

# PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ENGLAND & WALES

## PREACHING AND HEARING THE WORD OF GOD



**A THEOLOGY OF  
PREACHING**

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**10 DOS AND DON'TS  
OF PREACHING**

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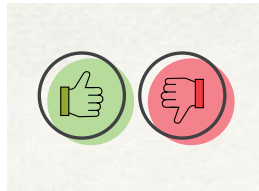
**ON DELIVERING  
SERMONS**

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## “ EDITOR'S NOTE

In January, the Presbytery conference was held in Sheffield. The subject was 'Preaching and Hearing the Word of God.' Several of our ministers spoke about various aspects of this important matter. The addresses were edifying, stimulating, and challenging. It was heartening for fellow-workers to seek to strengthen one another in their vital, God-given task. This issue of the *Presbyterian Network* contains some of the conference addresses.

Although most of the addresses were about preaching, the hearing of the Word preached is of fundamental importance and eternal significance to every person. Our Lord said, 'Take heed what you hear!' His parable of the sower is all about this. (Mark 4)

May the pulpits of the EPCEW be platforms for sound biblical preaching; may the congregations be marked out by diligent hearing of the Word. ◦

## 🎁 SUBSCRIPTIONS AND GIFTS

We wish to thank readers for cheques paying subscriptions and making gifts towards the publishing costs of the *Presbyterian Network*. Some may find it helpful to know that subscriptions and donations can be paid via **PayPal** (and those living abroad can make a payment in their own currency.) To do this, you simply go on [PayPal.com](http://PayPal.com) and donate/pay money to the following account: [treasurer@epcew.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@epcew.org.uk) ◦

## 📍 SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

### 📍 BARRY



Our Sunday sermons are taken from the OT book of Judges and the Gospel of John. In January, we received the keys to our new building. The work of site development is a great undertaking and will involve many years of effort, but one step at a time the Lord has been leading, refining our vision, and providing. We are praying the Lord will provide a pathway to complete our first phase so that we can relocate in 2019, Lord willing. We were encouraged by volunteers from Ely Presbyterian (Cardiff), Princes Street Baptist (Barry), and Immanuel Presbyterian

(EPCEW), who supported our Garden Clean-up Day on 9 February. That Saturday, many in the town stopped to ask us what this was all about. This was a dead church for many years. There are signs of life from the Lord; Barry is starting to take notice.

✍ Drew Goodman

### 📍 BERLIN

We firmly believe that Sunday is the high point of the week. As a church we experience this truth more and more. We enjoy the two services and the catechism class, but we also enjoy the fellowship. As we changed our service times and now have a lunch together every Sunday, we also have time to fellowship. In recent weeks I have often heard the comment that the time between the morning and afternoon services is too short, as the people enjoyed their conversations.

With the new year, we have started two new sermon series. I am preaching through Exodus in the morning and Galatians in the afternoon. On Wednesday we are looking at the Letter of James.

Please pray for our midweek Bible study. The number attending went down over the last six months. Prayer is a means of grace, and the midweek meetings are the time in the week when we can pray together for the needs of the church, local and global.

✍ Johannes Müller

## SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

### BURY ST EDMUNDS

The Lord is faithful, and we continue to rejoice in the faithfulness shown to us as a church. We are smaller in number at this time certainly than we have been over the last few years. However, we have seen slow progress in the spiritual maturity and desire of a number of folk who have joined us over the past year. The Lord has also sent one or two who have quietly thrown themselves into serving the church where there were needs.

This is also a time of earnest prayer for the church. We are pleading with the Lord for more fruit from the relationships we have formed in the community through the Mums and Tots group, the coffee morning, and the youth club. We are pleading with the Lord for more labourers - strong Christians who might serve in the church, and staff and help to sustain her outreach work.

Finally, we are pleading with the Lord for those in the congregation with serious illness or longer-term side effects from past illness. These things cause us to feel our weakness, but also drive us to seek our strength more fully in our God.

 Benjamin Wontrop

### CAMBRIDGE

We have recently started a Christianity Explored course and have two non-Christians coming along each week. It is an encouragement to go through Mark's Gospel and to be reminded of what a great

Saviour we have. We pray that these two unbelievers will repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ. We have also had the opportunity to support the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union's (CICCU) 'Events Week', an annual outreach to the students of the university. Among other things, this involves lunchtime and evening apologetic/evangelistic talks every day for one week, and it has been an encouragement to see a number of students come along to these events and hear the gospel clearly proclaimed.

We look forward to having our first weekend 'retreat' as a church in May, and to the upcoming wedding of one of our members, Cheryl Turkington, and her fiancé, David Morris, in the same month. We are just sorry that, once married, they will be settling in Edinburgh and not Cambridge! We have been going through Daniel and some Psalms in our Sunday services.

 Douglas McCallum

### CARDIFF - BETHEL

One of the main topics of conversation in the neighbourhood over the last few months has been 'The Wall'. In late November, a drunk driver attempted to go through the grounds of the church, but only succeeded in ramming the side wall of the church in spectacular style. Uninjured, the driver walked away, but the disruption caused to the church has been dramatic, and children's activities seriously curtailed.

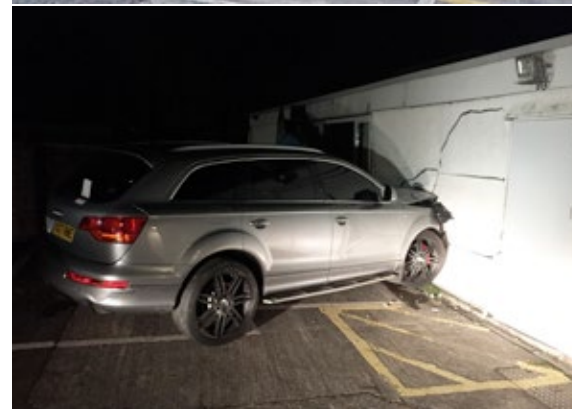
Theological student Matt Faux has been

## SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

on a month's placement with the church and has had an opportunity of speaking to members of the community; he has been made aware of the loneliness, isolation, and need in the area. Please pray that Bethel will become as a beacon offering light and hope to a desperate people.

Despite the disruption, we were able to hold a Women's Christmas Cake Decorating evening, and the first of our *Common Ground* coffee mornings was held, encouraging neighbours to drop in for a chat. A monthly Theological Reading Group has also been started on a Saturday morning.

 Patricia Stowell



### CARDIFF - IMMANUEL

On the Lord's Day, ministry has been from Acts and Isaiah. We have just 'visited Athens' (Acts 17) and heard Paul preaching to the philosophers the God who was unknown to them, warning of judgment, and leading some to the Saviour. We have heard Isaiah foretelling of Cyrus, who was to be born a century afterwards, and order Jerusalem to be rebuilt. Isaiah continually raises our eyes to the Servant of the LORD who would come to the rebuilt Jerusalem.

Some of our members are suffering through advancing age and health concerns. We are much in prayer for Judith, a daughter of Mavis, one of our members, who is seriously ill with cancer.

Iestyn ap Hywel has been with Immanuel for six months already. We are thankful for him and Sunni; and we are praying that this will be a time when his love for the Lord and his gifts grow.

We are about to host the Hebrew Bible week announced in the previous issue of the Presbyterian Network. We are expecting about 12 to take part.

Our greatest need is for the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who teaches us to love, to be at one, to hunger for the Word, and delight in the Sabbath. We are also continually praying for the recovery of those who have wandered from the Lord.

 Peter Naylor

## SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

### CHELMSFORD

At the beginning of November, we took over a local Costa Coffee for an evening, and Darren Moore spoke on the topic 'One way? No way! Is Christianity arrogant?' This was well attended, and after the talk questions were submitted by text to encourage even the most timid to take part. This anonymity worked well and Darren answered a large number of far-ranging questions. Clearly, this is a good forum for addressing the pressing questions people have about Christianity and the Bible, and another one is planned for March. This time the venue is a Costa in central Chelmsford, so please pray that passers-by will be drawn in to listen.

A men's breakfast is held monthly in homes, but every three months 'The Big Breakfast' is held, which is evangelistic in intention, and at which visitors hear a speaker who has an interesting life story to tell as they share their faith. In November the speaker was Jeremy Marshall. His life as a chief executive of a city bank and his diagnosis of incurable cancer is described in *City Lives* by Marcus Nodder. This was well attended and free copies of the book were distributed.

We are thankful that Gap, our group for teenagers, has recommenced, meeting monthly before church on Sunday mornings. Please pray for this group, that those who attend may gain a deeper understanding of God's Word and enjoy fellowship together.

 Ruth Ferguson

### CHELTENHAM - NAUNTON LANE

Refurbishment of the church hall was completed on schedule in November. Members of the team, led by Stephen Johnston, had all contributed in their areas of expertise and had planned and executed the programme of work. It is our prayer that the building will be used well to the glory of God.

We appreciate the support of visiting preachers during the ministerial vacancy. It has been supplemented by the elders and Rev. Michael Cochran. Rev. Richard Holst is preaching several series for us.

The annual Kids Christmas Club was held on Saturday 22 December. This was led by Michael and Laura Cochran, who were ably aided by a number from the congregation. About 15 children attended and we hope that the follow-up contacts will help to bring them back to the church's regular children's meetings.

The middle of winter is when the planning starts up for the summer mission to the Presbyterian Church in Mangalia, and its church plant in Limanu. With recent encouraging news of the children's work there, this aspect will be the focus of the team.

 Tai-Tuck Yu

## SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

### CHELTENHAM - WHADDON ROAD

We have much to be thankful for as a church. Our outreach at Christmas time (carol services and choir concert with evangelistic message) was well attended and we continue to make contact with outsiders through the choir. We have admitted a family into membership and others have come forward wanting to become members. The Wilkes family (Mission to the World, PCA) hope to arrive on 27 March. Their role will be to seek to support the ministry of the church as well as focusing on outreach.

We have a need to add to the leadership of the church. While we grow in numbers, our need is to grow in maturity. We have been going through the book of Revelation in our evening services and have been struck by the penetrating yet deeply loving words of our Saviour to his church. He calls them to hold fast to the truth and stand faithfully in the world, which is only possible through union and communion with Christ. Our great need is to deepen in this

 David Pfeiffer



### DURHAM

In the last issue of the *Presbyterian Network* we mentioned the desire of the church to interact more with the Christian Union at Durham University. The Lord answered our prayers when Phil Baiden spoke at the CU Central meeting in December. He spoke on the topic of prayer from 1 Thessalonians and was well received. The CU has its mission week at the end of February and a couple of our students are involved in the work surrounding that event. We also rejoiced when one of our American postgraduates submitted his PhD dissertation.

We held another Open Church Night in December which ended with us singing songs outside the chapel to our neighbours. We received an appreciative round of applause from one resident. Our meeting on 25 December was led by Rev. Bill Schweitzer of Gateshead which was another reminder of the fellowship we enjoy with churches in our Presbytery. The Lord has sustained a number of members through times of family illness, as well as bereavement.

We continue to be encouraged from John's Gospel in our Lord's Day services.

