

Preaching sermons and shepherding the flock: What's the connection?

Lionel Windsor | 2 Feb 2015 | Priscilla and Aquila Conference | Moore College, Sydney

1 THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

This paper is seeking to address the question: What is the connection between preaching sermons and leading a congregation?

Before we start, we need to get the question into some perspective. This is a particular question but it fits into a broader context. It is connected to two other questions that are relevant to complementarian Christian ministry.

1.1 A COMMON QUESTION: ARE WOMEN ALLOWED TO PREACH SERMONS?

The first, commonly asked, question is this: “Are women allowed to preach sermons?” Those who ask the question are usually concerned with whether women can preach the Sunday sermon in a mixed-gender adult Christian congregation. The question arises because in 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul prohibits women from teaching or exercising authority over a man. The question is whether this prohibition applies to the modern Sunday sermon. Those who ask the question often find that they need to spell out a little what they think the modern Sunday sermon actually is—and how it relates to authority and Christian leadership, and teaching. Hence, although it is not the question we are asking today, it is related to our question.

1.2 A MORE IMPORTANT QUESTION: HOW CAN ALL OF US BE SPEAKING GOD'S WORD?

However, it is important to take a step back and remember that there's another, far more significant question. How can *all* of us find appropriate ways to be speaking God's word to each other in loving Christian community?

We need to be speaking God's word, of course. People are saved through hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ and turning to him, and people grow in their faith through hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ and continuing to believe and live for him.

So as we delve into our specific question about the connection between leadership and preaching sermons in church we need to keep remembering that preaching sermons is only one kind of important speech that occurs in the Christian community. The New Testament expects all Christians, by God's Spirit, to speak the word of God to others, in a multitude of different ways and contexts according to gifts and circumstances, for mutual encouragement, edification and growth, and to win disciples (see e.g. Eph 4:15-16, 25; Col 4:5-6). This ministry of God's word occurs both in what we might call “public” contexts (e.g. in a formal church gathering) and also in “personal” contexts (e.g. in conversations within and outside of the gathering). We all need to be speaking God's word, but we also need to recognise that we will speak God's word in different ways, according to our relationships in the community in which God has placed us.

1.3 THE PARTICULAR QUESTION IN THIS PAPER: HOW ARE SERMONS RELATED TO CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP?

The question of this paper is one facet of the broader question I have just outlined. We are asking today: How does this particular form of speaking God's word—the preaching of sermons—relate to a particular kind of role in the Christian community—congregational leadership?

The core of the material I will be presenting here is taken from an essay I wrote in a volume called *Women, Sermons and the Bible*.¹ My essay was seeking to critique an assumption that often lies behind arguments made by those who identify as “complementarians” yet who wish to promote the practice of women preaching sermons to mixed-gendered congregations.² This assumption is that preaching sermons (on the one hand) and congregational leadership (on the other hand) are actually two distinct activities or categories, which can be separated from one another in practice.

This assumption often comes to light in statements about what the modern sermon actually is. The modern sermon, some argue, should *not* be understood as an act involving significant authority or leadership. Rather, preaching sermons should be understood simply as a timely exhortation made by a Christian person to a group of other Christians on the basis of a safe, fixed and authoritative body of scriptural/apostolic truth. According to this account of preaching, the Christian congregation already has the authoritative truth in their hands (in the form of the Bible). Thus it would be wrong to think of the preacher as an authoritative “teacher” whose job is to ensure that his congregation learns and obeys this truth. Rather, the preacher's job is simply to comment on the truth, to exhort us to listen to it afresh, and to apply it to our lives.³ In other words, the preacher's relationship to the congregation should not be understood primarily in terms of leadership; rather, preaching sermons should be understood primarily as an act of mutual encouragement—and the words of the preacher should be judged and assessed by the congregation accordingly.

Of course, there is one sense in which the assumption is warranted. Scripture is indeed the supreme authority for Christian faith and conduct. That's why so many evangelical preachers rightly champion the “expository preaching” model. The idea here is that the typical sermon involves explaining and applying a passage of Scripture. By ensuring that the sermon is

¹ L Windsor, “Preachers and Leaders”, in *Women, Sermons and the Bible: Essays Interacting with John Dickson's Hearing Her Voice*. Edited by Peter G. Bolt and Tony Payne. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2014.

² By ‘complementarian’ I mean those who affirm differing levels of leadership, responsibility and authority for men and women in congregational life.

³ See P Bolt, “Reading God's history as our good news” in *Women, Sermons and the Bible: Essays Interacting with John Dickson's Hearing Her Voice* (Peter G. Bolt and Tony Payne, eds., Sydney: Matthias Media, 2014) for a survey of different forms of this view, including those by JI Packer, Graham Cole, Gilbert Bilezekian and John Dickson.

grounded in the inspired text, the expository preaching model rightly links the authority of the preacher with the prior authority of the word of God.⁴

However—does that mean that there is *no* relevant authority when it comes to preaching sermons?

This claim has been made by a number of writers in the last 30 years. In 1985, for example, Gilbert Bilezikian wrote the following:

Prior to the writing, and the canonization of the books of the New Testament, teachers were the dispensers of Christian truth. Their authority was absolute and normative, provided that they were duly trained and authorized. With the formation of the New Testament canon, the locus of authority was displaced from the teacher to the teaching inscripturated in the New Testament. As a result, a current-day teacher has no personal authority other than his or her competency. The authority resides in the text of the Bible. A teacher today is only sharing knowledge and insights from Scripture. A sexless teaching machine may do as much without making any authority claims.⁵

J I Packer is also quoted in this regard.⁶ In a paper in a conference on biblical interpretation presented in the 1980s, Packer claimed that the canonisation of the New Testament and the invention of the printing press has entirely removed the element of personal authority invested in the activity of teaching. Of course, Packer never denied that preaching sermons is an activity related closely to the biblical word “teach”. He believed that teachers in the ancient world, like those who preach sermons today, actually *taught* their congregations in the sense of explaining and applying the apostles’ words and the Old Testament. However Packer argued that there was one particular element inherent in ancient teaching that is missing in the modern sermon: that is the element of “authority”. In the ancient world, because there was no New Testament yet, Christian teachers had two tasks in relation to apostolic doctrine. The first task was to teach *from* the apostolic doctrine. The second task was to remember and accurately convey the apostolic doctrine *itself*. According to Packer, it is this latter “take it from me” element of teaching (and this latter element only) that invested ancient teachers with personal authority. However, since we all have Bibles today and the authoritative element of teaching is not required, teaching from the Bible does not carry any personal authority any more.

Thus, says Packer:

⁴ E.g. “The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching” (HW Robinson, *Expository Preaching: Principles and Practice*, 2nd edn, IVP, Leicester, 2001, first edn 1986, 20).

