

bring salvation (1 Cor 1:21-23). The minds of unbelievers have been blinded so that they are unable to see the light of the gospel of the glory\* of Christ (2 Cor 4:4).

#### 4. Twentieth-Century Scholarship.

In 1936 C. H. Dodd's seminal study on the preaching of the apostles was published. There he defined preaching as "the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world" (Dodd, 7). He arrived at an outline of the primitive *kerygma* by comparing the early sermons in Acts with the pre-Pauline creedal fragments in Paul's letters. A later study of the *kerygma* described the apostolic preaching as "a proclamation of his death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus that led to an evaluation of His person as both Lord and Christ, confronted man with the necessity of repentance, and promised the forgiveness of sins" (Mounce, 84). All of these aspects of preaching are clearly seen in the preaching of Paul in Acts. For example, the importance of the resurrection is pivotal in both of Paul's sermons recorded in Acts (13:27-31; 17:31). A similar message is suggested by 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, which may sum up Paul's gospel as it was first preached to the Thessalonians: turn from idols\* to serve the living and true God\*; it is his Son who died and whom God raised from the dead [and exalted\* to heaven\*], this Jesus will come from heaven to rescue his people from the coming wrath.\*

Dodd's emphasis on the content of the kerygma was in response to R. Bultmann's understanding of the kerygma as the active and effective Word, rather than content, that addresses men and women in their existential situation and elicits a response of faith. According to Bultmann, Paul's knowledge and interest in the historical Jesus were minimal and did not constitute the kerygma. Thus the existential and the salvation-historical perspectives on kerygma were squared off against one another, and the term *kerygma* and question of its precise character took on far greater weight than it is given in the NT itself.

In recent decades various aspects of the issue have been pursued. Some scholars have revisited the question of Paul's familiarity and interest in the historical Jesus and his use of Jesus tradition in his preaching. Bultmann's claim, based on his tendentious interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:16, has been discredited in the view of many scholars. Hence, G. N. Stanton's study of the place of Jesus of Nazareth in early Christian preaching concludes that "the possibility must be allowed that Paul laid greater emphasis on the pre-crucifixion events and the character of Jesus in his preaching than he does in his epistles" (Stanton, 113;

see too Lemcio). While Paul's explicit references to sayings of Jesus are relatively few, the possible allusions are, by some accounts, numerous (see Jesus, Sayings of). This phenomenon might be due to the Jesus tradition having been transmitted in the setting of Paul's initial missionary preaching and teaching.

Consideration of the varied settings and activities of communication within the early Christian communities questioned whether preaching can be sharply distinguished from other forms of communication. What sort of distinction should be drawn between mission\* and community *kerygma*? More importantly, has too rigid a distinction been drawn between *kerygma* and *didachē* ("teaching")? Paul seems to indicate a relationship between the two in Romans 2:21, where the content of *kerygma* seems to be defined as *didachē*. J. I. H. McDonald has suggested that the distinction between *kerygma* and *didachē* lies in the "situation" and "posture" of the communicator "rather than the substance of the message, . . . preaching and teaching are properly regarded as being broadly complementary and as denoting the whole process of communicating the appropriate message" (McDonald, 5). McDonald has examined *kerygma* within the context of the *koinōnia* of the community, where *didachē* ("teaching"), *prophēteia* ("prophecy," "inspired utterance"), *paraenesis* ("moral exhortation"), *paraklēsis* ("exhortatory preaching" to the community) and *paradosis* ("tradition\*") all play a role and have varying degrees of overlap and interrelationship (see Teaching/Paraenesis).

