

**Contextualised
expository
preaching:
a defence**

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Declaration of originality

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a qualification at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

Evangelicals believe in the authority of Christian Scripture for both belief and behaviour. Is the practice of preaching, however, an area in which Scripture's authority is overlooked? The predominant model of preaching in the Majority world is 'topical' or 'textual' rather than expository. This thesis is in part a response to a critique of expository preaching as culturally-determined. But it is also a reaction to the notion that preaching is no more than 'teaching the Bible'.

Drawing on the results of evangelical scholars in the areas of biblical theology, systematic theology and contextual theology within Scripture, this thesis proposes that responsible Christian preaching should be both expository and contextualised. Beginning with the central place of the words of God in both God's creation and God's covenant with his people, it traces how the giving, recording, preserving, learning, passing on and contextualisation of these vital words of God has been an essential part of biblical faith throughout the OT and NT. It is observed in the ministries of Moses, the faithful priests and the writing prophets within the OT; then in the NT when the OT is applied to Jews, within the NT when the OT is applied to Gentiles and Jews, and within the creation of the NT itself.

Examining the way in which these words of God have been 're-preached' to subsequent generations within the OT era shows that a foundation is laid for the exhortation to "preach the Word" in the post-apostolic age. Yet the contextualisation of God's words, particularly evident in the NT epistles addressed to churches in various cultural contexts, demonstrates that teaching the Bible without regard for the cultural context is deficient preaching. This thesis defends the contextualised expository preaching of the words of God, showing how Scripture itself demonstrates that contextualised expository preaching can be defended on biblical grounds.

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Notes and abbreviations

NT New Testament

OT Old Testament

Unless indicated, all Bible quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (Anglicised Edition) 2002, London: Harper Collins Publishers.

INTRODUCTION

Expository preaching: merely a cultural form of preaching?

Evangelical churches and ministries throughout history have maintained a great emphasis on the Bible as God’s Word, and consequently the preaching of the Bible has been considered important. Though Western evangelicalism was often embroiled in efforts to counter more liberal views of Scripture for much of the 20th century, the situation has been very different in the Majority World, where Christian Scripture has frequently been held in high regard by Christians, the Church and theological institutions.¹ Evangelicals have consistently held to the authority of Christian Scripture for both belief and behaviour – but is the practice of preaching an area in which Scripture’s authority has been overlooked?

Over the last decade a significant proportion of my ministry has included cross-cultural training of Bible college students, pastors and preachers for expository preaching.² This has been primarily within SE Asia, with Crosslinks’ Schools of Biblical Training and Langham Preaching. Sometimes, when explaining and teaching expository preaching in these Majority world cultures and contexts, my colleagues and I have encountered comments that such preaching is culturally-determined, being a more ‘Western’ style inappropriate in Asia and, by implication, in the Majority world as a whole. Instead the predominant model frequently favoured in these contexts is ‘topical’, ‘thematic’ or ‘textual’ (where a verse is usually considered in isolation from its context) rather than what I shall define as expository.³

This criticism, that expository preaching is culturally defined and shaped, has also been raised in some missiological writing. For example Jiménez (2008, 706) states:

Given the political and ideological influence of Great Britain and the United States in the modern world, the preaching models developed in these countries have influenced preaching all around the globe. The British rationalistic approach to preaching may be the most prominent homiletical model in the

¹ See for example Jenkins 2006, 18-41 (chapter 2: ‘Power in the Book’).

² See below in chapter 2 for the working definition that I have adopted for this thesis. For now I simply mean preaching which seeks to teach and explain a Biblical passage (or even a verse) understood in its historical and literary context but applied to the contemporary audience.

³ I am not aware of documentary evidence for this, but it has been an observation made by several preaching trainer colleagues working with Crosslinks and Langham Preaching.

world... British homiletics blends insights from the patristic sermon pattern, the Calvinist ideal of the sermon as public exegesis, Greco-Roman rhetoric and the “Belles Lettres” that used aesthetic qualities to move the hearer to “experience the sublime,” presented through a dramatic delivery. The sermon must begin with a proposition, that is, the exposition of a universal biblical truth. The sermon develops such a proposition through four steps: instruction, imagination, passion and motivation.

Jiménez mentions by name a number of preachers from the 19th century and 20th century including the late John Stott, the well-known British pastor-preacher who taught and modelled expository preaching. The article, however, seems to misunderstand - and thus misrepresent - Stott’s intention and practice in preaching.⁴ Although Jiménez notes that “the practice of commenting on sacred texts in the context of communal worship comes from rabbinical Judaism” (2008, 704) he assumes that preaching is simply “preparing a speech” which has emerged from Graeco-Roman practice. But, as I will seek to demonstrate, such an approach fails to take account of the pattern that is evident much earlier, within Scripture itself. It is not an imposition or innovation by a later culture.

There is a more widespread scepticism about expository preaching in Western cultures too, with many in the West making similar protestations that preaching in general is no longer culturally appropriate - and in fact has never been justifiable.⁵ Thus, in commenting on Stott’s impact on, and involvement with, the church in the Majority world, Chapman (2012, 152) considers that

the expository style of preaching that Stott had believed in so strongly for so long, may have been one more Western imposition: its emphasis on the sober explanation of Scripture owed much to the sort of Enlightenment rationalism Stott had first learned from his stern medical father. In the key section in his book on preaching, there were more exemplars from modern Europe than from the Bible.

If it is simply a cultural practice, then any suggestion that it should be practised more globally might be perceived as simply one further expression of cultural imperialism. Is it true, however, that expository preaching is merely a culturally-shaped way of preaching? Or are there clues within Scripture which indicate that it ought to be a more transcultural phenomenon?

⁴ This thesis will not directly address Jiménez’s criticism, but it should uncover the points at which he is mistaken, in presenting Stott’s biblical and theological basis for preaching in chapter 3.

⁵ Cf. Pearse & Matthews 1999; Norrington 1996.

The challenge of preaching in the global context

Alongside this criticism that expository preaching is a cultural phenomenon, expository preaching can be perceived as being rather academic - too focused on the Bible text and less engaged with the culture. Hence Majority world pastors and preachers often consider that topical preaching is better at addressing the contextual needs of disciples within their churches.⁶ Sometimes 'topical' or 'textual' preaching has predominated and endured because national pastor-preachers have imitated what they observed and learned from (Western) missionaries in earlier generations.⁷

The reality of much Christian ministry in the global context is that people are coming to faith in Christ, and the church is growing, in areas where distortions of the Christian gospel and 'biblical' teaching, such as the so-called 'prosperity gospel', often prevail (cf. Twongyeirwe 2016). Yet these are usually the same parts of the world where Christian pastors eschew expository preaching.

Is it possible for expository preaching to address the needs of the people, and to engage with them in a culturally appropriate way? Could it be that careful expository preaching, which engages responsibly both with the specific issues of a culture and the immediate and larger biblical context, will address such misconceptions of the gospel and biblical teaching, and thereby strengthen the church?

Expository preaching without contextualisation

Meanwhile, in Western contexts, expository preaching might be perceived or presented as purely 'teaching the Bible',⁸ without any need for acknowledging the specific context in which the speaker and listeners inhabit. Although such an attitude may encourage good exegesis and explanation of a Bible passage, and aim to expound the main idea of the biblical text, it is still possible to ignore the context in which the Bible's message is being preached, and thus genuine communication is weakened. But

⁶ Comments such as these have been made to fellow preaching trainers across SE Asia and further afield.

⁷ One example is a comment made to me in Pokhara (Nepal) in 2012 by a Nepali colleague about the style of preaching that arrived initially with missionaries in Nepal.

⁸ By 'teaching the Bible' here I mean efforts at simply explaining what the text says and what it meant for the original readers or hearers.

as Stott himself recognised and urged, the preacher’s responsibility lies in both halves of what he termed “double listening” (Stott 1992, 13) – paying attention both to the text of Scripture which is being expounded, and the world around the preacher and congregation.

Sometimes this preoccupation with simply ‘teaching the Bible’ has been rooted in a deeper scepticism about attempts to contextualise the Christian gospel, fearing that any efforts to acknowledge the culture may reshape the message of Scripture. At the same time there may be a blind spot as to how this contextualisation is in fact already being incorporated into explaining the gospel and making disciples through expository preaching. (Keller articulates his own intentions as a preacher to self-consciously teach and preach in a responsible contextual manner, bearing in mind his audience cf. Keller 2015; also Helm 2014). But if it can be shown that the NT Scriptures themselves incorporate such a contextualisation of God’s words to new audiences and contexts, this might persuade those who have been wary of such language about contextualised preaching.

Seeking to move beyond ‘proof-texting’

All Scripture has been written and given for a specific purpose (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If evangelicals accept the divine nature of Scripture given through human authors, they should also recognise the Authorial intent of Scripture - both as a whole and in each section of that whole - despite the widespread ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’.⁹ Though it is foolish to claim infallibility in our interpretations, Christians – whether preachers or not - are not free to ignore the Author’s broader purpose in giving us the Scriptures.

The substance of the argument of this thesis is not ‘word studies’ on preaching, as this would narrow the approach I have adopted to studying Scripture and ignore the place of ‘word ministry’ which runs more widely throughout the Scriptures (cf. Meyer 2013, 316-318). What follows will be substantially more than presenting ‘proof texts’, although there will be appeals to Scripture, which I have sought to responsibly interpret

⁹ ‘The hermeneutics of suspicion’ is a form of hermeneutics which attempts to interpret and unmask meanings which have been deliberately hidden.

in their context. It seeks to uncover an underlying rationale from the nature and purpose of Christian Scripture – and the essence of the relationship with the covenantal Lord who longs for his people to know him and his will, living in loving obedience and relationship with him (cf. Frame 2010, 117). The very nature of a covenant relationship is that it requires words, which are to be understood by those between whom the covenant is made. Just beneath the surface of Scripture lies this biblical-theological foundation of the place of God’s words in his relationship with people - and although it may be readily assumed in theology, it should be recognised and expressed in preaching.

This approach to preaching, and the theology which underpins it, is tightly bound up with the classic evangelical doctrines of the inspiration, authority, sufficiency, clarity, necessity and trustworthiness of Scripture (see Adam 1996) – recognising that the whole of the OT and NT is verbal revelation from God (Packer 1979, 65-76). Of course, it also assumes that Scripture is authoritative and prescriptive when interpreted properly.¹⁰

We should be wary of appeals to simply follow the example of Jesus and the apostles, or any other biblical characters in order to justify the need to preach or for the content of contemporary preaching. We cannot assume that because particular biblical characters did something then modern preachers should follow suit.¹¹ Such an approach would fail to appreciate the uniqueness of such individuals in salvation history, or their particular authority to speak or interpret earlier Scripture. Nevertheless, as we will see, the apostle’s mandate given to the next generation still stands (2 Timothy 4:2).

Towards a biblical theology of expository preaching and contextualisation

Though much has been written on the theory of preaching, together with practical guidebooks focusing on ‘technique’, there is far less literature bringing together studies in the areas of biblical theology,¹² homiletical theology and recognition of the contextualised nature of theology within the Scriptures themselves.

¹⁰ This distinguishes classic evangelicalism from ‘fundamentalism’.

¹¹ Otherwise why not follow the prophet’s behaviour of ‘naked preaching’ in Isaiah 20:2-3?!

¹² Throughout I am broadly using the term ‘biblical theology’ in the sense identified as ‘history of redemption’ by Klink & Lockett (2012, 59-75). I will provide a fuller definition below in chapter 2.

Various evangelical scholars (including Stott 1961 & 1983, Packer 1979 and Adam 1996) have written about expository preaching from a theological perspective. This has laid the theological foundation for much contemporary understanding and practice of expository preaching. Others (Frame 2010, Meyer 2013, and Adam 2000, 2004 & 2008) additionally point to the central place of God's Word in his covenant relationship with his people from the inception of that relationship, and therefore his words are deliberately written down, preserved and proclaimed to future generations. This message becomes the core of NT post-apostolic ministry of making disciples in every culture (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus teaching and explaining Scripture's message relevantly in every culture becomes paramount for making faithful disciples – and the emphasis on expository preaching being able to do this most effectively should become clearer. Alongside this, studies in the contextualised nature of Scripture, particularly in the NT epistles, have emerged within missiological writing (Flemming 2005 & 2010), whereby God's Word is taken by the apostles and applied to the specific cultures and situations of the NT churches. This suggests that this part of the Scriptures provides a model for contextualised preaching and teaching today, as well as the more obvious instructions to 'preach the Word' (2 Timothy 4:2) faithfully in new contexts and cultures.

Goldsworthy (2000, 32), writing about preaching and biblical theology, notes that

One of the real gains of applying the method of biblical theology is that it enables us to understand the biblical teaching on any given topic in a holistic way. We are not dependent on a few proof texts for the establishment of a doctrine or for understanding the nature of some important concept. We can look at what lies behind the developed concept as we may have it in the New Testament, and ask what is really impelling it into the prominence it seems to have. We can observe the various strands that give this doctrine its texture and its richness. We can then evaluate the importance it should have in the contemporary church. The standard manuals on preaching rarely deal with the subject from the point of view of biblical theology.

To my knowledge, a synthesis of this study of contextualisation observed within Scripture (primarily in the NT), allied to a clear biblical theology of God's Word and the systematic theological arguments for expository preaching, is even more rare than Goldsworthy's conviction. This is what I seek to do in the present thesis, since when biblical theology's contribution to the theology of preaching Scripture is combined with

the arguments often employed to promote expository preaching, and the contextualisation observed within Scripture, it indicates that expository preaching is in line with the way that God has always addressed and developed his covenant people throughout human history.

Progression of argument in this thesis

The first chapter - the conceptual framework – will set out the parameters within which I will investigate these areas of study, and set out the presuppositions and convictions from which I am beginning. I will also propose an outline definition of the terms in the thesis – ‘biblical theology’, contextualised’ and ‘expository preaching’ to clarify my argument. But as we embark on this study, it is important to note Runia’s observation (1978, 6-7) that

none of the New Testament writers gives a deliberate and explicit exposition of what preaching is. All we have is a great number of scattered references. But they are surely enough to get a clear picture of what the New Testament writers mean by 'preaching'.

This should therefore sound a note of caution against defining expository preaching too tightly, and rather to see first what emerges from the biblical text itself.

Chapter 2 will lay the foundation for what follows, tracing a biblical theology of God’s Word (e.g. Adam 2004 & 2008, Frame 2010) as God’s words are given, written down, passed on and then proclaimed. These words are given to his people at particular important points within salvation history and become essential to their covenantal relationship with him. By ‘biblical theology’ I do not simply mean a theology that is Bible-based, but is “the study of the Bible’s unfolding revelation of God in a way that enables us to understand the Bible as a whole.” (Jensen 2007, 163 n3) What emerges is an inconspicuous but constant theme of God’s words being ‘re-preached’,¹³ as they are faithfully recorded, passed on, explained and applied to a new generation of believers in their particular context, which, in turn, reflects a redemptive-historical approach to biblical theology. This provides a more solid basis for expository preaching than an appeal to isolated verses in Scripture.

¹³ ‘Re-preached’ is the expression that I have chosen to use, because this is what appears to happen as later ‘preachers’ (e.g. Moses, Ezra and the priests and several OT prophets) take God’s Word spoken or written earlier in redemption history and proclaim it afresh into a new context.

Chapter 3 will examine the theological foundations for expository preaching which are widely agreed upon within evangelical circles (e.g. Stott 1961 & 1983, Packer 1979), as providing the rationale for expository preaching. I will focus on the theology of expository preaching, not its praxis – and therefore I will not be considering case studies of how various preachers preach in an expositional manner within their cultural context, nor the ‘effectiveness’ of such a style of preaching.¹⁴ My concern is to concentrate on what theologians have written to legitimise expository preaching.

Chapter 4 will draw upon recent studies where there has been growing recognition of contextualised theology observed within the OT and especially the NT - for example in Flemming’s work on the Pauline letters and Acts. This contextualisation *within* Scripture, especially the New Testament, indicates how God’s words are faithfully and responsibly (re)applied to new audiences or in new contexts.

The summary draws these three strands together, to show that it makes sense for God’s Words to be taught and applied carefully into every new context, so that people are brought to faith in Christ and grow as disciples. This thesis therefore explores how a biblical theology of contextualised expository preaching can emerge from a dialogue between three areas of theology.

The potential contribution of this study

This thesis will seek to identify a deeper set of assumptions about why evangelicals are committed to expository preaching: it seeks to explore and present a biblical apologia for expository preaching which is contextualised. Is there a theological rationale and evidence within Scripture which could show that preaching that is both expository and contextual is not simply biblically justifiable, but warranted - even mandated?

The goal of this preaching is not simply communication of the Bible’s truth or as an end in itself. It is that people hear God’s voice, and respond in faith and obedience to

¹⁴ Though the ‘effectiveness’ of expository preaching is obviously is a legitimate concern, how its effectiveness could be measured is another question entirely.

the good news of what he has done in Christ and all that he has revealed to us. In the discussion that follows, it is important not to lose sight of this goal for preaching and teaching.

Understanding contextualisation from this ‘biblical theology of expository preaching which is contextualised’ will hopefully create a recognition that Christian preachers, teachers and theologians have the opportunity and responsibility to engage with issues not directly raised in Scripture, but which nevertheless might be of pressing concern within any context in which the church exists - or does not yet exist. These issues must be addressed for the sake of genuine discipleship and growth towards Christian maturity (cf. Ephesians 4:16ff).

If the biblical and theological foundations for contextualised expository preaching are strong, then it will have implications for the exercise of a preaching ministry, although it is beyond this study to thoroughly explore what these may be.

My thesis is that faithful, responsible Christian preaching will be both *expository* (i.e. teaching and explaining the Bible in such a way that it recognises the original context in which, and audience to whom, it was written and also respects the form of Scripture as God has given it to us) and *contextualised* (i.e. thus engaging with the contemporary listeners to whom it is being communicated and applied) – and that this manner of preaching is consistent with a biblical theology of God’s Word (i.e. it reflects both the purpose and way in which God’s Word has been given, passed on and proclaimed throughout redemption history as it is recorded Scripture).