 Phil Baiden

### GATESHEAD

On Sunday 3 February, we celebrated our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Gateshead Presbyterian Church, with a church lunch. At this very joyful occasion, Jon, Bill and Nathan reminded the congregation of the many

 **SPOTLIGHT** on the Churches

blessings we have received from the Lord over the past few years. It was fitting, that Bill's sermon in the morning prompted us to look at Stephen's courage and zeal (Acts 7) and that we should continue to press on in faith, instead of becoming lukewarm. It was also a good time to look forward to our building project for the All Saint's church in Newcastle City Centre. The project is going forward, and we have already ordered a suitable, custom-made pulpit for the church. Our prayer is that the Lord would use this beautiful building for his glory.

Additionally, we are encouraged by the attention that Westminster Presbyterian Theological Seminary (WPTS) is receiving. In order to make the Seminary particularly known among the local churches, we introduced a monthly Lunch Time Lecture. The first one was on 30 January, when Bill spoke on the Holy Trinity. Future speakers will be Rev. Phil Baiden, Rev. Dan Peters, Rev. George Curry, and Rev. Dr Gary McKee..

 Florian Weicken

 **HEXHAM**

February marked the fourth anniversary for Hexham Presbyterian Church. At the beginning of the month the Riegers returned to Hexham after several months visiting supporting churches in the United States. In the Lord's kind providence, Nathan Hilton was able to fill the pulpit while Josh was away. During this time there were several visitors and some numerical growth in the congregation. We have been increasingly active in outreach, both as a congregation and personally. We are praying faithfully

for more opportunities and increased fruit. We are planning to begin a Christianity Explored course in March. Pray that we will see visitors attend who are looking to learn more about the Christian faith and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to Christianity Explored, we are looking forward to beginning a children's Sunday school before the morning service in the coming weeks. We are praying this would be a blessing to the children in the church and a further opportunity for outreach.

 Joshua Rieger

 **HULL**

The services on the Lord's Day for the Christmas season were well attended and we hope that the word preached will be effective in the lives of all who came to hear it. We had a New Year celebration at the church. Yet again we had good numbers and the gospel was proclaimed.

One of our members, Tracey has made good progress at the Union School of Theology with a view to training as a Scripture reader for SASRA. We have a few members and associates who are undergoing tests and treatments for various illnesses. We have seen answers to prayers regarding these things. Despite the fact that we have no pastor, the Lord is sustaining us despite our weakness. He promises never to leave us or forsake us. We continue to make preaching and teaching a priority by holding two services on the Lord's Day and a Bible study on Wednesdays.

 Chris Lawson

 **SPOTLIGHT** on the Churches

 **OXFORD**

As we enter the sixth month of the life of Oxford EPC, we can only praise God for an unexpectedly blessed start to this new church plant. Please give thanks for: the central venues of St Luke's Chapel and the Friends Meeting house, which are wonderful locations for worship and outreach; the forming of an initial membership on 6 January; the gathering of 25-35 for our morning services and 15-20 for our evening services each Sunday; the bi-weekly student Bible studies where a good number meet for food and in-depth study of God's Word; and regular visitors, some of whom are not Christians (yet!).

Whilst the beginnings of Oxford EPC have been very encouraging, we are very conscious there is a long way to go. Please pray for: financial stability into the future; more families to join; the conversion of sinners; and the establishment of the church. We are excited that Rev. Michael Cochran (with Laura and Fox) are moving to Oxford in the summer to help the work here. Please pray for them as they return to the USA in February to raise more financial support ahead of their move.

 Andy Young

 **SALFORD**

Give thanks that a mixed congregation is gathering: about 25 in the morning; about eight in the evening. Pray for a healthy routine of attendance, Lord's Day after

Lord's Day, coupled with a growing hunger and thirst for Christ.

Chris has been formally installed. We were encouraged by those who visited from elsewhere in Presbytery. Kevin Bidwell gave the charge to Chris from 2 Timothy 4 and Paul Brown charged us as a congregation to pay careful attention as hearers of the Word. It was good then to have newcomers at Christmas. To build bridges, we took part in the school's Christmas fair and an assembly. We also went carol singing again.

In the new year, we began with a short series 'God's good gifts to humanity' (creation ordinances). Chris is now preaching from Ephesians and the Songs of Ascent, while teaching us midweek from John Murray's book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.

We are also glad to be able to support the local work of Manchester City Mission, the Salford Globe Café for international students (starting up Bible studies) and the university Christian Unions, especially through Chris giving evangelism training.

 Rosemary Statter

 **SHEFFIELD**

At last the extension to the Hill Top Chapel has been completed; just before Christmas the builders left the site. The Reformation Bible Conference 2019 took place at the very beginning of the New Year. We wondered whether the building would work, but by the end of the conference our

## SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

unreserved conclusion was that it does, for which we thank God – not simply for a Chapel extension, but for a completely reconfigured building.

The church continues to grow and develop. We are relaunching a number of things, such as the catechism class for adults at 10:00 am on the Lord's Day, with a catechism for children as well, so that parents can be involved and instructed. Do come and visit us for worship on a Lord's Day.

There is still further work to be done. We need to build an outbuilding for storing gardening and other equipment, and we need to extend the car park. This all takes faith, patience, and wisdom.

 Kevin Bidwell



Kevin Bidwell and Bill Schweitzer outside the new entrance to Hill Top Chapel

## SOLIHULL

We are thankful to the Lord as we look back at the last year and look forward to this one. People are being added to our number. We have some people still attending as a result of the Summer Mission. Others have transferred from other churches. However, later this year we expect to lose some people for career reasons.

Some sad news is that we had the deaths of two of our senior members, Shirley Hateley and Ella Tran, over the Christmas period. These were the first ever deaths of members of our church. We thank God for his grace in their lives.

We have a developing relationship with Sovereign Grace Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC, who sent a mission team last Summer. They have invited us to visit them in February. We would appreciate your prayers for the fruitfulness of the gospel as a result of this relationship.

We continue to pray for opportunities to explore church planting in the conurbation of the West Midlands. We currently have our eye on Acocks Green in neighbouring Birmingham. Please pray that the Lord would provide further opportunities and resources to develop a pioneering work.

 Stephen Dancer

## SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

### SUNDERLAND

We thank God for his goodness and grace to us. We began meeting weekly after Christmas on a Wednesday evening at 19:30. The group has continued to solidify and the members have expressed their commitment and calling to support the work. We study the book of Acts together and have just completed chapter 15. I am amazed at the sincere and heartfelt response of my brothers and sisters to the Word of God which is manifest in their thankfulness and fervency in prayer.

We launched our new website recently complete with introductory video: [www.sunderlandpres.org.uk](http://www.sunderlandpres.org.uk).

We value your prayers in these three areas: 1. Our initial funding goal is on the horizon. Please ask that our Father would pour out abundant blessings on us. 2. My family and I are attempting to sell our home in Gateshead and move to Sunderland. Please pray for this tricky process. 3. We are still searching for the right Lord's Day venue. Please pray that God would lead us to the ideal location for accessibility, suitability for worship, and growth.

 Nathan Hilton



### TRANÅS, SWEDEN,

There are some major changes in the church at present, primarily that pastor David Bergmark will end his service as pastor in Immanuelskyrkan in June this year. The family is planning to move to the USA for two years for studies.

The question of new leadership in the church is of course on our minds and we ask for your prayers.

 Sune Jäderberg

# REFORMATION CONFERENCE UK 2019

**SUBJECT: 'THE HOLY TRINITY'**

**10 - 12 OCTOBER**

**GATESHEAD**



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Orthodox theology holds many wonderful doctrines, but the doctrine of God as Holy Trinity is the most fundamental. We are baptized into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit—apart from faith in this Triune God, we are not Christians at all. Yet it is also true that many people view the Trinity as an obscure doctrine they wish they knew more about. Helping people to grow in the knowledge of their God is the very purpose of the ReformationUK 2019 conference on the Holy Trinity.

Today this doctrine of the Trinity is under attack, not only by enemies of the faith but some times even by well-meaning men who have departed from the church's creeds and confessions in a misguided attempt to address other concerns. Thus, the conference will seek to refute some of the errors being discussed in our day as well as teach straightforwardly the beauty and perfection of the biblical doctrine. **We hope you will join us.**

# A THEOLOGY OF PREACHING



WILLIAM M. SCHWEITZER

In his book *Reformed Preaching*, Joel Beeke points out that the Reformation's recovery of preaching brought with it an entirely new vocabulary. No longer would the Christian church have 'priests' to offer 'mass' but 'preachers' to preach the 'sermon.'

This monumental shift in practice was no accident. At one level, it was simple obedience to the clear commands in Scripture to preach, including the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Beyond that, it was the logical outworking of the whole of Reformed theology. Indeed, there is something about the nature of the gospel itself, and the triune God who gave us this gospel, that demands preaching.

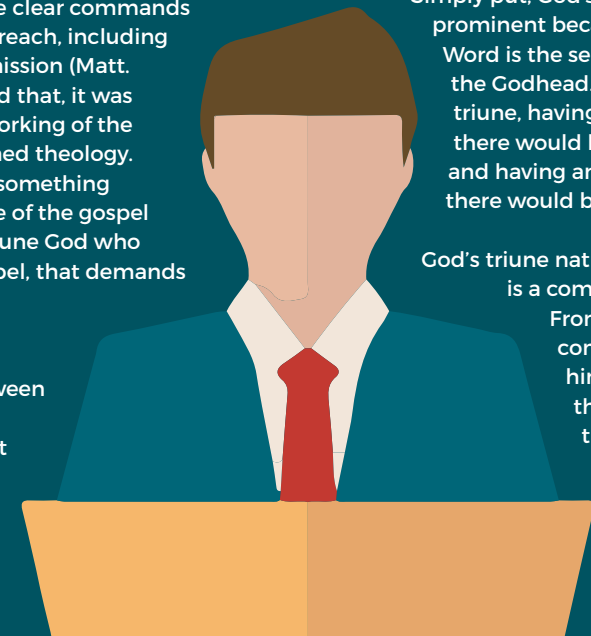
What is the connection between our gospel and preaching? What is there about our God that he should

be preached rather than made known by other means?

## 1. GOD'S NATURE

There is a connection between the Holy Trinity and the centrality of God's Word in the works of creation and redemption. Simply put, God's Word is so prominent because God the Word is the second Person of the Godhead. If God were not triune, having an eternal Son, there would be no Redeemer, and having an eternal Spirit, there would be no revelation.

God's triune nature entails that he is a communicative Being. From all eternity, God communicates within himself, among the three Persons, all that he is. God's intra-trinitarian relationship is not that which somehow



binds together the Trinity, as the erroneous idea of a 'divine dance' would suppose. Rather, God is triune because of his eternal ontology: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. It is this eternal triune ontology that entails exhaustive communication between the three Persons.

This perfect, eternal communication is taught in John 1:18: 'No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.' It is impossible that the Father should have remained forever unknown to the Son. The Son's eternal situation 'in the bosom of the Father' is precisely that which proves his perfect knowledge. All that the Father is, the Son knows fully and intimately. Hence, God's eternal communicativeness is part and parcel of his triune nature.

Finally, God's spiritual nature calls for words rather than images. Consider the Second Commandment's unqualified prohibition, not merely of the use of images in worship, but of the production of any visual representation of God whatsoever. There is something about the nature of God that is completely incompatible with the use of images. That something is of course his spirituality; his nature as Spirit makes it fundamentally impossible and highly injurious to attempt to know him through any picture. Words, and the preaching of words, are wholly appropriate for the communication of the one true and living God.

