

Ethics

A scenic view of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, a building with a snow-covered roof is partially visible. The middle ground shows a steep, snow-covered slope with several ski lift towers and cables. The background features more snow-capped peaks under a blue sky with wispy clouds. The overall atmosphere is bright and clear.

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From the Editor

Technology is always a mixed blessing as the creations and inventions of imperfect people. It is not only that good tools may be used in evil ways, but also that tools alter us in various ways, changing our perceptions and relationships for good or ill.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of medicine. Jan Dudt helps us wade through the complexities of the technology and ethics of reproductive technologies in his article “Reproductive Technologies: Blessing or Curse, Dilemmas for Christians.”

“Abuse: No Joke, No Myth” by Shane Lems addresses a problem in the church that few want to discuss. The ethical and spiritual seriousness of all kinds of abuse requires us not only to discuss it but also to face it with grace and truth. Those of us who confess the Bible’s teaching on the sinfulness of sin should be the first to do so. One of the very helpful books reviewed by Lems is Michael Kruger’s *Bully Pulpit*.¹ It recently received first place in the church and pastoral leadership category in the annual *Christianity Today* book awards.

In chapter 11 of *The Voice of the Good Shepherd*, “Remember Your Medium,” I look at the central importance of preaching as a natural medium unmediated by technology in the pastoral setting. I explore this medium with the three media metaphors: conduit, grammar, and environment—used by media ecologist Joshua Meyrowitz.² I also explore four types of preaching within Reformed circles and conclude with Robert Lewis Dabney’s “Seven Cardinal Requisites of Preaching.”

In “Redemption in Christ” Ryan McGraw reviews the fourth of seven volumes of seventeenth century theologian Peter van Mastricht’s monumental *Theoretical-Practical Theology*. “His scholastic precision and distinctions, constructive engagement with early church and medieval theology, and extensive practical application have become theological rarities in modern times.”

Charles Wingard reviews a superb new volume *How to Read and Understand the Psalms* by Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel. The authors masterfully “instruct readers about the structure of individual Psalms, explore their various forms, explain the

¹ Lems reviewed of *Bully Pulpit* in *New Horizons* in August https://www.opc.org/review.html?review_id=928

² Joshua Meyrowitz, “Multiple Media Literacies.” *Journal of Communication* 48, no. 1 (winter 1998): 96–108.

arrangement of the Psalter's five books, and offer suggestive outlines that will assist pastors and teachers in effectively communicating their message.”

I offer a very brief review of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in a category I have rarely used: Servant Classics. This is to whet your appetite for an edifying classic that may have been forgotten.

A reminder about the prices indicated in book reviews. I always use the list price. I leave it to readers to look for discounts. Oddly, most publishers now give discounts on their websites, but a wider web search is advisable.

My poem “We Have Waited for the Snow” is especially for snow lovers. It always reminds me of how the Lord views a redeemed sinner: “wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:7).

The cover is the view from the Klein Matterhorn (Little Matterhorn), the highest cable car station in Europe (3,883 m. or 12,739 ft.). On the summit viewing deck we were pleasantly surprised to see a plaque with this verse from the King James Bible: “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches” (Ps. 104:24), followed by this hymn stanza,

Father Almighty, wonderful Lord
Wonderous Creator, be ever adored;
Wonders of nature sing praises to You,
Wonder of wonders—I may praise too!

The same plaque is in the main lodge of the Grand Canyon National Park.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

CONTENTS

ServantEthics

- Jan F. Dudd, “Reproductive Technologies: Blessing or Curse, Dilemmas for Christians”
- Shane Lems, “Abuse: No Joke, No Myth”

ServantWord

- Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Voice of the Good Shepherd*, Chapter 11, “Remember Your Medium”

ServantReading

- Ryan M. McGraw, review article, “Redemption in Christ,” review of Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Redemption in Christ*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester and Michael T. Spangler, vol. 4
- Charles M. Wingard, review of *How to Read and Understand the Psalms*, by Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel
- Gregory E. Reynolds, *Servant Classics: Review of Robinson Crusoe*

ServantPoetry

- Gregory E. Reynolds (1949–), “We Have Waited for the Snow”

FROM THE ARCHIVES “ABUSE, BIOETHICS”

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-30.pdf

- “Elders and Sexual Abuse – A Pastor’s Dilemma.” 11:4 (Oct. 2002): 73–77.
- “A Christian Anthropology for Contemporary Bioethics.” (David VanDrunen) 17 (2008): 79–85.
- “Genetic Engineering, Human Nature, and Human Destiny” (David VanDrunen) 31 (2022): 97–101.
- “The Importance of Biblical Anthropology.” (William C. Davis) 30 (2021): 125–29.
- “Medical Technology: A Blessing Not to Be Idolized.” (William C. Davis) 30 (2021): 133–35.
- “Perfecting the Imperfectible.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 17 (2008): 18–23.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

ServantLiving

Reproductive Technologies: Blessing or Curse, Dilemmas for Christians

By Jan F. Dudd

The pace of new technological developments is staggering. It is difficult to process the potential impact they can have on our lives and culture. It is even hard for those of us who teach and work in technological fields to keep abreast of the trends and to process them with biblical discernment, insight, perception, and wisdom. Thirty years ago, Neil Postman expressed concern in his book *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*.¹ His assessment was that when a technology is admitted to a culture, it plays out its hand. That is, new technologies end up shaping us in ways we do not often think of or are even aware of as the technology becomes commonly used. In our technology driven society we tend to assume that the next technological advancement is inherently an improvement over the old. The assumption is not always warranted. We as Christians need to be skeptical. Currently our western cultural context seems to be increasingly willing to distance itself from any informed Christian assessment of the new. Some Christians may think technology is neutral, and whether it is used for good or evil is dependent on the purposes and ethics of its use. However, that claim may be debated. Technology always reflects a practical use of information rooted in God's created world. It is true that it can be used for good or evil. The same can be said of things created good, such as sex, food, drink, words, the list could go on. Ultimately these good creations are either used in the good service of the Creator, or they are used in service of Satan. So, in a way there is no neutrality.

What seems shocking to many is that some of the latest modern technologies appear to be sinister from the start. Indeed, they still reflect the created order or else they would not work. However, the motivation behind them taints the possibility of them ever being used ethically, especially if the culture rejects biblically informed ethical principles.

It becomes the job of Christians to work with these technologies and develop the ethical frameworks for using them, if they can be used at all. Central to biblically informed ethical use are definitions we find in Scripture for humans being in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), the nuclear family as being the only sanctioned way of bringing children into the world (Gen 2:24), and the value of the human body as an essential part of the image bearing human (1 Cor. 6:19–20, 1 Cor. 15). No other arrangement than the married husband and wife is considered a legitimate means of human reproduction. Behind it all is the Creation Mandate to be fruitful, multiply, have dominion, and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28; Ps. 8).

Being in a fallen world has meant that the situation becomes complicated in the face of these principles. One or both parents may die, leaving a single parent or orphans. In

¹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

our culture out of wedlock births are epidemic. This often creates single parents or opportunities for adoption, a legitimate biblical solution. Infertility has plagued our species from the earliest times. Solutions for infertility are old—for example Abram, Sarai, and the traditional surrogate Hagar (Gen.16).