This does not, however, necessarily dictate a particular style of preaching, which will inevitably and appropriately vary according to the genre and particular literary style of the passage of Scripture, its theological and conceptual density, the ability and personality of the preacher, the biblical literacy, Christian experience and understanding and general knowledge of the congregation, as well as the assumptions and world-view of the local culture, in terms of illustrations and stories used and the applications made of the biblical truths which are being taught.

My desire is to help preachers within the Majority world appreciate this biblical rationale for contextualised expository preaching - which genuinely engages with the

cultures in which the Bible is being taught (to make disciples), so that authentic contextualisation of the gospel can happen. But I also wish to urge preachers within Western churches, and who wish to help train preachers, to see that good expository preaching is much more than merely ‘teaching the Bible’: they must engage in contextualisation in their preaching too, rather than being wary of it.¹⁵

¹⁵ And in the Western world ‘sub-cultures’ are often more important than national culture and both cultures and sub-cultures are changing more and more rapidly. So ‘cross-cultural’ awareness is essential to the missionary task in the West, even in places where there are no immigrant communities.

CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Presuppositions

In writing as a confessing classic evangelical,¹⁶ I acknowledge my commitment to and presuppositions about the Bible – the unity of the biblical canon, in its diversity; its sufficiency, clarity and authority. Since I am mainly working alongside and engaging with those who also have a high view of Scripture, my research is focused on those scholars who have written from a similar perspective, as my thesis is an attempt to synthesise studies which rest on these foundational convictions.

My research has focused on reading and analysing the writings of various evangelical scholars in the fields of biblical theology, contextualised theology as observed within Scripture, and systematic theology (as it pertains to preaching). There will also be some reference to work in biblical studies as necessary. I will concentrate almost exclusively on texts from the last fifty years because this is when there has been a resurgence of interest in biblical theology and in expository preaching, and the development of studies in contextualisation within the Bible itself.

Since I am seeking to demonstrate there is a biblical theology of expository preaching which is contextualised, each phrase is important and requires definition - ‘biblical theology’, ‘expository preaching’ and ‘contextualised’.

Definitions

‘Biblical theology’

Biblical theology embraces God’s progressive and cumulative revelation in Scripture, with unity-in-diversity across both testaments of Scripture. Such an approach accepts that the Bible is God’s Word through human authors, which conveys one coherent story.¹⁷ Hence Goldsworthy (1991, 37) notes

¹⁶ As a classical evangelical I hold to the historic Christian creeds and Biblical faith as represented, for example, in the doctrinal basis of the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship in the UK (part of IFES) or the Lausanne Covenant.

¹⁷ See also Carson 2010, 19-53.

It follows the progress of revelation from the first word of God to man through to the unveiling of the full glory of Christ. It examines the several stages of biblical history and their relationship to one another. It thus provides the basis for understanding how texts in one part of the Bible relate to all other texts.

Biblical theology also recognises that there are concepts which can be traced through Scripture, not just words – such that, in the case of this study, the place of God’s words can be identified as a prominent theme running through the canon, with the gospel as our hermeneutical key. Rosner (2000, 10) explains how

biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible’s teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible’s overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.

‘Expository’ preaching

Liefeld (1984), in considering what expository preaching is and why it is important, explains that “the essence of exposition is *explanation*” (1984, 5). He draws out the implications for expository preaching in that it “deals with one basic passage of Scripture”, “has hermeneutical integrity”, “cohesion”, “movement and direction” and “application”. He helpfully points out that exposition is not “verse by verse exegesis” (1984, 20), nor is it “a running commentary” (1984, 21). He identifies characteristics of good expository preaching, which “conveys the basic message of a biblical passage faithfully... communicates the message well, using a structure and features that are appropriate...” and “meets the needs of the congregation in a way consistent with the purpose and function of the passage in its original life setting.” (Liefeld 1984, 24)

Thus expository preaching does not require a sermon structure that includes alliterated headings to assist remembrance, although some structure or progression is likely to help the listeners follow what is being said. Nor does it require verse by verse explanation of a passage, although there are times when an element of this may be required to understand the flow of logic, for example in a Pauline epistle. It would be impossible and unnecessary, however, to do the same for a section of OT narrative, which may span several chapters. As we shall see it does mean explaining the meaning

of a Bible passage appropriate to its immediate and larger context within Scripture, which is why biblical theology is also necessary.

Carson gives a broad definition of expository preaching whereby it

is simply the unpacking of what is there. In a narrative text (e.g. 2 Samuel) or major epic (e.g. Job), fine exposition may focus on several chapters at once. If a sermon takes two or three short passages from disparate parts of the Bible *and explains each of them carefully and faithfully within its own context*, it remains an expository sermon, for it is unpacking what the biblical text or texts actually say. If we expect God to re-reveal himself by his own words, then our expositions must reflect as faithfully as possible what God actually said when the words were given to us in Scripture.

(Carson 2007, 176-177 original emphasis)

Allen (1998) helpfully distinguishes between content and form when discussing expository preaching, although he then appears to merge the content with the preparation of the sermon.¹⁸ But he helpfully points out that “If a sermon faithfully explains the text so that the audience understands the biblical revelation of God and His will, that sermon can be called expository even if it does not fit the strictures of expository preaching as a method of organization.” (Allen 1998, 6) This is a very significant observation, since it allows for a broader expression or recognition of expository preaching than something which is necessarily seen as very structured.

Expository preaching should acknowledge that Scripture, each part of it, has been given by God for a particular purpose, which is not merely a transfer of information. This will include growing in knowledge and love of God, seeking God’s transformation of the person through encountering his words. Expository preaching should be influenced by the literary and rhetorical style of the book of the Bible, as it will take account of the particular personal style of the human author, and their historical and theological context.

Expository preaching is not a rationalistic, cold, emotionless teaching of the Bible (though sadly some may preach like this). It does not need to be overly academic, even though it does require study by the preacher. But such preaching should appeal to

¹⁸ This raises the question whether what is important in exposition is the content (‘exposing’ a Bible passage to the listeners) or the style and organisation. In other words, does expository content require expository organisation? I am not sure that it does.

the whole human person, made in God's image - heart, mind and will (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-5//Matthew 22:34-40).

I will otherwise deliberately leave a 'definition' slightly loose since defining too precisely what expository preaching looks like may prevent us from allowing Scripture to reveal it (which by its very nature it should do). Otherwise, if we determine in advance what it is or looks like, apart from studying Scripture, then we may fail to recognise what it could be.¹⁹

'Contextualised' preaching

Robinson (1974, 59-60) recognises the need for the contemporary speaker to be sensitive to the situation into which he or she is speaking, when he comments that

To carry out this purpose the expositor must not only know his message, but the people to which it will be delivered. He must exegete both the Scriptures and his congregation. Imagine that Paul's letters to the Corinthians had gotten lost in the mails and had reached the Christians in Philippi instead. Those people would have been perplexed at what Paul wrote. The believers in Philippi lived in different situations than their brethren at Corinth. The letters of the New Testament, like the prophecies of the Old Testament, were addressed to specific people living in particular situations.

I am therefore proposing that 'contextualised preaching' be understood as preaching which engages with the culture and values of the people to whom it is addressed, including their worldviews. It will seek to understand the environment of both the non-believer and the believer, and tackle the issues and challenges which emerge when people seek to be disciples in that particular place at that particular time. This does not indicate that the context determines, shapes or constricts the biblical message preached, but that it engages and addresses that context. (An example would be the NT Corinthian church's misunderstanding about the human body because of the influence of Greek thought, as becomes particularly evident in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 & 15:1-58).

¹⁹ The same would hold true in any other area of theology, for example, when examining the Scriptures' teaching about the love of God.

In reality, contextualisation is always happening, for better or for worse, as Flemming notes

In a sense, contextualization must occur on a regular basis in any Christian ministry. Anytime one preaches a sermon, teaches a theology class, or shares the gospel with a group of college students, the message should be shaped by the context of the people to which it is being communicated. Every preacher/theologian stands in the middle between the horizon of the Bible and that of his or her receptor group, with the need to allow one's own preunderstandings to be dynamically fused to both text and context. We may be competent exegetes and interpreters of the original meaning of the text. Yet, unless we are able to contextualize that meaning for a contemporary audience so that it has an impact comparable to that on the first hearers, the hermeneutical task falls short of its goal. Thus not only missionaries and non-Western Christians need to be engaged in a conscious effort at contextualization, but all those involved in Christian ministry and theologizing. Western theology in its various forms is every bit as much a contextualization as that being done in Asia and Africa today. (Flemming 1995, 143)

Flemming's comments reveal the importance of doing this well.

Explaining the limits of this study

I am not proposing to examine or evaluate other kinds of contextualised preaching, nor to compare expository preaching with other styles of preaching, or to investigate examples of practice of preaching in different cultures or periods of church history, although reference will be made to various theologians and preachers.

I will not seek to defend preaching *per se* as a good Christian practice in ministry, or even that preaching should occupy a central place within faithful Christian ministry.²⁰ Nor am I making a sharp distinction between 'preaching' and 'teaching' – a distinction pressed by Dodd (1936) but which Mounce demonstrated cannot be justified from the Gospels (1960, 40-43) nor in Paul's letters (Mounce 1993, 735).²¹

I will not investigate what contextualisation in contemporary expository preaching should look like (see Osborne 2006, 410-433 for a discussion about a process

²⁰ See Old 1998, 19-250 for his argument for its basis in Scripture, both from example and exhortation/explicit instruction to do so.

²¹ Similarly Runia (1978, 31-32) and Greidanus (1988, 6-7), though Old (1998, 122-127, 152 & 198) attempts to retain the distinction.

and principles that might be used). It may well be that expository preaching could have a different style or appearance in different cultures, even though its theological basis remains the same.

I am not claiming that expository preaching is the only form of preaching observed in Scripture, nor that it is the only valid way of preaching. There are clearly other forms of ministry of the Word as well. Nor will I address the relationship between God's speech and the particular words of the preacher who seeks to preach his Word (see Ward 2009, 158-172; and Runia 1978, 33-35). Instead I will concentrate on Scripture and the theological reasons others have proposed for expository preaching.

CHAPTER 2: TRACING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF GOD’S WORDS

In this chapter we will see how God’s words have been central to his relationship with his creation, and with his people through his covenant, as the biblical account unfolds. I intend to demonstrate how biblical theology strengthens the justification for contextualised expository preaching, since God’s words are basic to this covenant relationship: God's plan to give verbal revelation within history entails that this historical verbal revelation must be written down, read, heard, meditated on, taught, explained and preached in every generation. As we will see, both expository preaching and contextualisation are thus both a part of this plan, and a consequence of it. God’s words were not only given at a particular point in time, but also deliberately recorded for future generations, to be taught and applied afresh in each new context.

Words of God are foundational for all creation

We begin by noting the nature and role of that word of God by which he creates, sustains and rules everything. Chapell (2005, 27) identifies several ways in which the words of God are inherently powerful, beginning with creation - for example in Psalm 33:

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. (Psalm 33:6, 9)

But God not only creates, he also controls his creation by his words, for example in this richly poetic description of God’s activity:

He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly...
He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow and the waters flow. (Psalm 147:15, 18)

And, in the context of God being able to effect the desired response within his wayward people, his words also perform his purposes exactly as he intends:

“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.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The writer to the Hebrews reaffirms this, as he explains how it is through the words of his Son that God now sustains and upholds everything: “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.” (Hebrews 1:1-3a)

It is not only with his creation in general, however, that God relates by his word. As Cole remarks (2016, 457-459), after creation God specifically relates to the first human beings he created by his words: “And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion...’ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth...’” (Genesis 1:28-29) “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden...’” (Genesis 2:15-16) Thus

From beginning to end the Bible is a book about God who speaks, about people who hear and respond to God’s words, and about people speaking those same words to others... The Bible opens with a God who speaks. The first chapter of Genesis rings with the refrain ‘and God said’ (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20). Words from God are powerful, creative, effective and successful. (Adam 2004, 47)

Such passages lay the foundation for the way in which God continues to relate to humanity through his words. God’s speech to the human beings he has made is essential to their relationship with him, whereby he is the speaker and they are to listen to obey (Adam 2004, 47; also Cole 2016, 465ff). This is the nature of God’s relationship with them before the Fall.

Yet even when the relationship between them is ruined - as those words are questioned, misrepresented and then disobeyed (Genesis 3:1-7) - nevertheless God’s communication with his people continues with words:

But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” (Genesis 3:8-13)

God’s covenant words are to be believed and obeyed. Genesis 3 tragically shows what happens when the words of God are neglected, denied or ignored.

The remainder of the Bible, both by its very nature and in its overarching narrative, is evidence of the ongoing relationship between the speaking God and human beings. With gracious words God makes a promise to restore the order of creation and the relationships which have been destroyed by sin (Genesis 3:15b). This promise is followed by repeated words of promise, and the responses required in the covenants, beginning with Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:8-17). And it is the words of God upon which each of those covenants is founded.

Words of God are foundational to the covenant

The concept of ‘covenant’ is at the heart of biblical faith and relationship with the LORD, such that Williamson (2000, 419) describes it as ‘one of the most important motifs in biblical theology’ - and the words of God are central to his covenants: covenants are words. Those words are to the fore in the covenant with Abram (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1ff etc.), and are subsequently repeated to his descendants (Genesis 26: 3-5; 28:13-15). There are further covenants made with Moses and Israel (Exodus 24:1-12) and David (2 Samuel 7:1-17; 2 Chronicles 7:18; Psalm 89:3-4; Jeremiah 33:21). Then there is the promised New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) which both Jesus and NT writers interpret as fulfilled in him (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8:8-13). God’s covenants, like human covenants, are comprised of words (Galatians 3:15).

Others have studied the contents or terms of each of these covenants (e.g. Williamson 2000, 420-429; Williamson 2007) and their relationship to each other. But what is significant is the indispensable place of God’s words in all of these covenants. This explains why it is crucial for the words of the covenants to be recorded and preserved, since they constitute promises God has made and the obligations laid upon human beings to respond. And God’s covenants are not just to individuals, but to their descendants as well.

Ancient Near Eastern covenants generally incorporated such terms, relying on written words so as to be recalled in the future, as well as spoken at the time of the institution of the covenant (Frame 2010, 147). Biblical covenants depend on similar terms, comprising words of God which are written down, on stones or in books (Deuteronomy 27:1-8; Joshua 24:26-27) to be recalled (cf. Clowney 2002, 41-43; Frame 2010, 106-110 & 146-151). Frame (2010, 106) therefore asserts that “there is no question that written revelation is a central part of God’s covenant with Israel in the time of Moses”, noting that the covenant relationship essentially requires and employs language which is to be passed on (Frame 2010, 212).

We therefore turn to see how these words of God are foundational in four ways: firstly within the OT; secondly within the NT when the OT is applied to Jews; thirdly within the NT when the OT is applied to Gentiles and Jews; and finally within the creation of the NT itself. In each case, I have given examples to indicate how central these words of God are to the covenant relationship.

Words of God are foundational to the covenant - within the OT: Moses, priests and prophets

Moses

After revealing himself to Moses in what he says at the burning bush (Exodus 3-4), the LORD redeems his people from slavery and establishes his covenant with them through Moses. After their victory over the Amalekites, the LORD tells Moses to record the event: “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” (Exodus 17:14)²²

In the context of the LORD making the covenant at Sinai, Moses both passes on and records the message from the LORD:

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. (Exodus 24:3-4a).

²² This is then ‘re-preached’ by Moses in Deuteronomy 25:19.

What he wrote becomes foundational for the subsequent covenant-making, as Moses reads from this written account:

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:7-8)

Moses did this because the LORD explicitly commanded him to do so (Exodus 17:14; cf. 34:1, 27), but also because Moses understood the words’ importance (cf. Deuteronomy 31:9ff). Since they are to be preserved, they are placed in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:21), indicating their value and importance for their own future and that of their descendants. Hence these words must also be taught by parents to their children (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). This is essential to prevent the people forgetting the LORD when they have entered the land (Deuteronomy 6:10ff). Although Old may go beyond what the text explicitly states, in including ‘preaching’ as part of catechising the young Israelites, the practice of discussing the Scriptures together as families (Deuteronomy 6:7) indicates that this activity is more than sheer rote-learning (Old 1998, 35).

Old further argues (1998, 32ff) that Deuteronomy is an exposition of the terms of the LORD’s covenant along similar lines as Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties, forming the basis for exposition/explanation and remembrance of the terms for future generations. Furthermore, “we have in the covenant theology of the Pentateuch the rationale for the reading and preaching of Scripture in worship – namely, that it is demanded by a covenantal understanding of our relationship to God and each other.” (Old 1998, 29) Thus what Moses does on the plain of Moab, on the verge of the entry to Canaan (Deuteronomy 1:5), is at the heart of the covenant relationship, in both reading and expounding what God had already spoken to them (Old 1998, 33). Meyer (2013, 103) therefore claims that: “Moses serves as the paradigm for preaching in the Pentateuch as a servant of God’s word in his role as a mediator in the covenant between God and Israel.”²³

²³ He also points out that it is the questioning of Moses’ role and authority by Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12:6-8) which highlights Moses’ stewardship of God’s Word most clearly (Meyer 2013, 105).

