

# JBTS

VOLUME 3 | ISSUE 1

JOURNAL OF  
BIBLICAL AND  
THEOLOGICAL  
STUDIES



**Theological Preaching and Preaching  
Through Theology: The Priority of the  
Pastor-Theologian**

*Gary L. Shultz Jr.*

## ***Theological Preaching and Preaching Through Theology: The Priority of the Pastor-Theologian***

**GARY L. SHULTZ JR.**

Gary L. Shultz Jr. (Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Fulton, Missouri. He teaches theology and preaching for Liberty University and Baptist Bible Theological Seminary. He also serves as a fellow for the Center of Pastor Theologians.

**Abstract:** Over the last several years a renewed call for the re-emergence of pastor-theologians has occurred within Evangelicalism. The distinguishing mark of the pastor-theologian is that his broader theological ministry to the church and the academy is explicitly grounded in his pastoral ministry, and his broader theological ministry strengthens and reinforces his pastoral ministry. While pastoral ministry has many facets, its foundation is the ministry of the Word, and the heart of the ministry of the word is preaching. Therefore, preaching the Word should be the priority and aim of the pastor-theologian, not only in his pastoral ministry, but in his broader theological ministry. This article will establish this truth by demonstrating how preaching is the theological act that grounds all other aspects of pastoral ministry even as it is grounded itself by that ministry. It will then explore how that truth should impact the pastor-theologian's broader theological ministry, leading it to be biblical, confessional, and culturally relevant, even when directed towards the academy. Preaching is the connecting center of the pastor-theologian's ministry, resulting in effective pastoring and ecclesial theology that not only reinforce one other but together preach the good news of the gospel to the world.

**Key Words:** pastor-theologian, preaching, pastoral ministry, ministry of the Word, academic theology, ecclesial theology

### **Introduction**

To many in the church and the academy today, the term “pastor-theologian” sounds like an oxymoron, another amusing attempt to combine two words that seem to contradict one another. While the same person might have been a pastor and a theologian at one time, certainly that is not the case today.<sup>1</sup> Theologians are scholars

1. The division between theology and the pastorate is a more recent development. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Recovering a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 69–97.

and intellectuals, concerned with issues that are probably important, but irrelevant to the lives of real people. Pastors are practitioners, concerned with the “real work” of the ministry and therefore focused on leadership principles, managing programs, and therapeutic techniques.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, both academic theologians and pastors reinforce this stereotypical divide between pastoral ministry and theology. Academic concerns rather than ecclesial or ministerial concerns often dictate the structure and content of evangelical theological scholarship, which serves to minimize the value of those ecclesial concerns and cast doubt upon the ability of pastors, no matter how well-educated, to make meaningful theological contributions.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, pastors typically face pressure from their congregations, broader culture, and even from themselves to do anything but engage in theological ministry, which after all is an academic pursuit that has nothing to do with practically pastoring a church.<sup>4</sup>

This divide between pastoral ministry and theology has led to what Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand call “the theological anemia of the church,” and “the ecclesial anemia of theology.”<sup>5</sup> The church no longer looks to pastors as a whole for intellectual leadership that addresses the crucial issues facing believers today. In many cases, pastors are not capable of providing that intellectual leadership, instead relying on the “professional theologians” to pick up the slack. Yet, whether they realize it or not, pastors are the theological leaders of the churches they pastor, and those churches will always reflect that theological leadership, or lack thereof. Separating pastoral ministry from theology has resulted in a severe theological deficit in our congregations, which in turn leads to a severe ethical deficit, compromising the integrity and witness of the church. Likewise, theological scholarship is affected when ecclesial concerns are minimized or dismissed. Because of their social locations, academic theologians often engage different questions than pastors do, and then answer those questions according to the dictates of the academy rather than the church.<sup>6</sup> Yet the ultimate purpose of theology is to benefit the church, addressing the pressing issues of the day in such a way as to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, build them up into the body of Christ, and help them achieve the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God (Eph 4:12–13).

In response to this current state of affairs, over the last several years there has been a renewed call within evangelicalism for the re-emergence of pastors who do

2. *Ibid.*, 1–15.

3. Gerald L. Hiestand, “Pastor-Scholar to Professor-Scholar: Exploring the Theological Disconnect Between the Academy and the Local Church,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70.2 (2008): 361–66.

4. Marva J. Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*, ed. Peter Santucci (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 3–4.

5. Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 13–14.

6. This is not meant to denigrate academic theology or indicate that faithful academic theology cannot benefit the church. Academic theology is an essential discipline. The relationship between academic theology and ecclesial theology should be complementary, not competitive. See *Ibid.*, 76–78.

the work of pastor-theologians.<sup>7</sup> While every pastor should be a theologian and lead their churches theologically, pastor-theologians as a vocation are different from other pastors in that they engage in theological ministries beyond their local churches, including the work of academic theology.<sup>8</sup> What distinguishes pastor-theologians from other theological scholars is that their theological work is explicitly grounded in the identity, social location, and ministry of the pastorate. In this way, pastor-theologians help bridge the gap between local church ministry and academic theology, bringing theology to bear on every aspect of their pastoral ministry, and allowing pastoral ministry to inform their broader theological ministry.

This does raise the question, however, of what this looks like and how this actually happens in practice. How does the identity, social location, and ministry of the pastorate inform academic theology, and how does that kind of theological work make a difference in everyday pastoral ministry? One of the primary connection points is found in preaching. While pastoral ministry has many facets, its foundation is the ministry of the Word, and the heart of the ministry of the word is preaching. Therefore, preaching ought to be the foundational ministry and goal of pastor-theologians, both in their pastoral ministry and their broader theological ministry. This article establishes this truth by demonstrating how preaching is the theological act that grounds all other aspects of pastoral ministry even as it is reinforced itself by that ministry. It will then explore how that truth should impact the pastor-theologian's broader theological ministry, leading it to be explicitly biblical, confessional, and relevant to the church and culture, even when directed toward the academy. Preaching therefore lies at the heart of the pastor-theologian's ministry. Recovering and practicing this truth is a key step in reintegrating pastoral ministry and theology. Through preaching, the pastor-theologian's pastoral ministry and broader theological ministry should ultimately reinforce one another, together communicating the good news of the gospel to the church, both local and universal.

### **Preaching as The Foundation of Pastoral Ministry**

Pastors engage in a number of essential responsibilities. In his classic work on pastoral theology, Thomas Oden includes chapters on administering the ministry of the church, leading the worship of the church (emphasizing the ministry of prayer),

7. E.g., *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership*, ed. Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016); Hiestand and Wilson, *Pastor Theologian; The Power to Comprehend with All the Saints: The Formation and Practice of a Pastor-Theologian*, ed. Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Cynthia A. Jarvis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); and Vanhoozer and Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*.

8. While in one sense, all pastors ought to identify themselves as pastor-theologians, in that the work they do is inherently theological, some pastors are called to become what Hiestand and Wilson call "ecclesial theologians," pastors who write "theological scholarship in conversation with other theologians, with an eye to the needs of the ecclesial community." *Pastor Theologian*, 85.

presiding over the ordinances, preaching, teaching, equipping others for ministry, pastoral visitation, pastoral counseling, crisis ministry, and benevolent ministry.<sup>9</sup> These responsibilities are based on biblical instructions like shepherding and feeding the flock of God (John 21:15–17; 1 Pet 5:2), proclaiming the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), presenting people mature in Christ (Col 1:23–29), equipping people for works of service (Eph 4:12–16), leading people to reach others for Christ (Matt 28:18–20), and keeping watch over yourself and the flock that Christ has given you (Acts 20:28).<sup>10</sup> Faced with these numerous responsibilities, each of them overwhelming in their own way (cf. 2 Cor 2:16), a divide can infiltrate the pastor’s thinking and ministry. Theology, biblical studies, and all of that over “stuff” learned in seminary might be good for preaching and teaching, but it’s not much help when it comes to everything else. Cultural and congregational pressure to act as a therapist, CEO, manager, or political organizer only exacerbates this divide.<sup>11</sup> Eugene Peterson elaborates on his experience, which he believes is typical of many pastors:

None of my learned advisors ever suggested that I give up my Christian faith so that I could be successful at this pastor business; but what they did do by implication was suggest that I give up on Scripture as having anything definitive to do with the pastoral vocation in contemporary America. Scripture was good for preaching, but when it came to running a church, organizing a congregation, managing conflict, training church school teachers, and getting out the publicity on the new missions emphasis, the Holy Scriptures didn’t offer much. Isaiah, after all, never had to run a stewardship campaign; Jeremiah didn’t know the first thing about conflict management...My advisors were happy to supply me with up-to-date texts written by various experts in the field, showing me how to be relevant to culture.<sup>12</sup>

Yet what makes pastoral ministry unique, and not just another helping profession, is that it is gospel-focused, Scripturally-determined, and explicitly theological in all of its facets, not just preaching and teaching. Even while elucidating the pastor’s many responsibilities, Scripture emphasizes that the pastor’s particular ministry is the “ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). John Calvin appeals to 1 Corinthians 4:1, (“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”), Titus 1:9 (“holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those

9. Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), v–vi.

10. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 49–63.

11. William H. Willimon, *The Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 55.

12. Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary Pastor*, 7–8.

who contradict.”), and “similar passages which frequently occur,” and concludes that pastors have two particular functions: proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments.<sup>13</sup> After outlining the pastor’s qualifications from 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, Mark Dever concludes, “The essence of the elder’s office is found in teaching—ensuring the Word of God is well understood.”<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that pastors should only preach and teach, but that the ministry of the Word should be the foundation and priority in everything the pastor does. Preaching the word works to theologically ground all of the pastor’s ministry even as that ministry serves to reinforce and ground the pastor’s preaching.

### **Preaching Grounds Pastoral Ministry**

The ministry of the Word is broader than preaching the Word, which is why the Bible can describe several different pastoral responsibilities while summarizing pastoral ministry as the ministry of the Word. The ministry of the Word includes any evangelistic, discipling, training, equipping, or counseling encounter that communicates or teaches the Word, either publicly or privately, in a formal church setting or beyond such a setting.<sup>15</sup> This ministry can be done behind a pulpit or lectern, in conversation over coffee, in an e-mail or on Facebook, by writing a book, or in any other way people communicate words to one another. While preaching is not the entirety of the ministry of the Word, however, it is the foundation of the entire ministry of the word. What makes preaching unique is that it addresses the entire church with the same word, giving theological direction to everything the church believes and does, including its ministries, evangelism, discipleship, training, equipping, and counseling. As Peter Adam defines it, preaching is “the explanation and application of the Word to the congregation of Christ, in order to produce corporate preparation for service, unity of faith, maturity, growth, and upbuilding.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, preaching sets the tone for the pastor’s broader pastoral ministry of the Word, including leadership, administration, and other facets often assumed to be non-theological. Preaching fills out and reinforces the content and direction of the pastor’s ministry.

This elevation of preaching as the heart of the pastor’s ministry of the Word is also seen in what the Bible tells us about the church’s responsibilities concerning the ministry of the Word.

13. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.3.6.

14. Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 56.

15. Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent, 2004), 59–61.

16. *Ibid.*, 75.

The ministry of the Word is not the special province of the pastor, it is the duty of all God's people.<sup>17</sup> The Thessalonians believers shared the Word so widely that Paul felt like he didn't need to add anything to it (1 Thess 1:8). Peter exhorted believers to make a defense to anyone who asks about the hope they have beyond this life (1 Pet 3:15). Paul tells the Ephesians to put on the "preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15) and take up the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17). The Colossians were to "let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another" (Col 3:17), and the Thessalonians were told to admonish each other as well (1 Thess 5:14). Titus was to make sure the older women were equipped to teach the younger women from the Word of God, so that the younger women would live out those principles like they should (Titus 2:3–5).

Yet, for all of the church's responsibility to carry out the ministry of the Word, nowhere does the New Testament call upon believers as a whole or the church in general to preach as it commands pastors to preach (e.g., 2 Tim 4:2). Preaching the Word as defined above is a distinct, particular ministry of the pastor.<sup>18</sup> One of its chief purposes is to lead to an effective ministry of the Word on the part of the entire church. Paul's instructions to the Colossians in Colossians 3:16 to teach and admonish one another with the Word in all wisdom come after his description of his own preaching ministry in Colossians 2:28 as admonishing and teaching the Word in all wisdom. As Jonathan Griffiths states, "Clearly their ministry to one another takes its cue from the ministry of the apostle Paul, and parallels his in significant ways."<sup>19</sup> The same pattern can be observed in 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:12–14) and Titus (2:1, 3–5). Pastors are to be stewards of the Word, faithfully preaching the messages God has given them to preach from his Word, and then the church is to steward the messages they have heard, leading to life and blessing (2 Cor 2:15–16).<sup>20</sup>

