

The Place of Persuasion in Preaching

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's wonderful to be here. The title of this presentation is Rhetoric and Christian Proclamation. Is there a place for persuasion in preaching?

Folks, this is quite dense, and I'm going to try and take my full amount of allotted time so as to avoid questions.

Over the last century, the word rhetoric has become a pejorative term used to describe speeches that are coercive and have little substance.

For example, that speech was political rhetoric. So what does this much maligned word have to do with the noble task of preaching the gospel? Well, that will depend on who you ask. Most modern preachers feel very comfortable using rhetorical strategies in their sermons.

At an academic level, there are many contemporary homiletics. So a homiletics is like a professor of preaching, for example.

[1 : 07] Well, no, that's exactly what it is. At an academic level, many contemporary homiletics wholly root their discipline in the ground of rhetorical thought. A casual read of many books available on preaching will reveal a large proportion, a little more than studies, and persuasive communication, with the role of God and the Holy Spirit in preaching often awkwardly tacked on to the start or the end of the book.

So there are those guys. And then there are other scholars who argue that homiletics has been completely hijacked by rhetoric. These scholars view preaching through a purely theological lens. They see no need for using persuasive strategies in a sermon because the preaching event is God speaking.

This position attempts to factor out the human element of the preaching equation. Other opponents of rhetoric and preaching, of persuasion and preaching, reject it on moral grounds, arguing that results, result-driven goals and coercive nature of rhetoric have an ethically negative impact on the task of Christian proclamation.

Catholic philosopher Mortimer Aldous summarizes this kind of polarizing debate by saying, rhetoric is often praised as a useful discipline or condemned as a dishonest craft to which decent men would not stoop.

So is there a middle ground? Can preachers completely trust in God's sovereignty during the preaching act and yet still utilize persuasive tactics like rhetoric or rhetorician?

[2 : 40] Or more simply put, assuming the sovereign role of God in a sermon, is there a place for persuasion when preaching? To address this question, I want to survey the historical relationship between preaching and rhetoric, as well as looking at some modern perspectives on the question.

And we'll attempt to establish a theological perspective from which to view the relationship of persuasion and preaching, and then finally conclude with some implications for contemporary preachers. All right, are you still with me?

Yeah. Really? Yeah. Oh, that's very impressive. Okay. Well, let's begin by just defining what I mean by rhetoric.

Well, despite the fact that the word rhetoric has got such negative connotations, its lineage as an academic discipline goes back about 2,500 years.

The most enduring definition is probably from Aristotle who said this. It's the faculty of discovering in a particular case what are the available means of persuasion.

[3 : 45] Well, more simply put, rhetoric can be defined as communication intended to influence. Now, in order to understand rhetoric more fully, let's briefly survey the early fathers of the rhetorical movement.

Now, I find this very interesting, but it's quite, it's compressing a lot of thought into a very short period of time. So I'm just going to go for it. Okay, here we go.

So 5th century BC, Greek culture is considered the birthplace of rhetorical practice. An itinerant group of philosophers known as sophists were the first to systematize their ideas on speech communication.

Now, they were charged for their services, and they made a living training sort of upper-class youth for public life, where speeches were a really vital part. And, I mean, there was, they were more than sort of opportunists who taught public speaking.

They did have quite a complex understanding of epistemology, though the lasting impression of the sophist movement is hinted at by the fact today that the term sophistry means fallacious arguments in order to manipulate.

[4 : 52] So this modern meaning stems from the two basic premises of the sophist movement. Firstly, that there are multiple truths in any given situation, and secondly, that the ultimate goal of public speech is persuasion.

Like, whatever idea you've got, the goal is just to try and make people think it, whether you really believe that idea or not. In a stinging description of the sophist movement, Christian writer and preacher William Coinger said, This is a great quote.

The sophists stressed successful speaking and placed great emphasis on dazzling the audience. These speakers made ideas, made ideas, but pegs on which to hang gaudy colors of display.

In response to sophist verbosity, Greek philosopher Plato developed a speech style which focused on, mostly just on delivering content, right? So Plato believed that the speaker should know the truth of the subject, present it in an orderly manner, be sensitive to an audience reaction, have a high moral purpose, and be willing to submit to cross-questioning.

It's easy to see why Plato regarded the sophism as an anathema. In his writing, he describes sophists as only a step higher than tyrants, who ranked on the bottom of his evolutionary scale.

[6 : 18] Now, by focusing on content, Plato's style of speech was an attempt to avoid the slippery ambiguity of words and their ability to deceive. So in the sophist and the platonic approach to communication, we have the seeds of the polarizing debate that exists today somewhere in the world, in normally homiletical circles.

And that's at the heart of the question I'm trying to get at here. Is there a place for persuasion when we preach? Now, Aristotle was a student of Plato, and he wrote the first major treatise on communication called The Rhetoric.

