

The Divine Authority of Preaching and Applying the Word: Ellen G. White's Perspective in Relation to Evangelical Viewpoints

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Rarely in an Adventist theological journal do we speak about preaching, the great work of the ministers of Jesus. Such a theme, though only occasionally suitable, should be full of interest to all, especially to the people of God. In what way should the gift of preaching be performed? What constitutes the special qualifications for it? How shall it be made most successful? How shall it best secure the blessing of God and aid in the advancement of His kingdom? These are inquiries which, while they may be of more special interest to those inducted into the full office of a minister of Jesus, should also interest those who look to the ministry as one of the highest sources of their instruction and are required to obey in the gospel those whom God has thus put over them.

By a careful investigation of the contemporary evangelical literature on preaching and the published writings of Ellen G. White, this article will answer two important questions. First, what is the general tenor of her writings in relation to the present evangelical point of view about the necessary components of preaching? Second, what is the importance of personal application in preaching, as seen in recent homiletical literature and White's writings? It is imperative that before these two questions are answered, the real picture of abuses in preaching be understood by all who thirst and hunger after the pure Word of God.

Abuses in Preaching Then and Now

In the field of homiletics there is a term to express abuses in preaching: "dis-exposition." We have all experienced dis-exposition as listeners. We can easily recall a Sabbath service in which a biblical text is presented, only to fade from view, never to return. Dis-exposition causes Sabbath indigestion. It is a natural feature of dis-exposition not to engage the text and its context. There is no attempt to convey the true meaning of the passage.

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Dis-exposition invites many abuses of the text. Peter Adam lists some of these in his book *Speaking God's Words*.¹ Kent Hughes adds to his list.² First, there is the de-contexted sermon. This occurs when the Scripture is wrenched from its surrounding context and mistakenly applied. An example of this is the preacher who used Revelation 11:10 as a Christmas text: "And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another." That preacher completely ignored the last part of the verse, which says, "because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth." That doesn't sound like a merry Christmas!

Second is the lensed sermon. The preacher sees every text through the lens of a favorite theme. That lens could be psychological, therapeutic, political, chauvinistic, social, or domestic, to name a few. No matter what the text, the preacher always ends up preaching a sermon on the home, social activities, or moral issues.

Third is the moralized sermon, in which every sermon has a moral. Take, for example, Paul's words in Philippians 3:13. The apostle's phrase "one thing I do" is stretched to teach the importance of having goals and goal-setting. Thus, personal and professional goals become the center piece of the sermon. Forget the next phrase in which Paul outlines his primary desire: "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

In the fourth type of dis-exposition, the doctrinalized sermon, the Scriptures are used as proof-texts for the doctrinal preferences of the preacher. Every sermon champions the preferred theological leaning.

The fifth abuse comes from silenced sermons. The preacher actually preaches on details that the Scripture does not address. The sermon goes something like this: "Now the Bible does not tell us how Mary felt, but we can be sure she felt this way. Therefore, we ought to feel the same." We have even heard of sermons that have been preached from the animals' perspective at Jesus' birth.

While these five abuses are frightening, the most common type of dis-exposition today occurs because of the "homiletics of consensus." In this type of preaching, the preacher determines the congregation's need from the pollsters' analysis of felt needs and then bases the preaching agenda on those feelings. Certainly, all biblical exposition must be informed by and sensitive to perceived needs. But the problem with preaching to felt needs is that our deepest needs often go beyond our perceived needs. For example, most Christian couples feel the need for teaching on marriage and family, but they may have a far deeper need of understanding Romans 1-3, because a profound understanding of the

¹Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 102-103.

²Kent Hughes, "The Anatomy of Exposition: *Logos, Ethos, and Pathos*," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3/2 (Summer 1999): 44-58.

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human predicament will inform and give wisdom with regard to marriage and parenting.

William H. Willimon, dean of the chapel of Duke University, wrote an article entitled, “Been There, Preached That.” In it he asked rhetorically,

Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than liberal mainliners? At the very time those of us in the mainline, old-line, sidelined were repenting of our pop psychological pap and rediscovering the joy of disciplined biblical preaching, these “biblical preachers” were becoming “user-friendly” and “inclusive,” taking their homiletical cues from the “felt needs” of us “boomers” and “busters” rather than the excruciating demands of the Bible. I know why they do this. After all, we mainline-liberal-experiential-expressionists played this game before the conservative evangelical reformed got there.³

A few paragraphs later, after warning against allowing the world to set our homiletical agenda, Willimon concluded the section by saying, “The psychology of the gospel—reducing salvation to self-esteem, sin to maladjustment, church to group therapy, and Jesus to Dear Abby—is our chief means of perverting the biblical text.”⁴

Ellen G. White never used the homiletical term “dis-exposition,” but her writings point to abuses mentioned above. In the chapter “Snares of Satan” in *The Great Controversy*, she points out:

In order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices, some will seize upon passages of Scripture separated from the context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite. With the cunning of the serpent they entrench themselves behind disconnected utterances construed to suit their carnal desires. Thus do many willfully pervert the word of God. Others, who have an active imagination, seize upon the figures and symbols of Holy Writ, interpret them to suit their fancy, with little regard to the testimony of Scripture as its own interpreter, and then they present their vagaries as the teachings of the Bible.⁵

White calls this process of homiletical dis-exposition a willful perversion of the Word of God. This perversion includes the following faulty practices in preaching: (1) using passages out of context, (2) quoting a text to prove a point, (3) imagining symbols and figures, (4) interpreting text to suit one’s opinion, and (5) presenting personal vagaries as teachings of Scriptures.

³William H. Willimon, “Been There, Preached That,” *Leadership Magazine* (Fall 1995): 75–76.

⁴*Ibid.*, 76.

⁵Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1911), 521.

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The chapter “A Spiritual Revival” in *The Story of Prophets and Kings* points out the faults of present-day preaching. White admonishes church members in general and those who stand to preach to avoid the pitfalls of “dis-exposition.”