In this way, preaching, as the heart of the pastor's ministry of the Word, is meant to ground the rest of the church's ministry and therefore the rest of pastoral ministry: leading and administering the church, seeing people brought to Christ, ensuring that people are discipled, equipping the church for service and witness, counseling, pastoral care, and all the rest. When pastors preach the Word faithfully, week-by-week proclaiming the gospel, each ministry of the church is positively impacted. If the preaching is theologically robust, expounding on the great truths of God from Scripture, it will over time lead each ministry in the church to be the same, strongly rooted in the truth of the gospel. This is the pastor's special role in the congregation,

17. Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017), 45–49.

18. *Ibid.*, 49.

19. *Ibid.*, 47.

20. Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 25–29.

and the heart of the pastor's theological ministry in a local context, "to serve others by building them up into Christ through the ministry of the Word."<sup>21</sup>

### **Pastoral Ministry Reinforces Preaching**

Yet the rest of pastoral ministry is just as central to the theological act of preaching as preaching is for it. Just as preaching grounds pastoral ministry, pastoral ministry reinforces and works to ground preaching. Preaching is a pastoral act, the act of a shepherd who tends the sheep by feeding them (John 10:9; 21:15, 17; 1 Pet 5:2). Yet a shepherd is not someone who drops in on his flock from time to time with a necessary word, but one who lives and ministers among them. As John MacArthur states concerning the ministry of the pastor, "It is not leadership from on high so much as leadership from within. An effective shepherd does not herd his sheep from the rear but leads them from the front. They see him and imitate his actions. The most important aspect of spiritual leadership is the power of an exemplary life."<sup>22</sup> This exemplary life the pastor is supposed to model is typically seen and experienced by the church in acts of ministry and leadership beyond the pulpit. A pastor's leadership, administration, counseling, visitation, discipling, outreach, and everything else will work to make his preaching heard and believed.<sup>23</sup>

As the ministry of the Word is carried on by others in the church, extending from the pastor's ministry of the Word, it will begin to have the same effect as the pastor's ministry, reinforcing the pastor's preaching because it is being practiced. Far from being an academic abstraction or a distraction from the real work of ministry, theology is then central to everything the pastor does and leads the church to do. Preaching that proclaims a Scriptural understanding of all of life, applies the Scriptures to all of life, drives the ministry of the pastor, and determines the ministry of the congregation, lies at the heart of this, and is therefore should be a primary focus of the pastor. Theologically robust pastoral ministry will work to ground preaching even as it is grounded by that preaching, which means that even amid the busyness of a pastor's life, as pastors work to fulfill of their biblical responsibilities, the distinct ministry of the ministry of the Word must remain the priority.

While all pastors should strive for theologically rich ministries centered by preaching that extends to everything they do as pastors, and while their ministries might not look all that different at this level from those of pastor-theologians, it is

21. Vanhoozer and Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 22.

22. John MacArthur, Jr., "What is a Pastor to Be and Do?," in *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates*, ed. John MacArthur, Jr., Richard L. Mayhue, and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1995), 29.

23. This is typically expressed in books on preaching through the rhetorical concept of *ethos*. Bryan Chapell defines *ethos* as, "the perceived character of the speaker; determined most significantly by the concern expressed for the listeners' welfare." *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 26.



particularly important for pastor-theologians engaged in doing theological work beyond their local context to prioritize preaching.

Pastor-theologians must consciously work to preach theologically. This includes working to apply their theological work beyond their churches to their churches, translating it into preaching even as they put it into practice as pastors. In this way churches are not only built up doctrinally and ethically, but theology is seen for what it really is, the sound doctrine of the church that leads people to experience and live out God's grace (Titus 2:1–15), and not merely the province of academia. As Thomas Currie notes, a local church in a particular place what theology is for, and where it is ultimately meant to be practiced: "Yet all of these important disciplines [theology] are taught for the sake of the body, that is, for the sake of the body's own witness to the joyfully disturbing presence of Christ in the world."<sup>24</sup>

