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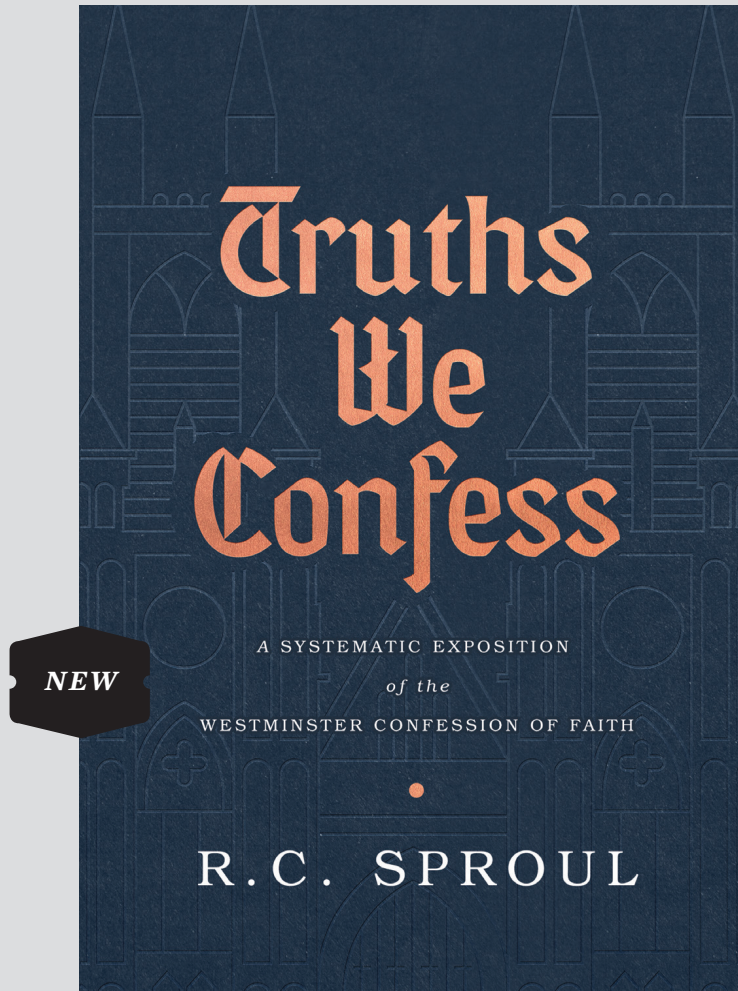
EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF
ONEPASSION MINISTRIES
WINTER 2020
No. 29

How
Expository
Preaching
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Feast or Famine

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES



Several years ago, I wrote a book entitled *Famine in the Land* that addressed the subject of expository preaching. The subtitle of the book says much about its message: *A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*. While writing, I was asked by one of the major seminaries in the United States to write a single article for their theological journal on biblical preaching.

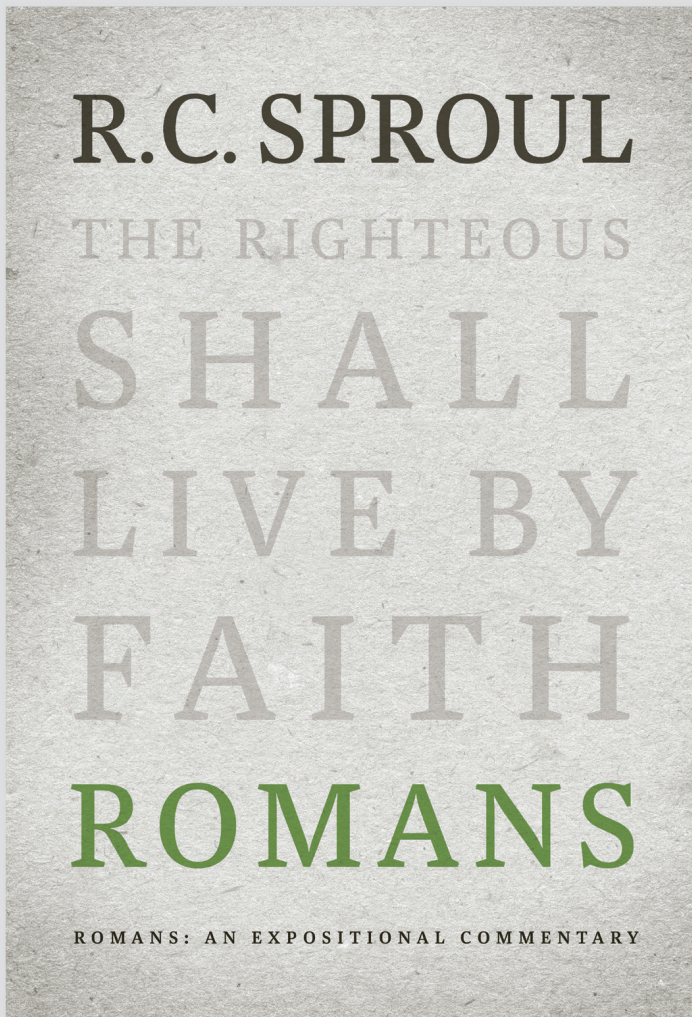
I responded by saying that I would write it, but on one condition, that I could write four articles which would come out quarterly for a year. The editor of the theological journal agreed, and I began to write these articles.

These four articles put their finger upon a live nerve in the body of Christ, as the book that they eventually became has since been translated into many different languages. The fact is, we are living in days in which there is a famine in the land for the hearing of the Word of the Lord. The prophet Amos said it was so in his day, and so it is in ours.

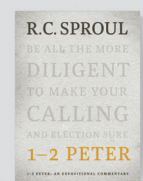
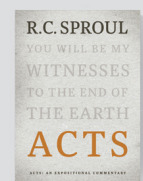
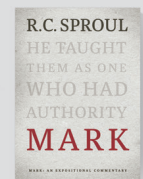
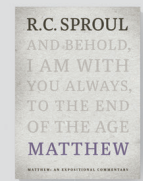
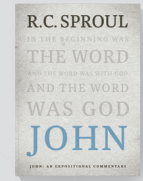
In this issue, we want to address how Jesus Christ uses expository preaching to build His church. A Bible-centered, text-driven pulpit is the key component of the church that

the Lord builds. This is because all her other activities are dependent upon the preaching of the Word. Until the Word is preached, we do not know who or how to worship. Neither do we know how the church is to function nor the saints to serve. It is expository preaching that sets in right motion everything that is good and godly in the life of the church.

It is our desire that this issue will remind you—and convince you if necessary—that expository preaching builds the church that most pleases Christ. We seek to clarify why this is true and how it is relevant for your pastoral ministry. May God use these pages to give you great insight into the inseparable relationship between expository preaching and the spiritual health of the church. ♦



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EXPOSITOR
ONEPASSION



WINTER 2020 ISSUE 29 © 2020 ONEPASSION MINISTRIES EXECUTIVE EDITOR *Steven J. Lawson* EDITOR *Dustin W. Bengt*
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How Expository Preaching Builds the Church

STEVEN J. LAWSON

Whenever a pastor steps into the pulpit, he is under divine mandate to bring the faithful exposition of Scripture. The Apostle Paul charged his young son in the faith, Timothy, to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim 4:1–2). This apostolic command to preach the Word was binding upon Timothy and remains non-negotiable today for all who are called to preach. Every man who stands behind the sacred desk must proclaim the Word if he would be faithful to his calling. This imperative, first issued by Paul to Timothy, echoes through the centuries and remains binding upon all who preach “the Word.”

In light of the timeless nature of this commission, reflecting upon how God uses expository preaching to build His church is highly profitable. Admittedly, such preaching may not grow the biggest church in town. But it is the right path to produce the healthiest church. The chief concern of every preacher should not be the size of his ministry, but the substance of it. His primary focus should not be upon the breadth of his ministry, but its depth. His priority should not be how many sit under his preaching, but the state of the souls of those who do. Simply put, his preoccupation should not be filling the building, but filling the pulpit.

On the last day, Paul writes, “Each man’s work will become evident, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will

test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Cor 3:13). This testing by fire will make known the *quality* of every preacher’s work, not merely the *quantity* of it. In light of this coming day, we want to give careful attention to how expository preaching builds the church that glorifies God.

The following points will help us reaffirm our commitment to biblical exposition in the pulpit. They are useful reminders of what expository preaching does.

1. It Establishes Authority

First, expository preaching reflects the authority of Scripture over the life of the church. A strong commitment to biblical truth in the pulpit anchors the Word of God in the most visible place before the congregation. It elevates the Word as the supreme authority over all the members and ministries of the church. An open Bible in the pulpit possesses the right to rule every person and program. Biblical preaching makes a firm statement that the first and last word in the church is not its tradition, nor the majority vote of the congregation, but lies with God Himself, who speaks through His Word.

It would be an utter contradiction for any preacher to confess his belief in the authority of the Bible, but then fail to exposit it. Such neglect would be an inconsistency of the highest order. Yet so many pastors live out this incongruity in their ministry. If a preacher asserts that when the Bible

EXPOSITORY PREACHING ELEVATES DIVINE WISDOM ABOVE WORLDLY THINKING. IT PROCLAIMS THE MIND OF GOD RATHER THAN THE MIND OF MAN.

speaks, God speaks, then so must he speak. If he affirms his belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture, an expository ministry is binding upon his conscience as the only logical path to follow.

John Calvin rightly understood that the divine authority of Scripture is manifested in expository preaching. As Calvin stated, “We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing of man mixed with it.” The Genevan Reformer believed that when the Bible is preached in the pulpit, God Himself speaks with commanding authority to the church. Consequently, Hughes Oliphant Old explains, “Calvin’s sermons . . . [reveal] a high sense of the authority of Scripture.” So it must be in every pulpit.

T. H. L. Parker, the noted authority on Calvin’s preaching, agrees: “For Calvin, the message of Scripture is sovereign, sovereign over the congregation and sovereign over the preacher.” As a result, the authority of God was demonstrated in Calvin’s preaching with every exposition of Scripture that he brought. In like manner, every Bible preacher today establishes this same authority of Scripture over every aspect of the life of the church.

2. It Exalts God

Further, expository preaching exalts the supremacy of God as the Word is expounded. The chief purpose of the Word of God is to glorify the God of the Word. That being so, true biblical preaching brings supreme glory to God. It proclaims that what God has to say is more important than what the world or any preacher has to say. Expository preaching elevates divine wisdom above worldly thinking. It proclaims the mind of God rather than the mind of man. Biblical preaching exalts

God to His rightful place as sovereign Lord over the church. It mutes the opinions of man and silences the clamoring of society. It turns a deaf ear to the bankruptcy of the culture and instead expounds what God has to say—and nothing more.

The first church was built by preaching the greatness of God. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached what God had powerfully done in Christ. He announced that Jesus was “attested by *God*” through “miracles . . . which *God* performed” (emphasis mine, Acts 2:22). He asserted that Jesus was “delivered over to the cross by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of *God*” (v. 23). Though the leaders of Israel conspired to put Jesus to death, Peter nevertheless declared, “but *God* raised Him up again” (v. 24). As Peter concluded this sermon, he proclaimed, “*God* has made Him both Lord and Christ” (v. 36). Those who respond, he said, will be those whom “*God* will call to Himself” (v. 39). It was this God-exalting preaching that inaugurated the church.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes this point as follows: “What is the chief end of preaching? . . . It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence. Preaching is first of all a proclamation of the being of God. . . . Preaching worthy of the name starts with God and with a declaration concerning His being and glory.” J. I. Packer, while a student in London, sat under the preaching of Lloyd-Jones, and he remembers, “No man ever gave more of a sense of God than he.” So it is that expository preaching should exalt the greatness of God in the church.

3. It Enforces Doctrine

Moreover, expository preaching best teaches the doctrinal truths that are found in Scripture. A Bible-teaching pulpit lays the theological foundation for any church. What a congregation believes must be well established by the pastor who

expounds the Word. This cannot be relegated to anyone else in the church. The preacher must be the primary teacher of sound doctrine in the lives of the believers under his charge.

The Apostle Paul requires that a preacher must devote himself to “teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). This means he must be giving instruction in biblical truth. He must “preach the word” with great “instruction” in “sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:2–3). As he expounds the Word, he must be “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching,” “exhort in sound doctrine,” and “refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). He must “speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). This remains binding upon every preacher today.

Lloyd-Jones asks the question, “What is preaching?” He answers, “It is theology on fire . . . Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.” He then explains, “Preaching must always be theological, always based on a theological foundation. There is no type of preaching that should be non-theological. . . . To me, there is nothing more important in a preacher than that he should have a systematic theology, that he should know it and be well grounded in it.” Every preacher must heed this charge.

4. It Elevates Worship

Additionally, the faithful exposition of Scripture elevates the purity of worship in the church. It should create the majestic atmosphere of a coronation service, in which God is being crowned with the praises of His people. In this sense, the biblical preacher is the primary worship leader in the church. His preaching should renew the mind and strike the heart to evoke praise for God in those who hear him. Their souls

should be lifted up to the heights of heaven under his preaching.

All preachers are to be exaltational expositors. The deeper people are taken in the Word, the higher they will rise in worshiping God. A text-driven pulpit instills within the congregation a holy reverence for God. Profound theology in preaching produces hearts full of passionate doxology. Bible-enriched sermons are to be constantly lifting up His greatness, unveiling His grandeur, and promoting His glory. The adoration of God in the pew is ignited by the exposition of the Word in the pulpit.

John Piper, writing in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, notes:

My burden is to plead for the supremacy of God in preaching—that the dominant note of preaching be the freedom of God’s sovereign grace, the unifying theme be the zeal God has for His own glory, the grand object of preaching be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God, and the pervasive atmosphere be the holiness of God.