## 2. GOD'S WORD

Amazingly, there is also a communication

*ad extra*, outside the Godhead. God, who needed nothing, even so determined to create. The work of creation was, beyond any doubt, a communication of God. Now we should immediately recognize that there can be no communication in the fullest sense except to intelligent creatures. We may speak to inanimate objects, but we cannot really *communicate* with them.

In the case of God's creation, Jonathan Edwards says:

'The great and universal end of God's creating the world was to communicate himself. God is a communicative being. This communication is really only to intelligent beings: the communication of himself to their understandings is his glory, and the communication of himself with respect to their wills, the enjoying faculty, is their happiness.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus God created intelligent beings to be fit subjects of his communication.

And God communicated in order to create. By God's Word all things have come into existence. Hebrews 11:3 proclaims, 'By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.' Indeed, God's Word not only created in the first place, but now continuously preserves the universe, 'upholding all things by the word of his power' (Heb. 1:3; see 2 Peter 3:5-7).

There is a parallel between creation and redemption. The instantaneous act of creation and the ongoing preservation of the universe, both by the Word; similarly, the instantaneous act of regeneration and the ongoing work of preservation of the saints, are both by the Word.

God's speech has inherent power. It always accomplishes all that God pleases. 'For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it' (Isaiah 55:10-11).

In creation, God speaks, 'Let there be light,' and there is light. His Word has infinite power not least because of its inextricable connection to the omnipotent God Himself. But, in addition to his power, we must also note the identity of God's Word with his mind, not neglecting also the identity with the Son, 'the Logos'.

The idea of light – its precise design as particle and wave, its parameters of speed, effects, etc. – were fully known in the eternal mind of God. We see more than hints of this concept in Scripture, when it speaks of 'the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). His 'works were finished from the foundation of the world' (Heb. 4:3). All that remained is for God to speak in time and this universe that had always existed in his mind would exist in time and space.

Did God *need* to say anything in order to create? We may reason, 'No, God *could* have simply exercised his almighty power.' In terms of what was fitting, however, clearly it was necessary. The link between divine speech and what was done – and bear in mind that the angels had been created in time to be witnesses – was essential to God's glorification. It is to the glory of God that his Word accomplished so much.

And we know that the Word is never alone in this efficacy, but it comes with the power of the Spirit. Herman Bavinck has a very helpful section on this (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.455-60). He frames the Reformed view between Rome (nomism) and the Anabaptists (antinomianism). Rome sees a magical power in the means of grace, focused on the sacraments. The Anabaptists denigrate and dispense with the means of grace in favour of the inner light. 'Over against both of these schools, nomism and antinomianism, the Reformers

jointly maintained that the Word alone is insufficient to bring people to faith and repentance, that the Holy Spirit can but usually does not work without the Word, and that Word and Spirit, therefore, work in conjunction to apply the salvation of Christ to human beings' (4.457).

This Reformed understanding is also distinct from the more subtle error of Lutherans:

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**God's speech has inherent power. It always accomplishes all that God pleases.**

'Whereas the Reformed usually say that the Holy Spirit unites with the Word (*cum verbo*), the Lutherans prefer to express themselves by saying and increasingly emphasizing that the Holy Spirit works through the Word (*per verbum*) as his instrument. And whereas the Reformed always made a distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary manner in which God works his grace in the human heart, the Lutherans, out of fear of the Anabaptists, increasingly omitted the extraordinary manner and said, "God grants his Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward word," or as Luther kept saying, "God does not give internal things except through external things."

<sup>1</sup> Edwards, 'Miscellany' 332, in *Works* Vol. 13, p. 410.



Under the polemic pressure from Anabaptists, Lutherans erroneously spoke as if the relationship between Spirit and Word were one of mere instrumentality. But the Reformed confess a union of Word and Spirit rather than mere instrumentality.

This union of Word and Spirit has practical implications. How, for instance, can elect infants be saved, unless the Spirit is united with the Word? Again Bavinck: 'It is always his word; he is always present in it; he consistently sustains it by his almighty and omnipresent power.... The Word of God is never separate from God, from Christ, from the Holy Spirit' (4.459). This is the great innovation of the Reformation. Because of these truths about the triune God and the Word, in which he remains forever present, this Word carries invincible efficacy and demands to be communicated.

### 3. GOD'S MESSENGERS

We have seen that God himself spoke the universe into existence and that his use of words served to bring him glory. The angels who witnessed this do not believe in evolution!

Yet for the greater work of redemption, with very few exceptions God chose to use messengers to speak on his behalf. Why might that be? It is to his glory that he uses spokesmen to accomplish his will – just as the true extent of a king's authority is seen in how people react to his ambassadors. "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects

Me rejects Him who sent Me." Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:16-19).

Jesus Christ rejoices at the success of his preachers! Not only does he share in their joy, but he is glorified in them; there is this transfer of what could be said of Christ speaking to what the disciples speak in his name.

God has used both angels and men to be his messengers. And among men there is a distinction between prophets and preachers. Essentially their task is the same, to take God's special revelation to the people. But the prophets were given their message directly from God and their only task was to deliver it, whereas the preacher is given the completed canon of Scripture, which he must bring to bear on the situation at hand. Yet his message remains the Word of God. The Second Helvetic Confession states: 'The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.'

In the Westminster Larger Catechism, we have an even bolder statement of this. Question 155: 'How is the word made effectual to salvation?' Answer: 'The Spirit of God maketh the reading, **but especially the preaching of the word**, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ.' This is remarkable. God allows, and indeed

requires, preachers to fashion messages that faithfully convey his truth yet in their own words.

This is an amazing thing, that God should so use preachers. We are vessels of clay but it is to God's glory to use weak vessels to carry out his great work of redemption. Indeed, we do so not as the prophets did, as mere mouthpieces. God grants us the privilege of using our minds to present his truth in our preaching.

### 4. GOD'S PREACHERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

Finally, there is a special suitability of preaching for the new covenant administration of the Covenant of Grace.

Consider the Larger Catechism Answer 33: 'The covenant of grace was not always administered after the same manner, but *the administrations of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.*' Answer 34 explains: 'The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances, etc.' The Word of God was certainly involved, in terms of promises, prophecies, and ceremonies. But under the new covenant? Answer 35 states: 'Under the New Testament, *when Christ the substance was exhibited*, the same covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations.' (compare the Westminster Confession 7.6).

There is a fundamental shift when Christ 'the substance' came, and fulfilled what

was prophesied of him, and completed all that the ceremonial law pointed to. Now there were historical facts to witness to. Now the gospel was made patently clear. And in God's plan, the modality of sending preachers to convey this news to the world is now the appropriate methodology of administering the covenant of grace.

### APPLICATION

#### 1. THE PRIVILEGE OF PREACHING

If someone believes through your preaching, know that God has used you to speak something into eternal existence in the infinitely precise and perfect plan of Redemption, the moment of the calling of each and every one of the elect is known to God, perfectly planned and provided for. And so the centuries march on from creation until the day someone is called; the days and hours count down until one of Christ's precious sheep is raised spiritually from the dead. And at that moment you breathe forth the words of the gospel – 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ' – and they are saved. We blow upon them the audible breath of life; God alone breathes upon them the invisible and inaudible Spirit of life, but the two work in perfect concert. Consider the privilege that we should serve as God's preachers! Imagine if you were summoned back to the dawn of time, and God were to give you the invitation to speak into existence the Atlantic Ocean. That would be something, but nothing in comparison with our privilege as preachers today, using our own words which are also his Word, to accomplish far better and more permanent effects.

#### 2. THE DEMANDS OF PREACHING

In intellectual terms, the prophets had it relatively easy. They were told what



**The Word of God is never separate from God, from Christ, from the Holy Spirit (4.459). This is the great innovation of the Reformation.**

message to convey. Jeremiah had many problems, but one of them was not trying to figure out what to preach to the people that week. He knew exactly what the message was, because it had been dictated to him directly. I hope we would not want to trade places with him. But there is a distinct demand laid upon us as preachers, and that is to study. We must master the completed canon of Scripture and the beautiful system of true theology taught by it. This points us to another great shift at the Reformation—discarding priestly garments, the Reformers adopted the robes of a scholar, for this was the nature of their ordinary work.



**When we come to our pulpits, we should do so with a keen sense of expectancy. The messenger of God is about to speak!**

The Westminster Confession of Faith 21.5 speaks of ‘the **sound** preaching’ of the Word. How do we make sure that our preaching is sound, firmly founded on the truth of God’s Word? Not by trying to interpret some isolated text atomistically, but by grasping the entire message of the Bible, with which the text is inextricably connected. This is where so many in our day fall down. Imagine if you were suddenly called upon to run a nuclear reactor. You were given a set of manuals but did not understand nuclear physics and were untrained in how the many complex components worked together. Even if you could find the place in the manuals where there were instructions on some particular task, you would have no idea whether what you did would run foul of something else you did not understand. This is pretty much what happened at Chernobyl. Lacking the necessary insight into physics and the basic design limitations of the reactor system, an inexperienced crew blindly carried out their ill-advised instructions to disastrous results.

Apart from the recovery of systematic theology, sound preaching is impossible. You must understand not merely the words but the intent behind them as in accord with the unified message of all Scripture.

They say every heretic has his text, and we know Satan himself is more than capable of quoting Scripture. The problem is that he does so without regard to the intent behind those words and in opposition to the unified message of the coherent Word of God. And in all of this, I need not say that we must follow rules of Reformed hermeneutics.

Finally, we must know our people in order to rightly apply the Word. This too, is a distinct task given to the preacher. The

Bible is a big book. How do we determine which of its many truths to bring to bear on a given Sunday? In short, we have to visit our people. It is in the hospital visit that we learn about the spiritual medicine needed, and it is in the hospitality of the minister’s home that we learn about the spiritual nourishment that our particular people most urgently need.

### 3. PREACH EXPECTANTLY

When we come to our pulpits, we should do so with a keen sense of expectancy. The messenger of God is about to speak! God is therefore about to act! Whether it is to soften or to harden, whether to save or to judge, we do not know. Whatever happens, we can be sure that the people before us will not remain unchanged. Something of eternal moment will be done. Preach expectantly, believing God’s promises about his Word to be true. ○

# PREPARING A SERMON OUTLINE

## FROM EXEGESIS TO EXPOSITION



DAVID PFEIFFER

When I was a boy, our family would spend some of the summer holiday at my grandparents in Bures, a hamlet village on the Essex-Suffolk border. My grandfather had an allotment, and he would allow us to go with him and help him dig up the potatoes and carrots as well as pick the runner beans, broccoli and cabbages. We would then walk back together to my grandparents’ house with the vegetables in the wheelbarrow, where my grandmother was ready to cook them in time for lunch. Lunchtime never disappointed!

