

## **SECTION 13**

### **The Why and What of Expository Preaching**

**“THE WHY AND WHAT OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING”**  
(HOW DO YOU BUILD A MASTERPIECE?)

*“Biblical preaching is `a Bible shaped word imparted in a Bible-like way.”*

*“In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.”*

-Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, p. 11

*“I propose instead that we forthrightly give up any claim that the Bible is authoritative (as I have defined the word) in guidance for contemporary faith and morals This, I would argue, is the inevitable and appropriate final step in the long story of the erosion of biblical authority. In public discussions the Bible must be discussed as a human document from the past and our dialogue with it seen as a human process of the present The Bible has no ‘legal’ authority to determine our ‘now’”.*

-Ms. Robin Scroggs, Professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary  
“The Bible as Foundational Document,” *Interpretation* 49 (1995): 23.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Jerry Vines has pointed out that expository preaching is discredited in many places not because the method is poor, but because it is poorly used. He notes that an expository sermon is not determined merely by the length of the passage considered, but by the manner of treatment of the passage. The expository sermon makes plain what the passage says and gives good application to the hearers. Expository preaching is not merely

preaching about the Bible but preaching what the Bible itself says. The expositor's main concern is setting forth the truth of God's revelation in language that can be understood.

For a sermon to be an expository sermon, Dr. Vines believes the following 8 things must take place:

1. The sermon must be based upon a passage from the Bible.
2. The actual meaning of the Bible passage must be found.
3. The meaning of the Bible passage must be related to the immediate and general context of the passage.
4. The eternal, timeless truths of the passage must be elucidated.
5. Those truths must be gathered around a compelling theme.
6. The main points of the sermon must be drawn from the Scripture verses themselves.
7. Every possible method to apply the truths found in the verse must be used.
8. The hearers will be called to obey those truths and live them out in daily life.

## **I. ADVANTAGES OF THE EXPOSITORY METHOD (JERRY VINES)**

### **A. SUPPOSED DISADVANTAGES**

1. "Expository preaching is dull" - but it doesn't have to be; the problem is in faulty preparation and delivery.
2. Preaching through books of the Bible in an expository fashion does not allow for the leading of the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation" - but the Holy Spirit should not be limited to working only in the pulpit. He can guide in planning and preparation.
3. "Expository messages have poor sermonic structure" - but this criticism only applies to the poor use of expository preaching.
4. "Expository sermons degenerate into merely reading verses and making comments" - but this is also criticism of expository preaching at its worst, not as it should be.

## **B. ADVANTAGES OF THE PREACHER**

1. Using the expository method makes it possible for the preacher to learn the Word.
2. Preaching expository messages through books of the Bible keeps the preacher out of a rut.
3. The expository method guards against using the Bible as a club.
4. Expository preaching enables us to deal with passages that might otherwise have been overlooked or even intentionally avoided.
5. The expository method makes the preacher work.
6. Preaching through the books of the Bible removes the anxiety about what to preach.
7. Expository preaching gives great confidence to the preacher.

## **C. ADVANTAGES TO THE PEOPLE**

1. Expository preaching gives people strength.
2. Expository preaching encourages the people to become students of the Word themselves.
3. Expository preaching has a way of broadening people's horizons.
4. Expository preaching will provide the preacher with an increasingly maturing congregation.

## **D. SOME DANGERS**

1. The expository preacher must be very careful not to become monotonous in his exposition.
2. The expository preacher can go into too much detail.

Walter Liefeld in his excellent work, *New Testament Exposition (From Text to Sermon)*, also addresses issues raised by Jerry Vines. He provides a complementary analysis that is helpful and reaffirming.

Liefeld believes the essence of exposition is explanation.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF ALL TRUE EXPOSITORY MESSAGES INCLUDE:**

- it deals with one basic passage of Scripture
- it has hermeneutical integrity
- it demonstrates cohesion
- it has movement and direction
- it fosters application

### **WHY IS EXPOSITORY PREACHING IMPORTANT?**

- It conveys the biblical revelation of God and his will.
- It teaches God's Word in the setting chosen by the Holy Spirit.
- It meets human needs.
- It directs the attention of the hearer to the Bible.
- There is a great need for the teaching of God's Word in a way that meets their true needs.
- It can serve as an important protection against the improper interpretation of Scripture.

### **WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING?**

- We can be more confident of preaching God's will when we preach his Word.
- We are confined to biblical truth.
- We proclaim the whole counsel of God.
- The context of the passage usually includes its own application.
- Scripture often provides a literary structure that can form the basis of a sermon outline.
- We can include touchy subjects in the course of sequential exposition without being obtrusive.
- It gives the preacher a fine opportunity to model Bible study.

### **WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING?**

- An excellent means of evangelism
- To minister to human needs
- To declare the will of God
- To motivate us in matters of faith, obedience, and spiritual growth
- To teach doctrine or theology
- The worship of God and the exaltation of his name

### **WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING?**

- It requires a thorough study of the passage
- The need to observe sound principles of hermeneutics
- Requires constant attention to the larger context of the book and even of the whole corpus of Scripture
- To be faithful to the original text it must be attentive to the literary form of the passage and its context
- Matching the passage to the needs of the congregation

### **WHAT EXPOSITORY PREACHING IS NOT:**

- Simply a verse-by-verse exegesis
- Simply a running commentary
- A captioned survey of a passage

These substitutes for expository preaching often share two basic faults:

1. They may fail to be faithful to the emphasis, doctrine, and function of the passage, and
2. They may fail to possess the qualities that make for a homiletically sound and pastorally applied message.

### **HOW CAN EXPOSITORY PREACHING BE MADE CONTEMPORARY?**

Good expository preaching helps bridge the gaps between the ancient world and our own.

It does this provided that:

- The preacher is aware of the two cultures and the two horizons;
- He has done his homework by learning all he can about the background and conceptual framework of the passage;
- He takes into account the level of biblical knowledge, experience with Christianity and the evangelical subculture, educational level, and socioeconomic environment of his congregation; and
- He carefully takes the congregation into the life-situation of the passage at hand before abstracting principles.

## **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD EXPOSITORY MESSAGE?**

1. Conveys the basic message of a biblical passage faithfully  
Hermeneutics - the biblical concern of the teacher  
FACTS
2. Communicates this message well, using appropriate structure and features  
Homiletics - the practical concern of the preacher  
FORM
3. Meets the real needs of the congregation, consistent with the purpose and function of the passage  
Human Need - the personal concern of the pastor  
FUNCTION

For purposes of sermon preparation, however, the function of the biblical passage in its context and the application of the text to congregational needs should be considered before structuring the sermon. The order will, therefore, be facts, functions, and form.

