

The Talmid



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus” is.”

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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What is biblical preaching?

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I. Introduction

In this paper I will outline my understanding of biblical preaching in the light of the work in class. First of all, I will define what is biblical preaching. Then, I will discuss the elements that make preaching “biblical”.

II. Definition: the criteria for biblical preaching

My first reaction toward the phrase “biblical preaching” is to think that it is a tautology. For me, preaching is nothing but the exposition of the Gospel in fidelity to the Scripture. However, after thinking it over, I realize that there are specific crite-

ria by which we can call certain style of preaching “biblical”. Thus, the question that I will address in this paper is “What makes a style of preaching 'biblical'?”

Biblical preaching occurs when there is a positive correlation between the content, the function and the form of the sermon and the biblical text. To put it in a different way, it is “to shape sermons in ways coherent with the dynamic, multi-form address of that [God] word.” [1]

Let us explore now the elements that make preaching “biblical.”

III. Content

A biblical sermon presents today, in a relevant way, theological insights that come out of a valid interpretation of the text. [2] As we know, the Bible is a text. As a text, from a hermeneutical point of view, it is detached from its authors and its original audience. So, the Bible —as a text— has a certain degree of

autonomy from its original contexts, when the modern interpreter reads the Scripture, the biblical text addresses her or him in a particular way. The reader, then, has new insights about the meaning of the text; the text has triggered a fresh interpretation of its message according its surplus of meaning.

These new insights about the text must be validated by the critical work of the interpreter. By this I mean that the fresh ideas triggered by the new reading of the text must be tested against two criteria. The first one is the canon. The Bible is one book that has major theological themes running from Genesis to Revelation. Our new insights about the text must be in basic agreement with the thematic axis that we find in the Bible. The second criteria against which our new reading of the text must be contrasted is the particular theologi-

cal outlook of the text. As we know, the biblical writers addressed different situations, reinterpreting the traditions in the light of their time. Therefore, the different biblical documents have particular theological outlooks.

Once we have tested our new insights of the text against the key theological outlook of the biblical document in particular we have an interpretation that is valid. This does not mean that is the only interpretation that is valid. This does not mean that is the only interpretation possible, but that it is a legitimate new reading of the text. Then, we can proceed to study hermeneutical implications of the text or our modern audience.

At this point, I should point the reason why I have defined content in terms of their theological claim of the text. Sometimes we hear sermons based in the Scriptures in which the preacher relays heavily on the biblical story. However, at the moment of the application the text is interpreted in the light of a broad umbrella —like theological concept. This is usually the case with the concept of love. Some preachers will find a romantic pseudo-Johannine concept of love in every text of the Bible. This instead of an expository sermon is a generic one that is not true to the Scripture or relevant to the audience.

IV. Function

The biblical texts were written with specific intentions. The authors wanted something to happen to their audiences. To achieve their purposes they employed forms and rhetorical devices that provoked different reaction in the hearers.

Although the original intention of the original authors is now largely lost, the form of the biblical documents still evokes particular feelings in the audience, thus provoking different reactions. Some texts give a word of judgment, other a word of hope, still other a word to transform. This reaction that text causes in the audience is what I call the function of the text. A sermon proves to be biblical when it has the same function that the text has.

The function of a text can be determined with certain accuracy through form criticism. Then through the hermeneutics of analogy, [3] we can find points of contact between the experiences depicted in the text and our audience, making the function of the text especially relevant to the contemporary hearers.

Although this hermeneutical method can be employed in almost any context, it is very particularly useful in Latin America, [4] where the sociology of oppression, the politics of domination, the extreme poverty and the hope for a new order resemble so closely the situations portrayed in the Bible.

Another important element is the vantage point from which the preacher tells the biblical story. It is really difficult to identify with a preacher who always takes a distant position as the authoritative voice in the story. The preacher must identify himself with the congregation. Furthermore, the preacher must practice what he preaches, adopting “a total style of life which embodies the spirit of the crucified Christ.” [5]

V. Form

It is not without certain reluctance that I include form as a criterion for biblical preaching. I really think that the preacher should master first the traditional forms and the deductive logic before going ahead with the design of inductive sermons and experimental forms. Having made this warning, I should say that ideally the biblical preacher should make the most of the text by designing the sermon in the form of the text.

