

Word and Witness

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have given us Your Word, that which is life and bread to Your people. You make Your Spirit shine upon it so that it is reflected into our hearts and our hearts made able to receive what you say. But not our hearts only, rather as we ingest all the goodness of what You have given, You make us also reflectors of Your truth to others. We would be those who shine well. Help us therefore by what we learn in this class, by what we do, to be those who are well equipped for shining in the darkness, for the sake of those whom You love and are calling to Yourself. We ask not on the basis of our ability but rather the ability that is made available by Your Spirit. We lean on You now and ask for Your help and aid, because apart from You, we can do nothing. Grant us therefore Your Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The goal for this lesson is to understand how important preaching is, and then what is really important in preaching. What is really important in preaching may surprise you as we move forward.

If I were to ask why you are taking this course, why you would go to seminary, I hope you would have some sense of gaining the knowledge and the skills for what God calls you to do. It is both sides of that, gaining the knowledge and the skills for what God is calling you to do, that is important. I think you would recognize that if you were here just to gain knowledge, the Scriptures themselves tell us the consequence of that: “knowledge puffs up.” That is all it does if there is not some release, some mechanism by which God enables us to share that knowledge. It will not ultimately benefit us—it is actually harmful to us unless there is some way in which it is being used for God’s purposes. The idea is that God is saying, “What I desire from you is not simply your knowledge of the Word but your ability to communicate it to others.” I mentioned this in our school’s convocation the other day: when the apostles prayed for others, they said, “We want you to know everything that we know, that you may know how wide and deep is the love of Christ Jesus.” But in order for that to be true, you have to be active in sharing your faith. This is an amazing concept. For us to really know what God is saying, we have to be actively involved in communicating it to others. Therefore, Dr. Rayburn, who taught this course for 25 years and was the founding president of Covenant Seminary, would always remind us in his first lecture, “Now there is only one king of your studies, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. But homiletics is the queen.” He was reminding us that everything we do in the curriculum—whether it is New Testament studies, Old Testament studies, systematic theology, or church history—is feeding a purpose. That purpose is to equip us to feed others, because this is really the means by which we ourselves will know and grow fully in the understanding of the grace of God that He intends for us. Thus preaching is, in a sense, elevated to the highest position. That sounds nice, until you consider the responsibility this puts on you. Once you elevate the task so high, once you say that this is the main thing to be done, then people who are about to do it feel very inadequate. When you elevate the task, you make the servant very lacking in confidence.

What I want to do now is to help you stop thinking that the responsibility for the effects of preaching all rests on you, that it is something you have to do well enough that it will have an effect. I want you to recognize this is its essence: the power is not in you, and it never will be. The power is in the Word. It is not how well you do the task that ultimately is the issue. It is how well you communicate the Word, which carries the power of God. We sometimes think of the greatest nineteenth-century Reformed preacher as being Charles H. Spurgeon. I want you to think of what he said about himself. He said, “I have often been surprised at the mercy of God to me. Poor sermons of mine that I could cry over when I get home have nonetheless led scores to the cause. And more wonderful still, words that I speak in ordinary conversation, mere chance sentences as men call them, have nevertheless been as winged

arrows of God and have pierced men's hearts and laid them wounded at Jesus' feet. I have often lifted up my hands in astonishment and said, 'How can this be? How can God bless such feeble instrumentality?' The key word here is "instrumentality." We are those earthen vessels, we are the instruments.

The power is in the Word. Therefore the clarity with which we present the Word is ultimately what preaching is about and not what you may be tempted to think this course is about. What is this course about? Well, if I just get the preaching outline right, if I can just deliver this well, then I will be a great preacher. Actually, no. It is the clarity of the Word, because the Word contains the power. There are many key verses by which the Scriptures relate this to us. The power of God inherent in the Word comes, we know, because the Word of God is what created the world and the universe as we know it. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He spoke, and it came to be. The power of creation was in the Word. The Word of God continues to control everything around us. Psalm 137:15-19 says,

He sends his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
He spreads the snow like wool
and scatters the frost like ashes.
He hurls down his hail like pebbles.
Who can withstand his icy blast?
He sends his word and melts them;
he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.
He has revealed his word to Jacob,
his laws and decrees to Israel.

