

As I say, these other courses you find in many other seminars--they are all good. But there are good books in all of them, and if a person is trained to think, he can take these books and the magazine articles and he can get a great deal of tremendous value. But I don't know any way you can really learn to understand the Bible except by taking time to really get into it and learn methods of interpretation, learn to go back to the original and see exactly what it means, see what exactly God says in His Word. See what the verses mean in context and see what the message is God has there for us.

So in our seminary we concentrate on really understanding the Word of God and to really understand it, I believe is a full time job for three years. I wish we had more time for exegesis than we have. But we can't spend all our time during the 3 years on this, which is the most vital thing because I believe there is one other thing that ranks equally with it, and that is the ability to get the message across.

So we give more attention probably to homiletics than almost any seminary I know about. We try to give a good training in speaking effectively in order to get the message across. In other words we believe that at the center of the minister's work and to some extent you might say at the center of the life of every Christian because the words translated 'preach' really mean to give good news. It is to present the message of God. It doesn't have to be preached from a pulpit. It doesn't have to be preached in a set service. It doesn't even have to be preached to more than one person. Everyone who is a child of God should have as one of the primary purposes of his life the presentation of the good news of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I was in college I knew a very fine Christian man, a teacher of a Bible school, who once told me about someone whom he said was just no good as a preacher. He said, everyone went to sleep when he spoke. He had nothing against him, but he said he called frequently on his people. And then the people felt we've got to return the call. Consequently they had a lot of people there to hear him preach. I didn't argue with this man. He was a man for whom I had a great deal of respect, but the thought came to me, if his calling is simply to get the people to come and hear him preach and he doesn't give them anything, what is accomplished?

It may be that in his calls he really preached to them and gave them the message. I don't know. But it is true that ordinarily the great work the minister can do in presenting the Word of God is the speaking to more than one person, though the personal work is tremendously important. The purpose of it seems to me to fall under two main heads. It is certainly to tell how we can be saved through Christ, is certainly the first of these.

I have sometimes gone to a church and heard a minister give a message that opened up some phase of the Christian life most wonderfully, and I received a real blessing from it, and yet I thought if there are people here who do not know how to be saved through Christ, they have been given a superstructure with no foundation. I have more and more felt that I have questioned whether a sermon is really a Christian sermon if it does not somewhere in it show how to be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't mean that all of our sermons should be evangelistic sermons by any means. The minister has as a great part of his purpose the teaching people to grow in Christ, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord. And people won't grow if they are constantly being given a message for the unbeliever.