These words should describe our preaching. After a pastor has delivered his sermon, he often stands at the front door of the church and greets those who attended the worship service. The greatest compliment he will ever receive is not, “Pastor, that was a great sermon.” Nor is it, “You are a great preacher.” The highest commendation he will ever hear is, “Pastor, what a great God we have. Ever since you came to be our pastor, God is growing larger and larger in my mind.” This is how expository preaching purifies worship in the church. It should continually unveil the infinite glory of God before the eyes of



the listeners. May it be so in your pastoral ministry.

5. It Edifies Believers

Moreover, expository preaching should play the leading role in conforming the individual members of the local church into the image of Jesus Christ. It is often said that “like produces like.” If that is the case, then only a holy instrument—the holy Bible—can produce a holy believer. Preaching the Word brings the sanctifying power of Scripture to bear upon the lives of the congregation in what the Puritans called “the primary ordinary means of grace.” That is, the pulpit is to be the chief influence to effect personal holiness.

The psalmist recognizes the purifying power of the Word when he asks the question, “How shall a young man keep his way pure?” (Psalm 119:9). For that matter, “How can a young woman remain morally clean? Or how can an elderly man or middle-aged woman keep their way right?” The answer is given, “By keeping it according to Your word. . . . Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (v. 11). These verses testify to the efficacy of the Word of God to sanctify believers. The ministry of the Word confronts sin, convicts hearts, and, as “a lamp to our feet” (Ps 119:105), leads believers down the narrow path of personal holiness.


Spiritual growth is primarily produced by the Word of God. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus intercedes for His disciples, “Sanctify them by Your word; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). This acknowledges that the written Word of

God is the foremost instrument to produce personal holiness in followers of Christ. The apostle Peter writes, “This is the word which was preached to you. . . . Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Pet 1:24–25; 2:2). The preaching of the Word matures believers into Christlikeness.

James Montgomery Boice writes of the powerful effect of Calvin’s expository pulpit upon the lives of the people: “Calvin preached from the Bible every day, and under the power of that preaching the city began to be transformed. As the people of Geneva acquired knowledge of God’s word and were challenged by it, the city became, as John Knox called it later, ‘a New Jerusalem’ from which the gospel spread to the rest of Europe, England, and the New World.” Likewise, in our day, the powerful effect of preaching the Word remains desperately needed to transform believers into greater godliness.

6. It Equips Saints

What is more, the preaching of the Word equips the saints for the work of ministry. This undoubtedly makes the church stronger. An expository pulpit prepares the entire congregation to serve God in whatever capacity they are called to serve. God’s design for the church is not that the preacher be responsible to do all the work. Rather, biblical preaching trains the entire church membership to be actively involved in carrying out the diverse tasks of ministry.



A BIBLICAL PULPIT DEMONSTRATES HOW THE LISTENERS CAN COUNSEL OTHERS IN DISCERNING GOD’S WILL AND PURSUING IT. IT TRAINS CHRISTIANS HOW TO COMFORT OTHERS AS THEY FIND THEMSELVES AMID THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE.



The Apostle Paul explains how this distribution of labor to the church is able to take place: “He gave . . . some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service” (Eph 4:11–12). “Equip” (*katartismos*) conveys the idea of preparing believers in their service to the Lord. The preaching and teaching of the Word is to prepare them for whatever God has assigned them to do. Paul later states the same while writing to Timothy: “All Scripture . . . is profitable . . . that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17). Here, the apostle teaches the sufficiency of the Word to equip God’s servants to fulfill their ministry.

Preaching the Word also equips believers to live the Christian life. It teaches them how to pray, whether for themselves, for others, and/or for God’s work. It shows believers how to walk by faith in their daily lives. A biblical pulpit demonstrates how the listeners can counsel others in discerning God’s will and pursuing it. It trains Christians how to comfort others as they find themselves amid the difficulties of life. It instructs people how to witness to unbelievers, as well as how to defend the faith. It prepares them to give an account for the hope that lies within them (1 Pet 3:15). Nothing should be more practical for daily living than biblical preaching.

In his pastorate at Grace Community Church, John MacArthur has had such an effect upon the lives of his congregation. His preaching has equipped them to be an army of servants engaged in the work of the Lord. In the early years of his ministry, the Christian magazine *Moody Monthly* ran a feature story on the impact of MacArthur’s preaching on the con-

gregation at Grace. The title of the article was “The Church with 1,000 Ministers.” Such was the impact of MacArthur’s expository preaching. This headline succinctly captured the way the church members had been equipped, through biblical preaching, to serve one another.

7. It Exemplifies Study

In addition, an expository pulpit demonstrates for the congregation how to study and interpret the Bible. Preaching the Word exemplifies how to rightly handle the Scripture. By his weekly pulpit ministry, the pastor models for his flock how to properly determine the true meaning of a text of Scripture. Likewise, he demonstrates through his preaching how the passage is to be rightly applied to daily life.

As he stands before an open Bible, the expositor shows the necessity of addressing the greater and immediate context of any passage of Scripture. In his preaching, he shows the importance of considering the historical background of the passage that helps to unlock its proper meaning. In his sermon, he shows the value of word studies, verb tenses, basic grammar, and cross references in Scripture. He points out the necessity of considering its cultural and geographical setting.

But tragically, wherever the preacher plays fast and loose with the Scripture, the congregation will follow suit, adopting the same practice at home in their own personal devotions. The prophet Hosea says, “Like people, like priest” (Hos 4:9). In other words, people will become like their spiritual leaders. The Apostle Paul invites this emulation of his example when he writes, “I exhort you, be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1;

Phil 3:7; 4:9). Jesus confirms the same, “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). This is a principle of life-on-life discipleship.

However the Bible is handled in the pulpit, it will be similarly treated by congregants in their personal devotional lives. In my own personal life, I learned much about rightly handling the Word by listening to excellent expositors dig into the Scripture and give its true meaning. All who preach the Scripture should feel the heavy weight of responsibility to show their flock how to properly interpret the text.

8. It Enlarges Faith

Expository preaching also enlarges the faith of those in the church. Paul writes, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). This is true not only in personal conversion, but also in the daily sanctification that follows. The Word preached is used by God to deepen a living faith in God among those who hear its truth proclaimed. The more the preacher immerses his congregation in the Word, the deeper they will be grounded in their faith. The preaching of “the faith” (Jude 3) strengthens their personal faith in God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul affirms this when he gives his farewell address to the elders in Ephesus. He concludes this discourse: “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:32). The word “build” (*oikodomeō*) is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe someone building a house. In like manner, the Word of God is able to build up and make strong those who sit under its exposition. As the Scripture is preached by “evangelists . . . pastors and teachers,” the Word is abundantly able to nurture believers into “a mature man” so that they “grow up into all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:11, 13, 15).

This strength of faith was seen in the sixteenth century during the reign of Queen Mary I (1553–1558). It was under strong biblical preaching that the Protestant believers were established in their faith as they would suffer greatly, even unto martyrdom. Approximately 288 brave-hearted believers were burned at the stake by the tyrannical Queen Mary

I, who sat upon the throne of England. These followers of Christ, mostly laymen, including women and children, possessed an unbending trust in the sovereign purposes of God.

Where did they find such strength of conviction? William Tyndale had earlier translated the Bible into English from the original biblical languages. This work immediately found its way into the English translations of *Tyndale Bible* (1526, 1533, 1534), *Coverdale Bible* (1535), and *Matthews Bible* (1537). The newly translated Scripture was soon chained to every pulpit in England in the *Great Bible* (1539). With this Bible fastened to every pulpit in England, it was faithfully preached in the days prior to Mary’s reign of terror. The faith of the saints was made strong by its exposition, so much so that they were willing to be burned at the stake for its truth. These brave martyrs were undoubtedly strengthened by a deep knowledge of Scripture. This must, once again, be equally true today.

9. It Enhances Unity

Further, an expository pulpit is the chief means to galvanize spiritual unity in any local church. Authentic unity begins with a congregation hearing and believing the same biblical truth. Genuine oneness in the Spirit is forged on the anvil of jointly held convictions in sound doctrine. No church can be united if it is divided in its fundamental beliefs about what the Bible teaches. The preaching of the Word is the greatest unifying force for any local body of believers.

The Apostle Paul explains, “He gave . . . some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers . . . until we all attain to the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:11, 13). In this passage, “the faith” refers to the objective truth taught in the Old Testament, by Jesus Christ Himself, and by the apostles. “The faith” equates to “that form of teaching” (Rom 6:17) known as “the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). Paul later identified it as “the standard of sound words” or “the word of truth” in “the sacred writings” of “Scripture” (2 Tim 1:13; 2:15; 3:15–16). Any small group Bible study can only create unity for a small segment of the church, maybe among ten to thirty people. But an expository pulpit builds and preserves unity for the entire congregation as it is assembled together to worship.

At the deepest level, spiritual unity is not found in a group

UNDER THE PREACHING OF THE WORD, THERE SHOULD BE AN ENDLESS SUCCESSION OF FUTURE PREACHERS BEING RAISED UP TO DO LIKEWISE.

of believers who are from the same socio-economic level. Neither is this oneness generated by a gathering of people from the same ethnic group. Nor is it found because individuals simply live in the same neighborhood. Instead, true unity is established when a congregation holds together the same biblical truths that are taught in the Word of God. This common commitment is bolstered as they sit under the strong exposition of the Word. As a result, they possess unwavering convictions in the truth found in the Word of God.

This kind of spiritual oneness occurred in Northampton, Massachusetts, under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards during the Great Awakening. As the Word was expounded by this gifted preacher, a spiritual unity took place that swept throughout the Connecticut River Valley. This season of revival was initiated by Edwards's biblical preaching, and he later noted it was evidenced in a sweet bonding together in the Lord. As a result, believers were drawn closer to one another in mutual love and devotion. We should expect no less in our ministries as the Word goes forth from the pulpit.

10. It Equips Teachers

Beyond this, expository preaching attracts gifted laymen who can teach the Word with the same biblical convictions. Such well-taught laymen strongly desire to sit under sound Bible teaching. They know too much to be satisfied with unsound teaching in their present church. The superficial handling of the Word will never satisfy them. They will actively search for a church with a preaching ministry in which the Word is rightly handled with precision and depth. As already stated, like attracts like, and so it will be on a spiritual level in the local church. Laymen grounded in the Word will be drawn to pulpits that accurately expound the Scripture.

Solomon observes this reality when he says, "As iron

sharpens iron, so one man another" (Prov 27:17). A Bible teacher who possesses a keen mind for sound doctrine will want to be sharpened by a biblical ministry where the truth is rightly handled. Consequently, a bold expository pulpit possesses a strong magnetic pull that draws other strong teachers to sit under its preaching, thus strengthening the church.

In my own pastoral ministry, I have witnessed this reality firsthand. As I have preached the Word, striving for exegetical accuracy and theological depth, I have seen lay teachers leave their churches, where the Word is being neglected, to sit under my expositional preaching. These leaders know they must be taught from the pulpit if they are to teach others in a classroom or small group setting. Wherever the Word is preached, other teachers will come to sit under it, even if they have to travel a long distance to do so.

11. It Educates Leaders

Likewise, expository preaching helps train future preachers for the church as it teaches sound doctrine and biblical theology. Such knowledge of the truth is necessary for men to serve as elders and teachers. This doctrinal grasp is critical for shepherding the flock. Preaching the Word gives these other leaders a strategic grasp of Scripture. It trains them in discipling members in the church. As the pastor teaches the church, leaders are raised up who disciple others. From the pulpit, there should be an informal theological education being given by the pastor to other leaders in the church.

This is absolutely necessary, because the only ministry skill listed in Scripture for an elder is that he be "apt to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). The other requirements address his personal character qualities. If he is to be able to teach, he must first be taught. Elsewhere, Paul asserts that elders must be "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 who contradict” (1:9). The lead pastor, who is to be the primary expounder of the Word, must be continually training lay leaders to be sound in the faith, who can, in turn, teach others.

In my last pastorate, men with eager hearts to know the truth were being raised up from within the congregation to serve as elders. Their preparation for spiritual leadership in the church was deeply informed by my preaching and teaching of the Word. Week by week, I taught the Scripture on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings. In addition, I weekly taught Sunday School and Friday morning discipleship groups. Through these five ministry avenues, I saw strong men being deepened in the Bible and better prepared to serve as elders and teachers in the church.

12. It Enrolls Preachers

Even more, expository preaching attracts and raises up young men who are being called into the preaching ministry. A fire in the pulpit soon ignites the souls of young men in the pew. Strong Bible-preaching pulpits cultivate fertile ground where young preachers are being drawn into gospel ministry. Young men most often discern their call to preaching when they are sitting under dynamic preaching. As the Word is expounded, Elijahs will be passing their proverbial mantle to a new generation of Elishas. This passing of the gospel baton best takes place under the strong preaching of the Word. Expositors produce expositors. This is one significant mark of a spiritually healthy church.

The Apostle Paul states, “The things which you [Timothy] have heard from me [Paul] in the presence of many witnesses,


entrust these to faithful men [under Timothy] who will be able to teach others [under Timothy’s disciples] also” (2 Tim 2:2). In this verse, Paul charges Timothy to entrust the truth he has received to the next generation of preachers, who will be able to do the same with other men. Thus this should continue to this present hour. Under the preaching of the Word, there should be an endless succession of future preachers being raised up to do likewise.

Such an attraction occurred in the nineteenth century under the preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Though he was only twenty-three years old at the time, his expositions were so powerful that many young men were drawn to the fire that was burning in the pulpit. As a result, he founded the Pastors’ College in London, England, in 1856. It would not be long before waves of young preachers were sent out from this school. This is the strong effect of biblical preaching upon those who are being called into gospel ministry.


