

SECTION 21

Purposes for Preaching

PURPOSES FOR PREACHING

I. VARIOUS PURPOSES FOR SERMONS

Though the list is not exhaustive, at least 6 distinctive purposes for preaching can be identified:

1. Evangelistic Purpose

The objective is to clearly communicate the gospel to those who do not know or have not accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior (ex. Peter's Pentecostal sermon in Acts 2)

2. Exhortative Purpose

The need for believers to grow in their devotion and love for the Lord is the focus.

3. Doctrinal/Theological Purpose

Here the goal is growth in the knowledge of God and His truth (This is a much neglected aspect of preaching in our day and one that needs to be recovered).

4. Ethical Purpose

This type of sermon focuses on the need of the audience to grow in various relationships (personal and social primarily).

5. Consecrative Purpose

Here the focus is on the need of the audience to grow in its commitment and service to God.

6. Supportive (Encouragement) Purpose

This purpose focuses on the need of the audience for support and strength.

In developing the purpose of a message, several considerations should come into play:

1. Determine the purpose of the biblical text.

You should honor the biblical writer's purpose.

2. **Determine the audience to whom you will preach the sermon.**

You must know your audience. What is going on with your people? The same sermon preached in your pulpit could have a different purpose when preached in a revival or biblical conference.

3. **Decide which of the six purposes is appropriate for your message on this particular occasion.**

This will influence the “thrust” of your message.

4. **State the purpose statement in clear, concise, and concrete language.**

II. PREACHING THEOLOGICALLY

Doctrinal/theological preaching is noticeably absent in the modern pulpit. Theological and biblical illiteracy is the heavy price being paid. As the preacher exegetes both his text and audience, he should be sensitive to the theological truths contained in and supported by the text. He must endeavor to develop a strategy that will allow him to convey these truths in a clear, winsome and relevant manner. It is my conviction that a faithful minister of the Word will bombard every text with a series of questions that many preachers of Holy Scripture never ask.

1. *What does this text say about the Bible* (and the doctrine of Revelation)?
2. *What does this text say about God* (also Creation, angelology)?
3. *What does this text say about man* (and sin, our fallenness)?
4. *What does this text say about Jesus Christ* (His person and work)?
5. *What does this text say about the Holy Spirit?*
6. *What does this text say about Salvation?*
7. *What does this text say about the Church?*
8. *What does this text say about Last Things?*

That we are not asking these questions was painfully noted by David Wells in *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* In an analysis of over 200 sermons published in 2 respected journals on preaching, Wells discovered the following: Only 19.5 percent were grounded in

or related in any way to the nature, character, and will of God. At issue here is not whether the sermons were about God; there are many other legitimate subjects about which a preacher might wish to discourse on a Sunday morning. Rather, at issue is whether the reality, character and acts of God provided an explicit foundation for what the preacher said about the life of faith, or whether the life of faith was presented as making some kind of internal sense without reference to the character, will, and acts of God. At issue, in short, was the prevailing *Geist* in today's pulpit. Is it anthropocentric or is it theocentric? The overwhelming proportion of the sermons analyzed - more than 80 percent - were anthropocentric. It is as if God has become an awkward appendage to the practice of evangelical faith, at least as measured by the pulpit. Indeed, it would seem from these sermons that God and the supernatural order are related only with difficulty to the life of faith; in any event, he does not seem to be at its center. Contemporary sermons are reserving the center for the issues that engage us in the course of life, or, more specifically, for the self. It is around this surrogate center that God and His world are made to spin. (p. 252)

Wells would later add in *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, that the contemporary pulpit is becoming captive to our "cliche culture" rather than to the Word of God. (p 118). Self has replaced God as central in preaching. (p 120).

God as holy and transcendent has been replaced by a God who is approachable, our buddy. The idea of personal holiness has given way to "psychological wholeness," and depravity has become a bad self-image or victimhood. (p 134).

"...God is disappearing from His church, being edged out by the self, making it alone as the source of all history and meaning." (p 139)

In *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, Gary L. W. Johnson, in "Does Theology Still Matter?" carries Well's argument a step further, citing a *Christianity Today* survey. He points out the anti-theological sentiment of many pastors in the modern church.

"They considered relational skills the top priority, followed by management abilities, communication skills, and then spirituality. Wells' assertion that the Christian ministry is being redefined in terms of the CEO and the psychologist, whose task it is to engineer good relations and warm feelings, is manifestly

ratified by this survey. It is difficult to imagine patients or surgeons listing medical knowledge as the least important item in that respective field - or, for that matter, those involved and affected by any particular vocational endeavor without massive repercussions.” (p59).

Alan Day, pastor of FBC Edmond, Oklahoma argues that there is a rationale, even a mandate for preaching theology.

