribes the righteousness given to believers as the result of the obedience of Jesus Christ. Paul also touches upon this truth in First Corinthians 1:30 when he reminds the believers at Corinth that “you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” The author of Hebrews emphasizes this idea as well when he reminds believers in Hebrews 10:14 that “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Later, he urges believers, based on this reality, to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,” (Hebrews 12:1-2). Therefore, as Michael Horton explains, “where most people think that the goal of religion is to get people to become something they are not, the Scriptures call believers to become more and more what they are already in Christ.”318 This is, in essence, what it means to ground all imperatives in the indicatives of the gospel.

This concept of the believer’s spiritual union with Christ in both salvation and sanctification also has important ramifications for the way pastors interpret and apply biblical texts. According to Chapell, “this means that, even if we do not mention Jesus by name in the explanation of a text, we must show where the text stands in relation to his grace in order to provide hope that the obligations of the text will be fulfilled.”319 “We must remember that even our best works deserve God’s reproof unless they are sanctified by Christ.”320

Therefore, applications that do not bring the redemptive truths of the indicatives of the gospel into light are not biblical applications. Furthermore, if preaching that emphasizes the imperatives of the Bible without mention of gospel indicatives becomes the steady diet of pastoral preaching received by a congregation, in time it can demolish Christian faith by presenting what is nothing more than a theologically liberal moralism of good works devoid of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. However, it is important to keep in mind that grounding the imperatives of the Bible in the indicatives of the gospel is not some sort of magic formula that guarantees certain spiritual results if used in sermon preparation and delivery. As J. V. Fesko Explains,

Interpreters and preachers should note…that the indicative and the imperative do not represent the divine and human sides of a salvation equation, or division of labor: the indicative being what God has done and the imperative being what the believer must do in response. This state of affairs would oppose the very realities that this grammatical distinction preserves and lead to legalism.321

319 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Worship, 246.
320 Ibid.
J. Gresham Machen makes this point clear as well when he states that “here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity – liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative; liberalism appeals to man’s will, while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God.”

J. V. Fesko explains this idea further as he describes the role of gospel indicatives in relation to biblical imperatives. Fesko states that

The NT, especially against the backdrop of the first century world, represents a radical break with the pattern typically employed by Stoics and Cynics. Throughout the ancient world there were peripatetic philosophers who wandered about exhorting people on how they should live…Christian preachers transformed the lives of men not by appealing to man’s own abilities, but by telling a story; not by exhortation but by setting forth a narrative event. Such an approach seemed foolish to the philosophers of the ancient world and still seems foolish to many preachers…But what we must realize is that when preachers present the indicative of this narrative, it is no mere story but rather the pneumatic revelation of God in the crucified and risen Messiah by which he raises the dead to life. By the pneumatic word, God enables those whom he has raised to carry out the imperatives of the word through their holy union with Christ.

Therefore, in developing redemptive-historical sermons, it is necessary for the integrity of the text of Scripture, the mutual spiritual benefit of pastor and congregation alike, and for the proper exaltation of the work accomplished by Christ, that one thoroughly ground all applications of Scripture in the indicatives of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the specific steps involved in developing *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical, expository sermons. In detailing these steps, this project gave attention to information on the manner in which the overall exegetical process of

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322 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 47.

323 Fesko, 50.
sermon preparation should unfold. In addition, this project placed focus upon specific steps of the redemptive-historical process, which form the final component of the overall preparation of *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical messages. The following chapter attempts to bring the ideas of this chapter and the entire work to a close by offering some additional summaries of this project and providing concluding thoughts on additional areas of consideration pertinent to this project.
CONCLUSION

Introduction

The project presented here has examined briefly the rise of theological liberalism and postmodernism and the influences that such movements have had on Christianity as a whole, and particularly on the preaching practices of pastors within conservative evangelical churches in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America. This project has also sought to provide as a necessary corrective to the negative influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery, a model for biblical, expository preaching. The model proposed has been described as a *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery. A model such as this represents a method of biblical, apostolic preaching the church today needs to reclaim and implement in pulpits on a broad scale for the spiritual growth and vitality of believers and the faithful proclamation of the redemptive message of Jesus Christ.

In the following sections, an additional demonstration of the importance of this approach occurs through a final summary and analysis of this project from this student’s perspective. The first section provides a brief overview and evaluation of the ministerial and professional/academic goals sought by this project along with an analysis of how well this project achieved those goals. The second section includes this student’s personal reflections on the growth experienced and insights gained during the development of this project. The third section examines briefly some of the theological issues that arose during the development of this project and how the project addressed those issues. The
fourth and final section provides suggestions for how this student and others might take
the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project and expand it,
adapt it, and implement it for future use in a variety of ministry contexts.

Evaluation of Ministry Goals and Professional/Academic Goals

There is a great need for a study such as the one presented here. As in the days of
the early twentieth century, when the American church stood at a turning point in the
development of preaching practices due to the onslaught of theological liberalism and
modernism, so too now the church is at a similar turning point through the influence of
postmodernism and the continued threat of theological liberalism. The tragedy that has
occurred, however, is that many conservative evangelicals who have historically stood
against theologically liberal and postmodern beliefs have inadvertently allowed these
movements over time to influence the methods adopted for sermon preparation and
delivery. As a result, a dangerous mixture of theological liberalism and postmodernism
has taken captive many American pulpits. This project, however, has provided
information about the above influences to help the reader understand better how to
discern such influences. As a result, it is this student’s analysis that this project has been
successful in achieving that ministry goal, as stated in the introduction to the project.

In addition, this project has presented a model for sermon preparation delivery
that has sought to provide a means by which pastors can be equipped to provide
suggestions for the correction and ultimate dissolution of the problems that arise from the
influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism, and in turn be better equipped to
serve their congregations with that knowledge. This has been done by advocating a lectio
continua, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery. From such a proposal those in full time pastoral ministry and those preparing for such ministries can gain valuable insight into proper methods of sermon preparation and delivery, and understand better where some of the negative influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism have had an effect on their own pulpit practice. This in turn can lead to congregations that are able to experience greater spiritual growth, knowledge of the Bible, love of Christ, and zeal for proclaiming accurately and authoritatively the Word of God to others.

This study is also significant for the skills it provides in general to allow believers and ministerial leaders alike to be able to better discern the negative cultural influences that have affected the church, and to provide biblical alternatives to counter those influences. To accomplish these goals this project has focused the reader’s attention on the importance of a high view of God, a high view of His word, and a proper biblical-theological framework from which to develop truly biblical, expository sermons. In addition, this project has sought to encourage pastors and preachers to work their way through an exegetical and redemptive-historical process that achieves the most biblical ends and provides for the greatest spiritual benefit to believers and unbelievers alike.

This project has also been successful in this student’s analysis, of achieving the professional goals stated in the introduction. This project has provided pastors and those in other fields of Christian ministry a greater understanding of the rise and subsequent influence of postmodernism and theological liberalism on American society in general and the church in particular. In connection with this, this project can serve as a helpful (albeit brief and cursory) guide to the present American cultural milieu, which will in
turn allow leaders in ministerial and academic fields to be more conversant with the
culture, and thus better equipped to impact the culture with the message of the good news
of Jesus Christ. This in turn can aid Christian leaders in developing a greater awareness
and sensitivity to the ideas and movements that have helped to shape American culture
and at the same time provide a greater understanding of the proper, biblical relationship
between the American church and American culture.

Lastly, this project has achieved the above academic goals stated in the
introduction by developing further a biblical-theological basis for *lectio continua*,
redemptive-historical, expository preaching. This has also led to a more developed
hermeneutical stance than had been present in the original project proposal and a more
detailed explanation of the importance of Christocentric hermeneutics, as well as a more
holistic understanding of the biblical record as a basis for a proper presentation of the
truth of God’s Word in public discourse.

Reflections on Personal Growth and Insights Gained

The personal growth experienced and the insights gained during the development
of this ministry project have been greater than could have been imagined prior to
beginning work on this project. Since the time work commenced on this project two and a
half years ago so much has been learned about preaching, hermeneutics, exegesis and
homiletics, and in the process this student’s perspective on preaching and convictions
about sermon preparation and delivery have been dramatically altered. In addition, this
student’s views on a host of related issues have also undergone some significant change.

Entering into this project it was already this writer’s conviction that the most
biblical method of sermon preparation and delivery was expository preaching, and that the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism were undermining this method. At the conclusion of this project, these convictions remain unchanged. However, in the process of examining the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery this student made numerous discoveries that challenged several presuppositions and assumptions about what constitutes truly expository preaching.

The most notable discovery made during the development of this research project was the method of sermon preparation described here as redemptive-historical. This student’s conviction from the outset of this project was that the preaching ministries of many American pulpits were under threat from the methodological influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism. It was a further conviction that such influences needed addressing and remedies offered for their elimination. However, it was not initially clear what those remedies should be or even how to seek them. With the discovery of redemptive-historical preaching and redemptive-historical or Christ-centered hermeneutics, that all changed. It then became clear to this student that the only way to offer an appropriate biblical alternative to the methods of sermon preparation and delivery that have developed in conservative evangelical churches was by implementing a *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical approach. It also became clear from further study of this approach that the problem was bigger than had initially been conceived and the consequences of this problem for the church as a whole was far more dangerous than had been originally thought. This student also came to the realization of how much he and others had acquiesced to the methodological influences of theological liberalism and
postmodernism in preaching, and the amount of relearning this student needed in so many areas in order to eliminate these influences from further pulpit practice.

Due to the above insights, many changes occurred in the way in which this writer views the Bible as a whole. Due to an in-depth study in redemptive-historical preaching and hermeneutics that came about as part of this project, a challenge presented itself to this student to reconsider many hermeneutical and theological presuppositions. This includes the way in which one understands the relationship of the New Testament to the Old Testament, the nature of promise and fulfillment, the relationship between divine intent and authorial intent in Scripture, biblical prophecy, and a whole host of related issue.

Theological Issues Arising During the Project Development

More theological issues arose during the development of this ministry project than could have possibly been imagined at the onset. Most of these theological issues came to the surface through the discovery of the redemptive-historical approach to preaching that came about during the development of this project. The most significant of these issues, in this student’s opinion, are hermeneutical concerns. These include the relationship of the New Testament to the Old Testament, the nature of promise and fulfillment, and the relationship between divine intent and authorial intent in Scripture. These issues in turn have raised numerous theological questions in the areas of soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. These questions pertain to concepts such as the nature of salvation in the Old Testament, the relationship of Old Testament believers to New Testament believers and the role of ethnic Israel in God’s redemptive plan. In addition, other questions have
arisen about the relationship between the indicative and imperative elements of Scripture and their connection to salvation and sanctification, along with a host of other related topics.

A full discussion of the above theological issues goes far beyond the nature of this project to address. However, the position that one takes on these issues determines in part whether the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project can be accepted in its entirety or not. Therefore, while this student cannot fully address the theological issues arising in the development of this ministry report, that does not undercut their importance. Without an appropriate answer to the theological questions that arose during this project, the work on it would have remained in a state of limbo, with only a research problem, but no real solution for how to address the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation delivery. Therefore, the theological issues raised during this project caused this writer to reevaluate, in light of Scripture, many positions and presuppositions once held. The theological issues raised during this project also provided a theological and hermeneutical foundation, and an exegetical and homiletic methodology for this project that would not exist in its current form otherwise.

A final theological issue that arose in the development of this project that deserves special attention, in this student’s opinion, concerns the role of sanctifying grace in preaching. Prior to the development of this research project, this student possessed a very high view of the Scriptures and expository preaching. Yet, at that time, these views did not include a full understanding of all the Bible teaches about the declaration of the Word of God as a means of God’s grace. Through further study, however, in large part
due to the writings of Bryan Chapell and Martin Luther, this student recognized that there is an aspect to the preaching event that is even greater than had initially been thought. This led to further study on the mediate presence of Christ in Christian worship and the way in which that presence works in conjunction with the Spirit of God and the Word of God during preaching to bring about spiritual conversion for the lost and sanctification for believers. While a fuller study of this topic would still be helpful, what this student has learned thus far has greatly aided in the development of the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project. It has also served to increase even more the more the high view of Scripture and the strong convictions about the need for expository preaching that this student already held before.

Suggestions for Expansion, Adaption, and Future Implementation

In giving thought to the ways in which this student and others might expand, adapt, or implement the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project, several ideas come to mind. To begin with, in regards to the expansion of this project, it is this student’s opinion that nearly any part of this project could potentially receive further development. This would especially be true for the areas of historical importance that explain the influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery. One could write a whole dissertation on just these influences. In addition to this topic, the sections on the history of lectio continua preaching, or the history of expository preaching in general could be developed into a large paper or thesis, as well as some of the areas of the theological foundation, particular those pertaining to biblical theology and Christocentric hermeneutics, and the biblical
basis for expository preaching. One could also do entire studies on the role of the public reading of Scripture in connection to sermon delivery, as well as the use of technology in preaching.

In addition to the areas of possible expansion, there are also areas where this project could be adapted to fit various contexts. While this project has dealt primarily with a lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to expository preaching, the same approach could be adapted for use in developing Bible study or Sunday school curriculum. It could be also be adapted for further use in non-worship settings to teach the overarching storyline of the Scriptures from a redemptive-historical perspective. In addition, the lectio continua aspect of this approach to sermon preparation and delivery could be adapted for use in developing a calendar of lectio continua Scripture readings for public worship, or for developing worship manuals that follow the redemptive flow of Scripture and the redemptive movements of the gospel as a rubric for designing orders of service.

In addition to areas for possible expansion and adaption, there are also goals that this student has for the future implementation of this project. Presently this student does not hold a full time ministry position. However, it is the goal of this student to attain a full time ministry position in the near future and incorporate the model of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project as a regular part of that ministry. It is also the hope of this student that pastors reading this project might implement, in their own pulpit ministries, the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated here. The implementation of this method might also serve such pastors as a means of countering any methodological influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism
that they perceive to have affected their own preaching practices, and might in turn lead such pastors in becoming even greater expositors of the Word of God, to the mutual spiritual benefit of themselves and their congregations.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, in whatever way one might perceive of this project, or in whatever way one might come to implement, expand, or adapt it, more than anything else, one overarching hope remains. It is the hope that this project might result in a renewed passion, or fresh discovery and zeal among pastors and seminary students alike for the need to preach *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical, expository sermons. It is the further hope that from that passion and discovery would arise from within the body of Christ, a greater knowledge and love of the Lord as well as a renewed desire to do His will, motivated by a proper understanding of all that Christ has done for us and continues to do for us every day.

It is the further hope that this project might lead pastors and preachers toward the development of specific biblical-theological rationales for their preaching that guide all aspects of their sermon preparation and delivery. It is also this student’s desire that from these biblical-theological rationales pastors might develop exegetical and homiletic habits to aid in the avoidance of the dangerous influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on their preaching practices. Lastly, it is this student’s hope that from those pastors influenced by the information presented in this project would flow grace filled proclamations of God’s overarching redemptive meta-narrative in Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.
The above chart shows the manner in which one should develop Christ-centered, redemptive-historical sermons. The green arrows show the appropriate progression one should follow in the exegetical and redemptive-historical process. The red arrows indicate incorrect progressions of exegesis and application.

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APPENDIX 2: OUTLINE OF THE EXEGETICAL AND REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL PROCESS

I. The Exegetical Process
   A. Read the preaching text (several readings are recommended)
   B. Develop a personal translation of the preaching text
   C. Develop a grammatical diagram of the preaching text
   D. Develop an outline of the preaching text
   E. Begin studying the preaching text in more detail
      1. Make personal observations about the preaching text
      2. Ask as many questions as possible about the text
      3. Consult outside sources in order to determine the full grammatical, historical, theological, literary, and cultural context of the text.

II. The Redemptive-Historical Process
   A. Determine the redemptive context
      1. Look for contexts that predict or typologically present Christ
      2. Look for contexts that prepare for Christ
      3. Look for contexts that point to the results of Christ’s work
      4. Look for contexts that reflect the grace of God that leads to Christ
   B. Determine the “fallen condition focus”
      1. Look for sins that listed in the preaching text
      2. Look for other areas of human need in the preaching text
   C. Develop applications of the text by grounding all imperatives in the indicatives of the gospel
APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE SERMON MANUSCRIPTS OF REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL, EXPOSITORY PREACHING

The following are manuscripts from sermons that this student preached recently in a congregational setting, through which the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project received application. The manuscripts included here include one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, in order that the reader might see what a sermon from either testament looks like when preached in a Christ-centered, or redemptive-historical manner.