Making this even more complicated is the modern global decline in birthrates. Major portions of global populations are currently significantly below the sustaining birthrate of 2.1 children per woman. Hence, they are at risk of serious population decline. According to World Bank data, the average European births per woman is 1.5, with many European countries being less. China is at 1.2, Japan is at 1.3, South Korea is at .8. In North America the situation is also in decline. Birthrate for the USA is at 1.6, Canada is at 1.4, and Mexico is at 1.8. In all these places the cultural value of the nuclear family and fertility has been in decline for decades. The long-range prognosis for such trends is not good. In fact, they are extinction trajectories.

Invitro Fertilization (IVF)

Yet these countries are often world leaders in developing reproductive technologies. For example, in England, in vitro fertilization (IVF) was first successfully used in 1978 to reproduce a child from a married couple who were struggling with infertility. The embryo was implanted in the mother after in-lab fertilization was accomplished. Louise Joy Brown was born July 25, 1978. It is true that technology like this helps us regain lost dominion that results from the fall. Infertility due to biological impairment would not have been a situation of the pre-fallen economy. We can be thankful for the recovery of fertility for those struggling with the loss.

However, ethical issues remain a concern with IVF. The issue of human embryos being produced in unsuccessful trials is troubling. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH),² the implanted embryo to birth success rate is about 30%, compared to 24% for natural conception to births.³ The pre-implantation embryo selection process in the lab may be increasing technological success over natural conception. This practice would be problematic for prolife Christians desiring to give all embryos a chance for development and delivery.

A big problem with IVF is the fact that the technology is not solely used by married couples. It can be used by single women using sperm donors to fertilize their eggs, or lesbians and gay individuals looking to have a child with the help of surrogates or sperm donors. In addition, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2% of live births in the US are the result of IVF.⁴ Not all of them are children of a married husband and wife. Even married couples may find that excess embryos from IVF procedures are unwanted, relegating these embryos to be stored indefinitely in liquid nitrogen at -320° F. These pre-born humans have a grim future unless their parents give them a chance at life, or a surrogate mother, hopefully married to a husband, steps forward to adopt them.

² Mahvash Zargar, Sorour Dehdashti, Mahin Najafian, and Parastoo Moradi Choghakabodi, “Pregnancy Outcomes Following *In Vitro* Fertilization Using Fresh or Frozen Embryo Transfer,” NIH National Library of Medicine, v.25(4), Oct–Dec 2021, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8489809/>.

³ C. E. Boklage, “Survival Probability of Human Conceptions from Fertilization to Term,” NIH National Library of Medicine, v.35(2) Mar–Apr 1990, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1970983/>.

⁴ “ART Success Rates,” Center for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/art/artdata/index.html>.

Christians need to be aware of the issues as they make biblically informed choices regarding their families. For example, adopting an embryo from cold storage and navigating the dynamics of relationships with the child's genetic parents can be challenging.

It is conceivable that IVF as a reproductive solution can be helpful for married husbands and wives. However, thinking it through should involve much prayer and seeking wise counsel. This technology should not be used except by those who are husband and wife creating their child together. And all embryos so produced should be given a chance to be brought to term.

Sperm Banks and Cryo-preservation

Sperm banks have been around for decades. Donor men are paid to donate their sperm, retained in liquid nitrogen cold storage. Sperm can be used sooner or later. Liquid nitrogen storage is nearly indefinite. The obvious ethical concern in this technology is the payment for sperm donation to fathers who have no intention to raise the children they sire, let alone be married to the mother. Profiled donors, often remaining nameless, are selected by women for artificial insemination or IVF. Some of these women are acting as surrogate mothers for anyone desiring to adopt a baby with traits hopefully mirroring those of the father or mother. In any event, it is thought that 30,000 to 60,000 births a year occur with the use of sperm donors. Many of the women are single or are lesbians who want to have a child. Some of the fathers are seeking contact with the children they anonymously fathered. Some are exploring the parental rights they have as biological fathers. One donor father who knows he fathered 96 children, went on a 9,000 mile trek through North America to contact the children.⁵ There have been cases of half-sibling couples marrying and having children before they realized they had the same father. These obvious ethical concerns mean that sperm banks used this way are not options for Christians.

Yet, this technology can preserve a husband's sperm for married couples that face the potential onset of the husband's infertility due to disease or trauma. In this way, an unfortunate effect of our fallen world can be addressed. Lost dominion can, in part, be regained.

Two Types of Surrogacy

Surrogate motherhood has become increasingly popular in recent decades. Traditional surrogacy, the type used by Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, where the surrogate as biological mother carries the man's offspring, is still around. It is banned in many European countries but is legal in the USA. The surrogate is the biological mother of the child, and her name is on the child's original birth certificate. How many children are born annually by way of traditional surrogacy is hard to know. Married couples and homosexual couples have used traditional surrogates. And they may pay dearly for it, \$120,000 to \$200,000. However, the ethical concerns experienced by Abram and Sarai are compounded by our modern cultural turmoil. For example, John Stonestreet and Maria

⁵ Amy Dockser Marcus, "A Sperm Donor Chases a Role in the Lives of the 96 Children He Fathered," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 27, 2023.

Baer report in *Breakpoint*,⁶ produced by the Colson Center, of a gay couple who wanted their surrogate to abort the baby because of fears that a premature baby would be at risk to have certain medical issues. The mother had contracted aggressive breast cancer and was advised to be induced to deliver so she could start cancer treatments. The child, born at twenty-five weeks, could have survived but unfortunately died soon after delivery. Legal issues compound the ethical crisis. In California, parental rights laws would have likely required the mother to abort at the behest of the gay couple who contracted her services.

Gestational surrogacy is also fraught with ethical concerns. In gestational surrogacy the surrogate mother carries the IVF embryo of a married couple, or an embryo from an unmarried woman and man. The surrogate would not be genetically related to the child. Christian women have been known to carry babies for married couples when the genetic mother could not carry the baby to term. Typically, this surrogacy is considered an act of kindness on the part of the surrogate, whether she is monetarily compensated or not. Risks associated with pregnancy are still a concern. Parental rights issues remain. And abortion may be considered if the developing child does not meet the expectations of the biological parents. Gestational surrogates typically are asked to meet the industry's standards of being healthy women who have had a couple healthy natural pregnancies. However, as altruistic as it may sound, payment for the service is typical and the commodification of physical humanity remains a grave concern. How does one put a price tag on human bodies?

Gestation By Way of Artificial Wombs

Perhaps the most chilling advancement in reproductive technology is the “progress” being made in development of artificial gestation, artificial wombs. The technology is progressing rapidly. Mice can be gestated from conception to 50% full term. Sheep can be taken from two-thirds term to delivery in artificial wombs. This technology is being considered for human trials by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA).⁷ The initial rationale is to offer treatment to babies that would otherwise face the risks of premature delivery.

Few premature babies survive if born before twenty-two weeks of gestation. Premature babies born after twenty-eight weeks are still at high risk of various medical conditions later in life. Premature babies put into artificial wombs (like those developed for sheep) and allowed to develop closer to the normal forty weeks could be healthier. This assumes that the technology works and does not create more of its own associated problems.

