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EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF
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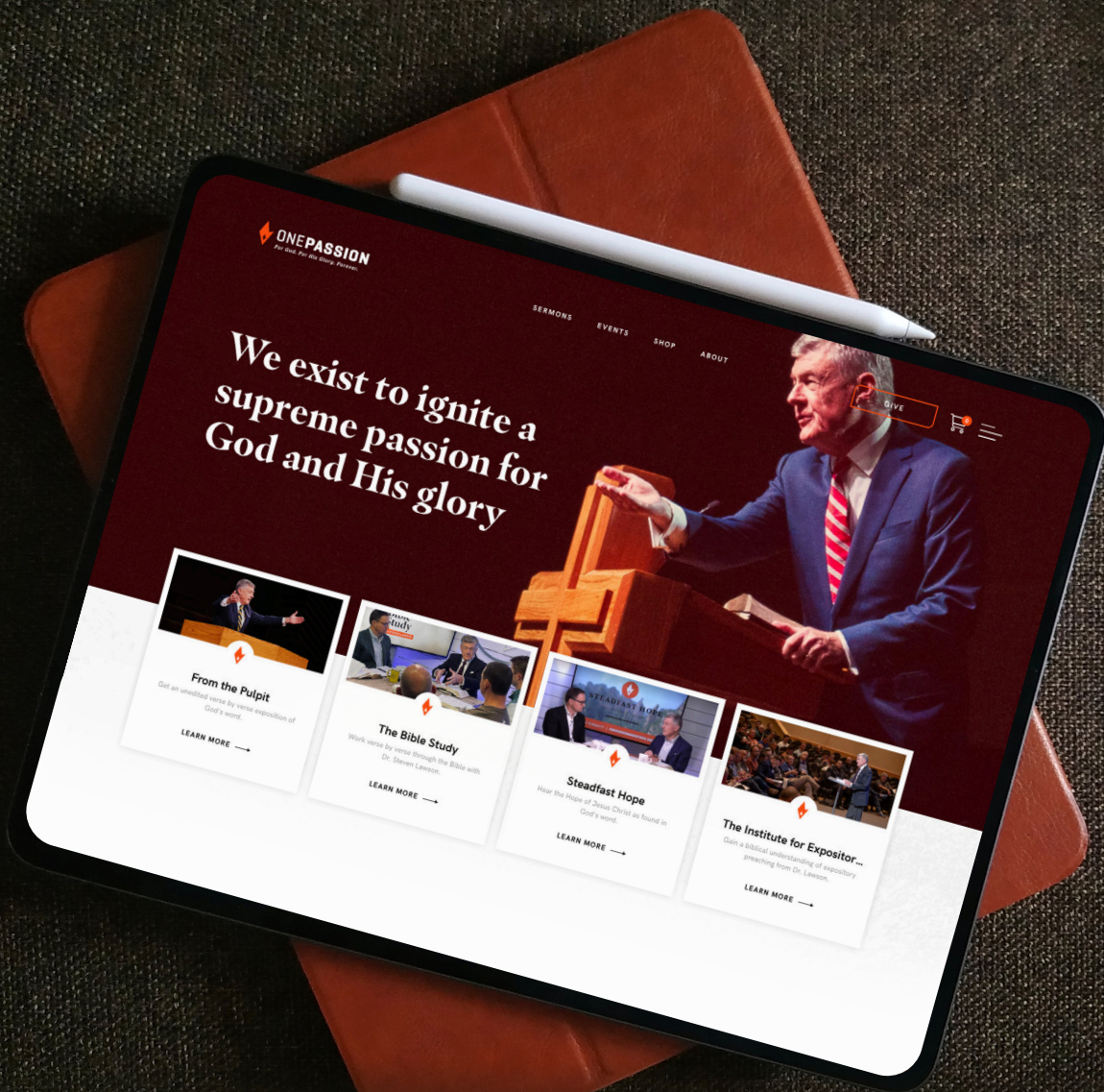
No. 45

PREACHING
with
PASSION



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The MARK of PREACHING

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES



I remember as a younger man when I first began to sit under great preachers. What initially captured my attention was how biblical the preaching was. There was a divine authority about their preaching because it was drawn from the pages of Scripture. But there was another element that was also noticeable—namely, the passion with which the message was delivered.

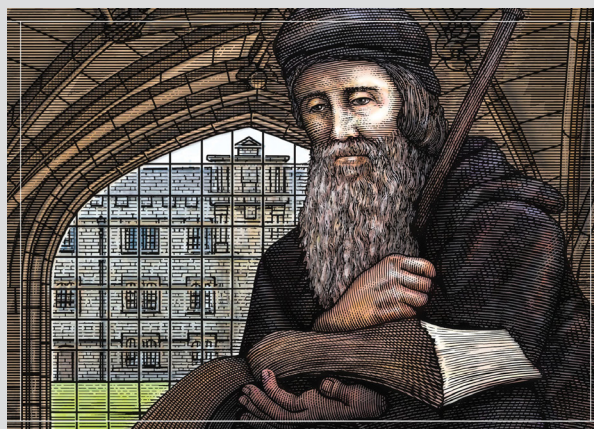
What marked their preaching was not just the biblical content that made their message so captivating and compelling. It was also the manner with which the truth was delivered. It was not just what these men said, but how they said it that made it so powerful. Their pulpit ministry was impactful not simply because of their doctrine, but it was also because of their delivery. At the heart of their preaching was the riveting force of conviction with which they proclaimed the truth.

These preachers seemed to trumpet the truth. They were heralds of the message, as though they had been dispatched from the courts of heaven and spoke with an intensity and urgency about them. It was this burning

zeal that caused the Scripture to pierce deeply into my soul like an arrow that had been shot from the bow of God. It was this glowing fervency that caused the gospel to plunge into my innermost being.

Such passion must also mark your preaching. It is what should distinguish you from another preacher. You may believe the same truth as another man, but it is so often the passion that will make you more effective. The difference may not lie in your message per se, but in how it is delivered.

In this issue of *Expositor*, we will discuss this intangible quality of passion in your preaching. I trust that these articles will ignite within you a flame to preach with an ever-increasing force of conviction. ♦



The Bible Convictions of

John Wycliffe

STEVEN J. LAWSON



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PREACHING

with

PASSION

STEVEN J. LAWSON

One of the most necessary and indispensable elements in effective preaching is passion. What makes one preacher more greatly used than another is not only the content of the message, but the manner with which it is delivered. The difference between two preachers lies not only in their doctrine, but also in their delivery of that truth.

Consider, for example, two men who are both exegetically and theologically sound. They teach essentially the same truth. But one man preaches his message with passion, while the other man with a subdued personality. The result, in most cases, is that the first man is a force in the pulpit, while the second man exerts a minimal influence.

What is the difference between these two preachers? It is not in what they say, but how they say it. Without passion, there is only the dissemination of information—but little more. Without zeal in the pulpit, the sermon will be reduced to a mere lecture. Without a fervent delivery, the worship center is little more than a classroom. Without a burning heart, the church is converted into a heady academy. Without a fire in the preacher's bones, the congregation is demoted into a student body—nothing more. Without passion, there is simply the transfer of knowledge, but not the salvation and transformation of the listeners.

Any preaching that lacks passion is missing the spiritual dynamics of what constitutes a true sermon. A dispassionate delivery falls woefully short of how

the message is to be given. If there is an absence of fervency, the message fails to rise to the level intended by God. If the preacher lacks the elements of confrontation, correction, and conviction, the sermon will fall flat. If the message is without inspiration, motivation, and summons, the words will fail to achieve the desired result. While God can work through any sermon, and any preacher, if we are to pursue the fullness of our calling to proclaim God's Word, we must allow the greatness of our message to inspire the passion with which we deliver it.

Because passion in preaching is so indispensable, several questions need to be raised: What is true passion? What are its distinguishing marks? Who demonstrated passion in the Bible? Who possessed it in church history? How can I possess it? Each of these questions will be addressed and answered in what follows.

THE MEANING OF PASSION

The *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* defines passion as a “very strong emotion, an intense enthusiasm for something.” The primary meaning of the word “passion” is “the suffering of pain.” The idea is to feel something very deeply in the core of one's being.

The Passion of Christ

The first example given by the *OED* is the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. This is known as the passion of Christ, which includes the agony of Gethsemane. The excruciating anguish of Jesus in the garden was severe as He prayed fervently with sweat drops of blood. The deep sorrow within His soul as Jesus hung upon the cross racked Him with pain as He suffered at every level—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He cried out with a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:46). Here is the primary picture of the word “passion”—the suffering of pain in the death of Christ.

As applied to the pulpit, the preacher must bleed the message. It must come flowing from his pores. It must cost him blood, sweat, and tears as he languishes to bring it forth. He must be like a mother giving birth to her baby, risking her very life in the delivery. So it

is in the delivery of a sermon. It should never be an easy thing to speak words of eternal life to those who are in dire need of its truth. As an expectant mother feels sharp pangs as she goes into labor, even so the preacher must labor as the time approaches to preach the Word.

The Suffering of Martyrs


The *Oxford English Dictionary* next lists “the sufferings of a martyr,” or “martyrdom.” Here, the emphasis is upon the depth of feelings that the martyrs endured as they went to the stake for what they believed. In the third century, the church father Cyprian of Carthage ordered the passions of the martyrs in Africa to be registered. In the sixteenth century, the martyrologist John Foxe did the same, recording the accounts of the passion of the martyrs in his famous book *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. The *OED* states that “passion is a narrative account of the passion of a martyr.” The depth of emotion that the martyrs felt as they marched to the stake to be burned arose out of their deep convictions in the truth. They were willing to die for the truth.

The martyr's death conveys the same depth of conviction that the preacher must feel as he preaches the full counsel of God. He must be willing to pay whatever price is necessary to proclaim what he believes to be true. When a preacher is put into such a situation, facing great opposition and even persecution, he speaks with much passion. The greater the danger to his ministry or life, the greater the urgency with which he speaks.

Affections Being Affected

The secondary meaning of passion is of a person being acted upon by an outside force. The individual is passive as something else is active and acting upon him. Here, the word “passive” is closely related to “passion.” The idea is that a person is greatly affected by a strong external force that is brought to bear upon them. The word “passion” depicts strong feelings with displays of deep emotions.

Several aspects of passion are as follows. It requires fervor, which is a warm intensity of feeling. It necessitates fire, which is a burning within, a burning passion. It has zeal, which is a strong, enthusiastic devotion to a



With passion comes a glowing warmth within the preacher's soul and that is felt even by his listeners.

cause. It has ardor, the fiery intensity of feeling. It has enthusiasm, the great excitement for or interest in a subject or cause. This kind of passion must mark the preacher as he heralds the truth. As he stands to minister God's Word, he must be deeply affected by God and the truth. He must be moved by the need that people have to receive the message into their lives.

THE MARKS OF PASSION

What are some of the distinguishing elements of passion in preaching? What comprises the reality of such genuine feelings in the pulpit? There are six specific aspects of passion that mark preaching with such deep emotion. These crucial elements include fervency, intensity, urgency, energy, authority, and sobriety.