The content of the Pauline kerygma, or gospel, inasmuch as it shares the same concerns as the larger question of the coherence of Paul's theology (see Center), has led some scholars to question whether it ever achieved a final and static form. Did it not develop over time? Is it perhaps better understood as being fluid, having a coherent substratum that was capable of varied contingent expressions according to circumstances (Beker)? Should the structure of Paul's kerygma be summed up as an integrated set of propositions, or should it be construed as a narrative of Jesus Messiah? Was Paul's kerygma (however it might be defined) one of a number of diverse *kerygmata* of the early church, some of which Paul would have found compatible with his own kerygma and others which he would have disavowed as "another gospel" (Dunn)? And to what extent was the kerygma of Paul continuous with or dissimilar from the kerygma of Jesus (see Jesus and Paul)? These questions continue to prod research into Paul and the early church and reveal a lack of consensus regarding the coherence, or center, of Paul's gospel, much less of a kerygma of the early church.

Finally, the relationship between Paul's kerygma and his self-understanding as an apostle\* as well as the social reality of his mission and ministry is being actively explored (see Social-Scientific Approaches to Paul). Clearly, Paul's theology of the cross shaped his apostolic lifestyle, the way in which he envisioned his mission and the definition of his gospel over against that of some of his opponents.\*

See also APOSTLE; ATHENS, PAUL AT; CENTER OF PAUL'S THEOLOGY; CHRISTOLOGY; CREEDS; CROSS, THEOLOGY OF THE; DEATH OF CHRIST; GOSPEL; JESUS, SAYINGS OF; JESUS AND PAUL; MINISTRY; MISSION; PREACHING FROM PAUL TODAY; RHETORIC; SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES; TEACHING/PARAENESIS; TRADITION; WITNESS.

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R. H. Mounce

### PREACHING FROM PAUL TODAY

Contemporary preaching from Paul's letters is a natural extension of their original use in first-century churches. For Paul not only addressed these letters to specific churches, he also requested that they be read in the church addressed (1 Thess 5:27; cf. 2 Thess 3:14) and be shared with other churches (Col 4:16). The link to contemporary preaching comes into view when one considers that these letters were not only to be read in the churches but also explained by the letter carriers (Doty, 30, 37). Preachers must be acquainted with several issues in order to do justice to Paul's letters in contemporary preaching.

1. The Nature of Paul's Letters
2. The Form of Paul's Letters
3. Rhetorical Structures
4. Selecting a Suitable Preaching Text
5. Analyzing the Preaching Text
6. Crossing the Historical-Cultural Gap
7. Designing the Sermon
8. Preaching Christ

#### 1. The Nature of Paul's Letters.

Paul's letters are ideal sources for contemporary preaching because of their kerygmatic nature. For not only are these letters relevant communications, some also contain the actual preaching\* of the apostle Paul, and all may be characterized as a special form of preaching and as the Word of God.\*

**1.1. Relevant Communications.** It is clear from Paul's letters that for the most part they were written originally for specific occasions. For example, the letter to the Galatians\* was written because Paul had heard that church members were "turning to a different gospel,\*" that of the Judaizers\* (Gal 1:6 RSV throughout); 1 Thessalonians\* was occasioned by Timothy's return from Thessalonica and his report to Paul (1 Thess 3:6); 2 Thessalonians was written to counter a pseudo-Pauline letter circulating in Thessalonica claiming "that the day of the Lord has come" (2 Thess 2:2); and Colossians\* was written to head off the threat of a deceitful philosophy\* (Col 2:8). Because Paul's letters were written for specific occasions, they have been called "occasional documents." This designation is homiletically significant because it reminds preachers that these letters were inherently relevant in the first century and that this relevance can be uncovered today only by way of historical investigation and interpretation.

**1.2. Summarized Sermons.** In addressing the immediate concerns that occasioned his letters, Paul also recorded here and there summaries of his typical sermons. R. Longenecker writes:

Probably . . . we should view the body of Romans (1:18-15:13) as something of a précis of Paul's preaching in Jewish synagogues of the Diaspora and at Jewish-Gentile gatherings, with that précis during the course of his missionary activities having become more and more polished in literary form. . . . The so-called Letter to the Ephesians . . . likely . . . was originally meant to be a précis of Paul's teaching on redemption in Christ and the nature of the church, and was sent out as something of a circular tractate letter to churches in the Roman province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital. (Longenecker, 104-5)

In the dictation of other letters, too, Paul would quite naturally have included previous sermon material.

