

10 Things You Should Know about the Necessity of Biblical Preaching

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In last week's installment of our ten-things-you-should-know series I focused on the causes for the demise of biblical preaching. Today I want to focus on why it is so critical that pastors be committed to the exposition of the Word.

(1) We must preach because of the power of the Word of God to change human lives and to transform the experience of the church. Tragically, although they would hardly admit it openly, many preachers have grown suspicious of the power of the Scriptures to change lives. Day in and day out they face marriages that are disintegrating, teenagers who are rebelling, both young and old fighting addictions from which they can't break free, not to mention the spiritual apathy of their congregations, and they secretly doubt if there is much help to be found in digging deeply into an ancient book. Contemporary problems call for contemporary solutions, and nothing seems more irrelevant and obsolete than Scripture. If that lie even remotely rings true in your heart, I urge you to carefully consider the following texts – Romans 10:17; 15:4, 13; Galatians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 4:6; 1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 4:12;

(2) We must preach because preaching is God's ordained means for making himself known to us. Throughout biblical history we see that "God's standard way of securing and maintaining His person-to-person communication with us His human creatures is through the agency of persons whom He sends to us as His messengers" (Packer, 15-16), whether prophets, apostles, pastors, or teachers.

(3) We must preach because preaching not only communicates truth about God, it also mediates the very person and power of God. That is to say, it is in preaching that God draws near to his people to comfort and encourage and strengthen us. As Packer says, "the proper aim of preaching is to mediate meetings with God" (*Truth and Power*, 158). There is a sense in which Scripture, like baptism and the Eucharist, is a sacrament. God himself, in his love and power and sustaining presence, enters our hearts in a unique and life-changing way when Scripture's words and images and stories and truths are ingested and flow through our spiritual veins.

(4) We must preach because preaching (aside from reading) is the most effective means for transmitting the truths of Holy Scripture. Preaching is teaching. Yes, it is more than teaching; but it is certainly not less than teaching. It is speaking "aimed at both mind and heart, and seeking unashamedly to change the way people think and live" (21).

(5) We must preach because Scripture is, in and of itself, preaching. Much in the Bible is sermonic: prophetic oracles from God as well as direct instruction, rebuke, exhortation, etc. If we are to understand the Bible we must be addressed by the Bible via someone for whom the Bible is alive and who knows and can articulate in life-changing ways its multi-faceted truths. Packer elaborates on the idea of the Bible itself as a sermon:

“Holy Scripture, the inspired Word (message) of the living God, may truly be described as God preaching – preaching, that is, in the sense of instructing, rebuking, correcting, and directing every reader and hearer for the furthering of faith, praise, holiness, and spiritual growth. God preaches thus in and through all the various stories, sermons, soliloquies, schedules, statistics, songs, and supplications that make up the individual books of the canon” (*Truth and Power*, 162-63).

“Since the Triune God – the Father and the Son, through the Spirit – already preaches to us every part of the Bible, the human preacher’s task resolves into becoming a mouthpiece and sounding board for the divine message that meets him in the text. It is not for the preacher to stand, as it were, in front of and above the Bible, setting himself between it and the people and speaking for it, as if it could not speak for itself. Rather, his role is to stand behind and below it, letting it deliver its own message through him and putting himself explicitly and transparently under the authority of that message, so that his very style of relaying it models a response to it. . . . [Thus] the authentic authority of the pulpit is the authority, not of the preacher’s eloquence, experience, or expertise, but of God speaking in Scripture through what he says as he explains and applies his text” (163-64).

(6) We must preach because preaching is the fuel for worship. Preaching fans the flames of passion for Jesus. Packer explains:

“The preaching of the Bible is the mainspring of . . . worship, for it fuels the devotional fire, constantly confronting Christians with God’s works and ways in saving them (redeeming, regenerating, forgiving, accepting, adopting, guarding, guiding, keeping, feeding), and thereby leading them into paths of obedient and adoring response. Indeed, from this standpoint biblical preaching is implicit doxology throughout; the biblical preacher will follow Scripture in giving God glory for His works, ways, and wisdom at every turn, and will urge His hearers to do the same. . . . [In sum], congregations never honor God more than by reverently listening to His Word with a full purpose of praising and obeying Him once they see what He has done and is doing, and what they are called to do” (“Why Preach?” 20).