Experimenting with the early stages of the technology is problematic. Prolife concerns would include making sure trials were not conducted on healthy mothers and babies, putting them at unnecessary risk. Trials would defensibly be offered as experimental treatments for otherwise hopeless cases where the baby would die if not

⁶ John Stonestreet and Maria Baer, “Why There’s No Such Thing as ‘Surrogacy Gone Wrong,’” *Breakpoint*, Colson Center, August 14, 2023, <https://breakpoint.org/why-theres-no-such-thing-as-surrogacy-gone-wrong/>.

⁷ Max Kozlov, “Human Trials of Artificial Wombs Could Happen Soon,” *Nature*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02901-1>.

gestated artificially. That decision may not always be clear, and parental rights can easily be violated. Yet increasing the likelihood of infant survival would be desirable.

Ethical, lifesaving use of artificial wombs would make the new advancements attractive. However, in our ethically confused culture it is quite possible that there would be many violations of Christian ethics in the development and use of the technology. Developing the technology in today's ethical environment would certainly mean that some level of human embryonic and fetal experimentation would be part of the development plan. If the technology is advanced by means of purposefully experimenting with unborn humans, Christians would have to cry foul. However, in the past, overt human experimentation has been avoided at times by the use of experimental procedures that have given a ray of hope in an otherwise hopelessly desperate situation. I would imagine the first cesarean section on a human was such a case. Eventually, the technique was perfected, largely through trial and error.

One can imagine a very sinister use of artificial wombs. In those countries with declining populations due to low birthrates, as seen in Europe and East Asia (North America is not far behind), it is conceivable that the technology could be used to prevent population collapse to avert economic and cultural ruin. In places where the traditional family is in crisis, central authorities may employ artificial wombs to avert demographic disaster. Governments would be engaged in raising and educating the children by means that would entirely circumvent the traditional family with nightmarish results. Pray that it never comes to this. If it does, Christians will be faced with profound challenges, from evangelism to nearly unimaginable social issues. We can always rely on God's grace to see us through. Opportunities to be salt and light to a desperate people would never be greater.

Humans as GMO

Genetically modifying humans is another deep ethical concern facing us. Presently, the only known genetically modified humans are the three Chinese girls who were genetically modified to be HIV resistant. The idea was to avoid the risk of them contracting HIV from their HIV positive father. Chinese doctor He Jiankui led a team using the gene-editing technology known as CRISPR to edit the genes of the IVF embryos of the genetic parents. Experiments were carried out on human embryos and fetuses carried by surrogate mothers. Dr. He successfully modified three young embryos but was eventually jailed for his efforts. The Chinese authorities took exception to Dr. He's freewheeling pursuit of scientific advancement.⁸ It is fair to say that this technology was advanced by human genetic experimentation that resulted in the death of trial embryos and fetuses. In a regime that has little concern for humans as *imago Dei*, the biggest issue was doing the work apart from the approval of the central authorities. For Christians, that is not good enough. The protection of human life from experimental trials and certain death is the bigger issue. Altering human genetics may be acceptable if it corrects a genetic defect and human life is preserved. However, defining what is a genetic defect is not always clear. For example, is lactose tolerance or lactose intolerance a defect? Most would think that hemophilia is a defect worth correcting if the correction

⁸ Sui-Lee Wee, "Chinese Scientist Who Genetically Edited Babies Gets 3 Years in Prison," *New York Times*, December 30, 2019.

could be done without jeopardizing human life, as it is a condition recognizably due to the fall. However, the gain must not come at the price of destroyed human life.

Cloning Humans

Human reproductive cloning is banned internationally. However, cloning human embryos for therapeutic experimentation, for example the development of embryonic stem cells, is acceptable in many countries, including the US. President George W. Bush issued an executive order in the summer of 2001 that cut off federal funding for many forms of human embryonic stem cell research. However, research could still be conducted with private funds. President Obama rescinded that order in March 2009 to remove politics and ideology from the issue and to let science be science. His explanation was an incredible statement full of politics and ideology.

However, reproductive cloning may well be on the horizon. Artificial wombs, genetic modification, the decay of the nuclear family, the rise of central authorities that have little regard for the human as the bearer of divine image, paves the way for the unthinkable. I was at a stem cell conference in 2007 when a researcher claimed to have cloned himself using somatic cell nuclear transfer, the same technology that produced Dolly the sheep and Barbara Streisand's replacement dogs. The research was done to produce stem cell lines for regenerative medicine. The work was done in the UK where law requires the clone to be terminated at the 16-cell stage. However, it is conceivable that the clone could have been implanted into a gestational surrogate mother and brought to term.

Undoubtedly, these reproductive technologies will be used as the future unfolds. Christians who understand the authority of Scriptures will be faced with opportunities for countercultural testimony and practice. We will be called to buck societal trends. Legal battles will occur. These are already realities. However, we will be faced with how we treat humans brought into the world, regardless of the technology used. Christians need to recognize all humans as image bearers of God. We will then need to fashion our cultural response accordingly. It is not a new thing that humans have reproduced by other-than-God-sanctioned means. However, it is biblically clear that all are to be recognized as *imago Dei*.

Technologies are already in motion that assault the image of God. Genetically engineering humans with non-human genes and human-animal chimeras are all possible. We can assume that those unrestrained by God's definitions of the created order are already making "progress" with these. Christians will increasingly be found to be in nearly intractable situations. We need to be praying for Godly wisdom, discernment, insight, and perception to remain faithful to our calling to protect the *imago Dei* as we realize our call to take dominion and subdue the earth.

Jan Frederic Dudd is a professor of biology at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.

ServantLiving

Abuse: No Joke, No Myth

By Shane Lems

Abuse. It has been a hot topic in our culture for the last fifteen years or more. Various abuse cases have been highlighted by the media more than a few times. To put it in other terms, pointing the spotlight on abuse has been “trending.” Reports of abuse often go viral online. Needless to say, many people in our culture know about abuse.

Typically, in Christian circles, cultural hot topics lead to debates. From climate change to women’s rights, to immigration policies to political movements, Christians debate and disagree upon various trending topics. However, abuse is not something about which Christians should disagree. Abuse is wrong, and it is detestable. Abuse is nothing to joke about. Whether physical, spiritual, sexual, emotional, or verbal, all forms of abuse are contrary to God’s Word (e.g. Jer. 22:3, Ps. 10:7, Prov. 24:1–2, etc.). Although it is unfortunate that false accusations of abuse happen, Christians should despise the very thought of abuse. Abuse is an evil and an injustice that originates from the dark corners of a sinful heart and is instigated by Satan himself.

Most people have heard about abuse cases involving CEOs, coaches, politicians, or people in other positions of authority. Even more discouraging and disheartening are the stories about abuse involving pastors and church leaders. It is not a myth. Some leaders in Christian churches—even conservative Christian churches—have abused God’s people. Like the evil, worthless shepherds of God’s people in Ezekiel’s day, some men today in leadership positions have abused God’s people and ruled them with harshness and brutality (Ezek. 34:4). The evil actions of these harsh shepherds cause the sheep to scatter and wander (Ezek. 34:6). The poor sheep are forced to run from the dangerous shepherd into the wilderness where they face dangerous animals. It happened in Ezekiel’s day; it still happens today. Sometimes men in authority simultaneously abuse their authority and the people under their authority, causing unimaginable harm to the flock. No wonder the Lord says *woe* to such wicked men and vows to hold them accountable for their terrible evil (Ezek. 34:2, 10).