**1.3. Long-Distance Preaching.** Paul's letters may also be characterized as long-distance preaching. They were like preaching not only because they addressed specific needs in early churches but also because they were primarily oral communications. Except for brief conclusions (2 Thess 3:17; Gal 6:11; 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18), Paul did not write these letters but dictated them to secretaries (amanuenses; cf. Rom 16:22) for the purpose of public reading in the churches. Like preaching, therefore, these letters were a form of oral communication. Moreover, in the Greek letter-writing tradition, a letter was a stand-in for the presence (parousia) of its author (see Itineraries). Since Paul was "unable to be present in person, his letters were a direct substitute, and were to be accorded weight equal to Paul's physical presence" (Doty, 36; cf. 1 Cor 5:3-4; 2 Cor 10:11). Listening to Paul's letter being read, therefore, was the same as hearing Paul himself speak—except that this speaking was long-distance and was committed to writing.

**1.4. The Word of God.** Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13). If the hearers heard Paul speak not only in his preaching but also in his letters, one may assume that they would also have accepted Paul's letters as "the word of God." This assumption was confirmed subsequently when the church acknowledged these letters to be canonical. As the Word of God, Paul's letters are the authoritative kerygma, eminently suitable as the normative source for preaching today. As the letter carriers originally

received "authority to convey the letters, to expand upon them, and to continue Paul's work" (Doty, 37), so contemporary preachers may continue Paul's work by expounding his letters. But to do so with authority,\* they will have to do justice to the inspired words of Paul (see Greidanus, 1-16).

## 2. The Form of Paul's Letters.

In order to do justice to Paul's words, preachers will have to take into account, among other things, the location of Paul's words: whether they function in the opening section, the body of the letter, or in some other section. For just as letters today have a standard form (Heading, Greeting [Dear Sir], Body, Complimentary Close [Sincerely yours], Signature), so Paul's letters reveal a standard form (see Letters, Letter Forms). The homiletical significance of Paul's letter form becomes apparent when one compares Paul's form with that of contemporary Greek letters.

**2.1. The Standard Form of Greek Letters.** The ancient Greeks had developed a standard letter form which consisted of three main parts:

1. An introduction, prescript, or salutation, which included the name of the sender, the name of the addressee, greetings and often a wish for good health.
2. The body or text of the letter, introduced by characteristic formulae.
3. A conclusion, which included greetings to persons other than the addressee, a final greeting or prayer sentence, and sometimes a date (Longenecker, 103).

**2.2. Paul's Changes in the Standard Form.** In writing his letters to various churches, Paul modified the standard Greek form in various subtle ways but particularly by developing two major sections: a section of thanksgiving (see Benediction; see O'Brien; Aune, 177, 186) and a section of exhortations. Thus Paul's letters usually follow a five-part form:

1. Opening: Sender, Addressee, Greeting
2. Thanksgiving to God for the Addressee's Faithfulness (missing in Galatians)
3. Body
4. Exhortations ("paraenesis")
5. Closing: Peace Wish, Greetings, Warnings, Benediction

**2.3. The Homiletical Significance.** The changes Paul introduced in the standard Greek letter form provide several hints for preachers on how these letters demand to be preached.

**2.3.1. Major Changes.** Paul changed the opening greeting of his letters from the standard Greek *chairein* (greeting) to *charis* (grace) and, probably in imitation

of the *shalom* of Jewish letters, added the word "peace" (Doty, 22, 29). The neutral Greek "Greeting" thus becomes the profound Christian greeting, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul also changed the conclusion to a peace wish and variations of "The grace\* of the Lord\* Jesus Christ\* and the love\* of God and the fellowship\* of the Holy Spirit\* be with you all." The whole letter is thus enveloped in the *inclusio* of God's grace and peace\*: "(opening) grace and peace, (closing) peace and grace" (Roetzel, 37). (Echoes of the opening and closing of Christian worship\* services are probably not accidental; see Liturgical Elements.)

