

From NT HELPS #2097 (SIDEBARS):

**A. "Gospelizing" (2097/*euangelizō*) – sharing the whole Gospel**

[...]

**Amping it up instead of dumbing it down!**

Beware of the fallacy that "ordinary people" coming to church need it "dumbed down" (because by implication, they are dumb). "Dumbing down" sermons from the Bible naturally avoid studying the details of the original text of Scripture.

Preaching-teaching *the Bible itself* takes the pressure off! Beware of specializing in "motivational messages" that merely allude (refer) to Scripture rather than *explaining* it.

"Topical preaching creates a particular mind-set in the congregation, and they typically demand more and more tempo and sparkling showmanship from that kind of speaker. All the topical preacher can do is, hope the tiger's taste for blood will eat him last!"

1. A sermon should be *Scripture-anchored*, keeping true to the Scripture *passage in its context*. "Preaching is generally most effective and accurate when based on a *full paragraph of Scripture*, sharing the text *verse-by-verse*" (G. Archer).

Some try to "save time and work" by preaching just *one verse* (or a *phrase*). But this "topical" or textual ("one verse") approach to preaching requires *more effort than "paragraph-preaching"*! Why? Because the preacher is then duty-bound to do a complete study of *each* word in the phrase throughout the Bible, in their individual contexts.

*Reflection:* Preaching should "drain a paragraph of Scripture dry," without "leap-frogging" (hopping) around the Bible – jumping from text to text without *contexts*! This style produces more *confusion* than light!

2. "Paragraph-preaching" honors the "sovereignty of the text" – and keeps the preacher *honest with the text* and its *context*. This provides *depth and variety* to *effectively feed the flock of God*. It also prevents the preacher from the *great error of separating inspiration from instruction!*

G. Campbell Morgan spoke of a preacher who "gave out his text and said, 'That is my text. I am now going to preach. Maybe we'll meet again, my text and I, and maybe not'" (*Preaching*, 40,42).

*Reflection: Inspiration and instruction belong together in Bible preaching and teaching. One at the expense of the other – is like rowing a boat with one oar (cf. Ecc 7:18)!*

[Proclaiming the Gospel involves two groups which are complementary: the "*academy*" (scholarly, academic community); and the "*practioners*" (working "on-the-ground"). The Bible college-seminary must retain an "on-the-ground" focus, and the practitioners preach, and teach, and reach out with power as they honor the full teaching of God's Word.

"Next-generation pastors" likewise are called to embrace both aspects (Eph 4:11,12).]

[...]

### **C. On the value and preparation of sermons . . .**

1 Cor 1:18-25: "<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, 'I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.' <sup>20</sup>Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since in the

wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (NASB).

### *Observations*

1. True preaching is *conviction-driven*. It aims at *persuasion* while still based on solid teaching. Preaching *passionately convinces* people about God's truths. The preacher must be *personally persuaded by God* – about the eternal importance of what is preached. Indeed effective sermons share what is *personally precious to the preacher* – i.e. burns in their heart *right at that time*. A key question then for the preacher is, "Am I living out this truth (challenge)," i.e. "Is God working out *this* truth in *my* life?"

*Reflection: Living out the truth of a text is essential to preaching with power. This makes preaching more than a "fireside chat" or a "casual talk" about the afterlife! True preaching is driven by a personal, God-inwrought conviction about the meaning of a text.*

2. *Instruction and inspiration* should stay together as the sermon moves *verse-by-verse* through a passage. This approach gives solid *teaching* and pointed *life-application*, combining to impact people's lives by the power of God. This also *overtakes the self-consciousness* of the preacher and inspires *spontaneous* "unexpected" expressions – like inspired emotions (jubilant joy,

weeping, etc.).

These should not be contrived ("worked up"), i.e. done simply for *the sake of effect*. But the *natural* results of *supernaturally-energized* preaching *do* include *God-inspired* changes with the *tempo of words* (going faster or slower), *pitch* (speaking higher or lower), and *volume* (becoming louder or softer).

*Reflection:* A sermon should *not* be "metered" for the *sake of effect*. This is mere *histrionics*. In contrast, "sanctified drama" is a valid by-product of being supernaturally borne along by the Holy Spirit. *How else could it be, when God emblazons truth on the heart?*

["*Anacoluthon*" sometimes occurs in Paul's writings – i.e. getting "so taken up" with the message the speaker "forgets" about the "form" of the sermon and moves in the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4).]