The following sermons also consist of full manuscripts. While this student’s normal practice is to preach from a full manuscript or shorter sermon brief, this does not mean to imply that manuscript preaching is the only proper method for delivering redemptive-historical sermons. The sermons included here appear as full manuscripts only as a means to present each part of the sermon in its full context, and in order to preserve in print what one would hear in a congregational setting. In keeping with this goal, the following manuscripts retain a normal conversational tone as used in oral communication. Thus, this student has not attempted to render every sentence grammatically correct or even to develop full sentences in all instances. In some places, however, the text has been indented or set in bold print to emphasize divisions of thought, the reiteration of the main idea of the sermon, or to mark redemptive-historical references. In other places, one will find explanatory comments not original to the
sermon in brackets or in italics. Each sermon manuscript included here took between thirty-five to forty-minutes to preach.

It is also important to note, as Dennis Johnson does in the opening to his own sermon manuscripts, that while the following manuscripts represent this student’s best attempt to produce redemptive-historical sermons,

There cannot be a single ‘template’ to which every redemptive-historical, Christ-centered, audience adapted sermon conforms. Variation in the character and gifts of the preacher, in the maturity and needs of the congregation, and in the distinctive features of a particular occasion will yield great variety in the sermon’s form and tone, in the balance of textual exposition, contemporary illustration, and focused application, and in other features. But these messages will give a taste of what preaching in the trajectory of the apostle’s proclamation of Christ might sound like.325

325 Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 409.
Genesis 38:1-30 – The Story of Judah and Tamar
“No One is Beyond the Reach of the Grace of God”

I. Introduction

Before we turn to the Scriptures today let’s go to the Lord in prayer and ask that He would bless our time together in His Word.

[Opening prayer]

Opening Illustration

As we prepare to look into the Word of God today, I would like for you to travel back in time with me in your minds to the year 1748. Picture yourself aboard a merchant ship bound from West Africa to England. Most of the voyage goes quite well, but near the end of the journey, off the coast of Donegal, in northwest Ireland, the ship suddenly encounters a fierce storm, and before long begins to sink. In the midst of the darkness of the night and the chaos and confusion of the sinking ship a young man of 22 by the name of John Newton is awakened from sleep. As the situation worsens and all hope seems lost that the ship will be saved, and with his young life hanging in the balance, John Newton calls out to God for deliverance. Miraculously, at that moment the ship’s cargo shifts, plugging the hole that was sinking the ship, and the ship safely completes the rest of its voyage to England.

Although John Newton wasn’t saved until two months later, it was this event that marked the beginning of his conversion to Jesus Christ. Prior to that time, John Newton had been a wicked and sinful man. His youth was filled with rebellion, and although he would become a sailor in the royal navy aboard the slave ship Pegasus, he remained obstinate and disobedient. In fact, Newton was so insubordinate that he was himself forced into slavery, being abandoned by his crew in west Africa to serve as a servant to an African duchess. Only after his father sent someone to search for him was he brought back to England, at which point the realization of his sin and his need for salvation finally came to bear upon His mind. In returning to West Africa later that year, John Newton was finally saved; freed from the chains of sin in the same place he had previously been not only a spiritual slave, but a physical slave as well. Later John Newton would go on to become a minister in England, and would be influential in ending the slave trade there. Newton would also come to write many hymns, among them his most popular, known today as “Amazing Grace.”

It was that same grace that was able to take a wretch like John Newton and turn him into a child of God. It’s that same grace that transformed me, and transformed those of you who are here this morning who have trusted in Christ for your salvation. It’s that same grace that God continues to work in the lives of all those who trust in Christ today. And we see that same grace at work in the lives of numerous individuals throughout the pages of Scripture, as God works to draw them to Himself, in order to show us today that
II. Explanation of Redemptive-Historical Context

We see this truth brought out powerfully for us in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 3:15, after Adam and Eve have fallen into sin, God promises to send a redeemer: one who would crush the head of the serpent and bring final victory to God and God’s people. One of the primary themes of the book of Genesis is this very reality, that in spite of humanity’s sin and the Satanic deception at work in the world that seeks to turn God’s creation against Him, God will still receive glory, because God had a plan to bring about redemption through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. By His grace, God is seen throughout the book of Genesis accomplishing just that. In Genesis God calls out from the nations and preserves for Himself a people. Through that people God worked to bring His plan of redemption to fruition and accomplish all that He had purposed to do in Christ.

One of the places we see this take place the most powerfully, and where God’s grace is put on display for us in a remarkable way, is found in the latter chapters of Genesis. There we see one of the sons of Jacob, who through great trials and temptation comes to stand as a leader among his family and in the process is used by God to preserve God’s people and accomplish God’s plan and purposes for the ages. But the person that I speak of is not Joseph, as you might have thought, but Joseph’s brother Judah, and the section of Genesis that I would like to focus our attention on today is Genesis chapter 38. So if you would please, turn in your Bibles there now to Genesis 38.

In Genesis 38 we come to an intriguing portion of Scripture that seems to interrupt the Joseph narrative of Genesis 37-50. Here we are given details concerning the life of Joseph’s brother Judah, and in particular, details surrounding the relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. So if you have made your way to Genesis chapter 38, please follow along with me, beginning in Genesis 38, verse 1.

III. Scripture Reading: Genesis 38:1-30

IV. Background Information

In order to better understand Genesis 38 it is helpful to understand a little bit about the events that surround it. In Genesis 37 we are told of Joseph’s sale into slavery, and in Genesis 39 the story picks up at the same place, with Joseph being sold to Potiphar in Egypt. From there the story unfolds to provide details about what happened to Joseph after that. But in between these stories we have the details of Genesis 38. Yet, Genesis 38 seems at first glance like an interruption in the Joseph story. In reality, it is a crucial part of the story that shows us that there are really two individuals whose lives are in focus throughout Genesis 37 to 50. There are two individuals whose life circumstances God uses as a means of displaying His grace and accomplishing His great redemptive plan. We all know how God uses Joseph, and we’ve probably heard many things taught about Joseph’s life, but rarely do we focus on the way God used Judah.

We first meet Judah in Genesis 37, verses 26 and 27. There we see that it is Judah who suggests to the rest of Joseph’s brothers that they sell Joseph into slavery. We’re told in Genesis 37:26-27, “Then Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is it if we kill our
brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.’ And his brothers listened to him. From these verses we see the cold and calculating nature of Judah. On the one hand, Judah acts as if he cares about his brother, Joseph, by mentioning the fact that Joseph is his own flesh and blood, and suggesting he shouldn’t be killed because of that. Yet, instead of rescuing Joseph, Judah suggests to the others that they sell Joseph into slavery. Which demonstrates that Judah doesn’t care about his brother at all. He’s just trying to make a personal profit out what would have otherwise been an unprofitable situation. From this we see that Judah was a ruthless person who cared about his own pleasure and personal gain more than the welfare of others. This theme continues into Genesis 38, as we are given more details about Judah and begin to learn more about his great wickedness.

V. Sermon Body

A. The Wickedness of Judah and His Line

We learn at the beginning of Genesis 38 that Judah not only hated his brother Joseph, but also had no desire to remain with the rest of his family. We’re told in verse 1 that “It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.” Here we see that Jacob leaves his family and travels to the city of Adullam, which was a good deal to the south of Shechem, where Judah was living at the time with his brothers. Once there Judah settles down, turning aside to stay in the city with his friend Hirah. There, according to verse 2, “Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her.”

So now, not only does Judah leave his family but he marries a Canaanite woman, even though the Israelite men we’re instructed to marry within their own tribe. This tells us that Judah not only cared little for his family, but he also cared nothing for the promises of God, since those promises were tied closely to the family and maintaining purity within the family line. Judah is clearly a wicked man. But Judah’s children were wicked as well. As the story unfolds, in verses 3 through 5 we see that from his Canaanite wife Judah has three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. According to verse 6, when Judah’s oldest son Er is grown he too is married to a Canaanite woman, named Tamar. As the story unfolds further we find out that Er was wicked, like his father. While we don’t know the details of Er’s sin, we know it must have been pretty bad, for in verse 7 the Lord puts him to death for his wickedness. As a result, Er’s wife Tamar is left without a husband and without a child.

Now the custom in the middle-east in that time, as explained in verse 8, was that whenever a man died without having children. If he had a brother who wasn’t married, that brother was required to marry his brother’s widow and produce children in his brother’s name. Later that would become a requirement for the people of Israel as part of the Mosaic Law. But as we see in verse 9, Er’s brother Onan refused to carry out this obligation to his brother, not wanting to bring forth a child that would not be considered his own. As a result, God strikes Onan dead as well, as we see in verse 10. As a result, Tamar has lost two husbands and still doesn’t have a child. Which was a terrible thing for any woman who lived in the ancient middle-east. To be a childless widow meant that you would have no one to take care of you in your old age. Although for the time being she
was still her father’s house, a time would come when she would be destitute and alone. But in spite of these terrible circumstances, Tamar’s father-in-law Judah didn’t care. As the story continues to unfold we see Judah promise Tamar his youngest son Shelah in marriage, as soon as Shelah is old enough to marry. But as time goes on, and Shelah reaches marriageable age, Judah doesn’t give him to Tamar as a husband.

So Tamar takes things into her own hands. We’re told in verse 13-16, “And when Tamar was told, ‘Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep,’ she took off her widow’s garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her at the roadside and said, ‘Come, let me come in to you,’ for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law…”

So Judah, consistent with his character, a character that desires only personal gain and pleasure, sees his daughter-in-law Tamar dressed like a prostitute, and not knowing who she is, turns aside to her. Tamar, having taken off her widows garments and covered herself with a veil, is able to maintain this deception. These are common themes throughout Genesis, as well, both the taking off and putting on of garments, as well as acts of deception. We see this earlier in Genesis 27 where Jacob deceives his father Isaac by putting on Esau’s clothes and covering his arms and neck with goats hair, convincing Isaac that he is Esau. Then, years later Jacob himself is deceived by his sons in Genesis 37, as they come to him after selling Joseph into slavery. There we’re told that after stripping Joseph of his robe, and killing a goat, they dip the robe in goats blood and use it to convince Jacob that Joseph has been killed. Now in similar fashion, Judah, who deceived his father Jacob, is in turn deceived by his daughter-in-law Tamar. Ironically, Judah will later be deceived again, by Joseph in Egypt, as Joseph hides his appearance from his brothers. But it is here, with this deception, that things begin to finally unravel for Judah, and the stage is set for Judah’s sin to be revealed.

We see the revelation of Judah’s sin begin to take place with the pledge that Judah makes to Tamar. At the end of verse 16 Tamar says to Judah: “‘What will you give me, that you may come in to me?’” Then in verses 17 to 18 we’re told, “He answered, ‘I will send you a young goat from the flock.’ And she said, ‘If you give me a pledge, until you send it—’” He said, ‘What pledge shall I give you?’ She replied, ‘Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand.’ So he gave them to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him.”

Here Judah does a very foolish thing, by giving as a pledge to the woman he meets, his signet, cord, and staff. In the ancient middle-east men of prominence would carry around their necks on a cord a cylinder seal with specific markings on it unique to them. They would use this seal to sign contracts by rolling the cylinder over the clay tablet on which the contract was written. But for Judah to give these items to a woman he thought was a prostitute would be like handing your driver’s license and credit card to a complete stranger. But God, by His grace, will use the foolishness and sin of Judah to accomplish His purposes, not only in the life of Judah, but among Judah’s family, and throughout the entire earth [redemptive marker].

As the story continues in verses 20 through 23, we see Judah send his friend along with a young goat to receive back his belongings. But his friend is unable to locate the
woman, and returns to inform Judah, and also lets him know that the people there knew of no such woman in their parts. Yet in spite of this information we see that Judah remains callous to his sin and unconcerned about others. He doesn’t care that he’s committed an act of fornication. Judah’s only concern is with maintaining his reputation and avoiding embarrassment in the community, hoping perhaps that this whole situation can just be swept under the rug. But the following verses change all that as word comes to Judah that his daughter-in-law Tamar is pregnant. In verse 24 we’re told, “About three months later Judah was told, ‘Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality.’ And Judah said, ‘Bring her out, and let her be burned.’”

Now the man who didn’t care about the injustice he was guilty of and the sins he had committed becomes enraged at the alleged sin of Tamar and wants nothing but justice to be done in her case. But as Tamar is being brought out in verse 25 to face the justice demanded by her alleged actions, things take an unexpected turn for Judah. We’re told in verse 25 that “…she sent word to her father-in-law, ‘By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant.’ And she said, ‘Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.’” And notice the similarities in what Tamar says in verse 25 and what Judah and his brothers said to their father Jacob in chapter 37. In Genesis 37:32 we’re told, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son’s robe or not.” Now Tamar says, “Please identify, who these are, the signet, and the cord, and the staff.” With this statement we see God at work in the life of Judah, confronting him with his current sin, but also bringing back to mind his past sin against Joseph. Judah then identifies the signet and cord and staff as his own, and says in verse 26, “‘She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.’ And he did not know her again.”

B. The Transformation of Judah and His Line by God’s Grace

With these words, we see a remarkable transformation in the life of Judah, as the amazing grace of God brings about repentance in this wicked man’s life. But how can we tell that Judah has really been changed at this point? What about this verse and the events surrounding it show us that Judah has truly repented of his sins and been transformed by God’s grace? For one thing, this event with Tamar is not the only incident that contributed to Judah’s transformation. Remember, we’re in the middle of the Joseph narrative in Genesis 38. And given the time frame of events as they unfold in these chapters of Genesis, we find that at the same time Judah conceives a child with Tamar, and during the three months that follow until Judah finds out, he and his brothers are traveling back and forth to Egypt to buy grain from a man they don’t yet know to be their brother Joseph. And the series of tests that Joseph puts his brothers through during that time, correspond with the pregnancy of Tamar. So as Judah comes before Joseph for the final time in Genesis 44 it is most likely just after the events recorded here at the end of Genesis 38.

This explains why Judah takes such a vocal role during his encounter with Joseph. But not only does Judah take a vocal role in speaking to Joseph in Egypt, but we see Judah in Genesis 44 do something even more surprising, when he offers to give himself up as a slave in place of his brother Benjamin, after Benjamin is supposedly caught stealing. But why would Judah do that, when he had been so quick to sell Joseph into slavery? Why would he now be willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his brother and
be willing to speak out boldly to the ruler of Egypt in defense of his family? When before he didn’t care about his family at all? Clearly, by the time Judah stands before Joseph to offer himself on behalf of Benjamin, something had changed in Judah’s life. And that change takes place, I believe, primarily in Genesis 38:26, as Judah says about Tamar, “She is more righteous than I.” At that moment, the weight and reality of his sin, both his present sin with Tamar, and his past sin surrounding Joseph, finally comes to bear on his heart and mind. And Judah repents of his sin and relinquishes control of His life to the one he should have been serving all along. So when Judah says of Tamar, “She is more righteous than I” that is a statement of true repentance and faith, which is supported further by the statement that follows that “he did not know her again.” Obviously, Judah acknowledged the sin he’d committed and made sure nothing like it ever occurred in his life again.

From that point on Judah learns to trust in the grace of God and the promises of God that he had previously spurned. That is why Judah is able to stand before Joseph in Egypt, and rather than seek some way out of the situation, as has been his pattern before, is willing to offer himself in place of his brother. This transformation in the life of Judah shows us that God is willing and able to work through anyone, and through any kind of situation and circumstance to accomplish His will.

C. The Same Grace of God that Transformed Judah and His Line Can Change Anyone

From this we see that no one is beyond the reach of the grace of God. We also see that no situation is too difficult for God by His grace, to overcome. Satan knew from Genesis 3:15 that God would send forth a redeemer, and throughout the book of Genesis we see Satan at work behind the scenes, doing all he can to make sure that doesn’t happen. Working through sinful men to bring about destruction and ruin to God’s chosen line. Working among even God’s chosen people themselves and their own sinful actions to undermine the redemptive plan of God. But time and time again we see that regardless of the schemes of the evil one or the wicked intentions of sinful men, God, by His amazing grace, remains true to His Word, and true to His promises, and brings victory out of seeming defeat, and brings redemption and restoration, and preservation of His people out even the most horrible circumstances. We see that here with Judah and Tamar. In spite of Satan’s best attempt to corrupt the family of Jacob and halt God’s redemptive plan. God steps in, by His grace to allow Tamar to conceive and give birth to twin boys, and through the line of descendants that would come from one of these sons, Perez, would be born our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [redemptive marker].

