

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ref-rev-01.php



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership
Volume 9 • Number 1 • WINTER 2000

BIBLICAL PREACHING

Phil A. Newton

George Barna, the guru of statistics among evangelicals, seems to be influencing today's pulpit more than the apostles Peter and Paul. Barna, whose popularity began with his book *Marketing the Church*, has assumed the position of telling preachers how they are to preach in order to "reach" certain segments of society. His basic thesis of "marketing the church" continues in his profusion of books. While no one can doubt the importance of Barna's statistical data to the strategies of evangelicals, it seems that he continues to cross the line of offering data to pontificating changes that ignore God's Word.

In a recent article in *Preaching* titled "The Pulpit-meister: Preaching to the New Majority," Barna departs from his role as a sociologist and assumes the role of professor of preaching. He does state that "the core of our message must never be compromised," but the paradigm he proposes can lead only to compromise. He suggests that "the new majority," the group of so-called Boomers and Busters (those born from 1946 to 1964 and 1965 to 1983, respectively), have certain characteristics which prevent them from being attentive to typical, traditional preaching.¹

I recognize that preachers must develop their individual styles and that preaching in certain parts of the world may vary due to particular cultural influences. But when the preacher must change his use of language to purge it of any hint of the theological or judgmental, he finds himself

positioned to be more of an inspirational speaker than a preacher of God's Word. When he must keep his sermons under twenty minutes, filling them with stories, avoiding "moral absolutes," and going light on scriptural references, he has no hope to teach and explain the doctrines of the Word. Barna goes so far as to state, "Increasingly we find that the entire approach of 'talking at the audience' is an ill-fated form of communication." He suggests that preaching in any kind of series will not work since the audience may change from week to week.²

The question Barna's article raises for me is this, *What are we trying to do in preaching? Are we trying to placate the self-centeredness of man? Or proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord"?* Preachers must reckon with the biblical issue of preaching rather than the sociological observations of Barna. Barna is fallible. God's Word is not.

In his classic work *Preaching and Preachers*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also."³ Assuredly, Lloyd-Jones did not have drama, entertainment, or pulpit chats in mind when he pressed the need for "true preaching." In his mind, true preaching was nothing less than the exposition of God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. "What is preaching?" Lloyd-Jones queried.

Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! Are these contradictions? Of course they are not. Reason concerning this Truth ought to be mightily eloquent, as you see in the case of the Apostle Paul and others. It is theology on fire. And a theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man's understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.⁴

The issue in preaching is proclaiming faithfully, accurately, and clearly the Word of God, so that the truth of the Word penetrates the mind to affect the heart, rather than the cleverness of the preacher impressing the hearers. At the core of all a preacher does is to dig deeply into the given text of Scripture, seeking to understand it grammatically, historically, and doctrinally. He must then apply himself, in the power of the Spirit, to let the text speak through him. J. I. Packer explained what true preaching is when he wrote:

The true idea of preaching is that the preacher should become a mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word from God to his hearers, talking only in order that the text may speak itself and be heard, making each point from his text in such a manner "that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence" (*Westminster Directory*, 1645).⁵

With much grief, I listened recently to a man who filled the pulpit with jokes, clever stories, and talk-show one-liners. But he never proclaimed God's Word. He read a text and even referred to it, albeit eisegetically. Yet the truths of the Word were never expounded for the congregation to be confronted with the living God and his truth. That is entertainment. It is not preaching in a biblical sense. I fear that such pulpit-abuse (or perhaps I should say, *congregation-abuse*) is all too common.

We must consider what we are attempting to do in the pulpit. It seems that some preachers have a goal to be enjoyed by the hearers rather than to help the hearers understand God's Word, and, consequently, come to know God in truth. Surely the shallowness in the pew is primarily due to the neglect in the pulpit. I agree with James Montgomery Boice: "The church has to rediscover who God is, come to know him, and fellowship with him. The avenue

for that has always been Bible exposition and teaching. There's no shortcut."⁶ Yet the popular methods of the day fall short of "Bible exposition and teaching."