Further, the new section of thanksgiving to God immediately focuses the listeners' attention on God's grace as it comes to expression in the church.\* Moreover, the new section of exhortations follows the thanksgiving and the body of the letter; that is, in all of Paul's letters, God's indicative precedes the imperative (see Ethics). In short, Paul's major changes have made his letters God-centered. The homiletical implication is clear: to be true to Paul's letters, one will have to preach God-centered, relevant sermons. The reverse also holds true: anthropocentric and legalistic or moralistic sermons do not do justice to Paul and are possible only by isolating the preaching text from its context in Paul's letter.

**2.3.2. Subtle Changes.** Paul's more subtle changes provide clues for understanding the concrete issues he was addressing. His variations in the formal opening frequently provide initial hints of the issues addressed. For example, in his letter to Philemon,\* which seeks unheard-of forgiveness\* and acceptance for the runaway slave\* Onesimus, Paul describes himself humbly as "Paul, a prisoner\* for Christ Jesus." By contrast, in his letter to the Galatians\* who questioned his apostleship\* and rejected his gospel of grace, Paul opens with, "Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal 1:1 NRSV). Similar clues to the letter's concern may be found in the description of the addressees.

The thanksgiving section provides even clearer clues to the reason(s) for writing and the major concerns of the letter. For example, the thanksgiving section to Philemon concentrates on Paul's love for the saints (Philem 5, 7). Not surprisingly, in the body of the letter Paul appeals for acceptance of Onesimus "for love's sake" (Philem 9). Paul's letter to the Galatians, by contrast, omits the thanksgiving section—an omission which speaks loudly of Paul's deep disappointment at their desertion of the gospel of grace. Paul jumps in immediately, "I am astonished . . ." (Gal

1:6). Since Paul tends to repeat his major concerns in various parts of his letter, he provides a string of clues to the main issues addressed and thus forces contemporary preachers to understand each issue in the context of the whole letter.

## 3. Rhetorical Structures.

Paul's letters reveal intricate rhetorical structures (see Rhetoric, Rhetorical Criticism). The existence of these structures in dictated letters can be accounted for by two facts: First, Paul made use of structured traditional materials such as hymns,\* creeds,\* ethical lists and doxologies (see Benediction), as well as his own standardized sermons. Second, Paul dictated these letters with a view to their being heard. For contemporary preaching, one needs to pay attention to these rhetorical structures.

Good preaching not only presents the text but attends to how the text itself preaches. The Scriptures are not a shapeless mass, a lump of dough, to be divided and shaped into sermons and lessons. The texts already have shapes and contours, reflecting the writer's concern for the arts of persuasion, for the listeners' need to remember what is read to them, and for ways of communicating which are congenial to the nature of the message; in other words, for communication that respects and cares for the listeners as thinking, feeling, deciding, believing human beings. (Craddock, 166-67)

**3.1. Repetition.** Repetition is still used today by teachers and preachers who are sensitive to the demands of oral/aural communication. Paul uses repetition at different levels. He frequently repeats major issues (e.g., Christian freedom in Gal 5:1 and 13). At other times he simply repeats a single word (e.g., the sevenfold repetition of one in Eph 4:4-6, "There is *one* body and *one* Spirit . . ."). Then again he strings together a series of questions (e.g., Rom 6—7). Repetition may serve simply to recall and/or elaborate a point, or to emphasize a point, or to provide continuity for the hearers. Since repetition still serves the same functions in oral communication, preachers should not only pay attention to Paul's repetitions but follow suit in their own preaching.

