

The Doctrine of Preaching in the New Testament

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The prophets of doom are predicting that the day of preaching is over. They say, "it is an outmoded form of communication in our postmodern age." "Some stress the worldwide revolt against authority, and others the cybernetics revolution in which ever more sophisticated electronic media will dispense with sermons as surely as the automobile has replaced the horse-drawn carriage."¹ We are told that the revolution against authority of the sixties combined with the visual age in which we live have made the practice of preaching obsolete.

If preaching in general has taken a beating, expository preaching has been given the death knoll. In the world, authority has been questioned. In the church, the authority of the Bible has been called into question. Robert Bratcher, a translator for the American Bible Society's *Good News For Modern Man* has said, "Only willful ignorance or intellectual dishonesty can account for the claim that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. No truth loving, God-respecting, Christ-honoring believer should be guilty of such heresy."² Dr. W. A. Criswell summarizes the attitude of almost the entire modern theological world as those who "apologize for the Bible."³ Liberalism has robbed the preacher of his authority. Since expository preaching is based upon the Word, it cannot be valid in today's churches because the Word of God has

lost its authority in the lives of men.

However, if one continues to take the Word of God seriously, then preaching cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. For those who believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, then preaching is still relevant no matter what generation within which they live. The preached Word has power. Jesus reminded us that before He returns that the "gospel must first be **preached** to all nations" (Mark 13:10 emphasis mine). Paul longed to "**preach** the gospel to you who are in Rome" (Romans 1:15, emphasis mine). Peter reminded the church that they were "born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). The Word, Peter says, "was **preached** to you" (v. 24). The Word of God, preached, is powerful unto salvation. It is no wonder that Paul encourages Timothy to "**Preach** the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2).

As a result of these concerns, the purpose of this paper is to examine the doctrine of preaching in the New Testament and to determine its continuing relevance in the church ministering in this modern culture. In order to accomplish this task, an understanding of the Biblical '*word*' which is translated as '*to preach*' will be undertaken. Following this undertaking, the form of New Testament preaching will be examined. This form will be defined as expository preaching. The theological foundations for this form will be given as well as practical applications and concerns for the modern church. Through this study, the relevance for the church will be ascertained.

The New Testament Word for Preaching

The New Testament uses a variety of words which in English are translated as preaching. These Greek words include *λεγειν*, *αποφθεγγεσθαι*, *αγγελλειν*, *αναγγελλειν*, and *καταγγελλειν* among many others.⁴ However, "there are two basic words used in the New Testament to describe preaching."⁵ The first of these words is *ευαγγελιζομαι*. In the Gospels, the word occurs eleven times (once in Matthew and ten times in Luke). It occurs fifteen times in Acts, twenty one times in Paul's letters, twice in Hebrews, three times in I Peter, and twice in Revelation. It is not found in Mark, John's Gospel, Ephesians, James, 2 Peter, John's epistles, or Jude. "Among the Greeks the term is used for the proclamation of victory."⁶ After a battle a runner would be sent home with the news of victory. Paul uses this analogy, when he says in Romans 10:15, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"⁷ In the New Testament, "this word emphasizes that the message of the preacher is good news." The good news is the coming of Jesus to earth, his life and death for the salvation of men. "*ευαγγελιζομαι* is not just speaking and preaching: it is proclamation with full authority and power."⁸

The other main word used for preaching in the New Testament is *κηρυσσω*, which means "to proclaim as a herald." The word comes from *κηρυε* which means a herald. "The herald had a place at the royal court, every prince had a herald, in many cases many."⁹ The herald spoke for the prince on diplomatic missions as well as the task of announcing his arrival. He speaks on behalf of the one to whom he is employed. In terms of preaching, the preacher serves as a herald in the sense that his "mission is to proclaim a

message from God to anyone who will listen."¹⁰ That message is still the message of Jesus, His life, death and resurrection. To preach according to this word "does not mean the delivery of a learned and edifying or hortatory discourse in well chosen words and a pleasant voice but it is a declaration of an event."¹¹ Again, that even is the coming of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The New Testament Form of Preaching: Exposition

In order to understand the form of preaching in the New Testament it is necessary to examine its Old Testament roots. The key passage in the Old Testament for the understanding of preaching is Nehemiah 8:8. "So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading." In this passage of Scripture, the exposition of the Word involves three elements. There is the presentation or reading of the Word of God. Second, there is an explanation of the Word of God, that is "they made it clear and gave its meaning." Finally, there is exhortation of the Word of God. "The Hebrew term 'understand' indicates that the priests caused the people to understand in such a way that they could use the information that was imparted."¹² Again, the three components of preaching in the Old Testament are the presentation of the Word, the explanation of the Word, and the exhortation of the Word.