What does the Bible have to say about all this? There's no more forceful nor clear passage addressing the subject of preaching than that which Paul wrote to Timothy in his last epistle.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5).⁷

Whatever the preacher is to be doing in the pulpit, at the very minimum he ought to be dictated by the teaching of God's Word. Anything less than this is a compromise of his ministry and calling. The example and exhortation of the Bible points back to the priority of preaching. Don Whitney expresses it well:

Regardless of how inefficient some may think preaching is in our technological, mass media society, regardless of how much more exciting or entertaining or even successful other methods may appear, the most effective way of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ is still through the means God was pleased to choose—preaching.⁸

With these things in mind, I offer some of the chief

issues raised by the apostle Paul in his exhortation to Timothy.

BIBLICAL PREACHING IS A SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY

The apostle Paul was nearing the end of his life as he penned these words to Timothy. We can call them "Final Instructions," for the apostle knew the pressures of the ministry which his young disciple faced. He understood that nothing short of biblical preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit will have the needed effect upon his congregation. So we see him reminding Timothy of the gravity facing him in the discharge of his responsibilities. For Paul, being a preacher was not a matter of fun or popularity. It was a divine calling that must be fulfilled in a God-ordained fashion.

We see that biblical preaching is a solemn responsibility . . .

Because of the Audience. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus," he begins. Paul wanted Timothy to understand that while he had a congregation who listened to his preaching, they were not his chief audience. Instead, God and Christ Jesus were.

This is a shocking thought to consider: The God of heaven listens in on the preaching of this pastor! There is no more important thing for me to remember when standing at the pulpit than the fact that the *ears of heaven* are attuned to every word I speak. The Greek of the prepositional phrase, "in the presence of," literally means "in the face of" (Gk. *enopion*). The solemn charge to preach and the discharging of the duty is given "in the face of" God and the Redeemer.

When I first spoke this truth to my own congregation there were a few people who were repulsed at the thought. They argued against such a proposition that God himself is the primary audience in preaching, while the congregation

is secondary. Yet this is exactly what Paul spoke to the church at Corinth: "Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up" (2 Corinthians 12:19). The solemnity of preaching demands that the preacher realize that he is speaking "in the sight of God," yet for the "upbuilding" of the congregation.

Because of the Accountability. The reminder that the Lord Jesus Christ is "to judge the living and the dead" should stem the endless jokes and cute stories that pollute the pulpit as a substitute for preaching. Those seated before the preacher will one day face a Judge who executes his judgment in righteousness. In light of this, can the preacher be trivial in the pulpit? If he truly loves those under his charge, can he neglect to expound the Word of God which addresses the "real need" of sinners rather than offering up sermonic ditties for the "felt needs" of his hearers?

Because of the Appearing. The imminence and gravity of Christ's return is held before Timothy as he is charged with preaching the Word of God. The preacher of the Word must keep in mind that we do not await clever timetables for Christ to return. He can end this life in a moment. The preacher must so live and so preach as if *today* is the day of Christ's appearing. The urgency of the messenger delivering the right message to his hearers is pressed upon us by this charge.

Because of the Authority. The mention of Christ's kingdom reminds Timothy of the sovereign rule of Jesus Christ over him and the affairs of his life. He is to live as one under authority of his King. His duty is to his King. His energies are to be expended for his King. When he stands before a people to deliver the Word of God, he must keep in mind that he stands as a representative of his King. And he is confronting his hearers with the lordship of Christ

over their lives as well. His message must not be muddled by a blend of self-help and psychobabble. As Paul expressed it: "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

BIBLICAL PREACHING IS A SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY

The three key words of our text, "Preach the word," drive home to us the specific nature of the preaching task. The preacher must expound the Word of God or else he has failed in his calling. He may be a wonderful administrator, a winsome personal worker, an effective leader. But if he fails to expound the Word of God, he is a failure to his calling to "preach the Word."

Before considering the specific elements involved in biblical preaching, I offer some observations on the trends that seem to be affecting the hearing of the Word in our congregations. These trends have had an impact upon both preaching and hearing.