**3.2. Parallelism and Chiasm.** Parallelism (e.g., A B A B') and chiasm (e.g., A B C B' A') are both forms of repetition and both are found in Paul's letters. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:55 Paul quotes the synonymous parallelism of Hosea,

O death, where is thy victory?

O death, where is thy sting?

In 1 Corinthians 12—14 Paul uses a simple A B A chiasm:



A. Spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-31a)

B. Love, the greatest gift (1 Cor 12:31b—13:13)

A. Spiritual gifts: prophecy and tongues (1 Cor 14:1-40)

Parallelism served not only as an aid to memory but also to emphasize and present the point from different angles. True chiasm, in addition, served to focus literally on the central issue, the turning point. Preachers today can use these ancient rhetorical structures, which are detected especially in the Greek NT, to gain a clearer understanding of a passage by comparing the parallel lines, to discern the focal point in the heart of a chiasm and to discover the limits of a section that makes for an ideal preaching text (see Greidanus, 58-67, 319-22).

**3.3. *Diatribes*.** As was customary in his time, Paul used "the device of *diatribe* by which a speaker or writer enters into imaginary debate with an interlocutor, raising points which he would make and objections he would voice, which are then answered and refuted" (Martin, 247). *Diatribes* gave the hearers a voice in the debate and thus sought to persuade. For example, Paul used the following *diatribe* in Romans 3:27-31: "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. . . . Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (for more examples, see Malherbe, 129-34). Awareness of this ancient rhetorical device will help preachers not only in tracing the course of Paul's argument but also in retracing in their own sermons the rhetorical trail laid down by Paul.

#### 4. Selecting a Suitable Preaching Text.

One cannot cut up Paul's letters into random snippets and still have confidence of doing justice to Paul. In selecting a preaching text, preachers interested in proclaiming the thoughts of Paul will wish to show respect for the shape as well as the content of Paul's letters. This respect calls for the selection of preaching texts that are appropriate passages, literary units, and that include, if feasible, the original issue, Paul's answer and defense, and his goal.

**4.1. *An Appropriate Passage*.** Before settling on a preaching text, preachers ought to raise the question of what goal, what objective they are seeking to accomplish with the sermon. If they desire to move their congregation to repentance, they will require a passage where Paul aims at that goal; if they wish to comfort, they will require a passage where Paul aims to comfort; if they wish to stir people to greater love, they will require a passage where Paul aims at that very

goal. Coordinating one's goal with that of the apostle Paul will prevent the dissonance that results when a passage of Paul is used for a different objective from what he had in mind.

**4.2. *A Literary Unit*.** To do justice to the shape and content of Paul's letters, one should select as preaching text at least a literary unit rather than an isolated verse or phrase. Paul's rhetorical devices frequently identify such units, for chiasm and *inclusio* encompass rhetorical units, and *diatribe* and repetition, such as the key word technique, continue as long as one is in the same unit of thought. The content, of course, provides the most obvious clue: a change of content means a different unit of thought. Selecting anything shorter than a literary unit is to chop up Paul's original units of thought. For example, to select Ephesians 1:4a, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world," to preach a sermon on predestination (see Election and Predestination) distorts Paul's construction and thought. For Paul continues in Ephesians 1:4b, "that we should be holy and blameless before him." And this verse, in turn, is but part of a single Greek sentence that runs from Ephesians 1:3 to 1:14. Since the units and sections in each letter are closely interrelated, the most appropriate treatment of Paul's letters would be a brief series of sermons on a specific letter.

**4.3. *The Issue, Response and Substantiations*.** Whenever feasible, a reference to the historical issue that gave rise to the text should be included in the preaching text. When the text is a response to a specific issue, combining in one text the original question and its answer can only benefit genuine hearing. Moreover, Paul's substantiations for a claim or demand should be included in the preaching text, for they are part of the thought unit. For example, instead of selecting as text only Romans 8:28, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose," one ought to include the substantiations of this claim that follow in Romans 8:29-30 (Liefeld, 70-71). The inclusion of the issue and substantiations would generally argue against selecting a preaching text from the opening of Paul's letters. Although the sender and greeting sections sometimes anticipate the burden of the letter, since the issue and Paul's answer and substantiations are stated much more elaborately in the thanksgiving and especially in the body of the letter, the latter deserve priority in selection for preaching texts.