Preparing a sermon outline is a little bit like the process described above – taking the food from the allotment, cooking it and then putting it on the dinner plate, ready to be eaten. The substance of the food is the same in the allotment and on the dinner plate; it consists of the same elements and nutrients. But its presentation is in a different form. As preachers, we are seeking to get the food of God’s Word into God’s people by presenting it to them in a way which is faithful and digestible. This is vital for their spiritual health. Our great desire is for Christ to be formed in them by the Spirit

through the ministry of the Word. It is this process – from understanding God’s Word (exegesis – the allotment) to preparing a sermon outline (exposition – the dinner plate) – that I want us to consider in this article.

### 1. FROM EXEGESIS

One word which I have found helpful in considering the process of understanding God’s Word is ‘honesty’ (D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, p.199). Our job is to understand God’s Word as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and not manipulate it to say what we would like it to say. We are to be servants of the Word.

In order to do this, we need to immerse ourselves in God’s Word. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great 19th century preacher, put it like this: ‘I always find I manage to preach best when I lie asoak in my text. I like to get a text, and find out its meaning and bearings, and so on; and then, after I have bathed in it, I like to lie down in it and let it soak into me’ (*An All-Round Ministry*, p.124).

But how do we soak ourselves in God's Word? Here are 5 steps I find helpful in this process:

### **Pray**

Without the help of the triune God, we cannot understand his Word. We need the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit to give us understanding. 'Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law' – that is our prayer as we come to God's Word. But it is also a prayer we continue to cry as we seek to understand it.

### **Read with questions**

We should read to enjoy God's Word, but also come to it with questions.

One of the temptations of sermon preparation is to get right down to our immediate text. However, we need to read our text in the context of the book in which it is found. It is important, I believe, to spend time reading through **the whole book first**, preferably in one sitting, and several times. When doing this, we will get a sense of the whole, its emphasis, message, literary features and pastoral burden. We will want to determine, as far as we can, the original audience and purpose. And this is in the context of the whole Bible: where am I in the story of redemption? And, of utmost importance, where is Christ?

Take the book of Joshua as an example. When reading the book, Joshua 21:43-45 jumps right out at you as the key passage. These verses tell us that Joshua is about God's gracious covenant faithfulness in fulfilling his promises to Abraham. The Lord accomplishes this through his presence with his people (Christ!) and the faithful leadership of Joshua (prefiguring Christ). In turn, the Lord calls his people to trust him, obey him and love one another. Chapters 1-21 are about God's covenant faithfulness to his people; chapters 22-24 are about the

people's covenant faithfulness to God. We read this never forgetting that the land is typological of the new heavens and new earth.

Once we have done this, we are in a position to get down to our text. Here, our analysis will be more detailed. We will try to engage with the text in the original language (as far as we are able), cognizant of its literary genre. How does the passage fit together? What are its literary features? What is its place and purpose in the context of the whole book? Are there any Scripture quotations, allusions or echoes? What points are being made? Which doctrines come to the fore?

Returning to Joshua, consider chapter 7. You will notice the passage is bookended by the theme of God's anger. The reason for God's anger is covenant transgression (verse 11) through Achan. But there is something else at stake here – God's glory and the good of his people (verses 9 and 19). In verse 21, Achan's sin is described in terms that echo Eve's sin in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:6) – 'saw', 'good/beautiful' (same root), 'desire/covet' (same root) and 'took', occur in both verses. But there is a difference: Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden (Covenant of Works) whereas the people of Israel are kept in the land (Covenant of Grace). This is through the punishment of Achan; does this not anticipate the cross? Also note that right at the very outset of the life of God's people in the land, there is a case of severe discipline, anticipating the incident with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 at the beginning of the New Covenant church.

### **Read some more**

When we prepare a sermon, we need the help of the Holy Spirit; but one of the ways the Holy Spirit helps us is by using others who have gone before us. We will

have unresolved questions and will have missed things in the passage. This is where commentaries are so helpful.

There are many commentaries available now. You will want to get the balance between what is solid, scholarly and stimulating, between the old and new. John Calvin is invariably good, and his writings are written with a conscious sense of being in God's presence. It is also good to have commentaries that engage in more detail with the literary and technical aspects of the text.

Theological questions will emerge that will need to be investigated more fully in biblical and systematic theologies. There is also value in picking up the phone to a friend who may give you some extra insight into the text.

### **Meditate**

As we are reading, we should be constantly praying and thinking. It may also be good to have a point where we stop or go for a walk to meditate on the passage. We need to preach it to ourselves before we preach it to others.

### **Crystallize**

Having unpacked the text, we now need to crystallize. What is the theme that unifies the various elements we have unpacked? Is it an attribute of God? A truth being argued? A comfort being administered? A warning being issued? An action being commanded or commended? A benefit of salvation?

A large parcel comes through the door. You open it to find that it is a flatpack from IKEA. The instructions are missing, so you lay out all the pieces. There are screws, nuts, four thin cylindrical parts of equal height, a large flat rectangular piece and several other

pieces of wood. What is it? After examining it, you discover it is a table. You have managed to see how the parts fit together.

Take Joshua 7 again. How do we crystallize this passage? God is angry at covenant unfaithfulness because he is first, supremely concerned for his own honour, and second, concerned for the good of his people. Therefore, behold the God of glory and grace! Trust him! Honour him above all! Be faithful to him!

## **2. TO EXPOSITION**

When expounding the Word, you are translating the written word from its biblical and historical setting into the world of your hearers. We must not forget the continuities we have with the original hearers – we have the same God, are the same people and are part of the same story. But there is a historical distance. Our aim is to bridge this gap – we are taking the food from the allotment to the dinner plate. This requires fidelity to the text and knowledge of your people and their world. It also requires imagination and creativity. How am I going to get this message across? How am I going to explain it and apply it? Here are seven elements that I consider to be important in your sermon outline.

### **(1) Manifest Fidelity**

When doing this *translation*, some things will remain the same. The message of the passage is to be the message of the sermon. The mood and drama of the passage set the tenor for the sermon. The pastoral burden of the passage is to be the pastoral burden of the sermon. These are the hinges on which your translation turn.

### **(2) Clear Structure**

You are taking people on a journey – they

need to come with you and not get lost on the way! Your outline ought to be a unified whole, not a collection of disjointed pieces. It ought to have an order – a beginning (introduction), a middle (body), and an end (conclusion). The Apostle Paul invariably describes the indicatives of the gospel (what God has done) before he issues the imperatives of the gospel (how we are to respond), and we ought to follow the same order. There ought also to be balance. Stuart Olyott commends a balance of stating, illustrating and applying (*Ministering Like the Master*, ch.1). This is a good place to start. Not many people can endure hours on end on the same motorway; they need variety and balance.

### (3) Pastoral Urgency

At some point, and perhaps fairly often at the beginning, you have to show why what you are saying is important to the hearers. You have to grab their attention. You need to show its relevance.

### (4) Persuasive Argument

When preaching, your aim is transformation into Christ's likeness. This requires addressing and changing the whole man – mind, will and affections. This occurs through persuasion. People need to be persuaded of the truth; their minds need enlightening. But they also need to be persuaded that the truth is good and desirable. This affects their will and affections. They need to taste and see that the Lord is good!

It is at this point that illustrations can be helpful. Spurgeon described them as windows that illuminate the mind. But illustrations can also be helpful in moving the will and affections. In one of the most memorable sermons I have heard (on Isaiah 53), Edward Donnelly quoted the song 'Mother Machree', which speaks of a son's

love for his mother. He described a hard-working farming mother whose fingers were clubbed, face wrinkled, back bent over, all because of her labour of love for her family. There is a special place in a son's heart for such a mother. But what about Christ? Do not his wounds show the depth of his love for us? How much more ought we to love him!

### (5) Dignified Simplicity

Do not be simplistic or crass, but do use language that people can understand.

### (6) Necessary Economy

There will be much you have to leave out. Focus on what is important; major on the majors and not the minors. For example, do not spend half your time discussing whether it really was Samuel who was raised through the medium of Endor in 1 Samuel 28!

### (7) Pointed Application

Don't spray aimless bullets in the air; get out your sniper rifle and aim at the heart of your hearers. There will be all sorts in your congregation – believers, unbelievers, backsliders, the encouraged, the discouraged, fathers, mothers, children, grandparents, singles, young married couples, elderly folk, the complacent, the afflicted...we could go on! You will not be able to address all of them all of the time, but remember who you are preaching to. Screw the truth into the conscience while also applying the balm of the gospel.

How shall we sum this up? The key is love. How God has loved us in giving us such a rich and gracious Word! How we ought to love him in applying ourselves to it and treasuring it in our hearts. And how we ought to love our people by feeding them with God's precious, nourishing, life-giving truth. ◦

# 10



# DOS AND DON'TS OF PREACHING



PETER J. NAYLOR

Preaching is a spiritual gift from God. Our ascended Lord gives pastors and teachers to his church. We cannot teach the gift, but we can seek to make progress in it, to stir up the gift of God within us.

When I was asked to speak about this, I felt inadequate for the task: I am still learning, constantly dissatisfied with my own preaching, utterly dependent on God. In asking for 10 dos and don'ts, the conference organizers thought that I might be a little provocative. I hope I have not disappointed, but also I hope that these 10 points will be very helpful.

At the outset, I want to mention the *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q/A 159 and the *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, the section entitled, 'Of Preaching the Word.' These repay study.



### 1. DO ALWAYS ASK, 'WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEXT?'

It is essential to ask, 'Why has the Holy Spirit placed this passage in this place in Scripture?' What was his aim? What is the

message of this text? (Clearly I am thinking of expository preaching.) If you fail to ask this question, you run the risk of finding your own message, and not God's. Then you will not be preaching God's Word, but your own ideas.

The Scriptures contain many indicators of purpose. 1. Sometimes there are explicit statements of purpose. 2. The context of a book helps us to see the purpose of a passage within it. 3. Repetition should be noted. 4. Where a narrative has quoted speech, that may be an expression of the main point. 5. Selectivity: what is not written, the omission of much, serves to focus on what is written.

Some examples.

1. In John 20:30-31, the apostle tells us his purpose in writing the fourth Gospel. (It also teaches us that John has deliberately omitted much, and that serves his purpose too.) Similarly, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 shows us the whole point of the book. And once again, the writer hints that he has chosen his words and set aside what might fill many books (verses 11-12).

2. When we turn to the book of Acts, we notice the circumstances in which it was written. Luke is in Rome, where Paul is held awaiting trial. Luke is writing to the 'most excellent Theophilus', a Roman governor, to assure him of the certainty of what he has already been taught (Luke 1:1-4). We can understand why Luke is particularly interested in the faith of Roman centurions (Luke 7; Acts 10); why he particularly notes the allegation that Paul's teaching is not lawful for Romans (Acts 16:21); and his detailed record of the trials before Felix, Festus and Agrippa. It is crucial for the acceptance of the gospel in Rome.

3. Daniel 11 contains a kind of survey of the history from Alexander the Great to Christ. There is a lot of historical detail, events that would come to pass in the intertestamental period. Yet the book is not aiming to give a detailed history but a perspective on that history. Notice how often we read that a kingdom is broken up, does not stand, does not prevail, but falls (verses 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 45). The whole point comes in Daniel 12:1-3: after all these kings have come and gone, the righteous shall awake (rise from death) and shine like stars for ever and ever!