Joseph would say to his brothers at the end of his life in Genesis 50:20 that “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” That could be said of Judah’s life as well. Judah’s evil and sin, that on the surface seemed to have no purpose, and that threatened to destroy the purity of Judah’s family and undermine the redemptive plan of God: that which Judah meant for evil against Tamar, God meant for good. So while the grace of God was obviously at work in the life of Joseph to accomplish God’s immediate plan to save the world from a great famine and preserve Jacob’s family in Egypt, we see the grace of God at work in the life of Judah to an even greater extent, as God uses Judah to accomplish His ultimate plan of bringing the Messiah into the world to save
people from their sins. As a result, Judah would later receive a great blessing from his father in Genesis 49, even above the blessing given to Joseph and his other brothers, and the tribe of Judah would become the leader among the people of Israel, due to the life of a wicked and rebellious man who was changed by the amazing grace of God.

**Application**

So as we look at this passage we see by these truths that God can do a work through anyone. And what a great encouragement that can be to us if we have loved ones who don’t know the Lord. Perhaps there is a friend or family member that you can even think of now that you’ve been praying for to come to faith in Christ. Genesis 38 tells us to never give up hope. If God could save Judah, even though it took decades for the final transformation in Judah’s life to be affected, then there is no one that God could not ultimately save if He so wills. From Genesis 38 we also see that no matter what trials may come or what temptations we may face, even when we falter and fail, we can rest in the all-sufficient, amazing grace of God [emphasizing the indicatives of the gospel], knowing that the same grace that saved us, that saved men like Judah, or John Newton, by that same grace, God continues to work through us, using even our sins and failures to draw us closer to Him, in deeper dependence on Him, in order to accomplish His will in our lives.

Perhaps there is even some struggle you are going through now, some trial you are currently facing that seems bleak and hopeless, and you don’t know how it’s ever going to work out right. Genesis 38 shows us that even in the midst of the darkest times, when all the forces of evil seem to be coming against us in an attempt to deceive and destroy us and cause us to distrust the promises of God, or when our own flesh seems to be at its weakest, God’s grace is still at work in the midst of it all. For we have one who came on our behalf, who was tempted in all ways like we are, yet was without sin, who when tempted by Satan in the wilderness, responded with perfect trust in God and His promises. That one, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who came from the offspring of Judah and Tamar, that one who “is more righteous I,” to use Judah’s words, that one has overcome the world. He has overcome the plots of the evil one to destroy God’s people, and he has overcome the sin of individuals, like Judah, like John Newton, like you and I. As a result, we can stand strong in whatever trials we may face, knowing that God will work through it to accomplish His plan, and that He may even use us in the process to be instrumental in bringing about His will: not only in our individual lives or in the lives of those we’re praying for, but on a global scale: as we see through the life of Judah, through the lives of Judah’s family, and through the lives of the countless individuals who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ, who came from the offspring of Judah and Tamar. Truly, no one is beyond the reach of the grace of God

[Closing prayer]
Sermon Manuscript #2

Philemon 1-25
“Living in Light of the Gospel”

I. Introduction
As we prepare to look into the word of God today, let’s begin by going the Lord in prayer and ask that He would bless both our reading and the preaching of His Word.

[Opening prayer]

Opening Illustration
I don’t know about you, but I love history, especially biblical history and church history. But I have also always loved ancient Greek and Roman history. In fact, an understanding of ancient Greek and Roman history and culture helps us in many ways to understand better the Bible itself. This is especially true for the New Testament, since the events of the New Testament unfolded under the influence of Greek and Roman culture and under the rule of the Roman Empire, during the height of Roman power and influence. As a result, many allusions to Greek and Roman culture, and practices, can be found throughout the New Testament. One such example is the Roman institution of slavery, which was a widespread practice in that day and age. During the time of the writing of the New Testament, the population of the Roman Empire was approximately 60 million people. Of those 60 million, about 18 million, or about 1 out of every 3 people were slaves. These slaves fell into many different classes or rankings within Roman society. So the treatment of slaves could vary greatly depending upon the type of position held or who your master was. Some slaves were treated very harshly, while others were provided for even better than some Roman citizens. But regardless of which end of the spectrum a slave fell into, one thing that was never tolerated by the Romans was a runaway slave. And the consequences for runaway slaves were severe, with Roman law allowing for a slave owner to exact whatever punishment they desired against their runaway slave. Those who harbored runaway slaves could also face severe punishment, and were often required to pay a slave owner for every day of work missed by a runaway slave.

I mention all of that to now draw our attention to a portion of Scripture that deals with this very issue, but does so in a very interesting way. So, if you have your Bibles with you today, I’d like for you to turn in them to the small New Testament book of Philemon.

II. Explanation of the Redemptive-Historical Context
Philemon is a very short book, a mere 25 verses. But within this small letter to Philemon is found a powerful message of transformation and reconciliation that touches upon issues related to slavery, but that also goes far beyond that particular issue to show us how to live in light of the gospel. In the process, it also provides us with many
important truths about our position as believers in Jesus Christ and about the responsibilities we have as believers, in how we treat others within the body of Christ. So, if you have made your way to the book of Philemon, please follow along with me as I begin reading in verse 1.

III. Scripture Reading: Philemon 1-25

IV. Background Information

In the book of Philemon we find the apostle Paul, writing to his dear friend Philemon, a wealthy Christian, whose runaway slave Onesimus had come in contact with Paul during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. It was during his contact with Paul that Onesimus was saved. Now, as Paul composes the letter before us, some time had elapsed since Onesimus’ first encounter with Paul. We know this from Paul’s statement in verse 10 in which he refers to Onesimus as his own child, and refers to himself as Onesimus father in the Lord. So obviously enough time had gone by for Paul to teach and disciple Onesimus and for their friendship to develop. But not only had Paul and Onesimus developed a close father/son type friendship. But Onesimus had also become a useful co-laborer with Paul and the other Christians in Rome. Paul states this in verse 11, as he explains to Philemon that while Onesimus was formerly useless, he had become useful not only to Paul, but now also to Philemon. This is an interesting little play on words that Paul does here. The name Onesimus means useful. But Onesimus hadn’t been useful to Philemon. In fact, Onesimus had become a liability to Philemon by running away, and may have also stolen from Philemon in the process, based upon Paul’s statement in verse 18. But now, the one who had been useless, had become useful. As a result, for perhaps the first time in his life, the meaning of Onesimus’ name had become a reality.

But, there was a problem, because Onesimus was a runaway slave, and as much as Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus serving with him in Rome, he knew that he was legally obligated to return this slave to his master. So under the guidance of Paul, that is exactly what we see Onesimus do. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon. But in sending him back, Paul sends him with this letter. Now let’s look briefly at Paul’s introduction to this letter.

V. Sermon Body

A. Paul’s Opening Greetings

As Paul begins his letter to Philemon he starts with the usual greeting that accompanied all of Paul’s epistles. With few exceptions, Paul’s format was very consistent from one letter to the next in how he would begin. Typically, he would introduce himself as the author, identify the recipients of the letter, and then wish upon those recipients grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He does the same thing here in Philemon, as you’ll notice in verses 1 to 3.

But while Paul’s greeting here is for the most part quite similar to the greetings found in his other epistles, there is one notable difference in Philemon that sets this greeting apart. If you’ll notice, in verse 1 Paul introduces himself as a prisoner for Christ Jesus. In all of his other epistles Paul identifies himself as a servant or slave of Christ Jesus, or as an apostle of Christ Jesus. But never as a prisoner for Christ Jesus. You may
be thinking, well Paul wrote this while he was in prison, so doesn’t it make sense that he would call himself a prisoner. But this isn’t the only letter Paul wrote during his Roman imprisonment. The letters of Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians were also written during this time. But Paul uses this particular greeting only in his letter in Philemon. This is significant because, although Paul was a prisoner, he wasn’t just any kind of prisoner. He was a prisoner for Christ Jesus.

In the Greek, the word translated “for” is in the possessive case, and can also be translated as “a prisoner of Christ Jesus,” which I think is a better translation and more accurately fits the context of this letter. That means that the point Paul is trying to make here is not that he is in prison because he is a Christian, and therefore is a prisoner for Christ Jesus. The point that Paul makes is, that while he may be in the custody of earthly governmental officials, he is truly captive to Christ, and to Christ’s authority [redemptive marker]. In the same way that Onesimus, while the earthly slave of Philemon, and therefore under the authority of Philemon. Has as his true master, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in turn, the slave master Philemon, while being a free man, earthly speaking, is just as much a prisoner of Christ Jesus as Paul was, and just as much a slave to Christ as Onesimus was.

So the point that Paul makes with this opening statement is a profound truth that in the spiritual realm everyone is equal in Christ [redemptive marker]. Paul states this explicitly in Galatians 3:28 when he says there that in Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” What Paul states explicitly in Galatians he does so implicitly in his letter to Philemon.

Application

By doing so Paul establishes at the outset of this letter the truth that because of what Christ has done on behalf of believers, we are all on equal standing before God. None of us is any better than another, and neither are any of us any less important than another. We are all slaves of Jesus Christ, we are all prisoners of Jesus Christ. Whatever our lot in life may be, whatever position God has placed us in, whatever roles he has given us to assume, we were brought to God in the same way, relate to him in the same way, and have a responsibility to live our lives in this world and with each other in the same way. Therefore, we need each other as believers, to support each other in our common pursuit of Christ-likeness and holiness, and in our desire to bring glory and honor to God. This means that as believers we must live in light of the gospel and learn better to forgive one another, to accept one another, and to embrace one another as being truly our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is what Paul encourages Philemon to do throughout this short letter.

Going back to Paul’s introduction to this letter, we see that he also mentions Timothy, in verse 1. As we know, Timothy served alongside Paul in many ways, and was Paul’s spokesman for others when Paul himself couldn’t be present. So here, we see Timothy included as part of this letter, as a way of providing his agreement with its contents, and as a result, helping to ensure all the more that Philemon would follow what Paul appeals to him to do in this letter. But not only does the authorship of this letter come in a sense from both Paul and Timothy, but Philemon is not the only recipient.
Notice Paul’s statement at the end of verse 1 and in v. 2, “To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house.” So while Philemon is the primary recipient of this letter, Paul also addresses it to two other individuals and to the entire church that was meeting in Philemon’s house. This tells us that Paul had intended from the start for this letter to have a wider readership than just Philemon. Because the truths that Paul expresses in this letter are important for the church as a whole to understand. Paul makes this clear at the end of this letter as well, by the use of the plural version of the personal pronoun you in verse 22 for example, “At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.” Then in verse 25, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Illustration
Here in the south this would be equivalent to saying ya’ll. We could even insert that word in these verses and read them like this, “…for I am hoping that through ya’ll’s prayers I will be graciously given to ya’ll.” Then in verse 25, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with ya’ll’s spirit.”

Application
What’s also interesting about verse 25, is that while the word your is plural, the word spirit is singular. Which emphasizes again the fact that as believers we are one in Christ, and therefore share of the same spirit with each other. What affects one of us affects all of us, and when the grace of God impacts the life of one of us, it is felt and experienced by all. So this shows us that while Paul addresses Philemon directly, this isn’t just a private matter between Paul and Philemon. Paul wants the church to know about this matter as well. This is very important because it emphasizes the fact that nothing that takes among believers is ever an entirely private matter. We have a tendency in our American culture to exalt the individual, and we are often so concerned about maintaining our own personal privacy. But Paul says here, that when it comes to matters between believers, our privacy shouldn’t be our primary concern. If we truly desire to maintain the unity of the body of Christ and the bonds of fellowship that we share as believers, then we must be willing to give up even our privacy. And we must so love one another as believers, that we can share with each other, and pray for one another about matters that out there in the world might not ever be discussed among people. But the love for another that brings that about is not something we can just produce in ourselves [redemptive marker]. It comes as a result of the gospel and living in light of the truths that the gospel declares.

Paul makes that point in verse 3, as he concludes his greeting and says to the recipients of this letter, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Then at the end of the letter, in verse 25 Paul repeats this idea again when he says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” That grace is the grace of the gospel.

Application
Paul doesn’t use words flippantly, and when he opens and closes his letters with mention of God’s grace and peace, this is much more than just Paul’s way of writing, but
represents his desire that the grace of God through Jesus Christ would truly impact our lives. That as we consider all that Christ has done for us and accomplished on our behalf, that that realization might create within us the desire and the ability to treat others in ways that would never be possible without that grace. So the same power of the gospel, the power of Christ’s life, death, burial, and resurrection that saved us and brought us to God in the first place. It is that same gospel that ought to motivate us in all we do.

B. Paul’s Commendation of Philemon

We see that it motivated Philemon as Paul explains in verses 4 through 7. There Paul tells Philemon how thankful he is for all that Philemon had done. He says in verse 5-7, “...I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.” So obviously the power of the gospel was already having an effect on Philemon and those with him. They were already doing a great work for the Lord, and Paul wanted that work not only to continue, but to grow even stronger. With these statements it’s possible that Paul may have even envisioned Onesimus as a potential co-laborer working alongside Philemon, as a way of achieving the goals Paul desired for Philemon and the other believers in his house.

So Paul reminds Philemon of how the grace of God has already been at work in Philemon’s life and in the process also uses these words of verse 4 through 7 as a way to move gently into his appeal for Onesimus that will begin in verse 8. And even though Paul could have come to Philemon asserting his authority as an apostle, demanding that Philemon do as he say Paul comes instead with great gentleness and kindness. Paul demonstrates the same love for his brother in Christ that he commends Philemon for in verse 5.

C. Paul’s Appeal on Behalf of Onesimus

Now, in verses 8 through 12 Paul explains to Philemon his request, and provides the rationale for this request. He begins in verse 8 by explaining that he could command Philemon to do what is right, because of his authority as an apostle. But instead of commanding he appeals again to love, in verse 9. Since Paul knew of Philemon’s love in other occasions, he can appeal to that same love now, confident that Philemon would demonstrate such love in the case of Onesimus. In fact, Paul states words to that affect in verse 21, “Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.”

As Paul continues his appeal for Onesimus, Paul reminds Philemon again in verse 9 of his state as a prisoner of Christ Jesus, as we had looked at earlier. But Paul also mentions his position as an elder in the church. That, I believe is what Paul intended here by the use of the term old man in verse 9. The word in the Greek can be translated as an elder or ambassador. So, Paul was not saying to Philemon, I’m an old man Philemon, and surely you don’t want to break the heart of an old man by not doing what I suggest. Paul was saying, I’m an elder, I’m a leader in the church, and I appeal to you Philemon, as a leader, to do what is right. But even as an elder in the church, Paul was not overbearing in his authority, but instead appealed to Philemon with kindness and love. Because Paul was
greatly concerned with maintaining the bonds of fellowship he had developed with Philemon and was concerned about preserving their relationship unharmed. It was a relationship from which Philemon had greatly benefited from, as Paul states in verse 19. But now, Onesimus had come into the picture as well, and Paul’s desire was that in the same way Philemon had benefited from Paul, that Paul might benefit from Philemon in how Philemon treats Onesimus.

Paul then explains in verses 10 through 12 the father/son relationship that had developed between him and Onesimus. Then Paul goes on in verses 13 and 14 and says, “I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.” Again we see the gentleness and kindness of Paul. He didn’t want to force Philemon’s hand in the matter, but wanted Philemon’s response to flow from his own love for God.

**Application**

Through this we see again how to **live in light of the gospel**, by allowing the ways we respond to difficult situations to be shaped from the outflow of our gratitude for the **grace of God** at work in our lives because of the gospel. Even to the point of serving as a mediator between two parties in order to bring about reconciliation [redemptive marker]. This, in fact, is part of the responsibility we have to our brothers in sisters in Christ. We have been called to a ministry of reconciliation that we are to be a part of as believers, not only in sharing the gospel with the lost so they can be reconciled to God. But sharing that same gospel with each other in how we treat one another, and in how we respond when a brother and sister in Christ has hurt us or done us wrong. Paul himself states in 2 Corinthians chapter 5:16-21,

> From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” [Development of broader context]

Do you see there the overlap of concepts from 2 Corinthians 5 with what we see here in Philemon. The concept of an appeal, the concept of reconciliation between two parties, the concept of no longer regarding someone according to their former way of life. Not looking upon them according to the flesh, but according to the righteousness of Christ. So, Paul’s appeal to Philemon, and God’s appeal to us through the pen of Paul, is that we would treat others, especially other believers, as Christ treated us. In order that the bonds of fellowship and the unity of the body of Christ would remain strong.

