

## **The Legitimacy, Place, and Function of Theology in Biblical Preaching**

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**Abstract:** Given that a specific paragraph of scripture provides the content for biblical preaching, should theology have any role in the development and delivery of a biblical sermon? This paper will evaluate the legitimacy of theology in the preparation of a biblical sermon, and where theology could most appropriately be introduced into the development of the sermon. It will also examine how theology may assist the preacher's presentation of the text within a biblical sermon.

To many, theology and preaching go together as well as hot cocoa and arsenic—sickening for sure and potentially lethal to effective communication. I think this is because there is a presumption of boredom attached to the concept of theology. To many Christians “boring” and “theology” seem to attract each other as naturally “guy” and “girl.” Because we want to avoid, if possible, inducing boredom through our sermons, we may only flirt with theology briefly in our preaching.

This paper will present an alternative viewpoint to the idea that theology is detrimental to good preaching. I will attempt to show that theology is not only beneficial but, in fact, necessary to the development and delivery of a biblical sermon. I will also attempt to spotlight where theology belongs in the preparation and delivery of biblical preaching.

### **Definitions**

I have already used the terms “theology” and “biblical preaching” in this discussion. Before proposing a relationship between these ideas, the ideas themselves must be clear. I will therefore define these terms as I intend to use them in this presentation.

#### *Theology*

In this paper “theology” is the systematic correlation and categorization of doctrines as they are presented in the Christian scriptures. It presupposes that the Bible's teaching on any subject is non-contradictory. “Since we presume divine authorship of the entire canon and that God has a unified message to present, the discipline of systematic theology seeks to express this larger

picture in a coherent fashion.”<sup>1</sup> Like an archeologist seeks to reconstruct a fossil by putting together the fossilized bones he uncovers, the theologian (or preacher doing theology, in this case) attempts to connect and relate one or more of the ideas in his preaching passage to what the rest of the Bible teaches in that theological category. A sermon, therefore, dealing with John 14:9 “...Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father...,”<sup>2</sup> would reference the doctrines of Christology and Trinity in some way. These are categories of systematic theology and, I will shortly argue, must be included in the sermon.

### *Biblical Preaching*

I have already stated my thesis as “theology is not only beneficial but, in fact, necessary to the development and delivery of a biblical sermon.” Having defined the meaning of “theology,” the phrase “biblical sermon” also cries out for definition. In his book *Biblical Preaching*, Haddon Robinson defines this type of preaching as “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”<sup>3</sup> This definition, and its development by Robinson through a singular Big Idea, is what I have in mind when I reference a “biblical sermon.” I offer my proposal about systematic theology not in relationship to any and every preaching model (or to preaching in general) but, rather, as a corollary and partner to biblical preaching as Robinson has defined it.

### **The Legitimacy of Theology in Biblical Preaching**

Robinson’s definition of biblical preaching explicitly mentions “a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage” but is silent on the issue of theology. His silence raises a question: Is systematic theology an appropriate discipline to apply to the task of biblical preaching? The question itself mirrors the ongoing debate between exegesis and theology, because the “study of a passage” in Robinson’s definition is exegesis. Yet there is a long-standing debate between exegetical scholars and theologians about the role of theology in exegesis. Moisés Silva has written:

Three centuries ago scholars were already arguing, with great vigor, that systematic theology—especially in its classical form—must be kept separate from biblical exegesis. Their concern was understandable. It would not have been difficult to show that theological biases had frequently hampered the work of exegetes, even to the point of distorting the meaning of the text. True “historical” exegesis was therefore being

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<sup>1</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*.

<sup>3</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 21.

understood, more and more, as *theologically unprejudiced* interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

To this day, it is not uncommon to hear sermons where the preacher's theology distorts, even eclipses, the meaning of the text. Therefore, the separation of exegesis and theology seems wise. These examples caution the preacher who wishes to be biblical against allowing systematic theology to have any place, lest the sermon be hijacked from the teaching of the text by the preacher's theology.