⁵ G Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1985, 184.

⁶ JI Packer, “The Challenge of Biblical Interpretation: Women”, in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Interpretation* (Broadman Press, Nashville, 1988, 103-15).

*When you teach from the Bible, in any situation at all, what you are saying to people is, 'Look, I am trying to tell you what it says. I speak as to wise men and women. You have your Bibles. You follow along. You judge what I say.' No claim to personal authority with regard to the substance of the message is being made at all.*⁷

Another claim concerning the reduced authority of modern preaching has been made recently by John Dickson in his book *Hearing Her Voice*.⁸ Dickson's book seeks to argue that the verb "teach" in Paul's technical usage (found especially in the Pastoral Epistles) refers only to the process of

*"preserving and laying down the body of oral traditions first handed over by the apostles. This body of traditions ... was a large collection of memorised sayings and stories of and about Jesus that the apostles passed on, along with their own authoritative rulings and insights on a range of topics."*⁹

Thus for Dickson "[t]eaching is not explaining a Bible text, nor is it applying God's truth to congregational life [revised edition: though it can involve both of these things]; it is making sure that the apostolic words and rulings are well known and maintained [revised edition: regularly

⁷ Packer, "The Challenge of Biblical Interpretation: Women", 114-15.

⁸ J Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*. We will refer in this paper to two editions of the book. The publication history of the book, however, is a little complicated.

The "first edition" referred to in this paper is the eBook published internationally by Zondervan in December 2012. The front-matter of the book reads: "ZONDERVAN / *Hearing Her Voice* / Copyright © 2012 by John Dickson / ... / This title is available as a Zondervan eBook."

The "target audience" of this first edition was senior ministers of churches. Dickson sent a free copy of this book to all senior ministers in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney in order to invite them to reconsider their reticence to invite women into the pulpit (see <http://www.lionelwindsor.net/2013/01/03/response-dickson-hearing-her-voice/comment-page-1/#comment-3321>).

The "revised edition" is the print book published by Dickson Publishing Ltd. in c. August 2013. It was presented as the print counterpart of the eBook. The front-matter of the print book reads: "This print edition of the Zondervan eBook is produced by Dickson Publishing PTY LTD / *Hearing Her Voice* / Copyright © 2013 by John Dickson. / ... / eBook details: / ZONDERVAN / *Hearing Her Voice* / Copyright © 2012 by John Dickson. / This title is available as a Zondervan eBook."

In May 2013, however, Dickson explained the relationship between the first and revised editions this way:

"Think of the eBook as the beta model and the printed one (which is the revised one, the second edition) as the main game. I regret causing that confusion."

https://www.facebook.com/john.dickson.9406417/posts/10152837425549447?comment_id=10152837945419447

The "first edition" has subsequently been withdrawn from the market.

The "revised edition" is now also available as an eBook from Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com/Hearing-Her-Voice-Revised-Perspectives-ebook/dp/B00ICBVWS8/>).

⁹ Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, 2.4 in 1st ed., 2.5 in revised ed., emphasis original.

rehearsed] in church”.¹⁰ It is beyond the scope of this paper to critique Dickson’s lexical claim—I refer interested listeners or readers to Claire Smith’s outstanding and thorough analysis in the book *Women, Sermons and the Bible*.¹¹ My concern here, rather, is in the claims Dickson makes about the nature of the typical modern sermon—claims which he makes in order to distance the typical modern sermon from his view of “teaching”:

*The words of the modern preacher are more like a commentary on Scripture and an application of Scripture... Evangelicals rightly train their congregations to weigh what the preacher says, and in this there is an implicit admission of the difference the canonization process has made to church life and of the fact that sermons are, in this sense at least, similar to the “weighed prophecies” of 1 Corinthians 14.*¹²

Many people have read Dickson here to be claiming that the canonization process has made a significant difference to modern church life, so that the typical modern sermon is not to be regarded as the authoritative speech of a Christian leader towards the congregation such as that implied by the verb “teach”, but more like the mutual “exhortation” of all Christians towards one another.

The key concern of this paper is to demonstrate that this effective separation of preaching sermons and congregational leadership is biblically and historically unwarranted. My argument is that, on the contrary, preaching sermons should be understood as *the public component of the speech of a congregational leader to the congregation under his care, by which he ensures that the truth handed down in the Scriptures is learned and obeyed by that congregation, in light of the congregation’s particular circumstances*.¹³ This truth, even though it now exists in an authoritative written form in the Scriptures, nevertheless needs to be guarded, learned and obeyed afresh in each generation.

I will first present material from my published essay and then add further observations and evaluations of alternatives. We will see:

- Part 2: The New Testament pattern is that congregational shepherd-leadership is to be exercised through various kinds of speech, not only repeating the apostles’ words.

¹⁰ Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, 2.2.

¹¹ C Smith, “Unchanged ‘teaching’: The meaning of *didaskō* in 1 Timothy 2:12”, “Can the Old Testament be ‘taught?’” and “Is the modern sermon an ‘exhortation?’” in *Women, Sermons and the Bible: Essays Interacting with John Dickson’s Hearing Her Voice*. Peter G. Bolt and Tony Payne, eds. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2014.

¹² Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, 4.2.

¹³ By using the term ‘public’, I am not referring to speech that is necessarily advertised, broadcast or made readily available to the population at large. Rather, I am talking about the speech of the congregational leader that occurs in the context of the gathered congregation, which is ‘public’ in the sense that it occurs in an open setting where all the church is gathered together, in contrast to ‘personal’ speech in which the congregational leader speaks to individuals or households.

- Part 3: There is a strong connection between this pattern of shepherd-leadership and the preaching of sermons in subsequent church history. Various ancient and Reformation writers saw the connection as vital, despite the fact that they were writing subsequent to the canonisation process and the invention of the printing press.
- Part 4: This pattern applies to modern sermons today, and has various implications.
- Part 5: This pattern will enable us to evaluate some alternative views about the nature of modern sermons.

2 THE SPEECH OF SHEPHERD-LEADERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

2.1 THE PATTERN

In a number of places across the New Testament, we see a certain pattern of congregational leadership:

1. Christian congregations often include certain people who have a leadership role, and who are described as carrying a weighty responsibility. This responsibility of the leaders is often linked to the predicted and inevitable rise of new, false teachings that must be dealt with afresh.
2. This leadership role is based on and derived from the word of the apostles, which in turn is grounded in the Old Testament Scriptures.
3. The congregational leaders discharge their responsibility primarily through *speaking* this word to the congregation, in a variety of ways.

2.1.1 Hebrews

We may observe this pattern in the reference to “leaders” in Hebrews 13:

Remember your leaders [Gr. hēgoumenōn], those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...