## II. DOING EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Sam Canine, former Professor of Pastoral Ministry at Dallas Seminary, believes there are 15 factors present in a, good homiletical process.

The preacher:

1. Sets high value on exegesis
2. Is able to do theological process
3. Knows the immediate audience
4. Knows the current world
5. Presents truth in today's terms
6. Has a good sense of timing
7. Knows the hurts of the present audience
8. Knows the joys of the present audience
9. Uses words for ears, not eyes
10. Struggles to be crystal clear
11. Balances force and friendliness
12. Makes word pictures vivid
13. Structures unity into message
14. Uses good progress throughout the message
15. Selects appropriate order in the message

Steve Lawson, Pastor in Mobile, Alabama, addressed the mechanics of expository in the July 1997 Southern Seminary magazine, *The Tie*. In an article titled "The Ten How-to's of Expository Preaching," Pastor Lawson provides an excellent overview of the preacher's task. He notes that "expositors are not born, they are made" (p.10). He then delineates his 10 how-to's.

### STEP #1 - PREPARATION

- Be the right person. Before the preacher can prepare the sermon, God must first prepare the preacher.
- Robert Murray McCheyne, the noted Scottish preacher, said, "The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness."

- Choose the right passage. We must exegete our audience, interpret their spiritual needs and determine the most appropriate series that will produce the desired result. Preach through entire books; shorter series through one chapter in the Bible (i.e. Hebrews 11, 1 Corinthians 13); a specific section in the Bible; a biblical character; or a biblical topic.

### **STEP #2 - OBSERVATION**

- Look for the central idea of the text, the “big idea,” or the main point of the passage We should ask ourselves, “What is the core truth the biblical author is trying to communicate?”
- We are to be like a detective poking for clues.
- Ask several key diagnostic questions: Who is speaking? Who is the original audience? What is he saying? Why is this recorded? When was this written? What are the circumstances behind this passage? What immediately preceded this passage? What follows? How does this passage fit into the overall theme of the book?
- Look for a unit of thought.
- Look for transitions in the flow of thought, breaks in the action, main verbs, cause and effects, key words and reoccurring themes.

### **STEP #3 - INTERPRETATION**

- Interpret the passage using the literal, historical, grammatical approach. By literal, I mean the normal, or natural, meaning of words, being careful never to allegorize or spiritualize the text. By historical, I mean the author's intent as he wrote to his original audience. By grammatical, I mean the understanding of the grammar, syntax and word studies in the passage.
- Use language tools.
- Consult commentaries.
- Check cross references.
- Investigate biblical background resources.

### **STEP #4 - ASSIMILATION**

- Take individual discoveries and collected observations and begin to organize them into a written manuscript that follows a verse by verse progression through the selected passage.
- Construct a preaching outline.
- Incorporate the research.
- Add transitions.

### **STEP #5 - APPLICATION**

- Ask, “Does this truth relate to their lives? What does God require of them?”
- Picture five or six of the congregation members seated around a table. Each of these people should represent a cross section of those to whom we preach. Ask yourself, “What does this text have to say to a successful businessman? A single parent? A college student? A retired grandparent? A young couple contemplating a move? How does this Scripture impact their lives?”

### **STEP #6 - ILLUSTRATIONS**

- Sermon illustrations are like open windows which allow outside light to be shed upon the passage enlightening its meaning. A good illustration can create interest, capture attention, explain a truth, motivate powerfully or insure that the message is unforgettable.

### **STEP #7 - INTRODUCTION**

- The introduction should be large enough to orient the listener to the sermon but small enough not to distract from the main body of the message.
- The oft-repeated three “I’s” of a good introduction are: interest, involvement, and identification.
- After the introduction, the preacher ought to be able to sit down and the congregation want him to get back up and finish the rest of the sermon.

### **STEP #8 - CONCLUSION**

- Last words ought to be lasting words.
- The conclusion should answer the question, “As a result of this message, what does God want the listener to do?” An effective conclusion should either summarize the main truths, specify application, motivate, confront, challenge the will, encourage or comfort.

### **STEP #9 - INTERNALIZATION**

- Now review the sermon notes to evaluate the general flow of the message as a whole.
- Ask, “Is the sermon material under each homiletic point equally distributed? Is the introduction too long or too short? Are there enough illustrations? Is application well distributed? Will the opening lines “hook” the listener? Is there balance and symmetry before the main points? Is a section top heavy and need to be redistributed? Do I have too many points? Do the transitions flow?”

- After the sermon manuscript is on paper, it must also be indelibly written upon my mind and heart.
- The best method of internalizing one's sermon notes is to pray through them, offering each specific truth to God for his approval and preaching the message, as it were, to myself asking God to make it real in my own life,

### **STEP #10 - PROCLAMATION**

- As the Spirit of God fills and controls, facial expressions, hand gestures, eye contact and voice inflection will communicate naturally - actually, supernaturally. These external aspects of sermon delivery should be the dynamic result of God working throughout personality and temperament, not something theatrically rehearsed nor intentionally imitated from another preacher.

Richard Mayhue supports Pastor Lawson's scheme noting, in his judgment, five minimal elements in expository preaching:

1. The message finds its sole source in scripture.
2. The message is extracted from Scripture through careful exegesis.
3. The message preparation correctly interprets Scripture in its normal sense and its context.
4. The message clearly explains the original God-intended meaning of Scripture.
5. The message applies the scriptural meaning for today.

-Richard Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 12-13.

### **CONCLUSION:**

#### **1. EXPOSITORY PREACHING IS BIBLICALLY BASED PREACHING.**

The danger today is in the attempt to be relevant, some preachers have moved from biblically based sermons to psychological-based sermons. The sermon sounds more like a lecture in a motivational or self-esteem seminar. The Scripture is used essentially to proof text what the speaker is saying or trying to prove.

Haddon Robinson says: “When a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he abandons his authority. He confronts his hearers no longer with a word from God but only with another word from men.” -(Robinson, 18)

1. The text of Scripture governs the expository sermon.
  - a. The thought and purpose of the biblical writer must drive the sermon, not a person or a need. The biblical text will address needs, but the text determines the need.
  - b. Preachers all too often read their text and then depart from it. His thoughts may even be biblically based, but they are not derived from the text.
2. The expository sermon is based upon sound biblical study.
  - a. The expository preacher will wrestle with the meaning of the biblical writer.
  - b. The expository preacher will honor the meaning of the text. It is a matter of integrity.
  - c. The expositor will work his way back into the world of the Scriptures to understand the message as it was written.