Silva states that, in evangelical scholarship, there is only a tolerance for theology and that tolerance lasts only as long as theology is done as a product of exegesis.

With the rise of so-called evangelical renaissance in biblical scholarship, therefore, we find a growing suspicion of, or lack of interest in, or downright dislike for, systematic theology. Oh, there is a place for systematics—I'm sure they would say—but that comes *after* exegetes have done their work without being burdened by modern, speculative questions. As a result, the traffic is essentially one-way. Biblical scholars do their honest work and present their conclusions to the systematicians (with the implication: those scoundrels had better pay attention to our exegesis).<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, to those suspicious of systematic theology, if there is any legitimate place in biblical preaching for systematic theology, it is after the exegetical work is done. Once you know “what the passage is talking about” and “what it is saying about what it is talking about,” then the preacher may choose to think theologically—but never before.

Against a negative view of systematic theology, Silva states, “In contrast, I want to argue not only that the exegete may address theological issues and suggest what bearing the text may have on theological reflection. I go a daring step further: my systematic theology may—indeed, must—inform my exegesis. To put it in the most shocking way possible, my theological system should tell me how to exegete.”<sup>6</sup> Like Silva, I think that systematic theology has an essential role at nearly every step in the preparation and delivery of biblical sermons. The remainder of this paper will develop some of the ways in which theology aids good preaching.

### Theology and Text Selection

Robinson's definition of biblical preaching states that biblical preaching is “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of **a passage** in its context. . . .”<sup>7</sup> This suggests that the first stage in biblical preaching is to choose the text from which you will preach. There are many factors that can aid the preacher in selecting a sermon text—the needs of the audience, the news of the day, the preacher's own walk

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<sup>4</sup> Moisés Silva, “Systematic Theology and the Apostle to the Gentiles,” *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 15 (1994), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p. 21, emphasis added.

with God or the biblical curiosity of the preacher or congregation. Many of these are related to theological categories. A church that is seeking a new pastor, for instance, may need guidance on this biblical office and its qualifications. This relates to the subject of ecclesiology; therefore, your theology about church government (what an elder is, how elders are chosen, etc.) is going to influence which passage you choose for this kind of message and how you will interpret that passage. Theology, then, is instrumental in the very beginning of the sermon development process. This holds true regardless of what influences your choice of text.

Theology is also helpful in the selection of the text when the preacher is moving systematically through a book of the Bible, because the preacher must decide weekly how much material can be covered in one sermon. There are several factors that go into this decision—the amount of time in the service budgeted to the sermon, the density of ideas in each verse or section of scripture, the preacher’s own time constraints for study, and whether or not this is a lone, freestanding sermon or one in a series to which the preacher will return next Sunday. These considerations are all legitimate; however, they are all secondary issues; the main issue when selecting a sermon text is where the thought of the author begins and ends in the passage. Preaching one complete unit of thought should be the major consideration for anyone attempting to do biblical preaching. Robinson writes, “We will not count out ten or twelve verses to a sermon as though each verse could be handled as a separate thought; instead, we will search for the biblical writer’s ideas.”<sup>8</sup> Later, Robinson adds, “In selecting passages for the expository sermon, therefore, a general principle to follow is this: *Base the sermon on a literary unit of biblical thought.*”<sup>9</sup>

While Robinson’s advice is sound, there are times when the literary units themselves are incomplete for a biblical sermon. The literary unit may have a complete idea within it, yet by itself it does not give the preacher an idea that is complete enough for a biblical sermon. In the paragraph below Bryan Chapell describes how this issue surfaced after one of his sermons.