"These same three components reappear in New Testament practice."¹³ This pattern is first seen in the life of Jesus. At the beginning of His ministry, our Lord read the Scripture, explained it and then made exhortation by

proclaiming that the hearers should honor Jesus (Luke 4:11-19). The most clear passage of Scripture which shows Jesus' exposition of the text is Luke 24:27 which says, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Again the three elements remain. Jesus presented the text, in this case the Law and Prophets. He expounded the text. Finally, He gave application. In this case, application is to believe the Old Testament testimony concerning His death and resurrection and thus worship Him (v.25). This should not be surprising since Jesus was schooled in the Old Testament teaching.

This form of preaching is also prevalent in the New Testament church as found in the book of Acts. Peter's sermon at Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:14-36 contains these elements. He read the Old Testament text, he explained it and then exhorted His hearers to trust Christ. Stephen, in Acts 7, through his defense of the gospel offers again an exposition of the Old Testament. Philip, in Acts 8:26-35, expounds the text to the Ethiopian eunuch.

This pattern of preaching was also a part of Paul's ministry. Paul exhorts Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." Again, the three elements are present. The presentation of the Word is obvious in this text. "The Word for 'preaching' in the Greek literally means to exhort or entreat."¹⁴ The Word teaching implies explanation of the text. Thus the three elements remain.

Again in 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul says, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct,

rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction." In this instance the word '*preach*' means to proclaim or publish."¹⁵ This is the presentation of the Word of God. Paul also admonishes Timothy to exhort the Word of God when he says to "correct, rebuke, encourage with great patience. Finally, there is explanation of the Word of God, which is evident when Paul reminds Timothy to give "careful instruction."

Not only did Paul teach this form of preaching but he practiced it as well. In Acts 17:1-4, Luke records,

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

Upon entering Thessalonica, Paul went to the synagogue where he proclaimed the Word of God, he explained it and he exhorted the people to place their faith in Christ.

In our day this form of preaching is best described as exposition or expository preaching. There are many ways to define expository preaching, but most of the definitions cover much of the same ideas. For example, Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as

The communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.¹⁶

Dr. Stephen Olford gives a definition that includes much of the same principles. For Dr. Olford,

Expository preaching is the spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God's Word, with due regard to the historical, contextual, grammatical and doctrinal significance of the given passage, with the specific objective of invoking a Christ transforming response.¹⁷

The principles of expository preaching include the reading of the text of Scripture, explaining what the text means and deriving from the sense of the text points of doctrine, thus applying it to the lives of men.

For this paper, the definition of expository preaching is to proclaim the text of the Word of God in its historical, grammatical context through the power of the Holy Spirit in order to convict, instruct and edify the hearers of that Word. Expository preaching is distinguished from other forms of preaching such as textual and topical preaching in that "expository preaching emerges directly from and demonstrably from a passage or passages of Scripture."¹⁸ That is, in expository preaching the points and the outline flow from the text of Scripture.

The Theological Foundations for

Expository Preaching

Expository preaching rests on a strong theological foundation. It is anchored in three major doctrines; the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Scripture, and the doctrine of the pastorate. Foundational to preaching in the doctrine of God, is that "God has spoken." God has revealed Himself to us. Hebrews 1:1-2 says,

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Without such revelation, we would not know God. Therefore, we speak because God has spoken. "How could we ever dare to speak if God has not spoken?"¹⁹ The prophet Amos says, "The lion has roared-- who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken-- who can but prophesy?" Because God has spoken, we too must speak.

Preaching is also grounded in the doctrine of Scripture. Scripture is God's Word in written form. It is inspired. Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Because the Bible is inspired by God it is valuable for all generations. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us that "the Word of God is living and active." The Bible is not a dead document filled with ancient facts, but it is alive and has power in and over the lives of people today.

The doctrine of Scripture communicates the truth that it should be preached. But if the Word is to be preached, the best means of preaching is expository preaching. "The type of preaching that most effectively lays open the Bible so that men are confronted by its truth is expository preaching."²⁰ This is especially true for those who have a commitment to Biblical inerrancy. If we believe that "all Scripture is inspired by God" and inerrant, then we must also be committed to the reality that it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) "The only response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it expositionally."²¹

Inherent in the doctrine of Scripture is the truth that God speaks through His Word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth" (John 17:17). Elsewhere Jesus reminded us that the Holy Spirit would come who would "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and illumines it in the hearts of men, so that they can hear God speak through His Word. Paul says, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). God continues to speak through the Bible.