"He sends his word and melts them..." That is an amazing thought, is it not? The Word of God continues to be active in persuading other people. "Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully [...] Is not my word like fire [...] and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:28-29). Some of you have friends you want to come to Christ, family you have prayed for for years. And you wonder what will finally break them. What does God say will finally break through? It is the Word that breaks a rock, a hard heart; it is faithfulness to what God Himself expresses. The Word of God performs the purposes for which He Himself designed it. "As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth [...] so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55: 10-11). One of the amazing passages in Scripture whereby the inherent power of the Word is demonstrated is that in Philippians where Paul says, "I am in prison, and while I am in prison I am still rejoicing that the Word is going forth. Now, some people are preaching it out of false motives. Some people are preaching it out of good motives. But I rejoice for both because as long as the Word goes forth it is still accomplishing God's purposes." Now, that is an amazing thought. People can even misuse it for their purposes, and God still uses it for His purposes. The Word has this inherent power in it that takes the burden off us of saying, "Unless I do it exactly right, it has no power." No, it has power beyond us. It has sufficiency unto itself, which ultimately gives me much confidence when I preach. There is not some magic when I preach—the Word has the power.

Why does the Word have that power? Because it is actually communicating Christ Himself, the divine *Logos*. Remember, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Who is being described? Christ. If He is described as "the Word," He is God still speaking to us in incarnate form, fleshly form—the Word presented. This is what God is saying to us, what Christ Himself represents. Why is this important? Because we recognize that, by the Word,

creation came into being. That is part of His power. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). The Word of God created. Here the Scripture uses a pun, does it not? God spoke, and it came to be, but the Word was also the means by which Christ came into creation and created creation. He is in fact that Word of creation. He is also the Word of the new creation (James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23). Hear the pun used explicitly in Scripture. James says, “He [that is, God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth.” What do you think James is talking about when he says that “God chose to give us birth through the word of truth”? Is he talking about the inscripturated Word, or the incarnate Word? The answer, of course, is both. He chose to give us life through “the Word of truth”—that is the Word about Jesus and the Word that is Jesus. Even more explicit is Peter’s saying: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” You have been born again by the word of God. Again, is it the inscripturated Word that is referred to or is it the incarnate Word that makes us born again? Again, it is a trick question. The answer is both. God is presenting Himself to us in the Word so much so that when He presents Christ to us He says, “This is the Word.”

Now it begins to be really amazing. What are the implications of that? If Christ is the Word, and when I speak I am presenting the Word of God, then when I speak, who is speaking? Is God yet speaking? Augustine said it this way, “When the Bible speaks, God speaks.” Thus if I say what the Bible says, who is still speaking? I know it is my voice coming out, but who is still speaking? God is still speaking to His people, through the human instruments who are faithful to His Word. Citing this, the Second Helvetic Confession (the early Reformers’ confession) sounds too bold to be true. It sounds almost heretical. But this is what it says, “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.” That is a very simple statement, but think of the implications. The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. God spoke, and creation came into being. He spoke, and it stood fast. I speak, and (if I am faithful to the Word of God) He still speaks. Thus Luther says, “The church is God’s mouth-house.” It is the house of God by which God is speaking to His people and into the culture. God is still speaking. Most bold was Calvin, and he said it this way: “God has so chosen, by His Spirit, to anoint the tongue and the lips of His preachers so that when they speak, the voice of Jesus resounds.” But we want to think, “That was just me, it was just me speaking!”

Have you ever sat around the table during a holiday and thought, “Lord, here are all my unsaved loved ones around this table. If only Jesus were here to talk to them! If only Jesus were here, then they would listen.” God has so chosen to anoint the lips and tongues of His preachers by His Spirit, that when they speak His Word, Jesus still speaks. Now, did everyone accept the voice of Jesus? Did everyone say, “Oh, it is Jesus—I will go with Him!”? Did everyone do that? No. But those whom God was calling to Himself, those whom He designed to have their hearts broken—as the Word will break a rock—those persons were persuaded by the voice of Jesus, which we yet possess when we speak the Word of God. It is not magic. It is not a question of “Did I use the right formula? Did I say the right words? Did I use the right tone of voice? Did I raise my hands just the right way?” No, it is the commitment to the truth of God’s Word that yet contains the power of God’s Word. That gives me such confidence.

The writer of Hebrews says it this way, “The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). That which we speak is yet living and active. Here is that activity of God, yet present and working, living and active as we speak the words of these pages of Scripture 2000 years later. Yet it is presently working because the Word of God is yet living and active. Thus Paul could say in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for *it* is the power of God for our salvation” (emphasis added). The good news, the truth of God—I am not ashamed of it because I recognize more and more that it is the power of God, communicated to His servants. And I am one of

them! I am not capable in myself. But given this might, given this *dunamis*, this power that is inherent to the Scriptures because it is the Word, when I present it, God is yet doing amazing works of creation even through such as I.

Now we think of Spurgeon again. Why was he so able? Because he knew he was so insufficient. He kept getting out of the way. How could God bless one whose efforts are as feeble as my own? How could I be an instrument in His hands? Because that is all I am, I rely entirely on Him—thus His power comes to the fore. There are many ways in which this is said. Maybe it is best just to express it in what you know.