## **2. THE EXPOSITORY SERMON IS APPLICATION-BASED PREACHING.**

It is relevant because it applies to the life of the preacher and the listener. Haddon Robinson highlights five characteristics of the expository sermon (Robinson, 20-29).

1. The passage governs the sermon.
2. The expositor communicates a concept.
3. The concept comes from the text.
4. The concept is applied to the expositor.
5. The concept is applied to the listener.

In a similar vein, Paul Borden (*Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 63-64) gives a fourfold description of the expository sermon.

1. An expository sermon contains a clear statement of the primary biblical idea that is legitimately derived from a passage or passages.
2. The structure of the sermon must be consistent with the structure of the text or texts.
3. The sermon must be relevant to listeners.
4. The idea, outline, application, illustrations, and assertions must fit with each other as well as with the context and intent of the biblical text. Without this, the sermon cannot be called an expository sermon.

In summary, we may discover something of what expository preaching is by noting what it is not.

1. It is not a commentary running from word to word and verse to verse without unity, outline, and intentional focus.
2. It is not rambling comments and offhand remarks about a passage without a background of thorough exegesis and logical order.
3. It is not pure exegesis, no matter how scholarly, if it lacks a theme, thesis, outline, and development.
4. It is not a mere structural outline of a passage with a few supporting comments but without other rhetorical and sermonic elements.
5. It is not a topical homily using scattered parts of the passage but omitting discussion of other equally important parts.
6. It is not a chopped-up collection of grammatical findings and quotations from commentaries without a fusing of these elements into a smooth, flowing, interesting, and compelling message.
7. It is not a Bible reading that links a number of scattered passages treating a common theme but fails to handle any of them in a thorough, grammatical, and contextual manner.
8. It is not exclusively a Bible book study.
9. It is not preaching which explains the meaning of the text in its context without applying it to today's hearers.
10. It is not a Bible study type sermon complete with word studies and exegetical comments.

-(Some of these are taken from MacArthur's *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* and Robert Kent Spann's *A Curriculum For Expository Preaching In The Christian College and University*, D. Min. Thesis, Gordon-Conwell, 1998, pgs. 74-75)

# Components of Expository Preaching

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## The Goal

After the cruelty and selfishness of a thirty-seven-year-old man had forced his wife and children from his home, he called in desperation wanting my aid in getting them to return. I said I would try to help if he would agree to get counseling for his problems. He agreed and came to the church office several days later. He brought a Bible with him.

I could not help but notice how strange it was to see this abusive man with a Bible under his arm. I had seen him many times before. He even attended our church occasionally, but I had never seen him with a Bible. Yet here in the darkest hour of his life, he thought he would find wisdom and aid in a book written thousands of years ago. No doubt his thinking was colored with a desire to impress me, and he undoubtedly had little actual knowledge about how to discern what the Bible would actually require of him. Still, as do all expository preachers, I shared the man's instinctive faith that the Bible could address the deepest needs of his life.

Expository preachers and the people who sit before them each week are convinced that the Scriptures can be mined to extract God's wisdom and power for daily living. Poor preaching may cast some occasional doubt, but preaching that truly reveals what the Bible means has kept this conviction alive for a hundred generations. Our goal as expository preachers is to keep this faith alive by demonstrating week after week what the Word of God says about the daily concerns we and our listener's face.

This goal reminds us that most people do not want or need a lecture about Bible facts. They want and need a sermon that demonstrates how the information in the Bible applies to their lives. Expository preaching does not merely obligate preachers to explain what the Bible says; it obligates them to explain what the Bible means in the lives of people today.<sup>1</sup> Application is as necessary for sound exposition as is explication. In fact, the real meaning of a text remains hidden until we discern how its truths should govern our lives.<sup>2</sup> This means that full exposition cannot be limited to a presentation of biblical information. The preacher should

***“Most people do  
not want or need  
a lecture about  
Bible facts.”***

frame every explanatory detail of the sermon so its impact on the lives of listeners is evident.

Such a perspective on the true nature of exposition challenges the notion some have of expository preaching. So much of the criticism expository preaching receives results from the assumption of some preachers that a sermon's primary goal is to expose listeners to information about the Bible. Sermons that mainly disseminate information seem out of touch, irrelevant, and even uncaring. Sermons that organize textual information and address immediate concerns also express congregational sensitivity while remaining fully biblical.

If we were to think of the object of a sermon as a large stone to be moved, we would recognize that some think of an expository sermon as using all its resources and features as leverage to move information into the mind of the listener.

However, a true expository message uses all its resources to move application.<sup>3</sup> The sermon's features become the leverage to impel biblical understanding and action based on sound exposition into the life circumstances of listeners as well as information into their thoughts.

John A. Broadus was the father of modern expository preaching. In his classic, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, this master teacher and preacher concludes that in an expository sermon, “the application of the sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done.”<sup>4</sup> Broadus’ conclusion has ample biblical precedent. Exposition assumes the duty of exhorting the people of God to apply the truths revealed in Scripture not because of the opinion of experts but because of the instruction of God's Word.

### **The Pattern**

Indications of our preaching obligations emerge in the Bible’s descriptions of Christ’s words as He accompanied the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke records, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The word translated *explained* means to unfold the meaning of something, or to interpret.<sup>5</sup> Later the two disciples offer commentary on Christ’s words saying, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). This opening of the Scriptures expresses the concept of revealing the full implications of something (as in opening a door wide to show what is inside).<sup>6</sup>

Unfolding and opening the meaning of the Word of God characterize the expositor’s task, not merely on the basis of Christ’s example, but also on the basis of ancient biblical precedent, which further defines exposition’s essentials. Probably the best description of ancient exposition occurs in Nehemiah’s account of Israel’s reacquaintance with the Word of God after the people return from exile in Babylon where they had forgotten God’s law and the language in which it had been given:

*Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*

*The Levites - Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah - instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.*

*They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read (Neh. 8:5-8).*

Here the exposition of the Word involved three elements: presentation of the Word (it was read); explanation of the Word (making it clear and giving its meaning);<sup>7</sup> and exhortation

based on the Word (the Hebrew terms indicate the priests caused the people to understand in such a way that they could use the information that was imparted).<sup>8</sup> The Word itself, explanation of its content, and exhortation to apply its truths composed the pattern of proclamation.

These three elements in this Old Testament proclamation consistently reappear in New Testament practice.<sup>9</sup> Luke records that when Jesus first explained His ministry in the synagogue He read the Scripture (4:11-19), explained the import of what was read (4:21), and then made the implications clear - though it was not to His listeners' liking that the obvious application meant honoring Jesus (4:23-27).