## 2. DO MAKE THE MESSAGE OF THE TEXT THE MESSAGE OF THE SERMON

As a rule, sermons should have one main point, one clear aim, a thrust, a message. Not everyone agrees with this; and I suppose that sermons may contain several lessons, several applications. Even so, I believe that we ought to have one clear aim.

For example, Joshua 2 tells us about the spies going to Jericho and meeting Rahab. It would be possible to preach on Rahab's faith and her salvation, with her household (see Hebrews 11:31). But in verses 9-11 and 24 we find the main point of this narrative. In both cases, the main point is preserved in quoted speech: 'the LORD has given you the land' (v.9) and 'Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands' (v.24). The major stress is on the LORD's fulfilling his Word, and that is a theme from cover to cover (1:2-7; 21:43-45 and even 24:33, the very last verse!). The message to every generation is that God does and will keep his promise and we may believe in him with

full confidence, and therefore serve and obey him. Of course, we can learn about faith from the example of Rahab. But that is subordinate to the main message.



## 3. DO PREACH CHRIST JESUS

I used to preach from a pulpit that had a brass plate with the words, 'Sir, we would see Jesus.'

There was a difference between Luther and Calvin on the way in which we should preach Christ from the Old Testament. Luther's approach was to find Christ everywhere, whereas Calvin placed importance on the historical context.

We know from Luke 24:27,44, that Christ is found in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (the Psalms), and that it is possible for men to read the Old Testament for many years and not understand that he is there. Christ is there, from the first promise (Gen. 3:15), indeed from creation and before it (John 1). He is there in promise, in prophecy, and in type. The covenant promises given to Abraham were Christ's (Gal. 3:16). The law speaks of him. The tabernacle, priesthood and sacrifices, were there as shadows of the heavenly realities (Hebrews 8:5). Lives were shaped to foreshadow him – examples are David, Solomon, Joseph, Jonah.

Dale Ralph Davis has given us some really helpful commentaries on the historical books (Joshua – 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles). In his books on the Psalms, however, I believe that he has missed something. He writes, 'I do not take a Christological approach' (*The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life*) and he has

explained his position in *The Word Made Fresh* (pp.134-138). There is more of Christ in the Old Testament than Davis realizes.

Take the Psalms for example. These were written almost entirely by David and the Levites, Asaph and others. David occupied a throne that belonged to Jesus Christ. He received a covenant from God that promised his greater Son's everlasting kingdom. He clearly prophesied of Christ (Psalms 2 and 110). That David's own experience led him to understand more of Christ, and that he himself was a type of his greater Son is beyond doubt (Acts 2 for example). Indeed, his whole life was shaped after Christ's earthly and present ministry: anointed, in conflict and suffering, enthroned, conquering the nations (1 Sam. 16 – 2 Sam. 8). And the Psalms that he wrote out of that life spoke of Christ. Take Psalm 3, for example. There is nothing obvious about Christ in it – on the surface. But once we notice that it follows the structure of Psalm 2 (which is unquestionably about Christ), our view of Psalm 3 deepens. It is a step-by-step response to Psalm 2. Further, Psalm 1 could be read as simply a word about righteous people in general. But Augustine saw that there is only one who fits the description of verses 1-3, and he is Christ.

And then, the priests' ministry was conducted within the tent or temple that was designed to teach them heavenly realities. From the physical structure around them, they received lessons about the Son of God.

Isaiah continually takes us to Christ. From his standpoint in history, the second half of the eighth century, he spoke of key events to come: the Babylonian Captivity, the Return to Jerusalem, and the Servant of the LORD, the Son of God to be born of a virgin, Immanuel. In Isaiah 1-39, the prophet

grapples with the realities of the reigns of Uzziah (his death), Ahaz (his unbelief), and Hezekiah (told of the exile to come); but in Isaiah 40-66, we hear no more of them, only of Christ.

We must preach Christ. He is the Saviour, the Lord, the Bridegroom, the Head of the church. We must make him known.



#### 4. DO NOT INTRODUCE YOUR SERMON WITH A STORY TO CATCH THE HEARERS' INTEREST

It is now common practice to do this; it was not always so. Let me ask you, What is more relevant, more interesting, more valuable, than the text of Scripture? Do we imagine that our 'stories' can remotely compare with the treasures of the text? What has the Holy Spirit given us? That is what he is pleased to use.

We are not entertainers. Throughout my life, I have from time to time visited the doctor. Not once has he sat me down and said, 'Let me tell you a little story!' No, he says, 'This is what is wrong; take this medicine!' And we are not responsible to win our hearers' interest by injecting a trite story. In fact, we must convey to our hearers that our sole concern is with God's Word, and that must be heard with serious



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concentration upon it. Carnal methods produce carnal fruit. It is the Holy Spirit's work to produce a hearing in the congregation.

If you disagree with me, on my side, I claim John Calvin, D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, and the Westminster divines, who wrote: 'Ordinarily, the subject of his sermon is to be some text of Scripture....Let the introduction to his text be brief, perspicuous, drawn from the text itself, or context...' (*Directory*). Look again at the sermons of these men. Did they ever begin with a story? I cannot find one sermon like that.



#### 5. DO NOT ALLITERATE

Some preachers love to arrange their sermon under a series of points all beginning with the same letter of the alphabet. 'Every point must begin with D.'

Very occasionally it really does work. I was told that Ian Paisley once preached a sermon on Daniel 3 under three headings: 1. They would not bend. 2. They would not budge. 3. They would not burn. I could wish I had worked that out. But most of the time, the search for headings all with the same letter is a snare. It can cause the preacher to twist the natural exposition of the text. The preacher becomes a slave to his own scheme, which distorts the text.

Do we really want our people to remember our sermon points? Do we not rather want them to carry home an understanding of the text and its doctrine?



#### 6. DO ALWAYS READ THE TEXT IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE, HEBREW AND GREEK

Every English version, whichever one you use, is one step removed from the text of Scripture (Westminster Confession, 1.8). You cannot see in English all that is there in Hebrew or Greek. For example, in Isaiah 45:14, you must ask, Who is addressed here? It could be Cyrus (who is in view from 44:28 - 47:15). But in Hebrew the 'you' is feminine singular - Jerusalem! We must read the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New in Greek.



#### 7. DO 'SLOW THINGS DOWN'

What is man's chief end? What does 'enjoying God' really mean? In Isaiah 58: 14 (אָז תִּתְעַבֵּג עַל-יְהוָה) the verb 'delight' carries the connotation of taking exquisite delight in sweet luxuries, the delights of love, or the delights of the table, as in Ecclesiastes (2:8 - 'the delights of the sons of men'). In the Song of Songs, the Shulammitte revels in the beauty of her Beloved. She lingers over every thought. She wants to think for a long time about his physique, his character, the joy of being in his arms, the comfort of his presence (Sol. 2:16; 5:10-16), and he likewise delights in contemplating her (4:1-15). 'Many waters cannot quench love'. Let us not quench love with our sermons. To delight

in, or enjoy God, requires contemplation. To meditate on the Lord requires time. And we must help our hearers to do this. Help them to stand still and gaze at the face of Christ in Scripture, to linger long at the cross. As best we can, let us take time over the Scriptural views of the Lord.

This is captured by certain hymns. For example:

When I behold my Saviour there on Calvary,  
O soul of mine, be still, reflect a while;  
gaze on his face, his hands, his feet and side,  
into those eyes that show no sin or guile.  
Why was he there? By God and man forsaken,  
the Man of Sorrows bows his head to die. (Finlandia)

And this:

My God, how wonderful Thou art,  
Thy majesty how bright!  
How beautiful Thy mercy-seat  
In depths of burning light!



#### 8. DRIVE IT HOME

Sermons involve reasoning, by which to persuade, to apply, to drive the Word into the soul. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can do that. We cannot. But the sermon, from his Word, is his chosen instrument.

We must preach with authority. We are not there to share a few thoughts. We are not sent to have a two-way conversation. We are ambassadors of God with his message, and that message has eternal and ultimate consequences.

We must aim at persuading, convincing, exposing the inner thoughts – to shine the light into the soul, so that the hearer feels that the eye of God is on him. We preach for conversions; we call men to repentance. We are not trying to win their approval, but to lead them to the foot of the cross in humble contrition.

But we must not bully. We must not be harsh or abuse the pulpit. We are not shouters! A soft word can break a bone. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he was gentle with them, as a nursing mother cherishes her children.



### 9. OPEN YOUR ARMS

I take this phrase from Stuart Olyott and the sentiment from C. H. Spurgeon. Do not preach unless you also love those who sit to hear you. Remember how much Christ loves his sheep, his lambs. Look at the congregation in that way.

Pastoral care brings numerous sorrows – sometimes joy, sometimes grief (Heb. 13:17). When I was ordained, I did not realize how many tears I would shed. It matters immensely that the flock should flourish. When they languish or wander, we are humbled with sorrow. The new commandment must be written on our hearts: ‘as I have loved you, that you love one another’.



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We cannot preach to those for whom we have not laboured in prayer.

After all, we cannot preach to those for whom we have not laboured in prayer.



### 10. DO NOT PREACH UNLESS YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT YOUR MESSAGE

We go into the pulpit frequently. The routine of the week! If our Sunday morning sermon is routine, our heart dull, if we are mildly bored with the sameness of it all, then we cannot expect our hearers to enthuse, can we? We must not say, ‘I will go out as at other times’. Lloyd-Jones began each sermon, with the same kind of opening: this is the most important thing you could ever hear! We need the Holy Spirit to captivate our thoughts with his Word.

By now, some readers may be saying, ‘I would have chosen some different points if I were asked to give 10 dos and don’ts. Of course. I had to choose. I had to leave so much out. May these things, at least, profit those who preach and give insight to the hearers into the task of the preacher.’

May the Lord increase the gifts and strength of his dear servants, and grant their labours to bear fruit, to his own glory. o

# THE PREACHER AS CHRIST’S AMBASSADOR



## A PURITAN PERSPECTIVE ON PREACHING



RICHARD HOLST

‘We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us’ (2 Cor. 5:20). These words were favoured by the Puritans as an apt description of the role of the preacher. Three points come out of this: 1. The Puritan view of the sermon. 2. The Puritan view of who should and should

not preach. 3. The Puritan theology of preaching. They took the office and function of the ministry very seriously and resisted every attempt at devaluing them. Here are some observations based on my reading of the Puritans, which I have found instructive and challenging.

An excellent introduction is found in Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Preachers, Pastors, and Ambassadors: Puritan Wisdom for Today's Church*, St Antolin Lectures, Vol. 2, (Latimer Trust, 2002-10).

## 1. THE SERMON

The Puritans thought that the sermon had been sidelined by the liturgy and brought into disrepute by bad preachers.

The Preface to the *Directory for Public Worship* states that 'Prelates, and their faction, have laboured to raise the estimation of [the liturgy] to such a height, as if there were no other worship, or way of worship of God, amongst us, but only the Service-book; to the great hindrance of the preaching of the word, and (in some places, especially of late) to the justling of it out as unnecessary, or at best, as far inferior to the reading of common prayer.'