Observations. First, there has been a popularizing and Americanizing of the Word to make it more palatable and acceptable to the masses. Rather than seeking to understand a text as God gave it, the preacher seems to be more intent on appealing to people. Often the goal is to increase church membership. But if that membership is gained at the expense of a genuine work of God through biblical preaching, can it really be worthwhile?

Neither Jesus nor the apostles sought to make the truth of God more palatable to their hearers. They laid the truth out with force and clarity. Paul assessed that his preaching of the cross was "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). They preached the truth and depended upon the power of God to drive it home to the

hearers' minds and hearts.

Perhaps one of the problems that has necessitated a watering-down of truth in the pulpit is a shallow theology of the Holy Spirit. Rather than believing the Spirit of God can penetrate calloused minds with the Word of God, preachers have sought to use clever devices and techniques to persuade hearers. A failure to understand the biblical doctrine of regeneration has led to untold harm in the name of evangelism, all because preachers do not *trust* the Holy Spirit to do his work.

When we try to use the latest methods of communication we may have a ready audience, but they pay more attention to our cleverness than to the cross. They are impressed with the speaker, not the Savior (1 Corinthians 1:17). While a seminary student, I had two different professors for preaching. One taught biblical exposition. The other encouraged preachers to offer fifteen-to-twenty-minute dramatic presentations to their congregations. One method communicates divine truth. The other draws attention to the preacher.

Second, the attention given to the "electronic preacher" has shortened attention spans and changed the appetites of congregations. I am thankful for the many wonderful media broadcasts that faithfully proclaim the Word of God. But I am appalled at the equally large number which proclaim everything but biblical truth. Some media preachers water down truth in order to be popular and secure good ratings. They know what sells. Marketing has driven them to change their content to appeal to the masses in order to gain a large following.

Another effect of media preachers is that even those who faithfully preach the Word have their messages edited to fit a twenty-five-minute broadcast format. Certainly this is understandable with the cost of airtime. But when you add to this the lack of hunger for the purity of the Word

and the typical church member's shortened attention span, you find complaints about Sunday sermons that last longer than thirty minutes.

I have been preaching since 1970. Since I started preaching expositively, about 1974, I have found that I will normally spend forty to forty-five minutes for each sermon. I've tried to shorten my outlines and change my notes, but nothing seems to have a real effect on my sermon length. And rightly so! The goal should never be to just get through. It should be to expound the text of God's Word.

A few years ago I found myself facing some disgruntled people who wanted shorter sermons. They really did not care what I preached as long as it was shorter! But I took time to explain, that in my understanding, I could not adequately deal with a text of Scripture in less than forty to forty-five minutes. I found a kindred mind in this with John MacArthur. He wrote:

If you are going to be a Bible expositor, forget the twenty- and thirty-minute sermons. You are looking at forty or fifty minutes. In any less than that, you can't exposit the Scripture. The purpose of a sermon is not to get it over, but rather to explain the Word of God. My goal is not accomplished because I am brief. My goal is accomplished when I am clear and I have expounded the Word of God.⁹

Third, proclamation has been replaced by a "talk-show-host" mentality. Because of a fear of offending or due to an audience's appetite, the "herald" no longer is concerned with speaking "thus saith the Lord," but "Whatever you want, I've got" and "Listen to me and feel good."

Don Whitney offers a personal vignette that illustrates this problem:

Your soul will only be fed from the Word of God. Without it, you will be undernourished and suffer spiritual marasmus. That's what happened to a man I'll call Chris whom I spoke with not long ago. When I talked with Chris he had been in seminary for a few months and was working for a parachurch ministry that specializes in teaching the Bible and theology. Prior to enrolling in seminary, he had for several years been associate pastor in charge of drama and music at a church a couple of miles from me where the pulpit ministry was based on topical preaching aimed at people's felt needs. The church had grown from very few to hundreds in a short time.