Word presentation, explanation, and exhortation remain prominent in the pattern of New Testament proclamation. Although the elements do not always follow the same order, they remain present. Consider the way these Pauline instructions to a young preacher unfurl:

### **1 Timothy 4:13**

#### **Word Presentation**

“(D)evote yourself to the ... public reading of Scripture

#### **Word Exhortation**

to preaching (the actual term is *parakleseis*, meaning to exhort or entreat. It comes from the same root as *Paraclete*, the name Jesus gives the Spirit, who comes as our counselor, advocate, or comforter)

#### **Word Explanation**

and to teaching.”

### **2 Timothy 4:2**

#### **Word Presentation**

“Preach the Word ...; (here the word for “preach” is *kerusso*, which means to proclaim or publish)

#### **Word Exhortation**

correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience

#### **Word Explanation**

and careful instruction.”

Paul’s practice was consistent with his instructions (*see Acts 17:1-4*). At Thessalonica the apostle went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews “from the Scriptures.” Paul first presented the Word to the people. Then Luke says that Paul was “explaining and proving” from the Word “that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.” With this explanation came at least an implied if not an overt exhortation to commitment; Luke next records, “Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.”

I do not mean to suggest that these features of exposition form the only observable pattern in the biblical preaching record, nor that every feature is always equally evident. However, these features are consistent enough to challenge today’s preachers to consider whether their exposition of Scripture faithfully reflects these biblical elements:

presentation of some aspect of the Word itself; explanation of what that portion of the Word means; and an exhortation to act on the basis of what the explanation reveals. Not only does such a pattern of unfolding and opening the Word reflect a simple logic for preaching, it also conforms to Christ's instructions for our proclamation. Surely it is noteworthy that the parting words of our Lord in the Gospels command His messengers to proclaim His ministry in the expositional pattern of the prophets and apostles:

**Matthew 28:19-20a**

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...

**Word Explanation**

teaching them

**Word Exhortation**

to obey

**Word Presentation**

everything I have commanded you.”

Though a normative order does not appear in Scripture, the features of exposition occur together with enough frequency to suggest a common approach to expounding God's truth: present the Word; explain what it says; and exhort based on what it means. This is expository preaching.

**The Components**

Exposition does not merely involve the transmission of biblical information, but further demands establishment of the biblical basis for an action or a belief God requires of His people. Relating the tense of the verb, the tribe of the person, and the history of the battle does not adequately unfold the intended meaning of the text. Until people can see how the truth of the text would operate in their lives, the exposition remains incomplete. This is why explanation, illustration and application act as the proof, the clarification, or the specification of the exhortation the preacher offers and the transformation God requires.<sup>10</sup>

This full-orbed understanding of exposition's content reduces the danger of an expository sermon merely degenerating into an exegetical paper, a systematics lecture, or a history lesson. Jerry Vines describes the danger:

Some have understood an expository sermon to be a lifeless, meaningless, pointless, recounting of a Bible story. I can still remember a very fine man deliver such a sermon from John 10. He told us all the particular details about a sheepfold. We were given a complete explanation of the characteristics of sheep. We were informed about the methods of an Oriental shepherd. When the message ended we were still on the shepherd fields of Israel. We knew absolutely nothing about what John 10 had to say to the needs of our lives today. That is not expository preaching.<sup>11</sup>

Expository preaching aims to make the Bible useful as well as informative. Addressing a clear purpose as one researches and develops the sermon will keep the sermon on track biblically and practically. This practice keeps the goal of expository preachers and the intention of the writers of Scripture the same: to “take captive every thought to make it

obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). We want thought about God’s Word to result in obedience to Christ.

Homileticians once divided sermons into three basic components: *exposition* (the explanations and arguments for what the text says); *illustration* (the demonstrations of what the text says); and *application* (the behavioral or attitudinal implications of what the text means).<sup>12</sup> These are helpful distinctions for teaching students to dissect others' sermons and to build their own.<sup>13</sup> However, these traditional categories can damage expository preaching if preachers do not see that explanation, illustration, and application are all essential components of opening and unfolding the meaning of the text. Explanation answers the question *What does this text say?* Illustration responds to *Show me what the text says.* Application answers *What does the text mean to me?* Ordinarily each component has a vital role in establishing listeners’ full understanding of a text.<sup>14</sup>

We should not limit a sermon to technical explanations simply because it is expository. Biblical truths that the preacher cannot illustrate can hardly be considered apparent, and scriptural details that the preacher will not apply do not encourage obedience.<sup>15</sup> To expound Scripture fully means to unfold the meaning of a text in such a way that listeners can confront, understand, and act on its truths.<sup>16</sup>

The more you preach, the more you will discover that this unfolding makes the components of, exposition interdependent and, at times, indistinguishable. Illustration

***“The components of  
exposition will  
blend and bond to  
drive the truths  
of God’s word  
deep into the hearts  
of His people.”***

Sometimes offers the best explanation; explanation focused on a text's purpose may sound much like application; and application may offer the opportunity for both illustration and explanation. As your expertise grows, the components of exposition will blend and bond to drive the truths of God’s Word deep into the hearts of His people.<sup>17</sup>

In a traditional expository message each component of exposition occurs in every main point of the sermon because it makes no sense to explain something that can be neither demonstrated nor applied.<sup>18</sup> There are, however, good reasons to make exceptions to this traditional expectation: sometimes a sermon uses a series of explanations to build to an application or to veil implications for a later, more powerful impact. However, the beginning preacher will find that listeners usually pay closer attention to a message whose demonstrations and applications of truth occur regularly and frequently in the sermon.

Today’s cultural influences make it unreasonable for the preacher to expect a congregation to stay with a message for twenty-five with the hope that something relevant will be said in the last five minutes. Congregational needs and capabilities make the old rule of

including explanation, illustration, and application in every main point a reasonable guideline, even if one does not follow it every time.

## **The Balance**

### *A Generic Approach*

The finest expository preachers prepare each message asking themselves this question while imagining that their listeners are present: What may I, with the authority of God's Word, require of you as a result of what we discern this text means? Recognition of listeners' spiritual need to discern personally a text's meaning for their lives, rather than simply accept the assertions or the dictates of the preacher, forces pastors to evaluate whether their messages are accessible as well as informative, applicable as well as erudite.

