

# The Priority of Preaching

John Cheeseman

## A Do We Need Preaching Today?

It is vital that we understand why preaching is so important in the life of the church. In recent years there have been those, even among Evangelicals, who have suggested that preaching is an outdated, outmoded method of communicating the gospel and that we should replace the sermon with dialogue, films and dramatic presentations. There is nothing wrong with using any of these methods in a service as long as they are additional to, and not instead of, the sermon. Outlined below are four important reasons to support this argument.

### 1 Jesus Preached

First of all, consider the emphasis on preaching in the Bible, and especially in the New Testament. Jesus himself, at the opening of his ministry in the Nazareth synagogue, read from Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news' (Luke 4:18). Jesus then applied this to himself by means of public exposition within the synagogue service. From this point on, his ministry was basically one of preaching and teaching: 'He went about all Galilee, healing in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel' (Matt 4:23). Even the demands of the crowd for healing miracles did not divert him from his main concern. 'Everyone is seeking for you', they told him after the dramatic healings at Capernaum. But Jesus turned his back on the crowds who wanted healing, and said: 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also – for this is why I came out' (Mark 1:38). Jesus' final commission to his disciples was to evangelize the world by preaching the gospel, 'repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations' (Luke 24:47).

The apostles were concerned to maintain the priority of preaching in their ministry. 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables ... we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:2). In the pastoral ministry, the pressures to do umpteen things at the expense of sermon preparation can be enormous. But we must get our priorities right. We must follow the apostolic pattern and put preaching at the top of the agenda.

The apostle Paul is a great example of this principle. Primarily, Paul's

ministry is not a sacramental but a preaching ministry ('Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel' (1 Cor 1:17)). He obviously regarded his own ministry as a pattern for his successors. This is very clear from a study of the Pastoral Epistles:

- 1 Tim 4:13: Attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching.
- 2 Tim 4:2: Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.

What do the New Testament words for preaching involve and imply? The basic verbs are: *kerusso* 60 times; *evangelizomai* 50 times; *didasko* 90 times. The common factor in all these verbs is the strong note of authority and proclamation. Professor Edmund Clowney explains the significance of these words:

The work of the apostolic preacher is described in contrast to jovial flippancy, high-flown speculation, sentimental gush, moralistic nagging, and a dozen other abuses of the pulpit. Nor can it be applied readily to such sermon substitutes as book reviews, interpretative dancing, feature movies or baptised vaudeville. (*Preaching and Biblical Theology* Tyndale Press p 20)

## 2 God Spoke

Christianity is a religion of the Word. God communicates with men by means of verbal revelation – through his chosen People, through the Prophets, through Jesus himself, through the apostles and, of course, through the Holy Scriptures which are the word of God written, according to Article 20 of the 39 Articles. Jim Packer describes the Bible as 'God preaching'. It is therefore God speaking to us which makes our preaching necessary. We must make known the very words he has spoken, hence the paramount importance of preaching.

## 3 Common Objections

However, we have to face the fact that preaching is not popular today and is in decline in a church which is trying not to be regarded as antiquated or out of touch.

In society at large and pervading the church also, there is a mood which is very much anti-authority. In the so-called 'post-modern' age in which we live, everybody has his or her own convictions and they consider these convictions to be just as good as the preacher's. Who does the preacher think he is, that he should presume to lay down the law? For most people there is no such thing as absolute or universal truth; everything is relative

or subjective. What may be true for you is not necessarily true for me. Christian ethics might need to be adapted to fit in with different cultures.

Against this, we assert that God has revealed himself to mankind. There is an authority inherent in Christianity which cannot be destroyed. What Christians believe is not an invention of man but a revelation from God. Christianity is a revealed religion. Absolute truth exists and requires obedience. We must preach it to our congregations.

Another persuasive argument against preaching is that we live in the age of television and people are accustomed to looking at images, not listening to arguments. This is true although we must ask whether it is a good or a bad thing? I would argue that it is a bad thing because people have become intellectually lazy; they would rather be entertained than think. God has created us as rational, thinking human beings. It is, therefore, degrading to our humanity simply to acquiesce in the *status quo*. We need to encourage people to think things through and use discernment. We must reverse this dehumanizing trend. It would be disastrous for churches to abandon the sermon in favour of the film-show. However, our preaching must not be dull, ponderous and monotonous. If we are to compete with television and videos, our preaching needs to be lively, engaging and memorable.