The Puritans agreed on the importance of the sermon though they did not entirely agree about what could or should be preached. The Directory gives advice in one place and issues directives in another, something the Scots found congenial, but others restrictive. The English Presbyterian and catechist, Herbert Palmer, asked if it is appropriate to include advice on preaching in a directory of worship, a question asked more recently by Hughes Oliphant Old. William Gouge and Thomas Gataker argued that the three-stage sermon structure proposed by the Directory was 'too strait (narrow) for the variety of gifts'. This three-stage structure is not the typical three points with which many

of us are so familiar, but three stages advocated by William Perkins: first, the reading of the text and an explanation of its meaning in the light of the Scriptures; second, the gathering of a few profitable points of doctrine from the natural sense of the passage; and third, the uses or application of the doctrines to the life and practice of the congregation – all to be in straightforward, plain speech (*Art of Propheying*).

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As an ambassador, the preacher must deliver God's word as he received it, 'lest we take away the power and majesty of God's Word in the manner of delivering it.'

Plainness and accessibility were essential. Perkins said that the sermon 'must be plain, perspicuous, and evident', adding, 'It is a by-word among us.' Faithfulness included accessibility. Cotton Mather said of John Eliot, a Puritan missionary to native Americans, 'his way of preaching was very plain; so that the very lambs might wade into his discourses on those texts and themes, wherein elephants might swim.' Thomas Fuller said of Perkins that 'his sermons were not so plain but that the piously learned did admire them, nor so learned but that the plain

did understand them' (John Brown, *Puritan preaching in England*, pp. 56-7).

Whatever we think about the place of preaching in a directory of worship, it has to be said that the Directory contains a lot of sanctified common sense: much to help the preacher 'convey truth to the hearer's heart with spiritual delight' so that hearers 'may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.'

Leland Ryken says that the Puritan sermon was always planned and organized. 'It may have been long and detailed, but it did not ramble. It was controlled by a discernible strategy and ... progressed toward a final goal' (*Wordly Saints*, p. 101).

*Always pastoral.* According to Perkins, 'everyone who either is, or intends to be, a minister needs the tongue of the learned ... by which he may be able to speak a word in season to him that is weary.'

*Always Scriptural.* As an ambassador, the preacher must deliver God's word as he received it, 'lest we take away the power and majesty of God's Word in the manner of delivering it.'

## 2. PREACHERS

Chad Van Dixhoorn writes that the Westminster Assembly, 'in a rare display of initiative...determined that preaching was important enough and bad preaching common enough that some directives were necessary.'

Who were the bad preachers? They were incompetent lay-readers drafted in to deal with the problem of absentee clergy. John Penry (Martin Marprelate) wrote to Queen Elizabeth describing non-resident ministers as 'odious in the sight of God and man' because they kept the people from 'the ordinary means of salvation, which is the word preached.' Strype comments that 'the want of clergymen' created the 'inconvenience' of ordaining 'illiterate men to be readers, which likewise many were offended at' (*Annals*, 1824, 265).

Then there were the Radicals, ordained

and unordained, who threatened disorder and chaos by their unregulated preaching. George Gillespie, a Scottish commissioner to the Assembly, fearing chaos and confusion, argued on the basis of Romans 10:15, 'How shall they preach unless they are sent?' that sending denotes a sender, and no one should presume to teach who has not been sent. He made a similar point on the basis of 2 Timothy 2:2. What he had heard from Paul, Timothy had to commit to

faithful men, 'who will be able to teach others also'. Gillespie said, 'Every man may not be a teacher'; teaching 'is no part of the general calling of Christians.'

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His fears were well founded. Antinomian preachers, like William Dell, opposed to all kinds of authority – church, universities (though he had been Master of Gonville & Caius, Cambridge), and especially the Assembly – asked 'What a sad

thing is it, when men look for their teaching no further than men? They only look to the minister or to such an able, learned, orthodox man, as they phrase it, or at the highest to the Assembly. And what they shall teach them, they are resolved to stand by it and build upon it for their foundation. In the meantime never regarding in truth the teaching of God, but say, What! can so many grave, learned, godly men err? And shall not we believe what they determine? Why now, these are none of the children of the spiritual Church, for they neither have God's teaching nor care for it. But the spiritual Church is all taught of God' (*Of the Spiritual Church*, 101).

The Puritans agreed with Calvin that 'Those that intrude themselves confidently [into the ministry], and in a spirit much elated, or who discharge the ministry of



the word with an easy mind, as though they were equal to the task, are ignorant at once of themselves and of the task' (*Commentary* 1 Cor. 9). They routinely differentiated between lawful and unlawful ministers, as William Gouge does in his reflection on 'we are ambassadors of Christ,' where he describes preaching as 'a clear revelation (exposition) of the mystery of salvation by a lawful minister.' Perkins said that preaching is to be of 'the word of God alone... in its perfection and inner consistency' done by one set apart 'according to the rule of God's word' (*Prophesying*, 9). The rule mentioned is the pattern of calling and appointment found in Scripture, the inward call to the ministry recognized and confirmed by the outward call of the church. Perkins said to aspiring preachers, 'Your conscience must judge of your willingness and the church of your ability.'

The Independents were less convinced about the necessity of ordination by the laying on of hands, and tended to regard a call by the congregation as formal commissioning. Either way, the order of Acts 13 – the Holy Spirit working through the church in setting apart men for the work of the ministry – was the pattern. This perspective embraced gift, calling and sending, a process that included training. They developed a method of 'quality control' for

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Preaching is the primary means by which Christ cares for his church and calls in the elect.

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The preacher is not free but bound. He gets his personal dynamic and rhetoric from the sermon's dynamic, that is ultimately from the text itself, and the preacher's rhetoric comes from the same source, his text, because he is Christ's ambassador.

the purpose of safeguarding the gospel and the church.

### 3. THE PURITAN THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

Preaching is the primary means by which Christ cares for his church and calls in the elect. The Puritan theology of preaching is encapsulated in 2 Cor. 5:20, 'we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us.' This model is fundamental to what they thought about preachers and preaching.

According to Perkins, preachers are God's messengers, who must 'preach God's Word as God's Word and deliver it just as [they] received it.' There must be consistency between the content and delivery, message and manner. He writes 'For as many men mar a good tale in the telling, so we must see to it lest we take away the power and majesty of God's Word in the manner of delivering it' (*Prophesying*). According to John Owen, the preacher's 'first and principal duty is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word' (*Works*, 16.5.74).

On this basis the preacher is not free but bound. He gets his personal dynamic and rhetoric from the sermon's dynamic, that is ultimately from the text itself, and the preacher's rhetoric comes from the same source, his text, because he is Christ's

ambassador 'as though God were pleading through [him]':

Anthony Burgess, in his *Spiritual Refining: A Treatise of Grace and Assurance*, comments on the words 'cause the people to hear my words' (Jer. 23:22). God's servants, he says 'must be like the Trumpet, that sends forth no other voice than was breathed into them. Ambassadors must keep themselves strictly to the words of their Commission.' From this we catch a glimpse of the importance not only of the preacher's faithfulness to his text but also of his manner of delivery. It is essential that he preaches to himself first and comports himself as one under the authority and power of his message. The Directory gives a somewhat lengthy outline of how preaching should be done:

- » *Painfully*, not doing the work of the Lord negligently.
- » *Plainly*, that the meanest may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words etc;
- » *Faithfully*, looking at the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at

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God's servants must be like the Trumpet, that sends forth no other voice than was breathed into them. Ambassadors must keep themselves strictly to the words of their Commission.



As a man under the authority of Christ and his message, the preacher is a servant: Christ's servant for the people's sake and the people's servant for Christ's sake.

his own gain or glory.

- » *Wisely*, framing all his doctrines, exhortations, and especially his reproofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail; shewing all due respect to each man's person and place, and not mixing his own passion or bitterness.
- » *Gravely*, as becometh the word of God; shunning all such gesture, voice, and expressions, as may occasion the corruptions of men to despise him and his ministry.
- » *With loving affection*, that the people may see all coming from his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good.
- » *As taught of God*, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teacheth is the truth of Christ; and walking before his flock, as an example to them in it.

As a man under the authority of Christ and his message, the preacher is a servant: Christ's servant for the people's sake and the people's servant for Christ's sake.

'Let us set a price upon God's ordinance. There must be this dispensation. Christ must be preached. Preaching is the chariot that carries Christ up and down the world' (Richard Sibbes, *Light from Heaven*, p 340). ○



# ON DELIVERING SERMONS



ANDY YOUNG

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Preachers pray, prepare and produce sermons with the express intent of preaching them! The act of preaching is the culmination of the hard work in the study.

James Henley Thornwell (1812-62) is considered to be one of America's greatest preachers. He had a very high view of what preaching should be, yet when he measured himself against his own standard, this was his conclusion:

‘My own performances ... fill me with disgust. I have never made, much less preached, a sermon in my life, and I am beginning to despair of ever being able to do it.’

I share that sentiment. I do not share his gifts or usefulness, but I very much echo that sense of inadequacy when it comes to preaching. There is something romantic and mysterious about preaching. Those called to preach love it, and yet we struggle with it as well. We delight in proclaiming

God's truth, we are passionate about being the best preachers we can be, we want to see a new generation of gifted men raised up to preach, and yet we despair of ever really being able to preach ourselves.

With this humbling reality in mind, this paper will consider the delivering of sermons. It will almost exclusively focus on the act of preaching itself – the actual time a preacher spends in the pulpit preaching.

## PRELIMINARIES

The first thing to note about sermon delivery is its importance. This should be so obvious that it almost does not need to be said. No preacher spends hours in the study writing his sermons, only to file them

away on a Sunday morning. No! Preachers pray, prepare and produce sermons with the express intent of preaching them! The act of preaching is the culmination of the hard work in the study. The Bible puts an emphasis on the act of preaching. Acts 14:1 says that Paul and Barnabas spoke in such a way that many believed. Paul asks the church at Colossae to pray for him, not only for gospel opportunities, but also that ‘I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak’ (Col. 4:2-4). These passages, together with many others (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13; 2 Tim. 4:1-2), highlight the importance of the ‘how’ of preaching as well as the ‘what’.

John Calvin was so convinced of the importance of preaching that he discouraged the simple reading of sermons. He knew that the success of

the Reformation hinged largely upon the success of preaching, and so he wanted preaching to be lively and engaging. We need to hear this today. Biblically faithful and exegetically accurate sermons, delivered in a boring, bland and banal manner, are a blight on the church. Yes of course we need to strive for exegetical accuracy and theological precision. But equally we need to strive for preaching that grips, thrills and enamours.

Having said this, we also need to be aware of two dangers. The first is that we venerate gifting over graces. This happens when we celebrate pulpit oratory at the expense of godliness, orthodoxy and pastoral care. Better a mediocre preacher who loves Christ and his people than a dazzling preacher who loves neither. The second danger is when an emphasis on the act of preaching leads us to be formulaic. There is something about preaching that resists over-analysis. It is better done than discussed; better experienced than examined. Yes, it can be helpful to analyse the various parts of preaching. Yet it must be remembered that preaching is more than the sum of its parts. You could have a man who is insightful in his exposition, deep in his theology, and who employs all the techniques of rhetoric, and yet who fails to preach. We need to resist the temptation to be overly prescriptive. A variety of gifts and styles are to be expected, and even encouraged, in the pulpit, all of which in their own way will exemplify true preaching.