In Deuteronomy Moses selectively and deliberately ‘re-preaches’ the events of Exodus to Numbers. “In particular, 1:5 describes Moses’ speaking as ‘expounding’ the law. The word suggests explaining, making clear God’s law” (Barker 2011, 32-33). As Barker recognises: “Deuteronomy is primarily a sermon. ‘These are the words that Moses *spoke*’ (1:1). Not only is this apparent from the form of the book, it is also clear from its style. Its form is almost entirely taken up by speech.” (1998, 1) He develops this observation further:

Deuteronomy begins with a history lesson but not merely for the sake of accumulation of knowledge. While Moses recounts some incidents of Israel’s past forty years in the wilderness, it is not to give a record of what happened: that is recorded in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Only selected incidents are mentioned here. What Moses has done is to choose some events of Israel’s past in order to make important points to Israel about the present and future. (Barker 1998, 7)

Barker (2011, 32) and Adam (2004) agree that Moses’ exposition or explanation involves preaching narrative (Deuteronomy 1-4), as well as the legal texts (Deuteronomy 5-26) along with the concluding exhortations of chapter 27-30. After pointing out that the book of Deuteronomy begins with Moses speaking, and comprises a series of four sermons of Moses, in Deuteronomy chapters 1-4, 5-26, 27-28 & 29-30, Adam (2004, 52-53) explains

These sermons were not only spoken but also written down, so that Israel could continue to hear God’s words through Moses even after his death... (31:9-11) So the basic structure of the theology of Deuteronomy is that God has spoken, and given his words to pass on to the people. The people must hear, believe, obey and preserve these words for future generations.

Barker (2011, 35-46) sketches out how, in the ‘preached historical narrative’ section (Deuteronomy 1-4), Moses expounds a number of earlier significant biblical passages (Genesis 15:5, Exodus 18:13-17; Numbers 13-14; 20-21; 32:28-42; Genesis 1:14-27 and Exodus 19-24). Moses “bases his sermon on the Bible, at least on the four preceding books of the OT. He shows both faithfulness to the text or tradition, but is able to draw out appropriate emphases to make his point.” (Barker 2011, 51) Old similarly (1998, 37-41) identifies characteristics of Moses’ preaching in Deuteronomy: recounting God’s faithfulness and what he has done for his people in the past; interpreting and explaining God’s Law; and exhorting the people to heed and act upon what is being said (Deuteronomy 4:1,9; 6:4-6; 30:11,14).

From Deuteronomy chapter 12 onwards Moses expounds the Decalogue, in the various laws recorded there. Wright (1996, 4-5) and Millar (1998, 105-108) outline how OT scholars have attempted to show close connections between the Decalogue, and the ordering/structure of the legal stipulations spelled out in greater detail in Deuteronomy chapters 12-26. And despite minor differences, it seems legitimate to infer that Moses effectively 're-preaches' the Decalogue of Exodus 20:1-17 in Deuteronomy 5:1-21.

Seen within the context of the covenant, and the importance of God's people keeping its words, it should be clearer why it is so necessary for these words to be written - in order to be passed on. Moreover, alongside the need to remember the words of God is an encouragement to be reading and meditating on God's Word.²⁴ Given the prominence of God's word through Moses in the Pentateuch, it is not surprising to hear the LORD's command to Joshua at the start of his ministry:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you... This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. (Joshua 1:7-8)

Subsequently Joshua wrote down the words of God (Joshua 8:30-35) at the renewal of the covenant on entering the land, and re-proclaimed God's words. Then, at the end of his life, Joshua ensures the future availability of God's words, by writing them down as part of the renewed covenant terms with the new generation: "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God." (Joshua 24:25-26) Thus it should be clear that God's covenant words are to be recorded.

Priests

These covenant words of God are so vital to the people's relationship with the LORD that they are to be taught and applied by the OT priests. In Deuteronomy 31:9-13, Moses calls for the regular public reading of the Torah every seven years, with implied directions for the priests to teach it, so that future generations will both obey it and fear the Lord. Commenting on Deuteronomy 33:10, where Moses blesses the tribe

²⁴ Later, in Psalm 1, it is seen portrayed as the essence of living a righteous life (Psalm 1:1-2, 5-6).

of Levi, Old notes (1998, 31) that “It was the responsibility of the priestly tribe of Levi to be ministers of the Word every bit as much as ministers of the altar”. Moreover the Levitical priests were to be preachers and teachers of the Torah, since the “sermonic material in Deuteronomy portrays Moses as the first great preacher and the founder of the long tradition of biblical preaching” (Old 1998, 28). Thus teaching and preaching is not a phenomenon which began later in Israel’s history with the prophets, as a reaction against the priestly sacrificial work of the Levites. It has a much older history, beginning with Moses: Levi was apparently a faithful priest who taught the words of God, in keeping with what the LORD had commanded (Malachi 2:5-8).

As the LORD explains to Aaron, part of his responsibility as priest, and by implication his sons after him, is that “you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses” (Leviticus 10:11). And much later, during the reign of Jehoshaphat, we read of an example of such ministry:

In the third year of his reign he sent his officials... and with them the Levites... and... the priests Elishama and Jehoram. And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the Lord with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. (2 Chronicles 17:7-9)

After the return from Exile, the scribe Ezra ensured the people gathering in the rebuilt Jerusalem heard the Law of Moses read and explained:

... Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law... the Levites, 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 meaning, so that the people understood the reading. (Nehemiah 8:2-3, 7-8)

Williamson (1985, 287-288) is confident that ‘the Book of the Law’ being read out was all or part of the Pentateuch, noting that “it should be observed that there is really only one focus of attention in this passage, namely, the reading of the Law. Everything else, including the most obviously liturgical elements... are subordinated to this.” (Williamson 1985, 282) He points out that the role of the Levites, as iterated in Deuteronomy 33:10, was to ensure that everything that had been read aloud was also understood by the people. “It is probable, therefore, that after each section of the Law

had been read (cf. v8), the Levites moved from group to group among the people making sure that all had understood what they had heard” (Williamson 1985, 290).

Referring to these same events, Adam (2008, 104) concurs:

The law of God was not only read, but also explained, or translated and explained. The Levites had the job of moving through the crowd, possibly translating for those who understood Aramaic better than the Hebrew of the law of Moses, and certainly explaining the meaning and implications of what Ezra was reading... Ezra and his colleagues were working hard so that the people could understand the law and its meaning. The reading was given in sections, for the text says, ‘from the book, from the law of God’. This meant that the people had time to hear and understand, not least because the Levites also gave an explanation of each of the sections.

Meyer classifies Ezra as a faithful steward of God’s word (2013, 173-174) perceiving that Ezra’s diligent study of God’s word, given the gap between the time of Moses’ writing the law and the contemporary situation, required the reading and explanation of it by the priests. Furthermore, Clines (1981, 112), referring to the covenant recorded in Nehemiah 10, has observed “that Pentateuchal laws form the basis of the exegesis that is developed in this chapter” and traces several significant connections between Nehemiah 10 and the earlier Torah.²⁵

Prophets

Moses implies that he himself is a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18) and is later described as such (Deuteronomy 34:10). There is, however, the promise of the future prophet ‘like Moses’ whom the LORD will raise up and to whom the people must listen (Deuteronomy 18:15-22). This underscores the importance of the words of God in his relationship with his people.²⁶ All true OT prophets follow in this line, which reaches its fulfilment in Jesus (Acts 3:22-23). Thus God’s covenant words are to be taught and applied by prophets. They have this role of ‘re-preaching’ the covenant to God’s disobedient people, whether it is earlier prophets such as Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, or the later writing prophets. Their message is not solely one of predicting the Messiah to

²⁵ We will explore this in more detail in the following chapter, as it pertains more to applying the Law in a new context.

²⁶ See also the responsibility of the future king (Deuteronomy 17:18-20) who must write out and read this same Torah.

come, but announcing the people's failure to abide by the terms of the Mosaic covenant. As Fee and Stuart explain (2005, 187):

The prophets' message is unoriginal. The prophets were inspired by God to present to their generation the essential content of the original Mosaic covenant's warnings and promises... Therefore, when we read the prophets' words, what we read is not new in concept but a new wording – in each prophet's style and vocabulary – of the same message in essence delivered by God originally through Moses. The exact wording may be unique, and in that sense 'novel', but the concepts expressed restate faithfully what God had already expressed to his people in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy... Gaining people's attention may involve rephrasing and restructuring something they have already heard many times so that it has a certain kind of newness.

Hence Old (1998, 77) identifies how Jeremiah in his 'Temple sermon' records the question that God asks of his people - whether they expect to be able to steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely and generally be unfaithful to the LORD (Jeremiah 7:9) – suggesting that this could be a sermon on the Ten Commandments. And Thompson (1980, 343-344 fn) observes that in Jeremiah 11:1-17 there are multiple citations and allusions to the LORD's words through Moses in Exodus and Deuteronomy, pertaining to the LORD's rescue of his people, to the requirements for obedience and stipulations of the covenant which was made and also the curses which would follow disobedience (cf. Jeremiah 11:3//Deuteronomy 27:26; Jeremiah 11:4//Deuteronomy 4:20; Jeremiah 11:8//Leviticus 26:14-43). Jeremiah thus displays great familiarity with the words of God through Moses in his own preaching. He also assumes it among his audience, making reference to the earlier message as he takes and applies it in this new context, for his own generation. Shaddix (2010, 39) also draws attention to the prophets as great examples of those who "provided explanation of God's previous written revelation."

Elsewhere in the prophets there are indictments against the Levitical priests, in the light of their responsibilities to God's people. Thus the Lord, speaking through Malachi, expects these priests to have been teaching God's people his Word, following the example of their ancestor Levi, but they have neglected this:

"True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way." (Malachi 2:6-8)

Likewise, implicit in the LORD's criticism through the prophet Haggai (Haggai 2:11-19) is the expectation that the priests should know and have taught the people how to respond to God's law, given the background of the covenant blessings and curses (Deut. 27-28). Hence, God's covenant words are interpretative - they are the way in which God's people are to understand history and God's dealings with his people (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:15-21, 22-23).

Furthermore, as with Moses and Joshua, we discover God instructing several prophets to write down at least some of their messages, including Isaiah: ““And now, go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness for ever”” (Isaiah 30:8; cf. Isaiah 8:1). Similarly the LORD tells Jeremiah: ““Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you’ ...and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD that he had spoken to him.”” (Jeremiah 36:1, 4; cf. Jer. 36:24, 32; 45:1; 51:60).

The words of God spoken, recorded, read, meditated upon, taught and applied in new contexts form the background against which we can see the ongoing place of God's covenant words in the NT.

**Words of God are foundational to the covenant –
in the NT when the OT is applied to Jews**

Luke presents Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2:41-52) as a boy familiar with the words of God, engaging in such dialogue with the religious teachers (Luke 2:46-47), thereby suggesting his parents took seriously the teaching of Deuteronomy 6 in his formative years.

Jesus' teaching and ministry then affirms (Matthew 5:17-20), interprets (Matthew 5:21-48) and fulfils OT Scripture (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; John 5:39-40). He claims that he does not make it redundant, instead emphasising that it should be known and taught (Matthew 5:17-20; 13:51-52). Thus he shows that God's covenant words are cumulative. Indeed, Jesus shows a deep familiarity with OT Scripture, defining his own mission from it. His high view of the OT is clear from his repeated citation and teaching from it, with his fulfilment of it particularly emphasised in Matthew's gospel. Frame

(2010, 242-244) interprets Jesus' quotation in Matthew 4:4 of Deuteronomy 8:3 as a statement that 'every word' is necessary and vital, indicating how all of God's Word is essential for the Christian – but also that this forms a substantial basis for Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees who were adding their own interpretations to the Torah (Mark 7:1-13), and of the Sadducees who were omitting sections of it (Mark 12:18ff).

Matthew chapters 5-7 might be considered one of the most sustained expositions of the OT which we hear from the lips of Jesus. Old (1998, 139) comments that: "While the Sermon on the Mount may not be a report of any particular sermon, it contains a good digest of the material Jesus typically taught in his preaching." Jesus most noticeably expounds significant aspects of the Torah in Matthew 5:21-48, as he repeatedly introduces citations from the OT with "'You have heard that it was said... But I say to you'" (alluding to Exodus 20:13-14; Deuteronomy 24:1; Leviticus 19:12; Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 18:19). Rather than rejecting these Scriptures, he criticises poor interpretations they may have heard from the scribes and Pharisees.

We will discuss in chapter 3 how Jesus' sermon in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-22a) appears to be an exposition of the first part of Isaiah 61, revealing both his practice of ministry and his self-understanding from the text. Although there is less emphasis on OT fulfilment in Luke than in Matthew, both Luke 24:27 and 24:45 show Jesus' belief in the importance of his disciples' understanding, and teaching, about him from the OT (Luke 24:45-48). Old (1998, 136-137) comments on Jesus' teaching and commissioning of the disciples in Luke 24, that

essential to this preaching is to announce that the Scriptures of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. Jesus sends the disciples out to do expository preaching, to explain the Scriptures as he himself had explained to them. Essential to the preaching of the gospel is the proclamation that the Scriptures have been fulfilled, that Christ's victory over death was according to Scripture.

We then observe in Acts 2:42 how the first disciples "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" indicating how crucial this was for them. Meyer (2013, 208) claims that Peter's interpretation and exposition of the OT passages, which feature in his sermons in Acts chapters 2-4, come from the way that Jesus had taught his disciples in Luke 24 and Acts 1:3.

Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:2-53 summarises (without citing) the message of a significant part of the Pentateuch.²⁷ He does quote the prophets Amos (Amos 5:25-27//Acts 7:42-43) and Isaiah (Isaiah 66:1-2//Acts 7:49-50), taking God's previously-given words and applying them to 1st century Israel: this is not about 'fulfilment in Christ', unlike many other sermons to Jews in Acts. Throughout the book Luke catalogues the spread of the word of God (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20), with the climax of this evident when the gospel is proclaimed to Paul's fellow Jews in Rome: "From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (Acts 28:23). Peterson (2009, 714) comments that the meaning of Luke's description for Paul's ministry is literally 'expounding', meaning 'explained.'

These words of God from the OT, however, are not only relevant to Jews – they are of great significance and importance for Gentiles too.

**Words of God are foundational to the covenant –
within the NT when the OT is applied to Gentiles and Jews**

Jesus' apparent acceptance and continuance of the manner in which the OT Scriptures were expounded in the synagogues, together with Paul's practice (in Acts) and explanation of his ministry to the Ephesian elders about teaching them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:17-35), strongly suggests that this practice of 're-preaching' God's Word was to continue.

The relevance of the written words of God in evangelism is evident with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), through Philip's explanation of Isaiah 53:7-8, so that Schnabel (2004a, 686) comments: "In hermeneutical terms, instruction from Scripture plays a central role in the conversion of the Ethiopian." Though the Ethiopian has prior familiarity and access to part of the Jewish Scriptures, it is significant that he is not a Jew, nor is Philip teaching a convert, nor do these events take place in the context of the church gathering/synagogue. Here written words of God are being explained and applied evangelistically.

²⁷ In a way this has parallels with Moses' 're-preaching' the narrative of Exodus-Numbers in Deuteronomy.

Then, as Frame observes (2010, 229-230), it is clear from Paul's letters that he understood, that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Paul writes this immediately after citing Psalm 69:9, which he interprets Christologically. Thus the OT Scriptures have an intended purpose for Christians, rather than an incidental benefit for us (cf. Adam 2008, 125-130). Paul employs a similar line of argument in 1 Corinthians 10, when he applies lessons from Israel's history to the church, specifically as it touches on God's judgment on idolatry:

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did... Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.
(1 Corinthians 10: 6, 11)

Writing to a predominantly Gentile church, the apostle is quite definite that these things were recorded for their (and our) benefit – not simply for the later Jewish community during the OT era. Therefore if (Gentile) Christians are not to fall, they must know and learn from these Scriptures. Implicitly, this requires reading and understanding them as larger narratives, to grasp their significance for NT believers.²⁸

In fact Paul regularly makes reference to OT Scriptures (Silva 1993, 630-642) and, although the apostles' use and interpretation of OT Scripture would take us into another field of study (cf. Beale and Carson 2007) their repeated reference to the OT is undeniable.²⁹ Silva (1993, 630 & 638) notes that even "some of the apostle's arguments that do not contain any apparent citations reflect a very deep insight into, and dependence upon, OT themes" and that "it is apparent to virtually all students of Paul that he regarded the Scripture... as proceeding from God himself and therefore as enjoying ultimate authority." Furthermore, in connection with the function of Paul's letters, Schnabel (2008, 419-420) states:

The fact that Paul repeatedly mentions teachers as an integral part of each location establishes a principle: when followers of Jesus gather in their weekly meetings, they are taught from the Scriptures (the Old Testament), from the Jesus tradition and from the foundational traditions of the apostles (among them Paul himself) who explicate the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of

²⁸ Hence the importance of understanding that God's revelation is cumulative, and historical and literary context are important - rather than it being a collection of unconnected sentences or verses (and hence very different to the Qur'an).

²⁹ Even when questions are raised about the 'legitimacy' of Paul's use of an OT text, or dependence upon the Septuagint rather than Hebrew text, the point still holds that he was citing and explaining the OT Scriptures (also cf. Longenecker 1975).

Jesus the Messiah and Savior... The phrase ‘do you not know’, which Paul uses fourteen times, refers both to the theological information and ethical knowledge which Christians were familiar with, whether they fully understood all the ramifications or not.

Schnabel also comments (2004b, 1548-1459) that the early Christians from non-Jewish backgrounds still recognised the importance and relevance of the Jewish Scriptures, as demonstrated by Paul’s frequent quoting from them in his letters.³⁰

In 1 Peter, although it is not verse-by-verse ‘exposition’, the apostle frequently reflects on and teaches from OT Scripture – for example, from Leviticus 11:44-45 (1 Peter 1:16), Isaiah 40:6-8 (1 Peter 1:24-25), Isaiah 28:16 (1 Peter 2:6); and Psalm 34:12-16 (1 Peter 3:10-12). Mounce (1960, 114-115) also notes Peter citing, or alluding, to Isaiah 53 (in 1 Peter 2:21-25).