**4.4. *Paul's Goal*.** Whenever possible, Paul's aim should be included as part of the text, for this goal expressed the relevance of this passage in the past—a relevance that can function as a bridge to con-

temporary relevance. For example, in preaching on Philippians 2, preachers have selected as their text the Christ hymn and preached on Christ's states of humiliation and exaltation.\* But what is the aim of such sermons? Paul clearly states his goal in Philippians 2:5 when he introduces the hymn with the words, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (NRSV). Paul's aim, as the preceding verses also show, is to stir the Philippians up to love and selfless service (Fowl; see Servant, Service). And that goal is still worth pursuing by preachers today.

#### 5. Analyzing the Preaching Text.

After selecting the text to be used in preaching, one ought to study it in its literary and historical contexts.

**5.1. *The Literary Context*.** The common advice to read through the whole letter in one sitting is good counsel, for that is the way letters are usually read. As one reads through the letter, perhaps several times and aloud in different translations, one should gain a sense of the whole document, its recipients, its occasion, its parts and its overall theme and goal.

**5.2. *The Historical Context*.** Since Paul's letters are occasional documents, written to respond to specific historical needs in the early church, it stands to reason that one cannot fully understand his letters without understanding the underlying historical background. Therefore, preachers need to determine the occasion that gave rise to the letter. The question is, What is the historical question to which this particular text is the answer?

Sometimes Paul himself identifies the question explicitly. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 he says that he will deal with the question "concerning those who are asleep." In 1 Corinthians\* he lists a whole series of questions starting with 1 Corinthians 7:1, "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote," and answers each in turn (see 1 Cor 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). However, Paul responds not only to their written questions but also to other issues: for example, 1 Corinthians 5:1, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you"; and 1 Corinthians 11:18, "I hear that there are divisions among you." Where such explicit identification of the historical question is lacking, it must be painstakingly gleaned from the letter itself and other sources.

**5.3. *The Text Itself*.** Reading the whole letter in its historical context has set the stage for analyzing the specific message of the preaching text. This is the time for careful grammatical-historical exegesis of the Greek text. It is also the time for comparing the message of the text with similar messages elsewhere in this letter, as well as in other letters and other books

of Scripture (*analogia Scripturae*, "analogy of Scripture").

Reading the text in its literary contexts will keep one from preaching, say, exhortations in isolation, for the imperative cannot be proclaimed without the divine indicative stated or assumed earlier in the letter (see Greidanus, 325-27). Reading the text in its historical context will make one aware of the intense relevance of Paul's letters for the churches addressed. However, this very relevance brings one face to face with the historical-cultural gap, for questions of circumcision,\* eating food offered to idols (see Food) and master-slave relations (see Slave, Slavery) are hardly burning issues in the West today.

#### 6. Crossing the Historical-Cultural Gap.

How can one preach relevantly to a twentieth-century Western church a message intended originally for the first-century church of Corinth?

**6.1. *Overarching Continuity*.** Without denying the reality of the historical-cultural gap, one ought first to appreciate the continuity between past and present—a continuity rooted in the faithful covenant God. God's plan for redeeming his fallen creation (Gen 3:15; Rom 8:19-23) results in the history of the coming kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:22-24; see Kingdom). In this history God calls into being one covenant people, the church (Gal 3:8, 29).