Fervency

Passion in preaching is always marked by fervency. This English word derives from a Latin word (*fervere*) meaning "boiling." There must be a fire in the heart and soul of the preacher for God Himself, for Jesus Christ, and for His gospel. Fervency comes with intense feelings and blazing zeal for the glory of God. It is repeatedly ignited by the knowledge of the greatness of God. It is rekindled, again and again, by a growing

awareness of the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. With passion comes a glowing warmth within the preacher's soul and that is felt even by his listeners. People are either drawn to this zeal or are repelled by it, but they are never indifferent to such preaching.

John Piper writes, "Preaching must not only have profundity of content, but the profundity of emotion and affection." This is true. Both the preacher's mind and heart must be aglow for the glory of God. A young preacher once asked Spurgeon, "Why will no one come to hear me preach? What can I do?" Spurgeon responded: "Douse yourself with gas, strike a match, set yourself on fire, and people will come watch you burn." The point was well made. People are drawn to a preacher who is burning with zeal for God. But cold preaching keeps the "frozen chosen" chilled to the bone.

Intensity

With passion also comes a singular focus upon God. This sole preoccupation produces intensity for the truths of His kingdom within the preacher. The word "intensity" means the reality of being possessed by a great force. Such a man is never laid back, nor nonchalant. He is never casual when he preaches, nor chit-chatting. Instead, a passionate preacher is marked by

an intensity because he is riveted upon God. Therefore, he speaks in a most riveting manner. He comes across with a force of conviction in the truth that impacts his listeners, who come under the persuasion of his words.

A man marked by intensity is on a mission and will not be diverted. He is a preacher of one thing—the glory of God. Those who hear him actually feel the truth when he presents it. They are pulled into his vortex because he has tunnel vision on the greatness of God. He maintains a keen focus on the gospel of grace. He is narrowly centered upon its proclamation. He cannot be distracted from this message, nor compromise its truth. Because of this, he is boldly intense, highly spirited, and most emphatic. As Jim Elliot said, “Wherever you are, be all there.” This kind of a preacher is “all in” as he stands in the pulpit.

Urgency


A preacher with passion also has an urgency about him. The word “urgency” implies something that requires immediate attention and sudden action. As he stands in the pulpit, the expositor believes that he must preach this truth now, be heard now, and be responded to *now*. His passion causes him to preach with an immediacy about the moment. He feels compelled with the dire need that his listeners respond to his message

now—today, not tomorrow. What he declares, he believes to be received now, in this present hour.

As he preaches, he is very persuasive with his congregation. He is exhorting and pressing them for their response at this very time. He is entreating them for an answer now. He does not adopt a take-it-or-leave-it attitude with his listeners. It is never enough for him that he is correct in what he says. It is never enough that those who hear agree with him. Rather, they must *respond* to the message today. They must own what he says *now*. His burning fire is unleashed as he preaches. This causes his listeners to feel the urgency to act, without delay.

Energy

Passion also involves energy in preaching. This includes the strength and vitality required to be dynamic in the pulpit. The preacher with passion is animated and lively as he exerts mental and physical energy in the pulpit. John Broadus’s *Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* describes this in his chapter “Energy of Style.” He writes, “The term ‘energy’ used, as applied to style, includes all that we mean by such separate terms as animation, force, and passion.” He then delineates these various aspects of energy in the pulpit—animation, force, and passion.



A man marked by intensity is on a mission and will not be diverted. He is a preacher of one thing—the glory of God.

Broadus begins by addressing the energy of animation in the preacher: “*Animation*, or liveliness, serves to stimulate attention; it is not enough for a speaker to say what the hearer may understand ... ; the point is to arouse him, to put life into him, to make attention easy ... and inattention difficult. For this the freshness of the thought, and the magnetic power of delivery, are the chief agents; but much may also be accomplished by animation of style.” With this aspect of passion, Broadus states, comes a contagious excitement and exuberance in the preacher’s delivery.

Authority

Another element of passion is the authority with which the preacher speaks. His passion arises from the depth of his convictions. The deeper his convictions in the truth, the greater is his passion. Men without strong beliefs are indifferent and wishy-washy. They come across as spineless, not wanting to ruffle any feathers. But a man with doctrinal convictions speaks with much emotion because he so deeply believes what he believes. He preaches as though eternal destinies are at stake, as if heaven and hell await the listener’s response.

Broadus notes that a passionate preacher will speak with the force of his convictions. He writes, “The term *force* is used especially with preference to arguments, and the kindred word *power* is applied both to arguments and to motives.” He argues that with passion, there is a force about the preacher that exerts a positive influence upon his listeners “with the aim, at last, to influence the will.” There is an unwavering dogmatism about his beliefs in the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. He cannot help but speak with passion as he preaches the message. Passion is often the catalyst that God uses to activate the human will toward receiving and following the gospel.

Sobriety

Included in the idea of passion is the word “sobriety.” The preacher must be “sober” (*nephō*)—that is, possessed with mental alertness. He must be of sober and sound judgment as he stands in the pulpit (2 Tim 4:5). He must be free from the intoxicating desire to win the applause of men rather than receive the approval of God. He must be unmoved by the spirit of the age.

He must resist any temptation to entertain his listeners but committed to “solemnly testify” (*diamarturomai*) to the truth (Acts 2:40; 8:25; 10:42; 20:21). This means the preacher must speak as a serious-minded man who solemnly bears witness to the divine message.

This sobriety does not mean he should be lacking in joy. It does not discount the fact that he may use an occasional appropriate use of humor. He should be winsome and engaging. However, the overall manner with which he comes across to his listeners is that of a serious man with a serious message. He should never appear to be frivolous, trivial, or light-hearted. This mark of sobriety is an important element in preaching.

Indispensable Marks

Broadus concludes his comments on passion in the preacher: “Without these qualities one may give valuable instruction; without them one might preach what silly admirers call ‘beautiful’ sermons; but if a man has not force of character, a passionate soul, he will never be really eloquent... No other topics can impart to the mind such vigor and authority as truths which we personally know to be taught in God’s Word. ‘A truly mighty sacred orator is mighty in the Scriptures.’” Every greatly used preacher is marked by this indispensable element of passion in the pulpit.

THE MODELS OF PASSION

Throughout redemptive history, preachers were moved with deep emotion as they brought the message of the Lord. Starting with the prophets of old, continuing with Christ and the apostles, and extending throughout church history, these men were known for proclaiming God’s message with swelling passion. It was never a light matter for them to preach the Word of God. The truth that they delivered was so heavy that it weighed deeply upon their souls. Divine judgment was pending. Eternal souls were hanging in the balance. Everlasting destinies were at stake. How could their preaching be a light matter?

The Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah, often called the evangelical prophet, was the



prince of prophets. In the days of his ministry, he was given a heavy oracle that was a burden upon him. Isaiah says, “The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. Lift up a standard on the bare hill, raise your voice to them, wave the hand that they may enter the doors of the nobles” (Isa 13:1–2). The word “oracle” (*massa*) means a weight, corresponding to the idea that the prophet’s message is a weighty truth to preach.

Such an “oracle” caused Isaiah’s message to proceed from him with deep emotion. He pronounced “Woe” (*hoy*), a word of judgment, upon the sinful nation of Israel with much intensity and sobriety (Isa 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22). His was a weighty message that was delivered in the appropriate manner with a heavy heart. Such a denunciation simply could not be brought in a light, frivolous manner. The content of the message determines the degree of the passion with which it is delivered. A weighty message provokes a very passionate delivery.

The Prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was moved to tears over the sins of God’s people. The prophet says, “Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jer 9:1). Again he says, “My eyes will bitterly weep and flow down with tears,

because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive” (13:17). Once more he states, “In my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure” (20:9). Here, Jeremiah confesses that God’s Word was burning within him like a raging fire.

What is escalating as a smoldering fire within him is God’s message. This compels him to proclaim the truth of God’s Word. He states, “Is not My word like fire?, declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer which shatters a rock?’” (Jer 23:29). When the Word is deeply embedded within a preacher, it erupts with a building intensity, releasing supernatural energy within him. The truth becomes like an eruptive volcano that must flow forth from his mouth.

The Prophet Ezekiel

God appointed Ezekiel to be like a watchman on the tower who must lift up his voice like a trumpet. This instrument sends a strong, clarion sound, like the preacher must declare the divine message. A trumpet blast projects a powerful, militant note that elicits a response from its hearers. The prophet records:

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, ‘If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take

one man from among them and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.' Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me." (Ezek 33:1-7)

As Ezekiel was appointed a watchman on the wall, every preacher is likewise positioned in his pulpit. And as the watchman blew his trumpet, the one called to preach must sound forth his message with a strong voice that is full of intense emotion.

The Prophet Jonah

When Jonah preached in Nineveh, it was much the same as it was with the other prophets that preceded him. When he came to "the great city," he raised his voice and preached with passion. He was not mumbling this message. Neither was he whispering it. He was certainly not speaking with a monotone voice. Rather, he cried out for all to hear:

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim [*qara*] to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out [*qara*]

and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." (Jon 3:1-4)

This Hebrew word *qara* means to cry out, to call aloud, to roar. It can even mean to roar like a lion. This is how Jonah delivered his message to the Ninevites. He proclaimed it with a loud voice marked by fiery emotion. This is precisely the kind of passion that should be heard and felt by those who hear true preaching.

John the Baptist

As we proceed to the New Testament, we encounter a similar manner with which the gospel message was preached. After four hundred years of silence from heaven, the first voice to be heard belonged to one who preached in the wilderness, John the Baptist: "For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!" (Matt 3:3). The word "crying" (*boaō*) is translated elsewhere as "shouting" (Luke 9:38; Acts 8:7; 17:6) and "loudly declaring" (Acts 25:24). Even so, when John preached, it was marked by ardent passion.

Jesus described the preaching of John in the same way, "He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light" (John 5:35). Like a brilliant torch, John was on fire for God, "burning" with internal heat and "shining" with the light of truth.

The Lord Jesus Christ

When Jesus saw the crowds, "He felt compassion for them" (Matt 9:36). The Lord was not a stoic Savior, nor a robotic Redeemer. He was not untouched, nor unmoved, by those in need around Him. Instead, He felt deeply for them. Jesus felt compassion for their lost condition and spiritual helplessness. The word "felt compassion" (*splagchnizō*) means, literally, to the intestines or bowels. It is used figuratively to represent deep emotions that one feels in the pit of the stomach. It represents an intensity of feelings that affects the person bodily. As Jesus ministered, He felt this deep emotion in His own body. He certainly preached with the same depth of feeling.

On one occasion, Jesus preached and "cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and

Throughout church history, the greatest preachers have been men marked by passion in their preaching.

drink” (John 7:37). “Cried out” (*krazō*) reveals great intensity and urgent desire. This same word is later translated as “shouting” (Acts 19:32, 34). The idea is to yell with full emotion. Even so, the gospel message must be boldly declared by Spirit-filled preachers.

