

75 Theses for Preaching in the 21st Century
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Out of a conviction that God has spoken and that He has spoken in His Word, the Bible, the following affirmations or theses are set forth as convictions and commitments for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and those who herald His truth for the glory of God, the building up of the Church, and the evangelization of the nations. These theses are not exhaustive nor are they beyond criticism. They are presented as axioms commonly held among evangelical and Baptist expositors.

- 1) The one true and living God is a Triune talking God. Francis Schaeffer says it well, “He is there and He is not silent.”
- 2) We affirm that this God has spoken in His Word, the Bible. [John Stott: “We should never presume to occupy a pulpit unless we believe in this God. How dare we speak if God has not spoken? By ourselves we have nothing to say...”, *Between Two Worlds*, 96].
- 3) The Triune God speaks both by natural (creation and conscience) and special revelation (Scripture and Christ). The latter is the focus of preaching.
- 4) Special revelation is the divinely intended content of those who preach. Its focus is two-fold: 1) the living Word (the Lord Jesus Christ) and 2) the written

Word (the Bible). [“Let us then consider it certain and conclusively established that the soul can do without all things except the Word of God, and that where this is not there is no help for the soul in anything else whatever. But if it has the Word, it is rich and lacks nothing, since this Word is the Word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of righteousness, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of power, of grace, of glory, and of every blessing beyond our power to estimate.” Martin Luther, “A Treatise on Christian Liberty.” *Three Treatises*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1947, 23.]

- 5) Without the preaching of the Bible, our people will perish with no genuine hope in this life or the next.
- 6) Jesus Christ is the Savior and hero of the Bible. As its focal point, he is to be faithfully proclaimed from all of Scripture. [Charles Spurgeon: “Leave Christ out? O’ my brethren, better leave the pulpit out altogether. If a man can preach one sermon without mentioning Christ’s name in it, it ought to be his last, certainly the last that any Christian ought to go to hear him preach”, sermon #768]. Robert Smith: “dust for Christological fingerprints” in every text.
- 7) There is no contradiction in being Theocentric and Christocentric in preaching. Exalting Jesus glorifies the Father (Phil. 2:11).
- 8) Jesus himself teaches us that all of Scripture testifies about Him. (John 5:39; Luke 24). The whole Bible is Christian Scripture.

- 9) The Bible as the Word of God written is faithful, true, infallible and inerrant as originally given. It corresponds to reality and is coherent in its message.
[Therefore, we can and should preach it with conviction and confidence.]
- 10) The Bible, as the Word of God written in the words of men, is uniquely a divine/human book. Faithful preaching honors the reality of this dual authorship.
- 11) The Bible is divinely inspired both in terms of the writers of Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21) and the words of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- 12) Faithful, evangelical, orthodox preaching stands on the bedrock foundation of the 5 solas of the Reformation: 1) Scripture alone, 2) Christ alone, 3) grace alone, 4) faith alone, 5) the glory of God alone.
- 13) The Bible as the very Word of God is authoritative, inerrant, infallible and sufficient for any and all matters of faith and practice.
- 14) The authorially intended meaning of the divine/human authors of Scripture is to be honored and pursued with a laser beam intensity. [Beware of the inherent dangers of a reader-oriented hermeneutic that relativizes the meaning of the text and that leads to unbridled subjectivism].
- 15) Evangelical interpreters approach the Bible with a hermeneutic of humility not a hermeneutic of suspicion. [We acknowledge our finiteness, cultural situatedness, assumptions and biases can blind us to rightly reading and

understanding the text. This is one important value of reading the text in community].

- 16) Readers of the biblical text should approach the text as those who discover the meaning in the text not those who deposit meaning into the text. [Once again, a hermeneutic of humility is essential and invaluable].
- 17) Interpreters of the biblical text exegete the text, they do not eisegete the text.
- 18) Biblical exposition should be the preferred and regular method of preaching. [It will most faithfully expound the truth of Holy Scripture and build healthy churches.]
- 19) Preaching that does not honor the author's intended meaning in the text is not faithful preaching. It questions the work of God the Holy Spirit in how Scripture is given.
- 20) Faithful preaching is text driven preaching that allows the divine revelation to provide the substance and structure of our preaching. [Sidney Greidanus: "Biblical preaching is a Bible-shaped word imparted in a Bible-like way" (*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, p. 11.)]
- 21) It is a form of ministerial malpractice to not preach the Bible faithfully week in and week out.
- 22) Faithful preaching, by which I mean Biblical Preaching or Expository Preaching, is not simply preaching through books of the Bible. The manner in

which one treats the text is the crucial and decisive issue! It should be preached verse by verse, phrase by phrase and word by word.