That is not to say that we should be 'anti-visual'. The Bible is not 'anti-visual' but in the Bible the word predominates. The visual is an accessory to the word not the other way round. For example, Baptism and Holy Communion are visual aids of the word. In our modern culture, on the other hand, the visual dominates and words are subservient to images, so that we have these common sayings, 'seeing is believing' or 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. The visual is largely effortless whereas the word is demanding. The visual has more to do with appearance and superficiality whereas the word teases out the true meaning. In the world of the moving image everything happens so fast. There is little time to exercise one's critical faculties. In advertising, for example, the emotions are manipulated at the expense of rational and critical thought. Often we are presented with situations which, if we had time to think about it, we would deem outrageous and immoral but we hardly notice as we focus on the product that is being pushed. This is a dangerous situation and we should be in the vanguard of resisting this tendency.

Visual aids can be useful in preaching, especially when children are present, but do not allow them to take over. They must always be subservient to the word, for that is the biblical perspective. How often, in a Family Service, is the visual aid remembered but not the message? 'Guess what happened in church today, Daddy, the Vicar ate a daffodil in the pulpit'. 'Why on earth did he do that, son?' 'I don't know Daddy!' The

greater use of visual techniques may have resulted in weaker preaching rather than better preaching, because the preacher relies on the visual aid to grab the attention instead of learning to preach in a way that is dynamic and challenging.

#### **4 The Power of God for Salvation**

In Scripture the visual is often linked to sin eg Genesis 3: 'She saw the fruit and it looked good;' or Exodus 32: 'Let us make gods that we can see.' The Bible calls us to walk by faith and not by sight. Jesus said: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.' Yet, nowadays there is a move away from listening to words and a hunger for signs and things visible in worship: pictures, icons, candles, statues and colourful vestments. There is a danger that the image will replace the Word of God. How many churches do you know where the Ten Commandments have been removed from the walls and how many now display some kind of 'stations of the Cross'?

Hebrews 4:12 says that 'the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart'. There can never be any substitute for the proclamation of that Word as the God-appointed means for the salvation of men and women and the edification of the church (Rom 1:15-16). There is an inherent power in the Scriptures. When we preach our aim should be to expound the message of the Bible. The Word of God is far more powerful and effective than the words of man.

If we take a bird's eye view of church history, the decadent periods have always been those eras when preaching has been in decline. On the other hand, the great movements of reformation and revival have always been accompanied by the greatest preaching the church has every known.

Give me a hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen such alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the Kingdom of God on earth. (John Wesley)

#### **B The Preacher**

The practice of preaching cannot be divorced from the person of the preacher. Consider the New Testament emphasis on the life-style and self-discipline of the one who brings God's message. 'Take heed to yourselves and then to your flock', said Paul when addressing the Ephesian elders.

The order is important. Our first responsibility is to ensure that our own personal walk with God is on the right footing. Nobody can be a good preacher unless he is a good servant of Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon described a good preacher but a bad Christian thus: 'He preached so well and lived so badly that when he was in the pulpit everybody said he ought never to come out again, and when he was out of it they all said he never ought to enter it again.' Here are four essential characteristics of the preacher as a person. Without these characteristics his ministry will be seriously defective.

## **1 Sincerity and Godliness**

To be effective preachers, what we say must not be negated by the way that we live. Paul wrote to Titus: 'Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds' (Titus 2:7). Jesus said: 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks' (Matt 12:34). Nothing is more sickening, especially to young people today, than hypocrisy. People can sniff the faintest whiff of religious humbug from a considerable distance. In recent days we have had a basinful of press coverage about preachers whose lives have not matched up to the doctrines they proclaim from the pulpit. This damages the cause of the gospel.

How do we maintain a life of godliness and sincerity? In the end it all boils down to disciplined habits of personal devotion, especially prayer and biblical meditation. The daily Quiet Time, as it used to be called, seems to have gone out of fashion in some Christian circles today. But if you read the biographies of the truly great Christians, you invariably discover that the bedrock of their devotional lives was a daily discipline of private prayer and meditation on the Word of God. No matter how far along the Christian pathway we progress, we will never grow out of the need for this. There are no short-cuts to holiness.