A few years ago, I preached at the church of a friend who had attended seminary with me. I preached from one of the Gospel narratives that was many paragraphs long. Afterward, my friend confided that he rarely preached from such narratives since we had been trained to preach only from expository units. By this he meant that he almost exclusively preached a paragraph or two at a time. He missed the nuance of the term.<sup>10</sup>

For a specific example of how this can happen, consider Ephesians 2. In that chapter, verse 1 describes how each of us was “dead in transgressions and sins.” Verses 2-3 continue the thought by detailing how spiritual death manifested itself in a disobedient life, one that earned the just wrath of God for each of us. Because of the density of these ideas and their importance, a preacher might be enticed to preach merely on Ephesians 1:1-3. The adversative “but” in verse 4 might give literary evidence to support the idea that verses 1-3 form a complete unit of thought. However, by preaching Ephesians 1:1-3 without verses 4-10, the preacher would be explaining the problem without give the solution. Grady Davis warns against this when he writes:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), p. 52-53.

For the preacher of the gospel, however he sees the dark state of man, must see no less clearly man's possibilities under the grace of God. That side of the picture is as real as the other.... This error, too, mars much of the preaching of our time. Unfortunately, men with some theological depth seem especially susceptible to it.... The sermon's falseness is not that it points out our helplessness to help ourselves but that it stops with saying this, as if it were the whole truth about our situation, or even the important truth."<sup>11</sup>

The answer to this pitfall is theology. When selecting a preaching unit, the preacher must think theologically in order to properly establish the passage. Robinson has argued that, when applying the Bible, the preacher needs to find "the vision of God" and "the depravity factor" within the preaching passage.<sup>12</sup> Bryan Chapell adds that the preacher needs to show how God's grace mediates the gap between the vision of God and the depravity factor.<sup>13</sup> These are all theological categories and, if they are necessary for application, then the preacher must be sure that the preaching text includes them all. When I decide where my preaching unit begins and ends in the text, I look at the literary flow of the passage, but I also make a preliminary check to be sure that these three theological ideas are present in my text. If one of them is missing, then I know that my preaching unit is too small. Without all three, I find myself unable to accurately and effectively apply the passage. Thus, theology is useful even when selecting the passage to be preached.

### **Theology and Sermon Exegesis**

Classic exegetical work looks at grammar, syntax, lexical aids, commentaries, and other tools, but often excludes theology. The assumption is that the preacher-interpreter must have a mind cleared of theological assumptions and simply work with the text at hand. But this is a naive and impossible goal. According to Osborne "the danger of our 'faith' rather than Scripture controlling our interpretation is very real; however, this does not mean we should jettison the concept altogether. In fact, we could not do so if we wanted to. One's theological perspective is too deeply ingrained for that, and I would argue that it is an aid rather than an enemy in the task of discovering meaning."<sup>14</sup> Rather than holding a suspicious, arm's-length attitude, consider a few of theology's benefits to sound sermon exegesis.

#### *Benefits of Theology in Exegetical Work*

#### Systematic Theology Restrains the Range of Meaning in a Preaching Text

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<sup>11</sup> H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1958), p. 231.

<sup>12</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, "The Heresy of Application" in *Leadership* (Fall, 1997), p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), p. 273.

Earlier, this paper referenced John 14:9 where Jesus claims that to have seen him is to have seen the Father. Historically, this is one of several passages used by modalists to deny the distinction in person of Father, Son, and Spirit. According to Brown:

The modalists emphasize the Gospel of John with its statements stressing the oneness of Christ with the Father, for example, “I and my Father are one,” and, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 10:30, 14:9). The word “one” in the Greek text of John 10:30 is the neuter *hen*, which suggests that the meaning is ‘one deity, one divine essence,’ rather than one Person, but this is a rather sophisticated insight. It makes sense only if one can conceive of God as subsisting in distinct Persons, namely, in the Father and the Son (and of course in the Holy Spirit as well). Anyone who has not yet been able to formulate the concept of the Trinity in this explicit way will of course find it simpler and more plausible to understand Christ as saying, “I and the Father are one Person,” in other words, presenting himself as a mode of the Father.<sup>15</sup>

Brown’s explanation is helpful because it summarizes the exegetical basis for the proper interpretation of John 10:30, demonstrating how sound exegesis will lead to proper interpretation. But Brown also demonstrates how easily one can stumble into modalism through imprecise exegesis. Good theology can save the preacher from error even if the preacher misses the important nuance in the text. While each of us should seek to learn the meaning of a Bible text for ourselves, it is foolish to ignore the theological insights mediated to us by church history. If preachers were truly to study the text with no assumptions, no pre-conceived ideas, no theological orientation, the resulting sermon would take much longer to prepare and would likely reinvent a number of theological errors that have been condemned historically as heretical. A solid grounding in systematic theology serves the preacher, not by giving a grid through which to filter the text, but establishing an orthodox framework where possible interpretations of the text can be properly, but quickly, evaluated.

