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The Pastor as Scholar

Introduction

Al Mohler, current president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary argued a problem for pastors today is they are “pulled in many directions simultaneously” so that serious theological work is set aside because of genuine pressing concerns for their ministry. For Mohler, the “managerial revolution” has turned pastors into administrators rather than theologians. The local pastor is more likely to read a book on leadership or organizational theory before a serious commentary or theological text. For others, a shift to a more therapeutic role sees “theology as the problem than a solution.” For Mohler, **“All this is a betrayal of the pastoral calling as presented in the New Testament.”**¹

Former president of Fuller Seminary Richard Mouw struggled early in his career with being an evangelical and an intellectual at the same time. In his formative years he was warned against losing the simple Gospel by scholarship. He recalls hearing “we don’t need exegesis, we just need Jesus” on more than one occasion. Yet Mouw says he was called to life as a scholar and he does not regret his pursuit of an intellectual life.²

When evangelicals began founding colleges and seminaries, there was a tension between intellectual rigor and practical training for ministry. As someone has taught New Testament Greek at a Christian University, I have needed to defend the value of learning to read the Greek New Testament on several occasions. Mouw says “there is a danger of allowing a concern for the practical value of learning to merge with lingering tendencies toward anti-intellectualism in the Evangelical movement.”³ This observation is as true today as it was a hundred years ago. Within Evangelicalism there are certain sacred cows which are rarely questioned because they imply liberalism.

Randolph Richards and Joseph Dodson believe the church needs quality biblical scholars who work with the biblical text, do quality exegesis or produce material which illuminates the text of the Bible. They point out bad exegesis dilutes and distorts the gospel and can actually hurt members of the body of Christ.⁴ The church needs well-trained pastors to provide biblical based answers to the sloppy and dangerous use of the Bible common among many congregations. Richards and Dodson encourage students to work on their own spiritual life, to be involved in church and community (don’t be a hermit), and to be aware that scholarship can “puff up.” The call on biblical scholars to serve in ministry and take care of their heart.⁵

As a senior pastor in Oak Park, Illinois and founder of the Center for Pastor Theologians, Todd Wilson has a foot in both pastoral ministry and the world of academia. For Wilson, the problem is not just that pastors have become less academic, the academy has become less pastoral.⁶ This division of labor cuts both ways, local pastors do not particularly care to wade into the deep waters of serious theology because there are other, “real world” problems to

¹ Al Mohler, “The Pastor as Theologian, Part One,” <https://albertmohler.com/2006/04/17/the-pastor-as-theologian-part-one/>.

² Richard J. Mouw, *Called to the Life of the Mind: Some Advice for Evangelical Scholars* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2014), 1-3.

³ Mouw, *Called to the Life of the Mind*. 16.

⁴ E. Randolph Richards, and Joseph R. Dodson. *A Little Book for New Bible Scholars* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2018), 49.

⁵ Richards and Dodson. *A Little Book for New Bible Scholars*, 101.

⁶ Todd Wilson, ed. *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership* (Downers Grove, Ill. IVP Academic, 2016), 13-14.

deal with in their churches. Academics would prefer the untrained local pastor stay out of theology as well, and many academic theologians do not have much to offer the church anyway.⁷

To a certain extent my own experience in the larger world of evangelical academia supports Wilson's characterization of academic disinterest in practical matters of ministry. I will offer just one short anecdote to support this, there are many others which come to mind (not the least of which is the titles used for most academic papers). I attended a regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society some years ago and heard an excellent academic paper on the theological issue of open theism. This is the view God has limited omniscience, that he does not know the future for certain and therefore prophecy is just a very good guess. This particular scholar offered a scathing critique of several of the major representatives of this view and concluded his paper. During the question and answer I asked "so what should we do about the scholars who promote open theism?" I was thinking about my own experience within the Grace Gospel Fellowship with pastors who have a very similar view and some of the effects that theology has on doing ministry. His response was, "I really don't care." For this particular scholar, there was no pastoral payoff to his theological critique of a very complicated theological debate. When pushed a bit, he expressed the view that it was not his job (as an academic) to decide what application this particular theological controversy has in the local church, it was not his concern, let some pastor work that out.

Summary and Segue to the main Section of the Paper. It is a fact the Grace Gospel Fellowship pastor is in many ways functioning as a pastor-theologian because of our commitment to the Bible and the ideal of the Noble Berean. We really do want to search the Scriptures to see if these things are true. In other ways, I think our theological vision is limited to the sorts of things that drive mid-Acts dispensationalists (where the church starts, baptism, even old classics like twelve in or out still come up far more than I would expect at this point). But I do see a growing separation between the local pastor and the academic work of theology. As part of their pastoral ministry, pastors need to be able to address some of the difficult questions of life. Theology provides the structure for addressing those issues.

What is needed is a biblical model for the pastor-teacher. I suggest Paul's final words 2 Timothy are a model of the pastor-theologian, Timothy is encouraged to rightly handle God's word in order to properly train the next generation of leaders and to guard the truth of the Gospel against attack from outside and within the church itself.

2 Timothy 1:13-14: Guard the Deposit

Paul as a preacher, apostle and teacher (2 Timothy 1:11)

The "preacher" in the ESV is better a "herald," or "proclaimer." A herald is a person appointed to deliver a particular message, in Paul's case, from God. As in other contexts Timothy is encouraged to guard or protect the deposit of tradition handed down to him.⁸ Two examples of this kind of tradition is the Lord's Table instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:2 and eye-witnesses to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Even in his earliest letter, Paul considers his gospel a tradition which cannot be modified (Gal 1:14).

Paul is clear, however, that much of what he preached he received directly from Jesus through a special revelation. For some doctrines, this is a direct revelation that could not be deduced from the Hebrew Bible. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul says that the Lord himself gave him the revelation of the rapture. That Jews and Gentiles are saved into a single body without requiring the Gentiles to keep the Law is a "mystery" which was unrevealed in the Hebrew Bible.

⁷ Wilson, *Becoming a Pastor Theologian*, 63. To illustrate this, Wilson cites a scathing review of N. T. Wright's *Justification* by church historian Gerald Bray. The review castigates Wright for trying to be both a bishop and an academic and calls on Wright to choose to be one or the other. In Brays view, Wright is doing theology as a hobby; he ought to "stop pottering around with theology."

⁸ The language is a little different in 1 Tim 1:18, 6:20 and 2 Tim 2:2.

For some of Paul's teaching, he may have been led by the Holy Spirit to interpret biblical texts differently, or to combine texts from the Hebrew Bible in unique ways which supported the idea that Jesus is the Messiah or that salvation is apart from works. Romans 4 indicates that the story of Abraham could be interpreted in a way that supported Paul's gospel. Romans 4 is biblical exegesis guided by the Spirit of God.

Guard the Tradition (2 Timothy 1:14, 6:20)

Timothy had been educated first by his family (2 Tim 1:3-7). Despite the fact that his father was a Greek, Timothy seems to have had a godly family, reflecting the importance of teaching children the scripture in a Jewish home. We cannot know when Lois and Eunice became Christians (at least before Acts 16:1), but these verses seem to imply they taught Timothy the gospel from a young age. Like Paul, Timothy can look back at his "ancestors" in the faith and know what they taught him was the truth. Given the importance of "keeping a trust," Paul is saying that the traditions handed down to him from his mother are worth remembering.

Paul sets himself up as a pattern for Timothy to follow (1:13-14). The fact Paul is a member of the first generation of the church and an eye-witness of the resurrection makes his testimony valuable, but he has also been given revelation directly from God. His preaching is of one approved by God to be the representative of the Gospel. As the church developed, fewer people would have been eyewitnesses, or even have heard the gospel from an eyewitness. The power of personal testimony was very important in the ancient world, even more than a published book.

Timothy is to "follow the pattern of sound words" which he heard from Paul. The noun used for "sound words" (ὀυσιών) is only used in the Pastoral Epistles and has the sense of correct, right, without error (as opposed to the teaching of the false teachers in Ephesus who do not have sound doctrine). Sound words are like a prototype, a pattern which is to be followed and by which Timothy can evaluate his own teaching. There is nothing here (or elsewhere) that implies Timothy is to take the words of Paul, memorize them and repeat them in his preaching. If a teaching is not "following the pattern" of Paul's gospel, then it is to be rejected as a false teaching.⁹ In 3:16-17, Paul states Scripture itself is the ultimate foundation for all teaching and behavior. This is remarkable, since the only Scripture that exists at this point in the Old Testament, and perhaps Paul's other letters if he talks about his own letters as scripture.

