

2. Expository Preaching – Why?

- a. Belief in the **authority** of Scripture demands expository preaching.

What people desperately need to hear is the voice and word of God, not the insights, philosophies and hobby horses of men. The preacher's task is, actually, a very simple and straight forward one – it is to tell people what God has already said.

Donald Coggan, a former Archbishop of Canterbury put it like this, "The Christian preacher has a boundary set for him. When he enters the pulpit, he is not an entirely free man. There is a very real sense in which it may be said of him that the Almighty has set him bounds that he shall not pass. He is not at liberty to invent or choose his message: it has been committed to him, and it is for him to declare, expound and commend it to his hearers....It is a great thing to come under the magnificent tyranny of the Gospel!"¹

The godly 19th century Anglican minister, Charles Simeon, wrote, "My endeavour is to bring out of Scripture what is there and not to thrust in what might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head never to speak more or less than I believe the mind of the Spirit is in the passage that I am expounding."²

It is through careful and faithful explanation and application of the breathed-out Word of God that God's voice is most effectively heard by his people.

As Augustine put it, "When the Bible speaks, God speaks". Or, more recently, Jim Packer, "Scripture is God preaching".

The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 states, "The preaching of the Word of God is the word of God."

- b. Belief in the **sufficiency** of Scripture demands expository preaching.

Ultimately, what lies behind the abandonment of a systematic, expositional approach to preaching is a lack of confidence in Scripture itself – in its relevance and sufficiency to address the lives and circumstances of contemporary men and women. Yet Scripture is utterly relevant for every time, situation, culture and context. In Scripture there will always be either an explicit or implicit principle addressing any and every issue faced by humans.

Preachers need a fresh conviction that God has nothing 'newer' or more 'up to date' or 'more relevant' than that which he has already given us in his Word.

When people say that the Bible isn't relevant, the implication is that it is the congregation who determines what they hear rather than God who determines what they are told. It's one of the marks of an increasingly religious but godless society that Paul warned Timothy about and in which context he charged him most solemnly, "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2)

- c. Belief in the **power** of Scripture demands expository preaching.

¹ Qtd by John Stott *I Believe in Preaching* pp126-127

² William Corus *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev Charles Simeon* p703

The Word of God faithfully proclaimed can do what no other means of communication can do. It is God's ordained means of

- i. creating: Genesis 1:1; Ezekiel 37; Romans 10:17
- ii. cleansing: John 17:17; Ephesians 5:25-26

It is the only means that God has guaranteed to bless so why neglect it?

I recently came across this quote in an article I found on the Internet, though I confess I did not make a note of the author or source:

"The Bible as the Word of God is meant to be read and proclaimed to ourselves and to others. There is a special blessing attached to the proclamation of the Word of God. The Word is powerful and is able to bring about profound and pervasive change as it is used by God in the lives of his people. I have never been able to understand preachers and teachers who abandon the proclamation of the Scriptures for the proclamation of anything else, like the latest findings of the social sciences, or clips from the latest Hollywood movies. While all of life needs to be discussed in light of what the Scriptures teach, there is no power like the power of God's Word brought home to the human heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. No amount of cleverness or contemporary relevance will make up for the absence of the faithful proclamation of the Word."

About six weeks ago I was in Khartoum, Sudan, leading an annual Preachers' Workshop for church leaders. At the time of the first seminar in 2005 these men and women had never heard of either systematic or expository preaching. The whole concept was alien to them as they were used to a very unplanned, off-the-cuff and topical approach to preaching. This year, I asked them to list for me what they perceived to be the benefits of expository preaching and this is what they came up with. I have edited the English slightly in one or two cases but in no way changed the sentiment.

- 1. It gives me a process by which I can organise and plan my preaching
- 2. It puts strength into my preaching
- 3. It is easier for the congregation to understand as I link with the previous section and now they are eagerly anticipating the next section
- 4. It helps the preacher connect with and demonstrate the oneness of God's Word
- 5. It gives me an inexhaustible supply of preaching material
- 6. It keeps me in the context of the text
- 7. It focuses the preacher on the text itself and stops me "beating the bush"
- 8. It helps the preacher go deeper into the Word
- 9. It guards against random, topical preaching which has damaged our churches
- 10. My people remember the sermons better

And my favourite:

- 11. It makes me preach the Book not about the Book

It was such a thrill to see how they were discovering these things for themselves. One of the young men shared that he had recently completed a four month series in his congregation, working systematically through Galatians. Hallelujah!