This was the case in my own life. As a young man, I sat under the biblical preaching of Adrian Rogers, the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. As I observed his bold pulpit delivery, he became to me a visible example of what God was calling me to do with my life. As he expounded the Scripture, I was being raised up by God to do the same. To this day, I bear the influence of his spiritually explosive expositions. This same effect will be true of others’ strong biblical preaching. It will be a catalyst to raise up young preachers.

13. It Extends Pastorates

What is more, expository preaching best produces long pastorates that extend over a lengthy period of time. When a pastor commits to biblical preaching through entire books



THOSE WHO SIT UNDER WEAK AND ANEMIC PREACHING ARE EMACIATED BECAUSE OF THEIR LACK OF BEING FED THE GREAT DOCTRINES OF SALVATION.



BIBLE-PREACHING CHURCHES ARE MARKED BY AN EXUBERANT SPIRIT, BECAUSE THEY ARE IMMERSSED IN THE WORD OF GOD. GENUINE JOY IS THE RESULT OF KNOWING, BELIEVING, AND OBEYING THE TRUTH. SIMPLY PUT, THE MINISTRY OF BIBLICAL PREACHING ENLARGES THIS EXPERIENCE OF JOY.

in the Bible, he never lacks for new material to address the congregation. There is always the next book in the Bible to be expounded. The faithful expositor has sixty-six divinely inspired books to expound. Many of these are lengthy books. If he will preach verse by verse through whole books in the Bible, he can preach in a pulpit until Jesus comes back and never exhaust his material.

Some pastors are perpetually moving from one church to the next. For some, I think it is because they have exhausted everything they have to say in a short period of time. Because they do not expound entire books in the Bible, they draw sermon material from a shallow well. Such preachers are fishing for what to speak on in a small pond. Consequently, they have but a limited repertoire from which to draw as they pastor any church. But this is never so with dedicated Bible expositors.

For over fifty years, W. A. Criswell pastored the renowned First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. Early in his ministry, he announced to his congregation that he would preach through the entire Bible. Cries went up that he would kill the church. But rather than this being the church's death sentence, Criswell's biblical preaching revived its spiritual life. Under his expository pulpit, the church grew exponentially until it became the largest Protestant church in the world. Members were sometimes asked, "When did you join the church?" Rather than answer with the month and year, the standard answer became, "We joined in the Gos-

pel of Matthew." Others would say, "We became members in Isaiah."

In my first church, I had a similar experience. During my fourteen-year pastorate, I expounded the Scripture, verse by verse, through entire books in the Bible. On my last Sunday as pastor of the church, I began my farewell sermon by saying, "Take your Bible and turn with me to the Table of Contents." I then walked the congregation through each Bible book we had studied together. By preaching through books of the Bible, an expositor will have many years of pastoral ministry laid out for him.

14. It Enriches Pastors

Nothing will deepen the spiritual life of the pastor like his personal discipline in preaching the Word of God. In his preparation for the pulpit, he is required to immerse himself in the Scripture. No dynamic personality, no gift of gab, no storytelling ability can make up for a lack of study. Biblical preaching necessitates that the preacher must carefully study the biblical text on a weekly, often daily, basis. Such a commitment deepens his knowledge of the Bible. In this process, it enriches and deepens his spiritual life.

Such study in preparation to preach keeps the pastor saturated with the Word. As he masters the Word of God, the Word of God masters him. This ongoing regiment renews his mind, reignites his heart, and reroutes his will. This constant exposure to the Bible forces him deeper into the text of

THE MAN WHO PREACHES EXPOSITIONALLY REALIZES A THEOLOGICAL BALANCE THAT IS EMBEDDED INTO EVERY BOOK IN THE BIBLE.

Scripture. This pulpit commitment drives him into more and more passages of the Word. It causes him to address those verses that are hard to interpret and understand. It forces him to wrestle with their meaning. Moreover, the hard sayings of Christ place great demands upon his own spiritual life. This rigorous discipline sharpens his own interpretive skills as an exegete and expositor. Moreover, it deeply implants the Word in his soul.

Martin Luther, the German Reformer and great preacher, challenged the preachers of his day to diligently study: “Let ministers daily pursue their studies with diligence and constantly busy themselves with them. . . . Let them steadily keep on reading, teaching, studying, pondering, and meditating. Nor let them cease until they have discovered and are sure that they have taught the devil to death.” Such study was the underlying foundation of Luther’s preaching ministry. It should be the mark of every pastor’s ministry.

15. It Encourages Assurance

Strong Bible exposition is used to bring believers a firmer assurance of their salvation as they hear its truths proclaimed. Through the preaching of the Word, gospel truths are made crystal clear to the congregation. The core doctrines of repentance, saving faith, regeneration, and the lordship of Christ have been delineated for them by the Spirit-empowered preaching of the Word. The necessary evidences of a dramatically changed life have been clearly taught to them. For the most part, those who are truly converted and know biblical truth are those who are assured that they are saved.

Conversely, though, those who sit under weak and anemic preaching are emaciated because of their lack of being fed the great doctrines of salvation. These truth-starved saints are those who, most often, lack the assurance of their salvation. They do not know enough Bible truth to be well grounded in their faith. The apostle John writes, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that

you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). This is to say, an understanding of the written Word of God is critical for any believer to know he has eternal life. The message of 1 John is that believers will have the assurance of salvation as they see the evidences of the new birth in their transformed lives. These distinguishing marks of regeneration should be clearly enumerated in the pulpit.

During the eighteenth century, the great English evangelist George Whitefield led the Great Awakening in the early Colonies on this side of the Atlantic. He regularly preached to many thousands of people in Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and elsewhere. Many hearts were struck with the Word of God, and souls were converted. After his preaching, Whitefield never gave anyone the assurance of their salvation. He did not need to do so. The gospel truths had been presented in clarity, and he left the results with God. The Holy Spirit alone can bring the assurance of saving grace to those who are born again.

16. It Excites Joy

Also, expository preaching produces a church that is marked by supernatural joy that only God can produce. Sitting under the ministry of the Word produces hearts that know authentic gladness in the Lord. Bible-preaching churches are marked by an exuberant spirit, because they are immersed in the Word of God. Genuine joy is the result of knowing, believing, and obeying the truth. Simply put, the ministry of biblical preaching enlarges this experience of joy.

The psalmist announces the inseparable connection between the Word of God and true happiness. “How blessed is the man” whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps 1:1–2). This passage recognizes that the source of “delight” is found in the Scripture. Again the psalmist writes, “How blessed are those . . . who walk in the law of the Lord. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies” (Ps 119:2). Once more he states, “I

have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies” (v. 14). Again, “Your testimonies . . . are the joy of my heart (v. 111). “I rejoice at Your word” (v. 162). The more one hears the truth preached, the greater is his or her rejoicing in the Lord.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ expounds the Law of Moses with heart-searching power. In this discourse—arguably the greatest sermon ever preached—He gave the true interpretation of the moral Law of God. As Jesus begins this exposition, He announces that those who belong to the kingdom of heaven are “blessed” (Matt 5:3–12). “Blessed” (*makarias*) means to be graced and favored by God, the opposite of being cursed by Him. It also conveys the deep state of genuine happiness within the soul that only God can give. It refers to soul-satisfying bliss granted to those who are poor in spirit, mourn, are meek, and yearn for righteousness. This expository sermon by Jesus promised joy to those who would receive its message.

In the Upper Room discourse, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11). The words that Jesus spoke promised to bring joy to His disciples’ troubled hearts at the announcement of His soon departure. In fact, His words offered the same joy that Jesus Himself experienced within His own soul. After Christ’s ascension, these disciples were “preaching the word,” which resulted in “much rejoicing in that city” (Acts 8:4, 8). This divinely given joy was produced by the proclamation of the Word. Later, when the Gentiles heard “the word of the Lord,” it produced “rejoicing” (Acts 13:48). When the Word is preached and applied to the heart, it produces an overflowing gladness of heart.


Jonathan Edwards described the joy that swept over his congregation as they sat under the influence of his biblical preaching. He noted that the singing of psalms could be heard throughout the city, resulting from the impact of the truth being taught and applied to their lives. The same remains true in this day. Such joy floods receptive hearts when they sit under the preaching of the Word.

17. It Ensures Balance

Yet further, the man who preaches expositionally realizes a theological balance that is embedded into every book in the Bible. There is a perfect symmetry written into Scripture, a proportioned emphasis upon both doctrine and duty. A perfect equilibrium exists in the Word between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, between law and gospel. Scripture strikes the right balance between divine justice and divine mercy, between heart conviction and soul comfort, between time and eternity. As we preach verse by verse through books in the Bible, it levels the field between knowing and doing in the Christian life.

Expounding the Scripture verse by verse prevents the preacher from overemphasizing one doctrine to the neglect of others. It guards him from incessantly riding his theological hobbyhorse. It prohibits him from repeatedly over-stressing his favorite truths at the expense of others. Instead, it causes him to be always moving on to the next verses and other doctrines. Every church needs to be fed this balanced diet from the pulpit. Expository preaching sequentially through whole books in the Bible will best ensure that the full counsel of God is taught to the congregation.

Consider the example of expository preaching from the Genevan Reformer John Calvin. He preached on a New Testament book on Sunday mornings and afternoons (although for a period on the Psalms in the afternoon). He preached through an Old Testament book on weekday mornings, Monday through Friday, every other week. These verse-by-verse, consecutive expositions included preaching through the entirety of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Job, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, much of Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea through Malachi in the Minor Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. This kind of widespread, diverse exposition produces balance in a congregation’s spiritual life.



**THE MAN WHO PREACHES EXPOSITIONALLY
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A BIBLICAL PULPIT TEACHES THE VARIOUS DOCTRINAL TRUTHS CONTAINED IN THE GOSPEL, WHICH, IN TURN, GIVES THE CONGREGATION CONFIDENCE TO WITNESS TO UNBELIEVERS.

18. It Educates Ministry

In like manner, biblical preaching instructs people in the divine blueprint for the church. An expository pulpit brings a clear understanding of the nature and mission of the body of Christ. This kind of preaching addresses the important distinctives that distinguish God's chosen bride. It defines such matters as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church discipline. It makes known the qualifications and ministries of elders and deacons. It shows how the body of Christ is to function in the exercise of spiritual gifts. It outlines the marks of true fellowship and discipleship. In this regard, biblical preaching allows the Scripture to regulate how a church functions.

This is what we find in the preaching of Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself taught on baptism (Matt 28:19), the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:26–29), and church discipline (Matt 18:15–18). He gave instruction on discipleship in the church (Matt 16:18–24). Though Jesus never addressed the offices of elder and deacon in the church, He nevertheless distinguished between true spiritual leaders (Matt 20:20–28) and false shepherds (Matt 23:1–33). Jesus further preached on prayer (Matt 6:5–15) and forgiving others in fellowshiping with them (Matt 6:12, 14–15).

In the Reformation, there came a renewed commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture to direct the church. This return led to what became known as the regulative principle. Calvin took the lead in this return to *sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone—to regulate the worship of the church. He removed from the church service any element not explicitly mentioned in the Bible or reasonably implied. The sermon was restored to its rightful place of centrality in the gathered church. He also reintroduced the practice of fencing the Lord's Supper and implemented church discipline. This brought a true reformation to the life of the church.

19. It Eliminates Mediocrity

Advancing further, expository preaching disrupts the status quo in any church. In a spiritually healthy way, it creates controversy as it brings the full counsel of God to bear upon the beliefs and ministries of the church. Preaching through books in the Bible guarantees that the whole purpose of God is being taught to the leaders and congregation. Doctrinal land mines that would otherwise be avoided become inescapable. The hard sayings in Scripture are addressed. Every sin is exposed. Every warning is issued. Subjects that the preacher might otherwise shy away from are directly confronted. This exposure to the full breadth of truth inevitably generates controversy. This turmoil causes everyone to re-examine the Scripture to see if what is preached is true.

This was certainly the case with the Apostle Paul as he expounded biblical truth. He was an extremely provocative preacher as he taught the Word. Wherever he traveled, he proclaimed the Scripture and “upset the world” (Acts 17:6). His preaching produced a catalytic effect that always shook up the religious establishment. This caused a new searching of the Bible “to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

John Broadus, distinguished professor of homiletics in the nineteenth century, gave a series of lectures on the history of preaching in which he noted four marks of the preaching during the Reformation. One of these features was that the Reformers' preaching created an inevitable controversy in the church, one that upset the world. Broadus writes, “Religious controversy is inevitable where living faith in definite truth is dwelling side by side with ruinous error and practical evils. Controversial preaching, properly managed, is full of interest and full of power.” This kind of a positive disruptive effect is still needed in every church today and comes as a result of expository preaching.

20. It Enlivens Hearts

Still more, expository preaching is used by God to usher in seasons of revival in the church. Scriptural truth comes like a blazing torch set to dry wood, reigniting hearts with renewed passion for God. The Word runs swiftly from the pulpit to the pew, spreading like a prairie fire. Under the Spirit-empowered preaching of the Word, believers are reawakened from their spiritual sluggishness and rekindled in their passion for God.

The psalmist acknowledges this in his own life, “Revive me according to Your word” (Ps 119:25). This word “revive” (*haya*) means “to be quickened, to have life, to recapture health, to live.” This is the enlivening effect of the Word of God. The psalmist continues, “I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have revived me” (Ps 119:93). Again, he writes, “Revive me, O Lord, according to Your word” (Ps 119:107). Under the preaching of the Word, complacent hearts are aroused, and sluggish hearts are restored to full vibrancy for God. Further, discouraged hearts are revived with new hope and replenished trust in God.