Obey your leaders [Gr. hēgoumenois] and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb 13:7, 17)

In light of the danger posed by “diverse and strange teachings” (v. 9; Gr. *didachais*), the author of Hebrews urges his readers to remember their (perhaps former) “leaders” who “spoke to [them] the word of God” (v. 7). This “word” is, at the very least, the message they heard from those who, in turn, heard the Lord himself (cf. Heb 2:3)—that is, it is apostolic. The speech of the leaders is clearly linked to this apostolic word. Furthermore, in verse 17, we read of *present* “leaders”, who carry on the work of leadership in their midst. The readers are to “obey” and “submit to” these leaders, because the weighty responsibility of these present leaders is being exercised (it is reasonable to assume) by doing what the leaders of verse 7 also did: by

speaking the word of God to them. The leaders are issuing directives that require obedience and submission, not only in matters of church organization but also in matters of deep spiritual significance which have to do with the “souls” of the hearers. There is a clear connection here between responsible leadership and particularly weighty speech that is linked with the apostolic word.

2.1.2 1 Thessalonians

We find another example in Paul's injunction to the church in Thessalonica:

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour (Gr. kopiōntas) among you and are over you (Gr. proistamenous) in the Lord and admonish you (Gr. nouthetountas), and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thess 5:12-13)

Many features of the pattern noted above are also evident here. There are people among the Thessalonians who carry a special authority: they “labour” and “work” among them, and are “over” them in the Lord, and therefore they should be esteemed highly. One way in which they ‘rule’ here is through their speech, which is doubtless linked to the words and traditions that the apostle Paul himself has given them (cf. 1 Thess 4:1-2, 15). On the basis of these words and traditions, the job of the leaders is to “admonish” the people. While there are presumably some similarities between rulers’ ‘admonishing’ (1 Thess 5:12) and the kind of mutual ‘admonishing’ that Paul urges all the brothers to engage in (1 Thess 5:14), the rulers’ admonishing appears to be of a special character by virtue of the particular relationship of authority involved.

2.2 SHEPHERDING

In a number of places, the speech of Christian leaders is associated with a particularly striking and apt image: that of a *shepherd* caring for his sheep.¹⁴ This image picks up on the common picture of a shepherd as a ruler in the Old Testament (e.g. 2 Sam 5:2, 7:7; Ps 78:70-72); Isa 40:11, 44:28; Ezekiel 34; Mic 5:4) and in the Greco-Roman world more generally.¹⁵ The role and activity of the shepherd toward the sheep involves responsibility, leadership and care—all of which, in the New Testament, are exercised primarily through speaking the word of God to the sheep. Interestingly, shepherd imagery is used both in relation to those who follow on from *Paul's* apostolic ministry and those who follow on from *Peter's* apostolic ministry.

2.2.1 Paul in Acts

In Acts 20:17-35, Paul presents himself as an example to the Ephesian elders in order to prepare them for his departure. Paul's own speaking ministry was thorough and wide-ranging. He *declared* many different things (v. 20a), *taught* both publicly and by household (v.

¹⁴ Technically the term ‘shepherd’ is synonymous with ‘pastor’. However, in many contemporary Christian circles the term ‘pastor’/‘pastoral’ carries different connotations to that of ‘shepherd’. Hence in this paper I will favour the term ‘shepherd’.

¹⁵ See, for example, HG Liddell, R Scott, HS Jones and R McKenzie (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th edn, Clarendon, Oxford, 1940, first ed. 1843), *poimēn*.

20b), *testified* to different kinds of people (v. 21), and *admonished* everyone ceaselessly (v. 31), in a way that ultimately comprised the “whole counsel of God” (v. 27). Paul here exhorts the elders to care for the church of God like shepherds care for a flock of sheep (v. 28). It soon becomes evident that this responsibility will be discharged through a speaking ministry that takes Paul’s ministry as its source and exemplar. In light of the inevitable advent of “fierce wolves” (v. 29) who will speak “twisted things” (v. 30), the elders are commended to the “word of [God’s] grace” (v. 32). The speaking ministry of the elders carries a heavy responsibility and thus a particular authority—they are “overseers” after all (v. 28). The strong implication of the passage is that the elders’ speaking ministry is to imitate the breadth and depth of Paul’s own speaking ministry, preserving the “whole counsel of God” in a variety of ways.

2.2.2 Peter

In 1 Peter 5:1-5, Peter urges the elders of the congregation to “shepherd the flock of God”. This metaphor needs to be understood in light of the entire letter. A foundational truth in 1 Peter is that *the preached apostolic word*, grounded in the Scriptures, is fundamental to the spiritual life of the readers: the word has brought them to life, and it will save and preserve them into the future (1 Pet 1:8-12, 20-25). Christ himself, the “Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25), leads his people through this word.¹⁶ There is, nevertheless, still a need for other human shepherds/overseers who work under the chief shepherd/overseer (5:1-4). Both the apostle himself,¹⁷ and also elders in the congregation who listen to his word, perform this role of under-shepherds. They have a solemn responsibility (5:1-4), which goes along with their authority (5:5). The logic of the letter drives us to expect that the way in which the shepherds/overseers exercise their responsibility is by bringing the word of Christ to people, preaching to them afresh, reminding them, and ensuring that the word remains in them.

2.2.3 Paul in the Pastorals

Those letters of Paul commonly designated the ‘Pastoral Epistles’ (or, to use an equivalent phrase, the ‘shepherding letters’) explore in depth the importance of Christian leaders and their speech. The pattern we have observed above comes out particularly clearly in 1 and 2 Timothy—that is, an apostle passes on the responsibility for guarding the apostolic word by raising up future leaders who will be able to speak the word into the lives of their congregation(s) in a variety of ways in light of false teachings. Paul, as a “preacher” and “teacher” (Gr. *kēruх/didaskalos*; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11), exercises his weighty apostolic ministry through *speaking* the gospel message with which he has been entrusted (1 Tim 1:11; 2 Tim 1:12). He urges Timothy to follow his example in this. In the light of certain false teachings (1 Tim 1:19-20), Paul commands Timothy to “wage the good warfare” (1 Tim 1:18), just as he himself has “fought the good fight” (2 Tim 4:7), through speaking the word of the gospel to his hearers (cf. 2 Tim 4:1-5). Furthermore, Paul urges Timothy to do unto others as Paul has done unto him: to pass the ministry on to other leaders, who can in turn teach future generations (2

¹⁶ See also John 10:3-5, 8, which describes Jesus as the “good shepherd” (cf. 10:11) who leads his sheep through his “voice”.

¹⁷ See also John 21:15-17, in which Jesus gives Peter the charge: “Feed my sheep”.