In the letter to the Hebrews, the emphasis of the writer is on God’s speaking to his people reaching its climax and fulfilment in the Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). Hence Jensen comments (2007, 169) how

Hebrews 3 and 4 uses Psalm 95 to show the contemporary nature of the Word of God. The psalm was not written in Moses’ day but centuries later, in David’s day. The people were already well settled in the Promised Land of rest at the time of the writing of the psalm. Yet the events of the Exodus are recalled to warn people to listen to the Word of God properly lest they fail to enter God’s rest. This is because the events of the Exodus were written down not for the sake of the generation who perished in the wilderness but for the sake of the generation upon whom the end of the ages comes – that is, Christians (see 1 Cor. 10:6,11).

God’s contemporary and necessary word to them, through what was written down then, is being addressed to NT believers today. This is further apparent from the author citing Psalm 95:7 (Hebrews 3:7), Jeremiah 31:33 (Hebrews 10:15) and Proverbs 3:11-12 (Hebrews 12:5). As Griffiths (2017, 107) notes more generally about the letter that

Hebrews essentially constitutes a series of expositions of Old Testament texts and themes in light of their fulfilment in Christ. It has been argued elsewhere that each of the structural units of Hebrews (of which there are perhaps eleven) consists of an Old Testament text (or texts), an explanation and application of

³⁰ *Contra* Thompson (1993, 944) who claims that “Paul’s letters indicate that he tended to cite the OT more frequently when writing to Jewish Christian congregations”.

that text to the contemporary congregation in light of Christ, and then an exhortation to respond appropriately...

Thus we have seen how the words of God are foundational within the OT, within the NT when the OT is applied to both Jews, and also to Jews and Gentiles. But also explicit within the NT is how these words of God are foundational to the creation of the NT itself.

**Words of God are foundational to the covenant –
within the creation of the NT**

At the close of Matthew's gospel Jesus commissions his apostles to be preachers of his teaching (Matthew 28:18-20), emphasising that they are to teach future disciples (to obey) everything that he has taught them. Schnabel (2004a, 360) observes how Jesus connects his own teaching to the teaching of the apostles and explains that

The teaching of the disciples in their missionary work and in their involvement in the local congregations is not mere dogma presented in theoretical propositions and memorized by the new converts; rather, it is, teaching content that can and must be put into practice in everyday life... The disciples convey what they as eyewitnesses have received from Jesus to new converts, who then as 'earwitnesses' will pass on the truth of Jesus Christ to the next generation. (Schnabel 2004a, 360-361)

Then in John's gospel, we read of Jesus' promises to the apostles

'Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.' (John 14:24-26)

Although Jesus does not refer to a covenant here, nevertheless there is a tacit understanding that his words are vital for subsequent generations of followers, given his threefold statement that showing love for him is evident by keeping (i.e. obeying) what he has taught (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). His promise of the Spirit's work here is specifically directed to the apostles, given their role in the future preservation and transmission of Jesus' teaching (cf. Carson 1991 505, 539-542; cf. John 16:12-15). With reference to this teaching of Jesus, Adam (2008, 226) notes that:

Here Jesus taught the disciples about the way in which the Spirit would direct them in their preaching and teaching ministry, and, as part of that ministry, bring about the writing of the Gospels, Acts, the epistles, and the book of Revelation. For the apostles were Jesus' representatives, and they taught, preached, and wrote God's words.

The apostles have a similar concern for this apostolic teaching to be passed on, with Paul instructing Timothy: "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Thus, from one generation of believers to the next, and from one church to another, the words of God will be preserved and handed on. Peter has a comparable concern for his audience - and implicitly future believers too - to have his written account of Jesus' teaching and ministry

And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:15-16)

The apostolic band were clearly in an exclusive position, as those who saw and heard Christ (cf. 1 John 1:1-5) or had researched and recorded what eyewitnesses had seen and heard (Luke 1:1-4).

Shaddix (2010, 38-40) makes a helpful distinction between "revelatory preaching" – which includes the recorded words of Moses and the OT prophets and, later, those of Jesus and the apostles in the NT - and "explanatory preaching" within Scripture (as we discovered, for example, with Ezra). He notes that "preachers in the Bible like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the apostles practiced what has been called *revelatory* preaching – they proclaimed God's Word as He revealed it for the very first time... But equally true is that they also did *explanatory* preaching based on what God had already revealed and inspired to be written." (Shaddix 2010, 38 – author's emphasis)

But as we shall see there is a clear command as to what their successors in the post-apostolic era should teach in their preaching ministry: Paul called it "the good deposit" (2 Timothy 1:14), and Jude referred to it as "the faith once delivered" (Jude 3). Shaddix comments that "the Pauline epistles are riddled with implications that such was the conviction in the early church" - as marked by Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4: 13 - and that "as the closing of the canon of Scripture marked the end of

God’s revelation of new truth, preaching naturally evolved to being exclusively explanatory in nature” (Shaddix 2010, 39-40).

Paul himself made reference to ‘traditions’ handed down to him in 1 Corinthians 15:2-3, and Frame (2010, 280) interprets this as the ‘tradition’ that Paul himself was passing on to Timothy, and which Timothy was to pass on to others (2 Timothy 2:2). Regarding 1 Timothy 1:15 and 3:1, Old (1998, 250) comments how “This was the way that Jewish rabbis had taught for centuries. Paul passed on to his pupils that which he had himself received.” And it is this pattern for apostolic ministry in the post-apostolic era, in which we still live, which is given in the Pastoral Epistles, as Meyer explains (2013, 222)

A shift takes place in Acts and the Epistles away from the direct preaching and teaching of the apostles themselves (such as Paul) to pastoral shepherds and elders who continue to preach the apostles’ teaching. In other words, we begin to witness a strong shift to today’s paradigm of stewardship: pastoral preaching... The difference is that pastors now preach the entrusted message of the apostles to specific congregations of believers.

We have already noted Paul’s injunction to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:11, 13, 15-16), within this new generation of pastor-teachers/preachers, as he instructs him to pass on Paul’s teaching/writing, also urging Timothy to carefully steward God’s Word since people’s response to it has eternal consequences (1 Timothy 6:20). Similar exhortations occur in 2 Timothy (1:13; 2:2; 2:14-15; 3:10; 3:16-17), since it is through the Scriptures that Timothy – and those others he appoints – will be “equipped for every good work” (cf. Frame 2010, 229-230).³¹ In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul is doing more than reminding him that the Scriptures are ‘God-breathed’: he is pointing to the sufficiency of the words of God to equip him, and future pastor-teachers/preachers, for ministry. Griffiths (2017, 57) comments:

The scriptural ‘word’ that is to be the substance of Timothy’s proclamation equips him ‘for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness’ (3:16), and so, in his preaching, he is to ‘reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching’ (4:2) These are functions that we would naturally associate, not with first-contact evangelism, but rather with the edification of God’s people; and that is evidently the context that Paul has in mind.

³¹ See also Griffiths 2017, 53-60.

In addition

In calling Timothy to this task and identifying him as a ‘man of God’, Paul sets Timothy the preacher in a line of continuity with himself and his own apostolic preaching. Furthermore, he sets Timothy and preachers who follow him in a line of continuity with authoritative speakers of God’s word in the Old Testament. (Griffiths, 2017, 60)

Titus’s appointment of elders in the church on Crete should reflect the same concern (Titus 1:9); and Paul teaches the entire church in Thessalonica about ‘holding fast to the teachings’ they had received from him, whether written or spoken (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Finally, in the book of Revelation, John is told to write down what he hears and sees (Revelation 1:1; 19:9; 21:5). This lends credence to the proposition that what God revealed was intentionally revealed, with the expressed purpose of passing it on to others.

In summary, given the place of the words of God as being central to his relationship with human beings, it makes sense that any contemporary preaching, teaching or exhortation for believers ought to communicate, explain and applying these words of God as clearly and faithfully as possible (cf. 1 Peter 4:11). This is consistent with the purpose of Scripture having been given.

CHAPTER 3: COMMON RECOGNISED FOUNDATIONS FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Historically, classic evangelicalism has encouraged preaching and teaching, often with a biblical text at the heart of a sermon or talk, with its meaning being explained. This is influenced no doubt by the apostle Peter's admonition, when discussing spiritual gifts and serving, that "whoever speaks" – thus including, most importantly, any who preach or teach – should instruct "as one who speaks oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11) to emphasise the gravity of this responsibility. We consider first the main systematic arguments which have been put forward, before turning to the 'examples' which might be appealed to from the Scriptures.

Theological arguments put forward for expository preaching

Packer's work *God has spoken* (1979) is based around three propositions, taken from a broad but deep grasp of Scripture: "God has spoken" (chapters 3-4), "God's Word Written" (chapter 5) and "God's Word Heard" (chapter 6). In his subsequent article, "Why preach?" (Packer 1999, 247-267) he addresses impediments to preaching today, and argues in favour of expository preaching using some of the classic NT texts (1999, 258), which will be considered below, but notes that application in preaching is essential. He states that God has chosen this means of communicating through human mouthpieces. Considering the Scriptures as the contemporary word of God for us today, gives rise to Packer's dictum that "Holy Scripture should be thought of as *God preaching*" (1979, 97 - author's emphasis).

Stott (1983, 92-134) lists five "Theological Foundations for Preaching": "A conviction about God", "A conviction about Scripture", "A Conviction about the Church", "A Conviction about the Pastorate" and "A Conviction about Preaching". His understanding of expository preaching springs from a theology of Scripture which emphasises the sufficiency, necessity and perspicuity of God's Word for the Christian life. Stott's convictions about Scripture - which profoundly shape his understanding of preaching - are rooted in his 'Conviction about God', and that in Scripture, and through his Son, "God has spoken" (Stott 1983, 94). Following from this comes his "Conviction about Scripture", that in the first place "Scripture is God's Word written" (1983, 96) and

that secondly “God still speaks through what he has spoken” (1983, 100). Here he notes the logic of the argument of the writer to the Hebrews in chapters 3 and 4 (that we saw in the previous chapter) who emphasises that God the Spirit is still speaking now through these same words of Psalm 95, and that he is not to be resisted: “‘*Today* if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts’” (1983, 101). The clear implication is that this exhortation applies equally to 21st century readers of these same Scriptures as it does to the letter’s original 1st century audience – as well as to those who originally read Numbers, those who sang or prayed Psalm 95 in the OT era. The third aspect of Stott’s “Conviction about Scripture” is that “God’s Word is powerful” (Stott 1983, 103), which he substantiates from God’s words about his Word through the prophet, in Isaiah 55:11.

He writes specifically about expository preaching, which is what he considers “true Christian preaching” (1983, 92 & 125), and in outlining “A Conviction about Preaching” he explains that expository preaching:

refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth), rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view... The ‘text’ in question could be a verse, a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book. The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said. (Stott 1983, 125-126)

Greidanus (1988, 15-16) - apart from noting that expository preaching gives the preacher confidence to preach God’s Word, and the listeners the confidence that they are hearing it – maintains that it allows Scriptures to be heard in church most clearly, and that from a pastoral-theological motive that it is easier to test what is being preached against the Scriptures (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:29). He states elsewhere that the preacher has a responsibility to “do justice to inspired words of Paul” in preaching well (Greidanus 1993, 739), which would mean expository preaching (giving his proposals for the approach to be adopted in Greidanus 1988, 1-16 and Greidanus 1993, 737-743). Greidanus (1988, 8) also claims that

The sermon as an exposition of the Scriptures can trace its roots from the Old Testament priesthood (Deut 31:9-13; Neh 8:1-8) to the synagogue (Luke 4:16-27; Acts 13:14-41; 17:1-3) to the New Testament church.

Adam (1996, 13-56) outlines three similar, though not identical, foundations for expository preaching to Packer and Stott. First is that “God has spoken” (1996, 15-26) and that he acts through his words: the creator God is able to communicate effectively through human words, rather than being silent or restricted in his ability to communicate through the speakers/writers in Scripture. A significant comment is that “his words remain powerful, and that without this historic revelation of God’s Words there can be no ministry of the Word.” (Adam 1996, 15) The second foundation is that “It is written” (Adam 1996, 27-35), referring to both OT and NT Scriptures as they describe a God who spoke but still continues to speak through the words he caused to be written down, in a variety of genres, within different cultures, over a period of time, by many different human authors. This word – initially spoken and then in writing – is a crucial part of God’s relationship with the people he had created and redeemed, as seen in the covenant (Exodus 34:27), and leading to what Packer (1979, 86-87) termed “cumulative revelation”, superintended by God. Thirdly, the call to “Preach the Word” (1996, 37-56) is the necessary and inescapable corollary from the apostle Paul as he exhorts the young pastor Timothy who was to continue faithful pastoral ministry.³²

Adam (1996, 37-39) describes Moses as “the great minister of the Word”, in speaking for God, writing down God’s words that he is given, reading these words to God’s people and then preaching them in Deuteronomy. Moses is succeeded by others in this ministry of the Word, for which he was a paradigm, including the promised prophets (Deuteronomy 18:14-22), and those priests who taught the law of Moses, including Ezra.

Adam (1996, 45-51) also notes Jesus’ ministry of the Word in preaching and teaching, continued through the apostles whom he appointed, and that this ministry after the apostolic era is carried on by elders “who labour in teaching and preaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). He concludes this section of the book (Adam 1996, 55-56) with several implications: “God’s words are effective”, “God’s words are part of his self-revelation”, “God has appointed the ministry of the word”, “God has preserved his words for us today”, “God has human agents in giving his revelation and preserving his words”, and that “God’s revelation is both historical and contemporary”. Furthermore Adam claims that the writer to the Hebrews is an example of an expository preacher within the NT,

³² He subsequently develops this further (Adam 2008).

perhaps pointing to the clearest rationale of a biblical theology of God's preached Word (Adam 1996, 78-79).

Chapell (2005) adds to these convictions, with reference to the weakness of the apostle in 1 Corinthians chapters 1-3:

Scripture's portrayal of its own potency challenges us always to remember that the Word preached, rather than the *preaching* of the Word, accomplishes heaven's purposes. Preaching that is true to Scripture converts, convicts, and eternally changes the souls of men and women because God's Word is the instrument of divine compulsion, not because preachers have any power in themselves to stimulate such godly transformations. (2005, 27- author's emphasis)

Thus it might be argued that the power of preaching lies within the Spirit of God taking the Word of God (i.e. the Scriptures), and that therefore the closer a sermon is in understanding and faithfully communicating the biblical text then the greater its 'potency', although there are undoubtedly many other vital factors that come into play.

Carson (2007), after explaining how we need to understand that God's revelation comes to us through his Word - and in reliance on God's Spirit to take that Word into the hearts and minds of the listeners - proceeds to state that

to remain true to this basic understanding of what preaching is, the preacher must be committed to the primacy of *expository* preaching. We must take pains to debunk what many people think 'exposition' and expository' mean... Exposition is simply the unpacking of what is there. In a narrative text (e.g. 2 Samuel) or major epic (e.g. Job), fine exposition may focus on several chapters at once. If a sermon takes two or three short passages from disparate parts of the Bible *and explains each of them carefully and faithfully within its own context*, it remains an expository sermon, for it is unpacking what the biblical text or texts actually say. If we expect God to re-reveal himself by his own words, then our expositions must reflect as faithfully as possible what God actually said when the words were given to us in Scripture. (Carson 2007, 176-177 - author's emphasis)

Meyer (2013) seeks to trace a rationale through the whole of Scripture for what Paul's charge to Timothy - "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:1) - actually means. His thesis is that "the ministry of the Word in Scripture is *stewarding and heralding God's Word in such a way that people encounter God through his Word.*" (Meyer 2013, 21 - author's emphasis)

But are there examples of such explanation and application within Scripture?

‘Examples’ in OT Scripture

Helm (2007, 250 n53) observes at least three significant examples of expository preachers. The first is Moses, where he identifies that the book of Deuteronomy consists of three sermons: chapters 1-4, 5-26 and 27-30, and that this is “not a second law being given out by God but *an exposition of the law being given by Moses*” (my emphasis).³³ The second example is the priest Ezra in Nehemiah chapter 8 (noted in the last chapter - when Ezra also preached in an expository manner, taking up most of the day! The third example is Jesus Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7), which Helm describes as “the most extensive exposition of Old Testament texts in the New Testament”. (2007, 250-251 n53) Helm also notes that in Luke 4:18-19 Jesus reads aloud from Isaiah 61, and then preaches from that passage – and that the likely chronology of events, with the Sermon of the Mount³⁴ following this, suggest that the first two Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 are drawn from Isaiah 61:1-2.

The ‘example’ of Jesus Christ

Building on our brief consideration in the last chapter, Matthew tells us that Jesus “went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel” (Matthew 4:23). Passages such as this and Mark 1:30 (cf. Luke 4:14-15) show the emphasis Jesus himself gave to preaching and teaching, as he understood his own ministry to be fulfilling that – quite apart from other explanatory comments he made (e.g. Mark 1:38-39). In Luke 4:16-21, when Jesus preaches in the synagogue we are given a particular and more detailed description of what this looked like, certainly on one occasion, as he read and then preached from Isaiah 61. It would be reasonable to infer that this was not a particularly unusual occurrence, at least within a synagogue setting. Mounce (1960, 42) argues, given the initially positive response of the listeners in verse 22, that Jesus must have given some kind of explanation as to what the passage

³³ Helm (2007, 250) does not give any details to support his claim, but Wright (1996, 4-5) outlines a case for Deuteronomy chapters 12-26 being an expansion of the Decalogue. Millar (1998, 106-108) is not convinced that there is a clear pattern, whereby the structure of the Decalogue corresponds to these chapters, adding that there is no quotation of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 12-26. Both recognise, however, that there is a strong connection, with which I would agree.

³⁴ Or, better, ‘the Sermon on the Plain’ (in Luke 6)?

from Isaiah meant, and how it applied, given his claim in verse 21 to have fulfilled this prophecy.

From passages such as this, Old (1998, 10) claims that

Jesus was himself an expository preacher, as the Gospels make clear at several points. To be sure, we get only a few brief glimpses of the preaching of Jesus in the Gospels, but those brief glimpses show him explaining the text of Scripture as the classic expositors have done before and after him.