Christians should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise, and this preparation they should make by diligently studying the word of God and striving to conform their lives to its precepts. The tremendous issues of eternity demand of us something besides an imaginary religion, a religion of words and forms, where truth is kept in the outer court. God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible and the Bible alone should be heard from the pulpit. But the Bible has been robbed of its power, and the result is seen in a lowering of the tone of spiritual life. In many sermons of today there is not that divine manifestation which awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. The hearers cannot say, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" Luke 24:32. There are many who are crying out for the living God, longing for the divine presence. Let the word of God speak to the heart. Let those who have heard only tradition and human theories and maxims, hear the voice of Him who can renew the soul unto eternal life.⁶

True Components of Preaching

Dis-exposition, as previously described above, is not a straw man that can be blithely torched. It is a serious problem that deserves careful thought. These abuses increasingly dominate the pulpits. These approaches to Scripture are not going to be replaced quietly and easily. Therefore it is necessary, as Adventists, to expound the true components of biblical preaching in the writings of Ellen G. White. This investigation will be seen in the three classical rhetorical categories of *Logos*, *Ethos*, and *Pathos*. These terms will not be used in their strict definition. Nevertheless, these categories, broadly understood and given Christian qualification, provide helpful headings in approaching the published writings of Ellen G. White in relation to the contemporary evangelical literature in homiletics.

Logos: The Preacher's Conviction About Scripture

Biblical preaching is preaching in service to the Word. To do this, a preacher must believe in the authority of Scripture and recognize the inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit. It presumes a belief in the authority of Scripture, but it is something more: a commitment to biblical preaching is a commitment to hearing God's Word. Christian preachers today have authority to

⁶Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1917), 626.

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speak from God only so long as they speak His words. Preachers are not only commanded to preach, they are commanded specifically to preach *the Word*.

The Authority of Scripture

Ellen White adheres to the position that the authority we attach to Scripture will determine the weight and prominence we give Scripture in our preaching. For preachers to present biblical sermons, they must recognize the infallibility, the sufficiency, and the potency of Scripture.

Infallibility

Biblical exposition comes only from those with a high view of the infallibility of Scripture. White recognizes the Bible as the infallible Word of God. On December 15, 1885, she wrote an article in *The Review and Herald* expressing her high regard for the Bible as infallible.

When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.⁷

Three years later she wrote an article entitled "The Faith That Will Stand the Test." She points out, "Had the Bible been received as the voice of God to man, as the book of books, as the one infallible rule of faith and practice, we would not have seen the law of Heaven made void, and the swelling tide of iniquity devouring our land."⁸ She further explains the authority of Scripture when people recognize its infallible nature, stating,

In order to exercise intelligent faith, we should study the Word of God. The Bible, and the Bible alone, communicates a correct knowledge of the character of God, and of his will concerning us. The duty and the destiny of man are defined in its pages. The conditions on which we may hope for eternal life are explicitly stated, and the doom of those who neglect so great salvation is foretold in the most forcible language.⁹

⁷Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), 416.

⁸Ellen G. White, "The Faith That Will Stand the Test," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 10 January 1888, par. 11.

⁹Ellen G. White, "The Faith That Will Stand the Test," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 22 September 1910, par. 2.

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She concludes the article in a negative tone, pointing out the result of not recognizing the Scripture as the infallible Word of God to men. She says,

As men wander away from the truth into skepticism, everything becomes uncertain and unreal. No thorough conviction takes hold of the soul. No faith is exercised in the Scripture as the revelation of God to man. There is nothing authoritative in its commands, nothing terrifying in its warnings, nothing inspiring in its promises. To the skeptic it is meaningless and contradictory.¹⁰

The summary of White's position on the authority of Scripture is at the introduction of her famous book *The Great Controversy*. She balances the importance of explaining and applying the teachings of Scriptures. She writes,

In His Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. . . . Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His Word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the Word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings.¹¹

Sufficiency

While a high view of the infallibility of Scripture is essential to biblical preaching, it is not enough by itself. Preachers must wholeheartedly believe in the sufficiency of Scripture and embrace Scripture's own claim about this matter. They must personally own the conviction of Moses, who said, "Take to your heart all the words with which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life" (Deuteronomy 32:46, 47). Such a belief is essential to a preacher's heart. The Scriptures were life to Moses and food to Jesus (Matthew 4:4; cf. Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

In the chapter "Later Reformers" of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume IV, White reviews the position of some of the reformers about the sufficiency of Scripture. She points out that "The grand principle maintained by Tyndale, Frith, Latimer, and the Riddleys, was the divine authority and sufficiency of the Sacred Scriptures. . . . The Bible was their standard, and to this they brought all doctrines and all claims."¹² She adds the name of John Trask and points out the deep conviction of the reformer about the sufficiency of Scriptures. She commends Trask for declaring "the sufficiency of the Scriptures as a guide for religious

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ellen G. White, "Introduction," *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1888), vii, viii.

¹²Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1884), 173.

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faith” and that he “maintained that civil authorities should not control the conscience in matters which concern salvation.”¹³ White further believes that “As we search the Scriptures we find ground for confidence, provision for sufficiency.”¹⁴

Potency

Combined with a high view of the infallibility of Scripture and a belief in its sufficiency, we need confidence in the Bible’s potency. There is a passage in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress* where the warrior-heroes Mr. Great-heart and Mr. Valiant-for-truth converse during the respite after a battle. The two spiritual warriors sit to catch their breath following the fight. Mr. Great-heart gestures approvingly to Mr. Valiant-for-truth and says,

“Thou hast worthily behaved thyself. Let me see thy sword.” So he showed it to him. When he had taken it into his hand and looked thereon awhile, he said, “Ha! It is a right Jerusalem blade.” Then said Mr. Valiant-for-truth, “It is so. Let a man have one of these blades, with a hand to wield it and skill to use it, and he may venture upon an angel with it. . . . Its edges will never blunt; it will cut flesh, and bones, and soul, and spirit, and all.”¹⁵

This passage illustrates the unbridled potency of God’s Word. The author of Hebrews writes, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12, 13). His Word can penetrate the hearts of the greatest sinners of our age. It can cut away our own religious façade, leaving us flayed, exposed, and convicted. His Word is so powerful that when He wills it, it will pierce anyone!