The reason to design sermons in the form of the text of basically that the function of the text is achieved in part by the movement of the form of the text. [6] Let us take, for example, the Psalm of Lament. The function of the lament is to give hope to the person that prays the psalm, restoring in that way the person to the faithful community. By and large, the lament achieves its function by a sudden movement from lament to praise. This movement from hurt to joy reassures the person about God's loving concern, solidarity and sense of justice. Then, the one who prays can experience a healing feeling of hope in God's fidelity. By far, it is easier to achieve the function of the Psalm of Lament if we incorporate in our sermon a movement from lament to praise.

VI. Conclusion

As we have seen, preaching is truly biblical when there is a positive correlation between the content, the function and the form of the text. [7] The task of the biblical preacher is, therefore, to let the text speak [8]; to allow the text to witness about God to the congregation; to let the theological

insights of the text, calm the lives of the audience for God.

VII. Endnotes

1. Don M. Wardlaw, ed., **Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture** (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp.61-62.

2. Severino Croatto, "La contribución de la hermenéutica bíblica a la Teología de la Liberación", **Cuadernos de teología** VI, (no.4, 1985):45-69. [E.T. "Biblical Hermeneutics in the theologies of liberation" in **Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology** (New York: Orbis Books, 1983):140-168.]

3. Walter Brueggemann, "As the text makes sense", **The Christian Ministry** 14 (Summer '83):8.

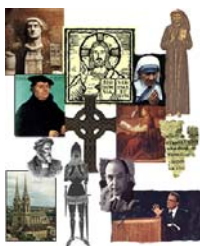
4. Justo L. González and Catherine G. González, **Liberation Preaching: The pulpit and the Oppressed** (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p.16. See Also Elsa Tamez, **Bible of the Oppressed** (New York: Orbis Books, 1982), pp.66-67 and Croatto, op.cit., pp.59-60.

5. William Baird, "Biblical Preaching as International Preaching", **Lexington Theological Quarterly** 16 (January 1981):111.

6. Elizabeth Achtemeier, **Creative Preaching: Finding the Words** (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p.61.

7. For similar statements see Leander E. Keck, **The Bible in the Pulpit: The renewal of biblical preaching** (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980) and Achtemeier, op.cit., p.61.

8. Richard C. White, "Building Biblical Sermons", **Lexington Theological Quarterly** 18 (April 1983):43-51.



STUDIES IN EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

STUDY 1 THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

THE ORGANIZATION

The form of the organization of the church, shown in the first seven chapters of The Acts, is of a very simple kind, but we are left in no doubt in regard to the firm basis of belief on which it rests.

The Head of the Church is Jesus Christ. It is in His name that the apostles preach; it is in His name that they offer remission of sins—upon repentance; it is in His name that believers are received into the church; it is for bearing His name that they are persecuted (**Acts 2:38; 3:16; 4:10, 12**).

The Voluntary Character.—No one allied himself with this church who did not desire to do so and because of his conviction of—and acceptance of—the truth in Jesus Christ. Hence the organization consisted of those who were profoundly impressed with the preaching of the new way—and walked in it (**Acts 2:41**).

The Ordinances.—In the picture of the early church given in The Acts, immediately after the close of Peter's sermon on the day of

Pentecost, it is shown that **"they who gladly received his (Peter's) word were baptized ... and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"** (**Acts 2:41, 42**).

In this statement there are five things asserted, two of which are that, at this beginning stage, the church at once took up the observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Doctrine and Prayers.—Referring again to **Acts 2:41,42** it is here stated that **"they—the disciples—continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine ... and in prayers."**

The apostles' doctrine was the supremacy and all-sufficiency of Christ. Prayer to God was much resorted to by the early believers. They found it an absolute necessity for them in the difficulties which hedged them in. An example of the prayers of the church is given in **Acts 4:24-30** where when the members had prayed earnestly for the manifestation of God's presence, **"the place was shaken where they were assembled together and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness"** (**Acts 4:31, 33**).

The Social Aspect.—"And all that believed were together and had all things common" (**Acts 2:44**). **"And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart"** (**Acts 2:46**). It is doubtful if the world has ever witnessed

such a perfect social estate. It was brought about by no passionate appeal against the inequalities in the lives of men or a forced communism, but believers in one Lord and Saviour had had their hearts so touched by His love that the evil and selfishness in them were purged away.