A friend and I were just talking before class about friends we have from our past. Do you have friends from the past you remember from high school or maybe college days, and you realize that you and they are now living entirely different lives? Maybe they are living in a pagan, self-serving, totally lost condition. I think of a couple of friends of mine. A boy I knew in high school, a friend of mine, basically lived for football and the weekends. There was also a girl I knew who basically lived to be appreciated by men; her life was basically giving herself to others in dating. I have kept track of those friends through the years. During college one of them became a Christian. And the other, after he became a parent and had a child who was diagnosed with cancer, also became a Christian. Both became Christians. I thought, “How did that happen? Was it something I said? Was it something a preacher at church said?” How could I say that? Here were people who were walking after idols, totally self-consumed. They turned from themselves to serve the living and true God. Scripture says they turned from idolatry to serve the living and true God. How did that happen? Was it because of some words, little puffs of air out of my mouth, some vocalization of syllables? How does that happen? Is not the Word of God like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces? This happened not by anything in me, but by the wonder of the Word that is committed to us. It has such power that even when I recognize my weakness, my feebleness, my frailness, my lack of adequate instrumentality, I say, “Thank you, Lord, for Your Word that takes the burden off of me. As long as I am faithful to it, it performs Your purposes.” I have a much lesser obligation than I would if it were up to some sort of dramatic presentation to make the Word of God work. My goal is simply to make the Word of God clear. When I have done that, the Word of God works.

Now we need to talk about how that occurs. The power of God—if you think of this Word and the power it has, how is it applied? One powerful way in which it is applied is by expository preaching. The power of the Word is applied in expository preaching. Now, we will do much defining of terms as the semester continues. Let us first define the term “expository preaching,” and then we will talk about its advantages. How is the power of the Word of God applied in expository preaching? Well, first, let us define what expository preaching is. It is this simple: the meaning of the message is the message of the passage. The meaning of the message (or the sermon) is the message of the passage. So, what the passage means is what the sermon will be about. Now, what the Bible says, God says. The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Thus all expository preaching is trying to do, at its essence, is to say, “What is the meaning of that passage? That is the meaning of the message I will be preaching.” That is expository preaching.

If you use expository preaching, what are the advantages? When the message of the passage is also the message of the sermon, what are the advantages? There are three. First, expository preaching confronts people with the truth of the Word. It is that truth that is so powerful. So if expository preaching is simply saying what the Word says, making the truth plain, then we are confronting others with the truth of the Word that has power. It is not my opinion and not the philosophies of men. I do not take a poll to find out what I should be saying. The power is in the Word, and expository preaching is saying, “I want to confront you with the truth of the Word because that is where the power is.

A second advantage of expository preaching is that it confronts people with the authority of the Word. You may have read in the preface to *Christ Centered Preaching* where I said basically, What is the great debate in our culture today? It is the debate not only over meaning, but authority. Does anyone have the right to tell me what to do? What is the basic answer of our American society to that question? “No! Nobody has the right to tell me what to do!” But God does. And God has spoken. Thus my goal in expository preaching is to say, “Now, I am telling you what you must do, not on the basis of my authority but on the basis of God’s authority.” I have no authority. “I too am a man under authority,” said the apostle. Do you remember? Do not listen because of what I say. Listen to the One whom I speak for. When I speak the truth of God, I can do so with boldness because my authority is not my own. I speak with the authority of the Word of God. Now, that is again taking the burden off of me of thinking, “I have to accomplish this.” No, it is not on me to make you believe. Nor is it on me to say, “You must believe because I say it.” You must believe and respond because God said it. It is His authority as well as His truth. When the meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon, I speak with God’s authority.

Finally, expository preaching confronts with the power of the Spirit. Who or what alone can change the hearts of men and women? Can you do it? No, you cannot. The Holy Spirit working by and with the Word in our hearts alone can change people. Who or what alone can change the hearts of people *eternally*? The Holy Spirit, working by and with the Word in our hearts. That is the specific language of the Westminster Confession, in the first chapter and fifth paragraph. It is a wonderful expression of what we understand God must accomplish through His ministers. It is not, you see, the Holy Spirit working apart from the Word. Any number of people will say, “The Spirit said...” and then gross heresy results. It is the Holy Spirit using what God uses to create the new creation and the original creation. He creates a new creation in us, new life, new conformity to His Word. And it is His Word that He uses. But He who inspired the Word is still illuminating us so that we will receive that Word and understand it—the Holy Spirit working by and with the Word. Thus, what does expository preaching do? It makes sure that the Holy Spirit has the right “raw material” for doing that work of construction that must be done in the human heart. I do not depend on something other than the Word to be used by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will use God’s Word to convince and change people. Therefore what I do in expository preaching is say, “Here is the Word,” so that people will be confronted with the power of the Spirit. It is this amazing thought. When I preach, I recognize I am never the first preacher. I am always the second preacher. The first preacher is always the Spirit. He gave the Word, and He is working already in the hearts of those who will receive it. Therefore when I speak I am a servant of the work of the Spirit. I come along after. I speak in conformity with what the Spirit is doing, but the Spirit is the first preacher. Thus I seek to work in such a way that the Spirit’s work is made manifest in the hearts of others.