Although we have very few details, Old (1998, 135-137) observes Jesus' use of the OT to explain his identity and ministry to his disciples soon after his resurrection, in Luke 24:25-27 & 44-48, teaching (and therefore likely expounding) the OT Scriptures about all of these: his suffering, his resurrection, the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness in his name, for all the nations, starting from Jerusalem:

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that *everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms* must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "*Thus it is written*, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:44-47, my emphasis)

This in turn, Old explains (1998, 137) would seem to be what the apostle Paul refers to when he wrote to the Corinthians about the 'tradition' which he has passed on to them (1 Corinthians 15:1-2): "that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the Scriptures*" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, my emphasis).

Old (1998, 114-122) also notes that the context within which Jesus began his ministry was that of the synagogue (e.g. Mark 1:21). That is where a significant part - though obviously by no means all - of his preaching and teaching took place, together with teaching in the temple in Jerusalem (e.g. much of Mark chapters 11-12), in a manner much like that of a rabbi with his disciples in a rabbinical school. In this context, it is notable that Jesus cites Psalm 110 (Mark 12:10-11) and Psalm 118 (in Mark 12:35-37), and effectively provides brief expositions of these - along with even shorter citations of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 (in Mark 11:17) - to the Jewish leaders and crowd in the temple.

But given the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and the consequential issue of whether the preacher is expected to (or could!) imitate him, perhaps the apostles are better examples to imitate?

The ‘example’ of the apostles?

Of all the preachers mentioned in Scripture, given their proximity to us within the Bible’s chronology, it would not be surprising to find the NT apostles being brought forth as evidence for expository preaching. Hence Old (1998, 169) claims that Peter’s speech in Acts 2:14-36 is an exposition of Scripture – predominantly of Joel 2:28-32, given its lengthy citation by Peter - with supporting texts from Psalm 16:8-11, Psalm 110:1 and Isaiah 57:19. Likewise, although he draws legitimate intertextual connections between Peter’s sermon in Acts 3 and the Servant Song of Isaiah 53, it is hard to sustain an argument that these are clear expositions of Joel 2 or Isaiah 53, even though Peter identifies Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of the promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15-19. (Old 1998, 169-172) In a similar vein, Mounce (1960, 113-115) describes Peter’s speech in Acts 3:12-26 as explaining the fulfilment of Isaiah 53 by Jesus in his suffering and resurrection. But again this is not necessarily an exposition of the OT passage but rather is a catena of quotations of Scripture which the apostle is drawing upon to show that Jesus is the promised Christ.

Paul’s practice of preaching in the synagogues – for example, the lengthy summary given by Luke in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-43) as a typical sermon, and more briefly in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2-3) - displays a similar approach to show the fulfilment of OT Scripture in Christ and his ministry. And when speaking to Gentile audiences, such as in Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) and Athens (Acts 17:22-32), whilst Paul communicates biblical truths to his hearers, it is done without Scriptural citation, and therefore cannot be claimed to be an exposition of any biblical text.

But this approach, of citing or referring to several OT passages within a sermon, rather than the systematic exposition of a passage, is the most obvious and frequent manner in which the apostles use the OT, certainly in Acts. Indeed, Scharf (2010, 68-85) has scrutinised the apostles’ preaching in the book of Acts, and legitimately raises the question “Were the apostles expository preachers?” Scharf urges us (2010, 65) to be

willing to re-examine what we consider to be ‘expository’ preaching, as he reiterates the unique position and role of the apostles, as they preach Christ from the OT – whether it is Peter (in Acts 2:14-39; 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-43) or Paul (in Acts 13:16-41; 17:2-3; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 26:1-23; 28:25-28) – or those like Stephen (Acts 7:2-53) and Philip (Acts 8:26-33) who, although they were not apostles, were from the apostolic band.

He notes (Scharf 2010, 74-75) that Philip’s teaching of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40 should be considered as an exceptional instance of ‘exposition’. Unlike the occasions for earlier sermons of Peter - such as the pouring out of the Spirit in Acts 2, or the healing of the lame man in Acts 3 – Philip’s speech was not given as an explanation of an event, but is a response to an individual’s question as he read OT Scripture. (Although Philip is addressing an individual, others may well have been present given the Ethiopian’s status and circumstances while he travelled). Thus, beginning with

that very text, Isaiah 53, Philip preached the gospel of Jesus... This conversation comes close to expository preaching as many contemporary Christian preachers practice it. Sensitive to the listeners' situation, the Spirit-filled preacher opens his mouth, begins with a biblical text, proclaims the gospel of Jesus, and invites a definite response of faith (v. 35). Philip's focused sermon was also true to the larger context of Isaiah where later on, in 56:3-4, outsiders such as eunuchs are included in God's people. (Scharf 2010, 74-75)

Turning to Paul’s preaching in Athens, in Acts 17:22-31, Scharf (2010, 80) notes how Paul engages the Areopagus, proclaiming the gospel but without any quotation of OT Scripture: “Paul's thematic sermon then was biblical in both content and aim despite the fact that it had neither explicit nor general textual citations.”

Overall, Scharf (2010, 85) concludes that the apostles were preaching that the Christ is Jesus, using the biblical texts, and there were occasions when they did not quote from OT Scripture even when the audience was Jewish. He also traces (2010, 85-89) the way that various authors – including Chapell, Helm and Ryken - have sought to define ‘expository preaching’ and he proposes that the apostles’ practice as recorded in Acts does not fall within their category of expository preaching:

So, were the apostles expository preachers? If by that question we are asking whether they always selected a discernable thought unit from the OT and drove home to their first century listeners what the text's human author evidently intended to say to his initial hearers, the answer is ‘No.’ If, however we are asking if they, led by the Spirit and sensitive to the needs of their listeners, saw

in a phrase, in biblical expressions, or in larger texts of Scripture some confirming testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus - truth of which they were eyewitnesses - and preached that, then the answer is a confident 'Yes!' They proclaimed what was really there but to which their eyes had to be opened. (Scharf 2010, 89)

However, given their distinct role and exclusive place in salvation history, the apostles' 'non-expository' preaching style, at least within the book of Acts, should perhaps not surprise us. They were proclaiming the fulfilment of God's promises in the OT about the Messiah, and so although it would make sense for them to refer to these Scriptures when preaching or engaging in discussion with their fellow Jews, the situation was very different with Gentiles who were ignorant of those promises and unfamiliar with those Scriptures. A different starting point for the discussion would likely be required, which is indeed what we observe with Paul (as noted by Scharf, above). But this does not negate the (possible) subsequent practice of expounding those Scriptures – especially when we grasped how central a place those Scriptures have in the relationship of those believers with their LORD, as we discovered in the previous chapter.

Scharf (2010, 89-93) notes the way in which the apostles were seeking to connect with their audiences – and also that they were eye witnesses to the risen Christ (even Paul) - which Christians today are not, though we do have the eyewitness testimony recorded for us in the canon of the NT. He urges (Scharf 2010, 92-93) us, as did the apostle, 'not to go beyond what is written' (1 Corinthians 4:6) , and that the apostles' examples of preaching, "though not exposition as many define it, should nevertheless stretch our own thinking and thus make our preaching more biblical instead of less so." He comments

Given the differences, our commission is slightly different. The apostles were commissioned to bear witness to Jesus (1:8) but saw themselves as preaching and teaching the word of the Lord (4:29-31; 8:25; 10:36; 13:5, 46, 49; 15:36; 18:11). They saw others as receiving and hearing it (8:14; 11:1; 13:44; 19:10). *Our charge, like Timothy's, is to 'preach the word' (2 Tim 4:2).* So, we do what they did, but with a different starting place. They began with the gospel events - things they saw with their own eyes - and preached Jesus as the Christ. They cited Scripture as God's affirmation that Jesus perfectly fulfills the role of Messiah. *We start with Scripture which testifies both to the events themselves and to their God-ordained significance.* The apostles listened to their hearers and were sensitive to their situations. Our approach should be the same. They saw Christ in all of Scripture; so should we. (Scharf 2010, 90 – my emphasis)

Thus, despite the non-expository ‘model’ that the apostles seem to provide in their evangelistic preaching recorded in Acts, we have seen there is still a solid foundation for expository preaching.

But before we leave the apostles’ preaching in Acts, we must briefly consider Paul’s own description of his pattern of ministry, of which he reminds the elders of the Ephesian church during his final speech to them in the context of opposition and false teaching which threatened the church (Acts 20:18-35). Scharf does mention this (2010, 80-81), with the comments that

Paul’s strategy for ministering the word places a premium on faithfulness to all God has spoken and to his mandate to get that whole message to the entire audience for whom God intends it... His absorption with Scripture - both displaying and proclaiming its message - was the most prominent feature of his ministry. (Scharf 2010, 81)

Paul’s expressed conviction - that “I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27) – raises the question as to what this counsel consists of. Peterson (2009, 568) proposes that “it refers more precisely to the whole plan of God for humanity and the created order revealed in the Scriptures and fulfilled in Jesus Christ” and that this “can be discerned from an examination of his letter to the Romans, which he had just written and sent ahead of him at this time.” In addition, as we discovered in the previous chapter (p30 above), the way that Luke describes Paul’s practice in Rome in Acts 28:23-24 suggests that the examples of Paul’s evangelistic preaching outlined earlier in Acts may not be the complete picture of the apostle’s preaching/teaching practice, particularly when he was given the opportunity to speak for a longer period.

Furthermore the close connection between Paul’s explaining about the kingdom of God and Jesus “from the law of Moses and the Prophets” points to a similar style to that of Jesus teaching the apostolic group in Luke 24:25-27 and 24:44-49. Although he mentions this passage, Scharf (2010, 84-85) does not follow up what this ‘expounding’ indicates beyond commenting that it would have been a synthesis of various biblical texts.

However, from the substance of Scharf’s argument above, it would *not* appear legitimate to claim that the apostles’ speeches and preaching in most of Acts is

exposition in the way defined earlier. (This touches on the broader issue as to what extent we should consider the narrative of the book of Acts as normative rather than descriptive, but this would take us beyond the scope of this thesis).

This therefore brings us to the point where we must consider what other support for expository preaching can be gathered from Scripture.

Explicit biblical commands and exhortations

As is evident from the reasons given by Stott, Adam, and Packer above, it is the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) which give us the clearest teaching about, and normative pattern for, pastoral ministry in the post-apostolic period. This is where some of the textual support for expository preaching is strongest.

Paul wrote to Timothy, whom he had appointed to ensure the continuity of faithful ministry in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3-7), in a context where false teaching was growing as teachers and those whom they taught abandoned the faith (4:1ff). The only qualification in 1 Timothy which Paul mandated for an elder/overseer, apart from godly character - which seems to be the priority (1 Timothy 3:2-7) - is that he is to be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). To this is added Paul’s instructions to Timothy himself in 1 Timothy 4:11-16, whereby he is to hold to the apostolic truth he received from the apostle (‘these things’) and communicate it to the church:

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

As with the practice in the synagogue (see below), there was to be both public reading of Scripture and teaching/preaching from it, with Paul encouraging Timothy to persevere in this kind of lifestyle and ministry (v15-16).

In Paul's follow-up letter, 2 Timothy, after providing the grounds for the authoritative place of OT Scripture within Christian theology and behaviour in 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Paul solemnly charges Timothy with the great importance and responsibility of preaching the apostolic message (2 Timothy 4:1-2). The latter would comprise at least OT Scripture fulfilled in Christ - if not also those NT Scriptures which existed in written form (perhaps some Gospel texts, given Paul's apparent citation in 1 Timothy 5:18 of Jesus' words preserved most likely in Matthew 10:10) - and the verbal message which Paul had given to Timothy and which Timothy himself has been told to guard (2 Timothy 1:14), and hand on to others who will, in their turn pass it on to even more (2 Timothy 2:2):

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

When one remembers the continuity between 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and 4:1-5 it makes this point even clearer.

Similarly in Paul's epistle to Titus, the elders whom Titus is to appoint (Titus 1:5) are to continue the ministry which Paul had instituted, and which Titus had continued and was now to preserve through their appointment. After the almost identical requirements for godly character (Titus 1:7-8; cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7), the elder's ability to maintain and teach sound doctrine, in an atmosphere of false teaching pervading the church, is spelled out:

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. (Titus 1:9-11)

Carson (2007, 174-175) notes this great emphasis in the Pastoral Epistles on the pastor/elder being able to teach God's Word, as noted in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9. He also points to the elders in 1 Peter 5:1-4 as having the roles of elder and 'shepherd', whose responsibility is to feed God's flock, from God's Word. He then explains that

preaching means what he terms ‘re-revelation - which is what I have described as ‘re-preaching’ in this thesis:

Across the centuries, God disclosed himself – he revealed himself in great events... he disclosed himself supremely in the person of his Son. But very commonly he revealed himself by his word. Perennially we read, ‘The word of the Lord came to such-and-such a prophet.’ So when that Word is re-announced, there is a sense in which God, who revealed himself by that Word in the past, is re-revealing himself by that same Word once again. Preachers must bear this in mind. Their aim is more than to explain the Bible, however important that aim is. (Carson 2007, 176)

These brief examples from the Pastoral Epistles highlight the important difference between Christ’s apostles in the NT and any Christian preacher today: Paul (and similarly the other apostles) sets in place pastor-teachers who will guard, explain and apply – and thus pass on - the God-given gospel.

It is perhaps worth noting, that there is no clear instance of a section of the NT itself being expounded within the NT canon, since the current NT canon did not exist as such until decades later.³⁵ However there are almost certainly references to some of Jesus’ teaching being cited or alluded to in, for example in 1 Timothy 5: 18 (citing Matthew 10:10), James 5:12 (echoing Jesus’s words in Matthew 5:34-37), and Acts 20:35 (possibly applying Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:8).

The image and concept of ‘stewardship’

But in addition to these explicit commands in the Pastoral Epistles for those who are pastors/elders, there is a very significant concept for the role of the preacher/teacher which Stott (1961, 9-28) identifies - that of being a steward, which is also picked up by Meyer (2013). This image of 'stewardship' in Paul’s epistles (and, I would add, perhaps at two places in the gospels, in Luke 12:41-43 and John 21:15-17) implies a careful looking after and passing on of something of great value:

The Christian ministry is a sacred stewardship. The presbyter-bishop was described by Paul as ‘God’s steward’. Paul regarded himself and Apollos as ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’... this is not a designation for apostles only, since he applies it to Apollos as well as himself, and Apollos was not an apostle

³⁵ Griffiths (2012, 42-46) however notes that the letter to the Hebrews treats itself as Scripture.

like Paul. ‘Steward’ is a descriptive title for all who have the privilege of preaching God’s Word... (Stott 1961, 19)³⁶

Stott continues by explaining how in the NT the ‘mystery’ Paul writes of is not a hidden secret, but what God has made known through the gospel (Ephesians 3:2-6), and thus the preachers in the NT and today are stewards of this open secret, which is now available to us in the canon of Scripture. Stott (1961, 21) elucidates further when he relates this to Paul’s charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy:

...the apostle lays great emphasis in writing to Timothy on his responsibility to ‘guard the deposit’. The precious gospel had been committed to his faithful care. It was a ‘good deposit’. He must stand guard over it, like sentinels over a city or warders in a gaol. If we are good stewards, we shall not presume to ‘tamper with God’s word’, nor to ‘corrupt’ it. Our task is ‘the open statement of the truth’. This, so far as it goes, is a good definition of preaching. Preaching is a ‘manifestation’, *phanerōsis*, of the truth which stands written in the Scriptures. Therefore every sermon should be, in some sense, an expository sermon.³⁷

Hence the idea of being a steward of God’s Word, given in the OT Scriptures and also the apostolic writings which ultimately come to be the NT, implies a grave responsibility for subsequent Christian leaders preserving and passing on these writings for the benefit of both present and future believers (2 Timothy 2:2).

Added to the theological rationale and Scriptural imperatives seen so far, there was also an historical background of reading and preaching from the OT against which Jesus’ practice and the apostles’ teachings must be seen.

Preaching in the synagogue up to 1st century AD

Old (1998, 9) - who identifies expository preaching as “the systematic explanation of Scripture done on a week-by-week, or even a day-by-day, basis at the regular meeting of the congregation” – describes how the “practice goes back to the worship of the synagogue long before the time of Jesus, when the Law was read through Sabbath by Sabbath, beginning each time where one had left off the Sabbath before”. He explains that the intention was that the whole of the Law would be regularly read aloud in public, much as it has been done in the time of Ezra. And he claims (Old 1998, 93) that it was during the centuries shortly before Christ’s birth that expository

³⁶ Stott footnotes the two biblical references cited here as Titus 1:9 and 1 Corinthians 4:1.

³⁷ Stott footnotes the three biblical references cited here as 2 Corinthians 4:2, 17.

preaching came to the fore: “Sermons... gave primary attention to what Scripture actually says. Expository preaching discussed the text, its grammar and vocabulary.... Preaching presented the Scriptures because the Scriptures themselves had authority.” He discusses (1998, 94-110) the development of weekly reading through and teaching from the OT Scriptures in the synagogues - and also preaching in the Rabbinical schools. Alongside other forms of synagogue preaching, Old notes the development of the synagogue and its connection to Ezra’s practice in Nehemiah 8 and expands on its practice by the beginning of the 1st century AD (Old 1998, 102-103):

The preaching in the synagogue had as its aim the interpretation and application of the lessons read in worship. It was understood that interpretation of the Scriptures had to be at two levels. The first level involved the more straightforward matter of interpreting the classical Hebrew into the language of the people... The translation was only the first level of the interpretation. The second level was the sermon. The sermon was supposed to be a learned interpretation and application of the text. It was supposed to teach, admonish, inspire, and comfort the congregation.