The Apostle Peter

On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood to preach and followed in the example of his Master. He declared the message as he had observed Jesus preach. He “raised his voice and declared to them: ‘Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words’” (Acts 2:14). “Raised” (*epairō*) means he “lifted up” his voice. He did so not only to be heard by the large crowd, but to reveal the blood-ear-nest passion that gripped his soul. The message could not be self-contained, but came from him with much strength of conviction.

The Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul preached with the same deep feelings and strong emotions, not unlike Peter. To the Ephesian elders, Paul reminded, “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:31). This kind of tear-filled passion consistently marked the preaching of this apostle. The word

“admonish” (*noutheteō*) means to exhort and plead with others to pursue a designated course of action. It is preaching that drives the teaching into the heart (see Col 3:16).

To the Colossians, Paul writes, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Col 1:28). The word “proclaim” (*katangellō*) is a compound word that means a solemn or public proclamation. The verb *angellō* means to proclaim, and the prefix *kata* intensifies the verb. When combined, these two words indicate speech that is forcefully and passionately delivered. This is the manner which marked the preaching of this apostle.

“Admonishing” and “teaching” are participles that modify “proclaim.” What is primary in this verse is to proclaim the message. This entails speaking forcefully and boldly, holding nothing back of the truth. The idea is to lift up the voice in order to be heard by all. It conveys the idea of declaring the message from the housetops. This is to assume the role of a herald who has been dispatched from Caesar’s throne to carry his royal decree to the outer parameters of the Empire.

From Age to Age

This brief survey of preaching in the Bible indicates that it was done with passion. There was no mundane proclamation of the divinely entrusted message by these

servants of the Lord. These biblical examples that are set before us speak volumes to us today. As we preach, let us follow in their steps. It matters to God not only what we say, but how we say it. Passion matters to God.

Throughout church history, the greatest preachers have been men marked by passion in their preaching. For over twenty centuries, the Word has been preached by men who have marked their eras with their strong biblical message. These pulpit giants did not whisper the message, but declared it with much passion, setting a pattern for all who follow.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther, the towering German Reformer, said, “The gospel should not be written, but screamed.” This reflected Luther’s preaching, which was energetic, engaging, and highly spirited. His heart was ablaze with the truth of the gospel, which consumed him with a burning desire to preach. Broadus writes in *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, “Luther is a notable example of intense personality in preaching. He was indeed an imperial personality. . . . Those who heard him were not only listening to the truth, but they *felt the man*.” So intense was Luther in the pulpit, Broadus adds: “His words were half battles.” He writes that Luther’s preaching was marked by “swelling passion and manly vigor.” His fiery delivery aroused the Germans from their slumber, being “strong and manly.”

Further commenting on Luther’s intense passion, Broadus makes an important point concerning the projection of the preacher’s personality:

Some think the ideal is to put the gospel alone before the mind, and let the preacher be entirely forgotten. “Hide yourself behind the cross,” is the phrase. What is here intended is well enough, but the statement is extreme if not misleading. What is the use of a living preacher, if he is to be really hidden, even by the cross? The true ideal surely is, that the preacher shall come frankly forward, in full personality, modest through true humility and yet bold with personal conviction and fervid zeal and ardent love—presenting the gospel as a reality of his own experience, and

attracting men to it by the power of a living and present human sympathy and yet all the while preaching not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord.

Broadus goes on to say that in the pulpit, Luther was a forceful personality with a compelling persona. This magisterial Reformer was “a conquering soul, a monarch, a born ruler of mankind.” Edward Plass, an authority on Luther’s preaching, concludes, “Luther was most impressive as a speaker. In fact, even as an author he is largely an orator. His written word is his spoken word in print. It has all the directness of verbal communication. If the vigor and force of Luther’s writings is to be fully appreciated, they should be read aloud.”

Philip Schaff, noted church historian, also commented that Luther the preacher was “a Boanerges [son of thunder], the like of whom Germany never heard before or since.” Philip Melancthon, Luther’s fellow German Reformer, said that Luther’s words in the pulpit were “born not on his lips but in his soul.”

Each of these comments about Luther’s presence in the pulpit reveals a man filled with swelling passion. His was an enormous personality, and this came through in his preaching. He spoke with the energy level of a soldier advancing to the front lines of battle. Such intensity should mark the exposition of every preacher, within the parameters of his own unique personality and the setting in which he finds himself.

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards is regarded by many as the greatest preacher born on American soil. This highly doctrinal minister nevertheless understood that preaching should “raise the affections” of his listeners. Edwards asserted, “If true religion lies much in the *affections*, we may infer, that *such a way of preaching the word* . . . as has a tendency deeply to affect the hearts of those who attend . . . is much to be desired” (emphasis added). In other words, preaching should “affect the affections” of those who sit under the ministry of the Word.

During the Great Awakening, the dignified clergy in Boston took exception to the kind of preaching by Edwards and others, such as George Whitefield, that stirred up the emotions of the listeners. Edwards



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JONATHAN EDWARDS

responded:

I do not think ministers are to be blamed for raising the affections of their hearers too high, if that which they are affected with be only that which is worthy of affection, and their affections are not raised beyond a proportion to their importance.

I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth.

Edwards then distinguished his sermons from the stiff, boring messages delivered by the Harvard-graduated ministers. Such preachers were stuffy, because they merely read their notes in the pulpit. Edwards took dead aim and stated:

I know that it has long been fashionable to despise a very earnest way of preaching; and they, and they only, have been valued as preachers, that have shown the greatest extent of learning, and strength of reason, and correctness of method and language; but I humbly conceive it has been for want of understanding or duly considering human nature, that such preaching [that raises the affections of people for God] has been thought to have the greatest tendency to answer the ends of preaching; and the experience of the present and past ages abundantly confirms the same.

This statement was an indictment of others' monotonous homilies. To the contrary, Edwards believed that true preaching should light up, fire up, and lift up the listener. It should motivate and move those who hear it. As with the preaching of the prophets and apostles, preaching should ignite great passion in hearts for God.

George Whitefield

There has been no greater evangelist born than the English evangelist George Whitefield. The secret of his success lay in his passionate delivery and zealous

proclamation. This was in a day when preaching had degenerated into a dry ritual of a minister merely reading his notes in the pulpit. Whitefield, though, burst onto the scene *preaching*—exhorting, pleading, wooing, calling, begging, even weeping. This was anything but a stoic, cold reading of his sermon notes, which was the practice of the day. Instead, Whitefield preached with his whole being, with demonstrative body language and commanding gestures. When he preached, his presence was larger than life, as his countenance was aglow in proclaiming the saving gospel of Christ.

Whitefield summarized his approach to preaching this way: “The church is asleep. Only a loud voice will awaken it from its slumber.” J. C. Ryle concurred: “His soul was all passion; his heart was all fire.” John Wesley, a contemporary of Whitefield, described his preaching as speaking with “divine pathos.” Wesley further referred to his “fervency of zeal, perhaps unequaled since the days of the apostles.” He preached with “religious feeling” and often wept as he spoke.

Some criticized him for it. Whitefield responded: “You blame me for weeping, but how can I help it when you will not weep for yourselves, though your immortal souls are on the verge of destruction?” Ryle maintained, “[Whitefield] rescued preaching. He made it what it ought to have been all along: a desperate plea to a perishing people, a confrontation with the word of the living God ... preaching was merely the way his heart reached out to the lost and the hurting.”

In Whitefield's only visit to Northampton, Massachusetts, he preached over the course of one weekend five times. Whitefield noted that Edwards sat on the front pew and was moved to tears by the emotional and evangelistic power of his delivery. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic, was once challenged as he was seen going to hear George Whitefield preach: “I thought you do not believe in the gospel.” Hume replied, “I don't, but he does.”

A person came up to George Whitefield once: “Can we print your sermons?” Whitefield responded: “Only if you can capture the thunder and the lightning.” Arnold Dallimore stated, “Whitefield taught the evangelical world a new manner of preaching. In a day when ministers in general were lacking zeal and were apologetic in preaching, he preached the gospel with aggressive zeal and undaunted courage. He set

mankind on fire wherever he went, and numerous men, learning from his example, began to preach after the same manner.”

James W. Alexander

James Alexander was a noted preacher in the nineteenth century, the eldest son of Archibald Alexander, the first president and professor of Princeton Seminary. The younger Alexander wrote a book, *Thoughts on Preaching*, in which he stated:

The same truths uttered from the pulpit by different men, or by the same man in different states of feeling, will produce very different effects. Some of these are far beyond what the bare conviction of the truth so uttered would ordinarily produce. The whole compass of truth, by the sudden passion of the speaker, is made *red-hot* and burns its way. Passion is eloquence. (emphasis added)

The difference between the two preachers is passion. The truth is made red-hot by the passion of the one preacher and is caused to burn its way to the end. Alexander wrote:

No man can be a great preacher, without a great feeling... . Preaching should be with affectionate earnestness and tenderness. The appearance of coldness and indifference in the preacher to the awful and interesting truths of God’s Word must have a most unhappy effect on the minds of the hearers ... *A man pleading* for the life of another must not appear as one discoursing on an indifferent subject. (emphasis added)

Charles Spurgeon

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is hailed as the undisputed “Prince of Preachers.” The expositions of this pulpit giant, delivered in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, are luminous. This master of the preached Word described the importance of passion in preaching: “No man who preaches the gospel without zeal is sent of God to preach at all.” This is to say, if there is no passion, there is no

preaching. He stated, “I like the idea of pouring our sermons out of our own hearts. They must come from our hearts, or they will not go to our hearers’ hearts.” Again, “True preaching is artesian; it wells up from the great depths of the soul. If Christ has not made a well within us, there will be no outflow from us.”

Spurgeon stressed, “[The preacher] must feel his subject. It is as marvelous as it is mournful, that the weighty and thrilling truths of God’s Word lose so much of their force from the little interest the preacher himself feels in his theme.” He reiterated, “No preacher can sustain the attention of his people unless he feels his subject; nor can he long sustain it, unless he feels it deeply.”

Once more, Spurgeon said,

If he would make others solemn, [the preacher] himself must be solemn; he must have fellowship with the truths he utters. He must preach as though he were in sight of the cross, and heard the groans of the Mighty Sufferer of Calvary; as though the judgment was set, and the books opened; as though the sentence were just about to be passed which decided the destinies of men; as though he had been looking into the pit of despair; as well as drawing aside the veil, and taking a view of the unutterable glory.

Alexander Maclaren

Alexander Maclaren, the noted Scottish Baptist preacher of the nineteenth century, comments on the passion that is necessary to be a preacher. He notes:

To cry ... suggests the manner befitting those who bear God’s message. They should sound it out loudly, plainly, urgently, with earnestness and marks of emotion in their voices. Languid whispers will not wake up sleepers. Unless the messenger is manifestly in earnest, the message will fall flat. Not with bated breath as if ashamed of it, nor with hesitation as if not quite sure of it, nor with coldness as if it were of little urgency—is God’s Word to be pealed in men’s ears. The preacher is a crier.

It is such criers who are so desperately needed in pulpits today. We have a generation of mumblers, talkers, and entertainers, but few proclaimers with a loud voice, as are needed in this hour.