Now, if I say all that—that expository preaching seeks to confront with the work of the Spirit—then I recognize that technical excellence is not really what preaching is about. Recognizing that undercuts much of what people think they will get in a preparation and delivery course. Are we not supposed to be talking about excellence in preaching? Yes. The fact that the power is in the Word does not mean we are to be stumbling blocks to others, right? At the same time, we are to recognize that the power cannot be in us or else we will actually hurt other people.

I want you to listen to a biographer describe Edward Erving. Now, you have probably never heard of Edward Erving, though he was the greatest renowned preacher of his era. Listen to what the biographer of Erving says. (Erving was the preacher in London in the nineteenth century to which all the celebrities went and the people of government). This is what his biographer says, “The effect of his preaching was to leave men dazzled and stupefied rather than convinced or converted. They went home marveling at the eloquence of the orator rather than mourning over their sins and yearning for God.” That is a rather stark condemnation, is it not? He was a great preacher. People just marveled at how he spoke. But what

did it accomplish spiritually? Virtually nothing. Now, let us compare that to a couple of other preachers from an earlier, and then from a later, era. Some of you have read these words already from Robert S. Rayburn, the son of Dr. Rayburn who used to teach this course. He wrote this to encourage us. He says:

The Lord will use what little we have. But His blessing ultimately is the key to our preaching rather than our abilities. Church history furnishes us with grand illustrations of this fact. I think, for example, of the court preachers of Louis XIV's day. In mid-seventeenth century France, that court was as decadent and depraved as any kingly court ever was. Yet all the while, it professed earnestly its Christianity. For its appointed preachers it had Jean Massillon and Jacques Bossuet. Theirs were some of the greatest preaching ever produced in the history of the church. It was not only some of the most eloquent and powerful oratory ever heard. It was pious and blunt, intensely earnest, unafraid, and for seventeenth-century Catholicism, it was highly evangelical. This is the same Jean Massillon, you may remember, who when appointed to preach Louis XIV's funeral sermon ascended into the high pulpit of Notre Dame, surveyed the great congregation, including the crowned heads of Europe, and forever honored the office of preacher by saying to them, "In the hour of death, only God is great." And what was the consequence of that bold, courageous, evangelical preaching? Nothing. The Spirit did not blow on that occasion. But a few years later, in Cambuslang near Glasgow, Scotland, there was a minister named William M'Culloch. He was so bad a preacher that he was nicknamed "the ale preacher" because when he got up to speak, all the men left for the pubs. His own son says of his father, "He was not eloquent. He was very different from the popular orators of his time." After being licensed, it took him nine years to get his first pastorate. But it was upon these ineloquent, poorly constructed, poorly delivered sermons that the Spirit of God fell in 1742 and produced such a spiritual awakening in Scotland such as has not been known since. He was no Massillon, but it was not M'Culloch's gifts that were the key, but the Spirit.

Who alone can convert the hearts of men and women? Only the Spirit, working by and with the Word in our hearts—not our oratory, not our excellence. But when we present the Word of God, it is the Spirit who then can use us as His instruments, though we are weak, ineloquent, and seemingly poor vessels. Commitment to the truth of God's Word is the enabling of the work of the Spirit for the purposes of God's Word. If you think of the effectiveness of the Word, you have to say, "How is it made effective in the lives of people?" This may seem to undercut just a little of what I have said. For while the power is in the Word, you know that we can get in the way. Can we not? How do we make sure that people are getting the Word and that we are not in the way? How is the effectiveness of the Word promoted by testimony?

I want to talk to you about Aristotle's distinctions of what is included in every persuasive message. Now, if we were in medical school, this would be the time in the class when you recognize that we will begin to get definitions. If you are in medical school, much of the first year you are simply learning the terminology. Homileticians do the same thing. We will be looking at sermons in this class, and we will be preaching sermons. Thus we need to know some common terminology. This is helpful so that we can dissect, as it were, but also so that we can heal—so that we know what we are talking about as we look at the different components.

One way of thinking about that is to think of the elements that go into a message that make it persuasive historically and what are unique aspects of that as we talk about getting people into confrontation with the Word of God. One way to think about it is this: every persuasive message is made up of at least three components. The first is called *logos* historically. What does *logos* mean in Greek? It means "word." It is the words, it is the verbal content. *Logos* is the verbal content of the message. It includes not only the

words used but also the argument used, its craft, and the logic of the message. What is the verbal message? That is the *logos* part of the message.

