BIBLICAL PREACHING

There is a wholesome return to Biblical Theology in the contemporary religious world. Its most rewarding facet is a new interest in Biblical preaching and some very excellent analyses of what constitutes it have recently been published.¹ This should be of particular interest to holiness ministers since the doctrine of holiness is said to be a more than usual theological sense - Scriptural Holiness. A return to Biblical preaching could result in a wide return to the doctrine which holiness people believe is the most central Biblical truth. Now if ever, is the moment to commend the doctrine to those whose concern it is to seriously read and honestly interpret the Word of God. Here-to-for, the affirmative answer to the question, "Was Wesley Scriptural," was met with a shrugged shoulder and a, "So what?" Now, if ever a Scriptural apologetic is relevant, this is the day; "So what?" matters and deserves an answer.

But to claim a Biblical status for a doctrine or system of doctrines involves much more than may appear on the surface. Shallow Biblicism is bankrupt. Reference to Scripture as the ultimate authority for faith and practice involves the exegete in questions not the least of which has to do with the nature of authority. A discussion of authority would take us too far afield for this study but it is mentioned because it relates to the central problem for a Biblical theology, namely, interpretation which is informed by it. Contempory conservative theology

recognizes the intrinsic authority of the Word of God and does not attempt to defend it. At this moment in theological history it is not so much the right of the Scriptures to speak to men that is challenged as the methods of interpretation which have divided Protestantism for so long. When all sorts of theologies, contradictory to each other in vital respects, are said to be Biblical, a thoughtful person seeking truth is justifiably perplexed. There can hardly be conceived a less lovely sight, and one more confusing to a non-Christian, than to watch Christians hurling texts of Scripture at one another like petulant children, to widen and perpetuate rifts in fellowship. The fact remains that those who indulge in such bickering are being left on the sidelines of the world's deep concerns to fuss among themselves and those who can contribute to real human needs out of the Bible are speaking to us, sometimes without regard for the disciplines with which the Christian Church has always guarded theological truth from error.

It is with a genuine sense of eagerness that the holiness Biblical student meets the challenge of this day. With confidence and deep humility he examines his own approach to Scripture to test its validity and its results. No other theological tradition has less to lose and more to gain by a criticized exegesis and none ought to welcome the discipline any more warmly.

Wesleyan Use of Scripture

It is well known that Wesleyans use the Bible differently than do some other theological groups. Their distinctive doctrine is come by because of this difference. It is necessary, not only to be aware of this fact but to understand why it is so and, further, to defend it
rationally if one is serious about commending his doctrine to other Biblically informed persons. The Wesleyans' general approach to Christian faith results in a relaxed and confident trust in the inspiration of Scripture. He is seldom concerned about defending inspiration. He assumes it and feels that the Holy Spirit is the guarantor of Biblical truth. He does not spend time, as a rule, in proposing theories of inspiration. Such an expenditure of time and effort seem childish and useless to him. It is enough to know that Christ, the living Word is unfailingly introduced to men through the written word when it is properly read. Knowing Him, the Scriptures are validated to the heart and mind of the believer. It does not require a certain kind of faith in the Scripture to read it, the Bible engenders faith in those who do read it without moral rejection.

This more spiritual, less formal, or verbal, view of inspiration is reflected in interpretation. And it is precisely here, that the most vulnerable point lies for holiness doctrine. At the point of greatest strength lies the need for greatest care. Interpretation takes on the character of the presuppositions which inform it. A faulty view of Scripture is always reflected in the method of its exposition. Again, Biblical preaching must proceed along disciplined lines of interpretation built on a proper view of what the Bible is and how it can be applied to preaching situations and human need.

Taking a Text

It is considered proper and necessary that a preacher justify his message by the taking of a Biblical text. The implication is thereby made, that what the preacher says not only has the sanction of God but
is God's truth. That this is implied ought to put a guard on the preacher's heart and lips that is never permitted to relax. The obligation of the called minister is to deliver God's word to men. The exhortation to "Preach the Word," requires that the messenger know what God's Word is about. Nothing less than a most devoted and honest and painstaking and prayerful and thorough attempt to know what a passage actually says and means will satisfy the divine call to the stewardship of preaching. The thrust of any message must be so true to the intent of the text that the hearer can go home to his Bible and find it there, still warm and convincing, even after many days or even months have passed. A sermon's right to be called Biblical is suspect, when it is spoiled by a different translation of the text or by completing the sentence or verse or paragraph in the Bible out of which the text was chosen.