On a positive note, and biblically speaking, pastors and elders are called to rule with Christ-like love, tenderness, and care (1 Pet. 4:1–4). Pastors and elders must not rule with a brawny, heavy-handed, tough demeanor. Instead, they must care for sheep in a loving maternal and paternal way (Ezek. 34:3–4; 1 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 1:2). Paul says that overseers in the church must not be violent, but gentle (1 Tim. 3:3). Shepherds are not to be arguers who like to quarrel (1 Tim. 3:3). They must be self-controlled in all areas of life, avoiding both anger and too much alcohol (1 Tim. 3:2–3). Along with all Christians, pastors and elders must cultivate and live out the fruit of the Spirit, including love, kindness, patience, goodness, and gentleness.

Pastors and elders must also lead the way in the blessed task of peacemaking. They do not take up weapons in personal conflicts, but pastors and elders help people lay down their weapons and seek peace. Shepherds are not fighters; they must not fight with the sheep. Pastors and elders must be kind to everyone, correct opponents with gentleness,

and let love cover all offenses (2 Tim. 2:24–26; 1 Pet. 4:8). Shepherds must stand firmly on the truth and boldly teach the truth, but when they interact with opponents or objectors, they are to speak the truth in love and correct others with gentleness (Matt. 5:44; Eph. 4:15).

Again, all these characteristics are Christ-like. He is our Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep with tender love. Our dear Savior never harms, manipulates, bullies, lies to, or deceives his sheep. Pastors and elders, by God’s grace, are called to be Christ-like in their care for the flock. Thankfully, God is abundantly kind to his people. He has given them many wonderful pastors and elders throughout history, men who have loved the flock so much they not only suffered abuse without retaliating (like Christ) but also even gave their lives out of love for the church (like Christ). Thank God for such wonderful, Christ-like men who have served his church!

But once again, we must not forget that abuse does happen in Christian churches. We must not be ignorant or naïve about the reality of abuse in Christian circles. And we must not turn a blind eye or a deaf ear when we hear about or see abuse cases of any kind. The Lord loves justice and calls us to practice justice while we walk humbly with him (Mic. 6:8). This means listening to cries for help, coming to the side of those treated unjustly, and making sure that unfit, evil shepherds are not allowed to rule (Isa. 1:17; Amos 5:15; Jer. 22:3; Jer. 21:12, etc.). Churches—and church leadership—should promote and seek justice in a biblical way, a way that glorifies the Lord and is good for his people. In a word, Christians should, in a just way, oppose abuse in the church. (Christians should also justly oppose abuse outside the church as well, but that is a slightly different topic.)

Opposing abuse in the church is easier said than done. However, there are good resources for churches to utilize when seeking help and pursuing biblical justice in abuse situations. In fact, many of these available resources are helpful to study *before* a church faces such difficult circumstances. Knowing the tendencies and tactics of abusers and church bullies will help Christians spot them and, with God’s help, prevent abuse before it happens—whether in the home or in the church.

One extremely helpful resource about abuse is *Why Does He Do That?* by Lundy Bancroft.¹ The subtitle gives more information about the book: “Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men.” To be sure, this is not a Christian book, and Christians will certainly find areas in it with which they disagree. However, Bancroft has many years of experience counseling, training, and helping women in abusive situations. He writes from a position of much exposure to and knowledge about abuse. We might think of gaining insight from Bancroft’s expertise in this area as plundering the Egyptians or going to the ant for wisdom (Exod. 12:35–36; Prov. 6:6; 30:25).

There are four main parts to Bancroft’s book: 1) The Nature of Abusive Thinking, 2) The Abusive Man in Relationships, 3) The Abusive Man in the World, and 4) Changing the Abusive Man. *Why Does He Do That?* is a very helpful resource because it gives details about the various mindsets of abusers. For one example, in chapter three Bancroft explains the mentality of an abusive man: he is controlling, he feels entitled, he twists things into their opposites, he confuses love and abuse, he strives to have a good public image, and he denies and minimizes his abuse (etc.). In the next chapter, Bancroft examines the different types of abusive men, and later in the book he addresses how a man becomes abusive and what it is like for a woman to live with an abusive man. The last few

¹ Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003).

chapters are about getting help for abusers and how to work towards an abuse-free world. Whether dealing with an abuse situation in the home or in the church, this book is a very important resource to utilize.

Specifically concerning abuse in the church, Michael Kruger's *Bully Pulpit*² is perhaps the best resource for churches that are dealing with bully pastors or elders. In a word, this book explains the problem of abuse in the church and advises Christians on how to biblically navigate abuse situations. In this book, Kruger shares his observations and research about how bully pastors function. From gaslighting to manipulation to narcissistic behavior, Kruger does a fine job explaining the various evil tactics bullies use to dominate the flock.

In *Bully Pulpit* Kruger also gives insight into spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse is something that Christians might not think about too often, but it definitely does happen. Kruger's definition is helpful: "Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals" (24). Chapters two and three cover the topic of spiritual abuse, and later in the book Kruger also explains some of the damaging effects of spiritual abuse.

Bully Pulpit also gives some insight into why churches fail to stop leaders who bully. This book also helps readers learn how abusive leaders retaliate. The various information about bullies is useful when dealing with such leaders; it helps Christians protect themselves and others against such men. The last chapter contains Kruger's recommendations for creating a local church culture that is resistant to spiritual abuse. Although this book is only around 150 pages long, it is full of extremely important, beneficial, and practical information about abusive leaders in the church. As I have mentioned elsewhere, this book should be read, marked, and studied by all elders and pastors.

There are quite a few other resources on abuse in the church and in the home. Other very good resources include *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church* by Anna Wood and Jeff Crippen, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* by Leslie Vernick, and *Is It Abuse?: A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* by Darby Strickland.³ Indeed, more resources could be listed here as well, and interested readers should look for other resources that aid Christians in dealing with abuse in a biblical, wise, and just manner. Abuse does happen in Christian circles. It is not a myth; it is not a joke. Christians should add it to their prayer lists: "Lord, help the victims of abuse, bring abusers to justice as you will, and give your church the resolve to deal with abuse in a biblical way."

Shane Lems serves as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Hammond, Wisconsin.

² Michael Kruger, *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022).

³ Anna Wood and Jeff Crippen, *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church* (Greenville, SC: Calvary, 2012); Leslie Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2013); Darby Strickland, *Is It Abuse?: A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020).

Servant Word

The Voice of the Good Shepherd: Remember Your Medium,¹ Chapter 11

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

*And I, when I came to you, brothers,
did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God
with lofty speech or wisdom.
For I decided to know nothing among you
except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

—1 Corinthians 2:1–2

*Suppose there had been a fourth temptation
when our Lord encountered the Devil in the wilderness—
this time an offer of networked TV appearances,
in prime time, to proclaim and expound his Gospel.
Would this offer, too, have been rejected like the others? If so, why?*

—Malcolm Muggeridge²

*The prophetic complaint of the Old Testament
seems to preclude any modern attempt at utilizing
the sacred groves of TV and magazine
as basic bearers of the Good News.*

—Duane Mehl³

Do not be intimidated by the vaunted superiority of modern media and their overestimated technologies as much of the church seems to be. Many churches use PowerPoint and other “visual aids,” as if they will lack cultural respect and authenticity if they are not “up to date.” The hidden message here is that given the proper techniques, we will be able to effectively minister to modern people, and thus we do not need God

¹ Adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 366–75.

² Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 30.

³ Duane Mehl, “Mass Media and the Future of Preaching,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 41 (1970): 210.

with all our technique. At best we ask him to bless what we believe are the best means, without consulting his Word at the outset. The problem is that by accommodating people in this way and making them feel that they are still in the world in which they live every day, we lend credence to the world's assumptions about the power of the electronic media; and we abandon people to the visible world that the Internet teaches us is all there is. We assume that technology can solve all problems, so that the supernatural seems implausible.

Do not be seduced by the latest audio-visual fads. Walter Ong warns: Audiovisuals are worst of all in their deception because in them the word is fitted exactly to the visual apprehension and deprived of the paradox and mystery essential to the word's dialogic setting.⁴

Note the ploy of Zedekiah in using a visual aid to impress King Jehoshaphat, while Micaiah simply speaks the plain Word of God (1 Kings 22). But what of the God-ordained drama witnessed in the so called "acting prophets"? T. David Gordon responds:

As bearers of revelation, prophets participated in that "many and various ways" in which God spoke to the world prior to the definitive word brought by Christ and his apostles. Prophets were not *expositors* of revelation but *bearers* of revelation; subsequent to their activity, all ministers of the word are expositors of revelation, explainers of revelation; not bearers thereof.⁵

Remember: no medium is better calculated by God himself to communicate his Word to his image-bearing creatures than live pastoral preaching. 2 Corinthians 4:6 declares: "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Professor B. B. Warfield said of Princeton Seminary's preacher-professor Dr. George Purves, reflecting on the fact that Purves had written few books:

We are, perhaps, prone to overestimate the relative importance of books: *Litera scripta manet*. But the "winged word" of speech moves the world; and it is better, after all, to form characters than to compile volumes.⁶

As necessary as books are in our preparation for preaching, they cannot replace preaching itself. Nor can the streaming video, the television, or the Internet.

Preaching as Conduit, Grammar, and Environment

First, as the minister of the Word in your congregation, you are the primary *conduit* of covenantal information from God; that is what *Westminster Shorter Catechism*

⁴ Walter Ong, Review: *The Humiliation of the Word* (Jacques Ellul) in the *Journal of Communication*: vol. 36, no. 1 (1986): 156–158.

⁵ T. David Gordon, "Drama in Christian Public Worship: Preliminary Considerations," n.d., unpublished paper.

⁶ David, B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony 1869–1929*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 186.

question number three sums up as “what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” The preacher more than any other member of the church must be a media ecologist, a good steward before God of the media of communication, especially the God-ordained medium of preaching. This is the reason it took eight chapters in my 2001 book *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures* to come to the subject of preaching itself. In emphasizing that the medium is the message, we must never minimize the message itself. Although every medium forms a distinct and important part of every message, the content is central, and that is precisely why we are concerned about the medium. The medium must be commensurate with the message. The two are inseparable. That is never truer than in preaching. We are stewards of the mystery of the gospel (1 Cor. 4:1–2; 1 Pet. 4:10). After describing the ordinary offices of the continuing church to Timothy, Paul says:

If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:15–16)

The message is absolutely *the* central reality in the existence and life of the church to which it is entrusted.

Second, as the minister of the Word in your congregation, the *grammar* of your preaching is a vital aspect of communicating the content of God’s Word. How to conduct yourself in the church (*ἀναστρέφεισθαι, anastrephesthai*) is a major concern of Paul in the ministry of Timothy and the post-apostolic church. The minister and his congregation are the medium for the life-altering message of the gospel, presented to the world as the embassy of Christ. The message is “incarnated” in the life of the congregation living in holiness and love. We should consider the grammar of preaching in terms of the unique “elements of production,” considered in chapter 1. The preacher faces the congregation with the open Bible in his hands. The raised central pulpit, characterizing church architecture since the Reformation, is part of this grammar. It says something about the place of the preached Word in the worship as well as the authority of the one whose Word it is. While some might argue that these elements are not essential to preaching, I think they reflect visually and acoustically the position of the Word in the church. Of course, this may not be possible in certain situations. But our didactic emphasis often eclipses the important secondary matter of the aesthetics of our worship space. The body, facial expressions, hand movements, the tone and volume of voice of the preacher, are all essential to the grammar of preaching. As we have seen, any medium which mediates these elements, in addition to preaching itself, modifies them in significant ways.

Third, as the minister of the Word in your congregation, the *environment* created by your preaching produces a life-changing counter environment over against the ungodly environment of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The text of Scripture, expounded, applied, and lived, forms the interface between the church and the heavenly realm of its Lord. It also connects the church which hears with the church that has heard and the church which will hear that Word. Preaching connects the church with the history of

redemption. As Samuel Volbeda insists in his book *The Pastoral Genius of Preaching*,⁷ true preaching in the church is the feeding of the Father's flock through the power of the written Word communicated to his blood-bought children (Acts 20:28). Evangelistic preaching outside the congregation is an extension of the Word as an intrusion into fallen history and culture, extending the ecclesiastical counter environment into the domain of a fallen world (Acts 17). The entire fabric of heavenly reality impinges on earth through the preaching of the Word. In Ephesus this invasion caused quite a stir because the Word challenged and restructured the lives, perceptions, and relationships of those who repented and believed the gospel. Luke tells us that

. . . a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. (Acts 19:19–20)

The business community, which was intimately entwined with the occult practices of the Ephesians, was up in arms (Acts 19:24ff). The media of communication were altered significantly by the presence of the preached Word.

One of the important questions we must face as preachers is, To what degree must we accommodate the unique characteristics and especially the weaknesses of the communication media of our age? First, the preacher must take account of the electronic environment. But even as he refuses, on biblical grounds, to forsake preaching itself as the chief means of God's communication, his hearers in the church and in the world are affected by the electronic media. Thus, second, especially with those who are not nurtured in the Word-oriented community of the church, the preacher must accommodate his hearers in the way Paul did at Athens, beginning with the general revelation of God in the situation of the Athenians. Paul followed the accepted format for public speaking in the forum on Mars Hill. What we explore below will focus on enhancing the characteristics which have always been featured in good preaching, many of which we have allowed to decay.

Some Distinctions of Preaching Types and Emphases

In Presbyterian and Reformed churches we may identify at least four approaches to preaching: neo-Puritan, redemptive-historical, theological or doctrinal, and expository.⁸ These are not necessarily different types of sermons. Jay Adams reminds us to beware of rigid categories:

Good preaching, then, while emphasizing one of the three aspects, will always include all three. There will be a text (a *telic* unit as a preaching portion), a topic (whatever is the subject or teaching, of the preaching portion), and an exposition (the work of the preacher to demonstrate that the purpose he teaches is actually the Holy Spirit's purpose in the text, and that is the sole authority for what he says). If your

⁷ Samuel Volbeda, *The Pastoral Genius of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960).

⁸ Ross W. Graham, personal e-mail, September 12, 1999.

preaching doesn't include all three, as well as application and implementation of the truth, there is something lacking.⁹

Every sermon must be textual, or it is not a biblical sermon. Textual sermons are not a type of sermon but must be the exegetical foundation and fountain of every sermon. As noted by Adams above, the same can really be said of "topical" preaching. Every text has a topic, but any topic which does not come from the text of Scripture is not suitable subject matter for a sermon. Even a biblical topic, like regeneration, must be rooted in a particular text, even though a sermon based on this text must consider what the whole Bible teaches on regeneration.