A second major component of any message is *pathos*, which is the emotive content. *Pathos* is the passion, emotion, or feeling with which something is expressed. Now, I must tell you it is sometimes hard for people, particularly men and young men in our culture, to feel the weight of *pathos*. This is because we are trained in a John Wayne, Indiana Jones culture—men are supposed to be stoic. To really be strong you do not express emotion. And there is, we all recognize, a manipulative sort of preaching that expresses emotion just for effect. But I want you to recognize how dangerous preaching that shows no passion can be. Read this without emotion: “And if you do not receive Christ, you will probably go to hell. Now let us look at the next page...” What did you just say? It was once said of Moody that he was one of the few people qualified to speak of hell, because he could not do it without weeping. It grieved him so much, and people knew it did. There is this sense that if the message does not move you, if it does not seem to have any impact on you, then why would you expect it to have an impact on anyone else? To speak of the love of God in a way that does not move you is actually to speak untruth. It is to say, “This is not very important. This is not very significant.” Your manner is now contradicting your message. This is a standard rule of communicators: if your manner contradicts your message, your manner will be believed. Thus the manner needs to go with the message.

One of the wonderful preachers of the nineteenth century was Robert Murray McShane. He was a wonderful preacher. He sparked a revival in Scotland, and then he died before age 30. He was the age of many of you in this classroom here when he was known as one of the greatest preachers of the English Isles. If you want to hear some hint of why he was so listened to, listen to his own diary. This is what he wrote on February 21st, 1836: “Preached twice in Larbourn on the righteousness of God from Romans 1:16. In the morning was more engaged in preparing the head than the heart. This has frequently been my error, and I always felt the evil of it. Reform it, then, O Lord.” What is he saying? “My sermon had become just a lecture. I was just giving them information. I prepared my head, but not my heart.” Some weeks later on March 5th, he again wrote in his diary: “Preached again in Larbourn, with very much comfort, owing chiefly to my remedying the error of 21st February. Therefore the heart and the mouth were both full. ‘Enlarge my heart, and I shall run,’ said David. Lord, enlarge my heart, and I shall preach.” This is a wonderful expression, is it not? “Enlarge my heart.” When you speak to God’s people, do they see your heart full? Are you able to express this? Now, our personalities vary greatly, right? But the goal is to say things as though you deeply mean them. You will vary. Our personalities vary. But in whatever way shows the depth of your feeling, talk to people that way—as though you care. Do this because it bears so much on the final aspect of persuasion; that is *ethos*.

The final component of every persuasive message is *ethos*. *Ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. What is the key adjective there? “Perceived.” It is not the actual character of the speaker. You may say, “Well, I know I am not like that!” Well, how are you being perceived? *Ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. That is one of the reasons *logos* and *pathos* are so important. What is your character perceived to be if you are disorganized? It seems that you do not care. What is perceived about you if you do not speak with passion? It is perceived that you do not care. You may care very much! But by inattention to *logos* and *pathos*, *ethos* is damaged. What everyone has known throughout the centuries, if you were evaluating the importance of these three—*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*—which is the most important for persuading people? *Ethos*, the perceived character of the speaker. You know this. Some of you may go to visit a friend on holiday who tells you about his wonderful preacher. Then you go listen to him and you wonder how you will talk about it with your friend, because you were not impressed. Why do they think he is so good? Because they know him. They know his heart, they know his care, they know his compassion. They listen to character, and the character becomes part of the

vehicle for hearing the Word of God. That is why the apostle would say, “We put no stumbling block in other people’s path.” It is our character that we recognize is part of the means by which people hear the Word of God. The path of the Gospel is the Word. We would recognize that the Word of God is what convinces. But somehow the listener has to get into contact with the Word. Thus we tell the meaning of the Word—that is *logos*, the verbal content. But if we have heart feelings, passion that does not show, if our manner contradicts our message, that becomes a barrier to people hearing the content of the Word. And of course, if our character does not reflect the meaning of the Word, then people will say, “What you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say.” Thus character becomes part of the point as well.

The listener has to go through these “doors” of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* to be in confrontation with the Word. Paul says it this way (in 1 Thessalonians 1:5), “Our gospel came to you not simply in words, but also in power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.” “Our gospel came to you not simply in words...” that is the *logos*. “...[B]ut also in power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction,” that is the *pathos*. “You know how we lived among you for your sake,” that is the *ethos*. These became absolutely key, the two components of *ethos* that you hear: “You know how we lived among you for your sake.”