And he's trying to bring the ideas of Plato and the sophists together. And so he described communication, his philosophy of communication is this, giving effectiveness to truth.

That's a great line. Giving effectiveness to truth. Now, he divided the speech act into three major divisions. He said there was the logos, which is the message, the ethos, which is the preacher, and the pathos, which is the audience.

And this is actually a basic model which still exists today when people study communication. Now, so initially, trying to synthesize the sophists and the platonic ideas, you could read this as saying Aristotle is shunning rhetoric in favor of a more practical handbook for persuading an audience.

[7 : 42] As I've already stated, this tendency can be seen a lot in the writings of modern homiletics who attempt to synthesize a theological and rhetoric perspective on preaching but end up just kind of focusing on the packaging rather than the content.

Another enduring definition of rhetoric is a first century Roman philosopher Quintilian. So he defines rhetoric as, and now, this is all old, so it's all not gender inclusive.

It's all just men. They just think men speak. So here we go. He defines rhetoric as a good man speaking well. His life's work was a 12-volume series on rhetoric called *Institutio Oratoria*.

Now, at the time of his writing, the most popular style of oratory in Rome was this very ornate kind of form which was sort of pleasing to the ear but didn't really deliver much content. His 12-volume behemoth was basically sort of a response to that flowery oratory.

Ironically, I think, 12 volumes. So he was an advocate to a return to simpler language, and he broke up rhetoric into five sections. He said there was *inventio*, which is the discovery of arguments, *dispositio*, arrangement of arguments.

[9 : 01] I studied Latin at school. I've forgotten it all. *Alicutio*, expression of style, *memoria*, memorization, *pronuntiatio*, delivery.

Despite the excessive nature of his works, Quintilian was actually more interested in *praxis* like the other guys, to be honest. Just the *praxis* holder. It is with Aristotle and Quintilian we find scholars who have the most in common with many preachers on the ground today who are delivering sermons on a weekly basis.

Like the fathers of rhetoric, modern preachers generally have a systemized strategy of writing a sermon which involves a movement from discovery of an argument to its final packaging and delivery. And like Aristotle and Quintilian, most folks today are more interested in *praxis* than theory.

Okay. That's rhetoric. That's a basic definition of rhetoric there as an isolated sort of subject. Now, I want to look at the relationship between rhetoric and preaching. And it gets more interesting here.

All right. With this, we now return to a central question. Okay. What place does persuasion, persuasive strategies, what place does the persuasive strategies of rhetoric have in preaching?

[10 : 13] And as I stated earlier, the answer to this question must be grounded historically in the tradition of the church as well as theologically in the word of God. So we begin the survey of the historic relationship between preaching and rhetoric.

And I want to show you that the relationship between these two disciplines began with a movement from suspicion, like, to a long period of complete integration.

For a time, the relationship was non-existent. It's a sort of, rhetoric really sort of disappeared off the academic mat. But more recently, with an increase in the study of rhetoric and homiletics, the relationship between the two disciplines can be best described as strained currently.

Here we go. So the Christian faith was born in a world dominated by Greco-Roman customs. So it's natural that some of the cultural practices of the society would find their way into the early church.

One writer said this, One of the most obvious of the church's adaptations was its appropriation of what was then the crown of liberal education, which was rhetoric, for its use in preaching.

[11 : 19] Tertullian was one of the first theologians to question the influence of Greek culture in the church. And he famously wrote, What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?

What concord is there between the academy and the church, between heretics and Christians? So we find, with many critics of rhetoric, they often seem oblivious to the fact that they criticize rhetoric in a rhetorically skillful way.

One guy says this, he notes that if one looks at the manner of Tertullian's critique, he shows, on the whole, a secret, kindly attraction to rhetoric, its refinements, and its tricks of style.

Now, like Tertullian, Jerome advises preachers to reject rhetoric. In a letter to his colleagues, he says, Do not appear over-eloquent.

So much do they like the adultery, even of the tongue. Later in that same letter, Jerome accounts a Damascus Road experience where he's brought before God and repents of reading Cicero.

[12 : 24] Now, not all of the church fathers agree with Tertullian and Jerome's critique of Greco-Roman oratory. Though some were suspicious, others, like Origen, accepted and even encouraged Christians to study rhetoric.

Now, the movement from suspicion to integration was helped immensely by the fact that almost all the great preachers of the patristic period pursued careers as rhetoricians before beginning their ministry.

This includes Augustine, Chrysostom, and the Cappadocian fathers. Though it's well known that each struggle with the question of what parts of an individual culture and training should be appropriate into the service of the Christian faith.

Though like Tertullian, when the question does arise in the writings of the patristic fathers, they are, like I've said before, critical of rhetoric in rhetorically impressive ways.