Chris had plenty of budget money and many talented actors, singers, musicians, and other workers as resources for his ministry. Afterward, however, he said to me, "I didn't know it when I resigned, but the following Sunday I realized that my soul was as dry and withered and empty as it could be. I had been running on the spiritual fumes of the pressure of preparation for each Sunday's drama and music. I was so busy that I hadn't realized I had dried up spiritually. It was because I was not hearing faithful, biblical exposition, but topical sermons aimed at felt needs. Everything was based upon marketing strategy. Only when I got away from all that did I realize that I was all but dead spiritually."¹⁰

I visited a church in Atlanta during a vacation and listened to a sermon that was really more of a "talk." It could easily have been given at a Kiwanis Club. My children quickly recognized that we had not heard the Word preached, but only a preacher trying to impress his hearers.

My family and I took a relative with us to another church in a southern metropolitan area. The church has a great reputation and has recently constructed a large facility to accommodate its rapid growth. When the service was over I asked the relative, who rarely attends church, what she thought. Without any kind of prompting from me, she

said, "I got the feeling that they were trying to entertain me." I thought that such a comment spoke volumes, especially coming from one who is unfamiliar with "felt-needs" or mega-church thinking. The evangelical pulpit has sunk into the mire of entertainment, thinking that it has to compete on the same level as the world, while hungry hearts are waiting to hear a word from God.

Fourth, we've lost our appetite for truth, and instead would rather appeal to people's interests or feelings or felt needs in our preaching. Rather than longing for truth to set us free or truth to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, or truth to expose the thoughts and intents of the heart, we want something to make us feel better about ourselves. We want something that does not make radical demands of us, something that does not disturb the way we're living our lives, something that won't challenge what we want to think or believe the truth to be. This is precisely what the apostle warned:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4: 3-4)

On one occasion a man came up to me after a service and stated, "I've had everything figured out and in a neat box, and your preaching challenges it. I don't like it, but I need it." The unfortunate thing is that *his box* kept getting challenged and he ran away from what he admitted that he needed. Biblical preaching will apply the truth of God's Word so that it judges "the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Unless the Spirit of God is working in a person he will have difficulty sitting under a steady diet of biblical exposition.¹¹

Too many fail to have interest in the content of sermons. They want only an appealing delivery so they can feel good about themselves. In contrast to this, Don Whitney has written, "And no matter how enthusiastic or passionate the presentation, it is still the *content*, not the physical force of delivery that determines faithfulness to the message."¹²

John Piper, who is known for books with superb content, wrote in the introduction of his book, *Future Grace*, one of the best statements on the need for content rather than mere appeal to itching ears. His statement concerns reading, but it is equally true of preaching.

Every book worth reading beckons with the words, "Think over what I say." I do not believe that what I have written is hard to understand—if a person is willing to think it over. When my sons complain that a good book is hard to read, I say, "Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds."

I have tried to write as I preach [and I believe he has succeeded]—with a view to instructing the mind and moving the heart. . . . [After giving the example of John Owen's writings being difficult to grasp, yet for 300 years his twenty-three volumes are still in print and still feeding hungry souls] The lesson is that biblical substance feeds the church, not simplicity.¹³

Fifth, we want the truth to be popular with everyone, enjoyed by sinner and saint alike. Yet this is foreign to both Old and New Testament teaching regarding the truth. Just look at the prophets, apostles, and teachers captured in God's Word. Was Jeremiah's preaching popular? Did Paul seek to "win friends and influence people" through his preaching? Did the multitudes persevere with our Lord in His declaration of truth? Paul expressed it well, "For the

message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Explanation. Perhaps a bit of amplification on precisely what is involved in biblical exposition will be helpful. It begins with understanding the text which the preacher desires to expound. I believe that the best approach on selecting a text begins with preaching consecutively through books of the Bible. That way a preacher is *forced* to deal with "the whole counsel of God," and his congregation will be exposed to the breadth of biblical truth. The preacher may also deal with topics or themes, but he should always be expository in his approach; that is, he should be a mouthpiece for the text.¹⁴