### **Preaching as The Foundation and Goal of Ecclesial Theology**

As pastor-theologians work to preach theologically so that they may pastor theologically, they also work in theological ministry beyond their local church. A pastor-theologian's particular contribution to theology is to explicitly do theology as a pastor, for pastoral purposes, and not simply with a pastoral perspective. The context and social location for theology matter. As David Clark states, "Experience always embeds theoretical commitments."<sup>25</sup> Ministering to people in different situations not only informs one's theology but helps to shape and express one's theology. Marital counseling cannot help but affect one's doctrine of sin or understanding of Ephesians 5:22–33; preaching the funerals of people as different as the ninety-year old saint or the week old baby will certainly impact one's eschatology or view of Revelation; leading a deacons' meeting one night and a business meeting the next cannot help but shape one's ecclesiology or understanding of the Pastoral Epistles. As Hiestand and Wilson elaborate, "One cannot help but be shaped in profound ways by the steady rhythm of such experiences, and consequently, one's theology is likewise shaped. Pastor are not, of course, the only Christians called upon to give counsel and care in the face of such circumstances. But without question, the vocational *Sitz em Leben* of the pastorate uniquely tests and shapes one's theology in way the vocational context of other social locations does not."<sup>26</sup> So this means that just as pastor-theologians bring theology, including academic theology, into preaching, so they to work to bring preaching into theology.

24. Thomas W. Currie, III, "The Theological Significance of Administration in Pastoral Ministry," in *The Power to Comprehend with All the Saints: The Formation and Practice of a Pastor-Theologian*, ed., Wallace M. Alston, Jr., and Cynthia A. Jarvis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 375.

25. David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Foundations of Evangelical Theology, Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 109.

26. Hiestand and Wilson, *Pastor Theologian*, 89. See also Todd Wilson, "The Pastor Theologian as Cruciform Theologian," in *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership*, ed. Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 69–77.

Pastor-theologians aim to do more than inform, consider theoretical or historical questions simply for their own sakes, or maintain a neutral, typically “academic” perspective. Instead, the goal of pastor-theologians’ theological work is the same as their preaching: life-change, or a broader ministry of the Word that leads people and churches to follow Jesus in every area of their lives. This is not to say that many academic theologians are not motivated by pastoral concerns, do not do their theological work for the church, or that they do not attempt to change others in a positive way through their work, it is rather an acknowledgment that they are not pastors, and that vocational difference affects theology and how it’s done. In addition, the strictures of academia often leave pastoral concerns unexpressed or underemphasized, while pastor-theologians make these concerns overt, the self-conscious purpose of their vocation.<sup>27</sup> Pastor-theologians address important questions generated and informed by pastoral ministry, and they address those questions while preaching through their theological work. What this looks like is theology that is unapologetically biblical and confessional, while also explicitly relevant to cultural and ecclesial concerns.

### **Theology that is Biblical and Confessional**

Preaching presupposes and demonstrates one’s theology of Scripture as well as one’s confessional tradition (which are usually related). Pastors do not typically introduce each sermon explaining their theological presuppositions or why they are opening up the Word of God. Instead, they seek to bring truth to bear on life, and in the process demonstrate their convictions about why that truth matters and how that truth impacts other important truths. If done well, preaching is applied theology, both in form and content. In contrast, much of academic theology is concerned with matters of prolegomena, whether that means how to do theology or how to properly understand the Bible, or even what the Bible or theology is supposed to be. These matters are important and have their place, but a preoccupation with them can lead to what Millard Erickson calls “a sort of imperialism about professionally produced theology.”<sup>28</sup> What Erickson means is an impression that theology is only for those who understand such issues, and inaccessible to all others. This in turn exacerbates the divide between pastoral ministry and theology, serving to reduce theology to a discussion that does not really impact peoples’ lives, even believers or pastors. As Helmut Thielicke warns theology students, this divide and reduction are why so many people in the church are skeptical of seminary educations.<sup>29</sup>

27. Hiestand and Wilson, *Pastor Theologian*, 90.

28. Millard J. Erickson, “On Flying in Theological Fog,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed., Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 338.

29. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, trans. Charles L. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 3–5.