## **2 Fearlessness**

To be effective preachers, we need to be delivered from the fear of men. There is an urgent need today for preachers who will proclaim the truth of God without fear or favour. The Apostles spoke the Word of God with boldness. They were not men-pleasers. We are called to preach what God has said, not what human beings want to hear. In 2 Tim 4:3-4 Paul says: 'The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth.' We have no business scratching their itch or pandering to their whims and fancies, we must preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, even

though it may not be popular with our hearers. We naturally like to be popular; we want to please people. There is therefore a great temptation to water down the message, to avoid those aspects of the gospel which make for disturbing or uncomfortable hearing. We think that we have to be attractive and our message acceptable if we are to be heard at all.

How do we avoid being men-pleasers? The answer is simple. We need to go into the pulpit with an awesome awareness that God and God alone is the One to whom we are ultimately accountable. We are subject only to his frown and his smile. Basically, it does not matter what the world thinks of us but it matters desperately what God thinks of us, as long as our message and not ourselves is the offence. Paul said to Timothy: 'I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead ... preach the word' (2 Tim 4:1-2).

It will not be our congregations that we shall have to face on Judgment Day, it will be Almighty God himself. We will have to give account to God for the way that we have discharged our responsibilities as preachers of the gospel. Feed your soul on these sober realities before you enter the pulpit and ask God to liberate you from the fear of men.

### **3 Love**

If we are to be effective preachers, we must love people. Jesus had compassion on the multitudes because they were as sheep without a shepherd. If we love our congregations we will spare no effort in spending time in our study, hammering out a clear structure to our sermons. We will be keen to get our message across with penetrating applications. If we love our people we shall want to take pains to ensure that we are communicating in a way that is relevant to their needs. We shall long to bring them the most wonderful news in the world – namely that it is possible for sinful human beings to be 'ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven' by their Almighty Creator.

How does such a love develop and grow within our hearts? Not by gritting our teeth and saying to ourselves ten times a day, 'I must love these people'! On the contrary real Christian love is something supernatural. It is not something we can work up in our own strength. It comes from God. We need to pray therefore that God will give us this love for our congregations. We also need to come back again and again to the Cross, and realize afresh what Jesus has done for us in dying for our sins. John Stott once wrote these words: 'The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled. But we have to get near enough to it for its sparks to fall on us.' As we contemplate the amazing fact that God sent his only Son into the world to die upon a cross in order that we might be fully

and freely forgiven, our response undoubtedly will be one of love in return. 'We love because He first loved us' (I John 4:19).

#### **4 A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit**

Surely our great desire as preachers must be that our message is proclaimed not in word only but in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction (I Thess 1:5). Why do we not experience this as often as we should? Could it be that our own pride and self-confidence stands in the way? In order to be used by God, we need to humble ourselves before him. In order to receive his power we must first of all acknowledge our own weakness and helplessness. Jesus said: 'Apart from me you can do nothing' – nothing that is spiritually worthwhile and productive. In your study, do not attack the text with your own self-confidence. Instead, cry to God for wisdom from on high. The power belongs to Christ. Spurgeon said: 'It is better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Spirit, than preach seventy sermons without the Spirit.'

Throughout our preaching and before we dare enter the pulpit, we must pray. Again to quote Spurgeon: 'We might as well preach to stone walls as preach to humanity unless the Holy Spirit is present with the word to convict the soul.' Martyn Lloyd-Jones described true preaching as logic on fire, and where does the fire come from? It comes, of course, from the Holy Spirit. Our sermons will never catch fire unless the fire of the Spirit burns within our own hearts.

### **C The Preparation and Delivery of a Sermon**

#### **1 The Subject**

The first stage in sermon preparation is to choose the text, or Bible passage, from which you intend to preach. Our aim as preachers should be to expound the Scriptures, because the word of God is far more powerful than the words of a man. That does not mean that we must never preach on a subject. There are different methods of expounding the Bible. We can preach on a single text, as Spurgeon invariably did, we can preach on a whole passage of Scripture, or we can choose a subject and then draw from various parts of the Bible those texts which relate to that particular subject. In essence all preaching should be expository, that is to say, explaining and amplifying what the Bible actually says. Do not use a text as a pretext for hanging out your own ideas and speculations rather like hanging clothes on a clothes line. There are many preachers who do this. They start with a text and they use it as a launch-pad for all sorts of extraneous ideas which have absolutely nothing at all to do with the text. That is imposition not exposition!

