

Faith Pulpit

Preach the Word

“Preach the word.” Paul’s pastoral command rings with clarity in the heart and mind of everyone who aspires to fulfill the biblical duties of the pastor (2 Tim. 4:2). The world today rejects the authority of God’s Word as well as its proclamation. The world and even many evangelicals see the Bible as outdated and inadequate as a guide for life. If we believe that the Scriptures are indeed inspired and the product of the breath of God, we must proclaim the Bible as the word of truth, the destiny-changing message, and the life-changing gospel that transforms a sinner into a child of God.

A First Commitment

Preaching the Word demands several basic commitments from those who desire to be faithful to this command. First, the command prescribes our message, namely that we restrict the content of preaching to “the word.”

Today we add the adjective “expository” to preaching to explain what should be obvious. The content of preaching must exclusively center on the written Word of God. Further, the preacher must preach the “all the counsel [i.e., the whole counsel] of God” (Acts 20:27). “This Old and New Testament is one revelation of God—one Bible—one unerring rule of faith.” Tendencies of pastors toward preaching only the Pauline epistles or just the New Testament should be resisted in light of the breadth of Scripture’s value. “All scripture (*graph?*) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Paul identifies this Scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18 by quoting from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This means the preacher who wants to faithfully preach “the Word” should not ignore the 77% of the Bible that was written before Christ.

The message must be proclaimed with accuracy. This means the preacher must understand the intent of the original author of Scripture and the context of a passage. Failure of the expositor to “rightly [divide] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) means the sermon lacks the foundational intent of preaching, that is, to preach the Word. This explains why any good Bible college or seminary places the emphasis of the curriculum on Bible interpretation or hermeneutics.

Bible interpretation means understanding the author’s intended meaning, the culture in which a passage was written, the grammatical construction, the meaning of words and phrases, the figures of speech, and the context. I like the term “normal” interpretation, understanding that the text must mean today what it meant when it was written.

The message must be proclaimed with integrity. Too many sermons miss the target of the biblical text. Some use the text as a pretext by reading a verse or two and then springboarding into whatever topic the preacher has in mind. Others read a text and then proceed to build a “skyscraper sermon”—with one story built upon another. A few randomly selected verses by a preacher do not make an expository sermon, no matter how persuasive or passionate the presentation.

Both types of sermons find themselves preached in far too many pulpits. Some sermons target the audience instead of the text and become “felt need” sermons rather than an exposition of Scripture. The desire for practical application must never supersede the meaning of the text. Other sermons become so technical that the preacher loses the listener in the details of the exegesis. Still other sermons might rightly interpret the text but the application wanders into a spiritualizing of meaning by taking the text in directions the Bible author never intended. These sermons might have biblical content, but they fail to rise to the level of expository preaching. They are about the Bible but not the Bible itself.

A Second Commitment

A second commitment prescribed by the command to “preach the word” is the method of proclaiming the truth, namely preaching.

The term Paul used here to describe the act of preaching describes a “heralding” of the message. The herald historically stood in place of the king to tell the king’s message. The herald had a great accountability to precisely relay the king’s message but also great authority as the herald spoke in the place of the king. To disobey to the word of the king’s herald was to disobey the king himself.

The preacher stands accountable to God for the accuracy of the message preached. Paul emphasizes accountability when after identifying the message to be preached as the inspired word (2 Tim. 3:16) and the value (or profit) of this message (vv. 16–17), he calls upon the Father and Son’s judgment of mankind (4:1) as a point of accountability.

Paul makes this point: in light of this coming judgment, preacher, preach the Word (4:1–2). Preachers must communicate the truth, understanding that their preaching affects people’s eternal destinies when they stand before God in the day of judgment. Paul makes the point of accountability when he repeatedly cites the value of sound doctrine and castigates those with wrong doctrine (e.g., 2 Tim. 3:8, 13).

Paul cautions those preachers who would build on his foundation (1 Cor. 3:9ff). Paul describes the judgment due preachers when their labors pass through the fire that tests their labors for Christ (1 Cor. 3:12–17). Undoubtedly, the quality of their preaching will be a significant part of that judgment.

James makes a similar point when he warns against becoming a teacher because “we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). God will hold accountable those who preach and teach the Word.

The preacher as herald speaks with the authority of the One who sent him. The preacher represents the King of Glory and stands in His stead. A preacher’s authority rests not in the strength of his personality, the breadth of his education or experience, nor the dynamics of his delivery. Rather, the preacher’s authority comes from the fact that he speaks the words of God as God’s appointed representative.

The exciting truth of ministry is that God’s people respond to the Word when it is preached with accuracy, integrity and authority. The key to building a solid, Bible-believing church depends upon the faithful exposition of God’s Word. Once God’s people get a taste for the solid meat of the Scriptures, they will accept no less. Genuine spiritual growth must include a regular diet of God’s Word.

We live in a culture that increasingly denies the person of God, devalues the power of the Gospel, diminishes the priority of the Word, and de-emphasizes the purpose of preaching.

The broader evangelical church is losing its solid grip on the Bible. In a quest for cultural relevance the evangelical church strives for felt needs, gimmickry, social justice, worldly music, and emotionalism. Their self-centered, contentless worship is like “clouds without water” (Jude 12). The age in which we live needs more faithful preaching of God’s Word, not less.

If (or, Since) we believe the Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant Word of God, we must demonstrate that reality by faithfully proclaiming the Truth through our preaching. Let us preach the Word with accuracy, integrity, and authority.

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