John Murray

John Murray, the renowned professor, exegete, and commentator in the early twentieth century, was possessed with a towering theological mind. But despite his brilliance, he recognized that preaching must be delivered with passion. Murray said, “To me, preaching without passion is not preaching at all.” Such a discourse is merely someone talking or lecturing, but certainly not preaching.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones


Arguably, the most influential expositor of the twentieth century was Martyn Lloyd-Jones, pastor of Westminster Chapel, London. It was his pulpit that started the current resurgence in expository preaching. The Doctor was known for his fiery passion in preaching.

In his landmark book *Preaching and Preachers*, Lloyd-Jones stated:

What is preaching? Logic on fire! ... It is theology on fire. And a theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man's understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. A true understanding and experience of the Truth must lead to this. I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one.

Lloyd-Jones further addressed this matter of passion in preaching:

This element of pathos and of emotion is, to me, a very vital one. It is what has been so seriously lacking in the present century, and



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CHARLES SPURGEON

perhaps especially among Reformed people. We tend to lose our balance and to become over-intellectual, indeed almost to despise the element of feeling and emotion. We are such learned men, we have such a grasp of the Truth, that we tend to despise feeling. The common herd, we feel, are emotional and sentimental, but they have no understanding.

Along this line, a young candidate for the ministry once approached Lloyd-Jones and asked: “What is the difference between preaching and teaching?” Lloyd-Jones responded: “Young man, if you have to ask me the difference between teaching and preaching, it is obvious you have never heard of true preaching. Because if you had heard real preaching, you would have never asked me the difference between teaching and preaching.” Lloyd-Jones discussed the difference between a lecture and sermon: “A lecture can be given any time, tomorrow, next week, or next month. But a sermon must be given *now*. It must come with a sense of urgency.” So it is that preachers must proclaim the Word with passion.

By this estimate, all preaching must include teaching, but not all teaching includes preaching. Preaching goes beyond teaching because it does more than inform the mind—it challenges the will.

John MacArthur

John MacArthur is certainly the most highly regarded expositor in our day. He has served as the pastor-teacher at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, for over half a century. Concerning the element of passion, MacArthur dismisses preaching without it:


Passionless preachers usually do not even realize the damage they do to the cause of truth. They may truly love the Word of God and have a high regard for sound doctrine, but what their dispassionate delivery actually communicates is apathy and indifference. In the end, they undermine the very work they believe they are called to advance. The world (and the church) would be better off

without such preaching. I have often said that if a man is unable to be passionate about the Word of God, he has no business preaching. If someone can stand in the pulpit and manage to make the Word of the living God sound dry and dull, that person ought to sit down and let someone else preach. This is true even if he possesses top academic credentials; one’s educational achievements alone cannot qualify that person to preach. Mere logic without the fire of passion is far from the biblical ideal for preaching.

MacArthur emphasizes the need for true preaching when he adds:

I am convinced that even in the most sound and solid Bible churches today, much of what is labeled preaching is not that at all. Turn off the overhead, eliminate the Power-Point presentation, stop passing out the fill-in-the-blank outlines, and let the man of God proclaim the truth with genuine, heartfelt fervor, energized by the Spirit’s unction. That is preaching. This is no argument against training or preparation. Good preaching occurs when the well-trained mind—filled with knowledge, skilled at clarity, motivated by love for the truth, and energized by the Holy Spirit—speaks powerfully to people. The true preacher is never content with informing his people about a few academic matters. He wants to overwhelm them with clear and powerful exposition of the Word so they feel the impact of God’s truth at the most fundamental level.

This indispensable element of passion, MacArthur argues, marks effective preaching: “Feel deeply about the truth you are to preach. Remember that expositors have a mandate from God to preach the truth and that eternal consequences hang in the balance.” If the preacher does not feel deeply about the message he brings, he should not expect his listeners to be gripped with what comes from the pulpit.



Preaching goes beyond teaching because it does more than inform the mind—it challenges the will.

THE MAKING OF PASSION

How can you develop passion in your preaching? There are some practical steps that you as a preacher must take. God works through several means to achieve His desired ends. So it is with passion. Here is how you may cultivate passion within your soul as you preach. You need the following:

Knowing God

First, preachers must have a transcendent theology, meaning a towering view of God upon His throne. Passion comes from having a lofty knowledge of God. The more we grow to have an exalted understanding of God, the greater is our passion for Him. Knowing the greatness and grandeur of God thrills the soul, which ignites fervent passion for Him. This must include growing to know the full counsel of God concerning His perfect holiness, absolute sovereignty, and saving grace. Such an understanding produces a breathtaking view of His glory and great excitement for Him. High theology produces high doxology and exalted passion for Him.

Looking to Christ

Second, preachers who would have passion must set their mind on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We must be growing deeper in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). This requires a deeper understanding of His

eternal deity, virgin birth, and sinless life. It includes personally meditating on His substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, and present enthronement. It necessitates carefully considering His imminent return, final judgment, and eternal reign. Passion is ignited by being riveted upon Christ (Luke 24:32).

Filling of the Spirit

Third, if men are to know increased passion in the pulpit, they must be filled with the Holy Spirit. A fervent intensity in preaching cannot be self-generated. No preacher is the source of his own passion. The Spirit must produce his burning zeal for God and for His truth. We must be possessed by the Spirit if we are to preach in power. Our soul must be repeatedly rekindled by the dominating control of the Spirit. Where the Spirit reigns, there follows an intense desire for the glory of God as we stand to preach.

Confessing Sin

Fourth, preachers with passion must be continually confessing their sin to God. Unconfessed sin quenches our zeal for God. Unrepented sin is like cold water poured on a blazing fire. It extinguishes the flame of passion to smoldering ashes. But when we confess our sin, God forgives us, and He stokes the dying fire within us, causing it to be reignited and once again burn brightly. Before David confessed his sin, his body and soul were languishing in doldrums. But acknowledging his sins to God reawakened his fervor for Him.

Offering Prayers

Fifth, preachers are passionate when they are regularly devoted to God in prayer. Personal time alone with God enlarges our hearts for Him. Consistent fellowship with God in prayer leads to a heart that is intense for His glory. By drawing close to God, we catch fire from Him. Our close proximity to God creates our glowing devotion to Him. There is no substitute for private time spent alone in His presence in prayer. Pouring out our soul to Him reignites our soul with holy passion for Him.

Seeing Lives Changed

Sixth, preachers who see people converted to Christ under their preaching experience an increased excitement to preach more. Hearing people's testimonies of coming to faith in Christ and seeing their lives dramatically changed produces authentic passion within us. Few things rejuvenate our hearts more than learning about others who have been saved under our pulpit ministry. In the midst of many pastoral challenges and difficulties, our spirits are rejuvenated when we observe others being helped through our gospel labors.

Reading Biographies

Seventh, a preacher's passions are greatly increased when reading the biographies of noted Christian leaders. This is especially true when learning about the heroic efforts of martyrs and missionaries who faced great adversity yet persevered in trusting and serving God. They sacrificed many personal comforts and paid an enormous price to spread the gospel. These heroes of the faith lived by faith and overcame many imposing obstacles to advance the kingdom of God. Their stories of faith inspire passion within our hearts. These accounts motivate us to undertake great adventures for God, even in the face of much opposition.

Fellowshipping with Believers

Eighth, preachers who would have passion must maintain close fellowship with other fervent believers. Passion is contagious. As fire spreads, so does passion spread from one life to another. If a preacher is predominantly spending his time counseling people with

complex troubles and investing much time isolated in his study, he may soon become burned out. Like any Christian, he needs positive relationships with encouraging people. He needs people in his inner circle who support him, who make deposits into his life, and who build him up. In such a spiritually healthy life, passion is most often generated.

Meditating upon Eternity

Ninth, preachers will experience an impassioned heart as they contemplate what relatively little time they have left in their life to serve God. Passion in our preaching tends to escalate as we remember the shortness of life, the suddenness of death, the certainty of judgment, the length of eternity, the reality of heaven, and the finality of hell. Considering these sobering truths creates intense passion as we stand to preach. We realize afresh that eternal destinies are at stake. We must preach, as Richard Baxter said, as a dying man to dying men, as never to preach again. Such an eternal perspective creates positive drive within us in the pulpit.

A FINAL WORD

I trust that you recognize the importance of passion in your preaching. This is not a matter to be relegated to secondary concern in your pulpit ministry, but one that is of great significance. If you are to be used by God with maximum impact upon your listeners, then you must be captured by passion as you stand to preach. Passion is a non-negotiable hallmark of true preaching. It has been a characteristic of all preaching with power. There are no exceptions to this—it is that important.

God calls you to preach His Word with your whole being. This includes not only with a sound mind, but with a spirited soul. It matters to God not only what you say, but how you say it. God is concerned with not only your doctrine, but your delivery. Your exegesis and exposition are important to Him, but so also is the energy with which you proclaim it. Passion in your preaching is critically important to God—and to your listeners. It must be, therefore, important to you. ♦



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JOHN MACARTHUR

Matthew records Jesus' parting instructions to His disciples in just two and a half verses: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18–20). Those are Christ's marching orders for the church. The two main verbs in that text reflect how narrowly focused the mandate is: *Go. Make disciples.*

Though simple, the strategy our Lord outlines here is absolutely comprehensive. It is *thorough*—comprising every command and every doctrine He ever spoke. It is *global*—extending to the uttermost parts of the

earth. And it is *endless*—delegating to Christ's followers a task that will not be finished until He returns. Furthermore (and note this well), the objective is to make disciples—not merely to collect professions of faith.

None of that takes anything away from the pinpoint sharpness of the Great Commission. As comprehensive as it is in its scope, content, and far-sightedness, our Lord's mandate is uncluttered and very basic. The gospel is both its starting point and its anchor. That's clear from Luke 24:47, where Christ (on the road to Emmaus) summarizes the Great Commission this way: "... that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in [My] name to all the nations." Later, in His final words before ascending to heaven, Jesus tells His apostles, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem



Jesus wasn't sending His followers to redeem their culture, do social work, vanquish slavery and other injustices, or upgrade public morality.

and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 ESV). Plainly, the heart and soul of our mission is evangelistic.

Jesus wasn't sending His followers to redeem their culture, do social work, vanquish slavery and other injustices, or upgrade public morality. All those things gradually happened as the gospel permeated the Roman world, but they were side effects and secondary benefits. The apostles' clear objective was simply to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth and continue teaching everyone who responds in faith. *Go. Make disciples.* That remains the singular duty of the church. Jesus' final earthly instructions to His followers have not been revised or amended for these postmodern times.

We ignore that fact to our peril. Church history is full of lessons about the folly of wandering from the Great Commission. When the church is engaged in gospel-centered outreach and disciple-making, the people of God flourish and the impact of our testimony in the world is both far-reaching and long-lasting. When Christians get diverted from their real mission,

their collective testimony suffers, confusion and false teaching move in, and congregations diminish, decay, and eventually die. The ones that don't die often become synagogues of Satan, peddling all kinds of false beliefs and ungodly values in the name of Christ.