1. THERE IS ABSOLUTE TRUTH
2. THE HUMAN CONDITION IS CONSTANT

“Truth does not change, and neither does human nature... scripture, common sense, sociology, and anthropology combine to support the argument that humankind is forever the same generation after generation, civilization after civilization. Therefore, the themes that the preacher addresses will be determined by his theological evaluation of man as *imago dei*, man as sinner, man as redeemable, et cetra. He may package his presentation differently than did Chrysostom or Augustine, but he must understand this aspect of the constancy of the human condition. This a theological perspective which must flavor all his preaching.” - (“Theology and Preaching,” unpublished paper, pgs 9-10)

Bryan Chappell emphasizes what he calls the **FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS (FCF)**. Others call it the universal truth or permanent principle the text affirms.

The **FCF PRINCIPLE** is grounded in 2 Timothy 3:16. As fallen creatures, we need heavenly direction for our sanctification.

All Scripture focuses on some aspect of human fallenness. However, with the work of Christ, it conversely focuses on God's redemption. The preacher must define and present the redemptive purpose. [I would expand this to the “theological purpose(s)”]

Biblical theology is vital for the preacher and preaching. Theology must be linked with God's redemptive work.

A biblical focus is a positive focus in Christ-centered preaching because God's good news of redemption is revealed. The centrality of Scripture and Christian doctrine is the cross of Christ. Through His suffering, redemption is possible.

Giving particular attention to the doctrine of redemption, Chappell sets forth 3 steps:

1. Identify the redemptive principles evident in the text.
 - A. Revealed aspects of the divine nature that provides redemption.
 - B. Revealed aspects of human nature that requires redemption.
2. Determine what application these redemptive principles were to have in the lives of believers in the biblical context.
3. In the light of common human characteristics or conditions contemporary believers share with the biblical believers, apply the redemptive principles to contemporary lives.

Not detracting from what Chappell says, indeed I affirm it enthusiastically, I would add that one could substitute the word “theological” for “redemptive” and by so doing catch the vision for how theology, which arises naturally from the text, can become a part of a healthy and vibrant pulpit ministry. Augmented with the insights and contributions of the great creeds, confessions, and theologians of the Church, the pulpit can once again become the feeding trough the Great Shepherd's sheep so desperately need and must have (Jude 3).

A CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPT

“7 SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARING RELEVANT MESSAGES”

1. Visit the “how-to” sections in your local bookstores.
2. Regularly have a small group submit a list of their greatest challenges at home and on the job.
3. Similarly, acquire inventories of needs from several secular (unsaved) people in your community.
4. Periodically, examine issues of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *USA Today*, as these publications are on the cutting edge of the felt needs and fears people are facing.
5. Apply practical aims to every study, message or program in your church.

6. Practice composing practical, catchy titles for your messages.
7. Limit your time to 20 minutes. And don't forget to keep your messages light and informal, liberally sprinkling them with humor and personal anecdotes.

-Doug Murren, *The Baby Boomerang*, pgs 227-28 [Question: Where is the Word?!!]

“Preachers who pick out texts from the Bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in the theology of the writer, are grossly misusing the Bible. Let them not end but start with thinking of the audience’s vital needs, and then let the whole sermon be organized around their endeavor to meet those needs. This is all good sense and good psychology.” - (Henry Emerson Fosdick, “What is the Matter with Preaching?” in *Harper's Magazine*, July, 1928, p.135.)

“I don’t think the average church member realizes the extent of the theological erosion that’s taken place on the American evangelical scene since World War II, but the changes I’ve witnessed in Christian broadcasting and publishing make it very real to me. Radio programs that once majored in practical Bible teaching are now given over to man centered interviews (‘talk’ radio is a popular thing) and man-centered music that sounds so much like what the world presents, you wonder if your radio is tuned to a Christian station. Some so-called ‘Christian music’ is just plain silly. God's people are getting their ‘theology’ from popular religious music instead of from the Bible and the hymnal. In so much of today's ministry ‘feeling good’ has replaced being good, and ‘happiness’ has replaced holiness.” - (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Myself*, 301.)

“We cannot preach at all without preaching some sort of doctrine; and the type of religious life that grows up under our preaching will be determined by the nature of the doctrines we preach.” -(Gary Johnson, “Does Theology Still Matter?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 65.)

“The essential secret is not mastering certain techniques but being mastered by certain convictions. In other words, theology is more important than methodology... Technique can only make us orators; if we want to be preachers, theology is what we need.” -(John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 93.)

“...the church that does not take theology seriously is unwittingly encouraging understandings of the faith that are warped or unbalanced.” -(Donald Bloesch, *Crumbling Foundations: Death and Rebirth in an Age of Upheaval*, 107.)