In her writings, White never uses the word *potent* as far as the Bible is concerned. She employs a simpler term, *powerful*. Relating it to preaching, White strongly believes the Bible possesses power to change people’s lives through the working of the Holy Spirit. She points out,

While we are to preach the word, we can not impart the power that will quicken the soul, and cause righteousness and praise to spring forth. In the preaching of the word there must be the working of an agency beyond any human power. Only through the divine Spirit will the word be living and powerful to renew the soul unto eternal life. This is what Christ tried to impress upon His disciples. He taught that it was nothing they possessed in themselves which would give suc-

¹³Ibid., 181.

¹⁴Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1964), 228.

¹⁵John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974), 283.

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cess to their labors, but that it is the miracle-working power of God which gives efficiency to His own word.¹⁶

Inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit

In addition to recognizing that the Word has authority, it is also important to recognize that the Word and the Spirit are closely connected. In a 1995 *Festschrift* article in honor of British preacher R. C. Lucas, Australian Old Testament scholar John Woodhouse made a compelling argument for preaching based on the inseparability of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. He says, “in biblical thought, the Spirit of God is as closely connected to speech.”¹⁷ Woodhouse concludes, “Precisely for this reason Scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness: it is in the Word that God Himself speaks today. Therefore, the surest way to recover the ‘living’ Word of God is to recover preaching that truly expounds the Scriptures.”¹⁸ When the Word of God is expounded, there the Spirit speaks.

White agrees in stressing the inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit. She makes clear the role of the Spirit of God in relation to His Word. She writes,

You have the word of the living God, and for the asking you may have the gift of the Holy Spirit to make that word a power to those who believe and obey. The Holy Spirit's work is to guide into all truth. When you depend on the word of the living God with heart and mind and soul, the channel of communication will be unobstructed. Deep, earnest study of the word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will give you fresh manna, and the same Spirit will make its use effectual. The exertion made by the youth to discipline the mind for high and holy aspirations will be rewarded. Those who make persevering efforts in this direction, putting the mind to the task of comprehending God's word, are prepared to be laborers together with God.¹⁹

White explains the process that takes place when a preacher proclaims the Word of God. The process is under the supervision of the Holy Spirit as the Word reaches the avid listener. She reminds,

It is the efficiency of the Holy Spirit that makes the ministry of the word effective. When Christ speaks through the minister, the Holy Spirit prepares the hearts of the listeners to receive the word. The Holy Spirit is not a servant, but a controlling power. He causes the truth to shine into minds, and speaks through every discourse where the minister surrenders himself to the divine working. It is the

¹⁶Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1952), 64.

¹⁷John Woodhouse, “The Preacher and the Living Word: Preaching and the Holy Spirit,” in *When God's Voice is Heard* (Leicester: Intervarsity, 1995), 55.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6 (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1901), 163–164.

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Spirit that surrounds the soul with a holy atmosphere, and speaks to the impenitent through words of warning, pointing them to Him who takes away the sin of the world.²⁰

White advocates that the Spirit plays a major function in preaching. To her, the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of power to make preaching a life-changing force. She points out,

The preaching of the word is of no avail without the presence and aid of the Holy Spirit; for this Spirit is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit, will it quicken the conscience or transform the life. A minister may be able to present the letter of the word of God; he may be familiar with all its commands and promises; but his sowing of the gospel seed will not be successful unless this seed is quickened into life by the dew of heaven. Without the co-operation of the Spirit of God, no amount of education, no advantages, however great, can make one a channel of light. Before one book of the New Testament had been written, before one gospel sermon had been preached after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon the praying disciples. Then the testimony of their enemies was, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." Acts 5:28.²¹

Ethos: The Preacher's Integrity

Ethos is simply what preachers are. It is their character. It is who they are as people. *Ethos* has to do with the condition of their inner life and with the work of the Spirit within, especially as it relates to their preaching. Biblical preaching is enhanced when preachers invite the Holy Spirit to apply the text to their own soul and ethical conduct.

The Preacher's Character

Phillips Brooks, the famous Episcopal bishop of Boston and the author of "O Little Town of Bethlehem," touched on this subject when he gave his famous definition of preaching in the 1877 *Yale Lecture on Preaching*. He said, "[P]reaching is the bringing of truth through personality."²² He then elaborated,

²⁰Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1915), 155.

²¹Ellen G. White, *The Desires of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1940), 671–672. See also Ellen G. White, "Who are the Sanctified?" *The Signs of the Times* (February 28, 1895), who writes, "When the Spirit of God moves upon the heart, it causes the faithful, obedient child of God to act in a manner that will commend religion to the good judgment of sensible-minded men and women. The Spirit of God illuminates the mind with the word of God, and does not come as a substitute for the word. The Holy Spirit ever directs the believer to the Word, and presents its passages to the mind, to reprove, correct, counsel, and comfort. It never leads its possessor to act in an unbecoming way, or to manifest extravagant and uncalled-for developments that bear not the least resemblance to that which is heavenly, and lower the standard of what is pure and undefiled religion in the minds of men."

²²Phillips Brooks, *Lecture on Preaching* (Manchester: James Robinson, 1899), 5.

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“Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching. The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him.”²³

In the early 1900s, William Quail carried the idea further by asking a rhetorical question: “‘Preaching is the art of making a sermon and delivering it?’ He himself answered it, ‘Why no, that’s not preaching. Preaching is the art of making a preacher and delivering that.’”²⁴

Ellen White also stresses the importance of the preacher’s character. She insists that living preachers should reflect the character of the Chief Shepherd. She writes,

The same Bible that contains the privileges of God's people, and his promises to them, sets forth also the sacred duties and solemn obligations of the shepherd who has charge of the flock of God. By comparing the living preacher with the divine picture, all may see whether he has the credentials from heaven,—likeness of character to him who is the Chief Shepherd. God designs that the teacher of the Bible should in his character and home life be an illustration of the principles of truth which he is teaching to his fellow-men.²⁵

She further emphasizes that a preacher should possess the same characteristics manifested by the Good Shepherd. She also points out that motive is the show-window of character. She states,

The preacher who bears the sacred truth for these last days must be the opposite of all this and, by his life of practical godliness, plainly mark the distinction existing between the false and the true shepherd. The Good Shepherd came to seek and to save that which was lost. He has manifested in His works His love for His sheep. All the shepherds who work under the Chief Shepherd will possess His characteristics; they will be meek and lowly of heart. Childlike faith brings rest to the soul and also works by love and is ever interested for others. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in them, they will be Christlike and do the works of Christ. Many who profess to be the ministers of Christ have mistaken their master. They claim to be serving Christ and are not aware that it is Satan's banner under which they are rallying. They may be worldly wise and eager for strife and vain-glory, making a show of doing a great work; but God has no use for them. The motives which prompt to action give character to the work. Although men may not discern the deficiency, God marks it.²⁶

²³Ibid., 9.