Concern for the needs of the listener as well as the information to be conveyed can affect the balance of the components in a message. As we have already seen, the pattern of exposition can vary. However, the most common order in which exposition's components appear is explanation, then illustration, then application.<sup>19</sup> This allows the preacher to establish a truth, then demonstrate and clarify its features before applying it. Each of these components is given equal time within the development of a message and/or its main points; there is something for everyone in roughly equal proportions.

### *A Customized Approach*

Fortunately, there are no generic congregations. Although it can be helpful for student preachers to prepare sermons that give equal attention to each of the sermon components so that they learn to use all the homiletical tools, differences among congregations will require pastors to vary the proportions of the expositional components in their sermons.

Pastoral sensitivity and respect for the unique character of every group will determine whether the following descriptions are mere caricatures, but they do help demonstrate ways in which preachers may vary the composition of their messages.

Youth pastors typically swell the illustrative component of their sermons and drive application home behind a few well-chosen explanatory points. Blue-collar congregations often desire solid explanation whose relevance is more fully spelled out in down-to-earth application. When professionals and management types dominate a congregation, the pastor may want to hit application more lightly since these persons are often most motivated by what they determine to do and are not accustomed to having someone else make decisions for them. In such a congregation it may be important to package the explanation in such a way that application becomes largely self-evident.

Each characterization is almost sinfully stereotypical and should not rule over common sense. My own experience has been that sermons that provide a healthy combination of all the expositional components can be preached with impact almost anywhere with only minor adjustments. This is not simply because congregations typically have a mix of people in them, but because we are each a mix of persons.

*“Avoid messages that  
do not offer  
proportional  
servings of explanation,  
illustration,  
and application.”*

Our minds need explanations of what the Bible says so that we know we have grasped the thoughts and standards of our God. Our hearts need the illustrations that so often touch our emotions or fire our imaginations to convince us that our God is not a cold collection of abstract ideas. We need application so that we have either the confidence that we are acting in accord with the will of God, or, that we gain the conviction that we must adjust our ways.

### *A Healthy Approach*

Even though the relationships are not exclusive of one another it is often helpful to think that explanations prepare the mind, illustrations prepare the heart, and applications prepare the will to obey God. This approach cautions preachers to avoid messages that do not offer proportional servings of explanation, illustration, and application. For example, a sermon that is three-quarters explanation, one-quarter illustration, and one sentence of application (the classic seminary sermon); or, has one sentence of explanation, is three-quarters illustration, and is one-quarter application (the popular media message) is unbalanced. A balanced expositional meal carries each component in sufficient proportion to nourish the whole person.

No strict rules will determine what proportion these components should take in any specific sermon. The text, the topic, the purpose, the gifts of the preacher, the target audience, the situation, the makeup of the congregation, the time that may be required to express an idea, the persuasive or the structural advantages of placing one component over another at various stages of the message, and the relative strengths of individual components of exposition in a particular sermon all have a role in determining how the preacher should distribute explanation, illustration, and application.

This does not mean that the composition of every sermon is completely up for grabs. I have observed a consensus - maybe more a spiritual instinct Christians share than a standard of orthodoxy -that at least guides me as I consider how to communicate Scripture. Balanced Christians disdain messages whose illustrations dominate to the point of entertainment, whose applications extend to the level of diatribes, or whose explanations enlarge to ponderous displays of academic erudition. Each extreme reveals a preacher preoccupied with special or personal interests over congregational health. Preachers once posted in their studies this reduction of the preaching task:

Preach  
reach  
each

Such a reduction still has great value. It advises us to resist the emphases of our academic training, popular preaching, or of congregational extremists who tempt us to

***“No strict rules  
will determine  
what proportion  
these components  
should take in any  
specific sermon.”***

preach without the balance that will nourish all the people at various levels of their being. Congregations need to hear what most preachers want to hear: solid explanation vividly illustrated, and powerfully applied.

1. John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (1982, reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 141, 145-150.
2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 200-201; see also John Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 93-98.
3. David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 96.
4. John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. J. B. Weatherspoon (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 210.
5. Gk. *dierrnuteo*.
6. Gk. *dianoigo*.
7. *From bin*: Hiph'tl participle masc. plural =

(v. 7); and, from  
masc. singular = “made”

the verb= “they gave from bin: Consecutive person, masc. plural understood” (v. 8). C. F. Keil  
more correct to suppose a and application of the  
recitation according to  
1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2  
Nehemiah, Esther, vol. 3, trans.  
from C. F. Keil and F. Del-  
*Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols.  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976),

the exile (although some claim the  
from dated to Moses) these ele-  
constitute the usual (but not exclusive)

pattern for preaching, which in God’s providence prepared the New Testament church to institutionalize this highly means of protecting and promulgating God's Word.

- Cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 443-45; and W. White, Jr. "Synagogue," in vol. 5 of *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 565-66.
10. Farris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1963), xi; Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 42.
  11. Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 5.
  12. Cf. Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, who divides exposition into the categories of explanation and argument separate from illustration and application, (144,155); and Andrew Blackwood, *The Fine Art of Preaching* (1937, reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1943), 113.
  13. I do not limit "exposition" to the details and the arguments of the text's explanation, but rather subsume explanation, illustration, and application under the larger heading of exposition. All are key in disclosing the meaning of a text.
  14. Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 155.
  15. Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 96,138-43.
  16. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 182-84.
  17. Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 155; Ian Pitt-Watson, *A Primer for Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 101; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher and Ancient Text*, 182-84.
  18. Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 211; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher and Ancient Text*, 182; D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 77; Vines, *Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation*, 133.
  19. Later chapters in *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chapell explain how and why this order should vary, but note here this logical progression that is most common in expository preaching.
  20. Robert G. Rayburn's lecture notes indicate that he taught this reduction with its simple poignancy for more than twenty-five years at Covenant Theological Seminary.

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# Expository preaching

*How to let the Light shine without getting in the way*

WILLIAM YUILLE

I suppose all who preach have a deep-seated reluctance to speak about preaching lest we be thought to imply that we are satisfied with our own preaching. However, I do have the deepest conviction about the centrality of biblical preaching.

I believe in preaching because it is biblical and profitable, and I want to illustrate that by referring to two men in Scripture. The first is in Ezra 7. Here Ezra is described as “expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord and the statutes of Israel.” There are his credentials, but I think the key is in verse 10, “Ezra had prepared his heart to *seek* the law of the Lord, and to, *do* it, and to *teach* in Israel statutes and judgments.”

These three actions and their sequence are most important. The outcome is found in Nehemiah 8: “He read therein [the law of Moses] before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (v. 3).