Obviously this is the practice in the synagogue, not the Christian church, as the people gathered – and it would not necessarily have needed to be the practice which the early Christians adopted, but neither would the apostles necessarily have rejected it outright. But in fact it does provide a helpful background to the approach so frequently adopted by the apostle Paul, as we observe in Acts. Thus as Schnabel (2008, 335) comments about Paul’s common practice in his evangelistic preaching when arriving in a new city:

As a former student of the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel, he could reckon with the opportunity to explain the Law and the Prophets for the synagogue congregation. In his synagogue sermons, he used the readings from the Torah and the Prophets to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the Promised Messiah.

Christian preaching over the last two millennia

Old also claims that expository preaching was the norm during the first five centuries of the church (1998, 10). His work on early Christian preaching in the post-apostolic era (Old 1998, 251-352) briefly covers the 2nd century AD *Didache* and Justin Martyr’s *Apology*, and Tertullian and Hippolytus, and sermons by Melito, Clement and Origen. Old’s conclusion (1998, 251) is that

it was the primary task of the Christian preachers of the second and third centuries to pass on this witness, that in Christ is the fulfillment of the Law, that in him the visions of the prophets have been realized. This was the heart of the earliest Christian preaching.

Again from a more historical perspective, Adam (2008, 108) records that “the practice of preaching through books of the Bible sequentially, verse by verse and chapter by chapter” was the usual practice of Augustine and John Chrysostom, and that

Zwingli, Luther and Calvin rediscovered it at the Reformation. It is the obvious way to preach the Bible, as it reflects the way in which God caused Scripture to be written (in books, not isolated texts or paragraphs). It enables us to imitate God in respecting the humanity of the authors and their style and historical context. It also reflects the usual way of reading books, and models a good use of Scripture to the congregation.

This brings to a close the examination of the more ‘systematic’ theological arguments, and passages of Scripture most frequently appealed to, along with the historical background, for expository preaching. It builds on, the biblical theology of the previous chapter, and which is not undermined if the apostles do not seem to model expository preaching in their sermons in Acts or in writing the letters.

But as we shall see in the next chapter, faithful expository preaching involves more than simply regurgitating the text of Scripture which was given in a previous era.

CHAPTER 4: CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE WORDS OF GOD IN OT & NT SCRIPTURES

Theologians writing for or in the Majority world concur that contextualisation and contextual theology are essential for authentic Christian discipleship and for the gospel to connect with their own cultures.

I will argue in this chapter that such contextualisation occurs within the Bible itself, because it is God's method of applying his historic revelation in new contexts, and this historic revelation includes his verbal revelation. (We will discover this process both in the OT and in the NT, where it can be 'contextualised' for a different culture, and/or a different time i.e. still to a Jewish audience but at a later period in history.) But in recent decades there has also been (renewed) interest in the contextualised nature of Scripture itself, particularly within the NT, and most notably in the apostles' preaching and writing in the epistles. As we shall see, the epistles are not the only place in which contextualisation is evident in Scripture.

So far I have argued that Scripture has been written and given by our gracious God, and that it has a central place for his relationship with human beings (as seen in the covenants). But its purpose has included it being addressed not only to its original audience but also to subsequent generations of believers.

It is helpful to identify two ways in which Scripture can be seen to be 're-preached' and contextualised, although it is not especially beneficial to consider these as separable. We can distinguish between these two ways, but also see their similarities.

The first way is that of earlier Scripture being taken and applied to the same (Jewish) people group at a time later within their history, mainly within the OT: an example would be Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy being a 're-preached' form of the message of (parts of) the Pentateuch to the next generation of Israelites. Jesus' teaching to his disciples is another (throughout John's gospel in chapters 2-15), as he constantly makes reference to the OT and interprets his ministry in the light of it. Stephen's speech to the Jewish leaders in Acts 7 is another example, as his sermon is a summary and exposition tracing Israel's history recorded in the OT narratives, and applying it to his 1st century AD Jewish listeners. Hebrews is a similar case, though there the Jewish

people have become Christians. But the OT is clearly being re-applied to them in their new situation.

The second way is when Scripture is taken and applied to another culture altogether (i.e. outside its Judaistic roots), as happened throughout the NT era as the gospel is planted in Gentile cultures. This is what we observe in Acts, such as the discussion at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and the NT epistles. This is what we will consider in this chapter. This of course reflected and expressed God's plan to create a people for himself, firstly through his chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, and then also through them to the Gentiles (Ephesians 2 and 3).

When considering "The gospel and contextualization" Goldsworthy (2006, 280) raises the question: "Is there a biblical theology of contextualization?" He perceives that there is, and that contextualisation begins with God's communication with the first man and woman in Eden, and then traces this through Scripture (Goldsworthy 2006, 280-288). As well as pointing to the example of Ezra and the priests in Nehemiah 8:8, he proposes that Christ's incarnation is God's supreme act of contextualising and adapting himself so as to reveal himself within a specific culture and time. He then traces out

some of the cultural adaptations in the unfolding of redemptive revelation. In the beginning God speaks to Adam and Eve in human language and establishes his word as the medium of divine-human communication. In doing so God is not invading some alien culture, but rather is establishing the first human culture by his word. (Goldsworthy 2006, 280)

Thus it should be neither surprising nor inconceivable that God's revelation is contextualised - despite humanity's Fall in Genesis 3, and God's deliberate confusing of human language at Babel (Genesis 11) - since it is after these epoch-defining events that Abram's call and God's clear progressive self-disclosure through words and word-interpreted events take place. Furthermore Goldsworthy explains that (2006, 285):

The use of the Old Testament by New Testament writers must be considered as a form of contextualization. It involves a reinterpretation of events and promises of the Old Testament into the new context revealed by the advent of the Christ.

Before we turn to this however, we must consider whether there is a case for contextualisation even within the OT itself.

Contextualisation within the OT?

It should not be surprising that there is less evidence of contextualisation of Scripture or preaching in the OT, given Israel's relative cultural isolation from the surrounding nations, specifically when God has instructed his people to be distinct from those cultures (e.g. the prohibitions outlined in Deuteronomy 23:2-8, where they were not to form alliances or marry across cultures),³⁸ though Gentile individuals such as Rahab and Ruth do enter the OT covenant community as exceptions, as they embrace the covenant and adopt the LORD as their God. In the NT there is a change, however, with the clear emphasis on the church taking the gospel message to the rest of the world (Matthew 28:18-20), with the dividing wall between believing Jew and Gentile destroyed (Ephesians 2:11-22) as they together come to Christ. As we shall see, this requires a significant shift in contextualisation of God's Word. Nevertheless, it is first worth considering the OT to revisit Moses' 're-preaching' of Exodus in Deuteronomy as we examined in chapter 2.

Deuteronomy

As Adam comments (2004, 53), "the basic structure of the theology of Deuteronomy is that God has spoken, and given his words to Moses to pass on to the people. The people must hear, believe, obey and preserve these words for future generations". And in the book is a 'new' Torah for the people as they enter a new environment. Though it is God's earlier, timeless words, they are preached for a new context - and this new context, with the Israelites now on the border of the land, is reflected in the adaptation or 'revision' of several of the laws. McConville (2002, 121-122) notes these and suggests reasons for such 'revision', given the new situation for Israel.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses 're-preaches' in summary form the salient points of the message of the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. (I am assuming Mosaic authorship for a substantial part of these books, even if they were subsequently 'edited', for example to account for the details about Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34).

³⁸ C.f. Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989, 4-7.

After commenting that “Moses’ sermon demonstrates several important lessons for preachers”, Barker (2011, 51) continues:

Moses bases his sermon on the Bible, at least on the first four preceding books of the OT. *He shows both faithfulness to the text or tradition, but is able to draw out appropriate emphases to make his point.* He assumes some knowledge of these texts and thus shows some subtlety in allusions, especially to Genesis 15 but also in his treatment of Numbers 13-14. However, *Moses is always faithful to the original intentions of those texts as he reapplies them to a new generation.* (author’s emphasis)

We should be alert to this observation that Moses has taken account of the literary and historical context of the original message, in the manner that Robinson (chapter 1) and Stott and Adam (chapter 3) are concerned with, for responsible expository preaching. Thus Moses does not simply repeat or regurgitate God’s Word, of which he himself had earlier been the messenger: he takes and applies it to their specific situation, in a slightly new way. One small example is the inclusion of the word ‘field’ (or ‘land’ in NIV) in the tenth commandment in the Decalogue as it is recorded in Deuteronomy.³⁹ A comparison of the historical context of Exodus and Deuteronomy acknowledges a change from the nomadic lifestyle of the Israelites in the Wilderness to their imminent occupation of the Promised Land, where owning (or coveting) a field – which previously had not been a possibility - could now become a challenge:

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's. (Exodus 20:17)

And you shall not covet your neighbour's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbour's house, *his field*, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's. (Deuteronomy 5:21)

Thus Moses’ ‘re-preaching’ of this commandment from the Exodus Decalogue takes the Israelites’ new circumstances into account.

Another example is the new (or additional) reason given for keeping the Sabbath in Deuteronomy 5. In the Decalogue in Exodus, the commandment was rooted Sabbath-observance in God’s creation:

³⁹ I am aware of other differences, such as the reason for the fourth commandment, and the ordering of the phrases in the tenth commandment, in Deuteronomy chapter 5.

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:11)

But in ‘Exodus re-preached’, the basis for the commandment is God’s deliverance at the Red Sea:

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:15)

These are not contradictory reasons for Sabbath-observance, but indicate an additional reason for the reapplication of God’s truth for God’s people living in a new context. Old expresses it thus: “As we find in Deuteronomy, *the Law is interpreted and applied to the situation at hand*. The interpretation is not a matter of historical reconstruction but rather of contemporary application. In other words, Deuteronomy has a keen sense of hermeneutics.” (Old 1998, 39 – my emphasis)

OT prophetic literature

We have already noted in chapter 2 that, as well as bringing new revelation from the LORD, the ministry of the OT prophets generally involved applying God’s Law to their own times. One example is the way in which the message of the prophets Haggai (Haggai 1:5-11; 2:15-19) and Malachi (Malachi 3:8-12) bring the language and terms of the covenant blessings and cursings of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 to bear on the people. They give the reason for the people’s current plight and urge them to respond in faith and obedience, as they ‘re-preach’ the Law.

Ezra

In chapter 2, we observed that Nehemiah 8 records how Ezra and the priests explained and ‘re-preached’ the Law to the people of Judah who had returned from Babylon. There would have been an element of interpretation involved in the new post-Exile context, as Goldsworthy (2006, 279) notes how

in Nehemiah 8:8 the law was read to the returned exiles, and a group of Levites gave the sense so that the people could understand the reading. Whether it was a linguistic necessity due to the Hebrew of the Scriptures having been superseded by Aramaic as the spoken language, or a religious one due to the people's new post-exilic situation, does not alter the fact that a process of interpretation was needed.

Clines (1981, 112-113) believes that taking the Torah and applying it to a new situation, as mentioned in chapter 2, would involve five different ways in which there is "legal development" of the Torah: "creation of facilitating law", "revision of facilitating law", "creation of a new prescription from a precedent in Pentateuchal law", "re-definition of categories, always in the direction of greater comprehensiveness", and "integration of distinct and therefore potentially competing prescription". He also claims that further on in the book, in Nehemiah chapter 10, "After the general agreement to 'walk in God's law' (v.30), particular *halakot* follow. Every *halakah* here has something novel about it, I would argue, but at the same time it represents the result of exegetical work upon previously existing laws." (Clines 1981, 111)

He identifies the following connections between Nehemiah 10 and the earlier Torah, among others:⁴⁰ of Nehemiah 10:35 to Leviticus 6:1-6, regarding the carrying of firewood; of 10:39 to Deuteronomy 14:23-36, as it relates to the collection of tithes (and he notes how this also appears in Malachi 3:10); Nehemiah 10:33 to Exodus 30:11-16, as it pertains to a levy for the sanctuary/temple; Nehemiah 10:36 to Deuteronomy 26:2; the Exodus 20:9-10//Deuteronomy 5:12-14 prohibition of work on the Sabbath more closely defined to include the prohibition against buying in Nehemiah 10:32; and the prohibition of marriage to foreigners (Deuteronomy 7:1-4) is now being extended to apply to all people in the land (Nehemiah 10:31). From this he draws out four exegetical principles from what is presented in Nehemiah 10, stating that "nothing in Nehemiah 10 is radically new; every *halakah* has some connection with a Pentateuchal prescription" (Clines 1981, 113) making a number of observations on these exegetical principles (Clines 1981, 113-114).

These three brief examples – from different biblical genres and periods within Israel's history – indicate that the teaching of the earlier Scripture required interpretation and application of that Word within a new context, which included an exhortation to obey this newly applied Word. Thus a precedent is already set in the OT

⁴⁰ Clines uses the verse numbering of the Hebrew text of Nehemiah 10, which is one less in English translations.

for the ‘contextual re-preaching’ of God’s Word, and moving to the NT we see this pattern continue.

Contextualisation within the gospels

The four gospel accounts can be considered as contextualised documents, accounts of Jesus’ life and work which are definitely intended to address specific audiences. This does not mean that their content is inaccurate or biased, but rather that they reflect the particular concerns of the authors and first readers. Ericson (1978, 71), though he writes more generally about contextualisation in the area of missions, comments that

it is important to recognize that the New Testament literature arises out of a context. The authors did not so much intend to be transhistorical as historical; they did not so much intend to be transcultural as culturally relevant; and they did not intend for their message to be antisocial or asocial, but directly instructive as to the proper expression of the Christian faith. In other words, the New Testament is a prime example of contextualization, and...there are patterns in the New Testament which give us direction as to the nature of acceptable contextualization, indicating both imperatives as well as limitations.

He notes that each of the Synoptic gospels is oriented to a certain audience, which has given rise to the overall structure, vocabulary and emphases of each (Ericson 1978, 72). Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989, 8) similarly note the NT contains ‘contextualised’ accounts of the life of Christ:

Each of the four Gospels, for example, reflects the cultural orientation of its author and is clearly addressed to a particular audience. Matthew’s Jewish orientation is reflected in his emphasis on messianic prophecy, kingship, the divine titles of Jesus, and the Aramaisms which characterize his Jewish-Greek language. Luke, on the other hand, reflects a distinctly Hellenistic mind-set. This can be seen in his use of what has been described as good Koine Greek with a rich and varied vocabulary enhanced by numerous Semitisms. The comprehensive range of Luke’s Gospel with its emphasis on the universal implications of the gospel gives it a unique appeal.

The Jewish flavour of Matthew’s account is evident in the frequent quotations of OT Scripture demonstrating the fulfilment of OT hopes and also, as Davies suggests (1994, 19-21), perhaps even the structure of the gospel itself. Similarly Mark’s explanation of the Pharisees’ ceremonial washings (in Mark 7:3-4) suggests that he is addressing an audience that is unfamiliar with these practices. Although the

characteristics of the gospels may not be ‘contextualisation’ in the sense of applying Scripture in a new context, nevertheless it indicates how each of the authors of the gospel accounts are aware of writing for a specific audience. Flemming (2010, 2) concurs: “Each of the four gospels, we could say, contextualizes the story of Jesus for a different target audience.”

But it is not only the gospel writers who demonstrate this awareness: Jesus himself does the same. Old (1998, 132-133), in his study of Jesus’ exposition of Isaiah 61 recorded in Luke 4:16-30 - and referring to the proverb and examples in Scripture which Jesus cites or alludes to - notes that

Early Christian preaching was sensitive to the congregation, and Jesus’ illustrations here are appropriate to this particular congregation and only to this congregation. It is important to point out this feature. The sermon is thoroughly expository and yet at the same time takes up into it the concerns, capacities, and interests of the congregation. It is an interpretation of Scripture and also an interpretation of the congregation.

Thus the four authors of the gospels, and their portrayals of Jesus’ ministry, indicate a sensitivity and awareness of the audiences they are addressing – and this is very evident in the preaching of the apostles in Acts.

Contextualisation in preaching in Acts

We have already examined the apostles’ preaching in Acts from the perspective of whether it can be called ‘expository’. But here we shall consider the extent to which it is audience-specific – for example in terms of worldview and cultural values, which is one important aspect of preaching that seeks to be properly contextualised.

Peter’s preaching to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:34-43 is to a God-fearer, but interestingly Luke’s summary of his sermon contains no references to the OT – perhaps reflecting the wider household audience rather than simply Cornelius himself. But Flemming (2005, 56-88) documents how the apostle Paul adapts his sermons and preaching to suit his audience in Acts. He provides a summary table comparing three of Paul’s ‘missionary sermons’ to three differing audiences: Jews and God-fearers (who would be familiar with the OT Scriptures) in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, in Acts

13:13-52; rural pagan Gentiles and indigenous Lycaonians of Lystra, in Acts 14:8-20; and urban Greek intellectuals in Athens, in Acts 17:16-34. It is clear that the hearers in the latter two settings are extremely unlikely to have had access to, or be familiar with, the Hebrew Scriptures. Flemming (2005, 84-85) explains that with Gentiles, unlike with Jewish audiences where Paul

communicates the gospel across cultural and religious barriers, we find a strikingly different pattern. He addresses Gentile pagans in a way that does not require a knowledge of the Scriptures to understand. He still tells the biblical story – it is the only story he knows – but he tells it in fresh ways... All of them herald the saving content of the ‘good news’ (Acts 13:32; 14:15; 17:18), even if that message is communicated with distinct emphases and in different ways.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the apostles’ evangelistic preaching to Gentiles who are unfamiliar with Jewish Scriptures, as recorded in Acts, does show this pattern, although biblical ideas are always conveyed.⁴¹ Writing of Paul’s method of engaging the audience in the Areopagus, Schnabel (2005, 183) likewise explains how

Paul employs convictions, arguments and formulations with which they were familiar and which they acknowledged as valid. Exegetes and missiologists often use the term contextualisation for this dimension of Paul’s Areopagus speech; an expression that has become a household term in mission studies.