Guard the Tradition by Passing it to Faithful Men (2 Timothy 2:1-2)

Paul tells Timothy to pass his teaching down to faithful men (2 Timothy 2:1-2). Timothy is to be a teacher empowered by the grace of Christ Jesus. Since he has received grace from God, he must pass along the deposit which was entrusted to him. The content of Timothy's teaching are traditions which he has already heard Paul preach before "in the presence of many witnesses." That this is the public teaching of the apostle is important. These are not private speculations or personal opinions. This teaching is what Paul always taught whenever he established churches and appointed elders.

This deposit is to be handed on to reliable men, the elders described in 1 Timothy 3. The elder described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 is a reliable person who can be trusted to guard the deposit of tradition handed down to them. Timothy

⁹ Perhaps this is why Onesiphorus is mentioned as a godly example in 1:16-18. Paul says that Onesiphorus came to Rome and "sought for him." First, he "refreshed" Paul (ἀναψύχω). This is a word Paul used in Romans 15:32, he was hoping to come to Rome and "be refreshed" by the congregation there. The word means something like "be revived." If you have ever been very tired in the midafternoon, all you need is a quick cup of coffee and a short nap and you are "revived." Second, he was not ashamed of Paul, despite the fact that when he finally found Paul he was in prison. Some have suggested that Onesiphorus had just died, explaining the need for mercy for his household, although this cannot be more than a suggestion. If Onesiphorus is functioning as an elder or even bishop in Ephesus, he needs mercy in order to deal with the chaos in the church there at that time. Timothy has a number of positive models (Paul, his mother and grandmother, Onesiphorus) to follow.

is to take the body of truth Paul gave him and invest it into the lives of people who are reliable, faithful, and will provide a return on the investment.¹⁰

Guard the Tradition because Many Will Reject the Truth (2 Timothy 1:15-18)

In 2 Timothy 1:15-18 Paul claims “all who are in Asia have turned away.” What is the reason for this defection? There is a strong possibility some of Paul’s supporters in Asia returned to Judaism (or a more Jewish Christianity) in the face of persecution. Judaism was a legal religion in Rome, Christianity was a strange innovation. If one could believe in Jesus as Messiah and worship within the synagogue, then it was safer to return to the synagogue.¹¹

If the gospel was supposed triumph, then the arrest and impending execution of Paul might have been a source of embarrassment. This would account for the several references in the book to being ashamed of Paul’s imprisonment. It is also likely at least some elders had developed doctrine in a direction Paul considered to be doctrinal error.

Paul warns Timothy to avoid quarreling about words or other theological babble. On the one hand, this is difficult since one has to have defined the “core” of the Christian faith very well in order to decide what qualifies as babble. For some. Speaking in tongues is extremely important to faith and church practice, but it is easy to dismiss to other. On the other hand, sometimes the theological “babble” seems fairly obvious, mostly since it is the sort of thing people are passionate about! (Like the famous definition of pornography, I may not be able to define it, but I know it when I see it!) Defining the core elements of the tradition is what a theologian does, but Paul is describing what the pastor does in his church.

Summary and Segue: Guarding the truth of the Gospel has an academic edge to is, perhaps what is sometimes called apologetics today. As issues arise in our culture, theologians must turn to Scripture to provide an answer. But there is certainly a pastoral aspect here since it is the elders of the local church who are to be the approved workmen guarding the Gospel. It is the pastor who encounters people where they are at and must be able to address their new issues with the truth of the Gospel.

An Approved Workman (2 Timothy 2:14-21)

Timothy is to present himself as an approved workman (v. 14-15, 22). Paul’s metaphor here is of a worker presenting himself before his supervisor. The verb (σπουδάζω) has the sense of hurried activity, eagerness or zealousness (BDAG). Perhaps someone who is doing a job will conscientiously, working hard to make sure that it is done properly.

Qualified

An approved workman might be someone who has been trained and “qualified” as a craftsman. The noun ἐργάτης is often an agricultural laborer (Matt 9:37, “fields,” 20:1, vineyard), but in Acts 19:25 it refers to craftsmen in a kind of guild. As an approved workman, Timothy is no longer an apprentice. He is a worker who has been examined by a master and given an approval by that master. We might have expected Paul to set himself up as the example since he has done this several times. But here the ultimate “approval” of a minister’s work is God himself.

¹⁰ This also hints at a problem of leadership in Ephesus. We know that Timothy was sent to Ephesus in order to appoint qualified men as elders and deacons, and likely to replace elders who had either rejected some of Paul’s teaching or had some behavior which disqualified them as elders. We know nothing of Phygelus or Hermogenes (1:15) other than they have deserted Paul. The verb ἀποστρέφω has the connotation of rejecting or repudiating (in middle or 2Ar Passive, as it appears here). It appears in the LXX in Hos 8:3 (the people of Israel “spurn” the Lord) and Jer 15:6 (the people have “rejected” the Lord). Paul’s arrest in Rome may have been traumatic enough to cause some to separate from him in order to avoid persecution.

¹¹ That Paul says that he is serving God as did his ancestors (1:3) may be a subtle attack on his opponents. Both Paul and the false teachers in Ephesus claimed to be the true heirs of Abraham, but Paul is the one is fulfilling the promises.

Not Ashamed

Timothy ought to do his ministry in a way that does not cause him shame. Anyone who has done a work that involved a skill has probably said “yeah, that is not my best work.” In the case of a craftsman going before a master for review, the worker will want to do their very best work possible so that they will not experience shame when their work is tested.

What would possibly cause Timothy shame? In order to be approved, Timothy is to “correctly handling” God’s word. The Greek word (ὀρθοτομέω) is very rare and is the combination of the word for straight (ὀρθός) and the verb for cutting (τέμνω), hence the KJV’s “rightly dividing.” When the word is used with a road in mind, it means “cut a road across country (that is forested or otherwise difficult to pass through) in a straight direction.”¹²

Correctly Handling the Word

In the context of 2 Timothy, the word has to been “correctly interpret” the Word of God. If Timothy is a craftsman, his “material” is the Word of God. Imagine a sculptor who is submitting a piece for an art competition. Although they craft a beautiful statue to display, they use the wrong material. Instead of clay or stone or wood, they used sugar. The first time it rains, the sculpture will melt away into nothing. Paul’s point here is that if Timothy is going to be an approved workman, he is going to need to know how to work with his materials in such a way as to present a finished product that will please the master.

This is why we need pastors who are theologians. There are many examples of people who are not well-educated and try to interpret the Bible in new and exciting ways (and they tend to find a platform on the internet and YouTube). It is easy to pull a few verses out of the Old Testament, combine them with some conspiracy theory and fears about the government and somehow prove the government is run by the Anti-Christ or that a given policy will somehow lead to the End Times and the Mark of the Beast.

Does this mean that only the seminary-trained professional scholar should attempt to read the Bible? That is not Paul’s point at all. Timothy is the trained professional in his situation in Ephesus and his responsibility is to give a gentle answer when someone suggests a reading of the Bible that is in error.

In summary, this section begins with Paul commanding Timothy to seek approval from God as if he were a worker looking for approval from his master. In order to gain that approval, Timothy must correctly handle his materials, in this case the word of God, and continue to teach the word of God in all circumstances.

Continue to Teach the Scripture (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Paul’s final commission to Timothy is to continue preaching the Word of God. The witness Paul calls upon for this charge is God himself, in the light of the imminent return of Jesus to judge the world. Paul uses the phrase in several other places in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 2:3, 5:4, 5:21, 6:13; 2 Tim 2:14) and in each case he is emphasizing some practical application of his instructions to Timothy.¹³

This is not the usual word Paul might use to exhort. The verb (διαμαρτύρομαι) is used when the circumstances are of “extraordinary importance” (BDAG). For example, it appears in Luke 16:28. When the rich man finds himself in Hades he wants to warn (exhort) his brothers of what they face.¹⁴ Paul used the word in 2 Tim 2:14, Timothy is to solemnly charge his congregation before God not to quarrel about words.