Biblical preaching is not easy to come by. There are basic disciplines that structure it. These must be known and practiced. Failure to do so has brought much preaching into reproach. If and when the preaching of holiness has erred at any of these points some of the questions raised about the doctrine can possibly be accounted for. One is made to cringe when a preacher attempts to defend the second crisis experience of holiness doctrine on the basis of Paul's reference in II Corinthians to the proposed "second benefit". This is in the same category as exhorting people to intensive Bible study on the basis of Jesus' words, "Search the Scriptures." Eternal security of the believer can hardly be convincingly taught from the words "God cannot deny himself," when the previous verse declares that the man who denies God will himself be denied by God (II Tim. 2:12, 13). The denials in these two cases are totally different and to attempt to confuse them is a sign of careless
thinking. These are all glaring examples of less spectacular but equally faulty exegesis committed with monotonous regularity in all denominational pulpits.

What "Biblical" Does Not Mean

Biblical does not rightly describe the kind of preaching whose only claim to it is the generous use of Biblical words and phrases. It must be remembered that the devil was quite adept at quoting Scripture to Jesus during the period of His temptation — accurately, too, but not in keeping with the original intention of the passage.

Biblical preaching, moreover, is not the result of culling a series of congeneal texts from the Bible into a logical or systematic arrangement. It is a curious thing that the letter of Paul to the Romans has become the proof-text book for the differences between Lutherans, Calvinists and Wesleyans. How can this be? By the simple device of careful selection of texts and by interpreting the whole according to the principle of selection. The truth is that likely all the central affirmations of each theological tradition can be found in the book of Romans but to put them into unresolved contradiction is to do violence to the intellectual competency of Paul — and no scholarship concurs in that. Some elements of the Christian faith are known only by way of proof-texts, e.g., the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, but systems of theology cannot be said to be Biblical by virtue only of a logically organized selection of Biblical texts taken out of their historical setting.

Biblical does not mean, moreover, that any one word has precisely the same meaning from one book to another from Genesis to Revelation, or even in every context within one book. A variety of meanings and enriching
of meaning and actual change of meanings is clearly observable throughout the Bible and even within the short scope of one book. Words are tools of thought and adjust themselves to a context serving the varied purpose of the author. The word "grace" in the New Testament is used in many senses. It would be a sign of real incompetence to arbitrarily impose one meaning on every example of the use of that word. When the principle "Scripture interprets Scripture" means either an artificially selective correlation of texts or a uniform interpretation of words, the interests of a Biblical theology are not served. Scripture often helps to clarify other obscure passages but just as often a thorough study of the context is the primary need for both of them.

Biblical preaching is not simply skimming over the surface of a book making running comments on the words without regard to the meaning they had for the human problems to which they constituted an answer. Nor is it Biblical exegesis to reconstruct the historical Sitz im Leben and fail to relate the spiritual truth which the passage carries to contemporary and personal needs.

Not all preaching which is graced by the name "expository" is Biblical preaching. Donald Miller, in his exceedingly valuable book, The Way to Biblical Preaching, establishes his thesis that all truly Biblical preaching is expository in that it is true to the sense of the passage and is itself an unfolding of Biblical truth. But dull, barren, wordy, wooden, stuffy comments on a passage can hardly be classified as Biblical. It is possible, and all too customary, to lose the view of the forest by rubbing one’s nose on each tree trunk. Yes, this kind of preaching stays close to the words but never finds the underlying, life giving, heart changing, mind enlightening sense of them. Words are
important to meaning but words can assume an improper autonomy which obscures rather than interprets meaning.

One of the most subtle temptations in preaching, and the one least obviously dangerous but the most disastrous to Biblical preaching is the tendency to read back into Scriptural words all the accumulated theology which church controversy and scholarly thinking and human experience and cultural change has added to the meaning of words in the past 2000 years. Whenever the word "saved" occurs in Scripture for instance, we assume it to mean "salvation" in the theological sense. Then the analogy of the man who is "saved" though his works are burned up (I Cor. 3) is made to teach eternal security, regardless of the fact that Paul was not talking about personal salvation here at all. In the same letter, the words "sanctified" (describing those to whom he wrote), and "carnal" are attributed to the same persons and occasions endless theological problems. Actually, a problem can only arise here. when these terms are lifted out of the context and defined out of a modern theological textbook and then imposed back into the Biblical text and the text compelled to conform to the word's 20th century meaning.