When those who study persuasive speech say what *ethos* is, it is always two components. It is credibility—do you know what you are talking about?—and compassion. Does the speaker appear to care about the listeners? If the speaker appears to care more about himself, what will you think of him? What is the reaction of listeners? It is to remove themselves from the speech. I do not want to be manipulated. If your main goal is your reputation, I will distrust you and not accept what you say. The very reason, you see, that preachers sometimes speak with boldness what they know will hurt people, is that the people know what they are doing. They are putting themselves at risk for the sake of the people. Preachers who ultimately only say what people want to hear finally are never heard. This is because people know of such preachers, “You do not care enough about me to put yourself at risk. When you care more about me than yourself, then I will listen to you (sometimes), even when you say very hard things, because you love me that much.” Again, if the goal is simply to assert your authority—“This is why you have to listen to me”—then I will not listen to you. Once again, your concern is for yourself. Now, how do people read all these things? By *ethos*. It is the involvement of the life of the minister with the people. Sometimes we preachers may think, “I could be a great preacher if they would just give me 40 hours a week in my study, if I could just concentrate on my message.” But the fact of the matter is that if there is not life on life, word will not be heard. It is actually that wonderful balance of having sufficient study to be credible and sufficient involvement to be known to be compassionate. The pulpit is not the only place where you preach. In fact, if it is the only place you preach, you will not be heard. It is involvement in life that gives foundation to what is said in the pulpit. These things can be seen in many places in Scripture. I think my favorite pastoral passage is 1 Thessalonians 2:3-8 and 11-12. As I read this, I want you to hear how the apostle talks about the power of what is moving forward and how it does. He writes:

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father

deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Paul was not using magic to make the Scripture work. That was the seven sons of Sceva. Remember them? They would just use the name of Jesus as a magic spell, and they thought that would make things happen. But Paul says, “We are not trying to trick you.” Paul later says, “We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.” What is he arguing for? Why should they listen to him? Here he is saying they should listen to him because they know he, Silas, and Timothy are trustworthy before God, even so trustworthy that they will not try to please their listeners but please God instead. Note these words, “...we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.” Now, here the New International Version (NIV) is being kind of gentle on our sensibilities. The literal Greek language here is “we were as gentle among you as a mother nursing her baby.” Here is an apostle! Does he have a right to be bold? Does he have authority? But he wanted to show them his compassion. “We were as gentle among you as a mother caring for her little children.” He then says, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God [*logos*] but our lives as well [*ethos*], because you had become so dear to us.” Wow, what a statement. “We have delighted to share not only the gospel but our lives as well, because we were so concerned for you.” Thus here the *logos* travels with the *ethos*, recognizing that becomes the way in which the gospel is heard.

Look now at 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter [...] flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace [...]. Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments.” “Study to show yourself approved unto God...” Now, that is almost surprising language. “Study so that you will proclaim the Word of God correctly,” is what we expect to hear said. But no. He says, “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” It is actually *ethos* now that comes into view prior to *logos*. Before you rightly proclaim the Word of truth, you are showing yourself approved unto God. “Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments.” This is a hard command for seminary students sometimes. I love to argue. I do! My college background was competitive speech and debate. I just love a good argument. I had to recognize early in my ministry that this would not serve me in the church. If the reason you come to seminary is so you will have a great debate, that may be fun for you but Paul said, “The man of God must not strive, he must not be known as a lover of debate.” I loved you so much. Yes, I would do everything I can to convince you, to make you know. But it is not about loving the debate, rather it is loving the product of truth. What is this doing in your heart? Am I actually caring enough about you to watch what happens to you and the people around us as we “simply engage in dialogue because it is fun to cross swords”? It does not serve the church. What are we doing? Defending truth or enjoying the battle?

Paul says to Titus in Titus 2:7-8, “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.” Now, at this point in the lesson I hope you are feeling a certain tension. Early on, I was saying, “It is not all on you. The power is in the Word.” Now what have I spent the last 10 minutes talking about? Your obligation, your responsibility, your faithfulness. How do those two things come together? Let me try to explain it this way. How do we reconcile the power in the Word and the place of *ethos* in the ordinary process of preaching effectively? I think it is this balance. God can work apart from us. Can He do that? Paul rejoices that whether taught by right motives or wrong, the Word is going forth. God can work apart from us. But He chooses more often to work through us. In that He uses our character to confirm the truth of His Word. So where does that leave us? It is here: His ability to work without us removes the burden of thinking, “I have to do it right or it will not work.” Do you hear that? His ability to work

without us removes the burden. His willingness to work through us grants us the blessing of knowing our labor is not in vain. Thus we have this burden taken off of us and still have the blessing of knowing that God rewards faithfulness. If I am not faithful, I am not rejected. If I am not able enough, I do not say, “Oh no! God cannot now work.” No, the burden is off of me. But I have the wonderful blessing to know that He is able to use my efforts—which I want to give Him. That is true of the heart of a believer. I want to serve my God, I want to use my gifts for His purposes. God blesses me by saying, “I will use them. It is My choice to do that, even though I do not need to do that.”