By contrast, the saving power of the gospel and the sanctifying influence of faithful ministry are clearly evident in the record of the early church, starting at Pentecost. The church took root and grew wherever the gospel was proclaimed. As more and more people were discipled, faithful witnesses took the message to the far corners of the known world. Less than a generation after Christ first gave His Great Commission to the original Twelve, people in the far reaches of the Roman Empire were referring to the apostles and their cohorts as “these men who have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6 ESV).

That wasn't meant as a compliment. It was the accusation of a mob in Thessalonica who incited a riot in opposition to the ministry of Paul and Silas. The fact that the church grew so quickly and reached so far in such a short time certainly does not mean the apostles

found a way to make their message popular. The gospel was no more popular in the first century than it is today. The majority of people rejected and opposed the message—often violently.

Thessalonica was by no means the only city where the gospel unleashed a riot. Before he ever arrived in Thessalonica, Paul had already met fierce resistance in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Tim 3:11). In fact, he had been stoned and left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:9). In Philippi, he was attacked by a mob, beaten with rods, and thrown in jail (Acts 16:22–23). Even as the church grew, the hostility from the wider community did not diminish. Some four years after Paul was run out of Thessalonica, Ephesus would respond even more angrily to the gospel (Acts 19:29).

What’s significant about all this is that in the face of such opposition, Paul made no effort whatsoever to adapt his methodology in a way that might mollify his critics or avoid the reproach. Whenever he came into a new region, he would immediately seek out the local synagogue, go there on the Sabbath, and preach Christ to the gathered assembly.

That, in fact, is precisely where Acts 17 starts: “They came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom, he went to

them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ” (vv. 1–3).

That simple message—the gospel, proclaimed boldly and without apology—is what triggered all the antagonism against Paul in Thessalonica.

If Paul had been thinking like the typical twenty-first-century church-growth strategist, he might have put the gospel on a back burner and concocted some kind of “pre-evangelistic” strategy—trying to win the respect or admiration of influential citizens before proclaiming the gospel in a culture where most people clearly thought the message was both foolish and deeply offensive.

But Paul didn’t do that. He went directly from Thessalonica to Berea and preached in the synagogue there (v. 10). When some hooligans followed him from Thessalonica and tried to provoke the citizens of Berea to riot, Paul moved on to Athens (v. 15), where, yet again, he took the gospel to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He also proclaimed the gospel in the Athenian marketplace during the week (v. 17), stirring both interest and controversy there, too.



Acts 17 goes on to recount how Paul was summoned to speak to the elite minds of Athens at the Areopagus—the gathering place of philosophers and intellectuals. It was not because he had won their respect, but practically the opposite: The philosophers thought he would make an amusing diversion—perhaps an easy target for some highbrow scorn. “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” (v. 18).

The apostle was himself an educated man, well versed in the philosophies and ancient writings of the Athenians. He was able to quote classic Greek poets to demonstrate that Greek beliefs were once closer to biblical truth than any of the philosophies commonly embraced by the elite minds of that first-century generation.


But Paul did not try to wow the erudite Athenians with abstract philosophical arguments or elegant oratory. He began by declaring to them that their religious beliefs were rooted in ignorance and all wrong. He announced that God “is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed,

having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (vv. 30–31). In other words, *Paul preached Christ*. He was about to expound the gospel more fully to these exalted Athenian intellectuals, but as soon as he mentioned the resurrection from the dead, the response was so much mockery, controversy, and crosstalk that the meeting broke up before Paul had an opportunity to finish his message to the Areopagites.

Again, the typical evangelical missional strategist today would no doubt wish to modify Paul’s approach. Surely such a response—by now a predictable pattern in Paul’s ministry—requires a revamping of the whole strategy. Right?

Wrong. Paul went straight from Athens to Corinth, where his strategy remained unchanged. “He was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). What kind of arguments did Paul use in Corinth? After such opposition in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, did he change his approach to suit Corinthian culture better?

He answers that question definitively in his first epistle to the Corinthians: “When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of



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JOHN MACARTHUR

wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:1–2). Paul stayed on message. Despite intense opposition everywhere he went (up to and including the real potential of violent resistance), he never downplayed or deviated from the gospel.

That is the only valid model for biblical ministry and the only way to stay faithful to Jesus’ simple mandate.

Paul clearly understood that. Don’t think for a moment that he stuck to his simple strategy because he was naive, unsophisticated, or inept. He understood the cultural context in which he ministered. He fully realized that “Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom” (1 Cor 1:22). He knew that the gospel is “to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness” (v. 23). But he didn’t abbreviate the message in order to eliminate the stumbling-block when he was in the synagogue. And he didn’t augment the message to make it sound more sophisticated when he was in the Areopagus. He preached the same gospel he preached in the open air of the marketplace.

In other words, he did not practice the kind of contextualization we hear so much about today. He had one message, and it was the same in every city: “We preach Christ crucified” (v. 23). To the Jews who sought signs, that was a stumbling block. To the Greeks who sought wisdom, it sounded foolish. Paul boldly, straightforwardly proclaimed the gospel to both groups anyway. Where’s the missional ingenuity in *that* approach?

Here’s the problem with all the clever and pragmatic strategies for church planting and church growth that abound in our generation: Christ hasn’t sent us into the world to see who can attract and entertain the biggest crowds. He didn’t instruct us to harness our collective clout to try to influence politicians or correct economic injustices. He didn’t ask us to find a way to make Him seem more likeable or adapt His message to the tastes of whatever culture we are trying to reach. He sent us to make disciples—by preaching the unadulterated gospel and equipping and instructing those who believe it to observe *all* their Lord’s commands.

“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us” (2 Cor 5:20). As such, we have no authority to edit or amend the message we are sent to deliver. Ambassadors are delegates and couriers for a higher power. They serve the head of

state whom they represent. They don’t get to make policy or invent communiqués of their own. They simply deliver the message they have been given.

Paul stayed faithful to that calling, no matter what it cost him personally. And it *did* cost him dearly. There *were*, of course, false teachers in the early church who banked everything on their personal popularity. They labored to win accolades and admiration where the apostle faced antagonism and hostility. Compared to them, Paul’s *curriculum vitae* looked appalling. In 2 Corinthians 11:23–27, he outlined the difference himself:

Are they servants of Christ? ... I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

From an earthly perspective, it would be easy to conclude that Paul was a monumental failure.

The truth was precisely the opposite. In every city where Paul was run out of town, he left behind a fledgling church. He continued to disciple those believers through his epistles, making return visits where possible and sending his own protégés to oversee and continue the work where Paul himself was unable to go.

In the end, despite all the hardships he suffered and all the opposition the powers of darkness have mounted against him, the fruits of Paul’s labor, as well as his simple missionary strategy, endure today as an example for us. His voice still speaks wherever the Word of God is heard: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). ♦



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the POWER *of*
PREACHING: THE
PRESENCE *of the*
HOLY SPIRIT

MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN

Andrew Fuller is remembered for many things: his defense of the free offer of the gospel and his missional theology, his ardent defense of classical Christianity and keen rebuttal of major theological errors thrown up in the wake of the British Enlightenment (like Deism and Socinianism), the key role that he played as the secretary of the fledgling Baptist Missionary Society from 1793 till his death in 1815, his remarkable ability for sustaining vital Christian friendships with men like William Carey (1761–1834). Preaching, though, is not something for which he is usually remembered. Yet, after his official call to the pastoral ministry of Soham Baptist Church in 1775 at the age of twenty-one, there were few Sundays that he did not preach between then

and his death forty years later. Possibly one reason why he is often overlooked in surveys of the history of preaching is that, according to his early biographer and one-time friend, John Webster Morris (1763–1836), Fuller

had none of that easy elocution, none of that graceful fluency, which melts upon the ear, and captivates the attention of an auditor. His enunciation was laborious and slow; his voice strong and heavy; occasionally plaintive, and capable of an agreeable modulation. He had none of that eloquence which consists in a felicitous selection of terms, or in the harmonious construction of periods;



If the preacher's own life and that of his hearers is to be shaped by the "important reality" of the Scriptures, he needs to "believe and feel" the truth he preaches.

he had a boldness in his manner, a masculine delivery, and great force of expression.

And yet, as Morris admitted, Fuller turned out to be a popular preacher; by the close of his ministry, a thousand or so would regularly attend his preaching in Kettering. More positively, Morris did note that Fuller's "preaching was distinguished for depth of thought, a fulness of scriptural truth, and great perspicacity and force ... It was like a blazing torch in the midst of the churches." Fuller also preached in a day when there were a number of pulpit celebrities, including his friend, the inimitable Robert Hall, Jr. (1764–1831), the memory of whose preaching overshadowed that of many others like Fuller.

Whatever the reasons for the "forgotten heritage" of Fuller's sermonic corpus, it is evident from various sources, including a large number of extant ordination sermons, that Fuller gave much thought to the significance and nature of preaching in pastoral ministry. The

following article seeks to isolate one aspect of Fuller's thinking about preaching, as necessary in his day as it is in ours: divine unction.

"Full of the Holy Spirit"

Thomas McKibbens, Jr., finds the following description by Fuller from a letter to his close friend John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825), to be a helpful summary of his thinking about the task of the preacher. Fuller is writing about the students under Ryland's care at Bristol Baptist Academy, where Ryland had been the principal since 1793: "I wish they may so believe and feel and preach the truth, as to find their message an important reality, influencing their own souls and the souls of others." If the preacher's own life and that of his hearers is to be shaped by the "important reality" of the Scriptures, he needs to "believe and feel" the truth he preaches. But from whence comes this power to "believe and feel"? For Fuller, it is incontestable that there is only one source—namely, the indispensable

presence of the Holy Spirit.

Now, Fuller's lengthiest discussion of this element of preaching is found in one of his earliest ordination sermons. Based on Acts 11:24, it was preached at the ordination of Robert Fawcner on October 31, 1787, in Thorn, Bedfordshire. The context of this verse in Acts was the ministry of Barnabas at Antioch. The verse itself described Barnabas as "a good man, and full of the Holy [Spirit] and of faith," and then added right after this description, "and much people was added unto the Lord" (KJV).

In his sermon, Fuller first explained the implications of the description of Barnabas as a "good man." He then turned to the phrase "full of the Holy [Spirit]." Fuller understood this to mean that Barnabas was "full of those fruits of the Spirit mentioned" in Galatians 5:22–23 and was, as it were, "overcome ... with the holy influences and fruits of the blessed Spirit." A pastor, in other words, had to be a man whose inner life was being deeply shaped by the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. Fuller went on to equate this to what is described in 1 John 2:20 as "an unction from the Holy One" and observe that such an anointing was vital for pastoral ministry.