Is it any wonder that distorted exegesis has torn theological brethren apart and made mockery of the term "Biblical"? Perhaps the author's sensitivity at this point has been unduly heightened by the change of heresy for the proper (to her) return to the Scriptures itself to establish the original meaning of these terms. Such a procedure can hardly be called, in truth, "another gospel," which is anathema. It must be granted that real Biblical preaching, arising out of an honest, painstaking search for Biblical meaning may sound like another gospel to those whose ears are tuned only to familiar, pat, comfortable phrases.
But it is the divine genius of the Word of God that it can startle, shock, probe, enlighten, heal, goad, when it is allowed to speak for itself. Certainly, the vast perspective of church thinking as recorded in its theology and massive commentaries dare not be ignored or disdained. No single insignificant individual has the scholarly or moral right to disclaim all dependence on, and freedom from the heritage of Christian culture and presume that he can improve on or even duplicate in one short, limited lifetime the accumulated wisdom of his fathers. But he always has the right and - in the Protestant circles - the moral obligation, to read for himself the Book which alone is the way to truth. The "great expounding books" which John Knox tells about in, The Integrity of Preaching, can "dull the fine taste" of the wine of the word of God by diluting it with too much human reason.

It is the preacher's task to "Preach the Word". This means that with the help of all the scholarship at his command he digs deeply into the inexhaustable riches of the word and discovers for himself the dynamic of its spiritual message. Preaching, then, will be inspired and exciting and relevant. To change the figure of speech, too much reliance on dogmatic interpretation (which is human after all) may drain off by tragic short circuit the inherent "charge" of the passage and leave nothing but cold, dead, harsh, uninspired preaching. Handling the Word of God is much like working with a "live wire," (as J. B. Phillips suggests). In the best sense, we do not determine the laws of its manipulation. It does. None of us can put a fence around the Bible and say. "I know what it means, what it can only say and what it cannot say." When we are the most complacent about it, the most assured, it strikes us the hardest. Such is the unspent thrill of reading the
Bible through the "innocent eye", as Ruskin expressed it. All advances in the Christian church have been born in a return to a fresh study of the Word of God. It can take care of itself - and men, too.

One other distortion of Biblical preaching seems worthy of mention. Its peculiar application in holiness preaching makes it particularly dangerous to holiness doctrine but it has a counterpart in other theological traditions as well. It is the tendency to interpret scripture in terms of human psychology and consequently, theological dogma, rather than being Biblically grounded, is but a reflection of generalized personal experience.

The preaching method of both the Calvinist and the Wesleyan today was largely molded in the furnace of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy of the early part of this century in America. In contrast to the liberal rejection of systematic theology and supernaturally revealed Biblical truth, a rationalistic theological approach was utilized by the fundamentalist to give clarity and form to his faith. An impeccable logical structure secured Biblical teaching from all intellectual attacks. The assumption was that truth and logic were identical and that the human psyche was principally intellectual and that all subjectivity was error since it partook of carnal nature. Christian faith was interpreted as adherence to a creed intellectually conceived and verbally acclaimed. Without challenging the basic presupposition of either the liberal or the Calvinist, the Wesleyan, aware of the inadequate religious experience of the Calvinist, though sharing with him the traditional Christian body of doctrine, stressed the personal experience of Christ and the inwardness and vitality of faith. But as is true with most reactions, the tendency is to over state the case and in the interest of the personal, experience
as such was not guarded carefully enough. Experience, as a psychological pattern, tended to become an end in itself determined orthodoxy. The Calvinist interpreted the Scriptures according to a pre-determined logic and the Wesleyan interpreted it in the light of personal experience. In both cases the principle of interpretation imperiously determined the meaning of Scripture and often distorted the message of it. The fundamentalist tended toward a radical dispensationalism and the Wesleyan to an immediate examination of his psychological status. The dispensationalist read the morning newspaper with his Bible - he became fanatically eschatological - a future deliverance from sin. The Wesleyan read his Bible emotionally, determining his present deliverance from sin by his emotional reactions.

In the interest of a proper emphasis an experience, but because the dangers inherent in experience, as such, were not recognized, a whole philosophy of holiness arose which has presented problems which careful Biblical preaching could never have raised. Basically, it was a defective view of holiness as a psychology that created the problems. Carnality was sought in the emotional life and not in a heart attitude. Hence, anger, impatience, irritability quickness, slowness, timidity, boldness, doubt and all such movements were made signs of the carnal, and the perfectly logical question arose, how then can I tell the difference between the carnal and natural traits? An over emphasis on the emotional tended to lead the mind away from the essential moral concerns to the superficial and passing secondary matters which obscured the true intent of Biblical holiness altogether. This whole psychological orientation has tended to color Biblical exegesis so that proofs for holiness dogma are often psychologically determined and Biblical exegesis is compelled to conform. To prove two works of grace by saying that it is impossible for a person to repent and dedicate himself at the same time
is not Biblical preaching to say the least. And to confuse a personal pattern of experience with Biblical truth and insist that everyone must conform to "my experience", is damaging to the claim — Scriptural. This analysis is not a generalization of holiness teaching as a whole but does describe the aberrations of it which give rise to the most serious problems.