### Systematic Theology Clarifies the Meaning of the Preaching Text

Since the Reformation, most Protestants have held to and practiced the analogy of faith as an interpretive principle. “The Reformers courageously argued that all faith and practice must be based on Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). But the Scripture still had to be interpreted. The Reformers’ solution was to announce that ‘Scripture interprets Scripture’ (*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*). The analogy of faith became a corollary of ‘Scripture interprets Scripture.’”<sup>16</sup> There is considerable debate, however, about how the analogy of faith should be understood. There are also questions about the legitimacy of its application. When Martin Luther evaluated the book of Hebrews, he was dismayed by the warning passages. According to Schoonhoven, “Luther felt the sting of these sections that he disavowed the book.”<sup>17</sup> Luther’s reasoning was

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<sup>15</sup> Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), pp. 134-35.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin R. Schoonhoven, “The ‘Analogy of Faith’ and the Intent of Hebrews,” in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 92.

theological. “Luther understood well what the text said, but he felt that he could not relate it harmoniously to the rest of the Bible. This... suggests that there is a profound deficiency in Luther’s hermeneutical procedure and theological understanding.”<sup>18</sup> Schoonhoven takes this anecdotal case as a reason to disregard the analogy of faith altogether. He declares “that Luther and other commentators follow the ‘analogy-of-faith’ hermeneutical principle, which we are convinced obstructs precise exegesis by demanding that all the biblical literature be read in the light of so-called ruling concepts derived from supposed clear statements of other Scripture. By so doing they have done great disservice to the text.”<sup>19</sup>

Because Luther and others allow theology to override exegesis, Schoonhoven is ready to dismiss the entire concept of the analogy of faith. I think this reveals why so many are nervous about introducing theology into the exegetical process. Against this viewpoint, others have proposed a qualified use of this theological tool. Kaiser recommends using this rule if it is limited only to “antecedent” scripture. He writes:

The only correction that we know for past and present abuses that have taken place in the name of doing good theological exegesis is to carefully restrict the process to (1) examination of explicit affirmations found in the text being exegeted and (2) comparisons with similar (sometimes rudimentary) affirmations found in passages that have *preceded* in time the passage under study. Thus the *hermeneutical* or *exegetical* use of the analogy of faith... must be carefully controlled diachronically (i.e., we must ever be aware of the various time periods in the sequence of the progress of revelation). So serious are we about this point that we would prefer to rename this procedure the “analogy of [antecedent] Scripture” when it is applied to exegesis in order to avoid any possible confusion in concepts.<sup>20</sup>

Kaiser’s proposal demonstrates how systematic theology (through the analogy of faith) can be useful in exegesis while still controlled from polluting exegesis. He shows that the progressive nature of revelation causes earlier revelation to inform later revelation. Thus, David’s Psalms call on the Lord to do certain things based on his theology—his understanding of the covenants God made with his people in Abraham and Moses.

Osborne finds Kaiser’s idea too restrictive and argues for the use of parallel passages in exegesis, but in a responsible way. To Osborne:

The answer is a proper use of parallels. They are not determinative of meaning but simply provide possibilities for reflection and yield parameters for the options.... The hermeneutical principles by which we may do this are critical. Primarily, we must assess the relative value of each theological parallel, giving the most likely passages greater weight but giving due weight to all passages dealing with the theme. We need to differentiate true parallels from seeming parallels, but at the same time we must explore

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 136.

all ramifications of the larger issue and place them in their proper biblical framework.... The *analogia scriptura* is a key to proper biblical theology and an essential ingredient in a canonical approach.<sup>21</sup>

Osborne's approach seems like the best one. We allow all of scripture to clarify the meaning of our preaching text, but we know that this can only happen when other scriptures are introduced and compared carefully. To that end, it is helpful to look at the ways in which this approach can go astray. We turn, then, to the risks involved with integrating theology into our exegesis.