Since the churches Paul addressed and churches today are essentially one church under God, living in the same NT epoch of kingdom history, God's message addressed to first-century churches is relevant for churches today (Greidanus 169-73, 330-31). This continuity accounts for the fact that so much in Paul's letters is directly applicable to the church today. Then as well as now, God's people were and are called to faith,\* hope\* and love.\* Nevertheless, preachers will frequently find themselves obstructed by the historical-cultural gap, for Paul spoke relevantly to churches that lived in a different culture and at an earlier stage of the NT epoch.

**6.2. *Analogies*.** A major bridge across the historical-cultural gap is provided by analogies between the church Paul addressed and the church today. These analogies are not figments of our imagination, for they exist by virtue of the fact that there is basically but one church and but one Word of God. Preachers, therefore, need not construct analogies but uncover existing ones. This search requires a thorough understanding of both the church addressed by Paul and the church today. It requires cognizance of the question behind the text—the question to which Paul responded.

Why was the church then in need of correction, comfort or encouragement? And is there a genuine analogy between that situation and the situation in the church today so that Paul's answer is an authentic response to the present need for correction, comfort and encouragement? One must be careful to search out real analogies. It will not do simply to draw an analogy between Judaizers in Galatia and conservatives or ritualists in the church today and redirect Paul's words for Judaizers at contemporary conservatives. Before drawing such an analogy to people today, one should at least take into account that Judaizers denied the gospel of grace by insisting on works (*see* Works of the Law) for inclusion among God's people.

**6.3. Principle and Practice.** If the issue is so culturally specific that no direct analogy can be found in the present church, it may be helpful to view the message as a particular cultural application of a biblical principle and seek to discover precisely what this underlying principle is. Once discovered, the question is how to apply this biblical principle today in an analogous way to its biblical application (Fee and Stuart, 62-70). For example, when Paul demands in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 that women must be veiled when they pray or prophesy, his command is clearly culturally conditioned. Preachers today would miss the point if they insisted in our culture that women be veiled. But the biblical principle behind this application, the principle of appropriate dress for women and men in the worship service (1 Cor 14:40), may open the way for contemporary application.

The search for the points of analogy is a risky task. This is so since there can be no total identity. History never repeats itself completely. . . . Thus preaching is a creative art. It is not a cool application but a creative vision for analogies. Risky it is, and that is why the preacher must seek the guidance of the Spirit as the sermon grows out of study and meditation. (Stendahl, 307)

## 7. Designing the Sermon.

After considering these issues, one is ready to begin designing the sermon.

**7.1. Paul's Goal.** One of the first questions that needs to be raised concerns Paul's goal or aim. Why is Paul writing this passage to this particular church? Is he aiming to teach, to reprove, or correct, or train in righteousness\* (2 Tim 3:16), or comfort or encourage? The question behind the text together with the text will help answer the *why* question.

**7.2. The Sermon's Goal.** The sermon's goal cannot always be identical with Paul's goal but should at least be in harmony with it. Preachers should ask them-

selves, Why am I preaching this sermon? This question will reveal one's goal. The sermon's goal will guide the preacher in designing the sermon, perhaps in selecting a fitting introduction and certainly in formulating a pertinent conclusion.

**7.3. Paul's Theme.** Along with the *why* question about Paul's aim, one needs to ask the *what* question about Paul's message. What is Paul's theme in this text? What is the main idea that encompasses all subsidiary ideas? This theme should be formulated in a brief sentence: subject and predicate.

**7.4. The Sermon's Theme.** Next, Paul's message needs to be compared with other Scripture passages to see if it can be preached as it is or needs some adjustments or qualifications. Usually Paul's message can be preached as is, but sometimes his message is one-sided and needs to be balanced by other passages before it can be preached as God's word for his people today. For example, Paul's message in Romans 13:1-7, "Be subject to the government because it is God's servant," needs to be balanced by Acts 5:29 and Revelation 13:1-10 before it can be preached today. Thus the sermon theme may need to be changed to something like, "Be subject to the government when it is God's servant."