Finally, expository preaching is grounded in the doctrine of the pastorate. In our generation, the pastor is to be a counselor, fund-raiser, visitor, soul-winner, leader, and if he has time preacher. But according to Scripture one of the main responsibilities of the Christian pastor is to feed the sheep. An examination of the requirements for

presbyters in the New Testament bears witness to this. Titus 1:9 says, He **must "hold fast the faithful Word as he has been taught**, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to **exhort** and convict those who contradict" (emphasis mine). Elsewhere Paul reminds Timothy that "a bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, **able to teach**" (*1 Timothy 3:2, emphasis mine*). The pastor is to hold fast to the doctrine given to Him and to exhort and teach it. "He must combine a loyalty to Scripture with the gift for expounding it."²² The pastor is to preach the Word.

These significant doctrines support the task of expository preaching. Expository preaching is God centered. It's goal is to allow the people of God to hear God's voice. The expository preacher seeks to preach what the Bible says is true, not what one wishes the Bible to say is true. Thus, the congregation hears what God says is true. Expository preaching is Scripture centered in that the outline and text come straight from Scripture. Expository preaching fulfills the mandate of the Christian pastor to feed the flock of God. It is only in Scripture that we find pure milk and meat for the church.

The Practical Applications and Concerns of Expository Preaching

There are some practical applications for this kind of preaching in the modern church. Expository preaching provides the tools for evangelistic preaching. It also helps the pastor to fulfill his role as teacher. Expository preaching can lead to revival and spiritual awakening. Expository preaching gives the pastor means of preaching all of God's Word. Finally, it answers the question of

authority.

First, expository preaching is best for evangelistic preaching. Paul reminds us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Expository preaching seeks as its purpose to allow the Word of God to be read, heard and understood plainly. When expounding the text through the power of the Holy Spirit, there is a greater chance of reaching the lost. Note also, that any text preached through the power of the Holy Spirit can be used because all of Scripture can preach the gospel.

Many see the peril of the church in our generation to be the lack of conformity to the Word of God. The church lacks the conformity because it does not hear the Word preached. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones reminds us that "the decadent eras and periods in the history of the church have always been those in which preaching has declined."²³ Expository preaching brings the Word of God back to the pulpits. This brings the church to the plumb line of God's Word with which to measure itself. When the church sees itself out of line with God's standard, then it can repent and begin to live as it should. This can bring revival to the church and possibly great awakening to our nation.

Expository preaching also provides an opportunity to fulfill the pastor's role as teacher. Most Christians, both veteran and new, have no clue how to "rightly divide the Word of truth." "Expository preaching teaches people how to think through a passage, how to understand and apply God's Word to their lives."²⁴ A steady diet of expository preaching can teach people how to read the Word of God for themselves.

Expository preaching also helps the pastor to preach all of Scripture. Paul said in Acts 20:27, "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." Expository preaching can provide a pastor a means to systematically preach the whole counsel of God.

Expository preaching also provides the pastor his authority. Since the outline and points for the sermon comes straight from the text, expository preaching will least likely lead the preacher to stray from the Scriptures. This is important because the messenger's authority lies in those Scriptures. If the preacher is faithful to the text, then he has confidence that the message is God's rather than his own. The authority for the message then lies in the one who sent the messenger rather than the one sent.

Conclusions

Those who have abandoned preaching, and specifically expository preaching, have done so for reasons stated at the beginning of this article. They have abandoned expository preaching because they have abandoned an inerrant Word of God. They have also abandoned expository preaching because of their conclusion that modern man has abandoned authority. Finally, they have abandoned expository preaching because they find oral communication outdated.

However through the definition of expository preaching and its foundations that have been given, expository preaching can be demonstrated to be relevant in our generation. First, expository preaching does rest on an inspired, inerrant Word of God. For those who have abandoned such a Word, expository preaching is irrelevant. But

preaching itself as well as the faith they proclaim to have is irrelevant as well. Without the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the Word of God, faith has no foundation but human subjectivity. Christianity becomes one option among many. There is no authority, no sure Word, nothing with which to base salvation. There is no answer for them but prayer.