Paul, in his letter to Philemon, anticipates this as the outcome. Just as Onesimus had been so useful to Paul in Rome, Paul anticipates the same usefulness to be true of
Philemon’s relationship with Onesimus, as Paul explains in verses 15 and 16. And Paul makes the point first of all that this entire situation had been orchestrated by God. He says in verse 15, “For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while.” It was wrong what Onesimus did, in running away from Philemon, perhaps even stealing from Philemon in the process. But in spite of that, God used it for good. Now Onesimus was saved as a result of his contact with Paul, and was coming back to Philemon, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.

We don’t know what took place between Onesimus and Philemon after this letter was received, but based upon Paul’s last statement in verse 16 it’s safe to assume that Philemon released Onesimus from his bonds of slavery. Paul says Onesimus was now a brother to Philemon, both in the flesh and in the Lord. In the Lord referring to the fact that Onesimus and Philemon were now brothers in Christ. But how could Onesimus be not only a brother in Christ but a brother in the flesh, unless Philemon freed Onesimus. So that no longer would Philemon relate to Onesimus as a master to a slave, but would relate to him as a friend, as a brother in the flesh

D. Paul’s Actions as a Reflection of Gospel Realities

Now, in the final section of Paul’s appeal to Philemon in verses 17 through 19, we come to what is in many respects the central verses of Paul’s letter. Paul says in verse 17 through the beginning of verse 19, “So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it…” Here Paul appeals to Philemon again to accept Onesimus and to treat him with the same type of love he has shown to others, remembering the even greater love that Christ showed to him. But now, Paul takes it a step further, and says, if you consider me your partner, in other words, if you really care for me, Philemon, and if you really care for the cause of Christ. Receive him as you would receive me, and if he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

Application

The point that Paul makes with these statements is this. If Philemon was to truly have the mind of Christ and live in light of the gospel, and if we today as believers are to do the same in our interactions with other believers. It means going beyond mere actions, going beyond simply receiving someone warmly and treating them with kindness and affection. It means that we must change the very way we think and perceive of our brothers and sisters in Christ. So that when we look upon each other, we don’t see each other according to the flesh, but we see one another as God sees us in Christ, through the lens of Christ’s perfect righteousness that we have been clothed with. So what Paul says here and what he offers to do on behalf of Onesimus paints a beautiful picture of what Christ did on our behalf, and Paul’s actions mirror the realities of the gospel.

1) Paul offered to pay the debt Onesimus owed, even though it was not Paul’s to pay, just as Christ paid the penalty for our sins, although he was the sinless Son of God
2) The reconciliation that Paul sought between Philemon and Onesimus was, in essence, brought about by Paul. He was the mediator that brought Philemon and Onesimus together, and through Paul, peace was restored, just as through Christ, who became our mediator between the Father, and reconciled us to Him, what we had done against God and the wrath of God that was due to us because of our sin was charged to Christ’s account.

Now, as God looks upon us, he does not see us as we were before, according to our former way of life, but according to the righteousness of Christ that has been charged to our account. Now we must in turn be willing to look upon others within the body of Christ in the same way. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:32, “forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” That may seem like a monumental thing to do, almost an impossible task to achieve, and apart from Christ it really is. But because of the gospel, and the realization of what Christ has done on our behalf and continues to do in and through us by His grace, this is a reality that has been made possible for each one of us who believe. Therefore, we must live in light of the gospel truths presented to us in Paul’s letter to Philemon. Understanding our wonderful position in Christ that came as a result of the gospel, and recognizing that the same gospel that saved us, can also radically transform the way we interact with our brothers and sisters in Christ. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of the gospel, be with your spirit to that end.

[Closing prayer]
INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Research Purpose

The purpose of this project is to examine the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons within conservative evangelical churches in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America. An investigation such as this will demonstrate that much of the preaching that takes place within these contexts has resulted in the presentation of a message that is a blending of postmodern thought and theological liberalism. This reality is evident through an analysis of common, contemporary methods of sermon preparation and delivery. This will serve to highlight the dangers associated with such methods and to point out the subtle undermining of biblical preaching that has taken place in many American churches in recent years as a result.

In response to the findings mentioned above, this project offers as a necessary corrective to the wedding of postmodern thought and liberal theology that has taken place within the preaching of conservative evangelical churches, a proposal for the development of a lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to expository sermon preparation and delivery.
The Influences of Postmodern Thought and Theological Liberalism on Sermon Preparation and Delivery

A Definition of Terms Used

In examining the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons within conservative evangelical churches in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America, it is necessary to define significant terms used in this project and to explain the context of their usage. The following includes such definitions as used throughout this project.

Postmodernism

The term postmodernism, as will be used throughout this project, refers to “a new cultural movement…which extends certain principles and symbols central to the modern age, even as it denies others.” Some of the common characteristics of this movement include a rejection of absolute truth, the denial of a method for determining truth, and an insistence upon deconstructing all truth claims in an effort to reduce such claims to mere social constructs. Such beliefs about the nature of truth and truth claims have led advocates of postmodernism to reject “all grand and expansive accounts of truth, meaning, and existence” or “metanarratives.” It is this rejection of metanarratives, or the denial of an overarching purpose of existence or universal principles of truth, that has formed the hallmark of postmodernism.


327 Ibid., 117.

328 Ibid., 118.
In describing the basic characteristics of postmodernism, Millard J. Erickson states that “one distinctive feature of postmodernism is the rather clear and universal rejection of metanarratives.”\(^{329}\) This rejection of metanarratives has in turn led in fields of biblical studies to an undermining of the grand-narrative of Scripture and the fragmenting of the text of Scripture in hermeneutics, exegesis, exposition, and homiletics in ways that either explicitly rejects or at least implicitly denies the overarching theme of the Bible. A more detailed description of these influences occurs below, and the influences of postmodern thought on the preparation and delivery of sermons receives detailed attention throughout this project as well. A fuller explanation of the characteristics of postmodernism, as well as attention to a description of the postmodern rejection of metanarratives will occur throughout this project in order to demonstrate how this common characteristic of postmodernism has found its way into conservative evangelical preaching practices.

Theological Liberalism

The term theological liberalism, as will be used throughout this project, refers to “a way of understanding Christianity as essentially consisting of a particular moral framework, and of understanding Christ as essentially a great moral teacher.”\(^{330}\) In turn, theological liberalism has tended to downplay or ignore altogether the redemptive nature of Christianity and the overarching redemptive themes of Scripture in favor of a system.


of ethical teachings based upon the Bible and designed to help people live a better, more morally upstanding life.\textsuperscript{331}

The influence that such beliefs have had on the preparation and delivery of sermons and the way in which theological liberalism has shaped many pastors’ beliefs about the purpose for preaching receives greater attention throughout this project. In the process, it will be clear that theological liberalism and postmodernism have been coalesced in Christian preaching to form a dangerous mixture of relativism and moralism. This is observable in the ways by which the pastors sometimes implicitly deny or ignore the metanarratives of Scripture in sermon preparation and delivery, while at the same time using various micro-narratives to advocate particular ethical teachings that the Scriptures are used to support. In this way, much pastoral preaching that takes place today presents a message influenced by postmodern thought and theological liberalism rather than a message influenced by God.

The irony in this, as T. David Gordon points out, is that “the very orthodox and evangelical Christians who protested against Protestant liberalism in the early twentieth century are quite likely to promote its basic emphases from the pulpit today.”\textsuperscript{332} Pastors do not do this explicitly, however, and neither do they consciously deny any fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith in the process. Yet there is, nonetheless, acquiescence to the methodologies of liberal theology in pastoral preaching whenever one ignores the overarching redemptive theme of Scripture, or when one turns the text of Scripture into a lesson on moralism. As Gordon explains further, “in terms of church history, liberalism

\textsuperscript{331} T. David Gordon, \textit{Why Johnny Can’t Preach}, 80.

\textsuperscript{332} Ibid., 79.
was an understanding of Christianity that wished to embrace its ethical system without its redemptive system…Therefore, Christian proclamation that effectively emphasizes morality rather than redemption is *Protestant liberal proclamation* [emphasis added].”

Conservative Evangelical

The phrase conservative evangelical, as used throughout this project, refers to those within American Christendom typically considered more theologically conservative and orthodox in belief and practice than those within mainline Protestant denominations. Conservative evangelicals also tend to emphasize certain distinct beliefs, such as a high view of Scripture and an emphasis upon personal conversion by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, over and above social needs. Conservative evangelicalism, as defined for this project, would not include Charismatics, Roman Catholics, or any mainline Protestant denominations.

*Lectio Continua*

The method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated as part of this project is *lectio continua*. The use of this phrase throughout this project refers to a method of expository preaching that emphasizes preaching done consecutively through the Scriptures, book-by-book. This project advocates this manner of preaching as a means to ensure that one preaches each text within both its canonical context as well as the context of the passage or book of the preaching text. Such preaching also maintains greater acknowledgment of the continuity of the Scriptural text and the relationship of each text

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to the overarching redemptive theme of Scripture, and as such stands in contrast to postmodern thought and theological liberalism. A more detailed explanation of *lectio continua* preaching will be included as part of this project, as well as a further study of topics related to this particular issue.

**Redemptive-Historical**

The method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated as part of this project will be redemptive-historical, in the sense that it will emphasize the preaching of Christ from all the Scriptures. This manner of preaching is one carried out in such a way as to faithfully proclaim the meaning of each passage of Scripture within its immediate context while also understanding that the full context of any passage of Scripture is Christ and God’s plan of redemption through Christ, as emphasized through a study of biblical theology. The manner in which this project advocates carrying out this approach, the details of this approach itself, and an explanation of the relationship between such an approach and biblical theology is given further attention below, as well as a further development in the project report itself. This method of sermon preparation and delivery also has certain hermeneutical implications mentioned below, which will be given greater treatment throughout the project as well.

**Steps to Discerning Postmodern and Theologically Liberal Influences**

In order to achieve the goals of this project it is important to describe how one can discern the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism in sermons preached during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This project will accomplish this
through an examination of the development of postmodern thought and liberal theology in general, and by providing a brief survey of the influences that such movements in thought and belief have had on the American church as a whole. This project will also trace further the specific influences that such movements have had on sermon preparation and delivery over the last one-hundred years, with special attention given to the influences that are observable in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century through an analysis of common, contemporary methods for sermon preparation and delivery used during the period under consideration.

The above analysis will delve into several areas related to these methods. The homiletic structure of sermons that make use of such strategies will be examined, along with the technique and style used to unfold these same structures. The manner in which pastors present the text of Scripture during such sermons, as well as the way in which the text of Scripture is applied, and the connection that such application has to the overall redemptive theme of Scripture will also be evaluated. In addition to these areas, this project will focus on issues related to exegesis, exposition and application, the reading of Scripture, the relationship of the Scripture reading to the sermon, and the pastor’s use of electronic media during sermons.

From the above analysis, the pervasiveness of postmodern thought and liberal theology within the preaching methodologies of conservative evangelicalism will be evident. This will in turn provide important information that will serve as a basis for an assessment of the current state of preaching in America, which will reveal a dangerous wedding of postmodern and theologically liberal methodologies within conservative
evangelical churches, as displayed from the pastoral preaching that takes place in these assemblies.

It is often easy to discern the presence of postmodern thought within certain segments of Christendom, most notably among those groups identified as part of the Emerging or Emergent church movement. These groups typically deny or at least question the existence of absolute truth, reject the metanarratives of Scripture, embrace the mystical and esoteric, and typically hold to unorthodox or theologically liberal views of God, man, Jesus Christ, heaven, hell, and salvation. As a result, the Emergent church represents a strange hybrid between postmodernism, theological liberalism and New Age mysticism that poses many threats to the spiritual health of the American church. These threats are especially evident in worship practices and most notably in preaching.

As Richard L. Holland, director of Doctor of Ministry studies and Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministries at the Master’s Seminary has observed, “under the influence of postmodernism and postconservativism, the Emerging Church is engaged in dismantling much of present-day worship practices in the local church.” Part of this “dismantling” involves the preparation and delivery of sermons. In what Holland refers to as an “iconoclastic dismantling of accepted worship forms,” he notes that “preaching too is receiving a theological, philosophical, and methodological facelift from leaders in the EC [Emergent Church] movement.”

334 Richard L. Holland, “Progressional Dialogue and Preaching: Are They the Same?” The Master’s Seminary Journal 17, no. 2 (Fall 2006), 207.

335 Ibid., 207-208.

336 Ibid.
Richard L. Mayhue, Vice President, Dean, and Professor of Pastoral Ministries at the Master’s Seminary, has also recognized this drift from a biblical model of preaching when he states that “biblical preaching’s authenticit is significantly tarnished by contemporary communicators’ being more concerned with personal relevance than God's revelation.”³³⁷ Mayhue contends, however, that “while the growing trend among today’s preachers is toward consumer satisfaction and contemporary relevancy, we reaffirm that biblical preaching must be first directed toward divine satisfaction and kingdom relevance, [emphasis added].”³³⁸ In order for this project to accomplish these goals, however, one must point out the influences of postmodernism and the dangers posed by such thought, as well as provide a biblical alternative to the methods advocated by individuals within the Emergent movement. Yet, while the practices of groups like the Emergent church need to be understood and exposed, and biblical alternatives provided for the beliefs and practices of such groups, it is even more important to expose the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism that are effecting conservative evangelical preaching practices. This is necessary in order to protect the American church, not only from dangerous practices from without, but also from equally dangerous yet subtle practices from within the church.

Therefore, while the influences of postmodern thought within Christendom as a whole continues to pose a threat to biblical proclamation through the challenges groups like the Emergent church present, the primary purpose of this project will remain focused

³³⁷ Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” The Master’s Seminary Journal 1, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 109.
³³⁸ Ibid., 128.
on the threat that can be observed within the pulpits of many conservative evangelical churches. This threat in many ways presents an even greater challenge to the spread of the gospel and the spiritual health and vitality of Christians than the problems created by the Emergent church movement.

Part of the problem is the seemingly orthodox positions advocated through much of the pastoral preaching that takes place in conservative evangelical churches. Many of these churches, while influenced methodologically in sermon preparation and delivery by postmodern thought and theological liberalism, are theologically conservative and espouse a system of belief that would reject postmodern thought and liberal belief. Bryan Chapell points out these facts in his work *Christ-Centered Worship*, as he describes his own experience as a pastor caught up in a mindset that was orthodox in belief, yet liberal in practice. Chapell explains that,

> The pattern of thought that I reinforced was not immediately apparent to me because I believed that my preaching was faithful to the commands of God’s inerrant Word…So, I preached the whole counsel of God as I understood it. Week after week, I told the imperfect people in my church to ‘do better.’ But this drumbeat for improvement, devoid of the encouragements and empowerments of grace, actually undermined the holiness that I was seeking to exhort…In particular I needed to learn to preach each text in its redemptive context…All Scripture has a redemptive purpose. No Scripture is so limited in purpose as to give us only moral instruction or lifestyle correction.\(^{339}\)

With these statements, Chapell explains some of the primary problems with modern preaching and helps his readers to see more clearly the negative forces that are exerting a powerful influence on sermon preparation and delivery.

Conservative evangelicals have exerted much energy throughout the twentieth-century in an effort to distance themselves from theological liberalism and

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\(^{339}\) Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 236.
postmodernism. Yet in spite of this stand against the encroaching influences of these movements on the church, much of conservative evangelicalism today has adopted the methodologies of postmodernism and theological liberalism in their sermon preparation and delivery. As a result, much of the pastoral preaching that takes places in conservative evangelical churches today is indistinguishable from the theologically liberal preaching common a century ago. This is a dangerous trend, which has continued unabated in many churches. This is due in part to an ignorance of the presence of these influences to begin with, as well as a failure to take seriously the dangers that come from such influences. Therefore, in the following section, some of these dangers receive further attention.