## PRINCIPLES

First, *sermon delivery should at all times endeavour to glorify God*. This should of course be used as a principle for the whole of life. Yet it also applies to preaching, and it can have significant practical implications.

Second, *sermon delivery should be consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit.*

The preacher needs to be self-consciously dependent on the help of the Holy Spirit as he is preaching. When ascending the steps of the pulpit in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, it is said that Spurgeon would say at each step 'I believe in the Holy Spirit.' Not only does this highlight the spiritual nature of preaching, it also reminds us that preaching is an act of spiritual warfare. Many ministers can testify to the reality that just before preaching – and even during preaching – they have felt an overwhelming sense of uselessness: that their sermons were more like dirty ditch water than pure milk. Many can also recount occasions when they have seen the seeds of God's word snatched away by the devil – before they could take root. Preaching requires the supernatural activity of God himself, especially during the moments when his Word is actually being declared.

Third, *sermon delivery should be expressive of what preaching is.*

As the primary means of grace it is the most fundamental way in which Christ communicates the benefits of redemption to his people. Garry Williams put it like this at a conference at London Seminary a few years ago: 'Is preaching A (the preacher) speaking to B (the congregation) about C (Christ)? Or is it rather C (Christ) speaking to B (the congregation) through A (the preacher)?' Our answer should categorically affirm the latter! As Matthew Jolley has said, preaching is simply 'Christ speaking'. And if this is true, it should affect the way we preach. We are not just telling people about Jesus. We are declaring the message of Christ, proclaiming the truth of the gospel, and heralding the Word of God. When this is grasped, it will transform puerile, insipid and dreary sermons, into earnest, heart-felt and urgent preaching.

Fourth, *sermon delivery should evidence the majesty, gravity and glory of the truth of Scripture.* The 'heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole - the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and the many incomparable excellencies' (WCF 1.5) of the Bible should be manifestly seen, demonstrated, and even experienced, in the very way we preach. This is why we should preach *sermons* and not *talks*, as the authority and majesty of Scripture is evidenced in authoritative and majestic preaching.

In addition to this, preaching should reflect the tone of Scripture. The way we preach particular passages of the Bible should reflect both the truth and tenor of those passages. This can be hard to define, yet it should also be somewhat obvious. If we preach Lamentations 1 in the same manner, style and delivery as we preach Revelation 21, something has gone seriously wrong. The nuances and variety of Scripture should be reflected in the very way we preach.

Fifth, *sermon delivery should be co-ordinate with a Biblical anthropology.*

The centre of the human personality is the heart, and so preaching should seek to enlighten the mind, to engage the heart, which in turn will move the will. Preaching is to be transformative. It is to be done in such a way that will change people into the very image of Christ. Preaching is therefore so much more than the imparting of information. It is the affecting of lives.

Sixth, *sermon delivery will decrease the preacher and increase Christ and his Word.* True preaching leaves the hearers remembering the Christ preached and not the preacher of Christ. The goal of the preacher is to get himself out of the way so

that Christ can be seen. There is something unavoidably counter-intuitive to this. The more natural we are in the pulpit, the less people will see of us. Artificial, clunky, and awkward preachers hide Jesus. The more naturally themselves they are in the pulpit – the more people see of Christ.

Seventh, *sermon delivery will be an overflow of a preacher's life outside of the pulpit.*

This is crucially important. Who the preacher is in his home, on his knees, and in his heart is necessarily connected to the pulpit. Preaching is not a performance of brilliant exegesis and oratory. It is the overflow of a life devoted to God and his people, and so who we are before and after preaching cannot but affect who we are when we are preaching.

## PARTS

With the above principles in mind it is worth identifying nine parts of sermon delivery that every preacher should be aware of, and work on.

**Demeanour.** This refers to the overall deportment of the preacher. We should preach as those with authority; not of ourselves, but by virtue of our calling, ordination and the message we proclaim. As such, preachers should never be apologetic in their style. However young and inexperienced we may be, let us preach like heralds with a truth to declare. Our demeanour should also be reverent and warm, as well as lively, personally engaged in all that we say.

**Voice.** The act of preaching is predominantly (although not exclusively) verbal. Therefore

our voices, and how we use them, are very important. We need to project our voices so everyone can easily hear us. We also need to vary our volume, tone, pace and intensity – all of which can enhance our words and bring emphasis and engagement to what we are saying. Cicero famously said 'the art of rhetoric is in the pause.' Well-chosen silences and pauses can greatly add to the message. They can draw attention to the importance of what has just been said and allow the congregation to let those truths sink in.

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**Preaching should reflect the tone of Scripture. The way we preach particular passages of the Bible should reflect both the truth and tenor of those passages.**

**Bodies.** We preach, the whole of us, including our bodies! This means that eye contact, facial animation, hand gesticulations, and posture all matter. They constitute significant features of the actual delivery of sermons and preachers need to hone their use of them to better communicate Christ. At the same time, they can be distracting. Staring at individuals, theatrical expressions, and repetitive movements can detract from the message we are proclaiming. The judicious and thoughtful control of our bodies in preaching will serve to engage people in the message we are declaring.

**Thoughts.** Our minds are to be fully engaged during the act of preaching. We are to strain our every thought to best communicate the truth of Scripture. However much sermon preparation we may have made, and however many notes we may have with us, we are throughout the delivery of sermons to be cerebrally absorbed in the task of best understanding Scripture and most effectively communicating Christ. That is why many preachers are mentally exhausted by Sunday evening!

**Affections.** Preaching should be affectional in its style and seek to engage the hearts and affections of its hearers. It should be obvious that a preacher loves the Christ he is preaching, deeply cares for the people he is preaching to, and is personally convinced by the truth he is declaring. Preaching should demonstrate in the preacher, and draw out of the hearer, the whole gamut of human emotions that are appropriate to the truth of Scripture.

**Urgency.** Preaching should be earnest, zealous and persuasive. Richard Baxter put it well when he said we should preach 'as dying men to dying men.' The hallmarks of this are in simplicity of speech and directness of address. The momentous nature of the claims of Christ and offer of the gospel are to be clearly, unashamedly and, sometimes forcefully, presented.

**Freedom.** Sermon delivery should be characterized by a freedom of expression and liberty of speech. Whilst the preacher is to study diligently for his sermons, and may even choose precise wording for specific points, he is nonetheless to cultivate a flowing articulation of his thoughts. This ease of delivery, and fluidity of discourse, is the culmination of everything already said. It is the combining of his life, preparation, thoughts and gifting, to best express at that moment in time, the meaning and application of Scripture to his hearers. As such a sermon should never be delivered as a postman delivers the mail – handing over a pre-packaged parcel. Sermons are to be delivered as a mid-wife delivers a baby – with care and vigilance until the child is safely born and in its mother's arms.

**Rapport.** Preaching is not a performance but an act of communication. We are to expect an exchange between the preacher and the hearers. Preachers need to 'read' their hearers and aim to gain a rapport with their congregation, both in and out of the pulpit. This can be wonderfully encouraging and terribly discouraging. We can note the devoted attention that one person is giving to the message, but also the disinterested boredom of another. Either way, we should use all the resources available to us to win the attention of sinners for Christ, and to keep their attention throughout the sermon.

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**Preaching is more than a mere communication of truth. It is to be an experience of the living nature of that truth.**”

**Personality.** Philip Brookes once said that 'preaching is truth mediated through personality.' Preaching will be necessarily idiosyncratic. It will be as varied as the men that are preaching. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a fine and greatly used preacher. Yet what the church does not need are dozens of Lloyd-Jones mimics in the pulpit. The church – and the world for that matter – needs preachers to be themselves. To be the men that God has made them. And to let the personalities of those men be used to communicate the glorious riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

The final note I want to end on is this: preaching is to be doxological. It is more than a mere communication of truth. It is to be an experience of the living nature of that truth, even as that truth is communicated through the foolishness of preaching. It is a glorying in that truth in the very act of preaching. As such, preaching is an 'event' at which the preacher and the hearer, through the act of preaching, should be given something of the taste and sense of Christ himself. ○

# JOHN NEWTON ON HEARING THE WORD



 MATTHEW JOLLEY

**John Newton (1725-1807) is known today, if at all, as the writer of the hymn *Amazing Grace*.** Possibly, he is known for his dramatic conversion to Christ. He had been working in the 18th century slave trade, desperately hardened in his sin, but he was powerfully converted by God's grace. He became an evangelical pastor, first in Olney in Buckinghamshire, then at St Mary's, London. He became a key inspiration to William Wilberforce in the effort to abolish the slave trade. But in his own time, Newton was most well known for his letters.

Christians from all corners wrote to Newton seeking advice and help concerning the various challenges and problems of the Christian life. His letters in response were published in various collections and ever since have been acknowledged for their wisdom and usefulness. Newton had a great

ability to apply the truth of the Scriptures to the needs and concerns of the Christian life. It is no exaggeration to say that his letters must rank as one of the most powerful and helpful pieces of devotional literature ever written. In all of Newton's letters two things stand out: Newton's absolute trust in the sovereign grace of God, and his own characteristic humility. To Newton the Lord was absolutely sovereign over all of life, dispensing his different gifts and blessings however he wills. This is the bedrock of Newton's theology. Conscious of his own unworthy past, Newton was humbled by God's sovereign grace in saving him. This led him to be gracious to others and always to criticize himself first. He had a truly catholic spirit. Truth with love was his motto. One of the best reasons to read Newton is the hope of catching something of that same spirit of meekness in your own soul.

Newton wrote a letter on the subject of hearing sermons, available in the first volume of the Banner of Truth edition of his works, and it is full of helpful wisdom for us today.

The key Scripture Newton cites in the letter is from 1 Corinthians 12:4 and 11: 'There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit' and he distributes 'to each one individually as he wills.'

Newton writes:

The faithful ministers of the gospel are all the servants and ambassadors of Christ; they are called and furnished by his Holy Spirit; they speak in his name; and their success in the discharge of their office, be it more or less, depends entirely upon his blessing: so far they are all upon a par.

I hope you, my friend, will always attend the ordinances with a view to the Lord's presence; and when you are in your proper place, consider the preacher (if he preaches the truth) as one providentially and expressly sent by the Lord to you at that time; and that you could not choose better for yourself, all things considered, than he has chosen for you.

Newton's point is, do not focus on the man. Do not look at the man preaching but look to God who sends him. Do not make too much of the man, for good or bad, whoever he is. Any blessing you receive comes from the Lord, not the man. The Lord grants different gifts to different men, knowing what is best for his church. One may water and another plant, but it is God who gives the increase. Beware of forming parties around particular men, no matter how gifted.

Today, Newton's advice is timely. There is the danger we make too much of men. Well-known people who appear to have a

lot of influence, because of the internet or because of their books, should not be put on a pedestal or used as the yard-stick to measure all other preachers. Even in your local church, if the church becomes too centred on the pastor, or the church has taken on too much of their image, we are making too much of men.

But on the other hand, Newton is always balanced: beware of thinking too little of the man. It is a great privilege to hear gospel ministry whoever the preacher is. Beware of having a critical spirit, of finding fault with a man for a word, or because his style is not your preference. You may end up sitting in judgment on the ministry instead of humbly receiving it as God's gift. Be gracious and think the best of the preacher. You as the hearer have a responsibility too. Have you prayed for the preacher and the ministry? Is your heart right and prepared for listening? Do you come in faith and expectation to hear from the Lord?