Verse 8 may be the best description of expository preaching: “They *read in the book* in the law of God distinctly, and *gave the sense*, and *caused them to understand* the reading.” He obeyed the Word of God and then proceeded to teach it.

Notice the same three actions in 2 Timothy—studying, obeying, and teaching. In Paul’s last epistle, he had something to say regarding the Word of God: “Study to show thyself [be diligent to present yourself] approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

That verse is an exhortation to study, to apply oneself to the Word of God. The word “study” in the AV doesn’t mean to simply study; it means *to be diligent*, the same word found later in 4:9—“Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.”

In chapter 3:14, Paul says: “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” For the word *continue* we could use the word “abide” or “remain.” He is saying that the Scriptures provide certain boundaries, and you are to stay within them. In other words, you are to obey what you read. Submit to the teaching of the Word of God.

He adds in verses 15-17, “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,” referring to the Old Testament, “which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Then in 4:3-4, he says, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” We’re heading towards a situation in which there will not be an interest in the Word of God, he warns. There will be no appetite for the Scriptures. People will have itching ears, wanting someone to give them what pleases them.

This warning has come true in our day. I say that not with reference to society or to Christendom at large—obviously that is true. I say that with reference to what is happening within evangelical churches.

But, Paul declares (2 Ti. 4:2), “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” So the message to Timothy: Be like Ezra. Give yourself to study God's Word, to obey it, and then to teach it. This is a biblical mandate for the preaching of the Word of God, and in particular for expository preaching.

What do we mean by expository preaching? I refer you again to Nehemiah 8: They “gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.” That's what I understand by expository preaching—to take the Word and explain it in its context.

Pick up any book on preaching and you'll get some definitions. John Stott has written a fine book which he calls, *I Believe in Preaching*. In it he says, “It is my conviction that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching. Every sermon should in some sense be an exposition of Scripture in the context.”

Haddon Robinson, an instructor of preachers, said, “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept derived from and presented through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context.”

Let me suggest six features of expository preaching.

## **BIBLICAL IN ITS CONTENT**

Ezra was an expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord. Timothy was to rightly divide the Word of Truth, continuing in the things he had learned. He was to preach *the Word*. God had seen fit to communicate His message in written form, therefore, they saw it as their responsibility to apply themselves to understand that communication and to share it with others.

The first and foundational feature in expository preaching has to be this: it is biblical in its content. In fact, I go beyond that. We are thinking not only about a message that is biblical in content, but also focuses on one basic passage of Scripture.

The passage may be quite broad, as in the case of the book of Hebrews, which is basically an exposition of Old Testament ritual and types. The writer to the Hebrews is explaining to us from the Old Testament how they have fulfillment and reality in the Lord Jesus. That particular document is priceless. There is a need and place for that kind of very broad approach to the sweep of Scripture.

I think there is also a need to focus in a narrower sense on a passage of Scripture. It might be a verse, a paragraph, a chapter, or a book. The size is not really of primary importance—of first importance is that the content of our preaching relates to that particular passage. Expository preaching, then, is not the linking together of different Scriptures to get a message. I'm not saying there's not a place for that, but that's not what we mean by expository preaching. Expository preaching is not to take something from here, something from there, and from somewhere else, then try to bring it together.

It is not simply a survey of that passage, either. Nor is it going through the passage and picking out some favorite ideas, like picking candy. It is not just a series of points. It is an attempt to come to grips with a passage of Scripture *as a unit*, in its context, and somehow communicate what is being said in that passage.

If we go through Scriptures, getting an idea here and there, there is value in it, and I don't want to minimize that. The danger, however, is that we are then not as likely to investigate the passage in context and listen to what Scripture is saying. In expository preaching you allow the passage to dictate what is being said, placing yourself under the authority of Scripture.

Stay with the passage, and use it as something that not only instructs you, but in a sense constrains you. If you have another idea but it's not in that passage, then it's irrelevant for that message. I may go elsewhere in Scripture, but only to validate or illustrate what I'm going to say, not to get another idea. I'm going to understand this passage and test my conclusion on the whole of Scripture. But I get my main message in this passage.

Let me suggest to you that not only is it a good thing for the preacher, but it is much easier on the audience. If you jump from one place to another, it can be very confusing. Whereas if you stick with a passage, taking your audience through it and explaining what it means, they can go home and read through it again, and can more readily rethink what it is that you have said.

### **FAITHFUL IN ITS INTERPRETATION**

Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord. This means “to seek something carefully with a view to knowing it.” It wasn't something that came easily: he prepared his heart to seek it. The same was true for Timothy. “[Be diligent] to show thyself approved unto God.” The New English Bible says “that you might drive a straight arrow through the word of truth.” (2 Ti. 2:15)

Paul wanted Timothy to have an overall grasp of Scripture so that he could have a broad appreciation of things, but he also wanted him to apply himself to the details, to the words being used, to the phrases and arguments. He wanted him to be diligent in applying himself. That calls for integrity. If I am going to study God's content Word and preach it, one of the requirements is that I not read into the text what I would like to be there. That's not exposition; that's imposition. We're all tempted to do that saying and, if we're honest, sometimes we're guilty of that. It's a mean very easy trap to fall into, but that's not our objective. Our objective is to let Scripture speak for itself.

Someone has said that Scripture is not our servant, making the text say something we want it to say. What Scripture has to say is what God has to say. Faithful interpretation requires that I be willing to submit my pre-suppositions to what Scripture says.

### **COHESIVE IN ITS STRUCTURE**

Expository preaching is not exegesis. It is not a collection of disjointed ideas, and it is not a verse-by-verse commentary. I am not belittling those—they all obviously have value—but that is not what we mean by expository preaching. Expository preaching recognizes that the passage is a unit and the various parts contribute to the unit. So as I come to a passage, I'm not just going to read verse 1 and say what I get from verse 1; then verse 2, and not what I get from verse 2. There may well be value in that, you but it's not expository preaching.

Expository preaching would see the passage as an entity. What is the point of this passage? What is the message here? How does the author look at this argument? The intent is to follow the flow of thought, arriving at something which is cohesive.

That is the real challenge. Much thought and meditation needs to go into it. Based on my experience with some younger men starting to preach, I think this is may be the area where they have a problem. It is one thing to have an understanding of what the passage is saying. Sometimes there is an assumption that once I've done that, now I can get up and preach. Perhaps I've done some word studies and understand the phrases. But the real challenge for the preacher is, "Now, what am I going to do with that? What is the main point? How am I going to structure it? How am I going to present it?"