One of the greatest revivals in the Old Testament occurred in Jerusalem at the Water Gate. After the wall was rebuilt, the people called for the neglected Law to be read by Ezra. Not only did he read it; Ezra also explained it to the over 40,000 gathered people (Neh 8:1–8). There is a direct cause and effect to be traced here. The public ministry of the Word was what sparked the resulting revival in the hearts of the congregation. It was the Law read, explained, and applied that brought the conviction of sin and joy in the Lord. To different degrees, this is what should be expected to accompany an exposition of the Scripture.

Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened up the meaning of the Scripture as it pointed to Himself: “Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). “Explained” (*diermēneuō*) means “to expound, interpret.” Their response to His exposition was, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

(v. 32). The word used for “explaining” (*dianoigō*) means “to open up.” The idea is to reveal the meaning of Scripture, to make plain what was previously hidden or obscure. Jesus’ teaching caused their hearts to be “burning” (*kaiō*), indicating “to be kindled by fire.” His explanations caused their renewed, fiery passion for God.

Church history certainly evidences this to be true. The preaching of the Word causes hearts to be enflamed with intense love for God. Throughout the centuries, the greatest revivals have been ignited by a new era of biblical preaching. The Reformation was sparked by the blazing preaching of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and many others. The Puritan era stoked the embers with the preaching of John Owen, John Bunyan, Matthew Henry, and countless others. The same can be said of the Great Awakening and the fiery preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. The result of their strong biblical preaching was a time of explosive revival, which is greatly needed in our own day.

21. It Emboldens Evangelism

Expository preaching emboldens people with the gospel, compelling them to share this saving message with a lost and perishing world. A biblical pulpit teaches the various doctrinal truths contained in the gospel, which, in turn, gives the congregation confidence to witness to unbelievers. To be well taught in the grand truths of our “so great a salvation” (Heb 2:3) energizes believers in their witness to those without Christ. They are better prepared in knowing what to say in presenting the gospel. In addition, they know how to defend biblical truths when counter arguments are brought against them. By being carefully instructed from the pulpit in the essential doctrines of salvation, the congregation has also been taught to call people to commit their lives to Christ once the gospel has been presented.

When Jesus called His disciples, He summoned them, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). In that decisive moment, they left behind their nets and stepped out to follow Him. They came under the powerful



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influence of His preaching ministry. This full exposure to the truth then propelled them into the world to share the gospel. So must it continue to be today. As believers sit under the strong preaching of the Word of Christ, it launches them into the highways and byways to be His steadfast witnesses. The exposition of Scripture puts a fire in the bones of the congregation, who, in turn, will bring their testimony of the gospel to the lost. Biblical preaching ignites bold witnessing. Deep convictions in the truth produce strong compulsions to share it with others who need to receive it.

This is precisely what occurred under the preaching of Charles Spurgeon. As this “Prince of Preachers” powerfully expounded the Word, the members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle were burdened to share the gospel message with the people of London. Large numbers took to the streets and spread the saving truth of Jesus Christ crucified. They distributed gospel tracts and copies of Spurgeon’s sermons far and wide. As they sought to win people to faith in Christ, they spoke to people in their neighborhoods and at work. They became the embodiment of Spurgeon’s famous book, *The Soulwinner*.

22. It Exposes Tares

Further, expository preaching exposes unconverted hearts,

which, according to God’s sovereign will, makes known the lost condition of many. The ministry of the Word shines sin-exposing light into their darkened souls. Those without a saving knowledge of Christ are most often exposed under the heart-searching preaching of the Word. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scripture (Heb 3:7), as the same Scripture is preached, now convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11). The revealing of sin often makes known to unbelievers their own self-deceived hearts.

This is what took place in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus expounded the moral Law of God (Matt 5:21–48) in order to unmask the religious crowd that professed to know God. Their hearts were far from Him, as the Pharisees and scribes had externalized religion. They had completely bypassed any heart reality. So Jesus cut to the chase and preached to the spiritually bankrupt condition of their souls. At the climax of this sermon, Jesus said:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who

practice lawlessness.” (Matt 7:21–23)

By this sermon, Jesus exposed the apostasy of the false religion of Israel. His exposition of the Law revealed the unconverted state of those who heard Him and called them to saving faith. This was necessary because no one can ever be saved until they know they are lost.

This is exactly what occurred during the eighteenth century in the Great Awakening. The Great Ejection had occurred earlier on August 24, 1662, when two thousand Bible-preaching Puritan pastors were put out of their pulpits. Consequently, the Church in England, as well as churches in the American Colonies, had devolved into sterile religion devoid of spiritual life. Countless numbers of church members were religious, but lost. Even many of the clergy were unconverted. Then the noted evangelist George Whitefield came onto the scene and preached the necessity of the new birth. He addressed the unconverted state of self-righteous church members, and the lost condition of vast multitudes were exposed. Like the great preachers of old, this kind of sin-exposing exposition remains critically important in this day.

23. It Evangelizes Sinners

Finally, expository preaching is a powerful evangelistic force in winning souls to Jesus Christ. As the gospel is proclaimed, it brings the power of God to convert unsaved hearts. Jesus launched His public ministry by proclaiming, “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). As a result, this preaching led to the salvation of souls. Jesus compared the gospel to a small seed (Luke 8:11). When sown into the soil of receptive hearts, this divine Word will produce an abundant harvest. This seed contains the germ of spiritual life. When preached, God, according to His sovereign purpose, will command it to germinate in barren souls. From expository pulpits, the gospel is sown into spiritually parched souls, resulting in the salvation of many.

Paul writes, “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!’” (Rom 10:14–15). This tells us a solemn truth—none will be saved until the gospel is preached to them. The apostle adds, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). This indicates that the chief means by which God intends for people to exercise saving faith is a response to hearing preaching about Jesus Christ. God has primarily designed the gospel to be heard and received through preaching.

When Paul instructs Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Tim


4:2), it is required that he “do the work of an evangelist” (v. 5). He is to do this evangelistic work with those who sit under his preaching (vv. 3–4). In other words, Timothy is to bring lost souls into the kingdom of God as he proclaims the Word of God. Peter writes the same: “You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23). The primary means by which the life-giving seed of the Word was planted in their hearts is found two verses later. Peter answers, “This is the word which was preached to you” (v. 25). The preaching of the Word was the primary means that produced the new birth within them.

How Jesus Builds the Church

In summary, expository preaching is the chief means by which the power of God is unleashed to build the church. God has placed His supernatural power in His Word. Like a heavy hammer wielded by a skilled craftsman, the preached Word can shatter the hardest heart and break it wide open. It has explosive power to expose the hidden corruption of a sinful heart. It has the ability to transfer sin-bound captives from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of light.

In January 1546, Martin Luther traveled from Wittenberg to Eisleben, Germany, the town where he had been born. The purpose of the journey was to settle a dispute between two brothers, the counts of Mansfield. While there, he was prevailed upon to preach in his home church, where he had been baptized and raised as a young child. Unknown to Luther or anyone present, it would be his last sermon. During this exposition, the famed Reformer said, “You think there is power in the relics that you travel to see and venerate in your many pilgrimages. You think there is power in Moses’ staff, Joseph’s coat, Pilate’s steps, Mary’s milk.” Luther then boldly asserted, “That is not where the power is. God put the power in the word.”

That is a message preachers today need to hear. God did not put His saving power in their unique insights into world events. God did not place power in their illustrations, per se. Neither did He put it in their testimony or personal experiences. Preachers need to be reminded once more that God has placed primary power in His Word. As the Word is expounded, divine power is unleashed, and it will explode in the lives of those who hear its proclamation.

This is how Jesus builds His church. Where the Word is preached with precision and power, He will gather the lost to be saved and the saints to be edified. God has promised to honor His Word. The Scripture will not return to Him void. He will surely honor the man who honors His Word—and strengthen Christ’s bride as a result. 



Biblically Anemic Preaching: The Devastating Consequences of a Watered-Down Message

JOHN MACARTHUR

Those who are familiar with my ministry know that I am committed to expository preaching. It is my unshakable conviction that the proclamation of God's Word should always be the heart and the focus of the church's ministry (2 Tim 4:2). And proper biblical preaching should be systematic, expository, theological, and God-centered.

Such preaching is in short supply these days. There are plenty of gifted communicators in the modern evangelical movement, but today's sermons tend to be short, shallow, topical homilies that massage people's egos and focus on fairly insipid subjects like human relationships, "successful" living, emotional issues, and other practical but worldly themes—informed by little or no definitively biblical content. These messages are lightweight and without substance, cheap and synthetic, leaving little more than an ephemeral impression on the minds of the hearers.

Some time ago I hosted a discussion at the Expositors' Institute, an annual small-group colloquium on preaching held at our church. In preparation for that seminar, I took a yellow legal pad and a pen and began listing the negative effects of the superficial brand of preaching that is so rife in modern evangelicalism.

I initially thought I might be able to identify about ten, but in the end I jotted down a list of sixty-one devastating consequences. I've distilled them here to fifteen by combining

and eliminating all but the most crucial ones. I offer them as a warning against shallow, marginally biblical preaching—both to those who stand behind the pulpit and to those who sit in the pew.

1. It usurps the authority of God over the soul. Whether a preacher boldly proclaims the Word of God or not is ultimately a question of authority. Who has the right to speak to the church—the preacher or God? Whenever anything is substituted for the preaching of the Word, God's authority is usurped. What a prideful thing to do! In fact, it is hard to conceive of anything more insolent that could be done by a man who is called by God to preach.

2. It removes the lordship of Christ from His church. Who is the head of the church? Is Christ really the dominant teaching authority in the church? If so, then why are there so many churches where His Word is not being faithfully proclaimed? When we look at contemporary ministry, we see programs and methods that are the fruit of human invention, opinion polls, neighborhood surveys, and other pragmatic artifices. Church-growth experts have in essence wrested control of the church's agenda from her true head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Puritan forefathers resisted government-imposed liturgies for precisely this reason: They saw that imposition as a

WHEN THE CHURCH IS COMMANDEERED BY COMPROMISERS WHO HAVE AN AGENDA OR PRIORITIES OTHER THAN THE LORD'S, THE GOSPEL IS MINIMIZED, TRUE POWER IS LOST, ARTIFICIAL ENERGY MUST BE MANUFACTURED, AND SUPERFICIALITY TAKES THE PLACE OF TRUTH.

direct attack on the headship of Christ over His own church. Modern preachers who neglect the Word of God have yielded the ground those men fought and sometimes died for. When Jesus Christ is exalted among His people, His power is manifest in the church. When the church is commandeered by compromisers who have an agenda or priorities other than the Lord's, the gospel is minimized, true power is lost, artificial energy must be manufactured, and superficiality takes the place of truth.

3. It hinders the work of the Holy Spirit. What is the instrument the Spirit uses to do His work? The Word of God. He uses the Word as the instrument of regeneration (1 Pet 1:23; James 1:18). He also uses it as the means of sanctification (John 17:17). In fact, it is the only tool He uses (Eph 6:17). So when preachers neglect God's Word, they undermine the work of the Holy Spirit, producing shallow conversions and spiritually lame Christians—if not spurious ones.

4. It demonstrates appalling pride and a lack of submission. In the modern approach to “ministry,” the Word of God is deliberately downplayed, the reproach of Christ is quietly repudiated, the offense of the gospel is carefully eliminated, and “worship” is purposely tailored to fit the preferences

of unbelievers. That is nothing but a refusal to submit to the biblical mandate for the church. The effrontery of ministers who pursue such a course is, to me, frightening.

5. It severs the preacher personally from the regular, sanctifying grace of Scripture. The greatest personal benefit I get from preaching is the work the Spirit of God does on my own soul as I study and prepare for one or two expository messages each Lord's Day. Week by week, the duty of careful exposition keeps my own heart focused and fixed on the Scriptures, and the Word of God nourishes me while I prepare to feed my flock. So I am personally blessed and spiritually strengthened through the enterprise. If for no other reasons than those, I would never abandon biblical preaching. The enemy of our souls is after preachers in particular, and the sanctifying grace of the Word of God is critical to our protection.

6. It clouds the true depth and transcendence of our message, therefore crippling both corporate and personal worship. What passes for preaching in some churches today is literally no more profound than what preachers in our fathers' generation were teaching in the five-minute children's sermon they gave before dismissing the kids. That's

no exaggeration. It is often that simplistic, if not utterly inane. There is nothing deep about it. Such an approach makes it impossible for true worship to take place, because worship is a transcendent experience. Worship should take us above the mundane and simplistic. So the only way that true worship can occur is if we first come to grips with the depth of spiritual truth. Our people can rise high in worship only in the same proportion to which we have taken them deep into the profound truths of the Word. There is no way they can have lofty thoughts of God unless we have plunged them into the depths of God's self-revelation. But preaching today is neither profound nor transcendent. It doesn't go down, so it doesn't go up. It merely aims to entertain.

By the way, true worship is not something that can be stimulated artificially. A bigger, louder band and more sentimental music might do more to stir people's emotions, but that is not genuine worship. True worship is a response from the heart to God's truth (John 4:23). You can actually worship without music if you have seen the glories and the depth of what the Bible teaches.

7. It prevents the preacher from fully developing the mind of Christ. Pastors are supposed to be undershepherds of Christ. Too many modern preachers are so bent on understanding the culture that they develop the mind of the culture and not the mind of Christ. They start to think like the world, and not like the Savior. Frankly, the nuances of worldly culture are virtually irrelevant to me. I want to know the mind of Christ and bring that to bear on the culture, no matter what culture I may be ministering to. If I'm going to stand up in a pulpit and be a representative of Jesus Christ, I want to know *how He thinks*—and that must be what I want for His people too. The only way to know and proclaim the mind of Christ is by being faithful to study and preach His Word. What happens to preachers who obsess about cultural “relevancy” is that they become worldly, not godly.