¹² *Thuc.* 2, 100, 2 although the compound is not used there, BDAG.

¹³ Robert W. Wall, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 278.

¹⁴ In LXX 2 Chron 24:19 the word is used to describe the activity of the prophets who warned Judah they were breaking the covenant.

Paul says the witnesses to this charge are God, Christ Jesus and the coming Kingdom. He is invoking the presence of God as a witness to the truth of his words. The verb “to solemnly charge,” can be a technical term for taking an oath, but “it can also be a technical term for the transfer of office.”¹⁵ In addition to the God as a witness, this charge is even more critical because the time is short. Jesus is returning to establish his glorious kingdom very soon. This is not a task that Timothy can put off for a few years and return to it when he has more time.

How should Timothy respond to this charge from God?

In All Circumstances

Timothy must be prepared to preach the Word of God in all circumstances. To be prepared (ἐφίστημι) has the sense of standing, prepared for activity. It can mean simply to stand next to something (in Acts 17:5, to attack), but also for an appointment to public office (just as in contemporary English one can “stand for an office,” see *Demosth.* 18, 60). The two adverbs Paul uses to describe this preaching are traditionally translated “in season and out.” The first (εὐκαιρῶς) refers to a good time for something to happen, a “convenient” time for the preaching. The word can be translated “at leisure.” The second adverb (ἄκαιρῶς) is the opposite, a bad time for something to happen, an “untimely” event (BDAG).

Does this refer to preaching when it is inconvenient to Timothy, or for the opponents? It is hard to tell from just this verse, but the gist of the phrase is “always preach the gospel, whether you want to or not; whether your audience wants to hear it or not.”

By preaching the Word of God, Timothy will “reprove, rebuke, and exhort” his congregations. A few verses prior to this Paul described the Scripture as the only appropriate thing for pointing out sin and correcting that sin, as well as exhorting people to holy living (2 Tim 3:16-17). The verb Paul used for rebuke in this verse only appears here in Paul’s letters, but is used for Jesus’ rebuke of demons (Mark 3:12 for example).¹⁶

With Complete Patience

Timothy is to preach the word of God with “complete patience.” Despite the fact he will continue to confront the opponents in Ephesus, he is to do so patiently. The noun (μακροθυμία) has the sense of bearing with someone for a long time, even if that person is difficult or is being provoked (BDAG). This is one of the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and the best example is God in the Hebrew Bible (Rom 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet 3:20; the related word μακρόθυμος is used to describe God in LXX Exod 34:6) and Jesus (1 Tim 1:16; 2 Pet 3:15).

It is very difficult to be patient when you deal with people who are difficult. It is very easy to identify a false teaching and attack with a vicious tenacity that tears people apart. Paul does not tell Timothy to attack, but rather be patient. Once again, this patient correct sounds like the ministry of a local pastor who must correct theological error.

Because People Cannot Endure Sound Teaching

Paul knows in the very near future there the churches he has founded will not want to endure sound teaching. To “endure” sounds as if we have sit through long and unpleasant sermons! The verb Paul uses (ἀνέχω) can have the sense of enduring something that is onerous or difficulty, such as persecution (2 Thess 1:4; 1 Cor 4:12), and in one instance it is used for accepting a legal complaint (Acts 18:14), something like “pleading guilty.”

In the context of Timothy’s commission to preach the word and exhort everyone to godly living, perhaps the sense of this is “accept a legal complaint.” Rather telling all Christians they must endure long and boring sermons, Paul means the opponents will refuse to accept healthy teaching because it is an indictment against them. They cannot stand to hear it because it points to their own shortcomings spiritually and theologically.

¹⁵ Spicq, 2:798, cited by Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 572

¹⁶ Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 576, cf. E. Stauffer, *TDNT* 2:623–67.

Paul once again describes good doctrine as “healthy” (1 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:9, 2:1; using the participle of the verb ὑγιαίνω as an adjective). People are craving teaching similar to craving junk food. It might make you feel good in the short term, but in the long term junk food will make you unhealthy and even kill you!

The time is coming, Paul warns, when people will want to hear things that their itching ears want to hear. These people will ignore the truth, wandering off into myths.¹⁷ This verb (κνήθω) only appears here in the New Testament and the Greek Old Testament. The phrase means something like “in order to have their ears tickled.”¹⁸ Even in English we use the word “itch” for some desire that we need to satisfy. Applied to the preaching of the Word of God, it implies that these people will want to hear the Scripture taught, but they will want to hear things that make them feel good, things that “satisfy their itch.” In the context, this is esoteric teaching, teaching that is more interested in dark secrets of “conspiracy theories” rather than the plain (and convicting) Word of God.

This is a very convicting text and very applicable to the issue of the pastor as a theologian. There are many people (myself included) who enjoy a particular sermon (or preacher) because they “get something out of it.” The sermon said something they want to hear, or maybe something they already believed. I personally enjoy a sermon better when the preacher says something I already agree with because it confirms my thinking. As a college professor, I am always amazed how often students do not want to confront new ideas. They want to know the things their youth leader are true. On the other hand, as a college professor it is very easy for me to present strange and esoteric things in class. Saying “mimetic” and “intertextual” makes you sound smarter, but does it really communicate to the present generation?

But my guess is **Paul taught Scripture in a way that made people squirm**. Paul’s preaching challenged the listener and made them uncomfortable. It is shocking to hear God is their father and he expects them to be honorable children in the household of God. It is far easier if God would just provide a list of items to achieve or rules to keep. I am certain Jesus’ teaching made people very uncomfortable; he confronted people directly over their hypocrisy.

These people who are coming soon from Paul’s perspective will devote themselves to teachers who satisfy their desire for controversies, conspiracies, and myths. By following teachings that satisfy their itch for controversies, the “people who are coming” turn away from the truth. The verb (ἀποστρέφω) has the sense of repudiate. The opponents have rejected Paul and his teaching (the same word is used in 2 Tim 1:15).¹⁹ By turning away from the truth they damage themselves spiritually. The verb (ἐκτρέπω) can refer to wrenching an ankle, or dislocating a limb. They are devoting themselves to unhealthy teaching and will critically injure both themselves and the flock entrusted to them.²⁰

Sober-minded, enduring suffering, as an evangelist

In contrast, Timothy is to be (first) “sober-minded.” This verb (νήφω) means to be well-balanced (in the way a drunken person is not).²¹ The idea here is that a person is not swayed by circumstances, they are under control

¹⁷ den Dulk argues “The expression refers to the experience of pleasure, not to the experience or relief of curiosity. This is significant for, among other things, how we understand the author’s portrayal of his opponents and their appeal to the believers.” The point is entertainment, “regularly associated with the pleasantries of oratory.” Based on the evidence he gives, I would have to agree with this assessment, and I do not know of any alternative argument (although I have also not really looked for it!) Honestly, this preaches better to me, since the problem people abandoning sound teaching for the best, or most popular speakers. I am not sure of your own experience in The Netherlands, but here in America people prefer the mega-church led by an attractive speaker who is in fact entertaining. For the average pastor who is teaching the Bible in accordance with the truth, this is difficult competition. Matthijs den Dulk, “No More Itch (2 Tim 4.3)” *NTS* 64 (2018): 81-93.

¹⁸ *EDNT* 301; the word appears in Plato for literal scratching of an itch (Philebus 46c, 51d).

¹⁹ The verb is used in the LXX Jer 15:6 for Judah’s rejection of the Lord just before the exile.

²⁰ Is Paul talking about what is happening in Ephesus at that time, or “the last days”? Earlier in the letter he talked about how “in the last days” people will fall away from sound teaching, but even there he seems to have in mind the opponents in Ephesus.