- 23) Biblical preaching recognizes and affirms the doctrine of progressive revelation. (see Matt. 5:17-18; Heb. 1:1-2) [God revealed Himself gradually and over time. The Bible has a promise-fulfillment pattern.]
- 24) Biblical preaching follows a historical-grammatical-theological-Christological hermeneutic.
- 25) Faithful exposition allows the Grand Redemptive Storyline of Scripture to provide a hermeneutical canopy over your investigation and study of any biblical text (Creation → Fall → Redemption → New Creation). Examine the little narratives in light of the Big Narrative. [You can also look at the storyline of the Bible in 4 questions 1) Who am I? 2) What went wrong? 3) Who made things right? 4) Where am I going?]
- 26) Because we are blessed with the whole canon of the Bible, we interpret texts in the context of the whole canon. [We take advantage of the fact that we have “the rest of the story” and the whole story of written revelation.]
- 27) A text cannot mean today what it did not mean to the original audience. However, in light of the Bible’s divine authorship, the whole and completed canon, and the coming of Messiah, it may have a fuller meaning than it did to the original audience [Vanhoozer: “My thesis is that the “fuller meaning” of

Scripture – the meaning associated with divine authorship – emerges only at the level of the whole canon”, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 264.]

- 28) When you preach simply be “a mouthpiece for the text” (Westminster Dict., 1645).
- 29) The basic elements of preaching should include exposition, illustration, application and exhortation. [These components have stood the test of time.]
- 30) The meaning of Scripture is one, but the applications are many. [This is especially true in varying cultural and social context].
- 31) As we interpret the Bible, thru the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Bible also interprets us. [It exposes our heart and convicts, corrects and encourages.]
- 32) Preach the gospel with such simplicity and clarity that if the message is rejected, it is because of an unbelieving heart not an unclear mind. [Luther: “to preach plain and simply is a great art”, *Table Talk*, p. 128].
- 33) Preach out of the conviction that apart from the Bible, we have nothing of eternal value to say. [Article XXV of the Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics (1982): “*We affirm* that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God. We deny that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture.”]

- 34) The man who faithfully preaches the Bible will face opposition from liberalism on the left and Pharisaism on the right. [He will not receive the applause of the world.]
- 35) Remember God has promised to bless His Word, not your clever ideas or cute utterances. God wants expositors not entertainers. However, this thesis does not reject the wise and judicious use of humor. [Spurgeon said, “less a crime to cause a momentary laughter than a half-hour’s slumber” (Jeff Robinson, TGC, 11-5-19)].
- 36) The Bible does not need to be defended; it only needs to be proclaimed.
- 37) It is a sin to read the Bible poorly in public worship.
- 38) Faithful preaching models for the sheep that you shepherd how you hope they will handle the Bible when they teach others.
- 39) Our grasp and understanding of the Bible will never be exhaustive, but it is sufficient for faith and obedience. [Only the divine mind knows the text exhaustively. However, with the aid of the Holy Spirit and good principles of interpretation we can know the meaning of a text genuinely and truly].
- 40) Good preaching will develop and explain the theology that naturally emerges from faithful exposition. Let exegesis drive theology and fill your preaching with doctrine. [Utilize the great Confessions and hymns of the church]

- 41) Effective preaching brings together in the preaching event the three canons of good rhetoric: 1) logos (what), 2) pathos (how) and 3) ethos (who).
- 42) Strive to make your time in the study one of personal worship and edification. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide and let the Word of God preach to you before you preach it to others.
- 43) The gospel of Jesus Christ should be preached in every sermon with a call to repentance and faith to that gospel given with clarity and urgency. Preach for a verdict.
- 44) Faithful preaching seeks to persuade persons to be reconciled to God [Lloyd-Jones calls it “logic on fire!”] [Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! Are these contradictions? Of course, they are not...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...I say again that a man who speaks about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one.” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, p. 97)]
- 45) Faithful preaching will be evangelistic and missional, theological and pastoral, encouraging and practical. [It is well-orbed and multi-faceted.]