8. It depreciates, by example, the spiritual duty and priority of personal Bible study. Is personal Bible study important? Of course. But what example does the preacher set when he neglects the Bible in his own preaching? Why would people think they need to study the Bible if the preacher doesn't do serious study himself in the preparation of his sermons? There is now a movement among some in ministry to trim, as much as possible, all explicit references to the Bible from the sermon—and above all, to never ask people to turn to a specific Bible passage, because that kind of thing makes “seekers” uncomfortable. Some churches actively discourage their people from bringing Bibles to church lest the sight of so many Bibles in-

timidate the “seekers.” As if it were dangerous to give your people the impression that the Bible might be important!

9. It prevents the preacher from being the voice of God on every issue of his time. Jeremiah 8:9 says, “The wise men are put to shame, they are dismayed and caught; behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what kind of wisdom do they have?” When I speak, I want to be God's messenger. I'm not interested in exegeting what some psychologist or business guru or college professor has to say about an issue. My people don't need my opinion; they need to hear what God has to say. If we preach as Scripture commands us, there should be no ambiguity about whose message is coming from the pulpit.

10. It breeds a congregation that is as weak and indifferent to the glory of God as their pastor is. Such preaching fosters people who are consumed with their own wellbeing. When you tell people that the church's primary ministry is to fix for them whatever is wrong in this life—to meet their needs, to help them cope with their worldly disappointments, and so on—the message you are sending is that their mundane problems are more important than the glory of God and the majesty of Christ. Again, that sabotages true worship.

11. It robs people of their only true source of help. People who sit under superficial preaching become dependent on the cleverness and creativity of the speaker. When preachers punctuate their sermons with laser lights and smoke, video clips and live drama, the message they send is that the people in the pew could never extract such profound material on their own. Such gimmicks create a kind of dispensing mechanism that people cannot access on their own—they can't use it to serve themselves. So they become spiritual couch potatoes who just come in to be entertained, and whatever superficial spiritual content they get from the preacher's weekly performance is all they will get. They have no particular interest in the Bible because the sermons they hear don't cultivate that. They are wowed by the preacher's creativity and manipulated by the music, and that becomes their whole perspective on spirituality.

12. It encourages people to become indifferent to the Word of God and divine authority. Predictably, in a church where the preaching of Scripture is neglected, it becomes impossible to get people to submit to the authority of Scripture. The preacher who always aims at meeting felt needs and strokes the conceit of worldly people has no platform from which to confront, for example, the man who wants to divorce his wife without cause. The man will say, “You don't understand what I feel. I came here because


you promised to meet my felt needs. And I'm telling you, I don't feel like living with this woman anymore." You can't inject biblical authority into that. You certainly wouldn't have an easy time pursuing church discipline. That is the monster created by superficial preaching. But if you are going to try to deal with sin and apply any kind of authoritative principle to keep the church pure, you must be preaching the Word.

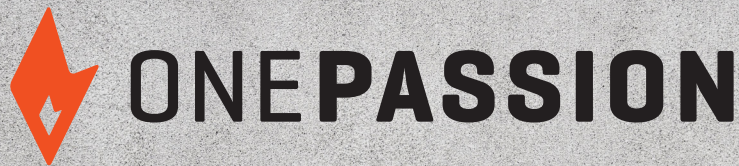
13. It lies to people about what they really need. In Jeremiah 8:11, God condemns the prophets who treated people's wounds superficially. That verse applies powerfully to the preachers who populate so many prominent evangelical pulpits today. They omit the hard truths about sin and judgment. They tone down the offensive parts of Christ's message. They lie to people about what they need, promising them "fulfillment" and earthly wellbeing when what people really need is an exalted vision of Christ and a true understanding of the splendor of God's holiness.

14. It strips the pulpit of power. "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12). Everything else is impotent, giving merely an illusion of

power. Human strategy is not more important than Scripture. The showman's ability to lure people in should not impress us more than the Bible's ability to transform lives.

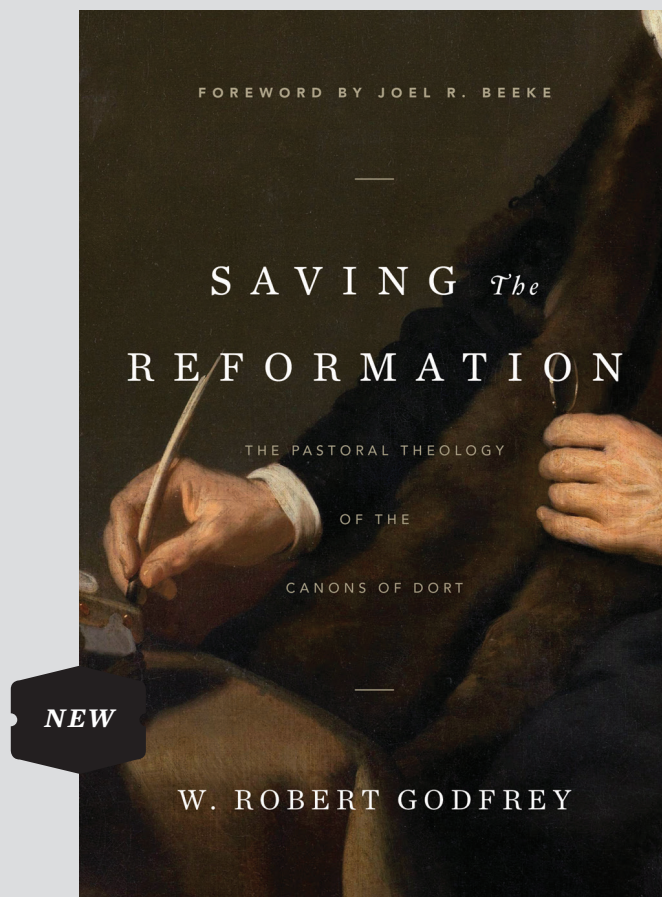
15. It puts the responsibility on the preacher to change people with his cleverness. Preachers who pursue the modern approach to ministry must think they have the power to change people. That is a frightening expression of pride. We preachers can't save people, and we can't sanctify them. We can't change people with our insights and cleverness, by entertaining them, or by appealing to their human whims and wishes and ambitions. There's only One who can change sinners. That's God, and He does it by His Spirit through the Word.

So, pastors must preach the Word, even though it is currently out of fashion to do so (2 Tim 4:2). That is the only way their ministry can ever truly be fruitful. Moreover, it *assures* that they will be fruitful in ministry, because God's Word never returns to Him void—it always accomplishes what He sends it to do (Isa 55:11). 



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Evangelistic Preaching in the Church

CONRAD MBEWE

I am concerned. I am very concerned about the absence of evangelistic preaching today. In many pulpits what is called evangelistic preaching is basically an appeal to non-Christians tacked on at the end of most sermons. But where are the sermons that from beginning to end are “reasoning and explaining and proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ”? Where are the sermons that are prepared specifically to chase sinners out of every godless nook and cranny until they fall on their knees before the cross of Christ? Where are the sermons that will wrestle with darkened consciences until they see their need for reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ? Where have the hellfire and brimstone sermons of a previous generation gone? Where are the likes of George Whitefield, the Wesley brothers, Howell Harris, Jonathan Edwards, and Asahel Nettleton today?

Let me grant from the very outset that I am not in any way suggesting that we must all rise to such prominence in evangelistic fruitfulness as to find our names in the Evangelists’ “Hall of Fame.” That would be to expect too much. We have different gifts and different degrees of giftedness. Some are more gifted at evangelistic preaching, while others do a far better job in ministering to believers. I do not doubt that. What I am, however, saying is that all of us who are called to the preaching ministry must do something to recover the lost art of evangelistic preaching before we lose it altogether. It is slowly becoming very difficult to find a preacher to handle a season of evangelistic preaching in our churches, whereas if you want someone to come and handle a series on successful Christian

living, it is preachers galore!

Yet when one looks at the Apostle Paul’s parting words to Timothy, a young pastor in Ephesus, there is no doubt that one duty that Timothy was implored not to neglect was that of evangelistic preaching. He is told to do the work of an evangelist as part of discharging all the duties of his ministry. We must do the same. In the midst of the arduous labors of teaching believers what to believe and how to live, we must also be busy in evangelistic labors. In the midst of leading the people of God in proper church life, we must also be leading sinners to Christ. It should not be one or the other. It should be both.

Why We are Losing Evangelistic Preaching

I have no doubt that one reason why evangelistic preaching has been lost, especially in Reformed circles, is due to its association with Arminianism and the more recent high-powered pressure tactics used to get people “to the front.” Anyone concerned to maintain a God-honoring ministry will want to keep as far away from that as possible. However, any basic study of church history will soon reveal that the altar call is a modern innovation that only goes back a century or so at the most. So, we do well to reject it as a component of evangelistic preaching.

Yet, I fear that in abandoning evangelistic preaching altogether because of this, we have thrown away the baby with the bathwater. Yes, we ought to abhor any form of manipulation. It only brings goats into the membership of Christ’s church and thus compromises the church’s witness in the world. But evangelistic preaching must be seen as the very warp and woof of

our calling to the preaching ministry.

Sadly, the lost art of evangelistic preaching has resulted in the lost art of personal evangelism. Since church members are not seeing a passion for souls in the pulpit, they are losing it in the pews. As the pulpit goes, so goes the congregation. Also, the advantage of having regular evangelistic preaching in the pulpit is that Christians have a role model regularly before them on how to present the gospel effectively to non-believers.

A church can never rise higher than its pulpit. If the pulpit is doing very badly in reaching sinners, the rest of the church will go the same way. This explains the dearth of soul winning today. We preachers are to blame!

Although we should be concerned with evangelistic preaching “out there” where the sinners are, we should not overlook the need to preach evangelistically to those who attend church regularly. Some people feel that this is unnecessary because, they say, it is essentially believers who attend church. But is that so?

Perhaps that might be so in some Western countries where the church is dying. What I have observed in Africa and in most parts of the world where I have preached is that a sizeable number in church on a Sunday are unbelievers. These need to hear the gospel, not as an appendage to a sermon tailor-made for believers, but as a message specifically aimed at them. Evangelistic preaching in church also encourages church members to invite friends and work mates whom they are trying to reach to church. They are sure that, once the invitation is accepted, the invitee will certainly hear the gospel.

Finally, evangelistic preaching is edifying and refreshing to the saints. The cross presented afresh with the appeal of evangelistic preaching has often made Christians say afterward, “You know, if I were not a Christian, I would have given my life to Christ today!” They see once again the folly and emptiness of the non-Christian life, and the fountains of love for Christ gush forth afresh at the sight of His bleeding form on the cross. The presentation of the milk of the gospel doctrines of redemption, the new birth, union with Christ, justification, and more, nourish the Christian’s soul as much as the strong meat of the Word. So, true evangelistic preaching is good for Christians, too, as long as it is not the only diet they have to live on.

Challenges Facing Evangelistic Preaching

One of the challenges of evangelistic preaching is that you must aim your cannon for the common man on the street. Preaching to believers has the advantage of the fact that you can assume their interest from the very onset. After all, they pay you to do the job! But the unbeliever’s attention has to be won. You have to win the right to be heard, and you have about ten minutes to do so!

Also, you can get away with a lot of religious clichés when

preaching to believers because you read the same Bible and sometimes the same theological works. But when preaching to unbelievers, what you have in common at the most is the daily newspaper and the TV. If you are going to communicate effectively, you will have to use ordinary day-to-day language. This can be very difficult for someone who has been sheltered from the world by a religious environment.

It seems to me that one of the challenges that the Christian church is facing today, perhaps more than at any other time in its history, is the reality of other religions in a society that accepts all religions as though they were equally acceptable philosophies. The popular question today is, “In the light of the presence of other religions, isn’t Christianity just one of the many ways in which human beings can go to heaven?” The popular answer today is, “Yes!” Because of this, evangelizing those who are sincerely following their religion is now not only a lost art but also seen as an insult. Thus, any straightforward evangelistic preaching outside the four walls of the church that assumes that Christ is the only way to God is at a disadvantage. It seems safer to only state that (briefly!) in a sermon inside your church building.

The biblical answer, however, is that anyone without Jesus Christ is doomed. This must be stated despite taking cognizance of the religious pluralism of today. We need to realize that religious pluralism is nothing new. In every stage at which pioneer missions have broken into new realms, this matter has had to be faced squarely. When Peter said of Jesus that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12), he was saying those words to the elders of a pre-existent religion!

Another challenge of regular evangelistic preaching is where to find texts of Scripture to sustain such a ministry every year. In this, the roving evangelist has the advantage of the fact that he can repeat his ten “most powerful” evangelistic sermons wherever he goes. As a resident pastor, you have no such luxury.

How do we get around this? The error that most of us make is that we look only for those texts that have some clear redemption themes in them (e.g. the Passover, Rahab’s red ribbon, Moses’ bronze snake). Once we have preached through these, and perhaps other clear gospel texts (e.g. Isaiah 55), we become stuck and so abandon evangelistic preaching. That is most unfortunate.

The truth is that the Bible has enough evangelistic material for a pastor to fill up two lifetimes of preaching! If space could have allowed, I would have demonstrated this, but allow me to point you to a master in this field. Read Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon* and especially his *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons* (both published by the Banner

LET THE WORLD KNOW THAT THEY CAN CRY TO CHRIST TO SAVE THEM, AND THEY CAN EXPERIENCE HIS SAVING POWER.

of Truth Trust). They are fine examples of how you can go to almost any text in both the Old and New Testament and use it evangelistically.

Attaining a Passion for Evangelistic Preaching

The secret of persevering in an evangelistic preaching ministry is having a burden for the lost around you. This is what will keep you preaching the gospel specifically for their salvation, and this is what will also keep you groaning for their salvation, until one by one God begins to reward your labors by their conversion.