²⁴Quoted in Paul Sangster, *Doctor Sangster* (London: Epsworth Press, 1962), 271.

²⁵White, *Gospel Workers*, 243.

²⁶Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 4 (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, n.d.), 377.

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The Preacher's Affections

However, nothing is more powerful than God's Word when it is expounded by one whose heart has been harrowed and sanctified by the Word he is preaching. Puritan Williams Ames said it exactly:

Next to the evidence of truth, and the will of God drawn out of the Scriptures, nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation. To this purpose it is very profitable, if besides the daily practice of piety we use serious meditation and fervent prayer to work to those things upon our own hearts which we would persuade others of."²⁷

Every appropriation of the truth preached will strengthen the preacher for preaching. Every repentance occasioned in his soul by the Word preached will be said of him, "His sermon was like thunder because his life was like lightning."²⁸

Theologically, Jonathan Edwards in his *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* has given us the best explanation of what must take place within us. Edwards did not use the word "affection" as we do to describe a moderate feeling or emotion or a tender attachment. By affection, Edwards meant one's heart, one's inclination, and one's will.²⁹ Edwards said, "For who will deny that true religion consists in a great measure in vigorous and lively actings and the inclination and will of the soul or the fervent exercises of the heart?"³⁰ Edwards then goes on to demonstrate from a cascade of Scriptures that real Christianity so impacts the affections that shape one's fears, one's hopes, one's loves, one's hatreds, one's desire, one's joys, one's sorrows, one's gratitudes, one's compassions, and one's zeals.³¹

White, in an article she wrote in 1881 entitled "Sanctification, The Life of John," makes a similar emphasis about the importance and necessity of the preacher's affection. She comments,

John's affection for his Master was not a mere human friendship, but the love of a repentant sinner, who felt that he had been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. He esteemed it the highest honor to

²⁷Quoted in Art Lindsley, "Profiles in Faith: William Ames, Practical Theologian," *Tabletalk* 7/3 (June 1983): 14.

²⁸Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Harper, 1960), 161, who quotes Cornelius A. Lapse, *The Great Commentary of Cornelius A. Lapse*, trans. Thomas W. Mossman (London: John Hodges, 1876) I:317.

²⁹Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1747; rpt. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 24, where he explains: "This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the inclination; and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will; and the mind, with regards to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart." Cf. 24–27.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 27.

³¹*Ibid.*, 31. Cf. 31–35.

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work and suffer in the service of his Lord. His love for Jesus led him to love all for whom Christ died. His religion was of a practical character. He reasoned that love to God would be manifested in love to his children. He was heard again and again to say, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." "We love him because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" The apostle's life was in harmony with his teachings. The love which glowed in his heart for Christ, led him to put forth the most earnest, untiring labor for his fellow-men, especially for his brethren in the Christian church. He was a powerful preacher, fervent, and deeply in earnest, and his words carried with them a weight of conviction.³²

Indeed, sermon preparation requires humble, holy, critical thinking. It allows the truth to harrow the preacher's heart. It is asking the Holy Spirit for insight. It is an ongoing repentance. It is utter dependence.

Pathos: The Pastor's Passion

The preaching event must also be an exercise in Spirit-directed *Pathos* or passion. A false passion can have much subtler roots. As Dr. Martin Lloyd-John observed,

A man prepares a message and, having prepared it, he may be pleased and satisfied with the arrangement and order of the thoughts and certain forms of expression. If he is of an energetic, fervent nature, he may well be excited and moved by that and especially when he preaches the sermon. But it may be entirely of the flesh and have nothing at all to do with spiritual matters. Every preacher knows exactly what this means. . . . You can be carried away by your own eloquence and by the very thing you yourself are doing, and not by the truth at all.³³

White, with a similar emphasis, reminds her readers that many preachers have preached a Christless sermon and are not affected by the truth they present before the people. With a rebuking tone, she says,

The preaching the world needs is not only that which comes from the pulpit, but that which is seen in the everyday life; not only Bible precepts, but Christlike characters and heaven-born practices; the living, loving disciples of Jesus who have felt that it was more precious to commune with Jesus than to have the most exalted positions and praise of men; hearts that are daily feeling the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, that are made strong and tender by inward con-

³²Ellen G. White, "Sanctification, The Life of John," *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 15 February 1881, par. 4.

³³D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959-60), II:266.

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flict and secret prayer, and whose lives though humble are eloquent with holy deeds—these are the kind of workers that will win souls to Jesus. In our ministry we must reveal Christ to the people, for they have heard Christless sermons all their lives.³⁴

In the chapter “The Message and Its Presentation,” White makes the distinction between those who preach with passion and those without. She makes the contrast when she writes:

There are men who stand in the pulpits as shepherds, professing to feed the flock, while the sheep are starving for the bread of life. There are long-drawn-out discourses, largely made up of the relation of anecdotes; but the hearts of the hearers are not touched. The feelings of some may be moved, they may shed a few tears, but their hearts are not broken. The Lord Jesus has been present when they have been presenting that which was called sermons, but their words were destitute of the dew and rain of heaven. They evidenced that the anointed ones described by Zechariah (see chapter 4) had not ministered to them that they might minister to others. When the anointed ones empty themselves through the golden pipes, the golden oil flows out of themselves into the golden bowls, to flow forth into the lamps, the churches. This is the work of every true, devoted servant of the living God. The Lord God of heaven cannot approve much that is brought into the pulpit by those who are professedly speaking the word of the Lord. They do not inculcate ideas that will be a blessing to those who hear. There is cheap, very cheap fodder placed before the people.³⁵

Passion and Personality

Passion can be demonstrated when a preacher raises his voice and flails his arms as if he is going to fly. But it can be equally present when the preacher talks quietly and slowly, calmly, and measurably.