(7) We must preach because preaching is not simply the fuel for worship: preaching IS worship. As Piper says, “in the same way that a melody can awaken us to the true beauty of God in the lyrics of a worship song, so the spiritual music of the preacher’s soul can awaken the people to

the glory of the preached truth of God” (“Preaching as Worship,” 33). Piper proceeds to cite three reasons why preaching is meant to be and to kindle God-exalting worship.

First, the Word of God says that everything is to be done in a worshipful, God-centered way: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Says Piper, “if everything is to be radically oriented on magnifying the glory of God and exalting the name of Jesus, how much more preaching!” (33). Indeed, this is why Piper defines preaching as *expository exultation*.

Second, “preaching is meant to exalt the centrality of God because the Word says that God himself exalts his own centrality in all that he does. And preaching is one of the great things that God does. . . . It is God's work. And therefore the mission of preaching is the mission of God” (33).

Third, “preaching is meant to exalt the centrality of God because the NT teaches that the appointed end of preaching is faith, and faith is the primary covenant requirement of God, precisely because it humbles us and amplifies the trustworthiness and all-sufficiency of God.” [In other words], “the aim of preaching is to beget and sustain faith. Why? Because faith magnifies the power and trustworthiness of God. . . . The heart of saving faith is a spiritual apprehension of the glorious trustworthiness of God in Christ and an earnest embracing of all that God is for us in Christ to satisfy the hunger of the soul” (33-34).

Thus when we preach we must continually ask ourselves: How can I awaken the slumbering passions of Christian men and women to prize and cherish and value the surpassing worth of knowing God in Christ? How can I speak and what should I say that will kindle the flame of love and adoration and trust and hope in God? How can I preach so as to lead the human soul to say “there is none like Christ, there is no treasure, no pleasure, no perk, no profit, no prize, no reward, no wife, no child, like Christ?” Or again, the aim of all preaching is “to wean the human heart off the breast of sin and bring it to satisfaction in God as the Fountain of Life” (“Preaching as Worship,” 39).

(8) We must preach because preaching is the catalyst for church growth, renewal, and revival. One would be hard-pressed to find in history a season of church growth and authentic revival that has taken place and sustained itself through time without strong preaching. “What history points to,” notes Packer, “is that all movements of revival, reformation, and missionary outreach seem to have had preaching (vigorous, though on occasion very informal) at their center, instructing, energizing, sometimes purging and redirecting, and often spearheading the whole movement” (21).

(9) We must preach because preaching is the means by which the glory of God is revealed and imparted to those who listen with faith. I encourage you to stop at this point and carefully read 2 Cor. 4:1-6, esp. v. 6.

We must not miss the emphasis Paul places on the glory of the gospel as it is proclaimed and what it means to those who believe. Paul himself literally saw the glory of God revealed in the literal face of Jesus when he was encountered on the Damascus road. That which Paul saw, he now sets forth by means of “the truth” (v. 2) of the gospel addressed to the ears of his hearers (i.e., to the Corinthians, to you and me). When we respond in faith, light from the glorified Christ shines into our darkened hearts (v. 6). As Barnett points out, “such 'seeing' of 'the light . . . of the glory' is, of course, metaphorical for hearing. The gospel of Christ comes first not as an optical but as an aural reality (see, e.g., Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2,5; cf. 3:1). Nonetheless, his words are not merely figurative. The intensity of Paul's language suggests that he is appealing to shared spiritual experience, his own and his readers'. When the gospel is heard and the hearer turns to the Lord, the veil is removed so that he now 'sees' the glory of the Lord (see on 3:16,18)” (219-220).

Don't miss this: the glory of God is present in the proclamation of the gospel (4:4-6)! This is why Paul is so appalled at the “peddling” (2:17) and “adulterating” (4:2) of the gospel by his opponents in Corinth. This is not a matter of mere words or a routine speech or a competitive attempt to appear more powerful or persuasive or verbally impressive than the other guy. The proclamation of the truth of the gospel is not entertainment. It is not a platform for a preacher to enhance his reputation or pad his pocketbook or impress people with his eloquence. A preacher or teacher must never open the Scriptures flippantly or casually, as if setting forth the truths of the gospel were no different from any other form of communication.

The same applies anytime anyone shares the gospel with a passing stranger in a restaurant or distributes a tract to a friend. Just think of it: when you speak or write or share the message of the cross, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as revealed in the face of Jesus” (v. 6) is shining forth. What an awesome calling we have! What an exquisite treasure we carry (4:7)!

(10) Finally, we must preach because it is by means of or through the preached Word that the Holy Spirit regenerates the human heart. Peter says it clearly:

“Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; . . . And this word is the good news that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23,25).