### *The Risks of Including Theology in Exegetical Study*

While I have advocated a role for systematic theology in the exegetical study of the passage to be preached, I admit that there are dangers in this approach. My belief is that awareness of the dangers can be curative. That is, if the preacher is aware of these pitfalls, it is possible to be on guard against them and avoid them. Just as we must guard against logical and exegetical fallacies in our preparation, we must watch out for theological pollution. Here are some of the traps we must avoid.

#### Using an Outside Text to Silence the Theology in Our Sermon Text

In Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus "...became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...." Some see this statement as potentially contradictory to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. Instead of working through the theological tension here exegetically (which would contribute to our theology of faith), they silence the teaching of the text through theology. Zane Hodges does this when he writes, "The salvation here... should not be confused with the acquisition of eternal life which is conditioned not on obedience but on faith (cf. John 3:16, etc.)."<sup>22</sup> This is a theological move which short-circuits the exegetical process and contributes to a simplistic understanding of saving faith, one that fails to account for the power of regeneration which comes to everyone who believes in Jesus by grace through faith alone.

#### Marginalizing the Teaching in the Sermon Text through Cross-referencing

This happens when we equate to similar passages that are only similar on the surface. First Corinthians 3:16-17 says, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." This passage is sometimes applied to taking care of a person's physical body. The preacher rails against smoking or gluttony, or some other unhealthy habit. But this interpretation and application is based on understanding the phrase "you... are God's temple" to be a reference to the Christian's physical body. First Corinthians 3 does not say that,

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<sup>21</sup> Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 274.

<sup>22</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in vol. 2 of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), p. 792.

but the preacher reads in 1 Corinthians 6:19 which says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit....” About this, Gordon Fee writes:

This passage has endured a long history of unfortunate interpretation in the church. Because the imagery of the temple is reapplied in 6:19-20 to the individual Corinthian who was going to the prostitutes, many have read that usage back into this passage as though it were a word of warning to individual Christians as to how they are to treat their bodies or live out their individual Christian lives. Both the context and the grammar disallow such interpretation, even by ‘extended application.’ This is all the more unfortunate because this is one of the few texts in the NT where we are exposed both to an understanding of the nature of the local church (God’s temple indwelt by his Spirit) and where the warning of v. 17 makes it clear how important the local church is to God himself.<sup>23</sup>

The error involved here is an unfortunate attempt at theologizing. The preacher is attempting to cast light on the meaning of “you,” but is misusing the analogy of faith instead of properly applying the normal hermeneutics of grammar and context. When we include theology within the exegetical process, we must be sure that we do not allow it to override the most basic interpretive rules. Otherwise, we mute and marginalize the real message of our text.

### Unfairly Presenting the Theology We Oppose

There is a place in preaching for warning a congregation against the false doctrine advocated by others. When appointing elders, Paul tells Titus that an elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” Sometimes preachers go beyond warning against false doctrine to vilifying any and every theological position that is opposed to our own. When preachers falsely portray an opponent’s position, they have crossed a boundary of appropriate theological discussion.

### Theology and Application

Previously I previewed how theology aids application and I suggested that the preacher needs to look for three theological truths when defining the preaching passage. In this section, I want to discuss in more detail how these three theological categories are useful for applying the Bible within a biblical sermon.

On the issue of application, Robinson writes, “Every passage has a vision of God, such as God as Creator or Sustainer.”<sup>24</sup> This is a theological statement. It suggests that every preaching unit must tell us something about theology proper. Robinson suggests that good application begins when the preacher asks what vision of God is presented in the sermon text. He continues, “Second I ask, ‘What is the depravity factor?’ What in humanity rebels against that vision of God?”<sup>25</sup> This

<sup>23</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 149.