According to John Piper, Sereno Dwight asked a man who had heard Jonathan Edwards preached if Edwards was an eloquent preacher. The reply was,

He had no studied varieties of the voice, and no strong emphasis. He scarcely gestured, or even moved; and he made no attempt by the elegance of his style, or the beauty of his pictures, to gratify the taste, and fascinate the imagination. But, if you mean by eloquence, the power of presenting an important truth before an audience, with overwhelming weight of argument, and with such intenseness of feeling, that the whole soul of the speaker is thrown into every part of the conception and delivery; so that the solemn attention of the whole audience is riveted, from the beginning to the close, and impressions

³⁴Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 17 (Maryland: E. G. White Estate, 1993), 73–74.

³⁵Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1946), 209.

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are left that cannot be effaced; Mr. Edwards was the most eloquent man I ever heard speak.³⁶

In 1897, White wrote an article, “Preach the Word,” revealing the need for preachers to be eloquent in proclaiming the truth and correcting errors. This is a good summary of her perspective on the right passion of a preacher reflected in his personality. She explains,

Satan can furnish men with endless excuses and evasions to cause them to neglect the duty of speaking words of warning to those who are erring, and of presenting the truth as it is in Jesus to souls who are perishing. The minister who loves to sermonize will be in danger of preaching to a great length, as though a multitude of words was all-essential, and thus he will become so weary that he will have neither disposition nor strength to engage in personal effort when he has an opportunity of coming heart to heart with his hearers. The minister should be ready to open the Bible, and according as circumstances shall require, read reproof, rebuke, warning, or comfort to those who listen. He should teach the truth, rightly dividing the word, suiting out portions that will be as meat in due season to those with whom he associates. Too many ministers neglect to deal faithfully with those with whom they come in contact. They leave plain dealing to be done by other ministers: for they do not want to run the risk of losing the friendship of those for whom they labor. If ministers would deal at the right time with those who err, they would prevent an accumulation of wrong, and save souls from death. If the work of reproof is neglected by one minister, and taken up by another, those who are reproved, receive the impression that the minister who did not point out their errors was a good minister. But this is not the case; he was merely a preacher, not a worker together with God for the suppression of sin. In the meekness of Jesus, you should do the work which will give full proof of your ministry. You should show a heartfelt sorrow for sin, but manifest no unholy passion in reproofing the error. All your efforts must be made with long-suffering and doctrine; and if you see but meager results of your work, do not be discouraged. This experience will call for the manifestation of long-suffering and patience. Keep working, be discreet, be discerning, understand when to speak and when to keep silence.³⁷

The Necessity of Personal Application

While those committed to biblical preaching, including Ellen G. White, are convinced of the truth and the power of the biblical text, many are unclear as to the question: Are preachers responsible only for *explaining* the meaning of the

³⁶As cited in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 49–50.

³⁷Ellen G. White, “Preach the Word,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 28 September 1897, par. 10.

text, or are they also responsible for showing their hearers how the passage *applies* in the life of the saved?

Objections to Application in Preaching

Contemporary evangelicals are not the only ones to struggle with this question. Karl Barth, reflecting his transcendent view of God and theology of revelation, questioned whether it was possible for any human being to apply Scripture. He insisted that being faithful to the text and also true to life in this age is “a serious difficulty” that has “no solution.”³⁸ Rather, the task of bridging the gap between the Bible and the life today remains in the hands of God alone. For Barth, application in preaching is merely talking about the text and contemporary life, while insisting that God must bridge the gap between the two. Application is inferential, not direct. An individual’s response results from an encounter with God Himself, regardless of the preacher’s work. Any attempt by the preacher at direct application might prejudice the encounter between God and the individual listener.³⁹

Dennison criticizes any emphasis on application in preaching, because many do so by attempting to find a point of contact between the text and the audience. He states,

Rather than seeing the hearers of the Word called and placed by grace within that Word and its flow of the drama of salvation, this approach, as unintentional as it may be, allows the contemporary situation to determine the Word’s relevance. Moreover, instead of seeing the hearers living by grace out of the heavenly world into which they have been introduced by God’s sovereign activity in the Word, this approach finds no place for the present eschatological and transcendent environment of the people of God, the very environment that sets them *above* their culture.⁴⁰

Dennison disdains the notion that preachers are responsible in determining Scripture’s relevance. On the other hand, he asserts,

Good preaching makes us and our contemporary situation meaningful in the text. In other words, good preaching doesn’t pull the Word into our world as if the Word were deficient in itself and in need of applicatory skills. Instead good preaching testifies and declares to us that we have been pulled into the Word which has its own marvelous sufficiency.⁴¹

³⁸Karl Barth, *Prayer and Preaching* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 108.

³⁹Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 20.

⁴⁰Charles G. Dennison, “Some Thoughts on Preaching,” *Kerux* 4 (December 1989): 8.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

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John MacArthur, Jr., though not opposed to the preacher developing general application in his sermons, rejects any obligation to do so. He downplays the need for sermon application, arguing that the Word of God has inherent power.

True expository preaching is actually the most effective kind of applicational preaching. When Scripture is accurately interpreted and powerfully preached, the Spirit takes the message and applies it to the particular needs of each listener. Apart from explicit general application in principlizing the main points in the exposition, the expositor is not compelled to give a set number of points of specific application before a sermon can have an applicational impact. This is not to say he should not make applications, but if the text is allowed to speak fully, applications will multiply far beyond what he can anticipate as the Spirit of God takes His Word and applies it to each listener.⁴²

The Need for Application

Despite the above criticisms and objections, we are convinced that biblical preaching which includes direct and explicit application to the lives of the hearers is the most effective. Some believe that application and translation of the text into contemporary life and specific situations is the work of the Holy Spirit. Such reasoning seems disingenuous at best. Why would the Holy Spirit require a preacher to explain the meaning of the text, but not to apply it? What biblical or moral principle makes exegesis the work of the preacher and application the exclusive province of the Spirit? More plausible is the belief that the Holy Spirit uses human means to accomplish both tasks involved in preaching.