If the social conditions of the present day are ever to be improved, the improvement must come through a church as devoted to its Lord as this early church. That the Christian community of goods here spoken of was purely voluntary and not required or demanded is shown by the case of Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:3, 4](#))—whom Peter tells it was in their own power to give or not to give—and in the case of Barnabas, who is specially commended, and yet there is no intimation that he sold everything. The point is that where there was any lack it was made up and to any in need ample help was given. Here was one great loving family in Christ. The principle underlying this Christian community of goods is **“that all possessing goods and industries are to be consecrated to God in the service of humanity”** ([Matthew 25:14–30](#); [Luke 13:6–9](#)). Christian love and Christian principles are to abolish poverty and want and to spread the gospel over the earth, and we are to live daily according to the brotherly principle exemplified in this early church, where the poor man knew no shame and the rich no haughtiness.”

The First Case of Discipline was forced upon the church by a flagrant instance of deliberate lying

([Acts 5:1–11](#)), showing how evil began very early to attempt to enter into the church.

The Election of the First Deacons.—We are told in the gospels how the apostles were chosen. We are told in the [sixth chapter of Acts \(vs. 1–6\)](#) how the deacons were chosen and ordained to their work. In regard to the other officers of the church which we find elsewhere mentioned we have no account—with the exception of the missionaries ([Acts 13:1–4](#))—of how they were chosen. The writers of the New Testament seem to be concerned chiefly in showing the great foundation upon which the church was to rest rather than the particular form or forms it took or should take on this foundation. The occasion of the election of the seven deacons was **“the murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.”** There may have been some truth in this charge. At any rate the apostles did not attempt, themselves, to settle the right or wrong of the matter, but called the multitude of disciples together and left the matter with them to choose men to remedy the wrong, if any. We have here the direct appeal to the church as a whole to settle a matter in dispute and it is very significant of the way things were carried on. After the seven deacons were chosen they were consecrated to their work by the laying on of the hands of the apostles ([Acts 6:6](#)).

The Grecians mentioned here, were “true Jews from foreign lands, who spoke Greek, used the Greek instead of the Hebrew Bible, and whose mode of life and thinking

was Grecised. The Hebrews were the pure Jews who not necessarily residing in Palestine, still used the Hebrew Scriptures and spoke the dialect of the sacred tongue then current; there was a natural jealousy between these two parties.”

Three qualifications were required in the deacons to be chosen:

1. **“Of honest report,”** men with goodness that makes itself manifest.
2. **“Full of the Holy Ghost,”** men who are thoroughly religious.
3. **Wisdom, men of prudence and good sense** ([Acts 6:3](#)).

How well these first deacons filled their office, not only in serving tables but in preaching the gospel, is shown by their record, especially in the cases of Stephen and Philip.

Bishops, Elders and Other Officers.—In two instances Paul gives a list of the chief persons in the church ([1 Corinthians 12:28](#); [Ephesians 4:11](#)) but the exact nature of the offices held by some of them has not been quite made plain. In the case of elders and bishops “the difference of name may point to some difference of origin or function; but in the New Testament—and Clement—the terms are more or less equivalent. Thus the Elders of Ephesus are reminded ([Acts 20:28](#)) that they are bishops. So, too, we find sundry bishops in the single church of Philippi. In the pastoral Epistles Timothy appoints bishops and deacons, Titus elders and deacons, though ([1 Timothy 5:17](#)) Timothy also has elders under him. The qualifications also of a bishop as laid down for Timothy are practically those of the elder as described

to Titus and equally point to ministerial duties in contrast to what we call episcopal” (Church Government, Hastings’ Bible Dictionary). In regard to the offices held by Timothy and Titus they were evidently of a temporary nature as both 2 Timothy and Titus are letters of recall from their mission (**2 Timothy 4:9; Titus 3:12**). It is quite evident that the primitive church was quite simply organized and officered.

Persecution began as soon as it was fairly understood that the apostles were preaching the supremacy of Jesus Christ (**Acts 4:2, 3; 5:17, 18, 28; 7:56–58**).

The Growth of the church was quick and strong. The numbers of believers increased very rapidly. The day of Pentecost saw 3,000 conversions (**Acts 2:41**). In the fourth chapter and fourth verse of Acts the number has increased to 5,000. Again “**multitudes**” of converts are spoken of (**Acts 5:14**) and that “**a great company of priests were obedient to the faith**” (**Acts 6:7**).

Continued in next edition...

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