In Fuller's mind, there were five ways in which this unction shaped a pastor's life. First of all, it enabled the pastor "to enter into the spirit of the gospel" and to rightly understand the truths at the heart of the Christian faith. In fact, Fuller was convinced that if Christians in general "had more of the Holy Spirit of God in their hearts," there would be far less friction between them concerning such great truths as "the loveliness of the Divine character," "the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the total depravity of mankind, the proper Deity and atonement of Christ, justification by faith in his name, the freeness and sovereignty of grace, and the agency of the Holy Spirit." All of these truths had come into dispute in eighteenth-century England as a result of the rationalism of the British Enlightenment, and, Fuller implied, only the Holy Spirit's presence could protect the pastor against speculations aroused by this corrosive rationalism. Little wonder he urged Fawcner to make Psalm 51:11 his prayer: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Second, Fuller was convinced that "being full of the Holy Spirit" will lead a preacher to use the very words of Holy Scripture that the Holy Spirit has inspired

rather than various alternatives which, while they might be more familiar to the ears of the preacher's audience, nonetheless subtly change the meaning of what is being communicated. Examples of such sermonic substitutions from his own day, according to Fuller, were to use "morality" in place of "holiness," "virtue" instead of "godliness," "good men" for "believers [and] saints," or to replace "communion with God" with "happiness of mind." If such substitutions become the norm, Fuller reasoned, it will result in "the gospel heathenized, and will tend to heathenize the minds" of both the preacher and hearer. For Fuller, the Spirit's help is vital not only in the discernment of biblical truth, but also in its communication: "Spiritual things will be spiritually discerned, and if spiritually discerned, will be spiritually communicated."

The anointing of the Holy Spirit will thus give a man a desire to speak in the very language used by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. As Fuller told Fawcner: the more you are filled with "an unction from the Holy One, the greater relish you will possess for that savory manner of conveying truth" as found in terms drawn directly from the Bible. Fuller's use of affective terms here—"relish," "savory"—is noteworthy. It is obvious that, for Fuller, the infilling of the Holy Spirit is closely tied to the creation of a spiritual appetite.

Then, the Spirit's anointing will be seen in a harmony between what a man preaches and inculcates from the pulpit and how he lives his life, for, and here Fuller cited Proverbs 17:7 as proof, "Excellent speech becometh not a fool." Fourth, this anointing will "give a spiritual savor" to the minister's speech as he visits the members of his church and will enable him to love them.

Finally, the Spirit's infilling will impart to the minister "a meek, mild, peaceful, humble spirit." It is noteworthy that these final three effects of the Spirit's anointing concern more than simply the act of sermon preparation and its delivery. The unction of the Spirit, in Fuller's thinking, does not simply relate to empowerment in preaching, but has an effect upon the whole of the preacher's life and ministry.

"Eminent Spirituality in a Minister"

After discussing what it meant for Barnabas to be "full of faith," Fuller closed Fawcner's ordination sermon



with a discussion of the final phrase of Acts 11:24, “and much people was added unto the Lord.” He discerned that Luke’s placement of this phrase immediately after his description of Barnabas was intended to lead the reader to draw a connection between Barnabas’s character and his success as a minister.

Fuller was unwilling to argue that ministerial success is automatically dependent upon spirituality. In other words, he was convinced, as was most of Western Christianity after the fourth-century Donatist controversy, that “the quality and state of he who administers the sacraments and the Word of God ... did not have an influence on its efficacy.” Nevertheless, Fuller did believe that ministerial “want of usefulness is often to be ascribed to ... want of spirituality, much oftener than to ... want of talents.” He thus laid it down as a rule: “Eminent spirituality in a minister is usually attended with eminent usefulness,” where “eminent spirituality” is to be understood in light of what Fuller has already said about the fullness of the Holy Spirit/the Holy Spirit’s anointing.

Such “eminent spirituality” was manifest in three ways. First, it is characterized by a “holy love to Christ and the souls of men.” For illustration, Fuller turned to three examples from the Old Testament—Hezekiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. He knew of many other notable examples, but he was running short on time, so he had to say:

Time would fail me to speak of all the great souls, both inspired and uninspired, whom the King of kings has delighted to honor: of Paul, and Peter, and their companions; of [John] Wickliff, and [Martin] Luther, and

[John] Calvin, and many others at the Reformation; of [John] Eliot, and [Jonathan] Edwards, and [David] Brainerd, and [George] Whitefield, and hundreds more whose names are held in deserved esteem in the church of God. These were men of God; men who had great grace, as well as gifts; whose hearts burned in love to Christ and the souls of men. They looked upon their hearers as their Lord had done upon Jerusalem, and wept over them.

This list of Fuller’s heroes reflects his catholicity and willingness to look beyond his own Calvinistic Baptist heritage for models in ministry. And yet it bears noting that, after the death of his close friend Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) of Birmingham, Fuller did not hesitate to recommend this Calvinistic Baptist pastor as a model preacher. As he stated in a later ordination sermon with regard to the way in which the gospel should be preached:

Consider the examples held up for your imitation. You have Peter ... Paul ... John ... Nay, more—you have Christ. Nor have you examples in distant ages only; but you have seen some, even among you ... Pearce!

“Eminent spirituality” also produces an ardency for “the glory of God, and the welfare of men’s souls,” which are “ends which God himself pursues.” As Fuller pithily observed in another ordination sermon, “a cold manner” in preaching “disgraces important truth.” Third, “eminent spirituality” is accompanied

by a genuine humility. In fact, Fuller wondered if “one considerable reason why most of us have no more real success in our work than we have” is because “we have not grace enough to bear prosperity.”

“The Presence of Christ”

A second ordination sermon in which Fuller deals with the spiritual anointing needed by pastors is a much smaller text, and more typical of the sermons of Fuller that survive, for Fuller rarely wrote out a full manuscript before preaching. Neither the date nor context of this ordination sermon is known. Fuller’s text on the occasion was the benediction of 2 Timothy 4:22, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit.” The blessing in view here, Fuller explained, is nothing less than “communion with Christ,” the “unction by which we know all things” (an allusion to 1 John 2:20), and the source of grace in the life of any true pastor.


Fuller delineated four implications of this blessing/communion/anointing—without which nothing can be done for Christ. First, it leads the minister to “delight in the doctrine of Christ.” In other words, his preaching is solidly Christ-centered. As Fuller noted about such preaching in another ordination sermon:

We preach “Christ Jesus the Lord.” This is the grand theme of the Christian ministry....

Preach Christ, or you had better be any thing than a preacher.... If you preach Christ, you need not fear for want of matter. His person and work are rich in fullness.

Then, this blessing or anointing “gives a divine energy to our preaching.” Such “energy,” Fuller hastened to point out, is quite different from “the greatest eloquence,” for the latter is never “a means of conversion” or conviction. Fuller found biblical evidence for this assertion in the preaching of Stephen (Acts 6:10), Apollos (Acts 18:25, 28), and Paul (1 Cor 2:4), where the common factor is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Third, this anointing or blessing will make pastoral visitation “savory and useful.” Finally, this anointing is needed to withstand the various trials involved in pastoral ministry: the way that God’s people grieve their leaders—Fuller does not say anything about church leaders grieving the congregation, though this also happens—and hurt each other, and the way that some of the church members reject their pastor’s doctrinal views or criticize aspects of his mode of living. Again, it is noteworthy that Fuller does not restrict the anointing of the Spirit to a sermonic context. It must accompany the Christian leader throughout the various areas of his life.



Fuller does not restrict the anointing of the Spirit to a sermonic context. It must accompany the Christian leader throughout the various areas of his life.

“Very Affecting” but not “Enthusiastic”

In the judgment of Edwin Dargan, the early twentieth-century Southern Baptist historian of preaching, Fuller was “a strong expounder of the Scriptures,” but his sermons contain “little warmth—no heat; imagination is scarcely in evidence at all; and ‘flights of eloquence’ nowhere appear.” Dargan, of course, never actually heard Fuller preach. A member of Fuller’s congregation by the name of George Wallis who regularly sat under Fuller’s preaching described it in his diary as “very affecting and evangelical.”

Fuller himself actually decried preaching “without feeling,” for, he asked, “how can we display the evil of sin, the love of Christ, or any other important truth, unless we feel it?” Again, he could tell a newly ordained pastor, the “gospel is a message of love, and therefore it ought to be preached with great affection.” The preacher, both in his preparation to preach and the preaching itself, must pursue these tasks with genuine heartfelt and heart-burning ardor. The place where such ardor was kindled was in private prayer. “Walking with God in the closet,” Fuller once noted in an ordination sermon on John 5:35, “is a grand means, with his blessing, of illuminating our minds and warming our hearts.” And it was in these times of private prayer that Fuller presumably expected the minister to pray for, among other things, the anointing of the Spirit.

At the heart of Fuller’s understanding of preaching, then, was that it must be grounded in ardent love—for

God and for people—but like many others in the eighteenth century, he was opposed to what that era called “enthusiasm”—that is, the assertion of spiritual affections without the Spirit-given means. For instance, Fuller emphasized that the anointing of the Spirit did not relieve the preacher of study. “It is a shameful abuse of the doctrine of Divine influence,” he asserted, “to allege it as a reason for neglecting diligent study for the pulpit.” Spirituality and learning were not mutually exclusive. What Fuller prized was the commingling of both. He stated as much in an address given in the final years of his life to the students of what was then called the “Baptist Academical Institution at Stepney” in London, established in 1810:

To what is it owing that some of our churches have been prejudiced against an educated ministry? I may be told, to their ignorance; and in part it is so; but in part it is owing to other causes. The lightness, the vanity, the foppery, and the irreligion of some young men have produced not only this effect, but an abhorrence of the very worship of God, as by them administered. Who were ever known to be prejudiced against [Samuel] Pearce, a [Benjamin] Francis, or a [Benjamin] Beddome, on account of their education? If there were individuals of this description, let them be disregarded as ignorant, and let them be

At the heart of Fuller’s understanding of preaching, then, was that it must be grounded in ardent love—for God and for people.

told that vicious characters are found among the uneducated as well as the educated. But be it your concern, my dear young men, to shun these evils. The instructions which you receive, if consecrated to Christ, will be a blessing to you; but if your object be to shine before men, they will be a curse.

There were some in the English Baptist congregations of Fuller's day who were deeply suspicious of learning because they had encountered seminary students who were marked by "vanity, ... foppery, and ... irreligion." But that was no reason to reject learning, Fuller argued. He then cited the examples of three remarkable eighteenth-century Baptists whom he had personally known—Samuel Pearce, Benjamin Francis (1734–1799) of Horsley, and Benjamin Beddome

(1717–1795) of Bourton-on-the-Water—all three of whom were graduates of Bristol Baptist Academy, but all of whom were known for their preaching and piety. Learning per se was no impediment to spiritual unction, as these three men clearly demonstrated.

Fuller himself did not have formal theological education, but that did not prevent him from using his God-given abilities to become a first-rate preacher of God's Word. As the nineteenth-century doyen of homiletics, John A. Broadus, noted, although "Andrew Fuller ... had practically no knowledge of the original languages [of the Bible], ... his interpretations of Scripture are clear and safe in a degree very rarely surpassed." But, as we have seen in this essay, there is another reason for the impact of Fuller's preaching—namely, what he had described in 1787 in the Thorn Baptist meeting-house as "eminent spirituality." ♦



“We preach “Christ Jesus the Lord.” This is the grand theme of the Christian ministry ... Preach Christ, or you had better be any thing than a preacher If you preach Christ, you need not fear for want of matter. His person and work are rich in fullness.”