The author recently heard a prominent holiness preacher describe ministerial instability, that is, an indecision regarding place of service, length of pastorate and such like, as a sign of carnality. It would seem more true to fact to say that one of the signs of a carnal heart could be an unstable spiritual vision but that instability as a trait could also have physical and psychological causes. It is important to put the horse on the right end of the cart.

What "Biblical" Means

Very frankly, it is much easier to say in what Biblical preaching does not consist than to offer a constructive alternative. Fortunately, a full treatment of the subject is not required here. Knowledge of the well recognized and currently emphasized criteria of sound Biblical exegesis and preaching will be assumed. There are, however, some important considerations to keep in mind regarding it that need to be recorded in this study. All of them have a direct bearing on holiness preaching as it comes under the judgment, "Biblical".

In what, then, does Biblical preaching consist when it issues in a presentation of truth suitable to being called holiness preaching? Prior to a detailed study it may be said in general that Biblical theology, which structures Biblical preaching must arise from sound exegesis
informed by an intelligent historical sense, a clear spiritual perspective and an intuitive ability to grasp the total Biblical message. The intensive exegetical discipline necessary must derive its character from extensive factual information and a deep and fundamental participation in the Christian commitment necessary to spiritual life and understanding. This is simply another way of saying that there is need to recognize the experiential dimension of Biblical truth in order to understand it and to have put one's self within the framework of that experience.

If holiness doctrine is inextricably woven into the warp and woof of the Bible, as we believe it is, a sound exegesis will find it and no theological, logical or psychological manipulation can long obscure it.

Biblical preaching, then, arises out of a way of thinking first, which is structured by a profound acquaintance with and a deep understanding of the spirit of the whole Bible. This takes more than a mere knowledge of the words or history or literature of the Bible though responsible exegesis cannot by-pass these things. No more could I interpret Buddhism authoritatively as an outsider looking in than a Buddhist could build a Christian theology as a Buddhist. One must stand within its truth and message as a participant not as a cold scientist. A scientist can only count and weigh the external, superficial features and classify them on the basis of logic or sociology or some scientific principle or psychology. Only one whose moral commitment permits him to sense the spiritual currents which sweep through the Book can he begin to adequately weigh the parts against the whole. If it be said that this is too subjective a consideration for serious thinking it must be recalled that all spiritual things or meaning lie deep in the
common experience of men, far below the test tube, and that in that experience stable norms of communication exist. Only a committed Christian can be a Christian theologian.

This existential understanding must, of necessity, be related to a concept of Scripture as communication. Whatever theory of inspiration one holds, to fail to see that God is saying something to someone whom he intends shall understand, is to forfeit the right to claim rationality for one's thought. There may be and are things difficult to understand but the difficulty is not intentional on God's part. Paul's "mystery" is not the Greek "gnosis", hidden from the uninitiate, but that which is revealed by God's Spirit. We have trouble because the human mind is limited in its ability to fully grasp some truths. God will always exceed human capacity to fully understand Him. But to see the Bible as communication is important to a true Biblical theology. This seems almost axiomatic.

Experience and Interpretation

Of particular interest to this study is the further observation that communication must proceed along the lines of human experience. This does not define inspiration but recognizes the ground of mutual understanding. Wesleyans think that experience is an important foci of theological truth. This does not mean that personal experience is the source of truth or that any pattern of human experience becomes the norm of all experience and orthodoxy. It simply means that the Bible message was given in human experience and to understand it it is necessary to share in some way in that human Christian experience. Experience, here, means the total involvement of a person in any event in distinction from any limited involvement such as emotion or intellec-
If the Bible were simply a textbook of abstract theological statements, our appropriation of them would be on the level of intellectual comprehension only. It would lack the moral element so necessary to Biblical understanding. The Bible is a book of experience. Its events occurred in history, among people, in profoundly human involvements. It was not handed down to us on golden plates but lived out among people. Revelation was not given in a vacuum but concretely, in experience. Jesus was a man who was seen, heard, touched, loved, hated. He spoke to real persons enmeshed in the web of life and sickness and family concerns and labor and social involvements and death. The language of the Bible is the language of experience. Because this is so it is timeless and able to bridge the passing cultures without loss of meaning. There are not many occasions in it where words were given apart from human cooperation. The Ten Commandments were etched by God on stone, and then the plates were broken. Jesus wrote on the dust of a street and busy feet obliterated the words. It is well that it was so. Only that which is lived through is really understood.

This in no sense means that experience itself is revelation. This is not a naturalism. It assumes that God introduced into the stream of history, events which He intended as revelation. It means that divine revelation, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was given to men in a universal language — human experience, which included the heart as well as the mind. In this way, meaning transcends language barriers and divine inspiration structures any serious translation and gives the possibility of the Word of God to all men.