The Problems That Come from Many Contemporary Models of Sermon Preparation and Delivery

The next step in the process for this project, after providing an explanation of the influences of postmodern thought and liberal theology on sermon preparation and delivery, and after explaining how to discern such influences, is to point out the dangers associated with these practices. This project will accomplish this by examining the underlying non-verbal messages present in many sermon structures and models for sermon preparation that have developed from the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism. This project focuses attention on the practical and theological ramifications of such non-verbal messages as well, which provides the rationale for one of the purposes of this project. This will also serve to establish the need for a study such as this, as well as the need for the model of sermon preparation and delivery advocated as part of this project.
The Problem of Hindered Spiritual Growth

Part of the danger that comes from many of the contemporary models of sermon preparation and delivery that are present in the American church relate to the hindrance of spiritual growth that created by such practices. As T. David Gordon points out, in discussing the influences of theological liberalism on the pulpit in the form of moralistic preaching,

People know what they ought to do, but they are dispirited and lethargic, without the vision, drive, or impetus to live with and for Christ. And the reason for this dispirited condition is that the pulpit is largely silent about Christ. He is mentioned only as an afterthought or appendage to a sermon; in many churches, he is never proclaimed as the central point of a sermon.\(^{340}\)

This does not mean to imply that pastors should not provide instruction on moral behavior from the pulpit, or that pastors should avoid ethical instruction altogether in place of simply directing people’s attention to the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, as Gordon explains, “the pulpit is almost never the place to do this. The pulpit is the place to declare the fitness of Christ’s person, and the adequacy of both his humiliated and exalted work for sinners.”\(^{341}\)

When this is not the focus, however, and the emphasis of preaching is on moral or social improvement, over time, such moralistic preaching can greatly diminish the importance of Christ and his finished work in the thinking of Christians.

A moralistic focus in pastoral preaching can also lead to one of two extremes among believers. It can result on the one hand in demoralized believers who feel the weight of their responsibilities to do better, but who sense at the same time that they are


\(^{341}\) Ibid., 91.
without the ability to see it through on their own. On the other hand, it can result in arrogant believers, deceived into thinking that their own high moral standards and consistent patterns of good behavior are the sum and substance of the Christian life.\textsuperscript{342}

**The Problem of the Implicit Denial of the Sufficiency of Christ**

The above problem also emphasizes the practical ramifications that moralistic preaching can have, but also hints at certain theological ramifications. Most notable among these is an implicit denial of the finished work of Christ as well as an implicit denial of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ in the life of believers. By emphasizing moral behavior in pastoral preaching, often in isolation of reference to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, such implicit denials become apparent, and thus demonstrate the influence of theological liberalism on pulpit practice. These and other theological ramifications of moralistic preaching receive additional consideration throughout this project. In order to combat such moralistic preaching and to focus believers attention where it should be “it will also be necessary to recover an enduring commitment to Christ-centered, expository preaching,”\textsuperscript{343} which will be one of the primary goals of this project.

**The Problem of the Misuse of the Scriptural Text**

Another danger that comes from the contemporary models of sermon preparation and delivery that are present in the American church is the subjective, existential, and decontextualized view of the Bible created due to contemporary preaching practices. This

\textsuperscript{342} Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 236.

happens in several ways, which this project will explain in detail. Most notable among these is the manner in which pastors read the text of Scripture in sermon preparation and delivery. In many churches, where preaching is not done in a *lectio continua* manner the alternative approach is often that of topical preaching. In topical preaching, the typical pattern is to choose a biblical theme or in some instances even a topic the Scriptures do not directly address and then attempt to find Scripture passages that discuss the chosen topic. Sometimes numerous passages of Scripture are laced together in order to build a systematic presentation on a particular topic or theme.

While such stringing together of Bible verses to add support to a sermon topic may seem to give biblical authority to a message, in reality it achieves just the opposite effect. As Rodney Decker points out in his enlightening article *Communicating the Text in the Postmodern Ethos of Cyberspace,*

> Wrenching texts from their contexts and foisting artificial and illegitimate associations upon the gathered scraps has always been a problem, but this becomes an even greater problem in a postmodern context in which such associative jumps are considered normal, in which the reader creates the meaning. No longer do the author and the text determine meaning, but now the editor and reader deconstruct and rearrange verbal scraps to produce the desired effect or message, whether that was God’s intent or not.\(^\text{344}\)

The further problem this creates, as Decker explains, is that it presents “not a coherent, integrated message, but one in which we may dip in at any point.”\(^\text{345}\) The result is a method of sermon delivery that presents a message based upon decontextualized and deconstructed collections of biblical statements that convey a practical view of Scripture that is thoroughly postmodern and theologically liberal. Such methods of sermon


\(^{345}\) Ibid., 67.
preparation and delivery convey a postmodern message in that the preacher of topical sermons becomes the determiner of a text's meaning, in isolation of that text's immediate context, and in disregard of the full redemptive metanarrative of the Scriptures. Such methods of sermon preparation and delivery also convey a theologically liberal methodology in that they treat the Bible as gathered pieces of independent data, brought together in a manner of the preacher's choosing. This is much in keeping with a liberal, higher-critical view of Scripture rather than an orthodox understanding. This can result in a message devoid of biblical authority, in spite of the impression that such sermons might give to the contrary.

A Lectio Continua Redemptive-Historical Approach to Sermon Preparation and Delivery

After describing the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons, after providing steps for discerning such influences, and after pointing out the dangers that these models for sermon preparation and delivery pose for the contemporary American church, it is necessary last of all to provide a solution to this problem. Therefore, the third purpose of this project is to propose a lectio continua, redemptive-historical model of sermon preparation and delivery as the necessary corrective for the contemporary forms of preaching that have become popular within many conservative evangelical churches. This project will accomplish this by first providing a biblical definition of preaching and looking at the practical and theological ramifications of such a definition for the preaching that takes place in the church today.
This definition of preaching, and the elements characteristic of biblical preaching, will serve as a starting point leading to subsequent areas of study throughout this project. However, simply providing a definition of biblical preaching does not satisfy the goals of this project. Since this project seeks to explain how one may apply a biblical definition of preaching to the actual preparation and delivery of sermons, as well as the homiletic structure inherent in such a model, it is necessary to survey the practice of biblical preaching by certain key figures throughout church history. This is necessary in order to better discern important characteristics of preaching that have been present in the homiletic practice of leading men of God throughout church history.

James F. Stitzinger, Associate Professor of Historical Theology at The Master’s Seminary, points out the need for understanding the history of preaching in quoting Alfred Ernest Garvie, from his book *The Christian Preacher*, where he states that

> The best approach to any subject is by its history; if a science, we must learn all we can about previous discoveries; if an art, about previous methods. The Christian preacher will be better equipped for his task today, if he has some knowledge of how men have preached in former days...While in preaching even, as in human activities of less moment, there are fashions of the hour which it would be folly to reproduce when they have fallen out of date, yet there are abiding aims and rules of preaching, which must be taken account of in each age, and which can be learned by the study of the preaching of the past.

Stitzinger then goes on to reiterate this same sentiment in his own words by stating that

> Indeed great value results from understanding those who have given themselves to a life of biblical exposition. The current generation whose history has yet to be written can learn much from those whose history is now complete. Time yet remains to change, refocus, improve, and be moved to greater accomplishment. An exposure to the history of expository preaching furnishes a context, a reference point, and a basis for distinguishing the transient from the eternal. It will motivate a person toward and increase his confidence in faithful Bible exposition. In the words of Stott, he will glimpse “the glory of preaching through the eyes of

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its champions in every century.” The history of expository preaching has an abundance of principles and lessons to teach those who study it.  

Obviously, such an endeavor as that which Stitzinger and Garvie advocate is not without its problems. The history of expository preaching spans nearly two millennia, and any effort to chronicle it in its entirety is a task of monumental proportions. Perhaps this is why, as Stitzinger notes, that “no work in the English language is devoted specifically to the history of expository preaching. This includes dissertations, definitive monographs, and surveys.”

Keeping with the above pattern, this project will not attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of the practice of biblical preaching throughout church history. This project will instead focus upon certain key individuals and movements throughout church history recognized by this researcher and others as modeling an exemplary pattern of consistently biblical, expository preaching that aids in the development of the model for sermon preparation and delivery that will be presented as part of this project.

An examination such as that explained above will also serve to build a biblical and historical foundation for the development of the lectio continua, redemptive-historical model for sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project. That is, a model that seeks to promote God exalting, Christ-centered, Spirit empowered preaching that incorporates specific elements into the overall structure of a sermon and into the exegetical process and homiletic preparation of sermons. All of these components are necessary for conveying the message of Scripture in the most accurate and biblical


348 Ibid., 5.
manner. This project will also provide sample sermon manuscripts and homiletic rubrics in order to demonstrate how one can put this model into practice in a congregational setting.

**Research Context**

The context in which the research for this project focuses its attention is that of the pulpit and the pastoral preaching ministry that takes place there. This context is one that is of utmost importance in Christian ministry, occupying in most churches a highly visible role, and as a result leading to the greatest influence upon the life of the church as a whole. Therefore, given the importance of such a ministry context, it is crucial that pastors be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to proclaim God’s Word accurately to the people of whom God has entrusted to them. Therefore, the primary audience of this project is pastors who occupy such roles of pulpit ministry.

A secondary context for this project is that of students preparing for a role of full time pastoral ministry whose responsibilities will be to preach the Word of God on a regular basis. Given the influence that preaching has on the spiritual growth of believers, it is important that those preparing for a leadership role in a local church setting be as prepared as possible to preach in a manner devoid of the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism. Therefore, those who are currently seminary students preparing for pastoral ministry would greatly benefit from the study that will be presented in this project.
Research Problem

An undermining of a biblical model of preaching is a continual problem faced in the American church due to the cultural and philosophical influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on sermon preparation and delivery. The problem that surfaces, therefore, more than the mere recognition of the presence of a postmodern and theologically liberal paradigm of preaching methods, is how to correct this malady of the American pulpit. This is necessary in order to bring about a renewed focus on biblical, expository, redemptive-historical preaching, and thus bring about greater spiritual growth and vitality, and love for Christ and obedience to his Word. Therefore, the research question that this project will seek to answer is, “Given the methodological influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons by pastors within conservative evangelical churches in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America, what approach to sermon preparation and delivery can correct this problem?”

Research Significance

The significance of this research project is manifold, for it touches upon issues that are applicable to the American church as a whole and to individual pastors on a variety of issues. In particular, the significance of this study comes from the fact that it proposes a methodology for the preparation and delivery of sermons designed to elicit the most spiritually beneficial response from believers, and to produce the greatest possible glory to God through a pattern of biblical preaching employed in the manner suggested in
this research project. The significance of this study also comes from the challenge that it will present to those who regularly preach the Word of God in a congregational setting.

This challenge consists primarily in a call to return to biblical, expository preaching, as well as a call to recognize what has transpired in the life of the American church that has so greatly hindered the faithful execution of this call. However, this is not the first such call to biblical preaching voiced from within the American church, nor perhaps, will it be the last. Merrill Unger, writing more than half a century ago issued a similar call when he observed that

To an alarming extent the glory is departing from the pulpit of the twentieth century. The basic reason for this ominous condition is obvious. That which imparts the glory has been taken away from the center of so much of our modern preaching and placed on the periphery. The Word of God has been denied the throne and given a subordinate place. Human eloquence, men’s philosophies, Christian ethics, social betterment, cultural progress and many other subjects good and proper in their place have captured the center of interest and have been enthroned in the average pulpit in the place of the Word of God. 349

The challenge that this project presents, therefore, is twofold. First, it is a challenge to pastors to examine their own practice of sermon preparation and delivery in an effort to discern if any of the negative influences discussed in this project may be present in their pulpit ministry. Secondly, it is a challenge to pastors to abandon any negatively influenced practices in favor of a more biblical approach.

In light of the important contributions that a study such as this is able to offer, it is necessary to provide an answer to the previously stated research question. This project has several goals that an answer to the research question posed by this project seeks to accomplish. These goals are both ministerial, and professional and academic.

Ministry Goals

First, it is necessary to provide an answer to the research question for this project since the pulpit occupies one of the most public components of the worship of the church and in turn exerts some of the greatest influences on those within the church. Therefore, it is important on the larger scale of Christian thought and practice for believers to be aware of the subtle influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism, especially in the realm of preaching practices. It is also needful for the church to be equipped with the skills necessary to discern such influences, as well as the knowledge to provide suggestions for the correction of the problems that arise from such influences, as well as the ability to work toward the dissolution of these influences.

It is also necessary to inform the church about the increasing dangers that such influences pose to the spiritual health and vitality of the church in order that the church can have at its disposal, solid biblical and historical justification for such concerns. It is also necessary for the church to be aware of such influences in order that they might be on guard against allowing these influences to take further hold upon the American pulpit, as has been allowed to occur mostly unchecked within conservative evangelical churches for the last several decades. All of this, in turn, can serve as a helpful spiritual aid for the church and a beneficial guide for believers who desire to learn how to better discern the presence of error, and at the same time grow in a deeper knowledge of the truth, and love of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, it is necessary to provide an answer to the research question for this project because it is important for pastors whose desire is to declare accurately and
authoritatively the full counsel of God, to be aware of any postmodern or theologically liberal influences that are inadvertently shaping their exegetical and homiletic practices.

Even the most theologically conservative and spiritually conscientious churches can become susceptible to the subtle influences of the thoughts and beliefs of the surrounding culture, and these same cultural forces can at times influence even the most spiritually discerning and astute pastor in seemingly imperceptible ways. When such influences gain sway among a body of believers, the effects are often observable through changing worship patterns and ministry practice. When such influences take hold of a pastor, the effects are often observable through the models of sermon preparation and delivery used, and through the manner in which pastors apply the text of Scripture in light of the redemptive theme of Scripture.

Given the realities stated above, it is important for pastors to examine their pulpit ministries in light of the information presented in this project. This information will serve to inform pastors as to the subtle influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism and provide helpful information about the manner in which such influences exhibit themselves in preaching. This should in turn cause those who recognize such influences in their own pulpit ministries to abandon these practices in favor of the lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to expository sermon preparation and delivery presented in this project. Due to such recognition, and change of course in preaching practice, pastors will be better equipped to serve their congregations, and their congregations will in turn experience greater spiritual growth, knowledge of the Scriptures, love of Christ, and zeal for proclaiming accurately and authoritatively the Word of Christ in their daily interactions with others.
Third, it is necessary to provide an answer to this project’s research question for the sake of the glory of God, and the exaltation of the name of Christ. In order to accomplish this important goal, however, it requires that a challenge be set forth for American pastors to return to a solidly biblical model of expository preaching. As is argued in this project, the model of sermon preparation and delivery presented in this project best achieves the above goals. This model also serves to convey a message that exalts God, focuses attention on Christ, and encourages believers to look away from themselves and instead fix their attention upon Christ, while learning to trust in the sufficiency of Christ and the power of his Spirit as revealed through the Scriptures.

Professional/Academic Goals

In addition to the significance of this project in accomplishing the above ministerial goals, this project is also significant in respect to certain professional and academic goals that it seeks to achieve. These goals, however, will be secondary to the ministerial goals of this project, and although important areas of consideration, will not constitute the primary goals of the research done for this project.

First, in answering the research question, it is the goal of this project to provide pastors and those in other fields of Christian ministry a greater understanding of the rise and subsequent influence of postmodernism and theological liberalism on American society in general and the church in particular. This goal is important for it provides for a more informed understanding of the present American cultural milieu, which in turn allows leaders in ministerial and academic fields to be more conversant with the culture, and thus better equipped to influence the culture with the message of the good news of
Jesus Christ. This goal also provides for a greater awareness and sensitivity to the ideas and movements that have helped to shape American culture and in turn provides a greater understanding of the proper, biblical relationship between the American church and American culture.

Secondly, an answer to the research question posed by this project addresses important hermeneutical issues. Many significant interpretive issues have come to the fore throughout the research process for this project. It is partly the goal of this project to follow these matters through to their conclusion in order to come to at least a workable proposal for the proper hermeneutical stance one should take in presenting the truth of God’s Word in public discourse.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Sources

The sources that exist on the topics discussed throughout this project are vast in number. It would be impossible to consult all of the sources available for this study. The following therefore, provides a discussion of the most significant sources in several areas and a brief explanation of what each of these categories of sources provides for the purposes of this project.

Sources on Preaching in Church History

As part of the brief survey of biblical preaching throughout church history that will be conducted in this project, consideration will be given to the influence of leading figures in church history whose examples of biblical preaching and distillation of biblical truth have led to the development of trusted models of sermon preparation and delivery. These models have in turn influenced heavily the model presented in this project.