Haddon W. Robinson notes, “Many homileticians have not given accurate application the attention it deserves.”⁴³ J. I. Packer admits that the present-day pulpit is weak in practical preaching.⁴⁴ Jerry Vines laments that the “subject of application in the work of exposition has not received sufficient attention.”⁴⁵ Harold T. Bryson predicts that “more than likely the concern for relevancy of

⁴²John MacArthur, Jr., “Moving from Exegesis to Exposition,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard Mayhew (Dallas: Word, 1992), 300.

⁴³Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Bakers, 1980), 89. Robinson also comments that “No book has been published devoted to the knotty problems raised by application” (90). Adams, however, takes up his challenge in *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*. While not fully addressing the reasons why application is necessary in preaching, Adams nevertheless states that it is. He bases his explanation solely on the nature of the task of preaching: “Is application necessary? Absolutely. And the reason is that preaching is heralding. It is not mere exposition. It is not lecturing on history—even redemptive history. It is not ‘sharing.’ It is authoritatively declaring both the good and the bad news of the Bible. It is forcibly bringing home to God’s people God’s message from God’s Word” (32).

⁴⁴J. I. Packer, “From the Scriptures to the Sermon,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 22 (1990): 49.

⁴⁵Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 97.

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the text will produce more books on application or interpretation and more emphasis in sermons on applying the biblical text to life in today's world."⁴⁶

Why would any preacher object to a focus on application? David Veerman suggests that critics do not understand what others mean by application.⁴⁷ He says application has the following elements: First, application is not additional information; it is not giving more facts in the sermon. Second, application is not mere understanding. Grasping the sermon or scriptural content mentally is far different from the ability to apply it properly in one's life. Third, application cannot be equated with relevance since listeners need specific and concrete admonitions. Fourth, application does not mean that the preacher provides illustrations. Although sermon illustrations are a necessary ingredient in proclamation, by themselves, they are not to be equated with sermon application.

Ellen G. White strongly stresses the need for application in preaching. She agrees with the above authors that it is not mere exposition which is the main concern of any preacher, but equally important is the application of truth in the lives of the hearers. She writes:

It is not enough that we merely give an exposition of the Scriptures, but we must have the Word of God abiding in us; and Christ has said that unless "ye eat of My flesh and drink of My blood, ye have no part with Me. None but those who eat of My flesh and drink of My blood shall have eternal life." (See John 6:53-56). Then He goes on to explain what it means. Why, He says, "the flesh profiteth nothing; it is the Spirit that quickeneth" (see verse 63), and He says that His flesh is meat indeed and drink indeed. Therefore, we are not to merely open the Bible and read something to the people and then go away out of the desk and carry no burden of souls with us.⁴⁸

In this portion of her writings, White emphasizes two major points. First, exposition of the Scriptures is important, but it is not enough as far as preaching or teaching is concerned. Opening the Bible and reading from it is basic in biblical preaching, but it does not end there. Second, she implies that each hearer of the Scriptures should "eat His flesh and drink His blood."

In her book *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, E. G. White has a chapter entitled "The Kind of Sermons Needed." She includes in the focus of the sermon the need for application of solemn truths discovered in the Scriptures. She asks a question at the beginning of the chapter and answers it by giving her personal comments. She writes:

⁴⁶ Harold T. Bryson, "Trends in Preaching Studies Today," *Theological Educator* 49 (Spring 1994): 119.

⁴⁷ David Veerman, "Sermons: Apply Within," *Leadership* 11 (Spring 1990): 121-122.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, "The Minister's Relationship to God's Word," *Sermons and Talks*, Vol. 1 (Maryland: E. G. White Estate, 1990), 62.

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Will our brethren bear in mind that we are living amid the perils of the last days? Read Revelation in connection with Daniel. Teach these things. Let discourses be short, spiritual, elevated. Let the preacher be full of the word of the Lord. Let every man who enters the pulpit know that he has angels from heaven in his audience. And when these angels empty from themselves the golden oil of truth into the heart of him who is teaching the word, then the application of the truth will be a solemn, serious matter. The angel messengers will expel sin from the heart, unless the door of the heart is padlocked and Christ is refused admission. Christ will withdraw Himself from those who persist in refusing the heavenly blessings that are so freely offered them.⁴⁹

Defining Application

So what is application in preaching? Several definitions exist, each having its own merit. John A. Broadus, in his seminal work on expository preaching, begins his chapter on application as follows: “The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but it is the main thing to be done.”⁵⁰ Broadus defines application as “part, or those parts, of the discourse in which we show how the subject applies to the persons addressed, what practical instructions it offers them, what practical demands it makes upon them.”⁵¹

Application thus includes three items: 1) application proper, showing the hearers how the truths of the sermon apply to them; 2) practical suggestions as to the best way and means of performing the duty urged upon him; and 3) persuasion in the form of moral and spiritual appeal for the right response.⁵² Ramesh Richard states, “The application is when you move your audience from just receiving to exhortation and implementation of God’s truth.”⁵³ Adams defines application as “that process by which preachers make scriptural truths so pertinent to members of their congregations that they not only understand how those truths should effect changes in their lives but also feel obligated and perhaps even eager to implement those changes.”⁵⁴ Veerman asserts that application

⁴⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1944), 337, 338.

⁵⁰John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, new and rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 210. John F. Bettler (“Application,” in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, Jr. [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986], 332–333) envisions an even greater role in application: “Application, no matter how skillfully structured or helpfully delivered, must never be viewed as an ‘add-on.’ It is not a skill to be developed merely as part of a good preaching repertoire. It is not frosting. It is rather the cake—the entire enterprise, from picking a text to post-sermon discussions, must be understood as *application*.”

⁵¹Broadus, 211.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Bakers, 1995), 116.

⁵⁴Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*, 17.