Tim 2:2). In this way, Paul is laying down the pattern for leadership in the generations to come. Thus Timothy's leadership, in imitation of Paul's leadership, is exercised through speaking and teaching and preaching the word, in a variety of ways, especially in the face of false teaching and alternatives (see especially 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3-4). This is the ministry that he has seen from Paul, and that he is in turn to pass on to others.

So 1 Timothy 5:17, for example, refers to elders who "labour in preaching and teaching". They have the weightiest responsibility and so should especially receive "double honour".¹⁸ There is also the "overseer" in Titus 1:7-9. The overseer is "God's steward" and, along with his role as a moral exemplar for the community, he must:

...hold firm to the trustworthy word in accordance with the teaching [Gr. kata tēn didachēn], so that he may be able to exhort [Gr. parakalein] in sound doctrine [Gr. en tē didaskalia tē hugiainousē] and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:9, my translation)

The "word" that the overseer must hold on to and enforce is the apostolic word with which Paul had been entrusted (Titus 1:3). The congregational leader must do a number of things with the apostolic deposit: live it out, hold on to it, exhort people on the basis of it, and rebuke those who are against it. There is no hint in this verse that the activity of holding on to the teaching carries a higher level of authority than the activity of exhorting people on the basis of the teaching. The overseer's task is to do all of these things, and as God's steward (v. 7) he carries a weighty responsibility in discharging all of his duties.

It is, of course, this general pattern that gives rise to a straightforward and quite natural reading of the verb 'teach' (Gr. *didaskō*) in the Pastoral Epistles: the general authoritative speech of congregational leaders within the early Christian communities, employing a variety of means to ensure that the apostolic teaching is learned and obeyed within those communities.¹⁹

Indeed, understanding the word 'teach' in this way explains the prohibition on 'teaching' by women to men in 1 Timothy 2:12, along with its connection to the verb 'exercise authority'. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 cannot be understood merely as an arbitrary prohibition on women speaking at all. Rather, the issue being addressed is the rupture in relational dynamics in the "household of God" (cf. 1 Tim 3:15) that occurs when a woman assumes this particular kind of responsible/authoritative shepherding-speech towards men, especially in the context of the gathered congregation (cf. 1 Tim 2:8).

¹⁸ They are thus 'teaching elders' (P Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*, IVP, Leicester, 1996, 55).

¹⁹ See, for example, WD Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC, vol. 46, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2000), 125-6; RL Saucy, 'Women's Prohibition to Teach Men: An Investigation into its Meaning and Contemporary Application' (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 37, no. 1, March 1994, 79-97), especially 81-91; CS Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (WUNT 2.335, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2012), 54-84.

3 PREACHING SERMONS AS CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A VENERABLE HISTORY

We have seen that the speech of congregational leaders, often aptly described as ‘shepherds’, is a key means by which the truth of God’s word was guarded, learned and obeyed among congregations in the first century.

Christians of course continued to gather after the first century. After very little time and following a practice that began almost as soon as they were received, the New Testament documents were collected and read among these congregations (see Col 4:16). Nevertheless, even with the documents of the New Testament available to them, Christians still saw an obvious need for congregational leaders—shepherds who had the solemn responsibility for teaching the truth of God’s word to their congregations. The most obvious public way in which they discharged this solemn responsibility was by preaching sermons.

3.1 CHRYSOSTOM

John Chrysostom, for example, introduces his discussion about the ministry of the word in book four of his *Six Books on the Priesthood* by alluding to Ephesians 5:26-27, stressing the great responsibility that lies on those entrusted with the church’s care:

For the Church of Christ is Christ’s own Body, according to St Paul, and the man who is entrusted with it must train it to perfect health and incredible beauty, by unremitting vigilance to prevent the slightest spot or wrinkle or other blemish of that sort from marring its grace and loveliness.²⁰

The way in which church leaders discharge their responsibility towards Christ’s body is by preaching the truth of Scripture, which is a continuation of the apostolic ministry. Speaking of Paul’s letters in particular, Chrysostom writes:

For by the use of them even today the presidents educate and train the pure Virgin whom Paul himself espoused to Christ, and lead her on to spiritual beauty. By them also they ward off the diseases which attack her, and preserve the good health she enjoys.²¹

Chrysostom goes on to apply the solemn injunctions to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 2:24, 3:14-17; Titus 1:7-9), which include the language of ‘teaching’, directly to the ministry of preaching.²²

²⁰ J Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* (trans. Graham Neville, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1977), 114.

²¹ Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, 123.

²² Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, 123-4.

3.2 AUGUSTINE

Augustine, too, sees preaching as a ministry that is of vital importance for the health of the church. In the first three books of his *De Doctrina Christiana* ('On Christian teaching'), Augustine stresses the importance of right scriptural interpretation, and explains how such interpretation should be conducted. In book four, where he finally turns to discuss the art of preaching itself, he is not content to describe preaching simply as the explanation and application of a scriptural passage. Rather, he describes the preacher as playing a vital role in preserving the truth of the Christian faith within his congregation:

*So the interpreter and teacher of the divine scriptures, the defender of the true faith and vanquisher of error, must communicate what is good and eradicate what is bad, and in the same process of speaking must win over the antagonistic, rouse the apathetic, and make clear to those who are not conversant with the matter under discussion what they should expect.*²³

3.3 CALVIN

The Reformation in Europe, along with the invention of the printing press, witnessed an exponential increase in the availability of the Bible to ordinary congregation members. Nevertheless, the magisterial Reformers still stressed the need for shepherd-teachers to guard the truth of God's word through preaching. For Calvin, the 'pastors' ('shepherds') were those individuals in the Christian community charged with the responsibility for continuing the apostolic commission within individual congregations. The key task of the pastor, alongside rightly administering the sacraments, was to preach, to teach, to instruct, acting directly in line with the ministry of the apostles:

*From these [1 Cor 4:1 and Titus 1:9] and similar passages which frequently occur, we may infer that in the office of the pastors also there are these two particular functions: to proclaim the gospel and to administer the sacraments. The manner of teaching not only consists in public discourses, but also has to do with private admonitions [cf. Acts 20:20-21, 31]... Yet it is not my present intention to set forth in detail the gifts of the good pastor, but only to indicate what those who call themselves pastors should profess. That is, they have been set over the church not to have a sinecure but, by the doctrine of Christ to instruct the people to true godliness, to administer the sacred mysteries and to keep and exercise upright discipline... Finally, what the apostles performed for the whole world [i.e. to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments], each pastor ought to perform for his own flock, to which he is assigned.*²⁴

²³ Augustine of Hippo Regis, *De Doctrina Christiana* (trans. RPH Green, OECT, Clarendon, Oxford, 1995), 4.14.