ANDREW FULLER



a **PASSION** *for*
PREACHING:
AN INTERVIEW *with*
STEVEN J. LAWSON

How did you become a Christian, and how were you called to ministry?

I grew up in a Christian home and was brought to faith as a young boy through the consistent witness of my father and mother. Specifically, it was through the reading of the Bible by my father each night that the seed of the gospel was planted, which God caused to germinate in my heart. Regarding my call to the ministry, I actually began preaching and teaching while in college in various ministries and churches. Upon graduating, I sat under the strong preaching of Adrian Rogers at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and strongly felt God summoning me into full-time ministry. His bold preaching electrified my heart and served as the catalyst that launched me to seminary, where I would be prepared for a lifetime of ministry.

What are the biggest challenges you have faced during your ministry? How have you faced these challenges?

In my earlier years, the greatest challenge I faced was preaching the doctrines of grace to congregations that were theologically untaught. To say the least, it was difficult and demanding to try to establish God-centered truth and a biblical philosophy of ministry where there had previously been a stronghold of man-centered thinking concerning the work of God in salvation. Though it was obviously a painful process, the only way to meet such an obstacle was head-on, unashamedly preaching the full counsel of God. This required much prayer, pastoral discretion, patience, and perseverance, which God honored. Over time, God established His truth in the minds and hearts of many, though it came at a high price personally.

What advice would you give to a young man who aspires to be a pastor?

First, any man aspiring to the pastorate needs to be sitting under strong expository preaching. He needs a role model who exemplifies what is in his heart to do. Second, he needs a personal ministry whereby he can use what he is learning, test his giftedness, and cultivate what has been entrusted to him. Third, he should

surround himself with a small circle of spiritually mature men who can provide wise counsel in helping steer his life and ministry as important decisions arise. Fourth, he must begin to inquire of various seminaries regarding his future theological education. He needs to contact some institutions, visit their campuses, and talk to some of the faculty. Fifth, he needs to become an avid reader of important Christian books, including the spiritual biographies of noted men who have been mightily used by God.

How does a pastor remain faithful to his calling over the long haul?

In order to persevere in ministry, a pastor needs to be, first and foremost, deeply rooted and anchored in God's Word. The more he studies, learns, teaches, and preaches God's Word, the greater will be his staying power in ministry. Further, reading Christian biographies of men who have faced great adversity in their ministries provides greater drive and endurance. Reading the heroic accounts of martyrs and missionaries who have faced great persecution should be at the top of his reading list. Likewise, being surrounded by a small group of laymen who will encourage him in God's work is a necessity. Pastors can be vulnerable to severe bouts of discouragement. Having the edifying feedback of trusted individuals helps him remain steadfast in doing God's work.

Who has most influenced your preaching?

There have been multiple influences upon my preaching—Adrian Rogers, W. A. Criswell, James Montgomery Boice, R. C. Sproul, John MacArthur, and S. Lewis Johnson. Each of these men has contributed something vitally important to my preaching ministry. Over many decades, John MacArthur has most shaped my approach to biblical exposition. He has influenced me in preaching through entire books of the Bible sequentially. I have learned from him the need for sound exegesis, word studies, historical background, cross-references, theological precision, sermon outline, and manuscript writing. Moreover, Dr. MacArthur has demonstrated the need for guarding the gospel and teaching sound doctrine.

Why have you focused so much of your attention on the practice of expository preaching and on helping both preachers and laypeople see its importance?

I strongly believe that no church can rise any higher than its pulpit. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church. The deeper the preacher takes his flock into the Word of God, the higher they will rise in worship. The stronger they are in the Scripture, the stronger they will be in the pursuit of holiness. Likewise, strong preaching leads to sacrificial service in the Lord's work. Strong exposition kindles hearts for the work of evangelism and the cause of worldwide missions. Every great movement of God in church history has been ushered in by a renewed commitment to solid preaching of the Word. If we are to see a spiritual awakening in our day, the church must recover the primacy of preaching. I desire to be used by God to help equip a new generation of preachers and laypeople in recognizing the importance of this primary means of grace.

Can you describe for us what your sermon preparation looks like?

I begin by photocopying everything that I need to read in order to prepare my sermon. This includes study Bibles, commentaries, expository sermons, linguistic and historical tools, and the like. I first read the passage and discover its literary unit, determining what verse or verses I will preach. After writing a block diagram and reading the passage in the original language, I identify the central theme of these verses. I then read all of my photocopied information, thoroughly marking it up. I draft the beginnings of a working outline

for the sermon. I will start writing the sermon—with a fountain pen, I might add—beginning with the first homiletical point. I then move systematically through the text, creating a manuscript that explains and applies each successive part of the passage. I will then add transitions, illustrations, and quotations as needed. The final step is to write the introduction and conclusion. I will compose this manuscript as though I can hear myself preaching it. At last, I will review my manuscript for length, balance, and quality, praying over its truths.

What is the purpose of OnePassion Ministries and how does it seek to accomplish its goals?

OnePassion Ministries was created to help bring about a new reformation in this day. The ministry website has most all of my preaching and writing resources (www.onepassionministries.org). We are hosting conferences both nationally and internationally in order to train preachers, teachers, prospective pastors, and interested laypeople in the art and science of expository preaching and teaching. I want to define what it is, what it is not, and show how to appreciate and effectively carry out this divine calling. I desire to help take people to the next level in their skills of handling and ministering God's Word. Also, I want to motivate those who attend our conferences to be fully committed to preaching the Word expositionally. Moreover, we want to host conferences for all people in order to introduce them to Christ and encourage them in their Christian walk. Finally, we will be hosting church history tours in which I will take people to important historical sites around the world. ♦

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STEVEN J. LAWSON



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the SPIRIT *and the* WORD:
REFLECTIONS *on*
SPIRIT-EMPOWERED
PREACHING

FRED G. ZASPEL

The familiar expression “the Spirit and the Word” captures well the biblical emphasis on the necessity of *both* the gospel *and* the sovereign work of the Spirit in preaching. Neither the “implicit faith” of Roman Catholicism nor the extra-biblical revelations of some charismatic types will do. The gospel is indeed “the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16), and the singular power and effectiveness of God’s Word is a theme that dominates Scripture from its opening pages onward. No other Word but God’s is able to effect life and thoroughly equip God’s people for life and service for God. For both the claiming (1 Pet 1:23) and the perfecting (2 Tim 3:16–17; cf. Rom 16:25; Heb 4:12) of God’s people,

there is no other message that will do.

We love—and insist on—this wonderful truth of the unique ability of God’s Word, and it is the great consideration that drives and shapes our preaching. And yet we never dare imagine that success in preaching is due to just so much human activity. If men and women are brought to life and built up in the faith by our preaching, it is only because God Himself has been at work in it: “Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess 1:5). It is not the Word alone that claims and transforms the hearts and lives of men and women. But neither is it the Spirit alone. It is “the Word and the Spirit”—the Spirit working by the Word.

This idea is reflected often in the New Testament. Sometimes particular emphasis is given to one side or the other, but the two are always held together.

Perhaps the most extended treatment of this theme is from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1–3. A kind of party spirit dominated the troubled church at Corinth. The church had enjoyed a variety of preachers—Paul, Peter, Apollos—and, as is always the case, personal preferences were expressed with regard to them, evidently to the point of faction: “I am of Paul,” “I of Cephas,” and so on (1:3). And it seems that *variety of preaching style* had come to mean too much. The expressions “cleverness of speech” (1:17), “superiority of speech or of wisdom” (2:1), and “persuasive words of wisdom” (2:4), whatever else they reflect in their particular historical setting, betray on the part of the Corinthians more a concern with form than with content—*how* the message was delivered more than the message itself; packaging the message in a way that was itself impressive and therefore presumably more persuasive. This kind of thinking, of course, is deeply mistaken, and Paul confronts it on several levels.

It is in this context that the apostle reminds the Corinthians at length that the gospel is considered by the world to be foolishness, and yet that it is by that message that men and women come to know God and are transformed. Now, if it is by a “foolish” message that God claims men and women for Himself, then we must conclude that this message “works” only because and only when God makes it work. That is the burden of 1 Corinthians 1:18–31. The gospel is considered foolish by all until, in the preaching of that Word, God effects a change in the heart to see it otherwise (1:21). The God who chose us in the past now in time calls us into the fellowship of Christ through the gospel that is preached.

But to say this is to say also that it is not the preacher or the style of his preaching that proves effective in transforming the human heart. It is God alone—the Spirit working through the Word to accomplish His sovereignly appointed ends.

The apostle presses his argument further in chapter 2. Here he holds his own ministry up as a model for them to consider carefully and follow. Paul’s ministry among them did not succeed because of Paul’s style of preaching. He did not package his message in some strikingly impressive way. Indeed, as the apostle reflects

on his arrival in Corinth, he recalls that he was marked by anything but self-confidence: he was fearful, even trembling (2:3) from the realization that what he had come to accomplish was beyond his ability to effect. His preaching, successful as it was, was not marked by self-confidence but by conscious dependence on the Spirit of God (2:4). His preaching was not persuasive because it was impressive; it was persuasive because the Spirit of God was powerfully at work persuading hearts by it.


Moreover, it was very important for Paul that this would be the case. If someone were to “believe” simply because they were impressed with the preacher, it would be a faith grounded in something human. But only a faith grounded in the power of God will do (2:5).

Paul expounds this further in chapter 2. The “hidden wisdom” of God in the gospel (2:7) remains unrecognized until the Spirit of God opens sin-darkened eyes (2:6–16). This divine message, glorious as it is, fails to penetrate the deep biases of the natural heart unless God Himself intervenes with power.

Paul emphasizes this yet again in chapter 3. For all their esteem as beloved ministers of the Word, “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?” Answer: they are but “*servants*”—“servants through whom you believed, *even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one*” (3:5; emphasis added). Put another way, the ministers are *nothing* (v. 7). One plants the seed, another waters it, “but God was causing the growth” (v. 6). Apart from the Spirit’s blessing, our preaching accomplishes nothing at all.

That is, the same apostle who affirms the singular efficacy of the gospel insists that this gospel is effective only as it is made so by the sovereign Spirit. We are saved by a hearing of the gospel (Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 1:18–25; 15:1; etc.), and we are built up and strengthened by the gospel (Rom 16:25). We are set apart to God both initially and progressively through the instrumentality of His preached Word. Yet none of this is simply “automatic.” Transformation of heart and life remains the prerogative of the Holy Spirit, who alone can use His Word to these ends. “The Spirit and the Word” is more than a mere slogan. It is an expression that captures exactly the means by which God works.

Now, what does all this mean to the preacher himself? How ought all this to shape our own thinking concerning our work of preaching?



The work God had called him to do, he realized, was a work that he was unable to do at all. It was a work only God could do.