A false dilemma is often fostered by distinguishing between teaching and preaching. The difference between *kerygma* and *didache* in the New Testament has been exaggerated. In Matthew 11:1 we read: "When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach (διδάσκειν, *didaskein*) and preach (κηρύσσειν *kērussein*) in their cities." Romans 10:15 also uses two Greek words for preach: "And how are they to preach (κηρύξουσιν, *kēpuxousin*) unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news' (εὐαγγελιζομένων, *euangelizomenōn*)." In Acts 28:31 we read that Paul was in Rome "proclaiming (κηρύσσων, *kērussōn*) the kingdom of God and teaching (διδάσκων, *didaskōn*) about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance." These three verses demonstrate that the three major words used for communicating the gospel in the New Testament are used interchangeably. Thus, rather than indicating a distinction of tasks, they reveal the richness of the concept of preaching.¹⁰ Proclaiming the message as a public herald of good news includes instruction. While teaching tends to focus on instruction, and preaching on the proclamation of the gospel and its application, all biblical communication of the gospel includes both. As Augustine enjoys: "instruction should come before persuasion."¹¹

Neo-Puritan Preaching

The Neo-Puritan approach emphasizes application. Clearly the Bible itself teaches that Scripture is given to transform God's elect (cf. Rom. 12:1–2). Application is the goal of biblical communication. Every text of Scripture is relevant because it is addressed to God's people, not because the preacher makes it so by "application." The commonest complaint about this sort of preaching is that it tends toward introspection and that it is too long. These are certainly dangers that I have seen in practice, where conviction of sin is seen as almost the sole purpose of preaching. But a more cogent criticism is in the failure to engage the listener in the context of the text itself. It may also degenerate into endless "practical" points of "how-to," ending in mere moralism, or worse, triviality.

⁹ Jay Adams, *Essays on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 8, in Douglas Van Allen Heck, *The ERS Basic: The Five Steps of Bible Exposition* (Tulsa, OK: Expository Resource Services, Inc., 1990), 20.

¹⁰ Cf a very helpful study of the NT words for preaching in Klaas Runia, "What Is Preaching according to the New Testament?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 3–48.

¹¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (427 AD; repr. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 137.

There may in some cases also be the tendency to preach a dozen sermons on one verse. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached in this way, consecutively, through entire books. This, however, is not truly expository since it often draws many sermons from one single verse and is thus more topical in its presentation. This is a distinct weakness of the Puritan approach. It unintentionally circumvents the Spirit-inspired structure of preaching pericopes. Also, Jay Adams has pointed to the dangers of the Scholastic method of Puritan preaching: doctrine then use; lecture then every possible application.¹²

Another flaw in this approach is to imitate the style of the Puritans, appropriate in their day, when preaching was a form of public entertainment, but not suited to modern sensibilities. Adopting the language and length of Puritan sermonizing would, I believe, be objected to by the Puritans themselves if they lived in the modern world.

Despite these weaknesses the best Puritans were expository, and “opened” the text of Scripture for the church to receive its application. The Puritan passion to engage saints and sinners with the Christ of Scripture is in the best tradition of biblical preaching.

Redemptive-historical Preaching

The redemptive-historical approach to preaching emphasizes the historical, covenantal context of every pericope. As in the textual sermon, every sermon must be redemptive-historical to be biblical. Cornelius Trimp has demonstrated that it is a false dichotomy to set the redemptive-historical approach over against the “exemplaristic” approach, as if redemptive-history has no application.¹³ The most common criticism of redemptive-historical preaching is that every sermon gives the history of the entire Bible through a single theme without ever challenging the hearer to change. I have never heard such a sermon but would not call it preaching if I did. On the other hand, I have heard plenty of exemplaristic or moralistic sermons. Joseph is our example of how to avoid adultery. Was this the point of the text? Clearly not! Joseph is a type of the faithful Deliverer, whose life of faith exemplifies holiness at every point, including resisting the temptation to sleep with Potiphar’s wife. The obedience of the Second and Last Adam is the point of this text. Yes, the crucified Servant of the Lord is our motivation for sexual purity. I will further explore the importance of redemption history for preaching below. Let it suffice to say that we are not to preach biblical theology *per se* but must preach redemptive-historically, which is to say we must preach Christ and him crucified.

Doctrinal Preaching

Theological, or doctrinal preaching is an emphasis that seeks to inculcate the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures. The common criticism of this preaching emphasis is that it teaches timeless truths not tied to the historical text and that it tends toward theological lecturing rather than preaching. Clearly, this is a danger, especially in reaction to the modern antipathy to doctrine. However, as with biblical theology, while we must not preach doctrine *per se*, we must always preach doctrinally. After all, what is “doctrine” but teaching. Our symbolic formulations of the teaching of Scripture provide a

¹² Adams, “Preaching with Purpose,” class notes.

¹³ Cornelius Trimp, *Preaching and the History of Salvation*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Dyer, IN: Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman, 1996).

marvelous map of the truth of Scripture. These must always inform the exegesis and content of preaching.

Expository Preaching

Most commonly advocated—though not frequently practiced—in evangelical and Reformed churches today is expository preaching. This involves the consecutive exposition, from pericope to pericope, of a book of the Bible. Calvin preached this way, and presently many Reformed pastors do the same. Among its many excellent strengths is the fact that it follows the logic of Scripture itself and inculcates biblical content in its biblical setting. Such preaching covers the rich terrain of the phenomena of the biblical text. David Helm defines it well: “Empowered preaching that rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of a biblical text.”¹⁴

The only weakness of this approach is that unless the books chosen are chosen with care, the preaching may not cover the whole counsel of God as a system of doctrine. For example, a preacher might preach through all four gospels consecutively over a period of years and neglect the Old Testament preparation for the incarnation and the apostolic interpretation and application of these events. Expository preaching is a wise choice for the pastor as long as he is willing to intersperse other sermons as occasion may demand in the life of his congregation. The broader idea of “expository” should be true of every sermon. In this sense, there is truly no such thing as a biblical sermon which is not expository, because every sermon must expound, explain, and apply a portion of Scripture, but this may not be done seriatim through entire books.

Timothy Keller also warns us that spending too much time on a particular book in a mobile society may actually rob people of the Bible’s rich variety. Thus, he advocates using shorter books from a wider variety of genres.¹⁵ However, this is not as much the case in more rural settings where the population is far less transient.

So let me make a special plea for a steady diet of preaching through whole books seriatim, since the Good Shepherd speaks to his church through the Word that his Spirit has artfully constructed. Here is a more expanded reflection on the value of expository preaching in the narrower sense.

In seeking to cover the whole counsel of God, we are reminded of what Paul said to the Ephesian elders: “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). As we glean from his letters, he had a keen sense of how to apply the whole counsel to the exigencies of each congregation.

Because expository preaching focuses on the details of the text, it tells us what we are certain God has said and wants his people to hear and be transformed by. Thus, it tends to humble us preachers with a sense that God works through his Word and so gets all the glory: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6).

¹⁴ David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 13.

¹⁵ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 39–41.