The preacher must diligently study the text he selects in its contextual setting. This involves a thorough study of the language and grammar used, the historical purpose of the text, the cultural factors that bear weight upon its meaning, and its connection to the balance of Scripture. Reading and meditating upon the text allows the preacher to consider its implications and truths, as well as feeding his own mind and soul with its life-giving truth. Depending upon the illuminating power of the Spirit in the study is essential. He will find that prayer must accompany his study or else he will be engaging in mere academics. He must seek to rightly explain "the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), so that he arrives at a proper interpretation. The use of research tools such as word studies, commentaries, theologies, and sermons can be helpful aids to the preacher in grasping the message of the text.

Once he understands the essential message of his text, the preacher will need to organize the message of the text into salient parts for proclamation. The starting point will be the development of a theme, which has been called "the

essence of the sermon in a sentence," or "the proposition," or "the dominating theme."¹⁵ At this point I have found it helpful to develop an outline, complete with points and subpoints, all of which help to amplify the dominating theme of the text. This gives structure to the sermon so that the preacher is not guilty of offering an incoherent collection of random thoughts on a text. Some preachers have the mistaken notion that if they can have a nice outline, perhaps fully alliterated, then they have done an exposition. I caution that the sermon is not a true exposition until the doctrines and principles of the text are expounded.

The preacher's goal should never be to impress a congregation with his great outlines! He should seek to explain and apply the text to his congregation. He will need to develop supporting thoughts that assist him in the exposition. He should use Scripture that shows the relation of the theme and integrating thoughts to the whole of God's Word. He will need to illustrate certain truths to help with the understanding process, being careful not to allow the illustration to become the sermon.¹⁶ By all means he will give attention to explaining the doctrines found in the text.¹⁷

The task of proclaiming the truths of the text will demand all of the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical energies the preacher can give to this work. He must approach the proclamation of the Word prayerfully, pleading for the fullness of the Spirit to endue him with power, recognizing that apart from divine power he will flounder in the waters of his own weakness. Tony Sargent has rightly stated, "The most humbling and wonderful experience for any preacher as he enters the pulpit is to know that God is with him. The most frightening for him is to be in the pulpit and feel that he is on his own."¹⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones exhorts the preacher to seek the power of the Spirit for preaching God's Word. "Seek this power, expect this power,

yearn for this power; and when this power comes, yield to him. Do not resist. Forget all about your sermon if necessary. Let him loose you; let him manifest his power in you and through you."¹⁹

The Greek word for "to preach" (*kerussein*) referred to the responsibility given to a herald. He may have been in the service of an ancient king, serving as his herald to deliver the king's word to the people. His chief responsibility was to faithfully proclaim the words of the one who sent him. He heralded the king's message with authority. To deny the herald's message was to deny the king who sent him. It is with this background that we see Paul exhorting the preacher to "herald the word" faithfully and authoritatively as one sent by the King. He must do so with clarity and passion for the message he is delivering. He must not take liberties with the King's message, but deliver it as the King intends. This is the preacher's job in the act of proclamation.²⁰

BIBLICAL PREACHING IS A SERIOUS RESPONSIBILITY

The *apostle* gives imperative counsel for the one who preaches the Word. He is to be *constant* in duty, "be ready in season *and* out of season." A preacher cannot let his guard down or neglect his spiritual life. He must live with a constant sense of readiness to deliver the message of God to waiting ears. Many preachers have negated their pulpit ministries by their personal lives. Their love of the world, materialism, flirtatious looks, neglected family life, and laziness have discredited the message they seek to preach. He must exercise discipline of mind and spirit to be *constant* in his work. Be ready in the pulpit and out of the pulpit!

The preacher must not fear being *confrontational* in his ministry. He will need to "reprove, rebuke, exhort" as he proclaims God's Word and as he deals with individuals. An unbelieving woman who had come from a cult back-

ground visited our church. She approached me after a sermon on "The Bread of Life" from John 6, with some striking comments. She told me she did not understand why she kept coming back, but that she felt compelled. Then she commented, "You don't give any options." By that she meant that the preaching has a solitary impact of demand, not a take-it-or-leave-it approach. It confronted her and gave only one option: *God's*.