Now, the idea is that it's extremely difficult to avoid rhetoric, even when one is trying to denounce it. And that's a conclusion I'm going to draw later on and expand on later.

[13 : 35] But I've given away the end, kind of, which is rhetorically really stupid. So, onwards. Onwards, folks.

Are we going okay? We're doing alright? Yeah. I find this stuff so interesting. So thank you for sitting here and smiling at me while I'm talking about something. It was not until Augustine that the dissonance between rhetoric and Christianity is addressed in a systematic way.

So, in his work on Christian doctrine, Augustine forcibly advocates for the use of rhetoric as a legitimate aid of preaching. His argument is based on the belief that rhetoric is morally neutral.

For Augustine, rhetoric contains no pagan baggage. He goes on to argue that rhetoric is vital for preaching because it makes the message of Christ competitive in the market. He writes, an extended quote, For since by means of the art of rhetoric both trust and falsehood are urged, who would dare to say that truth should stand in the person of its defenders unarmed against lying, so that they who wish to urge falsehoods may know how to make their listeners benevolent, or attentive, or docile in their presentation, while the defenders of the truth speak so that they tire their listeners, make themselves difficult to understand, and what they have to say dubious.

Though Augustine did not always approve of using rhetorical strategies, early in his faith he denounced it, believing it dishonest, but probably due to his sophist heritage.

[15 : 09] However, on Christian doctrine he makes it clear that at some point he moderated his stance, arguing that defenders of the faith should not be unarmed in the face of falsehood. Though it's important to know that Augustine does not advocate the use of rhetoric unquestionably, he rejects both the sophist approach of speech-making that majors in eloquence, and also rejects the platonic belief that preaching is solely about content.

On the continuum between these two stances, Augustine finds a position that prioritizes content whilst not ignoring style. He yogis for a delivery method that is expository, yet interesting, one that would keep bored congregations awake and persuade them to live a Christ-like life.

Taking this into account, we find in Augustine a very helpful strategy for dealing with the modern tensions surrounding the issue of persuasion and preaching. Augustine's both-and approach is summarized well by homiletician Reznor.

A preacher should do all one can do in interpretation and articulation, but be expectant that God will bring the message he chooses. Whether or not this position is theologically sound, we'll address later on.

By the 4th century, the church had accepted the use of rhetoric in preaching, though this was largely owing to the influence of Augustine. Reznor, a homiletician, notes that the adoption of rhetoric into the church was due to the Christianization of the Roman Empire under Constantine, which baptized many formerly pagan disciplines, bringing them into the Christian family.

[16 : 41] Now, the place of persuasive tactics in preaching would go pretty much unchallenged for the next 1,500 years. And it's not until the 20th century that Karl Barth rethought preaching and passionately attacked the place of rhetoric in Christian proclamation.

But despite this long break in the debates surrounding the place of rhetoric, there's a few little issues in the sort of post-Augustine period, pre-Barth period in the middle, which are worth noting.

So let's note those. Yes, let's note those. So during the Middle Age, the relationship between rhetoric and preaching died out as a subject of interest due to the fact that very few people were studying rhetoric.

Whilst manuals for preaching did appear in large quantities in the 13th century, they mostly advocated sermon forms which were rigid and often thematically tied to the number 3, in an attempt to kind of, like this weird attempt to bring the Trinity into sermons somehow.

In the scholastic period, there was a heightened interest in Aristilian logic. And this had a large influence on theology, but little attention was paid to Aristotle's writing of rhetoric.

[17 : 54] Some sermons in this period were preached in a special type of Latin called Ad Clarem. It was a language reserved for sermons in universities and monasteries, and then a more vernacular style was used in the village.

Very few of these sermons have survived, which is probably good. I think they're a bit useless. I could say more about that, by the way. It was during the Reformation that a minor revival in preaching occurred.

For Luther and Calvin, this was a necessity. It was not the study of rhetoric, but it was a necessity that drove these guys to move away from this rigid form of preaching to a more passionate approach.

Koenig writes this, Luther forged his method and style in preaching in the foundry of struggle out of the fire of opposition. Unlike the scholastic and after-dinner type sermons discussed previously, Luther and Calvin returned to the style of Augustine.

He preached forcibly and plainly. Unfortunately, neither theologian left a systematic study of homiletics. As the Reformation became a bit more institutionalized, there was a return to a more rhetorically ornate sermon.

[19 : 13] In direct response to this, the Puritans advanced a style of preaching of speaking simple truths in a plain manner. An acoustic appraisal of Anglican preachers of the 17th century Puritan writer Richard Baxter describes the messages as this is actually great.

Painted obscure sermons like the painted glass of the windows that keeps light out are too often the works of painted hypocrites.

The paint upon the glass may feed the fancy, but the room is not well lighted by it. The Renaissance was an area of fundamental change in society.