This has significance for Biblical exegesis. History is important
to the revealed message. It is not simply the words of the speaker that bear importance, or some isolated fact in the story but the whole complex of event, as recorded. In other words, the context is as important to the message as the words. Where the context is spelled out, that fact must be taken seriously in exegesis. The context is inspired, too. It matters very much about the problem to which the text is an answer. One may know very little about the situation in Corinth which archaeology is gradually unfolding for us, we will have to wait patiently for that story to be finished and it will help us a lot. But the things which are told us in the letter are vital to an understanding of the message of the book. Marriage counselling, or decisions about feminine dress or participation in worship service or law suits for Christians, or instruction about the Lord's Supper and the importance of "tongues" requires a profound understanding of the situation in the Corinthian community. We would like to know much more than is told us, but what is told us, by Paul, cannot be lightly dismissed if one presumes to apply truth from that book to local problems under the label, Biblical preaching. Actually, a great deal is shared with the reader, but it takes sanctified diligence to find it. Failure to apply this diligence has resulted in useless and harmful and divisive teaching from the book.

Biblical exegesis which structures Biblical preaching must look behind the words to find the human situation to which the words are addressed in order to properly apply the truth of the words themselves. Those who hold as high a view of inspiration as evangelicals do, will understand the force of this statement. When this principle is honored interpretation is stabilized. "Literal" interpretation is no longer simply an inflexible, grammatical absolutism imposed on the dynamic
Biblical text but is a proper transposition of the meaning resident in the original life situation to our situation when it is comparable to the first one. A human judgment here is required and implicitly assumed in the interpretive act. A thoughtful analysis of Biblical stories shows clearly the reason people so universally recognize themselves in the Bible. The emphasis is not, mainly, on the temporal, the local, the cultural. There is no bondage to false scientific ideas, or the passing philosophical systems of thought. True, the whole environment in the Bible is authentic and we are comfortably assured by this that the Bible people were actually live people on this earth, but standing out from the environment we see people who think and observe, and feel and react just as we do. The Bible is, fundamentally, the heart pilgrimage of humanity and what God said to people three and four and five thousand years ago is just as relevant to us as it was to them. The passing cultural contingencies seem to fall away from the eternal truth of the message. Yet the cultural forms cannot be sealed away as uninspired for they contribute a vital kind of meaning.

Flexibility of Biblical Language

The reason it seems important to take time to say these things that are so commonly understood is that we tend to forget that the passage of time is not a sufficient reason for investing the flexible Biblical language of experience and devotion with absolute scientific precision. This does not mean that we are free to take liberties with the text and mutilate the record by deed or spirit, but it does mean that the word must recreate a situation in the human heart today comparable to the situation out of which the word was given, before the true
meaning can come through in interpretation. It is just as false to
Biblical meaning to woodenly literalize the poetical phrase "the four
corners of the earth," into a scientific judgment, as to define God
or sin philosophically or to inflexibly absolutize, theologically, such
terms as grace, love, justification, or even sanctification. None of
these terms can properly be lifted out of their environment - or con­
text - and frozen into immobile, lifeless, hard, polished scientific
nomenclature. They were put into a setting which would, when respected,
preserve their warmth, and relevancy and dynamic quality. The human
element in the Bible to which the divine speaks is the common life blood
that keeps the divine meaningful to all who partake of life. The story
is the flesh around the idea. It preserves the idea from becoming so
detached and irrelevant and intellectualized that it loses all contact
with reality. It saves justification and sanctification from abstraction.
It saves redemption itself from becoming a museum piece which men may
only study scientifically and write learned tomes about but never partake
of.

Again, this does not mean that the inspired Word of God can be
separated from the fallible human element in the Bible. It does mean
that the human element is itself inspired in such a way as to be insepar­
able from the divine and to be the avenue of communication to all men.
The divine message requires a thorough understanding of all the context
provided by way of history, culture, event, problem, teaching and all
together it is the "given" which is called the Word of God. It is a
revealing experience to see how much meaning Acts 15:1-11 gives to the
8th and 9th verses which are usually considered totally apart from the
context.
Biblical preaching is particularly affected by this element of the experiential in exegesis. There are two divergent attitudes toward experience in evangelical Christendom. One builds its whole system on the supposed stability experience gives to Christian faith, the other resolutely avoids an experiential dimension for the same reason to preserve stability and objectivity. Evangelical theologies, both experiential and non-experiential, claim to be "Biblical" but mean very different things by that term. One type finds in the Biblical record a living experience and theology is the structure of thought which attempts to analyze, rationalize and promote that Christian experience. The other "stylizes" the Biblical expressions into premises which are then used as terms in a logical structure. The first must always permit the Scriptural presentation to challenge and correct and enrich its theology. The second tends to rigidify theology and equate it with the Scripture texts upon which it is built. One seeks the inner vital, spiritual meaning; the other attempts to stabilize and objectify formal expression. One preaches for an "experience", the other for decision. One is not happy without some evidence of heart change. Tears are in order and a lingering around the altar in prayer until a "witness" comes. The other is impatient with emotion and places great stress on verses of Scripture and "confession with the mouth."