The Apostle Paul said, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men” (2 Cor 5:11). Or as Spurgeon once said,

If you want to win souls for Christ, feel a solemn alarm about them. You cannot make them feel if you do not feel yourself. Believe their danger, believe their helplessness, believe that only Christ can save them, and talk to them as if you meant it. The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved, they will rest too; but if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy too. I hope you will get into such a state that you will dream about your child, or about your hearer perishing for lack of Christ, and start up at once and begin to cry, ‘O God, give me converts or I die.’ Then you will have converts.

Brethren, if we are going to fully appreciate how vital evangelistic preaching is, we must be convinced of what the world needs to be saved *from*. The world around us needs to be saved from the blinding and enslaving power of sin, and the resultant guilt of sin.

Remember, we are all born with a corrupt nature that blinds us so that we cannot see the things of God. This also gives us a propensity toward evil; wickedness is its fruit. We

are powerless to change that! We are born guilty before God because of Adam’s sin and our own sins; hence, by nature we are objects of God’s wrath. The power and guilt of sin make ours a hopeless case. These facts are not only biblical facts but are also discovered in experience.

It is in view of this dark picture that the apostles asserted only one source of salvation—Christ! Instead of quarrelling with this uniqueness of the gospel, we ought to be rejoicing that salvation can be found at all! All we need to do is look at our past lives and see how we were fettered to sin. We probably tried one religion after another, but our conscience was never satisfied. The reason why all else must fail is that all other options begin with us as human beings trying (and obviously failing). They are telling a slave or a prisoner to release himself. It is impossible! Salvation must begin with appeasing God so that He can help you. This is what the Christian preacher alone offers in his evangelistic preaching.

This is where we see the absolute necessity of the gospel. It begins with the appeasing of God on the cross of Christ. He was “given to men” by His sacrificial death. He suffered God’s wrath as our substitute. His death on the cross both removed our sin and removed God’s wrath from us. To show that God was fully satisfied with the payment, he raised Jesus Christ to life. He ascended to heaven, where He received the Holy Spirit who regenerates us, convicts us, points us to Jesus, saves us, and sanctifies us. Every preacher should proclaim this message at least once a week from his pulpit. We have a great Savior. He must be proclaimed!

This is why it is so sad that evangelistic preaching is fast becoming a lost art. You who have felt the pangs of your guilty conscience and found peace with God, you who have felt the unyielding chains of sin, and found freedom at last in Christ—offer it to the lost and perishing! Stop wasting your time trying to compare religions. Why seek the living among the dead? Proclaim the unique gospel to your dying day. Let the world know that they can cry to Christ to save them, and they can experience His saving power. Amen! ♦





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Why Expository Preaching is the Power for Pastoral Ministry

MICHAEL MILTON

How can we have an effective pastorate? How can our ministries, our preaching, support church health? How can we be faithful in our ministries?

There is a parable for young preachers in Walt Disney's *Dumbo*, the little circus elephant that had a hard time keeping up with mom and the other adults. He would just latch his trunk onto the tail of the massive mammal in front of him and go with the herd! He was small, but with one critical attachment, he could keep up.

How do we keep up as pastors in today's world? How do we even keep up with those who have gone before? How do we follow great preachers? How do we follow long pastorates? There are significant and divinely wise answers to those questions that may be located in the Bible and cultivated through prayer, study, consecration, and dying to ourselves. There, a little pastor named Timothy, just like the name of the mouse in *Dumbo*, who followed a ministry giant, a pastoral pachyderm named Paul, is instructed in how to latch on to the legacy:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is

coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim 4:1–5, ESV)

Let's just say it and let the power and the possibility for failure sink in: Timothy was pastor of the church planted by Paul. When I feel really challenged, I think of Timothy. The elders at Ephesus had fallen on the neck of Paul and wept over his departure at Miletus. Three years of powerful ministry gave Paul the right to call them to shepherd the church of God, whom He had purchased with His own blood. And Paul, in his swan song at the twilight of his remarkable ministry, reminded Timothy how he had to follow Him. He gave the secret to power. He lifted a mouse (no, his words were so divine and powerful that they magically transformed the mouse into an elephant), a giant linked to his ministry, and linked to Jesus Christ, powered by Almighty God Himself.

And what did Paul commend? He commended the Word of God, and after calling it God-breathed, he charged a God-called man to preach. The answer to the question, "How do mice latch onto elephants?" is neither original nor surprising

THE ONLY WAY FOR ANY OF US TO STAND IN THE LONG AND HONORABLE LEGACY OF GOSPEL PREACHERS IS THROUGH EXPOSITORY PREACHING.

in this setting. Like Charles Hodge addressing new students at old Princeton, I, too, say to you, “I glory in saying that you will learn nothing new here.” But it is an answer that every frail follower of pulpit giants must remember: The only way for any of us to stand in the long and honorable legacy of gospel preachers is through expository preaching.

Why? I offer eight concise reasons why expository preaching is the power for the pastorate, whatever your situation.

1. Expository Preaching is the Power of the Pastorate because it is Divinely Wrought.

The way for Timothy to take his place as “[the] beloved child [of Paul]” (1:2), to latch onto the legacy of “faith that dwelt first in [his] grandmother Lois and [his] mother Eunice” (1:5), to “fan into flame the gift of God” (1:6) which was transferred through the apostolic laying on of hands of Paul himself (1:6), to overcome a “spirit” of “fear” (1:7), to “guard the good deposit entrusted to [him]” (1:14), to teach others what he has learned from Paul, thus extending the apostolic succession to another generation (2:1–2), to avoid getting “entangled” (2:4) with “civilian pursuits” (2:4), to proclaim and teach the whole counsel of God, from the old covenant to the new covenant (as Paul speaks of in 2:8–13) “for the sake of the elect that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory,” “to take his place,” to “flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness” (2:22), and to do all of the things he is charged to do at Ephesus like: reminding the saints not to quarrel about words (2:14), to “avoid irreverent babble” (2:16), to correct his opponents with the aim of leading them to repentance and a knowledge of the truth (2:25) so that they may avoid the “snare of the devil” (2:26); to say it again, the way to be this man and conduct this ministry is—to preach the Word.

For Paul makes it clear that the Word of God alone is able to meet the mission of the preacher. The reason this is so is that the Word of God is the authoritative instrument from the throne of God to accomplish God’s mission in the world. We remember that Paul’s admonition to “preach the word” follows his teaching that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent for every good work” (3:16–17). In everything he had written previously, Paul had been building up to say that.

I love the way Dr. Robert L. Reymond puts it: “The Bible is a Word from another world.” In his *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Reymond writes, “When God gave his Word to us, he gave us much more than simply basic information about himself. He gave us the *pou sto* (“[a place] where I may stand”), or base that justifies both our knowledge claims and our claims to personal significance.”

The Word of God is the place where the pastor may stand. Indeed, our very existence, our calling, our vocation only have meaning through this Word. I recently read J. C. Ryle’s wonderful *Warning to the Churches*, in which the old Bishop of Liverpool warned his diocesan ministers of the perils they faced. The book left me amazed at his prophetic gifts and understanding of the times. I do not have such gifts, I am sure. But I do want to raise a danger related to the matter before us.

We live in a culture that increasingly demands image and entertainment to communicate, that tells the preacher that short sound bytes are more persuasive than exposition of a text, that narrative is of more importance than the exposition of a text, that postmodern man cannot endure direct teaching, but needs to make the homiletical turns for himself. I say that this is a danger to the preaching of the Word, to evangelism, and to discipleship. And in the midst of such

an age, we would all do well to remember that God called for Israel to do something that the heathen did not do, to think about Him in His Word, not in image. The late Neil Postman, a non-practicing Jew, saw this clearly. The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking. Iconography, thus, became blasphemy, so that a new kind of God could enter a culture. People like ourselves, who are in the process of converting their culture from word-centered to image-centered, might profit by reflecting on the Mosaic injunction.

The Word, my beloved brothers in the ministry, is the God-given place where we may stand, where we may reason, where we may dialogue with others. Indeed, we have been forbidden to go elsewhere. As a pastor, the reason that I want to focus on expository preaching, that is, proclaiming the inerrant and infallible Word of the living God as it is written, as it has been transmitted to me by God through the church, passing muster with the intent of the author, with conviction in my own life, and with love for those before me, is because expository preaching fixes itself, by its best definition, onto God's Word, divinely wrought and divinely authorized. This has powerful implications for my ministry that I want to explore further.

The only way for me to stand in the company of pulpit giants is to stand with this Word from another world. The truth is, if they are truly giants in the church, if they are linked from Spurgeon, to Ryle, to M'Cheyne, to Whitefield, to Bunyan, to Luther, to Calvin, to Wycliffe, to Augustine, to Paul, to Jesus and the prophets, then they are men of this one Book, and that is all they have to say. This leads me to a second reason that we must cling to expository preaching in order to find our place in the accredited college of godly preachers.

2. Expository Preaching is the Power of the Pastorate because it is Biblically Faithful.

We have seen that Paul tells Timothy to preach the Word, and we all know why. Preach the Word because the Word is divinely wrought. It is God's Word, and what could be nobler? If there were no other reason to proclaim His Word than the mere fact that the Bible is His Word, that would be enough. The matter, then, becomes, how shall we do it? To "preach" the Word must be to faithfully communicate that Word (from another world). Expository preaching, properly understood and properly done, fulfills this mandate.

Expository preaching is defined concisely and biblically by Albert Mohler in his contribution to *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*: "Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible." And

if expository preaching is really exposing the mind of God in a given text and communicating the mind of God to men and women, then no other methodology will do.

William Temple was not an expository preacher, though he said enough good things that we often quote him. But the old Bishop of Canterbury did not believe that God would communicate His Word propositionally in the Bible because man could not understand it even if He did. Temple did not believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. Temple did believe that you could understand what he wrote; otherwise, he wouldn't have written anything, but that is another argument. Enough to say, that if we believe that the power for our ministries is the Bible, as Paul teaches us, then it surely follows that expository preaching is the only model we should seek in communicating that Word.

As one who serves a seminary and who is also a professor who gets to teach preaching every now and then, and who, as a pastor, gets to mentor younger preachers before sending them to other places of service, the subject of "the future of expository preaching" in light of postmodernity and post-Christian America is a hot topic. Many are wrestling with the question of whether such communication really can reach across the widening and ever-changing rivers of modern culture to grip the hearts and persuade the minds of an emerging generation. The realities of the emerging generation cause them to question expository preaching, and, in fact, have led several on a journey to "find their voice," as they tell me, apart from the safe constraints of exposition. I'm happy to say that many of these with whom I have met have worked through that question to rediscover the power of expository preaching for this generation.

The whole matter of whether expository preaching can effectively communicate to a "late modern" Western secularized culture is a question that has been posed and pondered by many. Yet, if we are preaching the very Word of God, then surely God knows what we need in every age. This Word worked in the fallen ruins of Eden when God promised a Savior in Genesis 3:15. The Word worked in Genesis 12 when God provided promises to Abraham for a land, a nation, and a blessing that would reach around the world. God's Word was enough in 586 BC in the crumbled remains of Jerusalem when a weeping prophet named Jeremiah preached through tears.

God's Word worked in first century Rome when Paul preached it. It worked in the eighteenth century in America when George Whitefield roared out its truths up and down the colonial coast. It worked in the nineteenth century in Korea when missionaries preached there, and it worked in industrial Dundee, Scotland, when Robert Murray M'Cheyne preached there.

It worked in the twentieth century, the bloodiest century in the world's history, when modernity overtook the West and men such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones thundered from a world capital such as London. And it will work in the twenty-first century, in postmodern and post-Christian North America, as it will work in China, Africa, India, and Bulgaria.

The Word will work in Chattanooga, will free slaves to sin in Miami, give abundant life in Los Angeles, renew cold-hearted saints in Des Moines, restore marriages in Peoria, reunite severed relationships in Louisville, sprinkle the spirit of holiness in New Orleans, call new missionaries out of Kansas City, and save souls from eternal damnation in Bangor, Seattle, and Paducah. The power of our ministries is expository preaching because, if what we have to say is the Word of God, how we say it matters. And expository preaching, rightly followed, is the way to say it.

Now, I have said that expository preaching is powerful because it is the Word of God and it is faithful to the Word of God. Let me continue with my reasons as to why it is the power for the pulpit, but let me be thoroughly pragmatic about it.

3. Expository Preaching is the Power of the Pastorate because it is Pastorally Effective.

If this is the Word of God—and it is—and if expository preaching is the biblically faithful method for giving out this Word of God—and it is—then it surely is the key to success in the pastorate.

What do I mean? I surely don't mean to connect success and effectiveness in the pastorate to being a celebrity, or selling books, or gaining fame. I recently read a fine sermon by J. C. Philpot, from 1857, about the ever-present temptation of pride and vainglory among preachers, and I am aware that each of us deals in some way with this. But no, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about effectiveness in what I call the essentials of the ministry—gathering, growing, and sending forth strong disciples of Christ.

I have in mind the work of seeing souls saved, lives transformed, marriages saved, young people's hearts burning with zeal for Christ and His kingdom, desiring to die to themselves to live for Christ. I have in mind "setting in order the things that remain" (Titus 1:5) and ordering our churches according to God's intentions. I have in mind speaking peace into a troubled, maybe even splitting, congregation. I have in mind being pastorally effective in shepherding the flock of God over whom God has made me an overseer.

There is no program, no model, no paradigm, no experiment, no policy, and no amount of pure elbow grease or mental genius that can equal the power of the Word of God preached. It accomplishes everything I hope for in the ministry. Recently, I read where someone said that the best

time-tested discipleship tool in the history of the church has been morning and evening worship where there is expository preaching. My own experience as a disciple and a pastor is that I couldn't agree more. I believe that this is so.