<sup>24</sup> Robinson, “Heresy of Application,” p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

too is theological, calling for the preacher to think about biblical anthropology. Bryan Chapell suggests a third theological category to look for—grace. In his view “the fact that the message is focused on an aspect of our fallenness precludes simplistic, human-centered solutions. If we could fix the problem with our own efforts in our own strength then we would not be truly fallen. Application that addresses an FCF [Fallen Condition Focus] necessarily directs people to the presence and power of the Savior as they seek to serve him.”<sup>26</sup> After tracing the theology of the passage through these three categories, the preacher then looks for meaningful parallels in current human life. Theology, then, helps the preacher to be faithful to the text and to apply it meaningfully in the contemporary world.<sup>27</sup>

### Theology and Sermon Delivery

Theology is not only useful in preparation. It can be helpful in the presentation of the biblical sermon as well. This usefulness appears when the preacher chooses to communicate some aspect of the biblical sermon in theological language. As one example, I have already argued that a sermon on John 14:9 (“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”) will inevitably touch on the doctrines of Christology and Trinity. At the very least, the preacher’s theology in these areas will be revealed; at best, the preacher will take the opportunity presented by these words to teach the congregation about the doctrine of the Trinity. This kind of thinking should be done for nearly every sermon we preach.

Part of the mission of preachers, pastors especially, is to build up the body of Christ through sound doctrine (Eph 4:11-14; 2 Tim 3:16-4:4). This calls for educating the body of believers so that they can see how the teaching of the Bible in a particular passage connects to the unified system of truth presented in all of the Bible. The best way to do this is to use the categories of systematic theology and to show how the truth in your passage connects to and contributes to the rest of scripture’s teaching in that category. Ed Rowell suggests asking yourself a series of questions as you prepare to preach. Some of these questions are theological: “What theological category would this fit under? Am I being theologically faithful? If the sermon is not theological on some level, what is it?”<sup>28</sup> These questions help the preacher shape the presentation of the sermon so that it fits with the entirety of Christian doctrine.

Assuming the preacher has made it through the preparation stage without allowing his theology to override the message of the preaching text, the remaining risk in using theological language while preaching is boredom. This occurs most frequently when the preacher uses theological terms without definition. When preachers refer repeatedly to the omniscience of God or to his sovereignty or refer to human depravity or any other theological term without definition, they place a mighty load on the minds of the listeners. Perhaps this is why preachers avoid theology

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<sup>26</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> I have explained this process of application in more detail in a previous EHS paper titled “Theology: A Master Key for Unlocking Application in Biblical Preaching.” This paper is available on my website at <http://brianjones.org/papers>.

<sup>28</sup> Ed Rowell, *Preaching with Spiritual Passion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998), p. 84.

like the measles; but in avoiding theology altogether, the preacher misses the opportunity to educate the congregation in Christian doctrine. It is far better, in my opinion, to speak of theological topics descriptively, then mention the theological term. In this way, the preacher might describe to the congregation how God knows everything. He knows everything that has ever happened, everything that is happening now, and everything that will happen. He knows what you argued about on the way to church this morning, he knows who has been dozing off during this sermon, and he knows where you will have lunch after church and what route you will take to get there. These concrete examples teach the theology of God's knowledge. Then the preacher should tell the audience, "Theologically, we call this 'omniscience'—the doctrine that God knows everything." Description followed by terminology helps the congregation to grasp the truth, then gives them the theological label to mark it. It keeps the listener from being fogged in by unfamiliar, unclear, undefined terms, yet it educates him and her theologically by not avoiding the proper theological name.

### **Conclusion**

Theology and preaching are intimately connected. Skilled biblical preachers will develop themselves theologically and deploy their theology in the preparation and preaching of biblical sermons, to the glory of God.