Holiness preaching, of course, is characterized by the first of each of the above contrasts. Its understanding of the Bible gives it this emphasis. If the experience of men today can become a participation in the knowledge and experience of Christ which the New Testament
people knew, by the same obedience and faith and commitment then the
danger of unguarded subjectivism is minimized. As a book of Christian
experience, it is believed that Christian faith must always seek to
relate itself to the Christian Book. Holiness preaching proceeding on
the confidence to keep truth experiential—available to the whole man,
the moral man -- it must include in its connotations and applications
the whole meaning it had for the persons receiving the message in the
first place.

Wesleyan theology attempts to use Scripture in a way that does
justice to the experiential element both in the Bible and in Christian
faith.

**Holiness Theology and the Bible**

The doctrine of holiness is based on a very broad understanding
of the total message of the Bible. It does not stand or fall on any one
or any selected groups of Scripture, certainly not on any philosophical
premise which would itself determine the conclusions. Many ways of
presenting the truth are employed and many different analogies used, all
of them obviously the concern of the Bible.

In a unique sense Wesleyan theology is totally dependent upon the
Bible for every facet of its structure. The Apostolic experience of
Christ is normative for all Christian experience because there is but
one Christ to know. Nor is it sufficient that the historical Christ,
alone, should be known. It is only enough when the Christ Himself becomes
a part of the human experience.

The relationship of great preaching and the formal theology out of
which it springs may not always be obvious. Preaching that moves men
to God and holy living must stay close to the idiom of life and is in that sense more universal and gripping than the carefully worked out theological formula which structures it. One is vital, the other is formal. The two need not be antithetical. Wesleyan preaching and theology partake of this apparent ambiguity. In a measure not so true of any other theological tradition, Wesleyan preaching must stay very close to life and be deeply realistic for it relates to life and human experience. In this it is distinctive. As a religion of life its theology is less logically structured than Biblically grounded. It must lie close to the existential Biblical teaching to remain close to the common experience of men everywhere in all times. In this sense theology is subservient to Scripture and experience.

Once more, the disclaiming of a logical structure does not mean that it is illogical. Logic is but one element of rationality—not its whole essence. Holiness theology claims to be rational, through and through. Love does not partake of logic but true love is rational. God is not a logic but a Person. Holiness is not an abstract conclusion at the end of a syllogism but a person loving the Person. This is a "reasonable service", and consistent with truth but not always philosophical speculation.

In a sense more important than any other, Holiness preaching, if it is Biblical, will be Christ-centered. If we take a cue from Paul, and no better example can be chosen, preaching Christ includes the historical aspects of Christ's ministry but goes far beyond that to the spiritual significance of Christ to our lives. I believe it is not unfair to say that holiness preaching tends to neglect the essential place of Christ in its message. Certainly, to Calvinists it often sounds too much like a
moralism than a gospel message. To make a personal confession, it has occasionally been my experience to have some one come up to the pulpit after I had preached a "holiness" message to announce to me clearly and solemnly the number of times I had referred to Christ. The total was all too low, I grant. I always felt the implied criticism was superficial and I wondered how much of the message the "accountant" could possibly get while tabulating words but I have never failed to be stung deeply by the comment.

If Christ is not our message, we have none to preach. But preaching Christ is not a matter of multiplying words or of anaesthetizing the conscience by magnifying the work of Christ out of its moral environment and so lulling men into moral stupor. It is the recreation of a moral tension between God's provision of grace and responsible human hearts. No preacher can force decision but his message, if it is Biblical, can be used by the Holy Spirit to do so. When Christ be truly preached a situation is created which compels decision regarding Him. Preaching Christ is to confront men by the moral imperatives by which men were confronted in His presence. Biblical preaching must begin with and culminate in Christ. One cannot preach Biblically without preaching Christ. It is the deep, ultimate demand on sinner and saint alike, that characterizes the Christ-appeal. Jesus not only saves men but He crowds them into the deepest sanctuary of their souls, and demands total moral commitment. Holiness is, essentially, Christ-centered.

Interpretation and the Interpreter

This whole philosophy of Biblical meaning and interpretation has a relevance for the preacher which must be recognized in any serious
discussion of Biblical theology and preaching. If what has been said is true, then the preacher to be a faithful messenger must first be a participant in the truth he declares. His task is to preach God's Word to men, not his own word in Biblical dress. It involves the important word "interpretation."