When I counsel people in trouble, I always ask if they are sitting under the expository preaching of the Word of God. I'm not asking them to come to my church, though I would love to have them. I'm simply saying that they must locate a place to belong, a local congregation, where the preacher is committed to moving sequentially through the Word of God—that may be moving through books, chapters, or other preaching portions within a book—in such a way that they are getting the mind of Christ in the study. Expository preaching is pastorally effective.

4. Expository Preaching is the Power of the Pastorate because it is Vocationally Satisfying.

When I say "vocationally satisfying," I am speaking to those who have come, in their own lives, to say with Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:16, "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"


If we are called by God to preach the Word of God to a dying world, and if preaching is unveiling the mind of God for man in this Word, and this is what expository preaching is, then it follows that we will only be happy in our work if we are doing that!

Let us not be gullible. Expository preaching fulfills God's purpose for our lives as preachers. He has called you to preach the Word, and you will never be happy until you go to that Word, live in that Word, exegete the meaning of that Word, dive like a Pacific diver to the bottom of the ocean for the rich pearls of that Word, and then come back up from your time in the deep-blue of God's presence, string those pearls together in a sermon, and put them on the neck of your people.

Only a preaching method, a preaching approach, that is radically Word-centered, Christ-centered, Gospel-saturated, and uncompromisingly faithful to the text will give you joy. For you were made to preach.

5. Expository Preaching is the Power of the Pastorate because it is Eschatologically Useful.

When I say eschatologically useful, I mean that expository preaching brings our people into contact with ultimate realities. In personal eschatology, expository preaching prepares our people to not only live but to die. Oh, if we could hear the stories of faithful preachers who have shared those sweet and sacred moments of vigil with a family when a loved one is going home. We know that the power for our ministry at that time is in the exposition of the Word. An elder in our



WHEN WE ARE ABOUT THE WORK OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING IN THE PASTORATE, THE WORK CARRIES US ALONG, IN A SENSE. WEEK IN AND WEEK OUT, WE DEVELOP A DISCIPLINE OF STUDY, FOR TO PREACH THE WORD OF GOD LINE-UPON-LINE, PRECEPT-UPON-PRECEPT, DEMANDS TIME, STRUGGLE, AND PRAYER.

church who recently went home to be with the Lord said, “I have been waiting for this. I am ready to go home.” This attitude comes from expository preaching.

Expository preaching also is eschatologically useful in that it brings our people to see God’s ultimate cosmic realities. On the one hand, faithful exposition of the Word will probably distance our preaching from some of the excessive, eisegetical propositions that we sometimes hear at certain prophecy seminars, statements that lead to theological speculation and seem to draw cosmic curiosity seekers. But faithful exposition of passages such as 1 Corinthians 15 or Ephesians 1 will lead our people to see that God is a teleological God, that this world is going somewhere, and that we who are God’s children are destined for something greater than ourselves.

The revelation of God gives meaning, purpose, context to time, space, and eternity, to man and God. It gives meaning to sickness, hope, and even happiness in the face of theodicy and the questions of suffering.

6. Expository Preaching is the Power of the Pastorate because it is Personally Edifying.

The call to preach the Word is a blessing. Each week we come to the text, and we are fed by it, hopefully, before we give it to others. I know the James 3 warning against being teachers, but we also know the words of Paul—this Word will “make

you wise for salvation” (2 Tim 3:15). We will save ourselves as well as those who hear us.

I must say this, also. When we are about the work of expository preaching in the pastorate, the work carries us along, in a sense. Week in and week out, we develop a discipline of study, for to preach the Word of God line-upon-line, precept-upon-precept, demands time, struggle, and prayer. I know that at this time, your heads and hearts are turning, perhaps not over this address, but over the portion of Scripture that you must deliver this week. Is there anything as rewarding in life as unburdening your soul in that movement when you approach the sacred desk and open up the Bible? Expository preaching feeds my soul. I know of no other way to put it. But more than that:

7. Expository Preaching is the Power of the Pastorate because it is Constantly Challenging.

To present the mind of Christ in a text requires much of us, does it not? I once heard a preacher say that every time he preached, a little piece of him died. I am sure there are those for whom that is true because they are tired of preaching, or because they know they will get ripped to pieces at the front door of the church. But this man was speaking about preaching in a way that I can identify with. To preach the mind of God, to go through the necessary steps to get there, then to

emotionally discharge the holy calling on your life through the act of expositing a text, is the most challenging thing in the world. It takes your very life.

I was once in a seminar with Dr. D. James Kennedy where seminary students got to ask him anything they wanted. One asked, “Dr. Kennedy, what is the most challenging thing you have ever done in the ministry?” His answer was, “Prepare next Sunday’s sermon.” We all know it is true. We all know that such rigorous preaching cut short the life of John Calvin. It must be balanced with recreation and separation unto God in quiet prayer and reflection. We all know that to constantly face the Word of God each and every week, sometimes three or four times each week, is overwhelming at times. But for those called to do so, it is a response to a calling to an amazing love that demands my soul, my life, my all. Would we really want it any other way?

8. Expository Preaching Is the Power of the Pastorate because It Is Always Contemporary.

When we go to the Word, and preach the Word, we never have to worry about whether it is the right time or not, or if this is the right message or not. Surely, some wisdom is needed to avoid preaching Lamentations at a wedding or Leviticus 15 and “bodily discharges” at the dedication or baptism of an infant. But, you know what I mean. As I think about the power of the pastorate, I am reminded once more that expository preaching is always in vogue, always “cool,” if you will, for the human condition remains the same in every age.

Conclusion

How did Lloyd-Jones follow Campbell-Morgan? Expository preaching.

How did Boice follow Barnhouse? Expository preaching.

How did Timothy follow Paul? “Preach the Word.”

We must guard what was deposited to us with expository preaching. We must, because we can’t conduct a sound ministry of visitation of the sick and dying without it. We cannot carry on the work of evangelism, discipleship, world missions, building up our saints, or being a witness to our communities without expositing the Word from another world. We were made for it. It is our lives. It is our heart.

Readers of great missionaries’ stories will recall the amazing story of that intrepid Scotsman, the physician Dr. David Livingston, who, like Lloyd-Jones, was not only a medical doctor but also a preacher of the gospel. You will recall that David Livingston’s body was returned from Africa, where he died, to be buried with highest honors in Westminster Abbey.

But do you also recall that before his body was removed from the deepest parts of that great continent to make the 700-mile trip to the coast, the tribesmen of the place where he died so loved this man that they removed his heart from his body and buried it with great ritual in the land where he preached the gospel? Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The tribesmen knew that David Livingston’s treasure was Africa. His soul would go to his Savior. His body would return, for the time being, to his native country. But Livingston’s heart was in Africa.

So, do our people know that we treasure them? Do they know that we treasure preaching the gospel of God to them? Do they know where our hearts are?

I was the twelfth pastor of a church that was started in 1838. The men who went before me were greatly loved. I followed one of the greatest Christian communicators of the twentieth century. Dr. Ben Haden remains a close friend. He followed a man whose name is engraved on everything from the YMCA to a homeless mission. He followed a beloved pastor who died five years into office but whose five years left an impression of ministry that was felt for six decades after his death. He followed a former Confederate chaplain who led a veritable civil rights campaign for African-Americans in the late 1800s in that community. He served for fifty years. He always wore a clerical collar and always left the gas light, later electric light, burning, on the porch of the manse—“just in case someone needs a minister.”

I once talked to some of the older folks in our congregation about my predecessors! “Why are they still venerated so? What was it about them that made them so special?” I heard answers—from different people, different stories, but always a common denominator.

I think that the reason my predecessors are so honored is that, like Livingston, they preached the Word to a certain people in a certain time in a certain place. That Word did for those people in their land, in their time, what the Word always does—saves, changes lives, heals, restores, gives hope, offers assurance, and brings God to men and men to God.

I am convinced that in the final analysis, this is the answer. All preachers, whether they consider themselves mice or elephants, great or small, are loved when they faithfully open up the Bread of Life and feed the lambs of Jesus. And this becomes our legacy, not that our images are recorded in oils to hang on a church wall, but that our hearts are buried in that place where we took our stand, spent our years, and gave our lives to preach the Word. For, you see, to those whose lives are changed, you will always be a giant. Amen. ♦



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The Posture of Preaching

THOMAS J. NETTLES

In referring to preaching posture, I do not refer to the alignment of one's body when standing. Good posture, of course, is advisable, for one breathes better, projects his voice better, and shows respect for the uprightness and symmetry with which God created His image-bearers. No better instruction on this feature of pulpit address can be found than that offered by Spurgeon in his *Lectures to My Students*. In his brief apology for this two-lecture series, Spurgeon summarized the intent by assuming that

No minister would willingly cultivate a habit which would blunt his arrows, or drift them aside from the mark; and, therefore, since these minor matters of movement, posture, and gesture may have that effect, you will give them your immediate attention.

But I refer to one's mental and spiritual posture. In what position does a person place his mind and heart as he approaches the time of pulpit proclamation? Within what framework does the preacher of the gospel align his thoughts as he prepares to stand before the people of God to deliver the message of God from the book of God?

My experience in considering this issue does not come from a long history of week-by-week preparation to give soul care to one group of people over several years of pastoral labor. My

preaching has been occasional in churches where I served as an assistant to the pastor, in conferences, a few interims, or one Sunday at a time in different churches. I have heard many sermons, however, as a church member and as a regular attendee at chapel through eight years of seminary life as a student and thirty-three years as a professor. And, as is true in virtually every Christian's relationships, many friends who attend church talk about sermons and preachers and the impact that certain styles of pulpit address have on them.

Content trumps everything. The *reconciling work* of Christ must be central to the message and omnipresent in the sermon portfolio of every pastor. By reconciling work, I mean the incarnation of the Son of God, His life of tested and perfected righteousness, His substitutionary death submitting to a wrath not His due but ours, His resurrection by the glory of the Father, His appearances and post-resurrection commissions and instructions, His ascension, His sending of the Spirit, His present work of intercession, and the hope of His coming again.

By omnipresent, I mean that each and every sermon must make some conscious and conscientious connection to the Messiah-driven nature of divine revelation. A sermon is not a Christian sermon unless it leads us to Christ; a text is not a biblical text unless it is seen in its connection to Christ. None of the promises are ours apart from Christ, but "as many as

may be the promises of God, in him [Christ] they are yes” and only in Him do we find the assured and final affirmation that we may indeed live to the glory of God (2 Cor 1:20). Every law was given by Him to drive us to Him; every deliverer of Israel pictures what only Christ does. Every Psalm gives praise to the King of kings; every proverb shows us that wisdom is bound up in the cross of Christ; every prophet lets us know that in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son. Christ Himself taught us this when he called two disciples “foolish men and slow of heart” because they failed to “believe in all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). Had they perceived correctly the prophetic message, they would have known that it was “necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory” (Luke 24:25, 26). He instructed them, therefore, “beginning with Moses and with all the prophets” and “explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures” (v. 27) Without Christ in His suffering and glory, all sermon content is trivial humanism.

Next to content, however, no listener can ignore the impression made by delivery. Delivery is affected, moreover, not only by the disciplined use of body and vocal inflection, but by the state of mind a preacher has prior to his taking his assigned place of instruction and admonition before the people of God.

So infused are matter and manner that one’s posture of presentation may allow the content to glow with magnetic fervor or bleach it into pale, insipid, even obnoxious hues by its impact on the existential credibility of the messenger. A serious message on the cross may wither from the flippant humor and ill-placed jocularity of the messenger. A message about the humiliation of Christ and the consequent necessity of humility on the part of His followers may crumble under the weight of the cavalier and detached carriage of the messenger. A message on the love of God may sag into mere amusement by the amateurish histrionics of the messenger. In short, the most glorious and compelling message possible may lose credibility by any number of ways in which a lack of earnestness becomes prominent.

Jonathan Edwards, in his *Thoughts on the New England Revival*, observed, “I think an exceeding affectionate way of preaching about the great things of religion, has in itself no tendency to beget false apprehensions of them; but on the contrary a much greater tendency to beget true apprehensions of them, than a moderate, dull, indifferent way of speaking of them.”

He argued that great earnestness did as much to settle the judgment in favor of truth as great learning and concluded, “Our people don’t so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched.” We, however, need a heavy portion of both. The truths of divine revelation, flowing like

hot lava from heart and lips burning with intense passion for God and souls, make truth not only heard but felt. Spurgeon added,

One of the excuses most soporific to the conscience of an ungodly generation is that of half-heartedness in the preacher. If the sinner finds the preacher nodding while he talks of judgment to come, he concludes that the judgment is a thing which the preacher is dreaming about, and he resolves to regard it all as mere fiction.

While Edwards specifically wrote to defend the exuberance of preachers in the first Great Awakening and to deflect the severe criticism they received in an attempt to discredit the revival, his argument that manner (the emotional and spiritual overtones) of delivery colors the content is widely applicable. Given our great tendency to sin and self-centeredness, particular steps should be taken consciously to give the best opportunity for an earnest manner commensurate with the glory of the message.

First, *we should consider who we are*—sinners prone to have our tongues corrupt the whole course of nature and defile our entire body because it is set on fire by hell. We preachers will be judged harshly for the wrong use of our tongues. On this we should meditate at several points during the week; we should recall those times that words spoken too quickly or with too little thought have hurt relationships and dishonored God. How much more will a word unfitly spoken, even the right word unfitly spoken, be a dishonor to God if we stand as His messenger and fail to mortify the flesh in our style of delivery. The immediate suggestions to the mind of light anecdotes or *ex tempore* comments about oneself or the congregation hardly ever advance the cause of the gospel in a message and usually lighten the mood so that the seriousness due to the proclamation cannot be regained.

Second *we should consider who the people are*—the sheep of God who need a shepherd that is not a mere hireling. The shepherd may protect the sheep by steering them clear of pitfalls, brambles, and sheep-eating predators. Calls to repentance, therefore, based on biblical admonition, mandate, and law should run liberally through the messages that we preach if we earnestly care for the souls of those that hear.