How do we go about choosing our text? Many preachers use the Lectionary. They look up the Old Testament, Epistle or Gospel reading for the Sunday in question and then choose a passage from one of the suggested readings of the day. This is quite a good discipline, especially in the early days of your preaching ministry, because it forces you to preach on passages that you might otherwise avoid. It stops you from always preaching on your favourite texts, and that is a healthy discipline. Obviously, if a particular text is very precious to us, we will tend to preach it with that much more passion and enthusiasm. At the same time we do have a responsibility to preach 'the whole counsel of God' to our congregations, not just those passages which mean a lot to us.

Some churches plan series of sermons, either on particular subjects, or perhaps on a particular book of the Bible or a section of a book such as the Sermon on the Mount. This is also a good discipline. You avoid the temptation of always getting on your favourite hobby-horse and you may have to preach on a text from which you might normally run a mile. Also, if the subject is a difficult and uncomfortable one eg the danger of gossip in the church – the congregation will be less likely to think that you are having a go at them, a thought which might have crossed their minds had you simply preached a one-off sermon on the subject. They will be much more likely to accept the teaching if it arises quite naturally, in the course of consecutive exposition. Another advantage of consecutive preaching is that the congregation comes to understand passages in their proper context and as they relate to other passages.

Obviously we should not feel bound by any system, whether it be the Lectionary or a series of expositions from a book of the Bible. For example, if the Third World War was to break out tonight we should not feel under an obligation to preach from the Lectionary tomorrow morning, unless of course the set reading was relevant to that situation. One always has to bear in mind the needs of the congregation at any given moment. It has been said, and rightly so, that the best preachers are usually good pastors, because they know the needs, problems, doubts and fears of their people. Always carry your congregation with you into your study.

## 2 The Study

First of all pray that the Holy Spirit who inspired the passage will help you to understand it. Secondly, read it and re-read it, until you have come to grips with the meaning. Do your own thinking before you consult the commentaries, otherwise you may be unduly influenced by the interpretations of other people. God has given each of us a mind and the Holy Spirit – do not just take things second-hand from others. You may come up with some original ideas which no one else has ever thought of,



although of course there is a value in learning from the wisdom of others. However, do not resort to the commentaries straightaway. Allow the text to speak to you first. As you do so, ask yourself two basic questions: What does it mean? What does it mean to me and the congregation to whom I shall be preaching? That second question is very important. The task of the preacher is not just to explain the meaning of a text. We must relate and apply the text to the hearts of our hearers. This is the difference between a sermon and a lecture. A sermon must have lots of application. During the course of this initial prayerful meditation, it is a good idea to scribble down, albeit haphazardly, the various thoughts and ideas which come into your mind.

### **3 The Message**

As you continue to pray and meditate on your text you need to isolate the main message that you want to get across to your hearers. It is possible to preach any number of sermons from a single passage, or even from a single verse – and each one could have a different main message. What you must not do, and this is a great temptation in the early days of one's preaching, is to pack into your sermon everything that you can possibly think of from your text. The congregation will not take it all in. Every sermon must have one major message. Another difference between a sermon and a lecture is that in a lecture students are expected to take notes and to revise them afterwards. On this basis the lecturer feels free to cover a wide territory. Very few people, however, take notes during sermons, therefore the sermon must make an impact then and there. For that to happen there has to be one main theme. If you have two main themes, you will have the material for two different sermons. For example, in the famous story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, there are at least three major themes which it would be quite wrong to cram into one sermon: there is the whole subject of spiritual warfare and David's trust in the Lord, which enabled him to overcome his enemy; there is David's motivation in wanting to fight Goliath – his consuming passion for the glory of God; in verses 28-30, there is the matter of David being put down by his eldest brother Eliab. Instead of retaliating to this tongue-lashing he refuses to argue and walks away from the scene with great dignity and self-control.

If all three themes were to be included in one sermon it would be far too much for the congregation to take on board at one sitting. Instead, preach three sermons on these three separate themes, albeit from the same passage.

Try to reduce the main message or theme of your sermon to a single short sentence. If you cannot do that your sermon is almost certainly too complicated or your material ranges far too widely for one sermon.