Confrontation is especially needed in a day when people are craving for pre-digested "applications" on the sermon that will make it "relevant" to everyday life. What most people mean by "applications" is, "Give me some options so that I can pick and choose what I want to do and not feel bad about what I don't want to do." We need not worry about going to extremes on applications. The Holy Spirit is adequate to apply the Word to the hearts of sinners and saints alike!

The preacher has the task of delivering God's Word "with great patience." He is to be *consistent* with his exposition, faithfully delivering God's Word week-by-week to his people. All will not appreciate the Word, nor will all respond immediately to the challenges applied by the Word proclaimed. Some may even get angry and leave. Yet the preacher is to be patient with his flock, realizing that their spiritual ears must be opened by the Holy Spirit. Some will be dealing with deep-seated sins. Others will feel mired in traditions. Still others will have a poor appetite for spiritual truth, an appetite that must be slowly cultivated. Short pastorates normally do not allow a preacher the time to develop a *patient* pulpit ministry.

A sermon worth listening to must have *content*. Content does not mean that the preacher has plenty of stories and interesting quotes. Rather, it means that the sermon deals with doctrine. The word for "instruction" in the NASB translation of 2 Timothy 4:2 is that common New Testam-

ment term of *didache*. It is elsewhere translated as "teaching" or "doctrine." Doctrine must never be confused with impossible-to-understand discussions by intellectuals. Good doctrine is the life of the church; it is the heart of the sermon. It is simply the "teachings" of God's Word understood in relation to the balance of Scripture. John MacArthur wrote, "A true expository message sets forth the principles or doctrines supported in the passage. True expository preaching is doctrinal preaching."²¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great nineteenth-century Baptist preacher in London, wrote in his *Lectures to My Students*:

Sermons should have real teaching in them, and their doctrine should be solid, substantial, and abundant. We do not enter the pulpit to talk for talk's sake; we have instructions to convey important to the last degree, and we cannot afford to utter pretty nothings. Our range of subjects is all but boundless, and we cannot, therefore, be excused if our discourses are threadbare and devoid of substance. . . . [T]he true minister of Christ knows that the true value of a sermon must lie, not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth which it contains. Nothing can compensate for the absence of teaching; all the rhetoric in the world is but as chaff to the wheat in contrast to the gospel of our salvation. However beautiful the sower's basket it is a miserable mockery if it be without seed.²²

After giving such clear instruction on preaching, Paul warns Timothy that everyone will not *want* such biblical exposition.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4: 3-4).

When this happens, does the preacher simply give people what they *want*? This is precisely the error of the current trend of “felt-need” preaching. The unfortunate thing is that many evangelical preachers of good standing have fallen into the trap of delivering cute sermons, warm fuzzies, feel-good messages rather than proclaiming truth. We must be *conscientious* of the calling of God to herald the truth, so that we do not get pulled into the vortex of congregations wanting to have their “felt-needs” met.

The preacher is not to take an opinion poll on what he should preach. While there are some exceptions, most congregations do not have enough spiritual understanding and discernment to know what they need. They will point to the direction of “felt-needs” every time, simply because they can be comfortable with that kind of preaching instead of having to deal with their own sin and the God-centeredness in true, doctrinal preaching. The problem of which Paul warns is that of falling prey to the “desire” (*epithumia*) of those who have no *desire* for enduring sound doctrine.

What is a preacher to do if the congregation cries for “felt-need” preaching? Stand firm. Remember your calling. Remember your *Audience*. Herald the truth. And seek to patiently instruct people in sound doctrine.

CONCLUSION

Biblical preaching is demanding work. The preacher will find himself expended in the study as he labors over the biblical texts and all of the works which address them. He must recognize the adversary’s subtle temptations to neglect the study, water down the message, and appeal to the desires of unregenerate people. He faces a constant warfare, both in the pulpit and out of the pulpit. He will be stretched, challenged, criticized and attacked, while at the same time loved and appreciated by those who hunger for

truth. He must live in dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit to enable him to “preach the word” and “to be ready in season and out of season.”