²¹ In Greek philosophy Epicurus taught that the goal of philosophy was to train people to have a “sober reasonableness” (Diog. L. 10, 132).

regardless of the events around them. In American English, we talk about a person being cool under pressure. The opponents are easily swayed by their passions, Timothy is to stay cool, standing on the foundation of Scripture. As J. N. D. Kelly suggested, "Timothy to "steer clear of the heady wine of heretical teaching."²²

Second, Timothy is to endure suffering. Enduring suffering is a common idea in Paul and appears several times in 2 Timothy (κακοπαθέω, 2 Tim 2:9, describing Paul's suffering). Timothy knows he will have to suffering for his faith just as Jesus suffered and Paul is presently enduring. Paul willingly suffered for the sake gospel (2:9) and he called Timothy to share in that suffering (1:8).²³

Third, he is to do the work of an evangelist. The word "evangelist" (εὐαγγελιστής) is used to describe Philip (Acts 21:8) and is included in a list of "offices" in Ephesians 4:11. Paul may refer to Timothy's calling as an evangelist, a "proclaimer of the good news." What strikes me as important here is Timothy's role as a guardian of the truth is not merely academic writing and esoteric theological debate. His proclamation is ultimately evangelistic; he is to present the gospel of Jesus Christ as Paul taught him to the next generation so that they will be able to stand for the truth in a world which cannot bear to hear that truth.

Conclusion

Paul tells Timothy to fulfill his calling by presenting the Word of God as clearly and accurately as possible to a world which desperately needs to hear it, but is unwilling to listen. This strikes me as in some ways an academic, theological pursuit. To know the gospel is to do theological work and understand how the whole of God's word applies to the present generation. But this also strikes me as a deeply pastoral calling.

In order to clearly present theological answers to complex modern issues, we need to not only know the theological answers but also present them in a way which has a chance of success. This requires pastoral the shepherding role of a pastor as well as the rhetorical skills of the preacher. Both Paul and Timothy therefore model the pastor theologian desperately needed by the church today.

²² J. N. D. Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 201.

²³ Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 576.

Pastor as Organizational Leader

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A Pauline vision for the Pastor as Organizational Leader

Apart from Jesus Christ Himself, there is no greater world-changer in the New Testament than the Apostle Paul. As the revealer of the Church, the Body of Christ, he would serve with almost reckless abandon to tell everyone about his “insight into the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4 NIV). Many Jews and Gentiles were saved, local churches were planted, heresies were attacked and leaders were sent out on mission all through the efforts of this man of God by the grace of God. Author John C. Maxwell has said, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” If this is true, then it would be prudent for us to study how Paul led the building of this organization called the Body of Christ that would change not just the world of his time but ours as well.

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul tells us that God has given pastors to lead the building up of the church (Eph. 4:11). What does it mean for the pastor to be an organizational leader? Is there a difference between being an organizational leader (someone who is responsible for making the church function well) and being the preacher/teacher/spiritual shepherd?

As mid-Acts dispensationalists we look to Paul’s writings first for how we are to live and operate as members of Christ’s Body. We also look there first for direction as to how the local church should be organized and operate. So it seems natural that if we want to know what the role of a pastor is as an organizational leader in this dispensation, we should look to Paul.

Paul Led People.

Throughout Paul’s letters he uses words that show he not only has authority to lead (“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus...” 1 Tim. 1:3), but his frequent use of imperatives show he is clearly willing to assert his leadership. His leadership was not just by decree but also by his living example. In 2 Tim. 3:10-11, Paul indicates that Timothy knew “all about [his] teaching, [his] way of life, [his] purpose, faith, patience, endurance, persecutions and sufferings....” Were it not for Timothy and Titus having personally experienced Paul’s life and teaching, his directive would have been both unattractive and unpersuasive.

Paul Led People to follow Christ.

Even though Paul recognized he had been given authority to lead others, he was careful to make sure he was leading them to follow Jesus Christ. In 2 Tim. 1:13, Paul tells his young son in the faith, “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.” He understood the church was God’s household (1 Tim. 3:15), and as such he himself was serving Christ (1 Tim 1:15). Therefore, he could boldly say, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1 ESV)

Pastor as Organizational Leader

Greg Ogden in his book, *Transforming Discipleship*, makes an interesting observation about Paul's ministry efforts.

"We must first note that the language that runs throughout the Gospels and the book of Acts is absent in Paul's nomenclature. ...His efforts were directed toward helping the church understand that Christians are about being "in Christ" or "Christ in you." This does not mean that the concept of discipleship is absent in Paul's thought. Being a self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted follower of Christ is just as much present in Paul's thought as it is in Jesus' thought. It is just stated in different terms." (Ogden, 99-100)

He goes on to say, "For Paul the primary goal of the Christian life is to reach the state of maturity in Christ." (ibid, 101) Colossians 1:28 describes Paul's goal for anyone God would bring along his path: "...that we would present everyone perfect in Christ." (NIV) Working with people to help them grow to maturity is the work of discipleship, and Paul would stop at nothing to see this happen everywhere he went.

Paul Led Through People to follow Christ.

It is to be expected that a man who had a conversion like Paul would be sold out to following Christ. From Jerusalem to Rome and everywhere in between, he challenged others to accept and live out the gospel of grace. One person can only be in one place at one time though. So how did Paul's gospel spread so far and fast in the New Testament world?

It becomes very clear when you read Paul's letters that he was not alone in his ministry. Instead, we read of name after name of people who journeyed along with him from time to time. Some names are very familiar to us (Timothy, Titus, or Barnabas) while others are much lesser known (Crescens or Justus).

There is no way that Paul could have accomplished the ministry he did apart from developing other partners in ministry. Many times we read of Paul sending his ministry partners to cities and regions as his representatives. In fact one of the most beloved books of the Bible for many is the book of Colossians. Paul never went to Colossae prior to writing his letter to them. It was Epaphras who had been discipled by Paul probably during the three years he spent in Ephesus who would take the gospel to that city.

If the church, the Body of Christ, was to actually look and act like the Body of Christ, it would only be done through the faithful efforts of many, many people. With that being said, he didn't just lead through people to follow Christ.

Paul Led People who would Lead People to Lead People to follow Christ.

This is the idea of replication or multiplication. Second Timothy 2:2 says, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” (NIV) Four generations of Christ followers are listed in this one verse: Paul, then Timothy, then reliable men and then others. This process of generational expansion would accomplish far more than Paul or even his own disciples could accomplish through their own efforts.

We can’t lose sight of the end goal of each generation listed – to follow Christ according to the revelation of the mystery. The church at Corinth seemed to lose sight of Paul’s goal, which is why he has to correct them. “For when one says, ‘I follow Paul’, and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men? What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe...” (1 Cor. 3:4-5) It was imperative to Paul that each leader was working for God’s glory, not their own.

Whether equipping ministry partners or empowering local church leaders as elders and deacons, Paul led people to be leaders who would turn around and lead others. When Paul sent Titus to the island of Crete, he gave him specific instructions to appoint elders in every town. These elders, he says, “...must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” (Tit. 1:9 NIV) Having capable, committed and equipped leaders was the only way for the church to continue to thrive as expansion continued.

Paul was given the responsibility of laying the foundation for this new organization (1 Cor. 3:10), but over and over he clearly states that he was an apostle, sent by God to deliver the mystery of God’s grace to the world through the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11 lists apostle and pastor as two distinct offices in the functioning of the church. Not once does Paul claim to be a pastor. Therefore, does his apostolic office cause him to lead differently than say a pastor would in a local church? In other words does Paul’s functioning as an apostle directly correlate to the functioning of a pastor?

What really is Paul’s vision for the pastor as an organizational leader, and what are the implications of it for today? Reading through his epistles gives us insight into how he carried out his role as an organizational leader, but I believe his letters to both Timothy and Titus give us the greatest look as to what Paul expected of the men who would lead as pastors in their local church organizations.

First and foremost, they were to shepherd their flocks toward the truth for this dispensation. No matter how inconvenient or countercultural Paul’s gospel ethic was, these men were charged with making sure they were teaching their people how to live in light of it. Titus chapter 2 outlines how this gospel was to be lived out by men and women, both young and old,

as well as by slaves and masters. I can't imagine these instructions were received with the warmest of receptions since they go against the desires of our flesh. Nevertheless, the gospel does have radical implications for the way we live, and the pastor is responsible for making sure those truths are being taught.

Both Timothy and Titus were also repeatedly warned of errors and troubles that would derail their ministries if left unchecked. An example of this is found in 1 Timothy 4:6-7 (NIV) where Paul exhorts Timothy, "If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly." As pastors of these local churches, it was absolutely essential that they shepherd the organization into the truth and away from error. Over and over problems were addressed, and Paul expected his leaders to be good shepherds for their flocks.