Exegesis is necessary but expository preaching is not exegesis. You have to come to grips with what the passage is saying. Some preachers would say that you shouldn't preach on something unless you can summarize the main idea in one sentence. I can't say that I have ever done that, but I would argue strongly, that if I'm going to preach on a passage, I should see that passage as a unit and make sure that what I have to say fits together.

### *Five Types of Messages*

## **TRAPS ON THE PLATFORM**

TYPES	ASSETS	LIABILITIES
TESTIMONY: Acts 9, 22, 26	natural to begin, interesting	Danger: too much talk of "I"
TEXTUAL: Acts 2	focused, easily retained	Danger: taking out of context
TOPICAL Hebrews	shows unity of Bible, thorough	Danger: ungainly, exhausting
HISTORICAL: Acts 7	Good for mixed audience, story	Danger: over-spiritualization
EXPOSITORY: Nehemiah 8	covers all topics and in context	Danger: superficial, uninspiring

*A P Gibbs, The Preacher & His Preaching*

## **CLEAR IN ITS EXPLANATION**

I appeal again to Nehemiah 8, “They...gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading,” so that what they heard was clear. Expository preaching should be clear in its explanation of Scripture. The word “expository” doesn’t occur in our New Testament, but the word “expound” does, four times in the book of Acts. It first occurs when Peter is explaining to the counsel what had happened concerning his ministry to the Gentiles. He expounds what had been done. We get it again in Acts 18:26 and 28:23. It has this idea of explaining something.

The word is also found in Acts 7:21, when Stephen says, when Moses “was cast out.” The New King James renders it this way: “When Moses was set out.” It is the same word that is elsewhere translated “expound.” What does it mean? That little ark was discovered among the bulrushes; they brought that ark to the princess and Moses was set out. He had been hidden, but now he was set out—he was exposed to view, so that others saw him. That’s the word “expound,” illustrating what is meant.

“What is not clear to me before I preach will certainly not be clear to anyone else when I’m finished.” That’s worth keeping in mind. If it’s not clear to me, I need to think it through before trying to explain it to others.

## **RELEVANT IN ITS APPLICATION**

Someone has said that the expositor lives in two worlds: he lives in the world of the biblical text (that is to say he is confronted with this challenge: what does it mean?) And that involves thinking about what it means to the people to whom it was first written and an attempt to come to grips with the text in its context.

He also lives in the world of today with real people in real situations with real problems. The task of the expository preacher is not simply to communicate information. He doesn't have the choice between being biblical and being contemporary—he is to be both biblical and contemporary. The content of the message must be biblical but it must not just relay information. It must be a message—something which motivates those who are listening to respond in some way.

If we had gone on in Nehemiah, we would have seen that there was a realization on the part of the audience that Scripture taught something that they had not been adhering to, and there was a response on the part of that audience to the Word of God as it was taught.

That is not to say that the response will always be positive. See Ezra 9 and 10; where they respond that the application of Scripture is not really what they wanted to hear. Nevertheless, it was a biblical and relevant answer. He had made a clear application of Scripture and he was not responsible for how his audience responded to that.

## **SYSTEMATIC IN ITS PATTERN**

There is a need for consistent, chapter-by-chapter exposition. It prevents us from following fads or from having hobby horses, if we have a planned approach to the Scripture. It will also mean that over time there is a comprehensive balance of Scripture. I think that is especially important when it comes to awkward subjects, some things that

we may not want to deal with. But if I am expounding Scripture in a systematic way and I come to that subject, then I teach it because it's there.

I know there are other ways to teach God's Word. In fact many great preachers have not taught Scriptures this way. C. H. Spurgeon didn't. It may have something to do with the fact that when he was a little fellow (so the story goes) he listened to some boring preacher who droned on through the Epistle to the Hebrews for years. Spurgeon said, "I don't know what it did for the Hebrews, but it sadly bored one Gentile lad." Maybe that is the reason he didn't give systematic expository preaching.

There were others, like Martin Lloyd-Jones, who preached fourteen years on the Epistle to the Romans! I don't doubt that there was great blessing by doing that, but my conviction is that in every assembly there should be basic, systematic expository preaching. That is the responsibility of the elders: to feed the flock. And one of the ways we ought to be doing that is by making sure there is a steady diet of systematic expository preaching.

That's not to say that we shouldn't invite other preachers. In our assembly, if we invite someone to speak, we tell them that we are going through the Book of the Acts, for example, but they don't have to feel obliged to speak on this subject.

Finally, James 3:1 states, "Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (NKJV). That is a serious consideration. John Owen said, "A man preaches that sermon only well unto others that preacheth itself in his own soul." If the Word does not dwell with power within, it will not pass with power to others. The first response to my investigation of the Word of God should be a deeper knowledge of God, so that I worship Him; that should lead me to a deeper appreciation of the will of God, so that I obey Him.

Such preaching needs divine unction. Alex Alexander put it this way: "It is possible to be homiletically brilliant, verbally fluent, theologically profound, biblically sound and orthodox, and spiritually useless. That frightens me. And I hope it frightens you, too."

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# WATERED-DOWN PREACHING

Kevin L. Howard

In a culture where “effective sermons” are defined by their brevity and their ability to make us laugh, we desperately need those who will faithfully declare the truth of God’s Word. This article is a call for all preachers to take seriously the task of preaching God’s Word rather than entertaining God’s people.

It seems that many have the impression that preaching should please the congregation. To hear much of today’s preaching one would think that the congregation no longer consists of sinful creatures needing instruction from God’s Holy Word. Rather, according to some, the congregation is the consumer and should be pleased with the marketed product (i.e., the sermon). But, preaching should first and foremost please God not the congregation.

Unfortunately, biblical sermons have given way to “speeches” “talks” that revolve around psychology, sociology, the latest news. For example, many pastors are more eager to quote magazine articles or talk-show hosts regarding money, success, happiness than to declare to their congregations what Scripture says about such issues. The way some preachers; carry on in the pulpit, one would think that the world has all the answers. But let us not be fooled into thinking that a pagan-controlled-culture can tell the church what's really important. What's really important is that we love God and be holy.

Sin is a rare word to hear coming from a preacher these days. After all, people; might take offense or be emotionally wound And while I'll agree that our job as preachers is not to verbally abuse people, neither is it our job to cater to their felt-needs. Our job is to tell the truth--God's truth. And if the content of that message offends, then so be at. The fact that people are offended by certain preaching might mean that the preacher should examine his methods, but it might mean that he is doing something right.

We should speak the truth in love, but we should not water-down God's Word to satisfy the thin-skinned. After all, the ones we're trying to be delicate with may be the very ones who need a jolt. Besides, all of us need occasional jarrings from God's Word.