Furthermore, he explains how Paul “employs concepts and formulations that reflect Hellenistic concepts and formulations, and at the same time he refers to the convictions and formulations of the Old Testament prophets and of Jewish apologists.” (Schnabel 2005, 183)

He explains from Acts 17:18 that “Luke emphasises that Paul proclaimed the same message in Athens that he had proclaimed in other cities” (Schnabel 2005, 174) – but nevertheless that “the speech which Luke records in 17:22-31 should not be understood in terms of a summary of Paul’s missionary sermons before pagan audiences but as a speech in the specific context of Acts 17:16-20.” (Schnabel 2005, 176)

Thus Schnabel concurs with Flemming: “Paul emphasises different convictions depending on the audiences to which he is addressing. The speeches in Acts show that he adapts his preaching to his listeners, which agrees with Paul’s statements in 1 Cor. 9:

⁴¹ Schnabel (2004b, 1379-138) identifies six different sermon types in Paul’s preaching in Acts – only one of which could be considered ‘expository’, though he uses the term ‘exegetical’ (where he interprets the OT Scriptures Christologically, to a Jewish audience).

20-22.” (Schnabel 2005, 177) But he proceeds with caution, noting that “Paul’s speech is traditionally regarded as an example of the early Christian missionary preaching before pagan audiences. However, in the context of Acts 17, Paul’s speech is a special case of missionary preaching before Gentiles at best.” (Schnabel 2005, 177) Helm (2014, 92-96) makes similar observations about Paul in Acts 17: 19-31 adapting his preaching to his audience in Athens.

In his later study, Schnabel (2008, 155-208) again examines the detail of Paul’s evangelistic preaching in Acts before Jewish and Gentile audiences. When discussing how Paul’s example might be of relevance for missionary work today, he notes how the apostle

does not redesign the content of his preaching depending on the likes and dislikes of his audiences in order to make coming to faith easier or more convenient. He adapts the form of his preaching to different audiences, but he never downplays or omits the central truths of the gospel that audiences might find unreasonable or impertinent. He adapts the linguistic expression of the news he proclaims to his audiences, but he always focuses on the significance of Jesus’ death on the cross and of his resurrection from the dead. (Schnabel 2008, 398)

From these few examples of the apostles’ preaching in Acts, it seems certain that, regardless of the audience, the apostles preach OT and NT truth evangelistically even when it is without direct reference to Scripture - although Acts 17:2-3 perhaps indicates Paul’s usual manner of using the Scriptures for ‘explaining’ the gospel to the Jews in the synagogue at Thessalonica. What is true of the recorded preaching in Acts is even more so when it comes to the NT epistles, to which we now turn.

Contextualisation within NT epistles

The following discussion is concerned more with the matter of contextualisation within this part of Scripture, rather than the ‘re-preaching’ of Scripture which we have considered thus far. Although there are many OT passages from which Paul quotes in his letters, these are not necessarily ‘expositions’ of the passages he cites, at least not in the way that we have considered exposition. (However we saw in chapter 2 how he does apply, for example, the Wilderness narrative from the Pentateuch in 1 Corinthians 10.)

Thus, though what follows is not an argument claiming that the apostle is engaging in expository preaching in his letters, it seems reasonably clear that he is applying the message of the gospel - as given both through the OT Scriptures and the NT gospel 'deposit' (2 Timothy 1:12-14; 2:2) to their situations - and that what the apostle is doing in writing indicates what he would have done if he were present with them in person (see below, pp66-68).

Out of all the apostles, given his role as the 'apostle to the Gentiles' (Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:1ff), we would expect Paul's preaching and letters to inevitably be the most overtly contextual. As he sought to convey the message of the OT hopes fulfilled in Christ, we would anticipate that his letters in particular would show evidence of engaging with the worldviews and cultures outside the Jewish environment, from which the gospel emerged, had been articulated and recorded for the first Jewish converts to the new Christian faith – and then communicated to new Christians from other backgrounds. As the apostle taught from the OT Scriptures, and sought to disciple these Gentile believers, whilst engaging with the issues which arose in the various churches, we do indeed observe this process happening. The NT epistles therefore incorporate Spirit-directed theological reflection, and are not merely 'data' or context-less propositions, but contextualised theology.

It is widely recognised among scholars that almost all of the NT letters are 'occasional' documents, indicating that they are written within of a particular set of circumstances to an individual or church. However, although Ericson (1978, 74-49), for example, considers a number of examples where contextualisation is seen in several Pauline epistles (as well as in Acts 15:1-29) - namely 1 Corinthians 8:1-10:22, 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 and Colossians 3:18-4:1 – his engagement with the texts lacks depth.⁴² As a consequence of this failure to engage with the texts in detail, when he considers the matter of church discipline, and compares the situations and manner in which various parties are to be handled - in Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, Philippians 4 and 3 John - he reaches a very generalised conclusion, that

there is no single pattern of church discipline presented in the New Testament. The method is appropriate to the socio-cultural environment and to the nature of the local church; it is, in addition, directly related to the nature of the offence. (Ericson 1978, 79)

⁴² Nor does he discuss the citation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-17.

Although one may dispute his first comment, he is nevertheless correct in recognising that each of the Scriptural texts to which he refers is addressing a different context and audience.

Flemming (2010) presents a stronger case for contextualisation of Scripture as he demonstrates how Paul contextualises the gospel in writing to the church at Colossae, claiming that “biblical writers not only offer us normative theological and moral content; they also model a process for doing theology in authentic context-sensitive ways... Paul writes letters that become a word on target for mission communities.” (Flemming 2010, 2) He also notes that, whilst the apostle Paul’s theologising has a level of authority which the modern preacher can never claim because of his ministry as an apostle, there are nevertheless lessons to be learned from his method of engagement with the cultures into which he was preaching and writing (Flemming 2010, 16).

In his earlier work, Flemming (2005, 182-213) describes in greater detail how the gospel message is taken, explained and applied to the particular contexts, issues and challenges facing the churches in Corinth and Colossians (2005, 214-233). He also shows how similar contextualisation is evident in the way that the four writers of the NT gospels have shaped and presented their accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry in such a way to suit their target audience – before closing with a similar approach to the book of Revelation (2005, 266-295).

It would be possible to scrutinise every NT letter to seek to establish in what ways or to what extent it is contextualised. But given the limits of this thesis I will rely on what Flemming and Schnabel have uncovered regarding the contextualised theology of 1 Corinthians. Why this letter? Because it is perhaps the epistle in which the apostle is most obviously addressing issues that the church had raised or which were matters of concern which he wished to tackle.

1 Corinthians: an example of contextualised theology

In his study of contextualised theology in 1 Corinthians, Flemming (2005, 182-213) focuses on 1 Corinthians chapters 8-10 and 15, which he takes as representative ‘cases’. He examines the way in which the gospel engages with the issue of food and its

link to idol worship in Corinthian culture (1 Corinthians 8-10), and also the way that the gospel message should reshape the Corinthians' way of considering the human body (1 Corinthians 15) which was still predominantly moulded by Greek thought.

But actually the whole of Paul's letter can be seen to be an interaction between the gospel message and the culture within (the church in) Corinth. Ciampa and Rosner state (2010, 5) that: "While other scholars have recognized that the Corinthian problems are mainly due to the influence of dominant Roman/Corinthians culture and values (rather than overrealized eschatology, Gnosticism, or some other exotic influence), we maintain that view more consistently". They then explain how the situation behind the issues in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 also mirrors the major views of the Roman and Corinthian society.

Several times throughout the second half of the letter, Paul writes comments which indicate their concerns, for example "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote ..." (7:1; similarly in 8:1; 12:1; 15:1) But there are also the issues which he sees as vitally important and which need to be faced by the church, all of which indicate an underlying failure to understand the gospel and its implications: divisions and pride (in chapters 1-3), sexual immorality (in chapters 5-6), and the destructive nature of their gatherings to share the Lord's supper (chapter 11).

In 1 Corinthians chapters 1-4, after his usual greetings and prayer (1:1-9), Paul addresses the matter of divisions within the church which has been brought to his attention (1:10-17). As Rosner & Ciampa (2010, 88 & 113-118) explain, the church has adopted the values and mores of Corinthian culture in their consideration of 'leaders'/orators, simply mirroring Greek ideas about oratory and status. Then in chapters 5-7, Paul is addressing an issue of sexual behaviour (5: 1ff) in which a man has been sleeping with his father's wife, though ironically this is worse than the behaviour of the surrounding culture. In chapter 6 Paul uncovers their need to resort to legal action to resolve their minor disputes (6:1-8) - but the worldliness and adoption of the surrounding pagan culture's standards by the Corinthian church is more widespread, as 1 Corinthians chapter 7 subsequently makes plain when he begins to respond to the matters that they raised in a letter to him.

In chapters 8 to 10 there is the specific question about food and idol worship which was deeply embedded in Corinthian culture, as an intrinsic part of social life in addition to religious practice in the city. Here Paul most obviously turns to the OT, namely the narratives in the Pentateuch (Exodus 32 and Numbers 11:1-34; 21:4-9; 25:1-18) to argue that they must flee idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14). Thus his reference to events in the OT Scriptures in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 shows Paul - with almost certainly a predominantly Gentile audience, *contra* Schnabel's comment below (Schnabel 2008, 198) - demonstrating that he saw the OT as being a trustworthy court of appeal and of relevance for his argument that their behaviour was wrong, even if they had not been aware of or especially familiar with these Scriptures.

1 Corinthians chapters 11-14 is Paul's response to what is happening when they gather for their meetings: in chapter 11 it is in terms of male/female roles and responsibilities, and the divisions again (this time social ones) – then chapter 12 addresses their misunderstandings about what it means to be 'spiritual'/spiritually-gifted, whilst chapters 13 and 14 uncover their distorted focus on knowledge rather than love and a desire to build up Christ's church. Then, as Flemming picks up again (2005, 201-211) 1 Corinthians 15 seeks to correct their (contextual) beliefs and misunderstandings about the human body from the core of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Thus Paul's addressing of these issues faced by the church in Corinth indicates the necessity of writing/'preaching' into that context – thus showing contextual theology taking shape as Scripture, the gospel and a biblical worldview are brought to bear on these matters. It also provides a framework or model of what addressing these concerns looks like. Added to this, Schnabel (2008, 189-196) in observing the apostle's explication of the gospel to the church at Corinth in the epistle, notes how

Paul constantly quotes or alludes to the Scriptures, that is, the Old Testament. While Gentile converts may not have immediately understood these allusions, Paul probably expected the teachers of the local churches, many of them in all probability Jewish believers,⁴³ to see the biblical background of his explanations of the gospel. The frequent references to Scripture also suggest that the reading and exposition of Scripture was a regular feature of the churches which Paul established. This is confirmed by Paul's advice to Timothy. (Schnabel 2008, 198)

⁴³ Schnabel does not justify this comment about "the teachers of the local churches, many of them in all probability Jewish believers..." and I am not sure on what basis he would substantiate the statement.

He then cites 1 Timothy 4:13-16. In a similar vein, Flemming notes how it is in Romans, Galatians, and 1 & 2 Corinthians that there are the greatest number of OT citations by the apostle, and that by quoting “texts repeatedly when writing to a church made up largely of converts from paganism... shows that he considers the Scriptures of Israel to be foundational for the spiritual formation converts.” (2005, 155) One brief example, could be that of Ephesians 6:1-3, where Paul takes the OT commandment about honouring parents, and shows its ongoing significance, although he does not adapt it for Christian Gentiles who could not literally expect that their “days may be long *in the land* that the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12, my emphasis) in the same way that the Israelites could:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honour your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’

Flemming (1995, 155) helpfully summarises the goal of faithful contextualisation, not only for the modern theologian and believer, but also as it occurs in the formation of the NT itself:

In contextual theologizing, neither God nor the constant gospel are redefined by the context. But how the message is expressed and what aspects are emphasized will vary from context to context and also within a given context as the receptors change. Successful contextualization involves an interaction between gospel and context, in which the gospel transforms the context, while the context brings to light deeper levels of meaning from the gospel.

The NT epistles - contextual preaching?

Longenecker (1983, 104) recognises that “the pastoral letters of the New Testament took their form from the conventions of the day, were written as substitutes for being present in person, and were meant to convey the apostolic presence, teaching, and authority.” After affirming their divine inspiration, he also emphasises that the NT epistles “are fully human writings as well, in that they were written in specific historical situations with particular purposes in mind, using the literary forms then current.” (Longenecker 1983, 101)

Doty (1973, 26), considering the nature of NT epistles, notes that Paul “wrote to instruct, to give advice, to encourage or reprimand; he taught, *preached*, and exhorted in

the letters” (my emphasis), though Doty may be referring more to Paul’s oratory *style* in the epistles rather than their *substance* when he refers to ‘preaching’. But, like Longenecker, Doty notes that “every letter represents what Paul thought ought to be addressed to the specific situation, and we often have a sense that Paul is preaching as if he were there in person.” (Doty 1973, 27; cf. also 36-37)⁴⁴

Thus it may be helpful to consider that the NT letters themselves are ‘preaching’ to those churches or individuals to whom they are addressed, albeit from a distance. Paul’s ‘preaching’ to them *in absentia* is implicit in that his written commands are to be taken as if he was there in person (e.g. regarding disciplining the church member in 1 Corinthians 5). As Runia (1978, 6) states: “The New Testament epistles too are closely linked with preaching. Although they are not sermons in the technical sense of the word, they certainly contain much material that was part of the preaching of the writers.” Hence under the heading, “Long-Distance Preaching”, Greidanus (1993, 738) explains how

Paul’s letters may also be characterized as *long-distance preaching*. They were like preaching not only because they addressed specific needs in early churches but also because they were primarily oral communications... for the purpose of public reading in churches. Like preaching, therefore, these letters were a form of oral communication. Moreover in Greek letter-writing tradition, a letter was a stand-in for the presence (*Parousia*) of its author. Since Paul was “unable to be present in person, his letters were a direct substitute, and were to be accorded weight equal to Paul’s physical presence” (Doty, 35: cf. 1 Corinthians 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 10:11).

Listening to Paul’s letter being read, therefore, was the same as hearing Paul himself speak – except that this speaking was long-distance and was committed to writing. Furthermore, having noted the widespread acceptance of Paul’s letters by the recipients and subsequently by the church (as recognised in their incorporation within the canon of Scripture)

As the Word of God, Paul’s letters are the authoritative kerygma, eminently suitable as the normative source for preaching today. As the letter carriers originally received ‘authority to convey the letters, to expand upon them, and to

⁴⁴ Doty (1973, 45-46) also considers that the trustworthy messengers who carried his letters – such as Tychicus (Eph. 6:21-22 & Col. 4:7-8) – would have had the opportunity and authority from Paul for ‘exposition’ and ‘expansion’ of the written material that they contained. Certainly they were being expected to deliver news about personal circumstances, although going beyond this could imply a certain blurring of the apostle’s unique authority with the delegated authority of the messenger. NB Doty does not accept Pauline authorship for the Pastorals, Ephesians, Colossians or 2 Thessalonians (1973, 65-71) – nor does he accept the sense of Paul’s writings being necessary and enduring for future generations, apart from Romans (1973, 76).

continue Paul's work' (Doty, 37), *so contemporary preachers may continue Paul's work by expounding his letters. But to do so with authority, they will need to do justice to the inspired words of Paul.*" (Greidanus 1993, 738 – my emphasis)

Griffiths (2012, 43) reaches a similar conclusion, regarding the nature and purpose of the NT book of Hebrews: "we can reasonably surmise that Hebrews was a sermon written from a distance (hence the epistolary elements at the end) and intended to be read out to a congregation".

If it is thus legitimate to consider Paul's letters as him actually preaching 'in absentia', so the contextualised dimension of his letter-writing should therefore be considered as contextualised preaching. The epistles show how the apostle engaged in 'written preaching' with the prevailing thinking and behaviour in the predominant culture(s) where the churches were located – and in the case of Corinth, this meant challenging and correcting ideas about Christian 'leadership' (1 Corinthians 1-4), sexuality and legal cases among Christians (1 Corinthians 5-6), about marriage (1 Corinthians 7) and male-female relationships (1 Corinthians 11). His insistence on the practice of this - with the matter of the seriousness of church discipline despite his physical absence (1 Corinthians 5:2-5), and the weighing and acceptance or ignoring of prophecy (in 1 Corinthians 14:36-38) - indicate that his letters are authoritative, and lends extra weight to the argument that they are 'contextualised preaching'.

But does being 'contextualised' imply irrelevance for another context? Frame (2010, 13) explains that just because a NT letter is 'contextualised' - though he does not use the term – this does not entail that the epistle's teaching is irrelevant in another geographical location (or at another time in history). He cites Paul's admonition at the end of Colossians: "And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16). So although we have noted that the NT epistles were addressed to particular churches, in specific locations within time and space, Paul's instruction here in Colossians implies that this letter is more than a context-specific word from the apostle. The implication is that these letters have value for another congregation - albeit quite nearby to their own – and that the teaching and instructions the letters contain will benefit believers elsewhere. Consequently, although we now only have the letter to the Colossians, its value for us as Christians some twenty centuries later should be noted as more than merely an historic document.

Similarly the inclusion of all the letters in Revelation chapters 2-3, which are very clearly 'contextual' letters, indicates their relevance for other readers – especially given the solemn concluding comments to the book:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19)

There is therefore a clear delineation between God's Word written and any others – with there being a mandatory requirement to listen and act upon the former.

As we turn to consider the implications of this for preaching today, Robinson (1974, 59-60) recognises the need for the contemporary speaker to be sensitive to the situation into which he or she is speaking, when he comments that

To carry out this purpose the expositor must not only know his message, but the people to which it will be delivered. He must exegete both the Scriptures and his congregation. Imagine that Paul's letters to the Corinthians had gotten lost in the mails and had reached the Christians in Philippi instead. Those people would have been perplexed at what Paul wrote. The believers in Philippi lived in different situations than their brethren at Corinth. The letters of the New Testament, like the prophecies of the Old Testament, were addressed to specific people living in particular situations.