Paul in no uncertain terms states to both Timothy and Titus that they were to be examples to the flock of what it means to follow Christ (1 Tim. 4:12 and Tit. 2:7). In what they say and do, Paul expected that they would be watched by their flocks. Therefore, it was imperative that they see the seriousness of their role as leaders in their churches, and live accordingly.

One other role which Paul addresses is the need to work with other capable leaders in the organization. Timothy is simply given a list of what elders and deacons should be like (1 Tim. 3), while Titus is given the instruction to find and appoint them to these roles (Tit. 1:6-9). Is Timothy not given this task because Paul had already appointed them during his stay in Ephesus, whereas Titus was going to a new area on the island of Crete? I think it is safe to assume that due to Ephesus being an established church, they were already in place, but I am curious to know if the Pauline vision puts the responsibility to appoint leaders on the pastor as the organizational leader? Timothy and Titus are directed differently for the specifics of what they are to do, but the premise is the same – find capable leaders who can help you shoulder leadership responsibilities.

Even though Paul was an apostle, he did function in a pastoral role from time to time when he stayed for a long time in one area. His three-year stay in Ephesus very much put him in that pastoral role, and it is fascinating to see this Pauline vision for pastors played out in his interaction with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Notice his instructions: keep teaching the truth, be on your guard against error, remember my example, and don't shirk your responsibilities to lead!

Paul's vision for the pastor as an organizational leader can be summarized by the following headings. He is to be a Teacher of the gospel for this dispensation, a Guardian of this gospel, and Example for the gospel in partnership with other gospel-centered leaders. Paul is very clear that leading the church is to be focused in these ways. Deprioritizing those items in order to

focus on other items can have disastrous consequences in the church as is evidenced time and again when heresy crept into the assembly.

Just as certain themes emerge in the letters to his pastors, it is also striking what does NOT emerge. What is NOT addressed by the Pauline vision for pastors as organizational leaders today? Not once do we read of the ideal size of churches to pastor. We can surmise that these assemblies were not very large due to meeting in houses, but we are still making assumptions at that point. Is there a right size and a wrong size for churches? We are never really told. Should we go back to a house-church movement as some are proposing for the Church today? I don't see the Bible speaking to this one way or the other. The focus is on protecting, knowing and living the gospel in our assemblies, no matter the size or location. Other issues are superfluous if the greater aims of the gospel are being met.

Other areas not addressed by Paul are how to structure the gathering of the assembly, staffing decisions, the weekly schedule of services and programs (including some sacred cows), how often pastors should preach or teach, and many other things over which we tend to squabble. Does a pastor have to be a visionary to be a good leader? Is it possible for the pastor to be an organizational leader without the gift of administration? These questions seem inconsequential to Paul in comparison to the emphasis he places on teaching, guarding and living the gospel as pastors in the church.

Paul's approach is very different from the legalism of the Jewish system that dictated all of life activities. He approaches it from the perspective that being in Christ and indwelt by the Spirit gives a certain amount of freedom to worship in grace, not legalism. So, the organizational structure presented by Paul is much more Spirit-led than not law-led.

How does Paul's vision for pastors he was leading fit with our vision for pastors in the 21st century? Are we expecting the same thing of pastors that Paul was expecting? Do we use a different set of metrics when evaluating effective leadership in the local church?

Henry Blackaby in his book, *Spiritual Leadership*, noted that in today's church culture,

"Pastors are expected to act more like CEOs than shepherds; the pastor's office is located in the executive suite, next to the boardroom where the leadership team meets. ...The pastor's performance is measured in terms of numbers of people, dollars and buildings. The more of each, the more successful the pastor. The godliness of a minister or the fervency of his prayer life many not be sufficient to satisfy a congregation looking to keep up with the church down the street." (Blackaby, 18-19)

Shawn Lovejoy in his excellent book, *The Measure of Our Success*, describes his battle as pastor with pursuing things about which God wasn't nearly as concerned. We buy into the pressures

coming at us from within and without to be successful, but whose definition of success are we using? Shawn writes,

“Most pastors I know are highly driven to be the best men, fathers, husbands, and pastors they can be. ...Let’s be honest, as ambitious self-starters, we can so easily begin to work *for* Jesus at the expense of working *in and through* Jesus. The more talented and driven we are, the easier it becomes for us to rely on our own ambition, talents, power, strength, intellect, and wisdom. We probably have the best of intentions, but at times our drive to succeed overrides God’s plans. ...I have told our church on many occasions that the greatest temptation I face is not stealing the money from the offering or having an affair; the greatest temptation I face is substituting what I do *for* God for what I am *with* God.” (Lovejoy, 17)

In 1 Cor. 2:1-5, Paul lists everything he didn’t bring with him when he came to Corinth to plant that church. He didn’t bring his eloquence or superior wisdom; instead he came with weakness, fear and trembling, in complete dependence on the Spirit’s power to change lives through the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17) Do we as pastors have that same confidence in the justifying and sanctifying work of the gospel in the 21st century as Paul did in his day?

Pastor Larry Osborne describes his own battle when evaluating his lack of ‘ministry success.’ “[God] showed me that the thought process that was leading to my depression (*Our church isn’t growing; it’s all my fault; I must be a bad person and pastor*) was identical to the thought process that produces arrogance when things go well (*Our church is growing; it’s all my doing; God is lucky to have me on his side*).” (Lovejoy, 29)

Why would God have Luke record the numerical growth of the church in early Acts if He is anti-growth? Why did God choose a driven leader like Paul to launch the Church, the Body of Christ, if He is not about expansion? Why would God give such detailed instructions about the expectations for leaders of these churches if he didn’t want churches organized and led well? Is God against organizational growth and effectiveness? No way. It’s simply a matter of prioritization.

We see a real-world example of this in Acts 6:1-7 when the apostles were feeling the pressure of caring for all the widows in their assemblies. The demands were becoming so great that they were being pulled from the of the Word to focus on lesser priorities. Therefore, they delegated the organizational demands to seven men in order to keep their priorities of prayer and the Word in place.

In Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV), Paul reminds us that it was God who gave pastors to the Church: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,

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attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” This is Paul’s vision for making disciples of every believer, and pastors are to partner with other leaders in the local and universal Church to make this a reality. With each part growing and doing its work, the Body will successfully fulfill its purpose – to become just like Jesus Christ.

Here are some questions we should be asking. How do we create environments that keep discipleship as the priority while still pursuing growth and health? Are the “good things” we do as churches aligning with the primary purpose of making disciples? Are we willing to stop a long-standing program if it is not making disciples? Are we willing to try something new to see Paul’s vision for organizational vitality lived out in our churches today? If we are going to be effective leaders and produce healthy churches we must honestly address and respond to these questions.

Paul’s vision is firm: Pastors are to be Teachers of His gospel, Guardians of this gospel, and Examples for the gospel in partnership with other gospel-centered leaders. The organization in form must always be secondary to the real goal of making disciples in the Body of Christ. Do we have the courage to pursue a Pauline vision for pastoral leadership in the church? Will we be able to resist the temptation to chase “success” at the expense of biblical success – real discipling? If not, where are we headed?

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Recentering the Sermon:

The Essential and Formative Role of Faithful Preaching in Christian Worship

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In a recent article in Premier Christianity, Skye Jethani argues for a detachment from the 500-year tradition of sermon-centric worship services which has served as the model for the Christian worship. Jethani (2019) notes that “in the past, access to Bible teaching required gathering with others in a sacred space at a set time to passively listen to a trained orator explain the scriptures” (pp 10). Today, however, the advent of technology has lead to “an almost infinite supply of immediately accessible and inexpensive options” (pp 11) for those seeking this same thing. Rather than fighting these trends, Jethani concludes the local churches should allow their congregation to have this need of biblical instruction met through alternative means (podcasts, online videos, etc) and instead focus their corporate worship on the things which are unique to the gathered community - namely practices such as singing, communion and fellowship. Jethani, a preacher himself, concedes that “people still need light, just not mine” (pp 2). While one can appreciate the intent of this article, it seems that the entire premise is off. Viewing the sermon as a passive event which seeks to simply educate and instruct on the Bible flattens preaching to something generic and inanimate. More importantly, it ignores the role the sermon plays in God’s unique revelation to his community. This paper is an attempt to recenter the role of the sermon in Christian worship. While affirming the power of embodied worship practices as heart-forming acts, this paper seeks to set the criteria for a sermon which may serve as a unique venue for a revelation event from God to the gather community.