What are the implications, then, of this *ethos* power, if we recognize that God can use it powerfully, even though He does not need to? There are three main implications. First, guard your heart. Guard your heart if *ethos* can be so used of God. Archibald Alexander said it this way, “There is no person that needs to be more in constant exercise of prayer than the theological student. In the midst of studies, his heart should be raised to God for help and direction more consistently than in any other place in society.” As you take in all this information, this material from the Word of God, know that what you are taking in will be used of God, and say, “I must guard my heart so that I will not take this improperly.” This is especially important as foundations are laid for all future ministry in life. Whether you know it or not, you see, this *ethos* enables us to witness to others and also to know the Word.

So far, we have talked about witness the most. People examine who you are and decide whether they will listen. We know holiness of life is necessary (most of the time) for the effective communication of truth. Do you know that holiness of life is also necessary for the knowledge of truth? That is a rather startling thought. By communing with God, I actually know more than I would know without Him. I cannot express to you all I wish I could in this regard. But you know it. Why are there certain ministers you have to listen to? It may be because they seem to have special spiritual insight. They walk with God, and something in you knows that. And because they walk with God, they seem to have—not a pipeline of special revelation—but their hearts resonate in such a way. They live in a way that makes God’s truth powerful in its communication. I think of A. B. Earl. He was a great Baptist evangelist in the last century. He wrote (prior to the radio and TV age) of what he thought would be so effective in communicating the Gospel to others. He ultimately recognized it was his own heart’s communion with God that would be effective. He wrote in his own diary these words, “This day, for the sake of God’s people, I make a new consecration of my all to Jesus Christ. I now and forever give myself to Him, my soul to be washed in His blood and saved in heaven at last, my whole body to be used for His glory, my mouth to speak for Him at all times, my eyes to weep over lost sinners, my feet to carry me where He wants me to go, my heart to be burdened for souls, my intellect to be employed at all times for His glory. I give Him my wife, my children, my property. All I have and all I ever shall be, I give to Him that I may obey every known duty for the sake of my Savior and His message.” Do you think this man knew something of the Lord? I think he knew more. Those who counted said that by the time he was done he was responsible for hundreds of thousands of conversions, in the pre-electronic era. Amazing. He knew more by walking with that. You will discover more and more of that, will you not? You will see it around you. Not to be judgmental of anyone, but the men who seem to be so intellectually gifted and yet so cold contrast with those who seem so warm toward God and what you really want to learn from them.

A second implication of the power of *ethos* is that we should become well acquainted with the grace your heart requires. Becoming well acquainted with the grace your heart requires is a recognition of something. Once we put so much weight on *ethos*, every one of you should say, “But I cannot do that! I cannot do that.” Here is this wonderful example of A. B. Earl who was willing to give everything to God. We recognize the power of that. But ultimately, A. B. Earl was preaching the Gospel, and the Gospel said, “I am not dependent on my work. I, in my best efforts, recognize my failures before God. Therefore I am dependent on His love and mercy on my behalf.” If you are to preach grace, you must

know it. And knowing it means you put before Him not only the willingness to obey God, but also the constant heart of confession. “Lord, as much as I will to do well, I fail. Though I want to do good, I do not. Teach me of Your love, teach me of Your mercy.” When you then experience grace, it is not your *ethos* that is the power of the Word. Rather, it is your recognition of God’s conforming your character to Himself by His grace and despite your character. Then your heart for God enlarges, and the grace of God begins to motivate you. Then you become one whose character is not only observed by God’s people, but whose compassion is felt by God’s people. You know the grace of God. Character, when pursued, leads you to a sense of failure. And failure rightly responded to teaches you much of the grace of God, which makes you desire to be all the more conformed to His image. It is interesting how that works, is it not? When I pursue character for His sake, I know the need of His grace. When I experience His grace, I long, so much more, for more of His character. It is my blessing, then, to follow it.

We guard our hearts and we become well acquainted with the grace that is in our hearts. The last implication of the power of *ethos* is this: believe in the grace that says you can be a great preacher. Dr. Rayburn, when he would teach this class at this portion of the lesson would always say to us, “You will have different levels of skill. Some of you are naturally gifted speakers, and some of you are not. But if your heart loves the Word of God and the people of God, the words you say—even if they barely crawl over the lip of the pulpit—will be heard by God’s people.” What they are listening for is someone who understands the grace of God. They listen for this more than for anything else. More than eloquence, more than great arguments, what people listen for is “Do you understand the truth of God so well that you can explain the Gospel to me? Why did I come into this church? Just so I would get more information? Just so that you could tell me that it is hard to raise kids? I knew that before I sat down! Why did I sit down? Do you not have a word of God for me? Is there not some healing you can provide?” When you know the grace of God, God can greatly use you. Believing in that grace is ultimately what makes you a great preacher. More than any other thing, it is ultimately understanding the work He has done on your behalf. Do you remember how Paul said it to Timothy? There he was, a young man fearing he would not be able to minister at Ephesus. Paul said, “Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given to you through prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them so that everyone can observe your progress.” Think of that. You are to put yourself on the line for people so that they can observe you as they hear what you are teaching. Be diligent in these matters. Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do you will save both yourself and your hearers. Watch your life but also what you teach, because you are teaching what saves people. Teach that and when you do, it will not only be nourishment to you but to many others as well. I want you to believe it deeply. God can greatly use you. Not because of your gifts, primarily, but because of your heart. Set on Him, you can lead others to His healing and His salvation forever.