²⁴ J Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. FL Battles, 2 vols, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20 and 21, Westminster Press, Louisville, 1960), 4.3.6. It is true that Calvin also saw a distinct role for

3.4 THE ANGLICAN ORDINAL

The Ordinal of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* is emphatic about the importance of the pastoral teaching ministry:

*And now again we exhort you, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have in remembrance, into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office and charge ye are called: that is to say, to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever.*²⁵

In the Ordinal, the biblical language relating to the weighty responsibility of Christian leaders, as bearers and preservers of the apostolic word, is applied here directly to the Anglican 'priest'. His teaching role is a solemn responsibility, and is a (if not *the*) fundamental component of his ministry. Three of the eight questions addressed to him relate to the office of teaching.²⁶ He is ordained to be a "Dispenser of the Word of God", then symbolically receives a Bible with the words, "Take thou Authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments in the Congregation, where thou shalt be lawfully appointed thereunto". So, as Robinson observes, in the Ordinal "The oversight of the church, the measure of 'ruling well', the task of building and protecting and nurturing, are all related to the teaching role".²⁷ True 'teaching'—that is, the private admonition and public preaching outlined in the Anglican Ordinal—is seen to be *the authoritative exposition and application of scriptural and apostolic truth* within the congregation.

3.5 PERKINS

The English theologian and pastor William Perkins (1558-1602), along with others from the Elizabethan Puritan movement, was fond of using the term 'prophesying' to refer to sermons—indeed, Perkins titled his influential tract on preaching sermons *The Art of Prophesying*.²⁸ The use of this specific biblical term, however, was not intended to imply that Perkins was advocating a new or different understanding of the *nature* of preaching sermons. Preaching, for Perkins and his colleagues, was still understood as the serious responsibility of the

'teachers'—that is, experts in scriptural interpretation with a specialist responsibility to "keep doctrine whole and pure among believers". However, Calvin believed that the pastor's role included the task of teachers, and more besides: "But the pastoral office includes all these functions within itself" (*Institutes*, 4.3.4).

²⁵ *Book of Common Prayer* (1662 Version, Everyman Publishers, London, 1999), 518.

²⁶ DWB Robinson, 'Ordination for What?', in PG Bolt and MD Thompson (eds), *Donald Robinson Selected Works*, vol. 2, *Preaching God's Word* (Australian Church Record, Camperdown, NSW, 2008, 414-37), 435.

²⁷ Robinson, 'Ordination for What?', 433.

²⁸ W Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying and the Calling of the Ministry* (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1996, first edn 1592).

congregational leader, whose task was to “teach” his congregation comprehensively from the Bible and to drive away false doctrine. The term ‘prophecy’ in fact serves to *highlight* the responsibility and authority attached to this particular form of speech. The preface to Perkins’ tract includes the following words:

In keeping with this dignity, preaching has a twofold value: (1) It is instrumental in gathering the church and bringing together all of the elect; (2) It drives away the wolves from the folds of the Lord. Preaching is the flexanima, the allurer of the soul, by which our self-willed minds are subdued and changed from an ungodly and pagan lifestyle to a life of Christian faith and repentance.

In the extended section on ‘Use and application’, Perkins is at pains to point out that the task of the preacher (or “the minister”) is to discern the different kinds of hearers in his congregation, and to direct his preaching deliberately so that each kind of person may be “taught” certain doctrines from God’s word.²⁹ He uses the term ‘teach’ and its cognates frequently (e.g. “Those who already believe. We must teach them...”; “...the specific doctrine which counteracts their error should be expounded and taught...”; etc.). He does so because he regards preaching as an intentional, authoritative, didactic activity undertaken by the minister toward a congregation. Thus, in section 10, Perkins claims about the minister/preacher:

The grace of the minister consists of the following qualities:

- 1. He must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). ...*
- 2. Authority, by which the preacher speaks as the ambassador of the great Jehovah (Titus 2:15; 1 Pet. 4:11).*
- 3. Zeal, so that, in his longing for God's glory he will seek through his ministry to fulfil and effect the decree of God's election of men and women to salvation (Job 32:18, 19; Col. 1:28, 29; 2 Tim. 2:25).*

3.6 THE REFORMERS AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD

Of course, in saying that preaching sermons carries a particular weight of responsibility and authority, the Reformers and their successors by no means denied the prior and superior authority of the biblical words themselves.³⁰ As we have already seen, congregational shepherds always speak as those under a greater shepherd, and their speech must constantly be brought into line with the enscripturated words of Jesus and his apostles. Nevertheless, the authority of Scripture does not preclude the responsibility—and consequent authority—of the preacher.

²⁹ Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, section 7.

³⁰ See, for example, Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.5, 4.3.1; cf. for example P Adam, ‘The Preacher and the Sufficient Word: Presuppositions of Biblical Preaching’, in C Green and D Jackman (eds), *When God’s Voice is Heard: The Power of Preaching* (IVP, Leicester, 2003, first edn 1995), 27-42.

4 SERMONS AND SHEPHERD-LEADERS TODAY

4.1 SERMONS TODAY

How, then, should we regard Sunday sermons today?

For most of us, the modern Sunday sermon is a readily identifiable element in our public gatherings. We usually have a “sermon” along with all the attendant contextual factors such as a prominent location in the order of the gathering and its historical name (“the sermon”)—and all these factors signal and orient people as to what it is. So in having a “sermon”, we are plugging into an identifiable contemporary tradition based on a long-established historical precedent which in turn is rooted in an important biblical idea, and which is connected to the verb “teach” (among other words) as used in the Pastoral Epistles. Our history and our practice have established the contemporary “sermon” as the public component of the shepherd-speech of a congregational leader. Therefore, if we use this element in our gatherings—the preaching of “sermons”—then we should realise what we are buying in to, and use it accordingly—or at the very least provide extremely good reasons if we decide we are now going to regard it differently. You cannot simply ignore the precedent!

4.2 SHEPHERD-LEADERS TODAY

It is, however, worth spelling out a little further who the congregational leaders are today.

Most of the historical figures and texts I quoted—Calvin, the Anglican Ordinal and William Perkins, who were writing in a context in which there was normally an identifiable and formally ordained “pastor” or “priest” (often only one) for each congregation. This does not, of course, mean that we must follow exactly their formal procedures for ordaining shepherd-leader preachers. We are not bound woodenly to tradition so that we must have a single ordained “priest” (or “senior minister”) for each congregation who alone is allowed to preach. Nevertheless, these historical texts do show that preaching sermons and shepherd-leadership are *intimately related*. That is:

1. When shepherd-leaders are recognised as such, their role is described fundamentally in terms of God’s word, which includes at its centre preaching regular sermons.
2. When the regular preaching ministry is described, it is described in terms of shepherd-leadership.