In performing such a survey, it is necessary to consult several significant sources. First among these is the work of James F. Stitzinger, whose article on “The History of Expository Preaching,” from *The Master's Seminary Journal* has made this researcher aware of the importance of studying the history of expository preaching for clues about the influences that have shaped its practice today. Stitzinger’s article also provides a
wealth of information on other sources that touch upon this topic and serves as a useful tool in locating information from these sources that would not have come to this student’s attention if not for Stitzinger’s citation of them.\footnote{350}

In examining significant contributions from biblical expositors from the history of the church, it will be necessary to consult certain church history and historical theology resources as well. Most notable among these sources is Hughes Oliphant Old’s seven-volume set, \textit{The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church}.\footnote{351} The information Old provides in these volumes offers a plethora of information on notable figures in church history who have contributed in positive ways to the development of a biblical model of sermon preparation and delivery. Along with Old’s volumes, Alister E. McGrath’s \textit{Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought},\footnote{352} will be consulted, as well as Justo Gonzales’ three volume set, \textit{A History of Christian Thought}.\footnote{353}

\footnote{350}{James F. Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching.” \textit{The Master’s Seminary Journal} 3, no. 1 (Spring 1992), 5-32.}

\footnote{351}{Hughes Oliphant Old, \textit{The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volumes 1-7}, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998-2010).}


Sources for Developing a Definition of Biblical Preaching

In addition to the above sources, Steven J. Lawson’s work *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* will serve as an important guide. In this work, Lawson examines “the distinguishing marks” of John Calvin’s pulpit ministry, “the core presuppositions that undergirded his biblical preaching,” and “his personal preparation for the pulpit.” By doing so, Lawson seeks to “raise the bar for a new generation of expositors” by seeing “what a commitment to biblical preaching looks like” in “the work of a man who was sold out to this sacred duty.” In addition to Lawson’s contributions, the chapters entitled “Roots of Reformed Preaching” and “Applying the Word” from Joel Beeke’s work *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* will be consulted as a further aid in developing a definition of biblical preaching. Part of the benefit in Beeke’s work also comes from the numerous suggestions given on a practical level about the elements of biblical preaching, and the characteristics of truly biblical, expository sermons that maintain strong doctrinal content, practical value, and experiential worth.

Out of the definition of biblical preaching that will come from the guidance of the above sources, additional insights will be set forth on the proper goals of biblical, expository preaching and the means for attaining such goals. Drawn from these insights a proposal will be set forth which will seek to provide the elements necessary for a sermon to qualify as biblical preaching, which will in turn aid the careful expositor in avoiding the use of postmodern or theologically liberal preaching methodologies.

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355 Ibid., xiii.

Sources on Exegesis and Hermeneutics

In order to accomplish this task, however, it is necessary to consult additional sources in the area of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. This is necessary in order to ensure that the emphasis of this project remains rooted in a biblical definition of preaching. This is also necessary in order to ensure that the conclusions this project reaches through this survey remain grounded in sound principles of exegesis and biblical theology.

Walter Kaiser expresses this need when he states that “a gap of crisis proportions exists between the steps generally outlined in most seminary or Biblical training classes in exegesis and the hard realities most pastors face every week as they prepare their sermons.”357 Kaiser goes on to state that “both ends of this bridge have at various times received detailed and even exhaustive treatments,” from “the historical, grammatical, cultural, and critical analysis of the text” to “the practical, devotional, homiletic, and pastoral theology.”358 Yet, as Kaiser explains further, “what is so lacking in this case is exactly what needs to be kept in mind with respect to every sermon which aspires to be at once both Biblical and practical: it must be derived from an honest exegesis of the text and it must constantly be kept close to the text.”359

358 Ibid.
359 Ibid., 19.
This project will give careful attention to Kaiser’s work and other similar volumes on biblical exegesis during the process of this study in an effort to maintain a close exegetical proximity to the text of Scripture as described by Kaiser in the preceding remarks. This will also be done in an attempt to accomplish at least in part what Kaiser insists is so needed in most sermon preparation and delivery today.

Most notable among other sources similar to Kaiser’s work are Douglas Stuart’s *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*,360 and Gordon D. Fee’s *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*.361 Each of these works are helpful in the process of building a biblical model of sermon preparation and delivery in that they each contain a short guide for sermon exegesis that serves to “provide the pastor with a handy format to follow in doing exegetical work on a passage of Scripture for the purpose of preaching competently on it.”362 These works also issue a challenge to preachers to prepare and deliver sermons that are “based on research that is reverent and sound in scholarship” and that serves “as an act of obedience and worship.”363

Therefore, due to the benefit of these works in developing a biblical model of sermon preparation and delivery, this project will refer to these and other works throughout this project as a means of accomplishing what Kaiser has described, yet doing so within the broader context of the intended purpose of this research project. An additional source of a similar nature that this project will reference is that of Gordon


Fee’s and Douglas Stuart’s, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.*\(^{364}\) This work, while designed to be an introductory guide for beginning students of Bible study, is an indispensable resource for those studying the Scriptures on a deeper level as well, and for those preparing to deliver sermons based upon those same Scriptures. Fee and Stuart provide valuable information to aid the Bible expositor in understanding the unique characteristics of each literary genre of the biblical text. Such an understanding in turn provides a better grasp of the proper hermeneutical guidelines for interpreting these literary forms, while at the same time helping to connect these guidelines to the larger redemptive picture that serves as the overarching framework of Scripture.

### Sources on Homiletics

In the area of exegesis and homiletics, attention will also be given to the classic work of John A. Broadus, entitled *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons.*\(^{365}\) While an older work in relation to other sources on this topic, Broadus’ contribution to the field of exegesis and homiletics remains one without parallel, and for the insights which he provides, it is necessary to consult this work for a topic such as the one presented in this project. Lastly, an additional source that will serves as an excellent guide to proper sermon preparation and delivery is Stephen Lawson’s four part series in the *Master’s Seminary Journal* entitled a “A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching.” In this series Lawson provides a strong Scriptural defense of expository preaching and demonstrates from numerous passages of Scripture that expository preaching is not a practice

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\(^{364}\) Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

superimposed upon Scripture from without, but is the manner that the Word of God itself reveals as the means by which God’s special revelation is to be taught to God’s people.

An important part of this research project and the model for sermon preparation and delivery proposed by it is that it stands in contrast to the changing patterns of preaching that are taking place within the American church due to the influence of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on preaching methodologies. Therefore, it will also be necessary as part of this research project to identify what these changing patterns are, and to explain how postmodern thought and theological liberalism have helped to shape these patterns, as well as how these two movements have been brought together in much of the preaching practices observed by pastors in conservative evangelical churches today. Some of these preaching patterns include a greater emphasis upon topical preaching, which serves to reflect a postmodern rejection of metanarratives.

An additional practice common in American preaching is an emphasis upon moralistic sermons that reflect a theologically liberal methodology that approaches the Bible as primarily a guide to moral and social betterment. Many preachers in conservative evangelical churches even advocate such approaches to preaching, unaware or unconcerned with the threat that such practices pose to the spiritual health of their congregations, or in some instances, even convinced that such practices will bring greater growth and spiritual well-being. This project will seek in part to make the dangers of these practices clearer and to challenge those who cling to them to abandon them in the face of the evidence that points out their danger.

In order to accomplish the above task it will be necessary to interact with the writings of those who advocate these new patterns and methodologies for preaching, as
well as those inside and outside the Christian community who advocate postmodern thought and theological liberalism in its contemporary form. The writings that this student seeks to access on these topics will consist primarily of articles within theological journals that address these issues. Most notable among these articles are Rodney Decker’s article “Communicating the Text in the Postmodern Ethos of Cyberspace: Cautions Regarding the Technology and the Text,” from the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, and Robert L. Thomas’ article from the *Master’s Seminary Journal*, entitled “The Nature of Truth: Postmodern or Propositional.”

Sources on Postmodernism

This student may also consult additional sources from notable postmodern writers and philosophical deconstructionists themselves, such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Michael Foucault, and Martin Heidegger, among others. In addition, this writer may consult additional works that interact with the writings and thought of some of the above postmodern authors. One such work is Albert Mohler’s *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. In this important work, Mohler explains the unique characteristics of postmodern thought and provides helpful guidelines for properly communicating God’s truth to a culture saturated with postmodern thinking.

In addition to Mohler’s work, this student will also draw additional information on the proliferation of postmodern thought in America from Millard J. Erickson’s work.

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Truth and Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism.\textsuperscript{369} This work also provides additional source information on the writings of leading postmodern authors and interacts well with such works in order to provide a better understanding of the underlying presuppositions of much of postmodern thought.

Sources on Redemptive-Historical Preaching

In proposing a \textit{lectio continua}, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery, numerous additional sources will be consulted that specifically address redemptive-historical preaching, or what is sometimes referred to as Christ-centered, gospel-centered, or Christocentric preaching. Several works stand out in this area that serve as the primary sources for information on this topic. Among these is Bryan Chapell’s \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon}.\textsuperscript{370} An additional source of significance in this area is Graeme Goldsworthy’s \textit{Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching}\textsuperscript{371} and Goldsworthy’s \textit{Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation}.\textsuperscript{372} An additional source that provides helpful information on this topic is that of Dennis Johnson’s \textit{Him We Proclaim}:


\textsuperscript{370} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).


Finally, this student will consult the classic work by Sidney Greidanus’ entitled *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature.* In addition to these sources, numerous journal articles are of value, most notably, the article by Sidney Greidanus in the *Calvin Theological Journal* entitled “The Necessity of Preaching Christ Also from Old Testament Texts.” All of these books and articles are helpful in building a strong case in support of a redemptive-historical hermeneutic and redemptive-historical preaching as the necessary alternative to other models of sermon preparation and delivery.

**Sources on Lectio Continua Preaching**

It will also be necessary for the purpose of this project, which advocates a *lectio continua* approach to preaching, to examine sources that discuss the public reading of Scripture and the proper use of Scripture in the homiletic process. While no books exist to address this topic, numerous journal articles touch upon this issue, which this writer will consult throughout this project.

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Theological Foundations

This project will propose a model for the preparation and delivery of sermons that examines the definition of biblical preaching, surveys the practice of biblical preaching and the influence of such preaching by certain key figures throughout church history, and argues against current trends in sermon preparation and delivery in favor of the model proposed here. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a description of the theological foundations and presuppositions that serve as the basis for this project and the model for sermon preparation and delivery that will flow out of it.

The following sections will present four such theological foundations. These theological foundations are a Scriptural foundation, a Trinitarian foundation, a soteriological foundation, and a biblical theology foundation. In addition to these theological foundations, an explanation of the hermeneutical foundation for the method of sermon preparation and delivery proposed in this project is also necessary, which is a foundation that flows out of the biblical theology foundation of this project.

Scriptural Foundation

In establishing the Scriptural foundation of a lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery, it is important to recognize that preaching is not simply the words of the preacher, or the skill of an orator. Preaching, in fact, transcends such ideas to convey the very Words of God. One cannot do this, however, without reference to those words. Therefore, preaching must involve the text of Scripture, and should give careful and close attention to that text. As a result, one of the primary theological foundations of the approach to sermon preparation and delivery
advocated in this project is a high view of Scripture that holds the text of the Bible in the highest regard and understands the Bible to be the Word of God. This means that the Bible not only contains and conveys a message from God as would be argued by those taking a Neo-orthodox understanding of Scripture, but is the very word of God, and represents the final and absolute rule and authority for all faith, practice, and belief. This view further holds that the Bible is an inspired, inerrant, and infallible record of God’s special revelation to humankind. This means that the Bible is free from error, contradiction, falsehood, fraud, or deceit in all that it states, all subjects that it touches, or in any area addressed, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Trinitarian Foundation

A God-Exalting Foundation

An additional theological foundation that serves as the basis for the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project is what this researcher has chosen to identify as a Trinitarian foundation. This represents the belief held by this author that the Bible teaches the existence of only one true and living God, eternally existing as three equal, yet distinct persons, who is a perfect, infinite, eternal, self-existent, omniscient, omnipotent Spirit who sovereignly rules with unending authority and absolute determination and dominion over all things.

God chose to create the physical universe and all that is in it, making humanity in His own image, and creating them for the purpose of bringing glory to God and enjoying

377 Some of the information from this section is adapted from a research paper presented by this student for the class DMIN 8323: Preaching and Teaching the New Testament, and used with permission.
fellowship with God forever. Because of the end for which God created the world, and the responsibility God gave individuals to bring glory to Him, it becomes necessary that in the proclamation of God’s message to humanity, as found in the Bible, that the end result in all instances be the glory or exaltation of God. Therefore, in order to begin moving toward the elimination of the negative influences of theological liberalism and postmodernism on sermon preparation and delivery, it is necessary that all sermon preparation and delivery include this element, of the glory and exaltation of God in preaching as one of its chief theological foundations.

John Piper points out the importance of such an ideal for preaching when he states that “the dominant note [emphasis in original]” and “the unifying theme [emphasis in original]” of preaching is “the zeal that God has for his own glory.” Therefore,

The Lord sends preachers into the world to cry out that God reigns, that he will not suffer his glory to be scorned indefinitely, that he will vindicate his name in great and terrible wrath, but that for now a full and free amnesty is offered to all the rebel subjects who will turn from their rebellion, call on him for mercy, bow before his throne, and swear allegiance and fealty to him forever.

An emphasis such as this in preaching finds its support in numerous passages of Scripture as well. In his article on “Expository Exaltation,” John Piper cites several passages to this end. Most notable among them is First Corinthians 10:31, where the apostle Paul states, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” That is, to do everything in a way that reflects back to God and others the character and moral attributes of God. Later, in Colossians 3:17, Paul makes a similar statement as the one

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378 For a definition of ‘glory’ as well as an explanation of how humanity brings glory to God see footnote 38 on page xv.


380 Ibid., 24.
found in First Corinthians 10:31, but there ties the glory of God to Jesus Christ when he states, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Here Paul links the preaching of the Word of God to the glory of God in Christ. That is, the reflection of the character of God through praise of the redemptive work He has accomplished through the life and ministry of His Son, in whom is the greatest demonstration of the nature and attributes of God. These and other similar passages make it clear that in all areas of life, the glory of God as revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ should be one of the primary focuses. If this is true, than certainly this ought to be the focus in pastoral preaching as well. Therefore, in considering the Trinitarian foundation to the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project, it must be conceded that not only should preaching bring glory to God or be God exalting, but it must also be Christ-centered. That is, exalting God in preaching primarily by drawing attention to the characteristics and attributes of God demonstrated through the person and work of Jesus Christ, as highlighted in each preaching text.

A Christ-Centered Foundation

A Christ-centered focus is at the heart of the redemptive-historical aspect of the model for sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project. This Christ-centered focus is also one of the most neglected components of truly biblical preaching among conservative evangelicals in the church today. Much misunderstanding arises here as well in discussing the importance of a Christ-centered focus to ministry, or preparing and

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381 Some of the information from this section is adapted from a research paper presented by this student for the class DMIN 8323: Preaching and Teaching the New Testament, and used with permission.
delivering Christ-centered sermons. Simply stated, preaching that is Christ-centered consists of the proclamation of the person and work of Jesus Christ, in particular, his sinless life and his substitutionary death, burial and resurrection for the remission of sins.

The apostle Paul provides the biblical teaching on Christ-centered preaching in several places, (Galatians 6:14; Colossians 1:28; First Corinthians 1:23). However, Paul’s strongest statements in support of this idea occur in First Corinthians 2:1-2. There, Paul states “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Paul’s statements in these verses, however, do not imply that all preaching should consist of nothing other than an evangelistic, gospel presentation, and it is obvious from Paul’s other writings that he did not speak exclusively on the message of the cross, but addressed a whole host of issues pertinent to believers. Therefore, in using the term Christ-centered preaching, one should not think that this implies evangelistic preaching, although that could be a part of Christ-centered preaching at times. Truly Christ-centered preaching, as taught by the apostle Paul and elsewhere by the apostles throughout the New Testament, has as its foundation the cross of Jesus Christ and the message of His death and resurrection, regardless of the topic addressed in the sermon.

Graeme Goldsworthy explains this concept further when he argues that the gospel of Jesus Christ is to form the lens through which Christians are to view all Scripture. As Goldsworthy explains, “the meaning of all the Scriptures is unlocked by the death and

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383 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 54.
resurrection of Jesus.”  

384 Therefore, Goldsworthy concludes, in line with the sentiments of the apostle Paul, that preachers cannot “truly or faithfully expound any text of Scripture apart from this heart of the gospel event.”  

385 To this Bryan Chapell concurs, stating that

The entire Bible is Christ-centered because his redemptive work in all its…dimensions is the capstone of all of God’s revelation of his dealings with his people. Thus, no aspect of revelation can be thoroughly understood or explained in isolation from some aspect of Christ’s redeeming work.