Do you feel the tension that I mentioned to you, of God saying, “I can work without you, but I choose to work with you. And if I will work with you, I need your heart as well as your words.”? Of course now we say, “But my heart is not pure enough.” That is right, but remember that God is sufficient still. This takes the burden off of us, even as it gives us the delight of knowing that we can be used of God. Who or what alone can change the hearts of men and women eternally? The Holy Spirit working by and with the Word in our hearts. In answer to a question, it is difficult to acknowledge that *ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. We all know that we can be perceived wrongly. But if people perceive me in a way that I do not intend, I have to recognize that and deal with it. Dr. Sanderson, when he taught here, used to say the way you should test any candidate for preaching is to play softball with them. When they are safe on second base on a close play, call them out and see what happens. What he means is, what

people perceive about a person largely determines how they will receive what he says. Philip Brooks' famous statement is "Preaching is truth poured through personality." Now, there are many different personalities. But if I think you are a liar, will I listen to you? If I think you do not care about me, will I listen to you? This is actually, I think, one of the weaknesses of my background, and I think this is true of many young men in my setting. When you come from families where you are taught to be stoic, not to show emotion, then it is more difficult to begin preaching and realize, "If I act like this does not matter, then I am perceived as not caring." I care greatly! But my manner is something trained from my youth that I have to in some ways war against in order to adequately communicate what God is saying. Now, this has much to do with personality. Some people, if they so much as lift an eyebrow, they are perceived to really mean what they say. But other people need to be very demonstrative because they are demonstrative all the time, so to act like they really mean something they need to be more demonstrative. We will talk about this more later, about how we can express things so that we do not miscommunicate what we are trying to say. There are simple things at times that we do and do not recognize.

For now, recognize that character comes across in ways we do not even know about. Sometimes when you are in a conversation with a person you have only known for five minutes, you make all kinds of judgments about them simply by their choice of words and the way they hold their body. What scares us is that speech communicators say people usually make those judgments in the first 30 seconds—whether or not you care about them and are willing to listen to them and whether or not they are willing to listen to you. Now, we are not with people for only 30 seconds. As pastors, we are with people for years and years. Recognizing that our perceived character really weighs in their minds, whether we are worth listening to—recognizing this is both important and deadly, if I do not believe in the grace of God—they will perceive my weaknesses as louder than my strengths. Therefore I need to know greatly, "God has forgiven me." That is what gets me back up here. He makes me His own, despite my weaknesses. Perceived character will always be a difficult issue. But it has to be in our minds as we evaluate giving ourselves for other people. It is not just about working in my comfort zone, right? We might think, "Well, I am comfortable with this." But how are you being perceived? That has to be taken into account as well. How do I find out how I am perceived? People will talk with you about what they are unhappy about. John Stott and many other preachers put themselves under the discipline of meeting with people weekly to get feedback on their messages. This is because they recognize that we can be the worst perceivers of ourselves. You have to have a certain strength and confidence to be able to do that, to ask, "What do you think?" We need to trust God enough and understand people enough to properly filter what they say. Certain people will come at you no matter what. You may need to say, "There is a certain legitimacy to what you are saying, but I need to remember who you are." And other people will never say anything unless something is really wrong, and if they say something then you really need to listen. That is some of that pastoral prudence coming forward. What do I need to listen to? What do I actually, before God, have to turn a deaf ear to?

Someone has asked, what is the difference between becoming credible for the sake of perceived understanding and becoming manipulative and not authentic? You have to understand that you have to do certain things so much that they become authentic for you. For example, if you just say, "I am not a demonstrative person. That is not in my nature. So I will not gesture when I talk." What I would say is, "Do you know what you need to do? You need to over-gesture when you practice, gesture all the time while you are talking. Then when you are speaking, it will be natural to you." You do enough of what is outside your comfort zone so that it becomes comfortable and natural to you. I am not talking about becoming a different person. But we must recognize that we cannot say, "Well, I am just a soft-spoken person, so I will talk softly when I preach." That does not work. You will have to raise your voice. And

if you consistently raise your voice, then it becomes not just something you put on, but it becomes natural to you.