Most obviously, of course, this ought to give us who preach a sober and more accurate estimate of ourselves. For all the lofty opinions we might secretly be tempted to entertain concerning our role and our abilities, the truth is we are but “servants” whom God may use—or not!—according to his own purpose. Whatever success our preaching has seen—however many people have come to faith and however many have grown stable in that faith—we may be assured it is not due to our brilliance or abilities. Success in preaching is proof only that God has been at work. It is a thrill like no other to see men and women come to Christ and grow in grace through our preaching, but we must never cherish any mistaken notion that somehow we are to be credited for our own “success.”

We’ve probably all seen preachers bound into the pulpit, seemingly full of confidence. But that is not how the Corinthians would have perceived the “mighty” Apostle Paul whose “weakness and ... trembling” (2:3) betrayed a keen awareness that he was in over his head. The work God had called him to do, he realized, was a work that he was unable to do at all. It was a work only God could do. Certainly, a preacher who claims to recognize the truth captured in this famous

expression—“the Spirit and the Word”—ought to be a man marked by a profound sense of humility.

This realization should also bring about a certain carefulness on our part, as for the Apostle Paul himself, never to speak in such a way that would just manufacture “results,” as though we could ourselves effect the transformation of the human heart. Paul was very concerned that no one would believe simply because he had spoken. He was clearly a brilliant man, and we can safely assume that he had intellectual abilities that would have been capable of manipulating people to “make decisions” for Christ. But he would have none of that! In all of his pleading and seeking to “persuade” men and women to come to Christ, he would not stoop to manipulation, for a faith that rises from anything human is of no value, and no genuine concern for human souls will be content with it. So Paul would allow nothing in his preaching that would distract from the message itself, leaving it entirely to the Spirit of God to convict and convince—and this “so that” (or “in order that”; *hina*, 2:5) their faith would rest in God alone.

Stated more positively, if we understand that it is only the Spirit’s enablement that renders our preaching successful, we will be men whose preaching is marked


by a profound sense of dependence upon God. This recognition of his own inability to effect genuine conversion led the Apostle Paul to an utter reliance upon the Spirit of God to do what Paul himself could not do. Paul preached the gospel, and he would plead and seek to persuade. But he would not presume to play the Holy Spirit as though he were himself the persuader. He preached recognizing fully that only as the Spirit of God was at work would his message accomplish that heart-transforming purpose for which it was sent.

Finally, a realization ought to make us men of prayer. If we realize that success in our preaching comes only when God is at work, then this sense of conscious dependence on him will drive us to petition him for his aid, seeking his blessing—his “anointing,” as it has been traditionally called—to use us as instruments of his saving and sanctifying grace. I am tempted to say here that a neglect of prayer for the Spirit’s enablement in preaching betrays a sinful sense of self-confidence. It certainly may. How else might we account for our

prayerless preaching?

We’ve all heard preaching that is marked distinctly by the Spirit’s blessing. And we’ve all heard preaching where the Spirit’s blessing is distinctly lacking. And we who preach have also likely experienced both ourselves. Preaching under the Spirit’s enablement can accomplish marvelous—indeed, supernatural!—results. By Spirit-anointed preaching, hearts and lives are forever transformed—lovers of sin become lovers of God, weak-souled believers become strong in faith, and God’s people are refreshed in divine love for faithful service to Christ. Spirit-empowered preaching—“the Spirit and the Word”—is the means by which God sets us apart, both initially and progressively, for Himself.

Let us who preach, then, seek the Spirit’s enabling power continuously, so that those who hear us will come to and grow in a faith that does “not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God,” to His glory (1 Cor 2:5). ♦



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11 TIMOTHY 1
is committed to thy trust, avoiding
profane and vain babblings,
and oppositions of science falsely
so called.
21 Which some professing have

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TIMOTHY

CHAPTER 1

DAUL, an apostle of Jesus
Christ by the will of God, ac-
cording to the promise of life
which is in Christ Jesus.
2 To Timothy, my dearly be-
loved son: Grace, mercy, and
peace, from God the Father and
Christ Jesus our Lord.
3 I thank God, whom I serve
from my forefathers with pure
conscience, that without ceasing
I have remembrance of thee in my
prayers night and day;
4 Greatly desiring to see thee,
being mindful of thy tears, that I
may be filled with joy;
5 When I call to remembrance
the unfeigned faith that is in thee,
which dwelt first in thy grand-
mother Lois, and thy mother
Eunice; and I am persuaded
that in thee also.
6 Wherefore I put thee in re-
membrance that thou stir up the
gift of God, which is in thee by
the putting on of my hands.
7 For God hath not given us the
spirit of fear; but of power, and of
love, and of a sound mind.
8 He not thou therefore ashamed
of the testimony of our Lord, nor
of me his prisoner: but be thou
partaker of the afflictions of the
gospel according to the power of
God;

Advice to Timothy
erred concerning the faith. Grace
be with thee. Amen.
8 The first in Timothy was written from
Lis-sa-ki-4, which is the chiefest
city of Phry-gia-4: 14: 18-4: 6-4: 18-4.

9 Who hath saved us, and called
us with a holy calling, not ac-
cording to our works, but ac-
cording to his own purpose and
grace, which was given us in Christ
Jesus before the world began.
10 But is now made manifest by
the appearing of our Saviour Je-
sus Christ, who hath abolished
death, and hath brought life and
immortality to light through the
gospel.
11 Whereunto I am appointed a
preacher, and an apostle, and a
teacher of the Gentiles.
12 For the which cause I also
suffer these things: nevertheless I
am not ashamed; for I know
whom I have believed, and am
persuaded that he is able to keep
that which I have committed unto
him against that day.
13 Held fast the form of sound
words, which thou hast heard of
me, in faith and love which is in
Christ Jesus.
14 That good thing which was
committed unto thee keep by the
Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us;
15 This thou knowest, that all
they which are in Asia be turned
away from me, of whom are Phy-
l-gel-4: 18 and Hier-nol-g-4: 18-4.
16 The Lord give mercy unto
the house of Ones-i-m-4: 18-4; for
he oft refreshed me, and was oft
assisted of my chain.

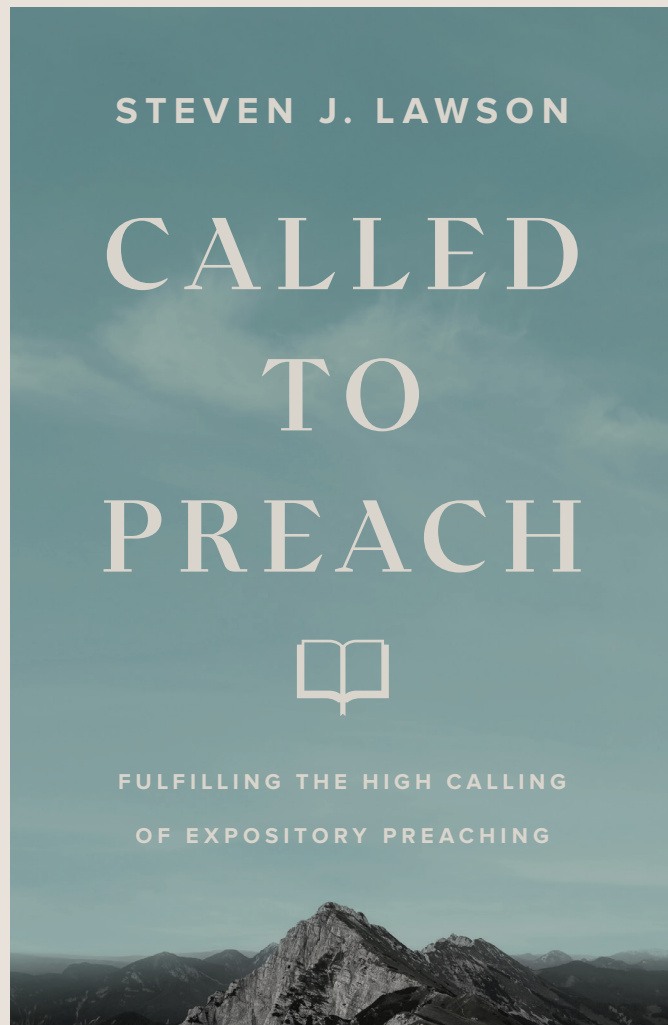
Conduct to prize and than
17 But, when he was in Rome, he
sought me out very diligently, and
found me.
18 The Lord grant unto him
that he may find mercy of the
Lord in that day; and in how
many things he ministered unto
me at Ephesus, thou knowest very
well.

CHAPTER 2

THOU therefore, my son, be
strong in the grace that is in
Christ Jesus.
2 And the things that thou hast
heard of me among many wit-
nesses, the same commit thou to
faithful men, who shall be able to
teach others also.
3 Thou therefore endure hard-
ness, as a good soldier of Jesus
Christ.
4 No man that warreth entan-
gled himself with the affairs of
this life; that he may please him-
self.
5 And if a man also strive for
except he strive lawfully.
6 The husbandman that labour-
eth must be first partaker of the
fruit.
7 Consider what I say, and the
Lord give thee understanding in
all things.
8 Remember that Jesus Christ of
the dead, according to my gospel;
9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an
convictor, even unto bonds; but
the word of God is not bound.
10 Therefore I endure all things
for the elect's sakes, that they may
also obtain the salvation which is
in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.
11 It is a faithful saying: For if
we be dead with him, we shall
also live with him.

12 If we suffer, we shall also
reign with him; if we deny him,
he also will deny us:
13 If we believe not, yet he abid-
eth faithful; he cannot deny him-
self.
14 Of these things put them in
remembrance, charging them be-
fore the Lord that they strive not
about words to no profit, but to
the subverting of the hearers.

15 Sturdy to show thyself ap-
proved unto God, a workman that
needeth not to be ashamed, right-
ly dividing the word of truth.
16 But shun profane and vain
babblings; for they will increase
unto more ungodliness.
17 And their word will eat as
doth a canker of whom is Hy-
me-nol-4: 18 and Phyl-gel-4: 18-4.
18 Who concerning the truth
have erred, saying that the resur-
rection is past already; and over-
throw the faith of some.
19 Nevertheless the foundation
of God standeth sure, having this
seal: The Lord knoweth them
that are his. And, Let every one
that nameth the name of Christ
depart from iniquity.
20 But in a great house there are
not only vessels of gold and of
silver, but also of wood and of
earth; and some to honour, and
some to dishonour.
21 If a man therefore purge him-
self from these, he shall be a vessel
unto honour, sanctified, and meet
for the master's use, and prepared
unto every good work.
22 Escal also youthful lusts; but
follow righteousness, faith, char-
ity, peace, with them that call on
the Lord out of a pure heart.
23 But foolish and unlearned
questions avoid, knowing that
they do gender strifes.
24 And the servant of the Lord



When the pulpit is strong, the church is strengthened, and her witness to the world is fortified.

But when the pulpit is weak, the church languishes in spiritual listlessness, and society suffers for it. Nothing must be allowed to supplant the primacy of the pulpit—not if the church is to flourish.

Through in-depth biblical analysis and inspiring examples from church history, Steven J. Lawson paints a picture of God's glory magnified through faithful preaching, reclaiming the high ground of biblical preaching for the future generation.

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