However, for those who still retain a belief in the trustworthiness of Scripture, then expository preaching is still relevant. It is relevant, first because the discipline of expository preaching finds its foundations within Scripture and the doctrines derived from it. After all, "the real secret of expository preaching is not mastering certain techniques, but being mastered by certain convictions."²⁵ Expository preaching becomes relevant when the preacher is mastered by the conviction that his method of preaching is right. Secondly, it is relevant because expository preaching seeks to honor the Scripture that is true for all generations. Scripture is always relevant, therefore, the preaching of it is always relevant.

Expository preaching is relevant for our generation because its authority lies outside the messenger. The messenger is an "ambassador for Christ, as though God were pleading through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). As ambassadors, "He makes available to us, and through us, all the resources of God."²⁶ One resource given to the man of God is God's authority. The authority for the ambassador's message lies in the authority of the One who sent Him. The preacher's authority lies in God.

People may question the authority of the preacher. But when they find out the authority for the preacher's message is in God, some still may question that

authority. But Jesus said, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, "so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them'" (Matthew 4:11-12). The message will be closed to those who reject God's authority, but to those who submit to it, they will have ears to hear. There are still those in our generation who through the power of the Holy Spirit, will listen. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). Expository preaching is relevant because God still has those who will listen to His authority. To abandon expository preaching because some don't respond to authority would be like throwing the baby out with the bath water. It does not make sense, therefore, expository preaching is still relevant.

Finally, expository preaching is relevant because expository preaching seeks to communicate. Expository preaching seeks to explain the text and to exhort the people to apply it in their lives. This cannot be done unless it is understood. People may have difficulty with oral communication, but that does not mean one must have to give it up. In order to explain the message, the messenger must adapt and use visual and other forms of communication to aid in the comprehension of the message. Over a period of time, the people of God can be taught how to better listen and understand the preached message. Expository preaching is relevant because its aim is to communicate the Word of God.

Dr. Stephen Olford concludes his booklet, Preaching the Word of God by saying, "it is my fervent prayer and

earnest hope that this book will stir my brethren, and start a movement to restore expository preaching to the pulpits of our land."²⁷ To that end, a hearty amen is given. For as the Word of God is faithfully expounded, the church will be restored to her former glory. As the Word is preached and obeyed in our churches, revival will come to our churches. This is the only hope for our nation. May God bring us to that end.

Footnotes

¹John R. W. Stott, "Biblical Preaching is Expository Preaching" in Evangelical Roots, Kenneth Kantzer, ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978.), pg. 159.

²Inerrancy: Clearing Away Confusion," Christianity Today 25/10 (May 29, 1981) 12.

³W. A. Criswell, "The Infallible Word of God" in A Passion For Preaching, David Olford, Ed (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), pg. 38.

⁴Gerhard Kittel, "khrussw" in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1974), pg. 703.

⁵Paul B. Smith, "Preaching" in A Passion For Preaching, David Olford, Ed (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), pg. 56.

⁶Gerhard Kittel, euaggelizomai in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1974), pg. 710.

⁷Smith, pg. 56.

⁸Kittel, Vol. 2, pg. 720.

⁹Gerhard Kittel, "khrue" in Theological

Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 3,
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1974),
pg. 683-4.

¹⁰Smith, pg. 56.

¹¹Gerhard Kittel, Vol. 3, pg. 703.

¹²Bryan Chappell, "Components of
Expository Preaching" Preaching 10 (May-
June, 1995), pg. 5.

¹³Chappell, pg. 5-6.

¹⁴Chappell., pg. 6.

¹⁵Ibid., pg. 6.

¹⁶Haddon Robinson, Biblical Preaching: The
Development and Delivery of Expository
Messages. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book
House, 1980), pg. 20.

¹⁷Stephen Olford, The Essentials of
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¹⁸D. A. Carson, "Accept No Substitutes, 6
Reason Not to Abandon Expository
Preaching" Leadership 17:3, (1996), pg. 87.

¹⁹Stott, pg. 160.

²⁰Haddon Robinson, "What is Expository
Preaching?" Bibliotheca Sacra 131, (January
1974), 57.

²¹John F. MacArthur, "The Mandate of
Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching", The
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²²Stott, pg. 167.

²⁴Martyn, Lloyd Jones, Preaching and
Preachers. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972),
pg. 24.

²⁵Carson, pg. 88.

²⁶Stott, pg. 160.

²⁷Henry Blackaby & Henry Brandt, The Power of the Call. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), pg. 29.

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