386 As a result, any truly biblical, expository sermon will be Christ-centered, or redemptive-historical.

**A Spirit-Empowered Foundation**

In addition to a God exalting and Christ-centered foundation, the approach to sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project also includes a Spirit-empowered foundation. However, by stating that preaching should be Spirit empowered is not to imply that preaching should be full of emotionalism or result in dramatic, public responses to preaching. As Jim Shaddix explains, “the effectiveness of pastoral preaching cannot and should not be gauged by what happens at the altar on Sunday morning…the effectiveness of pastoral preaching must be gauged by whether or not we who listen to preaching look more like Jesus this year than we did this time last year.”

387 Therefore, if preaching is truly Spirit empowered, it will achieve the gradual transformation of

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384 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 54.

385 Ibid., 55.


individual lives and entire congregations over time, but may not result in instant spiritual change or overtly visible responses to pastoral preaching.

One of the methodological influences of theological liberalism on sermon preparation and delivery that is observable in many conservative evangelical churches is what some describe as evangelical decisionism. Decisionism often pushes for an immediate response to preaching or for some visible sign of conviction. As Graeme Goldsworthy explains, however, part of the problem with decisionism “is not the call for a decision. The error of decisionism is to de-historicize the gospel to make the decision the saving event. To that extent it expresses an existential hermeneutic” and thus gives rise to pastoral preaching that exhibits the same, subjective, existential focus on human experience, rather than the historical reality of who Jesus is and what He accomplished on the behalf of sinners in His life and ministry.

Truly Spirit-empowered preaching lies in close connection to the exaltation of God the Father through Jesus Christ. As Shaddix states, “it is through spiritual transformation that God glorifies Himself in the preaching event” and “through the truth of God’s Word, we are being made to look more and more like Jesus.”

Therefore, in order to ensure that preaching is Spirit empowered, “both preacher and people must simply let the Bible be what it was intended to be and do what it was intended to do - transform us into the image of Jesus Christ.” This kind of gradual spiritual transformation and almost imperceptible spiritual growth may not be that instantly exciting at times. It also may not produce the immediate outward displays or

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389 Ibid., 98.
public responses that are so often craved by pastors and preachers, but it is the Spirit-empowered work that God has designed to accomplish through preaching, which comes about as a result of the careful and consistent exposition of the Word of God in a redemptive-historical, or Christ-centered manner.

Soteriological Foundation

A third theological foundation that serves as an important basis for this project is a soteriological foundation. This foundation represents the belief in the doctrines of grace. This belief refers in one sense to the sovereign rule of God over all things, and carries with it ramifications for a proper understanding of human nature and the role of the church as the spiritual body of Christ. As used in this project, however, it refers more specifically to God’s sovereignty in salvation, and the corresponding role of God’s sovereign grace in personal sanctification, which comes in large part from a consistent exposure to biblical, *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical, expository preaching.

This in turn plays an important role in the preaching of God’s Word, the understanding of the Word, and the spiritual growth and sanctification that comes to believers because of that Word. In this sense, the soteriological foundation of this project helps to resolve part of the stated problem addressed by this research project, for it provides for the spiritual growth that is often lacking in the American church due to the patterns of sermon preparation and delivery that have developed from the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism. This project will include a fuller discussion of these issues and the important role that preaching plays in the sanctification of believers.
It is important to note, however, that in spite of the preceding remarks, and the strong stand that this researcher takes in support of the doctrines of grace, this research project will not focus attention upon providing any sort of apologetic for the doctrines of grace. Such a goal goes far beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, this project will argue that a biblical definition of preaching and a biblical model for the preparation and delivery of sermons should have as a part of its underlying theological foundation an acceptance of the doctrines of grace. This includes an acknowledgment of God’s sovereign grace, humanity’s total inability, and God’s irresistible grace in the process of salvation, as well as the important role that God’s grace plays subsequent to salvation in bringing about sanctification through the preaching of the Word. In this way, a preacher will have a better understanding of God’s role, their own role, the role of those sitting in the pew, and the manner by which those roles inform the preparation and delivery of sermons. Due to an acceptance of such truths, pastors will also be better equipped to carry out the task of proclaiming the message of the Bible in the most God honoring and spiritually beneficial manner.

Others also emphasize this same idea and point to the importance of the doctrines of grace as a necessary element to proper biblical preaching. Charles M. Blake, for example, in his article for the *Founders Journal*, “Preaching and the Doctrine of Election,” shows that “the doctrine of election offers six helps to the soul of the minister as he preaches the truth.”\textsuperscript{390} Others, as well, argue along similar lines, and this project

\textsuperscript{390} Charles M. Blake, “Preaching and the Doctrine of Election,” *Founders Journal* 62 (Fall 2005), 12.
will refer to these works.\textsuperscript{391} Most notable among them will be Joel Beeke’s work, \textit{Living for God’s Glory: Introducing Calvinism}.\textsuperscript{392}

In addition to Beeke’s work, J. V. Fesko’s article in the \textit{American Theological Inquiry}, entitled “Preaching as a Means of Grace and the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Reformed Perspective”\textsuperscript{393} will be consulted, as well as sections from Michael Horton’s \textit{The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way}.\textsuperscript{394} Michael G. Brown’s chapter in the book \textit{Planting, Watering, Growing: Planting Confessionally Reformed Churches in the Twenty-First Century} entitled “How’s the Food?” also provides helpful information on this issue and will be referenced in this project,\textsuperscript{395} along with Jon D. Payne’s work, \textit{In the Splendor of Holiness: Rediscovering the Beauty of Reformed Worship for the Twenty-First Century}.\textsuperscript{396} All of these sources provide helpful information on the proper development and delivery of biblical, expository sermons, which take into consideration God’s sovereign grace at work through the preaching of the Word, as a means of both salvation and sanctification.

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  \item \textsuperscript{391} See Paul T. Furhmann, “Calvin, the Expositor of Scripture,” \textit{Interpretation} 6, no. 2 (April 1952), 188-209.
  \item \textsuperscript{392} Joel R. Beeke, \textit{Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism}, (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008).
  \item \textsuperscript{393} J. V. Fesko, “Preaching as a Means of Grace and the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Reformed Perspective,” \textit{American Theological Inquiry} 3, no. 1 (January 2010), 35-54.
  \item \textsuperscript{394} Michael Horton, \textit{The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way}, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).
\end{itemize}
It is also important to note, that much of the modern models for sermon preparation and delivery that have gained in popularity in the American church, have developed under the influence of Arminian theology, which bears close relationship to theological liberalism. Therefore, in standing against current trends in preaching, and in standing against the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism in the church, one must consequently stand against the equally dangerous theology of Arminianism and its related subsets that have inspired modern trends in preaching.  

Biblical Theology Foundation

An additional theological foundation for this project that will serve as a guide in the development of the method of sermon preparation and delivery advocated here is that of biblical theology. The field of biblical theology has suffered great neglect in the church in recent decades, and such neglect is one of the reasons for the ease by which theological liberalism and postmodernism have been able to influence so strongly the preaching methodologies of the American church. In recent years, however, this important field of biblical studies has been re-discovered, and interest in the overarching redemptive-historical context of Scripture that is emphasized as a result of biblical theology has ignited a renewed interest in truly biblical, expository preaching. This renewed interest in biblical theology has at the same time led to a greater concern for and desire to correct the malady of the American pulpit that has developed in part from an ignorance of a full-orbed biblical theology.

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Since the area of biblical theology has a significant role to play in the method of sermon preparation and delivery discussed in this project, it is important to explain this field in more detail and to provide a rationale for the importance of such a field of study for pastoral preaching. Therefore, the following section will consist of an explanation of biblical theology as well as a brief description of the sources that best describe this important area of biblical studies.

A Christocentric Hermeneutic

To begin with, in understanding biblical theology, it is important to realize something of the nature of Scripture itself. As Graeme Goldsworthy explains in his work *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*, the Bible declares “that there is one God who has revealed himself to us by his word.” Furthermore, the Bible is “one unified word from God,” and provides us with one way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Goldsworthy concludes, the entire Bible is about Christ.

With this understanding of the Christocentric nature of the Scriptures, the Bible can be seen as God intended it, and as emphasized by the field of biblical theology; that is, primarily an explanation of the history of redemption and the calling of one elect people of God to himself throughout that history. Biblical theology, therefore, focuses one’s attention upon the importance of understanding this “big picture” of the Bible that


399 Ibid., 16.

400 Ibid., 18-19.
is rooted in salvation history and the ultimate consummation of that history in the Lord’s return.\textsuperscript{401}

Due to this understanding of the Christocentric nature of the Scriptures, pastors can be better equipped to emphasize the redemptive aspect of any biblical text.\textsuperscript{402} In order to aid pastors and students of the Scriptures in discerning these redemptive aspects of the text, Goldsworthy points out various principles for interpreting and preaching Scripture through a redemptive lens. This can be done by examining the way Jesus Himself viewed Scripture, how that view was reflected in Jesus’ own life and ministry, and how that view continued to be reflected in the teachings of the apostles who followed after Jesus.\textsuperscript{403} As a result of these reflections, Goldsworthy concludes that “the Bible is first and foremost about God as he reveals himself in Jesus Christ,” and due to this reality “the preacher must be absolutely scrupulous in making this clear”\textsuperscript{404} in preaching.

This understanding of the Christocentric nature of the Scriptures also challenges the preacher on a hermeneutical level to see the role of the gospel as “the hermeneutical key” that unlocks the pages of the Bible. As Goldsworthy states, the “proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the person and work of Jesus” and to recognize that “Christ is revealed as the meaning of the Scriptures so that no part can be rightly understood without reference to him.”\textsuperscript{405} This is what Sidney Greidanus refers to as Christocentric interpretation. As Greidanus explains, “The essence

\textsuperscript{401} Graeme Goldsworthy, \textit{Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture}, 22.

\textsuperscript{402} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{403} Ibid., 46-47, 56.

\textsuperscript{404} Ibid., 61.

\textsuperscript{405} Ibid., 84-85.

The problem with much of the pastoral preaching that takes place in conservative evangelical churches today is that pastors rarely utilize insights from biblical theology in sermon preparation. As a result, Christ does not become the central focus of every passage of Scripture. This leads to a failure to draw proper redemptive lines during preaching marking a Scripture passage’s relation to Christ. This leaves pastors with no other alternative than to turn each passage of Scripture preached into a moral lesson. This is especially true when dealing with passages from the Old Testament. In preaching from the Old Testament, pastors often show the influences of theological liberalism on their preaching methodologies in the most pronounced ways when Old Testament passages become the source of moralistic sermons. Such sermons are often driven by a desire (albeit a sincere and good intentioned desire) to provide principles for daily living or social betterment. As a result, pastors can inadvertently take attention away from God’s redemptive plan in Jesus Christ. Yet, in the words of Bryan Chapell, in order for sermons to be truly biblical, expository sermons “Christ must be the beginning, middle, and end of every sermon…Preaching must exalt Christ for awakening, justifying, sanctifying, and comforting sinners.” “To preach what people should be and do and yet not mention him who enables their accomplishment warps the biblical message. God’s redemptive work is integral to every biblical passage’s proper exposition.”

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An understanding of this reality makes a Christocentric reading of Scripture essential to truly biblical, expository preaching. Such a reading of Scripture can come only from a proper understanding of biblical theology and the redemptive theme of Scripture made clear from this field of study.

**A Sensus Plenior Understanding of Scripture**

The importance of biblical theology and the need for a Christocentric reading of Scripture also brings to light further issues of hermeneutical consideration. These issues address questions about the manner in which Scripture finds fulfillment or the way in which the Old Testament finds fulfillment in the New Testament, as well as the level to which the authors of the Old Testament were aware of this fulfillment when they wrote. An answer to these questions is crucial for the proper understanding of the nature of Scripture and the proper relating of that nature to the model of sermon preparation and delivery advocated in this project.

It is this researcher’s belief that while the authors of Old Testament Scripture knew much about the meaning of what God revealed to them as they recorded Scripture, the full ramifications of what they wrote were not always made clear to them. This is why, in many instances throughout the New Testament, interpretations are given of certain Old Testament passages that expand upon the original meaning of those passages. Therefore, it is clear from such New Testament examples that the fuller divine meanings of the Old Testament passages referenced were unknown to the authors of these texts and involved a meaning that transcended or expanded upon the original, authorial intent of the message. This concept, of the expanded, divine intent of Scripture, known as the
sensus plenior view of biblical interpretation, is the hermeneutical position that this project affirms.

Some might react to this view by arguing that such an understanding of promise and fulfillment allows for multiple understandings of a single passage of Scripture. Some might also argue that the sensus plenior approach to understanding the Scriptures undermines the text of Scripture by presenting more than one correct interpretation, and thus undermines the very presuppositions of this project, by encouraging a subjective understanding of Scripture not based in a historical context. However, in answering such objections it should be noted that “Scripture presents one, consistent, organic message. It tells us how we must seek Christ, who alone is our Savior and source of strength, to be and do what God requires.”

Therefore, while “the redemptive dimension of a particular Scripture passage may not seem to dominate the text’s landscape because the redemptive features of a passage sometimes appear only in seed form. Still, exposing the revelation properly requires understanding a passage’s redemptive content and context,” which may be a context unavailable or not immediately understandable to the human author of that particular passage of Scripture.

A sensus plenior approach to biblical interpretation argues, therefore, that the author need not know fully the ramifications of what he is writing as long as later biblical revelation makes clear those ramifications. This project will develop this hermeneutical approach and provide a biblical defense for it throughout in order to show that this is the

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408 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 277.
409 Ibid., 276.
proper hermeneutical method for preparing and delivering biblical, redemptive-historical, expository sermons.

**Theoretical Foundations**

In standing against theological trends and philosophical movements that have caused a gradual drift away from biblical, expository preaching, pastors have allowed many secular ideas to gain sway upon the preparation and delivery of sermons. Therefore, in laying out the theoretical foundations of this research project, there is a sharp contrast presented between the ideas undergirding this project, and those that have taken sway in much of America society. The following section explains two major theoretical foundations for this project. These theoretical foundations consist of an epistemological foundation and an axiological foundation.

**Epistemological Foundation**

In examining the biblical definition of preaching, and proposing a model for the preparation and delivery of biblical sermons, it is necessary to explain certain theoretical foundations. Chief among these theoretical foundations is epistemology. In establishing the epistemological basis of this research project, this researcher affirms the belief in absolute truth, and in the ability of people to know that truth objectively. Part of this belief also carries with it the recognition that some things are true, while other things are false, and that no two things can both be true, in the same way, and to the same degree, at the same time.
Part of this belief also carries with it the acknowledgment that all truth, ultimately, is God’s truth, but that the truth revealed in the Bible, through God’s special revelation, is the final and supreme authority for truth. In other words, any truth claim that contradicts a truth claim of the Bible must be false, and one must therefore reject such claims in acceptance of what the Bible declares to be true.

The impact that this theoretical foundation has for the preparation and delivery of sermons is highly significant, for it establishes the preaching of God’s Word as contained in the Bible as a proclamation of absolute and knowable truth, which stands as the final and supreme authority for the lives of all human beings. Therefore, the practice of pastoral preaching represents the most important form of public address known to man, as it seeks to declare to individuals the truth. As a result, it becomes necessary that the truth be disseminated in the most accurate and reliable manner.

Therefore, the epistemological foundation of this research project necessitates several things. It necessitates an examination of the biblical definition of preaching in order to help pastors ensure that in their efforts to relay the truth that they are in fact relaying it correctly. It also necessitates that pastors convey the truth with the proper emphases and goals in mind, by utilizing a biblical method of sermon preparation and delivery that maintains conformity to the professional, academic, and theological foundations of this project.

Axiological Foundation

It is also necessary in establishing the basis for this research project to explain the axiological foundation for this work and for the model of sermon preparation and
delivery advocated as part of this project. In doing so, the primary branch of axiology addressed is the area of ethics. Within the area of ethics, this project will focus particularly upon the ethics of preaching.

To explain it another way, it is apparent in observing some of the common patterns in preaching that have developed within the American church that many of these patterns focus upon one of two things. These patterns serve to manipulate or coerce individuals, not from the word of God and the propositions contained in that Word, but through the oratorical skill of the preacher.

On the other side of the spectrum are those preachers who do not even identify themselves as preachers, because what they do is not preaching by even the loosest definitions of the term. Instead, their focus is upon relevancy, and their goal is to relate to individuals on a popular level and identify with them in unique ways. Such speakers seek to elicit a response as well, sometimes much in the same way as the directly manipulative or coercive preacher, but through an indirect method of conversation or dialogue.