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is “answering two questions: *So what?* and *Now what?* The first question asks, ‘Why is this passage important to *me?*’ The second asks, ‘What should I do about it today?’”⁵⁵ Wayne McDill claims,

Application is more than just taking the sermon truth and attacking the congregation with it. Application presents the implications of biblical truth for the contemporary audience. It is a call for action, putting the principles of Scripture to work in our lives. It deals with attitudes, behavior, speech, lifestyle, and personal identity. It appeals to conscience, to values, to conviction, to commitment to Christ.⁵⁶

For McDill, sermon application can be either descriptive or prescriptive. Descriptively, application applies the principles of Scripture to contemporary life, pointing out examples of obedience and disobedience and the results that follow.⁵⁷ Prescriptively, the preacher may use Bible truth as guidelines and applications for behavior.⁵⁸

Hermeneutics and Application

Evangelical scholars distinguish hermeneutics from exegesis. In such a view biblical hermeneutics involves explaining a passage of Scripture, but is not complete after that process. V. C. Pfitzner comments on the difference between these two concepts:

The task of exegesis is to ascertain exactly what the author wished to say in the precise historical situation in which he was, in which he was himself translating the message of the Gospel. The hermeneutical question already begins with the task of translating the original words of the text, of understanding what they meant then, but it is really felt only when the exegetical task is completed and we are left with the task of understanding this text for ourselves, of understanding its message in our precise historical situation. The hermeneutical problem thus involves not only our understanding of the original text, but also the problem of bridging the historical time-distance between the original text and that which it proclaims and ourselves.⁵⁹

Therefore, preachers, as interpreters of a biblical text, must move beyond what a Scripture passage meant then to what it means now both for themselves and their congregations. Hermeneutics as a process includes application as well.

⁵⁵Veerman, “Sermons: Apply Within,” *Leadership II*, 122.

⁵⁶Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 187.

⁵⁷Ibid.: “The implications of biblical truth are thus used as a measure for life, not to tell the hearer what he should do but to show him what is actually taking place.”

⁵⁸Ibid.: “Our hearers want to know in concrete terms how they are to live out the implications of biblical truth.”

⁵⁹V. C. Pfitzner, “The Hermeneutical Problem and Preaching,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 (June 1967): 348.

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In other words, the preacher must apply his biblical text in order to complete the task of hermeneutics. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard acknowledge that

Despite the importance of application, few modern evangelical scholars have focused on this topic. In fact, most hermeneutics textbooks give it only brief coverage, and many major commentary series only mention application with passing remarks to help readers bridge the gap from the biblical world to the modern world.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, in their opinion, while proper application is dependent upon establishing the meaning of a text, “the process of interpretation is incomplete if it stops in the land of the meaning.”⁶¹ Furthermore, they “insist that the goal of hermeneutics must include detecting how the Scriptures can impact readers today.”⁶²

White admonishes those who sit in the pews who listen to preaching to diligently study the Scripture and weigh the interpretation being proclaimed in the homily. She points out,

By searching the Scriptures we are to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. The Bible has not been given for the benefit of ministers only; it is the book for the people; it is the comfort of the poor man. It is a great mistake for ministers to give the impression to the people that they should not read the Bible because they cannot understand its sacred teachings, and should be content with the interpretation given by those whose business it is to proclaim the word of God. Ministers who thus educate the people are themselves in error. The Bible and the soul were made one for the other, and through the agency of the word and the Holy Spirit, God moves upon the heart. To him who receives the love of the truth, the word of God is as a light that shineth in a dark place, pointing out the path so plainly that the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein. He realizes that “the entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”⁶³

The “Gap” Between Then and Now

As noted earlier, those who object to application in preaching voice their most strident objections to the metaphorical “gap” between the biblical text and the contemporary audience. In their zeal to defend the timeless and transcendent nature of the Word of God, they ignore the very real differences between the world of the Bible and the world of the hearer. To ignore application for fear of

⁶⁰William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 403.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 401.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 18.

⁶³Ellen G. White, “The Bible to be Understood by All,” *Signs of the Times* (August 20, 1894), par. 02.

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rendering the Word of God unapproachable or incomprehensible, however, is a needless fear.

The need to study and contextualize certain cultural references is obvious, and so should be the need to make contemporary application. There is indeed a chasm “between two worlds” which is traversed by application.

This “distance” between the context of the Bible and a contemporary setting can be seen in four areas.⁶⁴ First is the distance in time. Second, the distance in culture widens the gap. The geographical distance is the third difficulty. And finally, the greatest difficulty is the linguistic difference. If translation and exegesis are legitimate means to bridge the distance between the text and us, then application of the text is legitimate as well.

Sidney Greidanus and John R. W. Stott both write extensively about this thorny issue of biblical interpretation. Greidanus first approaches the issue of this chasm in terms of a gap between stages of redemptive history that makes application necessary.

The sermon, therefore, still consists of explanation and application—not because the Word is objective, but because the Word is addressed to the church at one stage of redemptive history while the preacher must address this Word to the church at another stage of redemptive history. The Word, to be sure, is addressed to the church of all ages, but this confession should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that it is first of all directed to a particular church at a certain stage of redemptive history. There is, certainly, continuity in redemptive history; there is continuity in the church of all ages; but the discontinuity between then and now should not be overlooked.⁶⁵

John R. W. Stott develops the metaphor of preaching as bridge-building. According to Stott, the enormous cultural changes that have occurred since the Bible was written have caused a “deep rift . . . between the biblical world and the modern world.”⁶⁶ Stott compellingly writes that the preacher’s responsibility is to build bridges that “enable God’s revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of men and women today.”⁶⁷

Some application zealots sow misunderstanding when they use terminology that suggests that it is the preacher’s task to “make the Bible relevant.”⁶⁸ To be sure, the Bible is relevant, first because of the nature of the Bible itself. But

⁶⁴Ibid., 13–18.

⁶⁵Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1970), 158.

⁶⁶John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Compare Nolan Howington (“Expository Preaching,” *Review and Expositor* 56 [January 1959], 63), who states, “To make biblical truth clear, there must be explanation; to make it relevant, there must be application.”

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while the Bible is “amazingly contemporary,”⁶⁹ its relevance is not always apparent. That is why preaching must faithfully apply it.