The church no longer had a monopoly on education, so new ideas flowed into the academy. There was a rise in the interest in the writings of Quintilian, Aristotle and Plato. It was during this period that scholars rediscovered the study of rhetoric.

As Protestant persecution in some places in the world rose, so did a more persuasive style of preaching. This was driven by persecution and the desire to win converts. The desire for converts and the rediscovery of rhetoric laid the groundwork for the establishment of the modern academic style of preaching known as homiletics.

[20 : 26] Today, homiletics struggles with its identity due to the fact that theology and rhetoric helped lay the groundwork for its development. So two different disciplines. The identity problem that haunts homiletics today is at the centre of the question that I'm trying to get at.

The identity of the crisis can be summarised as follows. Is homiletics a branch of theology or rhetoric? Can you still with me at all?

Great! Yes, we're doing okay. In its early stages of development, 18th, 19th century, rhetoric's influence on homiletic profoundly increased.

Homiletics was effectively hijacked by what is known as the elocution movement. This movement appeared to be focused exclusively on delivery, voice, and bodily action.

Probably this had something to do with the development of Toastmasters, because those are the three major things of Toastmasters. Now, severed from its place as a discipline rooted in theology, homiletics was relegated to a division of rhetoric.

[21 : 30] So John Broadus, the influential American homiletician, defined homiletics as a branch of rhetoric, or a kindred spirit at least. During the same period, a Presbyterian theologian and pastor, Robert Dabney, wrote a textbook in homiletics called Sacred Rhetoric, the first chapter of which addresses not the Word of God or the Holy Spirit, but eloquence.

Now, the tide slightly turned when Danish philosopher Kierkegaard attempted to bring preaching back under the umbrella of practical theology.

He believed secular theories of persuasion form an inadequate approach to preaching because the goals of rhetoric and preaching are very different. Instead of persuasion, Kierkegaard developed what he called an edifying discourse.

This form of preaching focused on indirect communication. Kierkegaard stressed techniques such as ambiguity, parables, imaginary characters, and dialogues. His interest was in protecting the congregation's ability to make subjective choices, something that he believed persuasive rhetorical strategies threatened.

Though his critics argue that even his indirect strategies are still persuasive, and the difference is in degree only. A Carl Barton, his book Homiletics, provides Christianity with its most vehement rejection of rhetoric.

[22 : 49] Bart's most fundamental understanding of preaching is that, quote, Preaching is the Word of God which he himself has spoken, end of quote. Though God uses human words, he's not bound by them.

Bart says, Take note of what is said, for it's unique. It is the Word of God, and it owes nothing to man's ingenuity. He can only bear witness to it. For Bart, God is the primary actor in the preaching process.

Bart portrays the freedom of preaching as a result of the freedom of God to choose our language at his pleasure and to make it the Word of God. Though I reject this kind of extreme position, Bart did provide homiletics with a much-needed corrective.

Today, the study of rhetoric and homiletics is flourishing, taking up the mantle of Bart. There's a growing chorus of modern voices who also reject using rhetoric and preaching, and see the goal of persuasion as inconsistent with Christian ethics.

One theologian, Lucy Rose, who believes that when the goal of preaching becomes persuasion, it drives a wedge between the speaker and the listener. She defines persuasion as the manipulative force of a powerful individual over an inferior.

[23 : 58] She believes that preachers must never try to convince, inform, explain, or communicate, all synonyms for persuade, because persuasive preaching and leadership styles have been abusive to many in the church, whose experience and convictions have been consistently ignored or dismissed.

Now, there are two flaws here with Rose's argument. Firstly, she works for the assumption that whenever there's a hierarchy, there's domination. Secondly, the assumption that the model of one speaker addressing a silent congregation is any less susceptible to unethical persuasive strategies than replacing sermons with some kind of congregational dialogue.

Given the complex nature of human communication, the simpler model of single preacher and listening congregation lends itself to a more transparent exchange of ideas where persuasion can be far more easily seen and assessed ethically.

Rose's assessment of preaching is not only naive, but could ultimately damage a community. Another voice is that of homiletician and Duke University professor Richard Liska.

Liska forcibly argues against modern preachers taking the cues from rhetoric. He argues the church is to reject the conception of preaching whose purpose, even in an established congregation, is persuasion or conversion.

[25 : 12] Liska advocates a more communal style of preaching. For preaching, he argues, is not one individual speaking out of his or her experience to another individual's experience. Rather, we must be the church speaking to the church, and preaching is our language.

We must discover our distinctive talk about God in the world. Like Bart, it is Liska's high view of preaching that drives him to reject rhetoric as a tool for preaching. Liska says, Now, despite the growing chorus of thinkers who reject rhetoric, they are a minority.

Most of the books reviewed in preparation for this talk here revealed that many, probably most modern homileticians, advocate for persuasion as an appropriate goal for preaching.