Of course, the situation in which churches recognise their shepherd-leaders today is not identical to the situation of Chrysostom, Augustine, Calvin, Cranmer or Perkins. While Anglican churches here in Sydney, for example, still have an ordained “presbyter” as a sole “senior minister”, many (I suspect most) of these ordained senior ministers choose to share their shepherd-leadership with others, both formally and informally, in ways that are at least tacitly recognised by the congregation even if they are not always formally or officially certified by the

relevant denomination. We have assistant ministers, pastoral teams, “team pastoring”,³¹ lay elders, leaders of specific congregations and ministries.

It seems best to say that to the extent that any of these people are engaging in public activities of shepherd-leadership of a congregation (or a “part” of a congregation), the points made above are applicable to them also.

How then should we think about sermons given by people other than the regular ministry staff team? We should consider that the reins of shepherd-leadership are being handed over to them for a time.

Consider the occasional “lay” preacher. These people should be chosen to preach sermons because they are, to some extent or another, shepherd-leaders of the congregation. They may be formal “lay elders”, or informal leaders. But in either case, we don’t ask just anyone to preach; we ask people who are already exercising leadership of the congregation in some way.

Or think of the ministry trainee or “student minister”. We ask ministry trainees to preach because they are actually members of our shepherd-leadership team. Yes, they are trainees. But the only way to train someone to do something is to get them to do it. So when we ask a trainee minister to preach, we are actually handing over the reins of shepherd-leadership/teaching to that person for a time. There is an analogy here with learner drivers. There may be another fully licensed driver sitting in the passenger seat, but the learner driver is the one behind the wheel and in control of the car for that time. Similarly, when a student minister is preaching a Sunday sermon, he is actually exercising shepherd leadership, even if there is a trainer present who (ideally) will be able to help with preparation and feedback.

Sometimes we will invite a guest to give a “sermon” (i.e. a piece of Bible teaching in the sermon slot and identified with the sermon). These should be people who are shepherd-leaders in another context, someone on whom the elder(s) of the congregation have done due diligence to ensure they are confident to hand over the steering wheel of shepherd-leadership for a time.

4.3 SERMONS TO SPECIFIC GATHERINGS WITHIN THE CHURCH

If preaching sermons and shepherd-leadership are so closely intertwined, then it makes sense for shepherd-leaders with a particular responsibility for a certain section of the congregation or a certain kind of “specialist” congregation to preach sermons to specific gatherings of those people under their care. For example, a women’s minister may decide it important for her ministry to preach sermons to the women when they gather together, or a children’s/youth minister might give appropriate sermons to the youth group.³²

³¹ <http://ministryprinciples.com/2014/05/29/the-nexus-conf-and-the-portfolio-model/>

³² This appears to be the context to which the Sydney Anglican Doctrine Commission report of 1987 (<http://www.sds.asn.au/Site/103254.asp>) is referring when it states:

4.4 GATHERINGS WITHOUT A SERMON

There are some times in our church life when we gather without a sermon and/or the sermon slot is replaced with a speech of mutual encouragement which is obviously not a sermon. This can be very edifying—particularly if it's clear to all what is happening and it does not happen too often (so that we still get a regular diet of actual sermons). An example might be a special guest missionary Sunday where the missionary speaks to the congregation about their work. Or to take another example: my own church does not have a sermon on Good Friday but instead a series of short reflections on Jesus' death from various congregation members or from all members of the (mixed gender) staff team.

5 EVALUATING SOME ALTERNATIVES

With these categories in mind, I'd like to finish by briefly outlining and evaluating some alternative views to that I have just stated. To assist us to categorise these alternatives, the following diagram may be helpful:



I have argued that the preaching of Sunday sermons should be regarded as public acts of shepherd-leadership (and thus as “teaching”). However, as I said at the start, I believe it vital that we should also promote public acts of mutual encouragement, which are different to the sermon.

4.6 Furthermore, the passing of the years has changed the pattern of congregational life. The ordinary “family congregation” is not the only kind of congregation within the pluralities of modern society. Today there are single sex congregations of primary and secondary children. There are congregations of women only in colleges and hospitals. There are congregations of university undergraduates who are mostly single. If the Pastorals encourage women to teach women and children, we believe it appropriate to appoint women as chaplains in women's institutions, authorised to preach and preside at the Lord's Supper. The point is that while 1 Timothy 2:11-15 applies still to “family congregations”, not all congregations today fall into that category.

There are other views on this matter, which differ according to how much they see sermons as shepherd-leadership/“teaching” and how much they see sermons as mutual encouragement/exhortation

5.1 VIEW 1: ALL SERMONS ARE SIMPLY ACTS OF MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT/EXHORTATION

The first view to be considered is the view that sermons do not really belong in the category of shepherd-leadership at all. Rather, according to this view, all modern sermons should be understood simply as acts of public mutual encouragement/exhortation.

This is the view expressed by Gilbert Bilezikian that we have referred to above:

A teacher today is only sharing knowledge and insights from Scripture. A sexless teaching machine may do as much without making any authority claims.³³

This is also the view expressed by JI Packer:

When you teach from the Bible, in any situation at all, what you are saying to people is, ‘Look, I am trying to tell you what it says. I speak as to wise men and women. You have your Bibles. You follow along. You judge what I say.’ No claim to personal authority with regard to the substance of the message is being made at all.³⁴

It is also mentioned by John Dickson as a conclusion of those who “embrace [his] entire argument”:

Others may embrace my entire argument and conclude that no one “teaches” any more in the strict sense mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:12 and that, in any case, explaining and applying a Bible text is never called “teaching” in the New Testament. That activity is closer to “exhorting” (or “prophesying”).³⁵

I will not dwell further on this view, as much of this paper was seeking to critique it. In short, I believe it is based on an incorrect assumption about the authoritative nature of modern preaching.

³³ Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 184.

³⁴ Packer, “The Challenge of Biblical Interpretation: Women”, 114-15.

³⁵ Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, Conclusion (first and revised editions).

5.2 VIEW 2: THE TYPICAL SERMON IS SIMPLY AN ACT OF MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT/EXHORTATION, BUT SOME (NOT TYPICAL) SERMONS ARE ACTS OF SHEPHERD-LEADERSHIP / “TEACHING”

In the revised edition of *Hearing Her Voice*, John Dickson tentatively and partially aligns himself with another possibility. The suggestion is that there is a special non-typical kind of sermon which may move beyond mutual encouragement/exhortation into the realm of shepherd-leadership.