It is therefore now time to draw these strands together to present the case for contextualised expository preaching in our contemporary setting.

CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CONTEXTUALISED EXPOSITORY PREACHING OF GOD'S WORD

I began this study by asking the question ‘Is there a biblical-theological basis for contextualised expository preaching of God’s Words?’ This was partly an attempt to respond to the critique of expository preaching as culturally-determined, i.e. a predominantly Western style of preaching. But I also wished to investigate whether Scripture itself demonstrates, and therefore indicates, that expository preaching should be contextualised.

After defining the limits and framework for this field of research, I provided some definitions of the terms and expressions employed. I then summarised a number of studies about expository preaching from the fields of systematic theology and homiletical theology, and from missiology as it relates to contextual theology in Scripture.

Drawing the evidence together

My investigation commenced in chapter 2 with the fact that God reveals himself as a speaking God right from creation. God’s words have always been important for his relationship with his people through the whole of human history. Tracing the way in which God’s words were spoken to the human beings he has made in his image, we noted that those words were then recorded as a vital means to establish and maintain that covenant relationship (through the OT priests) – and this is also how God calls for the relationship to be restored (through the OT prophets). In the NT that relationship is established through the proclamation of the gospel, which builds upon the OT revelation which has been preserved. This revelation reaches its completion when that message is written down and passed on to the post-apostolic generations in the form of the combined OT and NT canon.

In chapter 3 I examined the theological justifications presented for expository preaching over the last few decades. On the whole these arguments have relied upon a

systematic theological basis of the place of God's Word: in his self-revelation, in the record of his dealings with his people, and in the need for the preaching of the good news of what he has done for the world. This has culminated in his supreme self-revelation and work through his Son – and that it is this good news which is to be proclaimed to all peoples. Hence preaching and teaching from God's Word are basic to faithful Christian ministry – and, it is claimed, this should be done by the careful expounding of the texts of Scripture. This argument has often, though not exclusively, appealed to a number of key texts, especially from the Pastoral epistles. These all rest, however, on the deeper theological foundations for expository preaching which biblical theology provides.

Chapter 4 focused on the way in which God's servants have contextualised their message from God to their particular audiences, without compromising or distorting that original word in the process. We observed this as Moses 're-preaches' the Pentateuch in his Deuteronomic sermons, and the OT writing prophets reapply the Mosaic covenant to their respective covenantally-unfaithful audiences (including spelling out the blessings and curses attached to that covenant). Furthermore this process continues as the NT apostles apply the gospel message and its implications in their writings to the newly-founded and predominantly Gentile churches. Here young Christians needed to comprehend the teaching and implications of God's words within their specific worldviews and cultures.

Some conclusions

The preaching ministries of both Jesus and the apostles cannot simply be replicated or appealed to as our model without further explanation and qualification. Lessons can be drawn, however, from their practice and assumptions about the importance of God's words being taught, explained and seen to be fulfilled in Christ – and from the apostles' instructions about the future ministry of church leaders in the post-apostolic era.

Biblical theology's role in this argument has been to perceive God's words as being central to his covenant relationship with his people, running through both OT and NT. This strengthens the more commonly recognised reasons given by some systematic

theologians for expounding God's words. When biblical theology's contribution is combined with the arguments for contextualisation being present within the canon of Scripture itself, this indicates how expository preaching from Scripture is consistently aligned with the way that God has always addressed his covenant people. Of course that preaching must be properly and thoughtfully contextualised.

I have begun to present here the elements of a coherent theological argument for expository preaching which incorporates careful exegesis, observing the contextual theology within Scripture, which in turn should promote an equal concern for contextual application. My aim has been to explore from within biblical theology a theology of contextualised expository preaching, whereby God's words are seen to be conveyed by the human authors of Scripture into a specific cultural context but then subsequently 're-preached' and applied into a new cultural context.

There does seem to be a clear pattern and logic: God's word is given in one context, is written down, preserved, read, passed on - and then taught again and applied in a culturally-engaged manner in a new situation. That new context may be historical, geographical, social or cultural - or any combination of these. Combining the three areas I have covered, contextualised expository preaching is not only justifiable, but also necessary for the spiritual well-being of God's people.

Some implications

The most important implication from this study is that faithful preaching must be both contextualised *and* expository. Therefore expository preaching that is not contextual is unsatisfactory, and contextual preaching that is not expository is unsatisfactory.

Whilst evangelical theology purports that all Christians, including preachers, must humbly learn from Scripture, is Christian preaching an area where this is failing to happen because of weak theology regarding contextualised expository preaching? This study has explored how there is a biblical paradigm for how God's word has been given in one context, and then faithfully exegeted, expounded and applied to a new context

and culture, which could serve the global church well. Thus preachers cannot afford to ignore or dismiss this as a culturally-determined way of preaching.

Expository preaching is not merely a cultural practice – there is good biblical warrant for it, from what we have explored: the nature of God’s words being spoken and then being indispensable to his covenant relationship with his people, meant that these words were recorded, preserved, read, learned, taught and reapplied – for us.

Good preaching is more, but never less, than teaching the Bible. Merely ‘teaching the Bible’ is not enough for a church congregation, if that constitutes no more than a ‘Bible lecture’ which explains what the Bible’s message meant for the original hearers or recipients. Indeed we see the Biblical authors - especially the apostles, but also Moses and Ezra, as well as OT prophets - taking God’s previously-given words and applying them in later and new cultural contexts. Should a modern preacher do any less?

Expository preaching should be thoughtfully contextualised⁴⁵ in a manner that reflects the way God’s servants communicated those words in ways that were relevant and understandable to their various hearers – whether they were later generations in the OT or, even more clearly, in the book of Acts and the NT epistles.

Preaching is not an end in itself, whether it is expository or not: it is for drawing people ‘from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages’ (Revelation 7:9) to know and worship Christ - and for the building up of God’s people to maturity. Preaching is central to that task (Romans 10:14) - although preaching is not the only form of word ministry observed or commended in Scripture.⁴⁶

There is therefore a great responsibility for any preacher or teacher to handle God’s word responsibly (2 Timothy 2:15). Given ignorance of biblical truth, prevalence of error and gross distortions of the gospel and biblical Christianity, for example in so-

⁴⁵ By ‘contextualised’ here I am suggesting expository preaching which, both in preparation and in communication, thoughtfully addresses the culture(s) and worldview(s) of the preacher’s audience, in a manner which incorporates what Bevens (2002) would probably identify as elements of the ‘translational’ and ‘countercultural’ models of contextual theology. My understanding, as a classic evangelical, is that culture is not the starting point for theology, but it must be seriously considered and addressed in preaching.

⁴⁶ Cf. Griffiths 2017, 45-49.

called ‘prosperity teaching’, a greater emphasis on training for such expository preaching is needed. It will hopefully also engender a right sense of accountability before God for the work of a preacher or teacher of God’s words (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).⁴⁷ Given the nature of God’s cumulative revelation in Scripture, preachers have a responsibility to understand, teach and preach the Bible in a way that recognises this dimension of God’s Word, rather than reading it as a collection of unconnected sentences or verses.

There is a wonderful opportunity and major challenge to be equipping and training preachers and teachers of God’s words. Paul urged Timothy, his young protégé on the verge of this new era in which God’s final full revelation has been given, that authentic ‘apostolic ministry’ means teaching the message that was given to him (2 Timothy 2:2).

Preaching can, and at times must, address issues or topics - and can be ‘thematic’ or ‘topical’ – although this does not necessarily exclude careful expounding of biblical texts in context. In fact ‘topical’ preaching and teaching requires *greater* diligence, in order to interpret those passages within their literary, geographical, cultural and historical contexts and to reflect the breadth of the whole of Scripture.

This therefore strongly suggests that the best way of preaching is by consecutive exposition of biblical passages, whereby a preacher takes the listeners through a Bible book – whether a prophet, gospel, section of narrative, law or an epistle. This is not demanded by Scripture, but would seem to be the most obvious manner of expounding (and of course applying) God’s words. It is also much easier work for preachers, who are always building on their understanding of that Bible book, or section of it, and so their preparatory work should be less arduous. It should also build the biblical understanding, and thereby the spiritual maturity, of the audience. This approach to preaching recognises the way that God has given his word to us - as books comprising paragraphs made up of sentences as part of narratives, speeches, epistolary arguments etc. in the sixty six books which constitute the two testaments of the Christian Bible.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Note that here the apostle is referring to church leaders, not simply individual believers.

⁴⁸ See Adam 2014.

By implication, allowing God to ‘set the agenda’ in our preaching in this way, God’s word is permitted to shed light on various matters the preacher or church may otherwise overlook, given our own cultural blind-spots - and his Spirit can bring to light issues we may prefer to ignore. Such an approach to preaching can tackle the imbalances of topical preaching, such as majoring on the preacher’s favourite topics, as we discover other issues which God has been speaking about consistently through the centuries. Given the Bible’s teaching on human beings ignoring or denying God, this should alert us to the need to listen to God’s concerns in Scripture, not simply what we believe to be relevant. There are issues which each culture may wish to filter out or consider unimportant. Conversely, a focus on what we believe is important and relevant for application today can skew the Bible’s message if we determine what needs to be taught, and plunder the Bible to prop up our own perspective.

Preaching which primarily comprises exhortations, or is topical, is most likely to be insufficient for maturing Christians on the basis of God’s grace, especially if it ignores both the immediate context of a verse and the larger context of the plotline of Scripture. It may be more prone to revert to ‘graceless’ preaching, for example if a preacher tackles biblical commands but ignores their literary and theological settings.

Looking further afield

Whilst I have not attempted to convince those who consider that the very practice of preaching itself is culturally repugnant or outdated,⁴⁹ this examination of the biblical background may help to show that preaching it is not a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, it is rooted in the theology of God’s covenant relationship with his people in which his words have always played a central role.

Some preachers might think their role is simply to teach what the Bible says, or insist that it is the responsibility of the individual listener (or the Holy Spirit) to apply the message they are communicating to the listeners’ lives and the contemporary world. The manner, however, in which we have seen that the OT prophets and NT apostles apply God’s words to God’s people, particularly Paul in his letters, may help to

⁴⁹ E.g. Norrington 1996; also Pearse and Matthews 1999.

persuade the modern preacher otherwise. These biblical characters made efforts to address their messages to the culture, churches and individuals to whom they preached or wrote. Both the general and specific instructions in the prophetic literature and NT epistles indicate that appropriate application of the message is an essential part of bringing God's word to individuals and communities.

For those theologians or preachers who think that the starting point must be the contemporary world, this study may show that contextualised expository preaching seeks to explain and relate words from God to the contemporary hearer. This does not belittle the importance of addressing concerns and issues facing the modern audience to whom the preacher is speaking. However, faithful preachers are those with 'a word from God' which must be heard, in as much as that message responsibly brings God's words to bear on the contemporary world. Also, whilst there is undoubtedly a place for dialogue in teaching - see for example, Jesus' own approach to teaching his disciples with question and answer, e.g. Matthew 18:1ff; 18:21ff; 19:23-30 - this exploration has studied how preaching is communicating God's words to human beings.⁵⁰

Areas for further study and exploration

I do not consider that there is a 'culture-less' way of preaching: expository preaching may well take different forms in different cultures, thus possibly reflecting so-called 'linear thinking' in certain cultures and 'configural thinking' in others. There is much scope for exploration and study of what contextualised expository preaching might look like in various different global locations, which could build on the conclusions of this thesis. What is important is the content of good preaching and teaching (being a careful explanation of this part of God's Word) together with its application (to the current audience), not the particular manner or form of that communication. The essence of well-contextualised expository preaching is that it will maintain this aim: taking God's words, teaching and explaining their meaning, and

⁵⁰ Jesus' manner of teaching through questions and answers indicates that there are advantages in such a dialogical approach to learning, and that it is not necessarily disrespectful towards a teacher for a student/learner to ask questions (which can be the case in many Asian and other Majority world cultures). Conversely, rote learning is also used in the Bible, and Western churches may well learn to use this method of learning.

applying them responsibly in a new context, regardless of the specific form of that preaching.

Some may question the validity of expository preaching in illiterate or oral cultures, where the people may not be able to read the Bible passage which is being expounded or where the Bible is not available in their own language. But does such an objection not assume that all the Hebrews in the OT at the time of Moses, who were to learn and teach God's words to their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-8), would have been literate? If they were not, then the parallel between the OT priests, who had the role of teaching and explaining God's words to the people then, becomes even closer to the situation in non-literate, mainly oral cultures today. As we have observed, in that situation in the OT, the priests were still charged with the task of expounding God's covenant words to his people (Deuteronomy 31: 9-13; Malachi 2:4-7) – but there was the added importance of reading the words, in addition to explaining them. The practice of the Levites around Ezra (Nehemiah 8:1-8) suggests that the same goal and method might be appropriate today in similar circumstances, assuming an adequate literacy among the pastor-teachers with that responsibility. Hebrew culture clearly placed a high value on oral learning (cf. Deuteronomy 6:6-8), even though there was also an emphasis on reading God's Word.

This potentially opens up a separate area for exploration on the value of 'rote learning' and memorisation, implied by the teaching of Deuteronomy 6:6-9, which is still prevalent in Majority world cultures, although it has been disparaged and largely abandoned in Western cultures.

Finally...

Praise God that he is pleased and able to work through whichever of his servants he chooses – even the least capable and irresponsible of preachers and teachers. However that does not remove the urgent responsibility and opportunity for practical training of preachers who will be diligent in faithful preaching of his words, applied in each new context and era, until Christ returns. May the Lord grant us the humility and grace, whatever our current ability in preaching, to keep on seeking to grow in our ability to expound and apply his words to every new generation for his glory, and that

more may know the true Christ of Scripture and that the church may grow to maturity in him.

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**APPENDIX: LITERATURE REVIEW OF TWO ARTICLES
RELATED TO CONTEXTUALISATION WITHIN THE OT AND NT**

Gilliland, D.S. 1989. New Testament Contextualization: Continuity and Particularity in Paul's Theology. In *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Today*, ed. D. S. Gilliland, 52-73. Dallas: Word.

Gilliland considers NT contextualisation, and recognises the unrepeatable incarnation of the Word, but urges that the message “must *become* flesh again and again” (1989, 52) because of the need to connect the Word to today’s world. He sees a “shift from Jerusalem to Antioch” (1989, 53) as the gospel spread, identifying some of Paul’s terminology in his letters (Romans, Philippians and Thessalonians) as suiting the Gentile context (1989, 56-57). He recognises that Paul’s theology is “revelational” and cannot be replicated, although he indicates Paul’s contextualising of theology is “missionary theology” which should not be expected to be characterised by “hard logic and consistency” neither does Paul give “a closed message” (1989, 58). This should not however be understood as an unaccepting accommodation of the gospel or message to the context. He believes there is centre to Paul’s theology, which he calls the “continuous word” and that “most of what Paul wrote and preached reveals a consensus around this symbolic center” (1989, 60) – but he also considers there to be a “particular word” whereby “the gospel is cast into the specific locale and moment” (1989, 64), as a way of explaining why there is a strong emphasis on, for example, Christ’s return in the letters to the Thessalonians and in Corinthians (1989, p64ff). Thus he claims that “Paul’s epistles cannot be understood if they are abstracted from the local setting and recast into a set order or bound together by propositions” (1989, 69). He concludes with an outline case study on the role of Abraham’s faith in Paul’s letters to the Galatians and the Romans, and the way that the presenting issues were different for the two audiences, to show the “continuity-particularity principle” (1989, 69) is different but reflected in each case. His aim overall is “to emphasize the contextual methodology of Paul” (1989, 70). Though his argument raises questions as to what extent Paul did have a “coherent center” (1989, 57) – and to what extent God has given us the core of what we need to know if Paul’s revelational theologising merely covered what was needed for that specific situation – Gilliland provides helpful observations on the need to consider the historical and literary context of each letter.

Glasser, A.F. 1989. Old Testament Contextualization: Revelation and Its Environment. In *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Today*, ed. D. S. Gilliland, 32-51. Dallas: Word.

Glasser considers that the OT “is replete with evidence that God continually used a contextualizing process in his progressive self-disclosure of himself to his people” (1989, 33). He recognises God’s willingness and ability to reveal himself and that the entire OT corpus does this accurately and, though diverse, the books still cohere as one consistent witness and revelation. “All the writers of the OT were culturally conditioned” (1989, 34), yet God’s Spirit gave them his written Word as they experienced life in a variety of settings and circumstances – for example as nomads, slaves, citizens and exiles in different locations and contexts. Glasser recognises the uniqueness of God’s revelation to Israel, pointing to Deuteronomy 4:33-34 and the OT prophets’ evaluation of the pagan deities and religions around them (1989, 35, 37) and is sure of the authenticity of the events in the OT and of YHWH’s uniqueness. Though he claims “there is considerable evidence that on occasion the writers of the Old Testament deliberately contextualized their material” (1989, 39), he does not provide much evidence, but rather points to the myths and cults of Israel’s neighbours and the OT prophets’ condemnation of unfaithful Israel’s behaviour in apostasy (1989, 39-40). He views the borrowing of the concept of covenant as God’s chosen means of contextualising his revelation (1989, 40-42), and that the prophets’ manner of communication revealed them as “masters of the contextualization process” (1989, 42). He sees some elements within OT Wisdom literature as most closely aligned with the religious practice/worldview of Israel’s neighbours (1989, 47-49). He concludes: “Down through Old Testament history God again and again met with his people where they were (in context!) and moved his purpose forward through intimate interaction with them in their varied existential situations... All his prophets from Moses onward were intensely loyal to the witness of their predecessors; and the new truths they revealed brought changes... but no radical discontinuity.” (1989, 49) Glasser recognises the manner in which God chose to communicate, identifying with some aspects of the surrounding cultures, whilst also distinguishing biblical revelation as unique and that often God’s Word critiqued Canaanite religious beliefs and practice. His particular concern is to show how the surrounding context was employed in shaping God’s communication to Israel.