PREACHING THE
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Preaching the New Testament as Rhetoric

The Promise of Rhetorical Criticism for Expository Preaching

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A thesis submitted to the Australian College of Theology in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Theology.

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Preface

This doctoral thesis presented to the Australian College of Theology argues for an expanded definition of the task of biblical exposition: it is not merely to discern the original meaning of the text and then to apply that meaning to a contemporary audience, but also to discern the original rhetorical function of the text in order to preach a contemporary sermon with an analogous rhetorical function. In other words, the sermon is not only to exegete and apply what the text says, but also what it does.

It is proposed that the discipline of rhetorical criticism, in which much work has been done over the past few decades, provides a means by which this might be achieved in the field of New Testament preaching. Although the term “rhetorical criticism” represents a diversity of methodologies, the presuppositions and aims of biblical exposition fit most naturally with rhetorical critical approaches that use the analytical terms and methods of the New Testament writers’ contemporaries, rather than more recent or universal analyses of rhetoric.

Limiting the scope of the present investigation to the Pauline corpus, the bulk of the thesis systematically works through the various aspects of rhetorical criticism. This includes questions of rhetorical species, rhetorical arrangement, and the three different kinds of proof (ethos, pathos, and logos). In each of these areas, scholarship in the field is carefully examined to provide an up-to-date understanding of the subject. The focus at each point, however, is on how this approach can inform the task of bringing to life the rhetorical function of an ancient text in a contemporary sermon. The principles for preaching thus derived are applied to a variety of Pauline texts throughout the discussion, culminating in a workshop which looks at how a sermon series on 1 Corinthians 1–4 might be designed.