The problem that arises in either scenario, however, is that the goal of the sermon is divorced from its biblically defined purpose and Scripture’s overall redemptive theme, and therefore, results in neither an ethical nor a biblical presentation of truth. In contrast, however, to these methods of sermon delivery, this project will argue that pastors should present the text of Scripture in a manner that allows it to speak for itself, without attempting to render aid to the Spirit of God through direct or covert manipulation disguised as relevancy. This does not mean to imply that no commentary should be made

on the text of Scripture or that pastors should not provide illustrations or make use of other homiletic devices in order to establish a rapport with one’s listeners. It is meant to imply, however, as will be argued further in this project, that in delivering sermons, care should be taken to allow the text of Scripture and the redemptive themes inherent in each text to be the guide of homiletic structures rather than the desires of the preacher or the felt needs of the audience.
METHODOLOGY

Nature of the Research

The nature of the research done in this project will be primarily qualitative. This qualitative approach deals specifically with the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on sermon preparation and delivery, along with a proposal for a model of sermon preparation that serves as a corrective to these influences. This qualitative research will consist, however, of both descriptive and developmental forms of research. Since this project proposes to examine both the definition of biblical preaching and describe the practice of such preaching throughout church history, as well as to propose a method for developing a lectio continua, redemptive-historical model for biblical sermon preparation and delivery, it is served best by including both descriptive and developmental components. The steps taken in the descriptive components of this project has been brought into focus already, while the developmental components used to propose a way of implementing in ministry practice the model advocated in this project, receives attention below.
The Exegetical Process

The first step to take in the model of sermon preparation and delivery advocated as part of this project consists of many parts within a larger whole defined by some as the exegetical process. In preparing sermons, the first steps in this process must involve the exegesis of the text of Scripture under consideration. This examination has typically taken the form of several specific steps in which the careful exegete seeks to determine the precise meaning of a text in light of its original, grammatical-historical context. This student assumes that those following this exegetical process will hold certain presuppositions about the text of Scripture in common with this writer, including its inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility, and consequently its divine authority, and its ability to provide knowable and discernible meaning. This student also assumes at this point that in order for one to carry out the exegetical process described below in the best manner that the preacher implementing this model will adhere to the lectio continua method of sermon preparation. Therefore, in most instances, the selection of the sermon text will be an easy task, as it will typically be the next pericope, chapter, or chapters from the particular book of the Bible the pastor is preaching through at the time.

After the selection of the preaching text, the first step in the preparation of an expository sermon is the reading of the preaching text. This writer recommends that pastors read the preaching text several times, in several different modern translations, in order to thoroughly acquaint and immerse oneself in the Scriptural text and to get a

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411 Some of the information from this section is adapted from a research paper presented by this student for the class DMIN 8343: Developing Relevant Expository Messages, and used with permission.

greater feel for the various nuances of meaning conveyed by modern translations of the text.

The next step is to develop one’s own translation of the text from the original languages. In the event that one is not able to work from the original languages, one should consult a good interlinear translation to aid in this process, or a good Bible software program such as *Logos Bible Software*, *Bible Works*, *PC Study Bible*, or another similar program. In translating, one should also give attention to critical problems and significant textual variants.

After translating the text from the original languages, one should diagram the various phrases and parts of speech and lay out these parts in a visual manner. With this diagram as a guide, one should then outline the text in as detailed a manner as possible. The next step is to begin studying the text in a more detailed manner than has already been done up to this point. During this phase of the preparation process, the initial study that takes place should consist only of one’s own personal observations about the text, in order to avoid an unnecessary bias toward one interpretation or another of the particular passage under consideration. After the text has been thoroughly exhausted and every pertinent question asked about the text, one should look to outside sources.

As outside sources are consulted this should begin with an examination of the historical, cultural, literary, and theological background of the preaching text, along with a study of issues pertaining to the date, authorship, recipients, and purpose of writing for the book in which the sermon text is found. In doing so, one should consult good exegetical and expository commentaries on the particular book or portion of Scripture under consideration. This student also recommends that one consult the works of certain
notable figures throughout church history for additional information on one’s preaching text.

The next step in the exegetical process is one of the most crucial. It is the current tendency among many within conservative evangelical churches, to stop the process of exegesis after all the work of translating and studying the historical, cultural, literary, and grammatical background is complete. However, as Bryan Chapell points out, while

Exegesis offers sound analysis of the words, grammar, syntax, and historical setting of Scripture…a minister who presents only the grammatical-historical meaning of God’s Word may be lecturing or discoursing, but he is not preaching. The word must be applied spiritually. Spiritual preaching is thus Christological. Through Christ it will also be theological, bringing all glory to the triune God.413

In fact, one of the issues that will be examined further in this project is the reductionistic approach of some bible interpreters, particularly in their dealings with the Old Testament, in which the text of the Old Testament Scriptures are treated as bare, historical facts, in isolation of their full redemptive context.414 As Chapell explains further,

No text exists in isolation from other texts or from the overarching biblical message. Just as historic-grammatical exegesis requires a preacher to consider a text’s terms in context, correct theological interpretation requires an expositor to discern how a text’s ideas function in the wider biblical message.415

Therefore, in emphasizing the importance of exegesis in sermon preparation, and the crucial role of a proper grammatical-historical method of interpretation, the model of sermon preparation and delivery proposed by this project will not stop at this point. The model presented in this project will urge the preacher to go further in the exegetical

413 Joel R. Beeke, Living for God’s Glory, 258.


415 Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 275.
process to develop a theological exegesis of the passage as well. One can accomplish this by seeking to recognize the redemptive elements of the preaching text and the manner in which the redemptive markers within that text make a display of God’s grace through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.416

After the steps described above are complete, the final step in the preparation process is to develop a sermon manuscript, or at least a detailed homiletic sermon outline known as a sermon brief. By doing this, the preacher is able to spend time constructing his words, in order to safeguard against careless or poorly thought out statements. A sermon manuscript also adds the benefit of allowing the preacher to make sure that his words accurately and appropriately express the ideas of the Scriptural text.

The Homiletic Structure

After the final step in the preparation process is complete, the pastor should give attention to the delivery of the expository sermon, and to the development of a theological strategy, which should form the basis for the form, style and other elements of the sermon itself. In delivering expository sermons, pastors often give little or no thought to the specific theological reasons undergirding the form and style of their sermons, or other components of the homiletic process. It is often the case, however, that the manner by which a pastor preaches a sermon and the methods used during preaching can convey a stronger non-verbal message than the actual words of the sermon itself. An examination of the ways in which this can occur will be part of this project, along with information about the medium of preaching as the conveyor of a non-verbal message.

This project will also argue, in light of the significant role that the medium plays in declaring the message, that each aspect of an expository sermon and every component of the homiletic process should reflect a specific theological purpose that relates to the overarching redemptive theme of Scripture. Therefore, one’s homiletic practice as well as one’s exegesis of a passage of Scripture will reflect certain theological convictions about the gospel that serve as the foundation for the method of sermon delivery that one carries out. A further explanation of these principles and the manner in which one might carry them out will receive attention throughout this project. A disregard for theological concerns in the homiletic process demonstrates a disregard for the text of Scripture itself. Therefore, what follows in the section below is an attempt to briefly describe what elements should be included as part of the homiletic process.

An expository sermon is first an explanation of the Word of God, and a reflection of one’s belief about that Word. In addition, one should base a sermon upon a fixed exegetical process and a redemptive-historical understanding of Scripture. Therefore, a sermon should naturally include, and ideally, begin with a reading of the text of Scripture. This reading should occur without commentary, within its full context in order to allow the listeners to experience the unadulterated public reading of Scripture in its full literary and canonical setting. This serves to reinforce further the need for a *lectio continua* method of sermon preparation and delivery, and highlights the relationship of biblical theology to preaching.

Once the pastor has read the preaching text the exposition of the text should follow. The manner in which this occurs may vary from expositor to expositor, but should follow closely the text and the intended meaning of the text. In addition to this,
one should present the explanation of the text in a logical, didactic manner that follows as much as possible the flow of thought that is present in the text. In other words, the central idea of a passage of Scripture should be the sermon’s main idea. Likewise, the main points and sub-points of the passage that are revealed during one’s study of the text should be the main points and sub-points of the sermon and should serve to support the main idea of the author. One should also take great care during this time to maintain a careful balance between an explanation of the text itself and an explanation of how this text fits into its broader context by observing the methods explained above.

Additional areas of concern pertinent to this process will need further exploration. Most notable among these concerns are certain hermeneutical issues related to application. Other concerns include issues regarding the use of the text of Scripture in sermon delivery, the extent to which one uses electronic media in sermon delivery, and the manner in which one reads the Scriptural text. This project will address these and other similar issues.

**Research Delimitations**

As stated in the explanation of the purpose for this project, this project will consist of a study of the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism within the preaching practices of conservative evangelicals in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America. This project will also provide a proposal for a preaching method that strives to counteract and correct such influences. Given these purposes, this project will focus attention on an examination of movements of thought and belief primarily within the United States in the twentieth to twenty-first centuries. However, it
is not possible to do a study such as this without also taking into consideration the foundations for such thought and belief in the movements that took place prior to the period under consideration in other parts of the world. Therefore, while focused primarily on movements of postmodern thought and theological liberalism within America, this project will also discuss briefly movements that took place in Europe, which continue to exert an influence in America as well as in Europe and around the world.

In addition to the research context for this project, an additional area of consideration will be to examine the influences of postmodernism and theological liberalism within conservative evangelical churches. While reference will at times be made to the presence of postmodern thought and theological liberalism within the body of American Christendom as a whole, that is not the primary focus of this project. Such references will serve mostly to provide a greater frame of reference and understanding of the overarching influence that such movements have had on the American church. These references therefore, will be more incidental than the rest of the data presented in this project.

The context of this research will focus on the influences of postmodern thought and theological liberalism on the preparation and delivery of sermons in particular. Therefore, while one can show that such influences are present within other areas of the American church, it is not the primary purpose of this project to examine such areas. As is true of the occasional references that will be made to such influences within the broader domain of Christendom, so too here, reference may at times be made in this project to the effect of postmodernism and theological liberalism on other areas within conservative evangelicalism that do not directly pertain to preaching. However, these
references will serve a greater purpose in this project than to merely provide a frame of reference and understanding of the overarching effect of such influences in areas beyond that of preaching. These references will serve to demonstrate the influences on preaching itself.

**Data to Be Collected**

The data to be collected in order to conduct the research for this project consists of material available in hard copy or electronic forms. This data will be in the form of books, theological journal articles, doctor of ministry dissertations, Bible software programs, websites, and audio recordings. It will be the goal of this student to gather such data from a broad spectrum of periods and perspectives throughout the history of the church in order to provide a thorough and balanced array of source material. It will also be the goal of this researcher to give ample attention to those sources published most recently, in order that the data presented in this project interacts with both current sources that are on the cutting edge of recent studies in expository preaching, as well as trusted sources from the past.

**Criteria for Collection of Data**

The criteria established by this student for the collection of data for this project involves two factors. First, in the collection of data, this student will consider the positions for which the authors of the material take. It is important in any research project for one to present a balanced and fair perspective and represent opposing viewpoints accurately. Therefore, it will be necessary to collect sources from those who agree with the arguments and proposals of this project as well as from those who disagree. In
looking to such sources and interacting with material from the sources that support contrasting methods from that which will be proposed in this research project, the conclusions developed as a result of this research will ultimately be strengthened, having been put to the test of falsification by authors of opposing views.

A second factor in the collection of data will be the diversity of the sources collected. In other words, while most of the sources acquired for this research project will consist of journal articles from on-line sources, this student will also attempt to include many other sources as well, rather than relying exclusively on one or two types of sources.

**Location of Data**

The location of the data to be collected for this project has come in large part from the ATLA religion database, which has provided most of the theological journal articles needed. WorldCat Dissertations has also provided some doctor of ministry projects for review. This student will acquire many other journal articles and miscellaneous sources through various websites. Some websites in particular are especially helpful in this regard; most notably the page entitled “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament” from the website of *The Gospel Coalition*, available at http://thegospelcoalition.org/preaching-christ. Also helpful is the website of the *Evangelical Homiletics Society*, available at http://www.ehomiletics.com/index.php, as well as certain broadcasts available on the *Reformed Forum*, available at http://reformedforum.org and the website of *Modern Reformation Magazine*, available at http://www.whitehorseinn.org/modern-reformation/modern-reformation.html. In addition to the above sources, this student will
also consult some Bible software programs such as *Logos Bible Software*, *Bible Works*, and the *PC Study Bible*.

The remaining sources, consisting primarily of various books, are already in the personal library of this researcher, or will be purchased by this student from various on-line bookstores, or requested through inter-library loan via the Cierpke Memorial Library of Tennessee Temple University and Temple Baptist Seminary in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This student may also borrow a few other sources from the library of Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, or from the library of Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee.
CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

There is a great need for a study such as the one proposed here. As in the days of the early twentieth century, when the American church stood at a turning point in the development of preaching practices due to the onslaught of theological liberalism and modernism, so too now the church is at a similar turning point through the influence of postmodernism and the continued threat of theological liberalism. The tragedy that has occurred, however, is that the conservative evangelicals who have historically stood against such beliefs have allowed many such ideas over time to influence their methods of sermon preparation and delivery. As a result, a dangerous mixture of postmodern and theologically liberal methodologies has taken captive many American pulpits.

In seeking to determine how to address this problem, a lectio continua, redemptive-historical approach to sermon preparation and delivery has been proposed. From such a proposal, those in full time pastoral ministry and those preparing for such ministries can gain valuable insight into proper methods of sermon preparation and delivery.

This study is also significant for the skills it provides in general to allow believers and ministerial leaders alike to be able to better discern the negative cultural influences that have affected the church, and to provide biblical alternatives to counter those influences. To accomplish these goals this proposal serves to focus the reader’s attention
on the importance of a high view of God, a high view of His Word, and a proper biblical-
theological framework from which to develop truly biblical, expository sermons.

In order to assist further in the implementation of the above goals this project has
also proposed a methodology for developing biblical, redemptive-historical, expository
sermons. This methodology includes a specific exegetical and homiletic process designed
to assist pastors in achieving the most biblical ends in preaching by use of an approach to
sermon preparation and delivery that provides for great spiritual benefit for believers and
unbelievers alike, to the glory of God. It is the hope that as this project progresses and as
this proposal develops further, that it might result in a renewed passion among pastors
and seminary students to preach *lectio continua*, redemptive-historical sermons. It is also
a hope that from that passion would come from within the body of Christ, a greater
knowledge and love of the Lord and a renewed passion to do the work of the Lord,
motivated by a proper understanding of all that Christ has done for us and continues to do
for us every day.
PROPOSED PROJECT OUTLINE

I. Introduction
   A. Research Purpose
   B. Research Problem
   C. Research Context
   D. Research Significance

II. Literature Review
   A. Introduction to Sources
   B. Theological Foundations
      1. Scriptural Foundation
      2. Trinitarian Foundation
      3. Soteriological Foundation
      4. Biblical Theology Foundation
   C. Theoretical Foundations
      1. Epistemological Foundation
      2. Axiological Foundation

III. Methodology
   A. Nature of the Research
   B. Data to Be Collected
   C. Criteria for Collection of Data
   D. Location of Data
IV. Project Report
   A. Examining the Biblical Definition of Preaching
   B. Surveying the History of Biblical Preaching
   C. Examining Key Figures in the History of Biblical Preaching

V. Understanding and Discerning Postmodern and Theologically Liberal Influences
   A. Surveying the History of Postmodernism and Theological Liberalism
   B. Understanding the Influence of Postmodernism and Theological Liberalism on Sermon Preparation and Delivery
   C. Evaluating Current Trends in Preaching in Conservative Evangelical Churches
   D. An Assessment of the State of Preaching in Conservative Evangelical Churches

VI. A Lectio continua Redemptive-Historical Approach to Sermon Preparation and Delivery
   A. The Biblical Basis for a Lectio Continua Redemptive-Historical Approach to Sermon Preparation and Delivery
   B. The Historical Basis for a Lectio Continua Redemptive-Historical Approach to Sermon Preparation and Delivery
   C. The Practical Basis for a Lectio Continua Redemptive-Historical Approach to Sermon Preparation and Delivery

VII. Project Conclusion

VIII. Appendixes

IX. Project Proposal Addendum

X. Bibliography
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION

September 15, 2011: Submit Doctor of Ministry Project Proposal


March 15, 2012: Submit Final Draft of Doctor of Ministry Project Report

April 2012: Complete Oral Defense of Doctor of Ministry Project Report

April 30, 2012: Participate in Commencement Exercises
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