Practice-Centered Worship and the Sermon

Before engaging with the sermon itself, it is important to briefly mention the importance of understand the formative nature of Christian worship. While a full treatment of his contributions are well beyond the scope of this paper, Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith has been extremely important in this area. In a continuing developing body of work, he has presented a model of Christian worship in which recognizes human existence is more than just in the mind. People are driven by desires which often operate below the surface of awareness but are nevertheless shaping and directing human action and formation. As a result, reorienting these desires, requires more than simply downloading more or better information, but by capturing ones’ imagination by offering a vision of human flourishing - the good life. Even still, real, sustainable change that gets below the surface of the brain only comes about through embodied, intentional and repetitive practice. Thus, Christian worship which seeks true formation must not have the sole objective of providing adequate information about God, doctrine or even Christian living. Instead, Smith suggests the worship services must exists as a type of practice ground where Christians gather to sing, share communion, hear the story of God, give and fellowship in order to shape their desires away from the messages of the “good life” which are offered by Western culture. Christian worship, then, seeks to intentionally reform and reorient the worshipers’ hearts towards their original, created intent - the truly good new of being in right relationship with God.

While Smith’s model is compelling, the impact that it has on the role and function of the sermon within church life is profound. Working from the assumption that the goal of corporate worship is to create a space where the story of God can seep into the hearts of the worshipers, Recentering the Sermon

Smith's standard for what is and is not effective must be run through this filter. While he does affirm that "the proclamation of the Word in preaching is the most intense or explicit moment for articulation of this (the Christian) story" (Smith, 2009, p.195), the tendency for sermons to be purely cognitive homilies causes him to seemingly diminish the role they can play in this regard. Without fully rejecting the place of the sermon, his emphasis is on what he considers to be the more embodied practices of communal worship (singing of hymns, communion, responsive reading, confession). Thus, while Smith understands the proclamation of God's story (via Scripture) to be a central player in the reshaping of hearts and desires, he seems to suggest the traditional sermon is simply too top-down and cognitive to be much more than a supporting player.

In contrast, many contemporary, Protestant worship services are fundamentally shaped around the primacy of the sermon. For example, Hugh's (2002) speaks for a vast number of American churches by declaring "music to be the servant of preaching" and thus "the entire service is built around the sermon" (p.167). Within a wide tradition of Protestant worship, the proclamation of the Word in the form of an extended sermon, is not, as Smith suggests, simply *one-of-many* practices which may help worshipers learn the story of God but instead serves as *the* primary, dynamic and prioritized moment of engagement with God. Smith may say that this is simply a side effect of an Enlightenment-mentality that values information over practice, but perhaps there is something more going on here. Perhaps, rather than being strictly a dumping ground for information, the faithful, bold-yet-humble proclamation of the Word by way of the sermon actually serves to form the desires and reshape the hearts of its hearers in a more dynamic way than Smith's model allows. Yet while a critique of Smith's approach is helpful, moving to the extreme of solely emphasizing the sermon at the expense of the all other worship practices may be an equally challenging mistake. Thus, it is important to approach the subject of Christian worship - and specifically the sermon - from a slightly different angle. This will be done by interacting with another perspective in which the sermon serves as *the* critical event in which the living and active Word of God is proclaimed within the gathered community. To do so, it will be helpful to turn attention to the contributions made by Karl Barth on the purpose, role, and power of homiletics.

The Sermon and Revelation

To begin to understand what Barth means when he writes about the *sermon*, one must first scratch the surface of his theology of *revelation*. For Barth, *revelation* is the beginning, purpose and end point of Christian existence as "the theologian must wait upon the high majesty of the divine Word, which is God himself as he speaks in his action" (Barth, 1963, p.184). Without *revelation* there is no way to know God, no theology, and therefore no opportunity for obedience or formation. For Barth, *revelation* is the *sine qua non* of the Christian's understanding of human existence. Significantly, this comes only from God as "he cannot be known by the powers of human knowledge, but is apprehensible and apprehended solely because of his own freedom, decision and action" (Barth 1959, p.23). That being said, because *revelation* is the event in which humans are able to know God, both human and divine parties must be

involved. Yet for Barth, the fact that God has made something known about himself (through the words of the prophets or the inspiration of Scripture) is in itself not enough. Rather, *revelation* is the twofold event¹ in which what God has made known about himself (via Scripture) is received by the people whom God intends to receive it. Revelation is from God but always takes place in the presence of His people. As Hart (1995) puts it, the “term revelation refers not to the objective self-manifestation alone, but equally to the act of faith in which it is heard and received and obeyed” (p.85). For the event of *revelation* to take place there must be both the *proclamation* (or announcement) and the *receiving* of the Word which is revealed in three distinct yet interwoven forms, namely “Jesus of Nazareth, the text of Scripture, and Christian preaching” (Hart, 1995, p.85). While the relationship between these is complex, their dependency on one another “begins with Christ whose saving economy in due course calls forth Scripture as a witness, and this in turn leads to the preaching ministry in the church” (p.86). In sum, the only way mankind can know God is through the Word of God which was most clearly manifest in the person of Jesus, faithfully witnessed by the authors of Scripture and then proclaimed by the church.

While Barth’s understanding of all three of these venues of revelation (Jesus, Scripture and sermon) are worth in-depth consideration, most relevant to the current discussion is the way in which the practice of Christian preaching engages with this powerful and indispensable event. However, before exploring this in detail, it is wise to hear Barth’s warning for the preacher who sets out to invoke any Divine revelation.

For Barth, *revelation* cannot be confused with a sort of new, authoritative *rhema* - or freshly inspired spoken word - as is valued within Third-Wave Theology, but rather any attempt at faithful proclamation must be in submission to the established revelation events of Jesus and the written witness of the biblical authors. Along with this, Barth’s high view of the sovereignty of God causes him to see both the announcement and hearing of the Word to solely be acts of God himself. It is therefore not up to the servant to dictate how and when this *revelation* event will occur. For example, if this event were to take place within the sermon, it must unquestionably be understood that any power, formation or revelation which may result is entirely the work of Spirit rather than that of the preacher. God may act in the sermon, but that is no result of smooth preaching or effective planning. Just as “the wind of the Spirit blows where it will” (Barth, 1963, p.57), even the most faithful sermon is subject to God’s sovereignty. This is inline with the Pauline approach, as the Apostle claimed he intentionally came to the Corinthians not with oratory skill, “but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:4b-5). Barth recognizes that Paul’s faith was not in his presentation, but in the unique movement of God which took place from the context of his preaching. It is therefore not the sermon, but the sovereign power of God that is the essential factor in allowing the congregation to know something about the divine. In this, the preacher must continue to fully depend on God’s movement.

¹ Barth prefers the term *event* as it indicates that revelation is a twofold occurrence of God’s speaking and his community hearing.

This is Not That

In an effort to define his terms clearly, Barth suggests several criteria which must be present of a pastor's effort to act in this way. Though God has the right and ability to use even the most insufficient sermon as he will, in *Homiletics* (1995) Barth suggest ten elements which must be present for a sermon to act faithfully in this manner. These range from the presence and engagement of the congregation, to the *spirituality* of the sermon to the centrality of scripture itself. While there is much to be said about the specifics of his criteria, within the scope of this paper it must be sufficient to summarize that for Barth, a faithful sermon must be more than simply a time to dispense information about God into the minds of a congregation. Rather, faithful preaching serves as a dynamic and unique form in which God makes known something about himself to his people who have, in faith, gathered in worship. Just as the Word was made known through the person of Jesus and preserved through the witness of Scripture, the sermon is a vehicle in which the Word can be brought forward into the lives of the believers. In doing so, Christian preaching actually functions alongside, though in submission to, the biblical text as, according to Barth, "the words of Scripture and those of the preacher do not cease to be fully human, but enter into a union with the Word of God who speaks through them" (Hart, 1995, p.88). Clearly, Barth has an exceedingly high view of the sermon the the formative, valuable and essential role it plays within Christian worship. As a result of this model, preaching is not simply one worship practice among many but rather it is one of *the* primary ways God speaks to his people.