Daniel Borman, author of *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching*, notes, Preaching is the communication of a biblical truth by a person to another person with the explicit person of eliciting change.

Borman says, No problem borrowing from a variety of academic disciplines to make preaching more effective. These include rhetoric. Whilst acknowledging the necessity of God's Spirit in preaching, Borman grounds his approach to preaching with the idea that God has chosen to use people to accomplish his purposes.

[26 : 33] For some, Borman's position is a sellout to Ristotelian logic, severing homiletics from theology, and attaching it to rhetoric. It would also seem that Borman does not adequately acknowledge the fallenness of humanity in preaching.

It is true that God uses people, but people may act unethically in serving God, and our desire to persuade may be a symptom of our fallenness. Another homiletician who was content to graft preaching to the rhetorical tree was the Baptist preacher John Broadus.

Though we lived in the 19th century, his ideas on preaching still hold a dominant position in the Southern Baptist Convention. He wrote, The chief part of what we commonly call application is persuasion, and it is not enough to convince men of truth, nor enough to make them see how it applies to themselves, and how it might be practical for them to act.

We must persuade them. Modern homileticians, Craddock and Myers, I really like Craddock, also see no problem using communication theory in writing about preaching.

Both are happy to define persuasion as the goal of preaching, though Myers' position on exactly what persuasion looks like is slightly nuanced. He says that, In actuality, preachers do not persuade a congregation at all.

[27 : 43] They only provide the stimulus with which people persuade themselves. Persuasion, then, is not located in the mouth of the speaker, but in the ear of the hearer. It is the congregation that generates messages for themselves, which Myers believes are far more authoritative than those from an outside source.

To illustrate his position, he helps use the metaphor of music. He says that a sermon is like a preacher singing a song that is either contagious or repulsive. Either the hearers wish to join in, or change the channel.

Clyde Fant, helpfully adds to the debate, by taking a position somewhere between Barth and Bauman. He notes that there is a fundamental problem with thinking about preaching as solely theologically, or solely rhetorically.

Fant says, If we do not acknowledge both frames of reference, then our thinking about preaching is hopefully schizoid. One half of its personality is Hebrew-Christian, the other half, pagan-Greek.

Ultimately, Fant argues that, whilst we must acknowledge rhetoric, preaching the gospel is not a matter of persuasion, rather it is a matter of faithful and fitting presentation. Faithful in terms of historic faith, and fitting in terms of the contemporary situation.

[28 : 52] Retired Professor Craddock, Fred Craddock, believes that rhetoric will always be present in sermons. Taking an extreme pragmatic approach to the question at hand, Craddock does not see the need to place preaching in either camp of rhetoric or theology.

He does not even see it as an issue of prioritizing theology over rhetoric. It is simply an issue of sequence. I think this is very good. Do your theologizing first, and then form this into a communication act that is heard well.

Okay, we are doing good. What time do I have to finish? Whatever? Fantastic. I am sure you are going to finish in very good time. Great. Okay, this brief survey has shown that for most of its history, Christian scholars have done little in the way of critically evaluating rhetoric in its relation to preaching.

Amongst the earliest thinkers, there was a suspicion of Greco-Roman rhetoric, but the church soon integrated it. Through the influence of Augustine, this went unchecked for 1,500 years, mostly, although there were periodic attempts to sort of, from groups like the Puritans, to put rhetoric's place back in its place, though not seriously challenged until the Barth attack of the 20th century.

Yeah. Yeah. Let's keep going. Okay. In this section, what I want to talk about moving towards a Christian form of persuasion.

[30 : 16] During the historical survey I previously outlined, we noted how often Christian scholars criticize rhetoric in rhetorically impressive ways. It seems it's very difficult to avoid being persuasive.

If this is true, then the thesis question of is there a place for persuasion in preaching is actually not the right question. So, the question I asked at the start, it's not the right question.

A better question should be, is it possible to preach and not be persuasive? Now, this is really important.

In rhetorical motives, Burke notes that wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion, and that wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. Burke goes on to note that the essential function of language itself is the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.

According to Burke, people ultimately desire connection whilst physically being disconnected. So, we use symbols to build bridges to overcome separate... This is just communication theory. Consequently, the purpose of persuasion is to bring together that which is a part, and according to Burke, there is implicit in language itself the act of persuasion.

[31 : 33] Therefore, wherever we use words to communicate, inherit in that symbolic act is a desire to persuade or connect. Simply put, wherever there are ideas being vocalized, there is persuasion.

So, Burke makes the case that in preaching, we simply cannot avoid being persuasive. Lucy Hogan, another homiletician, arrives at the same conclusion. She says that to one trained in the 20th century rhetorical theory, advancing the argument that a spoken public discourse should not be persuasive is like suggesting that a group of musical instruments should not make music.