I can imagine a third response (closer to my own current thinking). Some may conclude that, although the modern sermon cannot always be equated with what Paul calls “teaching” in 1 Timothy 2:12, some sermons today may be close analogies to the careful transmission of the apostolic deposit. On this view, sermons are seen on a spectrum: ...

... some will want to say that Paul wanted congregational preaching, not just congregational structures, to embody God’s complementary design for male-female relationships. Hence, sermons at the “mandating-of-apostolic-doctrine” end of the spectrum—which I believe is not the typical Sunday sermon—ought to be preached by the (male) Senior Minister.³⁶

The problem, however, is the repeated stress on the non-typical nature of such “teaching” sermons.³⁷ The biblical and historical texts envisage the kind of weighty shepherding “teaching” by congregational leaders to be so important and fundamental for the ongoing life of congregations that it should be a *typical* feature of church gatherings. Paul refers the Ephesian elders to his own example in which he did “not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house” (Acts 20:20); Calvin says of the shepherd leaders that “they have been set over the church not to have a sinecure but, by the

³⁶ Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, revised edition, Conclusion. Dickson also raised this idea in the first edition of *Hearing Her Voice*. However, many early reviewers of his first edition believed that he did not endorse the idea. See e.g. Luke Collings (http://findingmykeys.blogspot.com.au/2012/12/gender-and-ministry-why-john-dickson-is_30.html) on 30 December, 2012; Lionel Windsor (<http://www.lionelwindsor.net/2013/01/03/response-dickson-hearing-her-voice/>) on 3 January, 2013; Michael Jensen (<http://sydneyanglicans.net/blogs/culture/a-surprising-consensus>) on 21 January, 2013; John Starke (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/reviewing-fresh-perspectives-on-women-in-ministry-from-keller-bird-and-dick>) on 31 January, 2013; Laura McAlister (<http://www.lauramcalister.com/2013/04/11/hearing-her-voice-a-catholic-perspective/>) on 11 April 2013. Reviewers may have been led to believe Dickson did not endorse the idea by the fact that he described it in these terms: “I have wondered about this. The problem is, every time I come up with a ‘for instance,’ it smacks of a legalism that does not reflect the gospel.” (Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, 1st edition, conclusion).

³⁷ There are a number of statements to this effect in the book, e.g.: “I don’t dispute that some sermons continue to function as ‘teaching’ in Paul’s sense, but I struggle to believe that most (or even many) do.” (Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, revised edition, Introduction); “It is further clear (to me) that modern sermons are typically more like exhortation than laying down the apostolic deposit (‘teaching’).” (Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice*, revised edition, Conclusion).

doctrine of Christ to instruct the people to true godliness, to administer the sacred mysteries and to keep and exercise upright discipline” (*Institutes* 4.3.6); the Ordinal of the *Book of Common Prayer* charges the priests “to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord’s family;” etc. It would be difficult indeed to achieve these ends using only a special kind of sermon that is “*not* the typical Sunday sermon”.

5.3 VIEW 3: SOME SERMONS ARE SIMPLY ACTS OF MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT/EXHORTATION, BUT THE TYPICAL SERMON IS AN ACT OF SHEPHERD-LEADERSHIP/“TEACHING”

We now turn to a third view, which I strongly suspect is more common and widespread amongst reformed evangelicals than views 1 and 2 above. According to this view, and contrary to views 1 and 2 above, the typical sermon *is* indeed an act of shepherd-leadership/“teaching”. Nevertheless, there are other kinds of occasional sermons, which may be called “sermons”, which occur in the place normally reserved for sermons in church, but which are not acts of shepherd-leadership, cannot be described as “teaching” in the New Testament sense, and really are acts of mutual encouragement/exhortation.

This third view is, in many ways, understandable. It has a certain strength to it: many who advocate it are, I think, doing so in order to promote *both* public speech involving mutual encouragement/exhortation—which in this view is the non-typical “sermon”, and public speech involving shepherd-leadership—which in this view is the typical “sermon”.

My criticism of this view, however, is related to its strength. It is trying to achieve two different things with the same kind of speech-act, and in doing so, it ends up confusing the categories. The “sermon”, as we have seen, is well established as the public component of the shepherd-speech of a congregational leader. It is an identifiable contemporary speech-act based on a long-established historical precedent, which in turn is rooted in an important biblical idea, which is connected to the verb “teach” (among other words) as used in the Pastoral Epistles. To have another kind of “sermon” in the place of the typical sermon with the same name and the same context is unhelpful.

Some argue that a person can preach a sermon “under the authority” of another shepherd-leader. For example, some have suggested to me that in the Anglican system, the senior minister (“priest” or “presbyter”) is the only individual who exercises real shepherd-leadership in the church. When anyone else other than the “priest” preaches a regular Sunday sermon—whether it is the long-term assistant minister, or the student minister, or the lay person—then their authority derives, not from the act of preaching the sermon, but from the fact that the church has a “priest” in charge who has duly authorised them to preach. A similar view, albeit in a different church setting, has been expressed recently by Craig Blomberg:

Rather the person or persons in a given congregation with whom “the buck stops” for the ultimate authoritative teaching role should be men. Can a woman

*preach a passage of Scripture if she does not hold such an office, under the delegated authority of the elders? Of course.*³⁸

My reply is that this way of thinking actually works against what I argue for in my essay—the intimate connection between preaching sermons and shepherd-leadership. It assumes that as I, as a congregation member, sit in church, although I see and hear a preacher bringing me the word of God in an authoritative way, I also must imagine that there is another, invisible authority behind the preaching, located in the “office” (i.e. the role—not the room!) of the priest or elder. However, this is not a helpful way to proceed. When a person is preaching, we are actually sitting under their shepherd-leadership. That is why I (and many other Christian leaders whom I respect) deliberately seek to sit under the word of God when hearing others’ sermons in church. Indeed, the activity in the New Testament that occurs under the authority of others is prophecy. But, as we have seen, preaching sermons is not equivalent to ancient “prophecy”. It is about leading the congregation in the word of God. When I preach, I’m leading the congregation in the word of God. When the student minister preaches, the student minister is leading the congregation in the word of God. The same is true for the “lay” preacher. The corollary of this, of course, is that we should only choose to preach those to whom we are happy to hand over the reins of congregational shepherd-leadership for a time.³⁹

³⁸ C Blomberg, “Women in the Pulpit?”, published online in 2014 by John Dickson at www.johndickson.org, 3-4. The page on which the paper originally appeared (<http://www.johndickson.org/defendingheroice.html>) appears to have been deleted, but the paper itself is still available for download via direct link at http://www.johndickson.org/uploads/2/3/8/8/23884833/women_in_the_pulpit. Some clarification is needed about the nature and purpose of this paper. At first glance, the paper seems to be critiquing all of the essays in Payne and Bolt (eds.), *Women, Sermons and the Bible*, including my own essay “Preachers and Leaders” which is directly related to the central concerns of the paper. For example, the paper includes a description of a situation in which there is an effective separation of preaching sermons and congregational leadership, followed by the statement: “Nothing in the Payne and Bolt volume comes close to convincing me that any of this is contrary to God’s will” (4). However, I have subsequently contacted Professor Blomberg and he kindly clarified that he did not in fact have a copy of the book *Women, Sermons and the Bible* when he wrote his paper. Rather, he had based his discussion on a set of PDFs containing some of the chapters which had been sent to him along with guidance as to which were the most relevant chapters to read. It appears that as a result, Blomberg did not take into account my essay on preaching and leadership. Thus his paper should not be considered as a direct critique of my essay.