## 4 The Structure

Having isolated the dominant theme, you must arrange your material in such a way that it serves or illustrates that one theme. In your meditation on the passage, you will have jotted down all sorts of marvellous thoughts and ideas and it is tempting to drag them all in. Resist that temptation. Only include the material which bears on your main point. You can use the other material for another sermon.

How do you arrange the relevant material? The classic pattern is a clear structure with an introduction, two or three sub-headings and a conclusion.

The traditional way to start a sermon is to announce the text. If you are preaching to a congregation which is trained in listening to Bible exposition, you can get away with that. However, if you are preaching to folk who are not used to it – especially if you are preaching to a very mixed congregation where there are many people who are not committed Christians (eg Harvest Festival or Christmas) – make sure your introduction is arresting so that you grab their attention from the onset. It may be best, for example, to start with a relevant situation instead of a text: ‘Did any of you see those terrible pictures on TV last night of the African children with distended bellies. How can we relate that to the biblical principle that God promises to supply all our needs?...’ So you lead them from the situation to the text (eg Matt 6:25ff).

After a brief introduction, we need two or three points as sub-headings to the main theme. Each point needs to be explained clearly and then applied to the needs of the congregation. Some preachers like to have alliterative headings as an aid to memory. This can be useful but do not become bound to this sort of thing. It can become wearisome to the ears of the listener – especially if the alliteration is forced and unnatural.

Application is absolutely crucial. This is what really makes the message come home with force and penetration to the congregation. People want to hear something that is relevant to them in their daily lives. We must spare no effort in making our application as concrete and down-to-earth as we can. Do not always include the application in the same place. Some preachers save up all the application to the end. This is not always a good idea. If you fill your sermons with application all the way through, it keeps people alert and awake. Call your people to examine their consciences in the light of Scripture. Do not be afraid of being direct and plain-speaking. Jesus did not mince his words. He called the Pharisees ‘white-washed sepulchres ... full of dead men’s bones’. Think of the needs of the particular congregation. There is no point talking about bringing up young

children to an elderly congregation.

What about illustrations? These are very helpful, especially if you are preaching a doctrinal sermon dealing in abstract truth which needs to be translated into concrete terms so that it can be readily understood. For example, if you are talking about the fallenness of human nature, with its tendency to go in the wrong direction, you could compare it to a ball in a game of bowls with its in-built bias never to go in a straight line. Not only does the illustration illuminate a profound truth, it also serves to relax the mind of the hearer. It relieves the heaviness of solid blocks of truth. Illustrations are not quite so crucial if the sermon is of a more practical nature but they can still be useful, nevertheless.

However, there are dangers with illustrations. They can become too prominent almost outweighing the message itself. People go away remembering the illustration but forgetting the truth it is supposed to illuminate. Do not allow your illustrations to take over. Illustrations can sometimes mislead, if inappropriate. For example, the Holy Spirit is often compared to a liquid – and so people talk about the fact that a vessel must be emptied in order to be filled etc – but the Holy Spirit is a person, not a liquid. We must be very careful that we do not mislead people by using inappropriate analogies, especially where God and the Trinity are concerned. In such cases it is better to stick to biblical models otherwise we can very easily lapse into heresy.

We also need to cultivate plainness and simplicity of speech. People live in a world of football matches, train-strikes, nappies and dishes. This does not mean that we jettison words like ‘regeneration’ and ‘propitiation’ but we do need to explain what they mean. The hallmark of the great preacher is that he makes hard things appear easy. Do not use too many long words. A sermon is not supposed to be a great literary masterpiece. Do not use two words where one will do; use short sentences and few, if any, subordinate clauses. Bishop Ryle taught: ‘Preach as if you were asthmatic.’

For the conclusion, you can choose to repeat your main headings (although you do not have to) but the important thing is to drive home the final thrust of your application. Every sermon should have one dominant message. The conclusion is the place to enforce this message in such a way that the congregation leave church with it ringing in their ears, whether it be a call to repentance, a summons to obedience or a challenge to witness.

Another marvellous way of reinforcing the message is to end in a prayer which prays home the content of the sermon, perhaps, on occasions, leaving a time for silent meditation when each person is given the opportunity of responding to God in the quietness of their own hearts.