Working on this assumption, we must reject my original question and in favour of a new one. The question moves from is there a place for persuasion in preaching to what is the place of persuasion in preaching?

That's the type of answer I must now give. Let's move on.

Let's move on to let me address ethics, the ethics of persuasion in preaching. If, if we cannot avoid being persuasive, if my first question was the wrong question, if we can't avoid being persuasive, then let's briefly address the ethics of persuasion in preaching there.

[32 : 53] Because that's the real question. What are the ethics around preaching and persuasion? Some have argued against using persuasion in preaching due to historical abuses arising from the power differential between preachers and the congregation.

Though this does not mean that all persuasive preaching is wrong, it simply makes us realise that there is a moral element to the equation and that the preacher should be aware of it. Against the tide of negative connections, connotations associated with persuasion, there are other voices who argue for the positive ethical impact of persuasion.

And Lucy Hogan is helpful here. I find this really interesting. She argues that persuasion and community building are not at odds with each other, as some feminist theologians believe. To the contrary, according to Hogan, persuasion is crucial to the building of a community that is inclusive.

To reject persuasion is not only impossible and wrong, potentially destructive. Let me unpack that a little bit. The idea of persuasion as a crucial part of a community building is also found in the works of Apperelman, and the name is completely unpronounceable, Olbricht Tiktaka.

So I'm going to call him OT, right? As I said, most ridiculous name. Shane Perlman saw persuasion as an argument, saw persuasion argument as essential to our common life together.

- [34 : 07] Perlman was a professor of law who, after the devastation of World War II, saw the need for working in a way for people to reason about their values. Perlman rejected the idea that persuasion is oppressive and manipulative, noting that you are, noting if you're trying to build community, you have the option of force and violence or of speech aimed at securing the adherence of the mind.

By choosing speech over violence, one values and honors the opinion of others, to quote him. Value is attached to gaining the adherence of one's by means of reasoned persuasion, and that one is not regarding him as an object but appealing to his free judgment, recourse to argument assumes the establishment of a community of minds.

This picture of persuasion is about respect and opportunity. The preacher respects his congregation and creates the opportunity of accepting or rejecting a proposal. It is essentially a moderating act, a step towards greater communion of mind and heart.

This is persuasion viewed as an invitation to change that is offered in an atmosphere of freedom and openness. During a sermon, the preacher offers a proposition to the congregation, a proposal for understanding God, the world, or the self, inviting its heroes to envision how they might be enriched if they would embrace the proposition.

In summary, persuasive rhetorical strategies in any type of discourse, whether it is in preaching or political speeches, have been unfairly branded as unethical. Persuasion is not the same as in manipulation, nor should be viewed as an attempt to dominate.

- [35 : 36] In the sermon, persuasion is always present, though manipulation does not have to be. It is paused to review what we're addressing, where we are at addressing our question. Based on the discussion so far, we revised the initial question, which was the concern of this presentation.

The question is no longer, is there a place for persuasion in preaching, but rather, what is the place of persuasion in preaching? It is founded on several premises. Firstly, utilizing rhetorical strategies in preaching has the most historical and contemporary support.

Secondly, according to communication theory, wherever there is ideas, there is persuasion. We simply can't avoid being persuasive. Thirdly, I just reject the idea that persuasion is inherently immoral.

Before moving to address this revised question from a theological perspective, we must first address, first attend to what some would argue as a biblical injunction against using rhetoric.

So, so, so far, so I'm saying you cannot avoid being persuasive in any form of communication. So, you can't say, should sermons be persuasive? They're just, they're going to be persuasive.

- [36 : 43] However, you might say, oh, but doesn't the Bible say don't be persuasive? Doesn't Paul specifically talk about this? So, let's talk about that quickly. 1 Corinthians 2 verses 1 to 5, the Apostle Paul writes, when I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God for I resolved and know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith may not rest on men's wisdom but on God's power.

So, what do we do with that? I mean, he's saying don't be persuasive. Just, it's all about the Holy Spirit. Right, so here we go. This has been interpreted as a blanket rejection of rhetoric and persuasion on Christian proclamation though a closer examination of the text reveals that this could not be what Paul intended us to hear.

Firstly, Paul argues against rhetoric in a rhetorically clever way. Secondly, Paul describes his own style as persuasive in 2 Corinthians 5.

Quote, Since then, we know what is to fear the Lord. We try to persuade men. Coinger takes the argument further by noting how Paul utilizes recognizable forms of, recognizable rhetorical forms in his letters.

[38 : 08] In his book, Elements of Style, Coinger outlines the Apostle Paul's treatise for the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15. He shows how closely it reflects the structure of forensic speech common in Greco-Roman rhetoric, which was a speech of the lawyers in the first century.