Because he views the sermon as a powerfully formative event it must be recognized that the Barthian view does not essentially disagree with Smith's practice-as-formation model, but rather claims that the faithfully prepared and delivered sermon functions in an entirely different way than anything else in the service. While it may not be an 'embodied' practice, in Christian preaching God may make himself known in a way that is unique to this particular form. While working in unity with the authority of Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ, the sermon, according to Barth, is the single most important act with which the church can engage - not as a means for cognitive development but as a vessel in which the event of revelation may take place. As Hart (1995) summarizes:

"Barth encourages us, therefore, to think of the task of preaching as a human task, to be sure; as a response to the prior word of divine grace, certainly; but much more than this, as that which is possible only on the basis of its objective and subjective conditions, the self-giving of the Son as Jesus Christ, and the presence here and now of the Spirit of Christ at work in the hearts and minds of both preacher and congregation." (p.102)

Therefore Barth does not, as Smith seems to imply, understand the task of the sermon to primarily function as an occasion for the congregation to gain more knowledge *about* God but rather to functions as a spiritually-rich event in which God may make himself known - and in doing so it operates outside of the limitations of cognitive practice. As a result, it is fully possible to affirm the model of practice-based worship presented by Smith without rejecting the central role which faithful Christian preaching must play. If this is to be the case, however, there must be

an established set of parameter for *what* a faithfully developed and presented sermon is. The reminder of this paper will be an attempt in this regard.

A Model for Faithful Preaching

As has been shown, Smith's model of practice-based formation under-treats the place of the sermon within Christian worship. While he does not dismiss the idea that the sermon should play some sort of role in the local church, it is secondary to the various forms of worship which are more tangible and embodied. The reason for his skepticism is the assumption that sermons are, by nature, cognitive presentation in which a pastor provides thirty-five minutes of information *about* God, doctrine or the Bible to a passive congregation. To be fair, within Smith's model, this type of preaching would be unhelpful, if not counter-productive! Thus, when thinking of the role of preaching in practice-based worship, one must first reject the view of sermon-as-lecture in favor of something more robust. If the sermon is to function in any meaningful way, it must be defined as *a unique and formative practice in which God's revelation, as given in Scripture, is proclaimed in the presence of the gathered community*. When understood and approached along these lines (by both the preacher and the congregation) the sermon, under the sovereignty of God, exists primarily as a *formative*, rather than merely informative, event.

However, even with this definition in hand, there remains much to explore in regards to how, precisely, a sermon moves from cognitive to formative. To do this it may be helpful to think of the sermon in terms of the interplay of freedom and limitation. It is critical that each preacher allows their own humanity and personality, as well as the unique context of their congregation to be involved in the preparation and presentation of the sermon (freedoms) while at the same time, there must be several boundary markers (limitations) which help to ensure that a sermon is intentionally moving closer to a formative event than to a informative lecture. The following four criteria of preparation and delivery will be suggested as the basic limitations in which the sermon should freely operate.

Preacher. As has already been established, the ultimate effectiveness of a sermon is entirely dependent on God's work and will. As Barth (1991) suggests it should be recognized that "Preaching is not a neutral activity. It is not an action involving two equal partners. It can mean only Lordship on God's side and obedience on ours" (p.50). However, while it is true that God does use "foolish things of the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor 1:27), the minister who seeks to be faithful to the task of preaching must be one who has personally been shape by the Word. Because God may use a preacher's preparation and delivery to form their community, the character and spiritual formation of the minister is critical. The New Testament epistles bear witness to the need for ministers to ensure their own lives are being shaped by the Gospel. Though it may be argued that not every overseer is given the regular ministry of preaching, it should be assumed that every preacher is qualified as an overseer. Thus, Paul's qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 serve as indication that the preacher must be one who is faithfully seeking to live in line with the story of God. While Barth (1991) is correct to emphasize that in preaching "a pardoned sinner is called upon to proclaim the Word of God"

(p.73) it is important for there to be an active and continual submission by the preacher to God is an essential criteria of a faithful sermon. It is necessary that the preacher is consistently, faithfully and humbly running the race of sanctification according to “the power that is at work” within the Body (Eph 3:20). Knowing and engaging with the Gospel is indispensable for the one who seeks to have their preaching do the same for others. Just as faithful proclamation must go beyond cognitive understanding of the Scripture and theology, the spiritual formation of the preacher must also be embodied and incarnational.

Along with this general focus on spiritual formation, preachers must also allow the specific text of each sermon to confront, shape, challenge and be at work within their own heart. As Barth claims, if a minister seeks to “undertake the exposition of Scripture, they must themselves have been listening previously to Scripture, and they must listen to it over and over again, and do so in a very personal repentance and thankfulness before God” (p.89). In other words, a faithful sermon is one that has taken root within the heart of the preacher who then seeks to communicate what they have learned. In order to do this, it is important for the preacher to not approach the task of sermon preparation as a static job to be performed weekly for the congregation. The Bible must never be relegated to simply another text to be used as a tool for study. Rather, the preacher must seek to enter each week of preparation with a desire to be formed by the Word of God. This is one of the most unique and challenging aspects of the call to regular preaching, as it is necessary for the minister to establish and maintain a desire to be personally formed by Scripture. As Peterson (2006) implores, preachers must cultivate a hunger for the Bible that forces it to be more than a manuscript, but rather “we open this book and find that page after page it takes us off guard, surprises us, and draws us into *its* reality, pulls us into participation with God on *his* terms” (p.6). Thus, the task of preaching begins long before the community has been gathered and the pastor enters the pulpit. The faithful sermon begins with the formation of the preacher as they seek to be shaped by the text from which they preach.

Text. Clearly, the role of Scripture in faithful preaching is central. While it is important for the preacher to move beyond exegesis towards some sort of application, it must be recognized that since the goal of formative worship is for the community to be shaped by the story of God, it is essential for preaching to be anchored firmly in text of the Bible. As Barth (1991) notes, because Scripture is the authoritative account of God’s revelation “The act of those who live by justification, then, can be no other than that of understanding and expounding the scriptural word, and to that extent repeating it” (p.75). For preaching to operate as a formative event within communal worship, it must be entirely grounded in the text. Certainly, in the process of preparation and study, preachers may have their minds opened to very particular ways (or topics) in which the text applies to the unique context of their congregation. However this aim towards a topical must not be *a priori*. To avoid the temptation to expound on the thoughts, topics and ideas of the preacher, faithful preaching must be expository.

Of course, it is possible for one to approach the sermon from an expository commitment while still selecting and avoiding particular passages which lend themselves to one’s own designs. In this, the dangers of subjectivity which are to be avoided in topical preaching are equally present. As Barth (1991) warns, “We should be on guard against picking a text that we

can simply exploit. The text itself must always be master, not we" (p.93). Attention must be given, therefore, to ensure selection of the text is as unbiased as possible. There are various ways in which this can happen, but perhaps the most common is the use of some sort of preaching curriculum or *lectionary*. Briefly, a lectionary is a series of texts which have been selected and organized in an effort to guide the church through Scripture in an ordered and uniform manner. While the use of the lectionary may be limited within our fellowship, the benefits that this method offers are substantial. First, a commitment to allowing one's texts to be selected by a previously established system, rather by the will of the preacher, avoids the danger of specifically-selecting passages that fit one's own agenda. In the same way, being guided by the lectionary removes the burden and temptation for the preacher to rely their own on creativity in selecting sermon series and topics. Second, many lectionaries are constructed in a way that promotes a broad survey of Scripture throughout the year, including the Gospels, Torah, Epistle, Prophets and Psalms. In this way, the community is confronted, challenged and comforted with the entire scope of the biblical writings. Other benefits of using a tool like this include the value of engaging with Christian's around the globe who - on any particular Sunday may be encountering the same text, as well as the power of submitting to the church calendar and it's emphasis on the incarnation and resurrection of Christ as the center of the Christian's life.