Vines notes the link between the relevant nature of the Bible and the task of application: “To fail to make practical application of the Word of God is to do injustice to the Bible’s purpose. God’s truth is timeless. God was thinking of us when He wrote the Bible.”⁷⁰ Scripture is relevant because it has the ability to speak to issues of contemporary human beings despite the distance between them. Olford correctly notes, “It would be safe to say that there is no part of Scripture that is unrelated to some aspect of faith and life.”⁷¹ Preachers, therefore, should note Kaiser’s understanding of the Bible’s ability to address the needs of people today. He writes,

The relevancy and adequacy of the Bible to meet the needs of a modern age are easily demonstrable. In fact, sermons that feature the latest pop psychology or recovery plan are settling for less than they could or should. In almost every contemporary issue the Church faces today, she would have been better off a thousand times over had she gone with a systematic plan to go through the whole Bible in an expository way.⁷²

Application is necessary in preaching a sermon because of the distance in time, culture, geography, and language between the ancient text of Scripture and the preacher. Nevertheless, preachers do not need to *make* Scripture relevant. They must, however, *demonstrate* its relevance; that is, they must appreciate the task of “transferring a relevant message from the past to the present.”⁷³

Bridging the gap between these two worlds is a matter of properly applying the message of a given passage to the preacher’s audience.⁷⁴ It is not an easy task for preachers, but one that is essential in order to fulfill the demands of the sermon. All Adventist preachers should stand with Stott,

⁶⁹Stott, 141. See also Keith Willhite, “Audience Relevance in Expository Preaching,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (July-September 1992), where he comments that “nothing is more relevant for human beings than the revealed Word of the living God” (356).

⁷⁰Jerry Vines, *Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 96.

⁷¹Stephen F. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, & Holman, 1998), 256.

⁷²Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Crisis in Expository Preaching Today,” *Preaching* 11 (September-October 1995): 8. William Ward Ayer (“The Art of Effective Preaching,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 [January-March 1967], 31) makes a similar call: “The man behind the sacred desk must have studied to show himself approved as he handles the truth, adapting it to the needs of today, needs which are basically the same as for all days, but especially for our day when surface situations have been so radically changed in a rapidly changing world.”

⁷³Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 158.

⁷⁴Willhite, however, believes it is an argumentative task, that the preacher must take into consideration aspects of argumentation to bridge the gap to audience relevance (356).

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Praying that God will raise up a new generation of Christian communicators who are determined to bridge the chasm; who struggle to relate God's unchanging Word to our ever changing world; who refuse to sacrifice truth to relevance or relevance to truth; but who resolve instead in equal measure to be faithful to Scripture and pertinent to today.⁷⁵

Benefits of Application

At least five benefits to the congregation are recognizable. First, the listeners are urged to respond as a result of hearing the demands made upon them by the biblical truth presented in the sermon. Second, application reaches the whole person. Application touches the mind, will, and emotion of the individual. Third, application develops Christlikeness in the listeners. Fourth, it develops moral discernment in an amoral environment. Finally, application allows hearers to grasp the biblical message as relevant to their contemporary needs.⁷⁶

White makes clear the outcome of truth applied in the life of a believer in the article she wrote entitled "Our Duty as Christians." She concludes:

Through the application of the truths of the Gospel, men become laborers together with God. But those who while claiming to believe the Bible fail to practise the truth it contains, are blind and can not see afar off. This is why so many men and women live at cross-purposes with God. They do not live and work upon the Gospel plan of addition. Their religious experience is dwarfed.⁷⁷

Application is the vital link between God's eternal Word given in antiquity and the concepts of men and women in the present.⁷⁸ Preachers need not discuss the option of "needs-based preaching" because the biblical revelation is more than adequate to touch hearers across the spectrum of humanity. The role of the preacher is to make biblical truth plain enough for listeners to understand its meaning and to demonstrate its relevance. Louis Lotz masterfully characterizes preaching which succeeds at both explanation and applications:

Good preaching begins in the Bible, but it doesn't stay there. It visits the hospital and the college dorm, the factory and the farm, the kitchen and the office, the bedroom and the classroom. Good preaching invades the world in which people live, the real world of tragedy and triumph, loveliness and loneliness, broken hearts, broken homes,

⁷⁵Stott, 144.

⁷⁶Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3/2 (Summer 1999): 70-84.

⁷⁷Ellen G. White, "Our Duty as Christians," *Signs of the Times* (September 12, 1900), par. 06.

⁷⁸Howington understands this role of application, stating, "The preacher will throw the light of divine revelation upon human need and will present the resources of grace that are sufficient for that need. His sermons will thus disclose the vital relation between the passage and actual life. Though the setting of the text is ancient, the living word through it speaks to personal need and in the present tense" (63).

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and amber waves of strain. Good preaching invades the real world, and it talks to real people—the high-school senior who’s there because he’s dragged there; the housewife who wants a divorce; the grandfather who mourns the irreversibility of time and lives with a frantic sense that almost all the sand in the hourglass has dropped; the farmer who is about to lose his farm, the banker who must take it from him; the teacher who has kept her lesbianism a secret all these years; the businessman for whom money has become a god; the single girl who hates herself because she’s fat. Good preaching helps them do business with God; it helps them interpret their own human experience, telling them what in their heart of hearts they already know, and are yearning to hear confirmed⁷⁹

Conclusion

Logos, Ethos, and Pathos are the key components of biblical preaching. What you believe about the Word is everything. As a preacher, Ellen G. White strongly believes the Scripture as wholly infallible, totally sufficient, and massively potent. She gives herself to the conviction of biblical preaching. She allows the Word of God to course through her being, inviting the Holy Spirit to winnow her soul in order to conform her life to the truth she preaches. It is her strong conviction that God’s Word must come out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation. In her time, when she stood to preach, she was drenched in an authentic passion that caused her to speak with utmost earnestness. In her life and ministry she combined the *Logos*, the *Ethos*, and the *Pathos* of preaching the Word, and the wind of the Holy Spirit was in her sails. God’s name is lifted up, and God is glorified.

To White, application is inherent in the definition of biblical preaching. It is impossible to preach a true biblical message without relating the biblical text to the contemporary hearers. She points out that application is also included in the task of hermeneutics, which involves the whole process of interpretation. Furthermore, application is the mechanism to bridge the metaphorical gap between the world of the biblical text and the world of the preacher’s audience. But she cautions her readers against viewing application as a human endeavor alone. It is definitely not a task to be undertaken apart from the preacher’s assurance of the inherent power of God’s Word (Isaiah 55:10) and the ultimate role of the Holy Spirit to apply that Word to human hearts. As daunting a task as it may be, application nevertheless is requisite in preaching a sermon in order to change lives.

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⁷⁹Louis Lotz, “Good Preaching,” *Reformed Review* 40 (Autumn 1986): 38.

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