And we could unpack that, but just trust me. Coinger believes Paul used this legal style to emphasize the truth of the teaching.

Coinger is not alone in his thinking. He states, another guy says, Paul's famous chapter on the resurrection of the dead is a perfect example of rhetorical argumentation.

And it interweaves judicial and forensic arguments in an essentially deliberate speech. August then was the first to note Paul's fondness for rhetorical devices. It is also clear the word persuade was important to Paul.

The word is translated from the Greek word pitho. Interesting, the word for faith has its root in that word. Pistis finds its root in pitho.

[39 : 14] According to Theia, the literal translation of pitho is to induce one by words to believe. It's often translated to obey. That actually means persuaded to obey.

So when Romans 13, 17 says, obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves, it actually means something more along the lines of allowing yourself to be persuaded to obey those who are in authority over you.

So how do we interpret 1 Corinthians 2 taking into account these issues? The key understanding is the cultural context which Paul was speaking. Paul was trying to differentiate himself from the sophist philosophers who were not interested in truth but rather results.

This is supported by the fact that he translated superior in 1 Corinthians 2.1. The word translated superior contains the idea of excess. So he's saying I don't come to you with these excessive persuasive strategies.

I could say more but I think I'll move on. I think that point's been made. So 1 Corinthians 2 is not an injunction against rhetoric or good style as Paul uses both. This passage is Paul's attempt to put distance between himself and the itinerant philosophers of the day who just sort of peddled ideas for money.

[40 : 33] Now we come back to the revised question. What is the place of persuasion in preaching? A rhetorical framework. And this is almost our last section here. For theologians like Barth the act of preaching is a source of tension which must be resolved.

The tension being corrupt humans how could corrupt humans be the mouthpiece of God? Lissigan notes in a theology of preaching any theology that takes the word of God seriously must reckon with its greatest source of embarrassment.

The word must be spoken and received by sinful human beings. In Barth's case the tension is removed by removing the humanness of the sermon element. In other words preaching is all God and nothing human.

That's what Barth says. Sort of. We have seen that other homiletics fall into the opposite era of saying it's all about persuasion it's all about rhetoric and effectively removing God and both positions are flawed.

Now Long said that there does not have to be an either or as the above. He says preachers cannot avoid rhetorical concerns. There is a scandalous fleshiness to the preaching and while sermons may be pure theology all the way through Saturday night on Sunday morning they are inescapably embodied and thus rhetorical.

- [41 : 43] Without trying to avoid the fleshiness of preaching like Barth does how then should we view the event theologically? Phant offers us a solution to the perceived problem. Phant homiletician for Phant the incarnation provides us with the best model for preaching because it is God's ultimate act of communication.

He says the divine human nature of its concerns are precisely those of preaching. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. Therefore our rhetorical strategies the form of the sermon are methodology and delivery are nothing more nothing less than the word of God taking flesh and dwelling among us.

Long and Phant find support in Lucy Hogan who also uses the incarnation to explain her theology and preaching. In the incarnation God became human and used language. if we deny the full implications of Christ's humanity we fall into docetism.

She notes denial of a full humanity employed as preachers would leave us with a kind of docetic homiletics one in which our humanity is not engaged.

An incarnational theology of preaching sees the human as redeemed and thus empowered to invite others to redemption a redemption only possible through the grace of God. Biblical support of this is found in Paul's writing.

- [42 : 57] He says we are ambassadors for Christ since God is making his appeal through us that's 2 Corinthians 6 through our human reason skill, language we can also therefore assume that God is making his appeal through our knowledge of rhetoric.

Our journey to the central question of this presentation is not finished. If persuasion has a place in preaching and the incarnation is a theologically robust model for the model of preaching then should preachers aim to be as persuasive as possible and here we're coming to the end.

Boundaries for persuasion Lifton reminds us that we should use the work of rhetoricians to make our proclamation more effective but we should not do so unquestionably. This is an issue of ethics.

One of the goals of preaching is clarity. This means preachers should present the message of a text so that the congregation might comprehend its intention using rhetorical strategies to help an audience comprehend and be persuaded of the content of a passage is within the ethical bounds of preaching but when our rhetorical strategies are designed to coerce and manipulate even when the end goal is noble we have moved beyond the ethical bounds of persuasion.

Prattock insightfully notes that the governing consideration in choosing words and phrases is that the goal is not to utter but to evoke to effect a hearing of the text.

- [44 : 18] So whatever rhetorical strategy we might have at our disposal to effect a proper hearing of the text we should use. Having helped people to understand the truth we must not move to try and manipulate them into action.

This is the role of the Holy Spirit. That's poor phrasing but you understand what I'm saying. The task of the preacher is to present the gospel and then allow the listeners to free and intelligent choices as they are impacted by the Holy Spirit.