³⁹ Certain shepherd-leaders may certainly have a responsibility to “guard the pulpit”—i.e. to do the proper due diligence to ensure that they only put such people in place. However, this does not mean the sermon occurs “under their authority”. Rather, they need to do the proper investigation because they are actually handing over the reins of congregational shepherd-leadership to the preacher for the time they are preaching.

5.4 (I ARGUE FOR VIEW 4: WE SHOULD PROMOTE PUBLIC ACTS OF MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT/EXHORTATION, BUT SEE ALL SERMONS AS ACTS OF SHEPHERD-LEADERSHIP/“TEACHING”.)

5.5 VIEW 5: EVERY EXTENDED BIBLICAL PUBLIC SPEAKING IN CHURCH IS AN ACT OF SHEPHERD-LEADERSHIP/“TEACHING”?

A number of reformed evangelicals argue that every extended biblical public speaking in church is an act of shepherd-leadership or “teaching”. This view is worth mentioning, partly because I have been asked about it, and partly because it is sometimes conflated with view 4, although it is not the same.⁴⁰ I do not, however, think this view is warranted. I believe it ultimately downplays and undermines other forms of biblical public speaking in church which the New Testament expects and which involve mutual encouragement rather than shepherd-leadership.

6 CONCLUSION

To sum up: preaching sermons should be understood as the public component of the speech of a congregational leader to a congregation under his care, by which he ensures that the congregation learns, obeys and holds on to the truth of God's word. A congregational leader leads his congregation *by* preaching sermons; conversely, preaching sermons *is* the key public expression of a congregational leader's role. We have seen how the New Testament bears witness to the importance of responsible and authoritative ‘shepherd-speech’ by congregational leaders. We have also seen how key figures throughout the history of the church have emphasized the importance of preaching sermons as the public means by which shepherds lead their sheep. The preaching of sermons today continues this task, and it is important. No matter how many Bibles our congregations or the individuals within them own, we still need godly, responsible leaders who preserve the truth through private instruction and public preaching.

There is, of course, a vital place for more general encouragement and mutual exhortation in congregational life. There are various kinds of ‘ministries of the word’ in which Christian brothers and sisters are called mutually to encourage one another (e.g. Col 3:16; Eph 4:15-16; 1 Cor 11-14; Heb 3:12-13, 10:24-25).⁴¹ The voices of men and women, young and old, should ring amongst us with God's word, and should do so more and more. The challenge is to ensure this takes place even as we are promoting the preaching of sermons, and not to neglect either. There are a whole lot of possible reasons we may neglect the promotion of mutual encouragement:

⁴⁰ The (minority) view 5 appears to be the view John Dickson is seeking to challenge when he speaks about the application of 1 Tim 2:12 and its prohibition concerning “teaching” this way:

I think we have taken an instruction Paul gave concerning a specific speaking ministry and have universalised it to apply to pretty much all sustained, biblical public speaking in church (first edition: “just about all forms of public speaking in church”). (Dickson, Hearing Her Voice, 4.1)

⁴¹ cf. Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 75-6; C Marshall and T Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything* (Matthias Media, Kingsford, Sydney, 2009), 44-59.

apathy, busyness on the part of ministry staff teams, a “professionalisation” of ministry culture, a view that the sermon alone is sufficient, a failure to recognise the diverse gifts of Christ’s body, a failure to follow through on what it really means to be “complementarian”, etc. Having said that, for at least the last 10 years since I graduated from Moore College I have been pleased to be involved in ministry teams which have sought creative ways to promote public acts of mutual encouragement/exhortation. I pray that the work of the Priscilla and Aquila Centre will continue to promote this great vision of partnership in ministry as we seek to proclaim the gospel of Christ together to a world that so desperately needs to hear it.

APPENDIX: IS THE SERMON “PREACHING” OR “TEACHING”?

In my essay,⁴² I deliberately left aside the issue of whether the modern Sunday sermon is to be equated with the New Testament Greek word for “preaching”/“proclaiming” (*kērussō*). Nevertheless, I did make a case that modern sermons are closely related to what Paul calls “teaching” (*didaskō*). Nathan Campbell, on the other hand, has argued in a blog post that the activity of preaching sermons is essentially equivalent to *kērussō*, and not to *didaskō*.⁴³ I mention Nathan’s piece here because Nathan and I have had a very productive discussion offline which has helped me to clarify what I think about the relationship between modern sermons, *kērussō* and *didaskō*. In short, I believe that modern sermons involve *both* “proclaiming” (*kērussō*) and “teaching” (*didaskō*). I admit that my definition of “preaching” in the essay itself is skewed towards *didaskō* rather than *kērussō*. In some ways this was inevitable given the focus of the essay. However, I am grateful to Nathan for providing me the opportunity to explore this question further.

I think it is important to understand what is the actual content of our “proclaiming”/“teaching” in sermons. We are not proclaiming/teaching a new kind of “law” like the Pharisees: i.e. the content of our sermons (the “apostolic deposit”) cannot properly be understood merely as the collected sayings/rulings of Jesus and the apostles. The content of our sermons is better understood as something grander: the astounding news about Christ and his kingdom, grounded in the Scriptures, centred on the gospel message, given shape and form in the collected sayings of Jesus and the apostles/the New Testament, exemplified in places like 2 Timothy 2:8. Each Sunday we want to be both “proclaiming” the apostolic deposit and “teaching” it. And the sermon does both these things. The congregational leader, standing in the tradition of the apostles, proclaims and teaches in the one action. The difference between the two words is not that they are two clearly differentiated actions; rather it is that one word focusses on the aspect of announcement, proclamation, news; whereas the other word focusses on the aspect that we are a community who needs to learn these things regularly, take them to heart and live them out together.

⁴² L Windsor, “Preachers and Leaders”.

⁴³ <http://st-eutychus.com/2013/hearing-her-voice-teaching-preaching-and-a-complementarian-ethos/>