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. (1 Cor. 4:6)

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Rev. 22:18–19)

Preaching through entire books of the Bible enables us ministers to face topics that we might be tempted to avoid, like homosexuality, or our salaries. It also prevents us from sticking to hobbies, only preaching on our favorite topics, or focusing on the indicatives or imperatives of Scripture only, thus avoiding antinomianism, moralism, or legalism.

Think of an in-depth exposition of a text as a powerful antidote to our image-saturated culture. It prevents us from using manipulative marketing techniques—methods of electronic persuasion. It also helps prevent a related danger by emphasizing the character and speech of God rather than the preacher’s personality or rhetorical skills.

It also keeps preachers from the latest fads, especially the pragmatism of the latest “how to” in our hyper-efficient culture. In so doing, this type of preaching teaches people to listen and to read their Bibles as they were written. Expository preaching demonstrates the method of proper biblical interpretation (hermeneutics); it teaches people how to read and study their Bibles. It also reminds hearers that we are committed to a common text, subverting the radical individualism that the electronic culture fosters.

Finally, it challenges preachers to preach the Christ of Scripture as we seek the hermeneutic of our Savior:

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’ (Luke 24:26–27, 44–47)¹⁶

This topic will be amplified in chapter 13.

True preaching should be a synthesis of the best elements of these four emphases, avoiding the weaknesses of each. If we stick to the Spirit-inspired purpose of each text in its context—immediate, the book, and the entire Bible—and remember Paul’s statement in Romans 15:4 “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,” we will preach biblically.

¹⁶ I owe a number of points in this section to Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God’s Word and Keep People Awake* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013), 40–41.

Dabney's Seven Cardinal Requisites of Preaching¹⁷

Robert Lewis Dabney's essential elements of sound preaching are as applicable today as they were in the nineteenth century. I reproduce them here for ready reference. T. David Gordon quotes Dabney and then adds helpful tests to help assess your own implementation of what is required in every sermon. Nothing in this part of Dabney's work would contradict the distinction between persuasion and proclamation made by Duane Litfin, as explained in chapter 6.

1. Textual Fidelity

For Dabney, a minister is an ambassador, who represents another, declaring the will of that Other. Therefore, he is not entitled to preach his own insights, his own opinions, or even his own settled convictions; he is entitled only to declare the mind of God revealed in Holy Scripture, the sermon must be entirely faithful to the text—a genuine exposition of the particular thought of the particular text.

Test: “Does the significant point of the sermon arise out of the significant point of the text? Is the thrust of the sermon merely an aside in the text? Is the text merely a pretext for the minister's own idea?”¹⁸

2. Unity

Unity requires these two things. The speaker must, first, have one main subject of discourse, to which he adheres with supreme reference throughout. But this is not enough. He must, second, propose to himself one definite impression on the hearer's soul, to the making of which everything in the sermon is bent.¹⁹

Test: “If ten people are asked after the sermon what the sermon was about, will at least eight of them give the same (or similar) answer?”²⁰

3. Evangelical Tone

It is defined by Vinet as ‘the general savour of Christianity, a gravity accompanied by tenderness, a severity tempered with sweetness, a majesty associated with intimacy.’ Blair calls it ‘gravity and warmth united. . . . an ardent zeal for God's glory and a tender compassion for those who are perishing.’²¹

¹⁷ from Robert Lewis Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric or a Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Richmon: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1870; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979) as adapted by T. David Gordon in *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messages* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R 2009), 23–8.

¹⁸ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 24.

¹⁹ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 24; Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*, 109.

²⁰ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 24.

²¹ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 25; Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*, 116–17.

Test: Do hearers get the impression that the minister is *for* them (eager to see them richly blessed by a gracious God), or *against* them (eager to put them in their place, scold them, reprimand them or punish them)? Is it his desire to see them reconciled to and blessed by a pardoning God? Does the sermon press the hearer to consider the hopelessness of his condition apart from Christ, and the utter competence of Christ to rescue the penitent sinner?²²

4. Instructiveness

The instructive sermon is that which abounds in food for the understanding. It is full of thought, and richly informs the mind of the hearer. It is opposed, of course, to vapid and commonplace compositions; but it is opposed also to those which seek to reach the will through rhetorical ornament and passionate sentiment, without establishing rational conviction. . . . Religion is an intelligent concern, and deals with man as a reasoning creature. Sanctification is by the truth. To move men we must instruct. No Christian can be stable and consistent save as he is intelligent. . . . If you would not wear out after you have ceased to be a novelty, give the minds of your people food.²³

Test: Is there any significant engagement of the mind in the sermon, or is the sermon full of commonplace clichés, slogans, and general truths? Is the hearer genuinely likely to re-think his view of God, society, church, or self; or his reasons for holding his current views? Is the mind of the attentive listener engaged or repulsed?²⁴

5. Movement

Movement is not a blow or shock, communicating only a single or instantaneous impulse, but a sustained progress. It is, in short, that force thrown from the soul of the orator into his discourse, by which the soul of the hearer is urged, with a constant and accelerated progress, toward that practical impression which is designed for the result. . . . The language of the orator must possess, in all its flow, a nervous brevity and a certain well-ordered haste, like that of the racer pressing to his goal.²⁵

Test: “Are the earlier parts of the sermon necessary to the latter parts having their fullest effect? Is there intellectual (and consequently emotional) momentum?”²⁶

6. Point

Dabney uses *point* to describe over-all intellectual and emotional impact of a sermon. Point is a result of unity, movement, and order, where there is a convincing, compelling weight upon the soul of the hearer. Hearer feels a certain point

²² Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 26.

²³ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 25; Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*, 117–19.

²⁴ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 26.

²⁵ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 26; Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*, 122–24.

²⁶ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 26.

impressing itself upon him, and feels that he must either agree or disagree; assent or deny.²⁷

Test: Is the effect of the sermon, on those who believe it, similar? If it encouraged one, did it tend to encourage all, and for the same reason? If it troubled one, did it tend to trouble all, and for the same reason? If it made one thankful, did it tend to make all thankful, and for the same reason?²⁸

7. Order

We would probably call this “organization,” but the point is the same. A discourse (sacred or otherwise) cannot have unity, movement, or point, without having order. Order is simply that proper *arrangement* of the parts, so that what is earlier prepares for what is later. A well-ordered sermon reveals a sermon’s unity; makes the sermon memorable, and gives the sermon great point.²⁹

Test: “Could the hearers compare notes and reproduce the outline of the sermon? If they could not reproduce the outline, could they state how it progressed from one part to another?”³⁰

Gregory E. Reynolds is *pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of Ordained Servant.*

²⁷ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 26–7.

²⁸ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 27.

²⁹ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 27.

³⁰ Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 27.

ServantReading

Redemption in Christ

A Review Article

By Ryan M. McGraw

Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706), *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Redemption in Christ*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester and Michael T. Spangler, vol. 4, 7 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023, 741 pages, \$50.00.

Steadily moving towards completion, this fourth of seven projected volumes of Peter van Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology* tips readers past the half-way point of a momentous publishing endeavor. Mastricht gives modern readers a glimpse into another world. His scholastic precision and distinctions, constructive engagement with early church and medieval theology, and extensive practical application have become theological rarities in modern times. Representing some of Mastricht's best material, this volume expounds the person and work of Christ, devoting nearly seven hundred pages to the Savior's glory. Here readers will find a precise, warm-hearted, and engaging treatment of one of the most foundational and central areas of Christian doctrine. Rather than attempting to cover the massive amount of ground travelled here, this review aims to give readers a general feel for the work, highlighting some features illustrating its character.