To understand the ethical bounds of persuasion further we will briefly look at the field of psychology. We will not briefly look at the field of psychology. Yeah, let me just jump straight to the end I think.

Practical implications for preachers. In his book *Hypnotism, Fact or Fiction* Marcuse outlines a case study where through the power of suggestion alone he convinced an atheist to become more religious.

The man started attending church for the first time in his life but they had to stop the program for ethical reasons. Psychologist McConnell writes, the time has come where if you give me a normal human being in a couple of weeks I can turn him into a Christian or a communist or vice versa.

[45 : 31] It is clear, it's interesting they put those things as opposites, right? It is clear that words are very powerful and they can be used in manipulative ways. Preaching pastors have an immense responsibility and with the week to week pressures of preaching it could be easy for their moral compass to shift with regards to the use of rhetoric.

With this in mind I'll finish by offering a few practical words of advice for preachers and ones for you as an audience if you're not a preacher for you to hold preachers accountable too. So here we go. Here is eight very short sentences on practical advice for preachers if you want to hold preachers accountable.

Take into account all I've said so far. So if persuasion is going to be there and if it's all about what the boundaries are what the ethical boundaries are for persuasion here's a crack at it.

What's your motives? It is clear that sometimes scriptures use hyperbole to make a point however we must check our motives when doing the same. Ask yourself am I trying to pop up a weak argument?

Am I obsessed with results? I had a friend of mine who talked about his old preacher who my friend was quite theologically very savvy and he knew whenever this preacher had a weak point the guy would smack the pulpit.

[46 : 46] So he would have a weak point he would smack the pulpit like that. He's just trying to prop it up like he's trying to convince people. Right. Two. Try to be objective and upfront when your position is a radical interpretation.

If I could if this was a a graph and this was no I'll say it differently.

The more radical my interpretation of a scripture the more likely I'm wrong basically. So if I interpret something I'm going this is such a radical interpretation it's so I'll feel so cool preaching this I really have to go is that my heart sort of going just trying to show off or am am I really convinced of this?

Sometimes it's really just I'm just trying to show off. Three. Do not overstate what the text says. If the question is is it ask the question is it true to the word?

Is it true to the whole truth of scripture? Avoid careless interpretations by being hermeneutically sound. Trying to hermeneutically stretch the text to make a major point out of a minor hermeneutical issue is misrepresenting the text.

[47 : 57] I listened to a sermon recently on the burial of Jesus which is a very important text. The guy who is a preacher I normally trusted when listening to spent most of the time talking about the evils of cremation.

I was so surprised by it. Although preaching has been described as truth through personality avoid celebrity type preaching where the people respond to the preacher rather than the word of God.

Five. Do not speak with confidence about something with which you are uninformed. Dick Lucas is my new favorite preacher and I've noticed that I don't think he's a Greek or Hebrew scholar and so I've noticed a few times when he is explaining a meaning of a word in the background he'll say I'm not a Greek or Hebrew scholar but here's what people who know about this stuff tell me.

I think that shows a lot of integrity. Six. Do not seek approval for a policy, program or theological position by linking it in the congregation's minds with emotional values like patriotism to which it has no connection.

I remember hearing an American preacher came to New Zealand who completely misread the country and he was preaching to like a group of like a thousand people it's a big revival thing.

[49 : 23] And he started talking about the Vietnam War and started saying things like my friends didn't die face down in the mud so something something freedom something something America something something yeah let's go for Jesus.

And we were just in America in some places it might have gone down really well. In New Zealand it didn't go down well. Like we didn't know what he was talking about. But even in America it would have been unethical to connect what he was saying to patriotism which had no connection at all.

Seven do not think that salvific ends justify your rhetorical means. You cannot trick somebody into the kingdom. And lastly this is important tell the truth and tell the truth in a truthful way.

Exaggerated or insincere emotions can make the preacher appear foolish. Larson writes and this is my best quote of the whole presentation here.

The unctuous elaboration of the obvious makes no positive contribution. It makes the preacher resemble a hippopotamus chasing after a pea.

[50 : 35] here. Now there is a lot more you could say about the ethical boundaries of persuasion but I'll conclude because my time is well shot of my time here.

In conclusion we end with an answer to the question that served as the beginning point of the paper. The answer is yes. There is a place for persuasion in preaching. All preaching is persuasive because all human discourse is persuasive.

While some may try to minimize the rhetorical elements of preaching they do so at the detriment of the kingdom. God has entrusted his gospel message into the hands of people. This message is embodied it's incarnated in persuasive forms inherent to all language.

Because rhetoric can be used ethically and unethically preachers should not avoid the explicit study of rhetoric but rather strive to understand the dynamics involved in speech communication so that they can seek to be responsible and God honoring in their use of it.

That's me. And I read a lot of books. Just to impress you. So there you go folks. That's the end of the presentation. Let me turn that around.