Preaching the Bible means that we will at times make, people mad by telling them the truth. It means we will have to say what goes against the grain of our godless culture. It may mean that, people leave our churches to find more comfortable places. But keep in mind, God does not call us to be pacifiers. God calls us: to be proclaimers. Churches are weak today, not because they have failed to embrace proper marketing techniques, but, because they have forgotten, or maybe never heard, God’s Word preached in an uncompromising and unflinching loyal manner. I am advocating biblical preaching, especially expository preaching, that declares God's truth without sugarcoating it for the weak-kneed.

Now this is not to say that congregations should blindly accept everything preachers say. People need to distinguish between what the preacher says and what Scripture actually says. But the problem in many churches today is that some congregations never have to look into Scripture because their pastors have very little use for it in their sermons.

Maybe many pastors steer clear of biblical sermons because of time constraints throughout the week. After all, pastors are quite busy, and biblically based sermons take significant time to prepare.

However, outside of nurturing his own walk with the Lord and caring: for his family, the primary task of a pastor is to feed the flock. Therefore, pastors must guard their prayer and

study time. Many pastors spend much of their time doing every thing but preparing food for the flock. They get caught up spending all of their time doing good pastoral things, like counseling and administration; but, as a result, the flock goes hungry.

The pastor must not allow even counseling, administration, or visitation to take away from his study and prayer time. Yes, pastoring involves more than just preaching, but what could be more honoring to God and necessary for the church than for the pastor to tend to the sheep by preaching God's Word? If the pastor preaches Scripture, then many of the congregation's true needs, not just felt-needs, will be dealt with in the sermon. I suspect that if the flock were adequately fed from the pulpit, then members of the congregation would be less likely to run to a counselor or a psychologist for help in life. Instead, they would find the answers to their questions and the solutions to their problems in God's Word.

Again, pastor's should seek to spend their time studying God's Word and praying. This might not sound practical, but it's exactly what pastors and their congregations need most.

If Scripture really is Holy, infallible, and inerrant, then shouldn't it receive more priority in public worship? Of course this is not to assume that the preacher and congregation are not to be studying Scripture in their private devotions, but Scripture certainly must not be neglected while the Christian community is gathered. Many Christians are not yet disciplined enough to study the Bible on their own, and they desperately need to hear God's Word unashamedly preached from the pulpit. People may never be encouraged to study it on their own if they are not exposed to it while gathered as the church.

I imagine some preachers are already responding to this article by thinking, "People aren't willing to receive the truth anymore!" If this statement has any substance to it at all, then it certainly demonstrates how important it is for us to declare God's Word. People need the truth whether or not they want it. If they leave the church, then let them leave, but we must not shirk our responsibilities.

Some preachers might respond to this article by saying, "Our congregations want something that's non-threatening!" If our congregations really don't want to be threatened, then maybe they should join a country club instead of a church. Unfortunately, that's exactly what many churches have become today, a place to feel good rather than a community of believers gathered to worship God. These type of "churches" consist of nothing more than sick people telling other sick people that they're okay, while all along death grips their lives. We would do well to keep in mind that as preachers our primary task is to tell the truth of God's Word not to be liked.

Others might reply, "People are bored with the Bible!" I'm sure there are some church members bored with the Bible, but for the most part, I think people are bored with certain preachers not with Scripture. Boring preaching is the fault of the preacher or the listener, not the fault of Scripture. Often times, we as preachers think; that our sermons have to be funny and no longer than twenty minutes, short and sweet, or people will not tolerate it. Actually, I suppose that people would gladly sit through longer sermons if their preachers used this time to unfold the life-changing truths of God's Word. Nonetheless, we must not buy into the mentality that the congregation is the consumer and that we must give them whatever they want. The church is not a business. It should function more like a family and a community of believers than a corporation or a gathering of stockholders.

Some preachers will say that biblical preaching, especially expository preaching, is not effective. But, what could be effective in honoring God and in helping Christians worship Him in Spirit and in truth than His Word? Unfortunately: man and pastors think that "effective

preaching”, must result in more money, more people, and mono popularity or it is not effective. Our task, is not to grow; a church numerically, Our task is to declare the truth—God’s Word.

The Word tells us what God is like. He is holy. He requires that all who come to Him acknowledge their sin and bow down faith to the sufficiency of Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ will judge those who refuse to surrender their lives to Him. Jesus will return to claim His own people and to mete out judgment on those who have rejected His atonement.

Our world will not be pleased to hear this, and we should not water-down our message to make it palatable. Nothing is wrong with tact, but our problem today is not that the Christian message lacks tact, but that we have lost our boldness to tell the truth. In the name of tact we have sacrificed truth, and that is a dangerous thing to do.

Jesus’ message was sharp and hard to digest, “Deny; yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.” May our lives not be spent on the trivial pursuits of life but on worshiping God and on declaring to others that all who come to God must come the way of the cross.

Certainly our congregations need encouragement, but the kind of encouragement they need can’t be found in a psychology book. They need comfort, but the kind of comfort they need can’t be obtained in a self-help class. They need truth, but they can’t ultimately find that in the newspapers or on TV. They need to know: how to apply God’s Word, but they can’t get that from a pastor more interested in being popular than in preaching Scripture. They need God’s Word! The Bible is the only source from which they can drink the healing truths of holiness. Without it, the people will perish.

None of us can think rightly apart from God’s Word or apart from the community of faith. How will people ever know what *they* really need if they aren’t hearing the Bible declare what they really need? If we listen to our own thoughts and desires, we might conclude that we need a sexual affair, or a bigger house, or another degree. But if we listen to God’s Word, we will learn that we need to know Christ better. Only He can grant us peace and joy that worldly pleasures and things can never bring.

Many of us need to repent for contributing to the mindset that the church is merely another means of public entertainment and is only here to engage in social action. If we must water-down something, then we should water-down our funny stories and our illustrations, but we should never water-down God’s Word. Our world wants to hear that they’re okay, but they desperately need to hear that they are “sinners in the hands of an angry God,” and unless they repent, hell is their destiny. Many in the church want their ears tickled, but they need to hear that no one can approach God except through repentance and faith. Will anyone tell them?

I stand not as one outside the circle of responsibility, but as one of you with probably more sins, weaknesses, and failures than most. I too repent for making the Gospel less than what it really is.

Kevin L. Howard was born in Cleveland, Tennessee. He has been preaching since 1988 and is ordained in the Southern Baptist Convention. This material may be used freely if source is specified. ©1997 by K. L. Howard