Ron Owens has written a song particularly for preachers. I believe its message and refrain are a fitting conclusion.

We’ve a gospel to preach, we’ve a message to share—
The eternal Truth is what we declare.
It’s the power to save, it’s the Spirit’s sword,
It’s the heart of God, it’s the Living Word.
We must study to learn and not be ashamed
To proclaim God’s truth in the Savior’s name.
With no compromise, but consistently
We must PREACH THE WORD with integrity.

What is made by man will one day be gone,
But God’s Holy Word marches on and on.
Though the flower will fade and grass will die,
The Eternal Word ever will abide.
We must pay the price, we must take our stand
With a heart on fire and God’s Word in hand.
On the brightest day, in the darkest hour
We must PREACH THE TRUTH in the Spirit’s power.

PREACH THE WORD! PREACH THE WORD!
Won’t you purpose in your hearts to preach the Word?
PREACH THE WORD! PREACH THE WORD!
Won’t you purpose in your heart to PREACH THE WORD?
It’s our call as His disciples to pass on what we’ve received.
Make up your mind and take the time to PREACH THE
WORD!

Author

Dr. Phil A. Newton is senior pastor, South Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee. This is his second contribution to *Reformation & Revival Journal*.

Notes

1. George Barna, "The Pulpit-meister: Preaching to the New Majority," *Preaching* (January/February 1997), 11.
2. *The Pulpit-meister*, 11-13.
3. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1971), 9.
4. *Preaching and Preachers*, 97.
5. J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1979), 28.
6. Quoted by Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 59.
7. Scripture references are from the *New American Standard Bible*.
8. *Spiritual Disciplines*, 64.
9. John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1992), 339-40.
10. *Spiritual Disciplines*, 66-67.
11. Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 for the biblical basis of this statement.
12. *Spiritual Disciplines*, 65.
13. John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1995), 16-17.
14. *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 255ff.
15. I have been greatly helped in biblical exposition by numerous books and preachers. My thoughts in this section will reflect their influence, though it would be difficult to footnote every detail. I mention a few: Drs. Stephen and David Olford maintain ongoing, short-term preaching institutes through Encounter Ministries Biblical Preaching Institute in Memphis, Tennessee, (800) 843-2241; they have coauthored a book on expository preaching, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998). John MacArthur's book, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, is a superb course in sermon-building and the exercise of preaching. Bryan Chapell's book, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1994), offers a thorough self-study approach in preaching.
16. I disagree strongly with my former preaching professor who taught me biblical exposition. He has changed his thinking, even to the point of implying that "illustrations are no longer just the 'window' to the sermon, they are becoming the 'truth' of the sermon. . . . They are being used to tell the story. . . . Sermon points are being related to the illustration" (*Facts & Trends*, vol. 39, no. 8, 4). While illustrations can be used effectively, preachers will do well to spend more time studying the text instead of trying to find the latest, clever illustration.
17. Martyn Lloyd-Jones stated in many sermons that unless a preacher deals with the doctrines in a text he has not dealt with the text! It is interesting that many of the Puritans and writers of the seventeenth and eigh-

- teenth centuries typically highlighted the doctrines found in their expositions. The unfortunate lack of doctrinal preaching in our day has given rise to the weakened state of the Christian church throughout the world. We do well to heed the need to deal thoroughly with doctrine. I commend Lloyd Jones' *Preaching and Preachers*, and John Piper's *The Summary of God in Preaching*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1990), as two volumes to stimulate your thinking on doctrinal preaching.
18. Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1994), 79.
 19. *The Sacred Anointing*, 57.
 20. I again commend Lloyd-Jones' *Preaching and Preachers* to address this subject. This book will help remind the preacher of the God-given privilege he has and how he is to carry out his role with holy passion.
 21. *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 288.
 22. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1990, reprint of the 1881 Passmore and Alabaster edition), 72.