Now, if Biblical truth is not only verbal symbols and rational concepts but moral experience, no mere intellectual interpretation of Scripture is adequate. Biblical interpretation is far more than an academic search for truth which can be systematized into a formal theology. It is a positive confrontation of personalized truth by the Holy Spirit, with the deepest human self. Biblical interpretation is not of grammatical forms and historical situations, centrally, but of spiritual truth. This truth is reserved for the surrendered heart and obedient mind. "Scripture is not given," said Andrew Murray, "to increase our knowledge but to change our conduct" (McQuilkin, Action, Nov. 1, '56). Only an eagerly seeking, and hungry heart and one which has tasted of God's rich grace can be sure that he is discovering God's truth. It is too easy for the stubborn, balky, unyielded heart to blind the mind to what the Bible actually says. Biblical preaching requires a preacher who is more anxious to know what the Bible says than what it can be made to mean. He is, to quote McQuilkin in what the author considers to be a spiritually sensitive article, constantly testing and re-examining, perfectly willing to discover the truth in conflict with the sanctions of tradition. It purposefully ousts opinion - even widely held opinion - and demands that it return only with the authorized credentials of solid Biblical evidence. It fears the bog of semantic stagnation - traditional statements and terms that hide or obscure the pure biblical statements, or that have lost their vitality or accuracy through common use or misuse. (p. 347)
The preacher, in other words, must himself have experienced the spiritual renovation of which the Bible speaks before he can interpret the Biblical message which is itself spiritual. He must be more than an intellectually committed person, he must be a morally committed person. This means that he has squared up to Christ to the deepest reaches of his being - at least as far as he is aware. It means that the Biblical message is personalized in himself so that he is his sermon, as Paul was.

This principle is important to the stability of interpretation which exegesis seeks. "Abstractized" theological statements, isolated from the human problem to which they are answers tend to lose vital touch with men as men and leaves the application of truth to a-personal considerations. Theology is extremely important. It gives us an objective norm of communicating our faith. Nothing that is said in this respect is in derogation of the proper scope of theology. But theology must always interpret its truth in terms of whole experience and only by recovering the whole experience which gave it birth can the meaning be universalized. The abstract must again be personalized. The truth must engage the whole man and live again in his fully human existence.

It need scarcely be said at this point that it is not meant that all the cultural accompanyments of any Biblical experience be imposed upon our lives. But the moral and spiritual situation of any age in any circumstance regardless of the level of culture remains the human experience to which the Biblical answer gives an authoritative answer.

To put it simply and clearly, the gospel appeal, by which holiness preaching is defined, was always in the Bible practical and morally
clear to the New Testament church. It spoke to life situations. It was a light, not only to the mind but to the hands and feet and heart. To be Biblical, preaching today must be morally relevant and practical. It dare not fade off into abstractions and platitudes and generalities and vague terminology. It was made for life, it must remain in life.

Problem of Theological Words

All of this has relevance for this study. We are seeking the meaning of all that is implied by holiness. Theology has utilized Biblical words and has also adapted other words to its technical use. Some of the questions raised by holiness theology become questions because the terms are not fully understood. If holiness theology is "Scriptural" the meanings should be found clearly in Scripture.

But language is both formal and vital. That is, language comes out of living situations and gradually gathers local connotations which are rich and high in communicative value among those who understand the overtones. As anyone knows who has travelled from section to section in one country or the world, the inflections of meaning are not automatically carried in the word itself so that a thought barrier is raised across the sections though the words are the same.

This is particularly true in religious circles. Each strong leader tends to express himself in a certain way and to mean certain things. His followers pick up the pattern of expression and it provides a medium of communication. When very vital theological truths are under discussion the language expressing these truths becomes set in a mold in the interest of preserving the particular truth involved.

When the influence of two leaders with strong language patterns
begin to touch and intersect, though the truths may be identical, the words and phrases are not the same and it may look as if the theology clashed. Often the judgment regarding truth has been superficially made and the different language patterns have actually served to create divisions among brethren that a more discriminating analysis could never have justified.

Denominational semantics follows the same trend. If care be not exercised orthodoxy can become a matter of linguistics rather than basic ideas and those who may express themselves differently are considered heretical.

The serious result may be that the evangelistic outreach of the denomination may be hindered by the "ingrown" but very sacred language of the group which carries no meaning whatever to those who listen. To the writer's knowledge a recent publication of a book of sermons written in a strongly denominational language pattern and understood with deep appreciation by those familiar with it, is totally incomprehensible to others who should be receiving the message of the book. While the intimate "family" words are precious to those inside the circle, a more universal and mature expression needs to be cultivated when matters as vital as religious truths are involved.

Theological words are actually family words. They arise in the warm atmosphere of a close association with life. But they tend to rigidify and as the family separates the words and original connotations drift apart.