- 46) The Great Commission is the final marching orders of King Jesus; therefore, it must continually be evident in our preaching. [A benefit is it will bring balance and health to your theology.]
- 47) Fill your sermons with grace and the Bible's indicatives, but do not neglect the Law and the Bible's imperatives. ["Who we are in Christ" will impact "How we live for Christ."]
- 48) All Christians are called to proclaim the gospel and teach the Bible while men who serve as pastors/elders/overseers uniquely have this ministry in the life and corporate worship of the church. [(Therefore, all have a ministry of admonishing, exhorting, and instructing one another.)]
- 49) Preach so that people will say "what a wonderful Savior," not "what a wonderful preacher."
- 50) The Holy Spirit is absolutely essential both in the work of the study and proclamation in the pulpit. [However, dependence on the Holy Spirit is no substitute for lack of preparation in the study.]
- 51) Preaching for changed lives (conversion/regeneration) depends on the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit. [Our assignment is to present a clear and compelling gospel. The Spirit's assignment is to take the Word of God and breathe new life into dead souls.]

- 52) Find the main idea of your text and let it guide you in articulating the main idea of your message. Further, let the additional (or “little”) points or emphases serve and feed the main point. [Be text driven through and through.]
- 53) Let both the substance and structure of the text determine the substance and structure of your sermon. [Bleed Bible when you preach and say and emphasize what the Bible does. Remember, the Holy Spirit of God inspired it all.]
- 54) Outline your message simply and clearly so that you have a road map or GPS indicating where you have been, where you are, and where you are going. [This will aid both the preacher and the people in comprehending the message.]
- 55) In a visual world take advantage of and use wisely visual aids.
[Comprehension increases substantially when people both hear and see.]
- 56) Preaching the Word is for the hardworking, not the lazy. Lazy persons should not be in the ministry.
- 57) When writing out your sermon, always aim for the ear and not the eye. [They are listening to you not reading you.]
- 58) Remember that though you have examined your sermon material for hours [I suggest 10-12 hours minimally], the people you preach to are hearing it for the very first time. [Always take that into consideration.]

- 59) Powerful preaching will inform the mind, move the emotion and activate the will. [It will impact the total person.]
- 60) Always dress in a manner that is appropriate to the occasion, recognizing it is better to overdress than underdress.
- 61) The importance of beginning well (introduction) and concluding well (conclusion/invitation) cannot be overstated. They are crucial to good communication. More sermons fail at these 2 points than anywhere else.
- 62) Aim to be understood by children and you will more likely gain the ear of adults as well.
- 63) Better to say something clearly than to say nothing with eloquence.
- 64) Few things are more effective in public speaking than the wise use of...the pause.
- 65) Recognize bad preaching will sap the life out of a church.
- 66) We affirm the truth that what you say is more important than how you say it, but how you say it has never been more important. [Chuck Swindoll former president of DTS and pastor wisely says, "If you think the gathering of Biblical facts and standing up with a Bible in your hand will automatically equip you to communicate well, you are deeply mistaken, It will not. You must work at being interesting. Boredom is a gross violation, being dull is a grave offense, and irrelevance is a disgrace to the Gospel. Too often these three crimes go

unpunished, and we preachers are the criminals...preaching is not as simple as dumping a half-ton load of religious whine, and a hodgepodge of verbs, nouns, and adjectives; but preparing the heart, sharpening the mind; delivering the goods with care, sensitivity, timing, and clarity. It's a difference between slopping hogs and feeding sheep... [Therefore] study hard, pray like mad, think it through, tell the truth, then stand tall. But while you're on your feet, don't clothe the riches of Christ in rags. Say it well." (Eva. Ch. Of Fullerton Newsletter, date unknown).]

- 67) Those who fill the office of pastor should be God called and scriptural qualified for the awesome task of pulpit ministry.
- 68) Men who are God's chosen instrument for the preaching ministry should be themselves under the guiding and empowering hand of the Holy Spirit. [God will uniquely use their personality, gifts, style and experiences to communicate the truth of his Word.]
- 69) Conduct your preaching ministry for the praise of God and never the praise of men. ["What we are after is not that folks shall say at the end of it all. "What an excellent sermon!" That is a measured failure. You are there to have them say when it is over, "What a great God!" It is something for men not to have been in your presence but in His."] (J.H. Jowett, quoted in *Context*, Dec. 1, 1997, p. 2).

- 70) Recall regularly the words attributed to Robert Murray McCheyne, “My peoples’ greatest need is my personal holiness.”
- 71) Remember that as you preach the Word of God all that truly matters is that you please God.
- 72) Engage and honor all three persons of the Triune God in you preparation and preaching.
- 73) Never forget you have a divine mandate and charge to preach the Word of God.
- 74) Preach the Word of God when you feel like it and when you don’t feel like it because it is what people need.
- 75) Pray that when your work on earth is done and you stand before King Jesus, the words you hear from the Master are these, “Well done My good and faithful servant.”