In eighteen chapters, Mastricht moves through Christ's incarnation, offices, states, and work of redemption. Tracing his covenant theology highlights the foundation on which the rest of the book is built, opening his Christology with a superb treatment of divine covenants. Genesis 3:15 provides the organizing exegetical principles, both for grasping Christ's work in terms of the covenant of grace and for reading the entire Bible coherently. Rather than using standard terminology of the covenants of redemption and of grace, he taught that there was an eternal covenant of grace between the Father and the Son that was the foundation of the historical covenant of grace with the elect in union with Christ, these covenants being both distinct and related. Mastricht furnishes readers with one of the clearest and most thorough treatments of conditionality in the covenants of redemption and of grace. The "eternal covenant of grace" is unconditional respecting the elect because Christ fulfilled all its conditions in their place as their surety. On the other side, while maintaining clearly that the covenant of grace is conditioned on faith supplied by the Spirit, he distinguished elements of the covenant given as means to ends from those that are the ends of the covenant. Thus, the Spirit gives to the elect unconditional calling, regeneration, and faith (implying repentance) through conversion based on the covenant of redemption. Yet justification, adoption, and glorification follow the condition of faith as the ends of the covenant (e.g., 40). Conditionality in the covenant of grace thus prevents both Antinomian and Pelagian ideas that we are saved through our own doing, whether partly or wholly, because the Spirit supplies faith as the pivot of

receiving the benefits of union with Christ. Faith is the condition of the covenant of grace, not in that it confers the right to the reward, which rests on Christ alone, but in that it confers the possession of the reward (41). Because this volume is occupied with Christ and his work of redemption, the ensuing material on Christ's incarnation, offices, states, and redemption all fall under the eternal covenant of grace conditioned on Christ, rather than the historical covenant of grace conditioned on faith. The remainder of the volume thus outlines what Christ did in fulfilling the eternal covenant of grace on behalf of God's elect.

Some outstanding chapters and features in the book are worth highlighting. For instance, his reduction of Christ's many names under the heads of "Lord," "Jesus," and "Christ" make his treatment easy to follow and remember without shortchanging the rich treasure trove of Christ's names in Scripture (chapter 3). Also, chapter eleven explores the life of Christ in depth in ways that are both rare in systematic theologies and reminiscent of Thomas Aquinas's extensive treatment of the topic. Though believers cannot imitate Christ in everything he did, his entire life provides both a foundation for the gospel and a moral pattern of Christian living in the Spirit (e.g., 392–94). In an age when Christians often reduce Christology to Jesus dying for our sins, not knowing how every aspect of his humiliation and exaltation are relevant to Christian faith and life, this chapter (particularly the practical section) is indispensable for fleshing out a Christ-oriented view of Christian living and experience. The Reformed church needs a broader view of Christ than we often have to fuel our prayers, devotion, and preaching. Augmenting his dogmatic treatments, the depth of his explanations and expositions in the elenctic parts contribute greatly to the value of the work. Often some of his clearest theological statements and distinctions appear here, contrasting orthodox viewpoints with those of opponents. Moreover, his Trinitarian theology is consistently pervasive, especially in rooting each aspect of Christ's person and work in the inseparable operations of all three divine persons and in the appropriate works of each person. This carries the advantage of teaching readers how to situate Christian doctrine in the Trinity in a way that is simultaneously robustly God-centered and intensely personal, both of which the church today needs.

Other features of the book either reflect historical interest or will surprise modern readers. Reflecting his context in the Dutch Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), Sabbath-keeping appears rhythmically in this volume (e.g., 244, 359, 371, 385, 459, 461–62, 501–02, 505–06, 515–16) in ways found only in England and the Netherlands at the time. While this was more a matter of difference in emphasis than of theological substance, it reminds us that our contexts often shape the questions we ask and the answers we seek.

It will surprise some readers that Maastricht believed that the majority Reformed view about the Decalogue was that it was "the renewal of the covenant of works," though with "an evangelical use" of driving people to Christ (45). Still, he distinguished the law itself as reflecting God's character from its use as a covenant of works, enabling him and other Reformed authors to retain a place for the law as a rule of life for believers. In other words, God presented the covenant of works at Sinai, not as a way of life, but as an evangelical means of driving believers to Christ for salvation, which Reformed authors called the first use of the law. This use of the law was alien to the covenant of works itself, which could not drive people to Christ, let alone offer him to sinners. The Mosaic

covenant continued to be an administration of the covenant of grace (46) because God never intended by it to place his people under a works covenant. While this viewpoint of the Mosaic covenant appears similar at first glance to the contemporary take on the republication of the covenant of works, Mastricht actually places a different option on the table for discussion.

Another noteworthy example of an unexpected twist is Mastricht's suggestion that it was possible, if not likely, that Mary remained a virgin perpetually after giving birth to Christ (297; 314). Though shunning Roman Catholic views of Mary's supposed conception without original sin, Mastricht believed that, though we do not know whether she always remained a virgin, it would be fitting if she were, because Christ himself had sanctified her womb. Though feeling like a remnant of medieval views of sanctity, this position was common among early modern Protestants.

However, Mastricht's denial that the human nature of Christ subsists personally "by means of the divine personhood" (132) is potentially troubling. Known as *enhypostasia*, this idea affirmed the personal nature of Christ's humanity while denying that Christ assumed a human person. Though some authors did not like *enhypostatic* language, this became the common way of stating that Christ was a divine person with two natures, making his human nature properly the humanity of the person of God the Son. John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, many Reformed authors, and most Lutherans affirmed this view in contrast to Mastricht. While retaining the integrity of Christ's two natures in one divine person, he (in my view) weakens the truth of the union of those natures. At the least, his statement that the "orthodox" (i.e., the Reformed) abrogate "all subsistence from the human nature" (148) overreaches. Those affirming the doctrine still taught that Christ was one person and that the human nature had no personal subsistence of its own, but they added that Christ's humanity was nonetheless personal due to hypostatic union with the person of the divine Son. This reviewer finds this more "Thomistic" version of the hypostatic union more satisfying than a completely depersonalized human nature in Christ, because it better accounts for the divine Son working personally through his proper human nature as an instrument of his agency. Mastricht is simply wrong in implying that Lutheran views of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper were the driving force behind *enhypostatic* accounts of the hypostatic union (151–57), because *enhypostasia* predated Lutheranism. Overstating "orthodox" unanimity recurs occasionally in Mastricht's work as a whole. Though reliable more often than not, his occasional overstatements should caution readers from taking all such assertions at face value. Reading more broadly in the literature of the time clarifies such points.

Volume four of van Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology* offers a rich feast of Reformed Christology. Though the meat he offers is often a bit tough and hard to digest, all his material is good meat. Prayerfully seeking spiritual nourishment through this book will make us better Christians and better preachers, and better preachers because better Christians. The Trinity, the Bible, and Jesus Christ are the core of biblical Christianity. We need books like Mastricht's to remind us that these are more than fundamentals on which we build everything else; they are the way of life itself.

Ryan M. McGraw is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as a professor of systematic theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.