Barth sees much value in seeking guidance from a lectionary, but does note that while this can be helpful "it is not absolutely necessary...to stay on the path suggested by church" (p.94). As important as it is to approach the task of preaching from an established commitment to Scripture, it is possible that too rigid of an adherence to the any preset plan may hinder God's leading of a particular community's engagement with the text. For example, because of the objective of moving through a large selection of text during the year, lectionaries do not leave much room for the benefits which come from an extended study of a particular biblical book. Therefore, being careful to not fall into the trap of preaching the minute, informative details of exegesis, a preacher can remain equally faithful to the Scripture by embarking on in-depth book studies, in which the entirety of the text is addressed over an extended period of time. In light of this, while a lectionary may serve as a helpful tool, the preacher should always approach text selection with a prayerful awareness of the moving of the Holy Spirit and the corporate needs of the congregation. If, however, one does choose to avoid the lectionary for whatever reason, it is advisable that the major annual markers of the Christian year - specifically Advent and Easter (perhaps the entire Lenten season, but at least Palm Sunday and Good Friday) remain as significant and celebrated points of focus for their role in ordering the life of the church. As a result, when the preacher is committed to engaging with the will of Scripture, rather than their own creativity, the sermon moves towards a faithful event of formation.

Delivery. Thus far, it has been suggested that the faithful sermon begins with the formation of preachers, but is focused on expositing a selection of text which does not primarily serve the agenda of the preacher. It could be argued, however, that it is the delivery of the sermon which differentiates it from any other type of communication. From the onset, when seeking to prepare and deliver a sermon that is both faithful and formative, it is necessary to once again remember that all effort and skill which the preacher offers is entirely secondary to the

work of God. However, this does not mean that the delivery and composition of the sermon has no bearing whatsoever. While the primary actor in the sermon is God himself, the preacher must seek to deliver the sermon in a way that intends to create the environment and context in which God may act. Thus, as the delivery of the sermon is both essential and redundant as the preacher is forced to confront the paradox of the mysterious way the foolish and broken are used by God for his own glory.

In order to address this paradox, Barth (1991) cautiously calls the preacher to understand the role of originality, noting that “conformity to Scripture is not a hood behind which we cannot see the preachers” (p.81). In fact, rather than attempting to remove themselves from sermon preparation, those called to this task should recognize that:

“it is as the persons they are that preachers are called to this task, as these specific people with their own characteristics and history. It is as the persons they are that they have been selected and called. This is what is meant by originality. Pastors are not to adopt a role...they are simply to be themselves, and to expound the text as such” (p.82).

In other words, a pastor has been called to the task of preaching not as disembodied speaker, but as an individual - and it is their individuality which must be called upon in the sermon.

Since the personality and experience of the individual preacher are to be leaned upon in faithful preaching it follows that each minister’s delivery should be a unique expression of their person and context. However, in another effort to guard against the sermon’s content being dictated by the preacher’s own agenda and skill, it must always be remembered that delivery is meant to serve the text. Thus, Barth (1991) reminds preachers that “simplicity is needed in a sermon” (p.83). By this, Barth not only means that the sermon must be organized in a way that speaks to the specific situation of the gathered community, but that the preacher should deliver the message in the language of the specific people of their congregation. Robinson (2001) affirms this call to simple language noting that “no matter how accurately a phrase or word expresses a speaker’s meaning, it is worthless if the listeners don’t understand what it means” (p.191). If the sermon is to be an event in which the people are formed by God, there must be a sense of intelligibility and an eye towards engagement with its delivery. Thus, while a faithful sermon must avoid becoming a showcase of the oratory skills of the pastor, the fact that the preacher has been called as a unique and uniquely gifted member of the Body of Christ demands their gifting be applied to the delivery of the sermon in a way that is submissive to the text, but active in the context of their specific community.

Along with this, in order to move the sermon from the realm of cognitive information and towards formative event, it is essential for its delivery to emphasize some sort of direct application. The danger in this, however, is that the preacher becomes too focused on *creating* a point of application, causing them to betray the intent of the text. It must be remembered that “Scripture does not need ‘to be made relevant’; it is already relevant. Often, however, that relevance must be demonstrated rather than assumed evident to the audience” (Willhite, 1992, p.356). It is not the task of the preacher to animate a static text so that it can be useful for their congregation, but rather to guide the community to a place where they are confronted with the living and active revelation from God. Barth (1991) refers to the taking up of this task as “a

certain ordinary courage...that simply wants to help the content of the Word to find expression in all circumstances” (p.114). Because of this, it is best think of the application of the sermon not as something that must be *created*, but rather something which must simply be *delivered* by the preacher to the congregation. Again, in order to effectively engage with this task, the preacher must be so formed and embedded within the story of God that these points of application are evident through prayerful study and preparation. When thinking of the parameters which mark out faithful preaching, one must approach the delivery of the sermon as a task that is essentially submissive to God while also being a simple, understandable, humble and active reflection of the gifting of the preacher in an effort to proclaim the direct application of Scripture to the lives of the community.

Community. The three criteria of faithful, formative preaching which have been addressed thus far (the preacher, the text and the delivery) can all be seen at work for the pastor in the quiet moments of preparation and study. However, because the goal of formative preaching is to create an environment in which God himself will shape the hearts of the entire congregation, it must be understood that the community which has been called to worship on any particular Sunday also plays a role in this. Before going further, it should be recognized that the power of the Word of God has previously and will surely continue to take root in the hearts of hearers who encounter preaching without any context, expectation and pretense. As a result, (as frequently displayed in the account of Paul’s missionary journeys) even those who hear the message of the gospel for the first time can be formed in divinely-ordained and powerful ways. Nevertheless, the focus of this thesis is on the role of the sermon amid the regular gathering of believers, thus the final parameter of faithful preaching is the faithfulness of the community.

Just as the preacher humbly begins the sermon from a place of expectation that God can use their own simple words as a tool for Divine transformation, it is equally important that the congregation receive the sermon with the same faith. In this way, listening to a sermon ceases to be a passive experience, and instead becomes an active practice in which the congregation trains themselves to engage the exposition of Scripture in a way that affirms the possibility of God’s revelation. By doing so, participation, practice, and formation take place even as the congregation remains seated and silent. In this way, the sermon ceases to be a static speech that is received and instead becomes a practice which is participated in.

Along with this participatory-orientation towards the proclamation of Scripture, the congregation also plays a role in cultivating an appetite to hear the preaching of God’s story. The congregation must recognize that through the proclamation of scripture, they are being reminded of their identity and purpose. As Smith (2016) notes, the formation of one’s heart “happens when God’s Word becomes the orienting center of our social imaginary, shaping our very perception of things before we even think about them” (p.85). Through the regular practice of engaging with faithful preaching, to story of God begins to seep into the hearts of the congregation. Of course, this type of shift in approach must be cultivated over time, thus the longer a particular preacher invests in the life of their congregation, the more effective this development will be. As such, the commitment of the pastor to a particular community is critical.

While the work of cultivating this culture of faithful-expectation for the sermon is a task of church leadership (2 Tim 2:2, 4:2, Titus 2:1) the preacher must be cautious to not “market” themselves or their dynamic, creative approach to preaching as the reason for the congregation to engage with the sermon. Rather, the focus must remain fully on the Word of God and the event of transformation that may take place in preaching - regardless of the pastor’s skill! In this way, Paul’s defense (1 Cor 2) takes root in the regular preaching within the local church. Establishing this dependence on the power of God may be as simple as beginning each sermon with a prayer that affirms the living and active nature of the Word of God. It may also be helpful for pastors and leaders to look for opportunities to have personal conversations with their congregation in which they are able to dialogue about the dynamic role of scripture and sermon. The community, therefore plays a vital role in faithful preaching, as their orientation towards this event aids them in being aware of its reformatory function.

Conclusion

In the 500-years since the Reformation, culture and technology have changed the way Christian engage with the work of the local church. Access to quality biblical instruction is at an all time high - but when understood correctly, the faithful sermon remains unaffected by these shifts. Because the sermon is not simply a time to instruct, but *a unique and formative practice in which God’s revelation, as given in Scripture, is proclaimed in the presence of the gathered community* it must remain at the heart of corporate Christian worship. However, it is important that both preachers and congregations take the role of sermon seriously by understanding the limitations that should be present to ensure that a sermon is functioning not as a static act, and as a unique venue for a revelation event from God to the gather community. When the sermon is elevated in this way, it reclaims its place as the central event of Christian practice.

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