## 5 The Delivery

It has been my experience that very little is usually said or written about the delivery of a sermon. But the act of delivery is extremely important. You can have the most wonderful sermon on paper but if it is delivered in a ponderous, dull monotone the impact will be lost on the congregation. If you have problems in the area of voice production you may need professional help. Please do not be afraid to seek such help. It could be the making of your ministry as a preacher.

Here are some practical tips:

### *a Notes*

First of all, should you preach from notes or a full manuscript? Even after 25 years of preaching, I still take a full manuscript with me into the pulpit but I do not read it. I use it as a point of reference. The reasons I have a full text are three-fold: (1) I find it a good discipline to write the sermon out in full – it clarifies my thinking. (2) It is a source of security when I step into the pulpit – no fear of drying up or forgetting what I wanted to say. If I get lost I have the manuscript as a back-up. (3) If the sermon is worth preaching once, it is worth preaching again so I keep the manuscript!

Do not read the manuscript. You need to reach the point where you are so familiar with your material that you only need the occasional glance at your script. This is because eye-contact with the congregation is most important. A preacher must read the eyes and reactions of the hearers. For example, if you think that a particular point has a special reference to the young people who are sitting in the front row, preach to them. Do not look at the side windows when making your applications. You can read people's attentiveness in their eyes. If they look half-asleep, pray that God will give you a penetrating illustration to wake them up! It is difficult to be effective in your application if you are tied to a manuscript because there is no interaction between preacher and congregation.

### *b Voice*

Learn how to modulate your voice, especially if this does not come naturally to you (read Spurgeon's chapter on the use of the voice in *Lectures to My Students*).

Be natural and be yourself in the pulpit. You want the same tone of voice that you would use in a lively, engrossing, personal conversation. Obviously you will need to be louder in the pulpit, especially if you do

not have amplification. You must project your voice so it can be heard at the back of the church. Since there tend to be a large number of older folk in our churches, it is useless if they cannot hear us loud and clear. Leaving aside volume, the quality of your voice should be the same as in a normal conversation. You need to modulate the tone in terms of pitch – high, medium or low. The golden rule is to start in the middle register, so as to allow the possibility of moving up or down the scale. Avoid the monotone and the ‘parsonical-drone’, which fades off into oblivion at the end of sentences. There is nothing ‘holy’ about this. Vary the volume, as you would in a normal conversation – louder or softer according to the content of the message (but even when softer it must be loud enough to be heard).

The use of pauses is very important: ‘Do not be like a wild horse with a bee in his ears till you have no more wind’; ‘don’t mistake perspiration for inspiration’ (Spurgeon). Pauses are needed for various reasons. They allow time for coughing, drinking of water and glancing at notes. But most important, they allow time for the message to sink in and stimulate a reaction. A pause will arrest attention at the right place. It is good to ask a question and then pause for the congregation to think about their response.

### *c Gestures*

If you have any habits or gestures which are distracting to your hearers, try and cut them out. That is where you need to expose yourself to the honest criticism of other people. You do need friends who will tell you the truth and not just make polite noises.

### *d Emotion*

Do not be afraid of emotion, but avoid emotionalism. On the one hand preaching the gospel is an emotional business. It will affect the emotions of the hearers as well as the preacher’s. Paul said in Acts 20: ‘I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.’ So do not be afraid of emotion in the pulpit if it comes naturally as you are gripped by the truth of what you are saying. But beware of emotionalism. Do not set out deliberately to manipulate the emotion of your hearers. There are two principles here:

- Never try to manipulate emotion (eg ‘I’ll raise my voice for effect at this point; that will really get them going’). That is the work of an actor and that is a prostitution of holy things.
- Never attempt to rule out natural, God-given emotion if it comes spontaneously.

## Churchman

### *e Flexibility*

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will lead you to say something which is not in your notes and which you had not planned or prepared. You need to be flexible enough to allow for that. If the Holy Spirit gives you light on your feet, follow that light. Your manuscript will be there next week, the same light might not. This is not to minimize the importance of painstaking preparation but never be so enslaved to your notes that you quench the Spirit. Of course, the Holy Spirit may work through what you have planned but he also works spontaneously, and you must allow for that.

**JOHN CHEESEMAN** is vicar of St James, Westgate-on-Sea.