Other passages are so culturally specific that their themes need to be recast to communicate to the church's present situation. For example, Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 8, "Christians may eat food offered to idols unless it causes a brother to fall" will need to be recast into a contemporary issue or the more general sermon theme, "Christian freedom is limited by the well-being of fellow Christians." The functions of the sermon theme are to keep the sermon on the right track and to ensure its unity as well as movement (Greidanus 139-40).

**7.5. The Form of the Sermon.** The form of a sermon on Paul's letters can vary from deductive to inductive development to a combination of both, and from a didactic form to a narrative form. Most appropriate is a form which closely conforms to the text itself by following its flow: for example, its development of ideas, its line of argumentation, or its repetition of words, phrases or questions.

**7.6. The Relevance of the Sermon.** As Paul's letters were intensely relevant for the early church, so sermons on his letters can be intensely relevant for the church today. This relevance can be achieved by taking clear aim as Paul did. Moreover, preachers can follow Paul in addressing the whole person—intellect, will and emotions—and in showing the relevance of their message for the whole of life—physical as well as spiritual and public as well as personal. Further

help for relevant preaching is provided by Paul's metaphors which range from putting on "the whole armor of God" with all of its parts (Eph 6:11-17) to running the race to obtain the prize (1 Cor 9:24), and from "justification"\* to "redemption" (*see* Redemption), and "adoption"\* to "liberty" (*see* Freedom). Preachers can use these metaphors to make abstract truths concrete and living for their hearers.

## 8. Preaching Christ.

Finally and most importantly, preachers are to preach Christ crucified and risen as Paul did (*see* Christology). Paul told the Corinthians, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2; *see* Cross, Theology of the). Contemporary recommendations to use Paul's letters to preach biographical sermons on Paul are obviously contrary to his intentions. Yet, as his letters show, Paul's preaching of Christ is not simply a constant retelling of Jesus' life, death and resurrection (Rom 10:9). Rather, Paul takes his *starting point* in Jesus Christ and preaches Christ as his person and work illumine all other vital issues and questions. "Jesus Christ and him crucified" is the heart of God's plan of redemption; from this heart, renewing power pulses into every area of life.

In the light of Colossians 1:15-20, preaching Christ means to preach the God through whom and for whom "all things" were created and through whom "all things" are being reconciled. Ultimately, preaching Christ has to do with "all things." Therefore, contemporary preaching from Paul's letters may rightly address any area of life and any vital issue, but all issues must be viewed and preached in the light of Christ and his redemptive work. This transforms one's preaching into the good news of which Paul said, "I am eager to preach the gospel. . . . For . . . it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom 1:15-16).

*See also* CENTER OF PAUL'S THEOLOGY; GOSPEL; HERMENEUTICS/INTERPRETING PAUL; PREACHING, KERYGMA.

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S. Greidanus

**PREDESTINATION.** *See* ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION.

## PRE-EXISTENCE

The term *pre-existence* refers to the idea of an entity having a heavenly existence before its earthly, historical or eschatological\* manifestation, sometimes even before the creation\* of the world. Pre-existence is attributed to Christ\* in a number of NT passages (e.g., Jn 1:1-18; Heb 1:1-3), including several Pauline passages, according to most scholars. But there is disagreement about which, if any, Pauline passages express the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ, about the conceptual sources of this doctrine, and about what the expressions of Christ's pre-existence meant. As well, Paul's letters suggest what may be an allied concept of the precosmic divine predestination of believers (*see* Election and Predestination).

1. Ancient Jewish Tradition
2. Christ's Pre-existence
3. Conclusions

### 1. Ancient Jewish Tradition.

**1.1. Background.** There is today a virtual consensus among scholars that the pre-Christian Jewish tradition provides the most important background for the idea of pre-existence in the NT. (For a fuller discussion, *see* Hamerton-Kelly 1966.) In addition to specific examples of pre-existence, two general concepts are to be noted: (1) that certain historical phenomena are