Newton:

There are hearers who make themselves, and not the Scripture, the standard of their judgment. They attend not so much to be instructed, as to pass their sentence. To them the pulpit is the bar at which the minister stands to take his trial, a bar at which few escape censure, from judges so severe and inconsistent...in the course of one and the same sermon, the minister has been condemned as a legalist, and an antinomian; as too high in his notions, and too low; as having too little action, and too much. Oh! This is a hateful spirit.

God dispenses different abilities and talents to different men, as and when he pleases. This is a blessing, not a problem. All together, make up the body of Christ. Each one with different strengths to be used for

the good of the whole. Moreover, God has chosen to put particular men at particular times in particular places, as and when he wills it. Trust in God's sovereign ordering of everything. Celebrate and enjoy the benefit of different gifts and abilities.

Newton:

Some are more happy in alarming the careless, others in administering consolation to the wounded conscience.

Some are set more especially for the establishment and confirmation of the gospel-doctrines; others are skilful in solving troubling points; others are more excellent in enforcing practical godliness; and others again, having been led through depths of temptation and spiritual distress, are best acquainted with the various workings of the heart, and know best how to speak a word in season to weary and exercised souls. Perhaps no true minister of the gospel (for all such are taught of God) is wholly at a loss upon either of these points; but few, if any, are remarkably and equally excellent in managing them all. Again, as to their manner, some are more popular and pathetic, but at the same time more general and diffuse; while the want of that life and earnestness in delivery is compensated in others, by the closeness, accuracy, and depth of their compositions. In this variety of gifts, the Lord has a gracious regard to the different tastes and dispositions, as well as to the wants of his people; and by their combined effects, the complete system of his truth is illustrated, and the good of his church promoted with the highest advantage: while his ministers,

like officers assigned to different stations in an army, have not only the good of the whole in view, but each one his particular post to maintain.

Today, because of the resources on the internet, we have the privilege of being able to listen to preaching from all over the world, from the great and the small. We should be thankful for different men with different gifts and enjoy them by looking to the Giver

of them all with gratitude. This is a good argument for why the regular pulpit ministry of a church should be shared. A diversity of voices and gifts are needed to bless the church.

Finally, three practical points of advice Newton gives to help us all benefit from listening to preaching:

### 1. SETTLE IN A LOCAL CHURCH

God's design is that you should be part of one local church, accountable, part of the family, under the ministry of a pastor who knows you.

Newton:

I do not say, that no circumstance will justify your going elsewhere at such times occasionally; but I think the seldomer you are absent the better. A stated and regular attendance encourages the minister, affords a good example to the congregation; and a hearer is more likely to meet with what is directly suited to his own case, from a minister who knows him, and expects to see him, than he can be from one who is a stranger. Especially, I would not wish you to be absent for the sake of gratifying your curiosity, to hear some

“

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new preacher, who you have, perhaps, been told, is a very extraordinary man. For in your way such occasions might possibly offer almost every week. What I have observed of many, who run about unseasonably after new preachers, has reminded me of Proverbs 27:8. As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is the man that wandereth from his place. Such unsettled hearers seldom thrive, they usually grow wise in their own conceits, have their heads filled with notions, acquire a dry, critical, and censorious spirit;

Today you frequently meet with Christians who say they do not need to commit to a local church; they get fellowship or Bible teaching in some other way. Newton warns that failure to settle in a local church can lead to someone becoming proud, arrogant and divisive. Settle in a local church and sit under regular ministry.

## 2. CHOOSE YOUR CHURCH WISELY

Newton:

As the gifts and talents of ministers are different, I advise you to choose for your stated pastor and teacher, one whom you find most suitable, upon the whole, to your own taste, and whom you are likely to hear with the most pleasure and advantage. Use some deliberation and much prayer in this matter. Entreat the Lord, who knows better than you do yourself, to guide you where your soul may be best fed.

Newton is trying to give some honest common-sense advice and stop us from being super-spiritual. The preacher is something to take into account, in the right way when choosing a church. It would not be wise to place yourself in a church

where you find the preacher's manner to be off-putting. But this is only one factor in choosing a church. Its creed, and spirit, its location are all factors we have to weigh up wisely. Ultimately, if the Word of God is being faithfully taught then we should all be able to settle and to prosper.

## 3. BE SURE TO DO THE WORD, AND NOT BE A HEARER ONLY

Newton:

Be cautious that you do not degenerate into the spirit of a mere hearer, so as to place the chief stress of your profession upon running hither and thither after preachers. There are many who are always upon the wing: and, without a due regard to what is incumbent upon them in the shop, in the family, or in the closet, they seem to think they were sent into the world only to hear sermons, and to hear as many in a day as they possibly can. Such persons may be fitly compared to Pharaoh's lean cattle: they devour a great deal; but for want of a proper digestion, they do not flourish; their souls are lean; they have little solid comfort; and their profession abounds more in leaves than in fruit.... Everything is beautiful in its season; and if one duty frequently jostles out another, it is a sign either of a weak judgment, or of a wrong turn of mind. No public ordinances can make amends for the neglect of secret prayer; nor will the most diligent attendance upon them justify us in the neglect of those duties, which, by the command and appointment of God, we owe to society.

Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. How should we benefit from hearing God's Word? Go and do it. ○



## ▲ BARRY

Wilberforce Chapel  
Barry Rd, Barry CF62 8HE  
Sun. 11am & 6pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Drew Goodman  
☎ 029 2140 4568  
✉ agoodman@barryepc.org  
🌐 barryepc.org

## ▲ BERLIN

Luisenstrasse 39, 10117 Berlin  
Sun. 10am & 4.30pm  
Kettinger Strasse 131, 12305  
Berlin. Wed. 7pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Johannes Müller  
☎ +491763102904  
✉ johannes.mueller@epkd.de  
🌐 www.epkd.de

## ▲ BLACKBURN

Fecitt Brow, Blackburn  
Lancashire BB1 2AZ  
Sun. 11am & 6.30pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Norman Green  
☎ 01254 260388

## ▲ BURY ST EDMUNDS

Newbury Community Centre  
St. Olaves Rd, Bury St Edmunds  
IP32 6RW, Sun. 11am & 5.30pm,  
Wed. 7.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Matthew Jolley  
☎ 01284 706123  
✉ matthewjolley@mac.com  
🌐 bse-pc.org

## ▲ CAMBRIDGE

Queen Emma Primary School,  
Gunhild Way (am)  
Resurrection Lutheran Church,  
Westfield Lane (pm)  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm, Thu. 7.45pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Douglas McCallum  
☎ 07855 130526  
✉ dmccallum1981@gmail.com  
🌐 cambridgepres.org.uk

## ▲ CARDIFF - BETHEL

Michaelston Rd, Culverhouse  
Cross, Cardiff CF5 4SX  
Sun. 11am & 6pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Mark Johnston  
☎ 029 2059 5000  
✉ revmgjohnston@gmail.com  
🌐 bethelpcr.org.uk

## ▲ CARDIFF - IMMANUEL

Heol Trelai, Caerau, Cardiff CF5 5LJ  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Dr Peter Naylor  
☎ 029 2040 5750 / 07773 093738  
✉ peter.naylor@immanuelcaerau.org.uk  
🌐 immanuelcaerau.org.uk

## ▲ CHELMSFORD

Hall Street Methodist Church  
Chelmsford CM2 0HG  
Sun. 11.30am & 6pm, Thu. 8pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Darren Moore  
☎ 01245 690559  
✉ darrenmoore@chelmsfordpres.co.uk  
🌐 chelmsfordpres.org.uk

## ▲ CHELTENHAM

23 Naunton Lane, Leckhampton  
Cheltenham GL53 7BJ  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
Wed. 7.45pm  
**Minister:** Vacant  
☎ 07778 530 452  
✉ ajhnt9@aol.com  
🌐 cheltenhampres.org.uk

## ▲ CHELTENHAM - NORTH

Whaddon Road E.P. Church  
Rear of Claremont, Whaddon Rd,  
Cheltenham GL52 5LZ  
Sun. 11am & 6.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. David Pfeiffer  
☎ 07846 858766  
✉ drpfeiffer85@hotmail.com  
🌐 whaddonevangelicalchurch.org

## ▲ DURHAM

The Chapel, Laburnum Avenue  
Durham, DH1 4HA  
Sun. 10.30am & 3.30pm, Thu. 7.45pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Phil Baiden  
☎ 07714 340 892  
✉ philbaiden@yahoo.co.uk  
🌐 depc.org.uk

## ▲ GATESHEAD

Lobley Hill Community Centre  
47 Scafell Gardens, Gateshead  
NE11 9LS, Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Dr Bill Schweitzer  
☎ 07939 071404  
✉ contact@gatesheadpres.org.uk  
🌐 gatesheadpres.org.uk

## ▲ HEXHAM

The Torch Centre, Corbridge Rd  
(near hospital) Hexham NE46 1QS  
Sun. 10am & 5pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Joshua Rieger  
☎ 07930 016785  
✉ joshuamrieger@gmail.com  
🌐 hexhampres.uk

## ▲ HULL

Rear of 336 Holderness Rd  
Hull, HU9 3DQ  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
**Minister:** Vacant  
**Contact:** Rev. Dr Kevin Bidwell  
☎ 0114 2431720 / 07954 546487  
✉ kevinjbidwell@me.com

## ▲ OXFORD

St Luke's Chapel, OX2 6HT (am)  
The Friends Meeting House,  
43 St. Giles', OX1 3LW (pm)  
Sun. 10.30am & 6.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Andy Young  
☎ 07963 139683  
✉ andy@oxfordpres.co.uk  
🌐 oxfordpres.co.uk

## ▲ SALFORD, MANCHESTER

River View Primary School,  
1 Wheaters St, Salford, M7 1QZ  
Sun. 11am & 5pm.  
**Minister:** Rev. Chris Statter  
☎ 07914 048085  
✉ salfordEPC@gmail.com  
🌐 salfordEPC.org.uk

## ▲ SHEFFIELD

Hill Top Chapel, Attercliffe  
Common, Sheffield S9 2AD  
Sun. 10am (SS), 11am & 5pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Dr Kevin Bidwell  
☎ 0114 2431720 / 07954 546487  
✉ kevinjbidwell@me.com  
🌐 sheffieldpres.org.uk

## ▲ SOLIHULL

37 Faulkner Road  
Solihull, B92 8SB  
Sun. 11am & 5pm, Thu. 7.30pm  
**Minister:** Rev. Dr Stephen Dancer  
☎ 0121 707 1826  
✉ info@solihullpres.org.uk  
🌐 solihullpres.org.uk

## ▲ TRANÅS

Höggatan 8,  
57333, Tranås  
Sweden  
Sun. 10am & 4.30pm  
**Minister:** Trygve Lundblad  
☎ +46 (0)70 238 70 75  
✉ trygve.tranas@gmail.com

## CLERK OF PRESBYTERY

Dr Falko Drijfhout,  
63 Larchwood, Keele, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 5BB  
☎ 01782 611280 / 07811 387438  
✉ f.drijfhout12@gmail.com

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