Interpreting Theological Words

Theological terms have a way of dropping out of the fruitful avenues of communication. Their necessarily technical nature required
for precise meaning tends to separate them from the dynamic flow of a living language. This is true of all intellectual disciplines. The tendency is to either force a gulf between theological language and the everyday world, so that people say, "I see no vital relation between Sunday and Church, and my work-a-day world," or, all the rich heritage of theological language is discarded and the new terminology substituted which has neither character nor stability and Christian communication is impaired. The irony of this paradox is that theological language was once the idiom of the work-a-day world.

Most religious conversation is an attempt at interpretation of theological terms. There are two forms of it. One is personal. "This is what theology means to me," we say, and preach with warm-hearted zeal. Preaching can never dispense with the personal experience of the preacher, but the danger here is that the preacher's experience begins to be confused with the message itself until methodology becomes as sacred as the Bible and if one challenges the method he is thought to challenge the doctrine, too.

Interpretation of doctrine, moreover, can be at the level of the scholar's desk. If care be not taken, here, the danger exists that not simply the archaic words will be translated into contemporary idiom but that the message itself be not properly distinguished from the temporal and that more than the temporal is discarded to the detriment of the message.

It is everlastingly the preacher's task to interpret theology to people. This means that Biblical preaching is orderly, sensible, aware of central Biblical issues, rational, consistent. It is also relevant, meaningful, vital. But interpretation dare not proceed on merely personal
and subjective principles lest the Word of God become in the preacher's mouth the word of man.

Holiness theology suffers the same foibles to which any scientific body of knowledge is heir. The need for interpretation is just as pressing - perhaps more so because of the existential dimension of holiness. The only safe and wise thing to do is to clarify the terms by reference to the Scriptures out of which they came. This takes the erratic and divisive subjectivism out.

Is the Bible Theology?

There is the belief in some quarters that there is no difference between doctrine and Scripture, that Scripture is itself doctrine. It seems scarcely worth while to devote time to this idea but if this concept should by any chance produce misunderstanding a word or two is well spent. It is well known that some segments of the Christian church do consider the Bible to be finished theology. Those who hold to a more rigid type of verbal inspiration are inclined to so do. In this view there cannot be recognized any significant element of subjectivity in interpretation either in the persons of the original writers or in the reader. Truth is totally objective and hence theology cannot be deduced but discovered. Underlying meanings are presumed not to exist in that all the same words have the same meanings, fixed and unalterable and a collation of texts in which these words occur would constitute systematic theology. One does not read the Bible for principles to be applied in the varied and changing situations possible in life but in a purely grammatical and historical sense in which no spiritual relevance is recognized. Application, then, of truth is external, forced, legalistic,
or when completely impossible it is assumed to be eschatological. In this view, human interpretation is actually engaged in but without recognizing the function. Because of this, human interpretation is confused and equated with Biblical teaching and a subtle but dangerous pride substitutes for humble dependence on the Word.

A more generally accepted view understands theology to be a deductive science. Whether systematic or not, theology is the human interpretation of the teachings of the Scriptures. The Bible is, then, the source book which is carefully examined. Meaning is presumed to lie in the words because meaning has structured the whole complex of life behind the words. Grammar is a tool of clear thinking not its prison. History is a context of event which contributes meaning to all intelligences in history. Theology is what we say about Biblical teaching understood in this way.

An example or two may help. Everything that goes into a doctrinal statement regarding the Trinity, or the divine-human nature of Christ is found somewhere in Scripture. But no doctrine of the Trinity or Christology is articulated anywhere. It took the Church many years to properly formulate them. In fact few, if any, of the Articles of Faith are found as such in Scripture. The deity of the Holy Spirit, so explicitly delineated in our creeds, is in the Bible a fact of experience not a philosophy. As H. Orton Wiley so wisely says, these most sacred Christian beliefs were experiences of practical religion before they became theology.

Therefore, when Biblical status is claimed for any doctrine it is proper to seek again the sources of that doctrine, not simply to challenge the claim but to enrich our understanding of it. It is a proper and
necessary task to return often to the Bible for the light its own
context casts on the theological words we have borrowed from it.

It is our intention, then, to undertake a fresh examination of
the Biblical material out of which holiness doctrine is built. It
must be an exegetical rather than a wholly theological enterprise. In
this it will gladly note that,

at length the day is drawing to a close, when dogmatic
and speculative opinion so dominates exegesis that its
party names can be applied even to the processes and
results of interpretation, on the assumption that
theological opinion should, of course, settle the meaning
of a text.¹

We desire to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to do
so requires that we lean heavily on the Scriptural presentation, ex-
tracting the meaning out of the human experience which forms a common
bond between all people.

¹Geo. B. Stevens, Pauline Theology. p. 156.