Pastor-theologians will not ignore issues of prolegomena, but as theologians outside the academy they can establish their convictions about these issues and then put them into practice, without continually having to defend their methodology or reference opposing arguments. Pastor-theologians are freer to appeal directly to the recognized authorities of their confessional traditions, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, or John Wesley, without having to continually demonstrate an awareness of secondary literature and other possible interpretations of the subject. Likewise, Pastor-theologians can more directly appeal to the Scriptures and expound the great truths of the Scripture, without explicitly defending their right to do so. Two contemporary examples of this can be found with N. T. Wright and John Piper. In the introduction to his work *Surprised by Hope*, for example, Wright explains that he is not going to address some pertinent issues that he could address about death and what lies beyond it. Instead, he is going to approach the issue as a biblical theologian for the edification of the church, and then he proceeds to do just that.<sup>30</sup> Piper, in his book *Counted Righteous in Christ*, one of his more academic works, does something similar. He explains in his introduction how his preaching from Romans 1–8 led him to consider a book on justification, and then in the first chapter how he approaches this work in a scholarly way, but as a pastor with pastoral concerns, standing on the truth of Scripture.<sup>31</sup> Pastor-theologians aim to preach through their theological work by expounding the truth of Scripture under the authority of Scripture, no matter their level of sophistication or intended audience.

### **Theology that is Relevant to the Church and Culture**

Because pastor-theologians aim to preach through their theological work, they aim to make their work explicitly relevant to ecclesial and cultural concerns. Practical application, or living out the biblical truth that is spoken and heard, is the goal and purpose of preaching. As Calvin Miller puts it, “Without application there is no sermon. Application is what gets the Sermon off the Mount, and down in the valley where the toilers live out their days. Once people know what the Bible says, their next questions are: So what? How to? Where do I start? Sermons must take the information they dispense and tell the church what to do with it.”<sup>32</sup> This application is both for the direct audience of the sermon, the church, and the broader culture within which the church lives. Effective preachers contextualize biblical truth, speaking directly to those in their churches in ways that they can understand, while also reframing their church’s questions, reshaping their church’s concerns, and redirecting their church’s

30. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), xi–xiv.

31. John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 13–15; 21–23.

32. Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 79.

hopes, all in light of the broader culture.<sup>33</sup> In this they aim to help their people live rightly within culture and even positively impact their culture.

Theology has a similar purpose and goal as preaching, in that it ought to communicate truth in a way that the church understands so that the broader culture is impacted. One could even properly define theology as the discipline which gives a coherent explanation of the truths of Scripture in the context of a culture, communicating those truths in contemporary language and applying those truths particularly considering contemporary concerns.<sup>34</sup> Pastor-theologians write theology for the same reason they preach, to apply truth, and they seek to apply truth in theology, as in preaching, by speaking to contemporary concerns that must be addressed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is an example of what this looks like. *Life Together* was written to describe what a real Christian community should look like, directed at a people who confessed Christianity but didn't know what it meant to live as Christians living among other Christians. Bonhoeffer begins his book by quoting Psalm 133:1 on unity, and then states that in the following pages he and the reader would "consider a number of directions and precepts that the Scriptures provide us for our life together under the Word."<sup>35</sup> From the beginning his theological work is framed as relevant for a specific ecclesial and cultural need. *The Cost of Discipleship* is similar, in that it is written for a church in a culture that doesn't really know what it means to follow Jesus as his disciples, but needs to know. Bonhoeffer also introduces this book by stressing the need to hear Jesus in his Word, and explains that this is what his focus will be.<sup>36</sup> These ecclesial concerns stand in sharp contrast to some of Bonhoeffer's earlier works, such as *Sanctorum Communio* or *Act and Being*, which did not share these pastoral concerns.<sup>37</sup> Pastor-theologians apply their theology, looking not only to inform, but to edify the church and impact the culture.

## Conclusion

Pastor-theologians bring theology into the pastorate and the pastorate into theology. They do this by engaging in theological ministry beyond their local ministries. This dual role means pastor-theologians are uniquely positioned to help churches recover theologically robust ministry, bridging the unfortunate divide between theology and ministry. At the same time, pastor-theologians can bring pastorally robust theology into the academy, helping recover an ecclesial purpose and emphasis

33. Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 99.

34. E.g., Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 8.

35. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: HarperCollins, 1954), 17.

36. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 36.

37. John Webster traces this evolution in Bonhoeffer's thought in *Word and Church: Essays in Church Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 87–112.

in theology. One of the primary ways pastor-theologians fulfill this dual role is by prioritizing preaching as the foundation of their pastoral ministries and the goal of their theological ministries. The church, the academy, and the culture at large all need pastors who can explain truth in a way that is biblical, confession, practical and relevant, bringing their unique identity and context to bear on the pressing issues of our day. As pastor-theologians ground their vocations in preaching the Word, this will take place.