Aside remarks, however, that draw more attention to the feelings of the speaker than the glory of the message hardly ever edify or endear one to the call of Christ. Self-conscious efforts to evoke a periodic “Amen” from the congregation may interrupt meaningful reflection on the part of the more serious listeners and could indicate that the minister is more interested in an immediate affirmation of a series of one-liners than a prolonged engagement with a biblical argument. Worse

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than that is the attempt to insult the congregation into response by clever, or not so clever, manipulations to shame: “Are you people awake yet?” “Are you thinking about beating the Methodists to the cafeteria?” or “Hello?!” after a failed attempt to create a chuckle.

A guiding question for us should be: when they hear our voice, will they indeed hear the voice of the Shepherd that gave His life for them? Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God” (see 2 Cor 3:2). This periodic consideration of who the people are, how Christ has died for them, and how the Spirit has called us to them and hopefully written them on our hearts as persons to be cared for will make our public messages to them filled with transparency, earnestness, godliness, and joy with the intent of edifying them by setting Christ before them. Instead of evoking a laugh from them, the point of our message should bring weeping from us and them for the reality of the eternity that looms before us mortals, the eternity in which we face the flaming eyes of the righteous judge whose vision will burn away every refuge except the cover of Christ’s obedience.

Third, *meditate seriously and purposefully on the glory of Christ*. The apostle Peter indicates that this action occupied the prophets prior to Christ’s coming. They “inquired carefully” as to what type of person or time might be required to fulfill the Spirit’s predictions concerning “the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Pet 1:10, 11 ESV). They labored over the revelation that they had with such intense interest that the Spirit made a separate revelation to them that the answers would not come in their lifetime.

These vital and compelling aspects of divine intervention were reserved for a subsequent age and could only be understood in light of the appearance of the person Himself. Only through Christ is the veil taken away, and, then, only “when one turns to the Lord” (2 Cor 3:14–16). Their turning to the Lord, moreover, was the result of hearing the “word of Christ” preached (Rom 10:17). After Christ’s ascension, the revelation was made in its fullness to the apostles and prophets (Eph3:5) even as they preached “the good news... by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12). The good news consisted of redemptive truth that even the angels did not fully grasp and which they evidently learned through the preaching of the apostolic generation.

As a result of the impact of this preaching, in which the sufferings of Christ and His subsequent glory were highlighted, Peter could admonish the churches to “set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13). Every admonition, every word of encouragement, every bit of instruction that Peter wrote relates immediately to the sufferings and glory of Christ. Their ground of acceptance is in His sufferings, and their hope for the future is in His glorification (1:2; 2:24; 3:18; 4:1, 2; 5:1, 10). Their reason for patience in all their trials is the suffering and glory of Christ (1:3–9; 3:14–18; 4:12–14). Their impetus for holiness is in the sufferings and glory of Christ (1:13–21; 2:18–23; 4:3–6). The energy and example for loving the brethren comes from the gospel of Christ’s suffering and glory preached to them (1:22–25; 3:8, 9; 4:7–11). If a preacher would understand a text and be inspired to preach all that it contains, he must spend time during the week reflecting on the glory of Christ in His cross, His resurrection, His intercession, and His coming.

THE PREACHER MUST BE DETERMINED THAT THOSE THAT HEAR THIS SERMON WILL KNOW THIS TEXT AND HOW ITS PARTS BOTH RADIATE FROM CHRIST AND HIS SUFFICIENCY AS SAVIOR AND LORD AND BEND BACK UPON HIM, REFLECTING HIS GLORY FROM A UNIQUE FACET ON THE JEWEL OF SCRIPTURE.

Fourth, *be saturated with the sermon text* and bear it consciously in mind throughout the sermon. In addition to thorough preparation in all the relevant helps available to the preacher, meditation on the text should heighten its importance in his mind so that he grasps the potency of the eternal blessings of grace flowing from it and can think of nothing more worthy of his allotted time than the display of Christ through its truth.

The preacher must be determined that those that hear this sermon will know this text and how its parts both radiate from Christ and His sufficiency as Savior and Lord and bend back upon Him, reflecting His glory from a unique facet on the jewel of Scripture. He must keep reminding the hearers that “Our text tells us so.” We would never want to do away with the massive variety of helps available today to expedite exegesis and give critical clarity to the meaning of a text. But we must also recognize that Scripture is its own best interpreter. A personal knowledge of the text, attention to its immediate context, and intimate acquaintance with the whole Bible make meditation on a particular text an edifying experience personally and lend power to one’s preaching. A. T. Robertson had broad acquaintance with large numbers of preachers that in truth were men of one book. He observed:

This was literally true in some instances, for some of the

early Baptist ministers were too poor to possess even a modest library. In some cases the old preacher would own Cruden’s *Concordance* or Matthew Henry’s *Commentary*. But the preacher who had only a copy of the English Bible often made such diligent use of it that he literally knew it. He could quote chapter and verse for his positions and expound Scripture by Scripture, a method not to be despised by the modern interpreter. Sermons out of the *Concordance* may be fearfully and wonderfully made, but sermons made out of the Bible which one has at his fingers’ ends may be charged with power and can certainly claim the promise of God to bless his Word in a sense not true of some modern disquisitions and essays. If some of the interpretations were at times crude and lacking in historical perspective, they at least reflected the light of truth. They were loyal to Christ and preached the reality of sin, the need of a Savior, and the power of Christ to save sinners of the deepest dye. The pioneer preacher believed his gospel with all his heart and had no doubts about it, for he had put it to the test in too many instances. He was a man of power largely because he was mighty in the Scriptures and was full of faith in God.

Fifth, *be single-minded in staying with the text and aware*

of the presence of Christ during the time of delivery. Many clever comments and easily permitted digressions would remain in the realm of the unspoken where they should be joined by many others were the preacher to cultivate a deep consciousness of Christ's presence with His people during the time of the ministry of the Word. The clutter of superfluous remarks could be swept away entirely if we kept in mind that the demands of the text should determine the contour and intent of every sentence.

Such concentration on text and Christ would defy the insertion of jokes. Free-standing fabrications of incongruity or implied ridicule simply for the sake of a laugh will not contribute to but will interrupt both the cogency of thought and the pertinent pathos necessary for penetrating a heart with truth and love. Late night talk shows may thrive on this material, but Christian pulpits will wilt right along with the souls that are periodically injected with the virus of insincerity. Jokes have nothing to do with the biblical text, and the attempt at teasing relevance out of them is so strained that the congregation usually sees through the charade; gospel seriousness flies away to find refuge somewhere else.


If you seek such jokes in the sermons of Calvin, Luther, Edwards, Whitefield, Wesley, Owen, Howe, Bunyan, Gill, Andrew Fuller, Richard Fuller, Robert Hall, John A. Broadus, James P. Boyce, or Charles Spurgeon, you will come up empty. They give no advice about it nor example of it. I doubt if the consideration of such a communicative device ever occurred to them, for their view of the task before them did not admit of it.

Spurgeon sometimes employed humor, but it was always in the flow of thought—an epigram, a pithy proverb, an ar-

resting image, an astute observation about human nature in its relation to divine things, a statement of irony—that sealed, rather than concealed or nullified, the truth being discussed. Boyce's sermons so overflow with earnest solicitude for the spiritual health of his hearers that one can almost feel the warmth generated by his devotional energy. Edwards' intensity for the truth of his doctrine and the salvation of his hearer, concerns intertwined at every phase of his sermon, reverberate with palpable power even from the printed page. Richard Fuller's saturation with the applicability of his doctrinal and textual theme left no space in his mental apparatus for a jocular spirit to shoulder its way into his thinking.

One should not infer from any of these suggestions that a minister of the gospel must be less, or more, than human. He should, however, recognize the sinful tendency that humans have to trivialize the sacred, and mortify that urge. He should recognize the sinful tendency to use the tongue as an instrument of hell, and fear the outcome. As one called to a transcendent task, he must not create a subterranean climate. As one given specific instructions about the chief function of his calling, he must avoid adding his own bright ideas about what would make it more compelling.

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching... But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim 4:2, 5). Hold fast the faithful Word that by sound doctrine you can exhort and convince those that contradict it; and show yourself to be a model of good works. In your teaching show integrity, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 1:9; 2:7, 8 paraphrased). ♦



**HOLD FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD THAT BY
SOUND DOCTRINE YOU CAN EXHORT AND
CONVINCE THOSE THAT CONTRADICT IT;
AND SHOW YOURSELF TO BE A
MODEL OF GOOD WORKS.**



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Doctor of Ministry

TAKING YOU TO THE NEXT LEVEL

As a shepherd of God's flock, the pastor demonstrates his love for the church most clearly through expository preaching. The D.Min. program modular sessions provide a way for you to grow in your preaching ability while remaining in your current ministry. Modular sessions are just three weeks each year during the first two years of the program—one week in January and two weeks in July.



GROW

Grow in knowledge of the Scripture, homiletics, and expository preaching.

STUDY

Study in Los Angeles under faithful preachers and teachers who are known for their expertise.

FELLOWSHIP

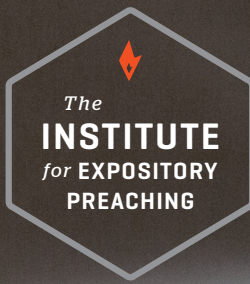
Fellowship richly with other pastors who share the calling to feed Christ's flock.

PREACH

Preach in your current ministry context using concepts from each modular session.

LEARN MORE

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UPCOMING EVENTS

**PREACHING THE
PURSUIT OF HOLINESS**
TUSTIN, CA

FEBRUARY 3-5, 2020
MISSION BIBLE CHURCH
1 HOPE DRIVE, TUSTIN, CA 92782

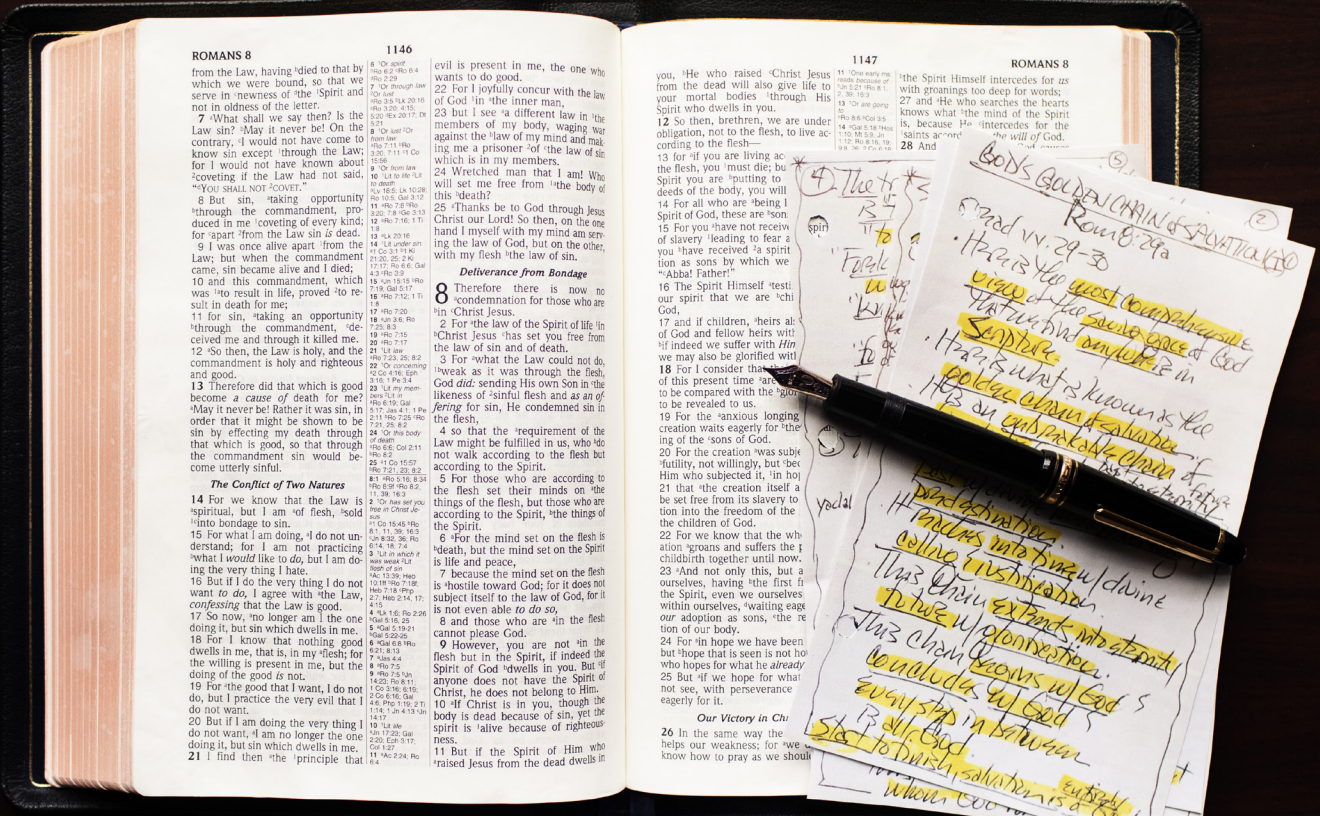
**PREACHING WITH
PRECISION & POWER**
PHOENIX, AZ

MARCH 30-APRIL 1, 2020
DESERT HILLS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
3636 W GREENWAY RD, PHOENIX, AZ 85053

**PREACHING THE
GOSPEL OF GRACE**
CONWAY, AR

AUGUST 17-19, 2020
GRACE BIBLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
701 GARLAND STREET, CONWAY, AR 72032

FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF UPCOMING EVENTS, PLEASE VISIT ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG/INSTITUTE/



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