

A Plea for Biblical Preaching

Editorial: Thomas R. Schreiner

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It seems that almost everyone trumpets the importance of expositional preaching, and yet genuine and powerful expository preaching seems to be in short supply. Too often the text that is read before the sermon is abandoned or distorted when the preacher arises to proclaim the word. I am reminded of an exposition I read on Acts 27 where Paul's shipwreck on Malta was used to say that we all need to take vacations. Paul would be rather surprised, to say the least, to discover that his trip to Malta was being likened to a Mediterranean cruise. Similarly, I heard a sermon on the many sufferings Paul experienced in his ministry on 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. One of the lessons drawn for the people was the need to eliminate busyness in our lives to reduce stress. I wondered what the preacher could be thinking. Paul catalogs his sufferings to show his devotion to Christ, and there is not a hint that he thought he was doing too much! Or, how many sermons contain striking alliteration, but the main points do not match what the biblical text actually says?

One reason for the decline of expositional preaching is lack of faith. What do we believe really builds God's church? The scriptures say that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17). If we want our people to trust in God and to obey him, then they must hear the word of God, for God's word is the means by which faith is generated. Do we say that the Bible is central, but in practice depend upon church growth strategies, recent insights from psychology, and leadership techniques? I am not denying that church growth semi-

nars, psychological study, and understanding leadership may profit us in our ministries. Problems arise, however, when such things become supreme rather than the scriptures. For instance, our study of the Bible may be haphazard, hurried, and superficial, but we feel a rush of excitement when *Leadership* arrives. Does not such a response reveal that we believe that *Leadership* is more useful and practical than God's word?

We may even decide the main points of the sermon before we begin to study the passage from which we preach. This latter practice indicates that we believe we have a better grasp of what the church needs to hear than God—for *we decide* what the church needs to hear. If we genuinely believe that the scriptures are the means by which God will strengthen the church, we will devote ourselves to study them thoroughly. We will regularly preach through whole books of the Bible to ensure that God's message is delivered, and not ours. In this way we will not be able to avoid controversial topics, such as, the Pauline restrictions on women. If we encounter texts that seem to be "impractical," we will pray over them and study them until God gives us understanding, believing that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Ti 3:16).

My prayer is that this issue of the journal will encourage pastors to persevere in the task of biblical preaching. In this issue we are reminded of those who have gone before us who have faithfully preached the word: John Calvin, Jonathan

Edwards, and James Petigru Boyce. The fruitfulness of their ministry was rooted in their faithfulness to the scriptures. We also include Kent Hughes and Mark Dever: two contemporary voices who proclaim the centrality of expositional preaching. Hershael York and Scott Blue remind us of a crucial point: Expository preaching must not be separated from application, for merely explaining what a passage means is not preaching at all.

The forum is also invaluable, for some of the finest scholars in evangelicalism answer questions pertaining to preaching. Is it important to use the original languages when preparing messages? Is knowledge of church history, systematic theology, or contemporary culture of any use for the preacher? And finally, what are the elements of a good sermon? My prayer is that those who read this journal will be inspired to “preach the word” (2 Ti 4:2). When many ceased following Christ, and he asked the twelve if they wished to depart as well, Peter confessed, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).