

## Why I Believe in Preaching Verse-by-Verse

By Nathan D. Ingram

As the Pastor of a congregation primarily composed of active duty military personnel, I am in the unique position of being able to touch an incredible number of lives. Seldom does our church family see a member stay longer than two years. As God's people have come and gone, I have had opportunity to spend time with believers from amazingly diverse religious backgrounds. As we have discussed the differences between their previous churches and our independent Bible Church, one subject is always discussed and is usually posed in the question: "why do you preach the way you do?" Five years ago, I made a commitment that, by God's grace and as He gives opportunity, I would preach verse-by-verse from God's Word. My purpose in the remaining lines of this paper is to explain, as a Pastor, why I have made this commitment to expository preaching.

As I discuss the subject of preaching with God's people, it had become abundantly clear that Christians today have a misconception of the purpose of a sermon. For many, "good preaching" is the preacher's ability to whip the congregation into an emotional lather. A booming voice, high volume, and choreographed body movements make for an interesting sermon some would say. For others, "good preaching" is the preacher's relevance to the modern situation. This type of preaching addresses the preacher's viewpoint on political and social issues, or brandishes the newest trends in psychology that are tagged with a few scripture verses for legitimacy. Still others feel that "good preaching" is the preacher's collective use of catchy proverbs and platitudes that have little or no direct bearing on the real Christian life.

The single common thread that runs through all of these opinions of "good preaching" is the conspicuous absence of the Word of God as the source and content of the message. Much of what is considered "good preaching" today handles much the scripture much like the national anthem at a baseball game. People like to hear it at the beginning, and would miss it if it were gone. However, in reality, it bears no relation on what is to follow.

Expository preaching, on the other hand, deals with a given passage of scripture verse-by-verse. What the text says is the content of the message. The preacher's purpose is not to propagate his opinion, but rather to explain to the flock what the Word says. With what qualification or authority does the preacher speak if the content of his message is not exclusively the Word of the God who called him? In the remaining lines of this paper, I wish to offer three reasons why I believe in preaching verse-by-verse.

**First, verse-by-verse preaching develops biblical literacy.** Although there are more versions of the Bible and Bible study tools available to the masses than at any other time in history, the alarming reality in the Church today is the biblical illiteracy of the average believer. When the average Christian encounters a crisis or is asked for an opinion, he simply does not know how to respond biblically. I believe that the weight of blame for this dilemma falls upon the weight of the preacher who has exchanged the

banquet table of the Word of God for the happy meal of opinions and platitudes. Believers do not go to their Bibles for answers during the week because the preacher does not go to the Bible for answers on Sunday morning.

**Second, verse-by-verse preaching feeds the flock.** If you join us on any given Sunday at Grace Bible Church, you will discover that we are in the midst of a study of a certain Bible book. We begin with verse one of the first chapter and continue through the last verse of the last chapter. We look at each verse with the belief that God was not lying when he proclaimed that “all scripture is inspired by God and is profitable.” We let the text speak for itself and leave refreshed and filled, having met God in His Word. Only God’s word can accomplish this.

**Third, verse-by-verse preaching keeps the preacher honest with the Word.** There have been several times in my preaching when there was a passage coming up in a book study that I simply did not want to deal with. I was literally dreading tackling the issues of election in Romans 9. I trembled at the thought of proclaiming God’s instructions for women, and then the difficult ending verses in 1 Peter 3. Most recently, with little anticipation I approached the subject of giving in 2 Corinthians 8-9. If I did not preach verse-by-verse, I might not have ever dealt with these issues. Because many preachers do not face these issues biblically, we have a Church today that is sinking in spiritual lethargy. Preaching verse-by-verse is a built-in accountability factor for the preacher to “declare the whole counsel of God.”

What are the results of emotionally charged “good preaching?” Perhaps a few are brought by hype or guilt to make a commitment to the Lord. Yet such commitments are like a New Years Resolution and do not last. What of socially relevant “good preaching?” Never did a man’s opinion win a soul to Christ, or mature a soul in Christ. It is when God’s Word is proclaimed that people’s lives are changed. And the pleasantly worded “good preaching?” Members of the congregation leave with a page full of new rally cries and T-shirt slogans. Yet, these in the end can only produce a Pharisee who honors the Lord with his lips, and proclaims profound platitudes in an attempt to sound spiritual. Yet, when God’s Word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed, there is real inward growth. When God’s word is proclaimed and understood verse-by-verse, the seed of those verses is planted in the heart of the hearer. Over time, the Holy Spirit is able to water those seeds and gradually grow each believer into maturity. God’s Word and it alone can produce a mature believer.

My commitment is a simple one. I need not labor to emotionalize the congregation. I need not attempt to win people over to my opinions. I need not scavenge for a new motto for the week. I need only to know what God’s Word says, allow it to change my life, and then communicate that knowledge to others. God is the one who causes the change and growth.

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