The preacher loses "(self)-consciousness" by giving *full priority* to the *impression the Holy Spirit* is making on people! We are too conscious of when our sermons "lag" as an "*art form*." Rather, we must focus on the *influence the Holy Spirit* has on listeners. This is what matters!

Preaching under the *influence of the Holy Spirit* is summarized by the words of John the Baptist, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (Jn 3:30)!

3. We are not called to *exhort people* from *our limited, personal frame of reference*! Rather, we are to *feed them* the Word of God by *preaching the Word* – not just *about* the Word! See Christ's *twice-repeated command*: "*Feed My lambs (sheep)*! See Jn 21:15-17.

*Reflection:* Martin Luther (commenting on preparing a

sermon), "First I shake the whole [apple] tree, that the *ripest* might fall. Then I *climb* the tree and *shake* each limb, and then each branch and then each twig, and then I look *under* each leaf."

Luther adds, "Pause at every verse of Scripture and shake, as it were, every bough of it, that if possible some fruit at least may drop down."

4. In sum, sharing the Bible *line-by-line* (*verse-by-verse*) is tried-and-true and *not surpassed* by "spinning a message" to "wow" people by trying to be so "relevant" we are no longer *timeless*! The *timeless* Gospel (Scripture) is *always relevant*!

*Reflection:* "A text, without a context, is only a pretext for a proof-text!"

Preaching Scripture is like releasing a lion. There is no need to defend it – just let it out of its cage and it will defend itself! (C. H. Spurgeon).

### **Key quotes**

- Martin Luther, "When I preach I regard neither doctors nor magistrates, of whom I have above forty in the congregation; I have all my eyes on the servant maids and on the children. And if the learned men are not well pleased with what they hear, well, the door is open.  
"A preacher must be both soldier and shepherd. He must nourish, defend, and teach; he must have teeth in his mouth, and be able to bite and fight.  
"He that has but one word of God before him, and out of that word cannot make a sermon, can never be a preacher"  
(*Table Talk*).
- John Wesley (about AD 1750), "Once in seven years I burn all

my sermons; for it is a shame if I cannot write better sermons now than I did seven years ago" (*Journal*).

- Charles G. Finney, "Great sermons lead the people to praise the preacher. Good preaching leads the people to praise the Saviour" (*Autobiography*, 72).

### **Steps in sermon preparation . . .**

Preaching delivers God's message in its *unity* and *progress* as the preacher stays *anchored* to the biblical text throughout the sermon. This preaches *the Word* – not just *about the Word* and honors the *sovereignty of the text* by being truly Scripture-centered (not "just scriptural").

#### ***Two key steps***

*Step one:* Select a Scripture passage in keeping with what the Lord has made alive (relevant) in the heart and "narrowed down" by simply looking in an original-language concordance for the particular word or phrase the Lord emblazons in the heart. This "match" with a specific Scripture passage enables the preacher to continue on as the Bible text itself informs the preacher (rather than the reverse!). In this way, the original idea of a sermon will not foist itself on the passage but rather the Scripture paragraph itself will develop the idea (sermon) *God's way*.

*Step two:* Search out the meanings of the key terms in the passage in a lexicon (original-language dictionary). Also pay attention to the "*connectors*" (conjunctions, prepositions) as they reveal the *overall flow* of the passage. This helps the preacher to see the *unity* needed in the *progress* of the sermon (which requires a central *thesis*).

- A *thesis* is the sermon "boiled down" to its *one-sentence*

summary. The thesis (proposition from the sermon) should be *explicitly* stated in the introduction of the sermon and naturally develops as the preacher works through the Scripture passage.

[It is good to state the *proposition* ("thesis") *more than once* – which helps the *progress and unity* of the message stay intact. The precise wording of the *thesis (proposition)* *may or may not occur* in the Scripture passage.]

- J. H. Jowett, "I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching . . . until we can express its theme in a *short, pregnant sentence* as clear as a crystal. I find the getting of *that sentence* is the hardest, the most exacting and the most fruitful labour in my study . . . I do not think any sermon ought to be preached, or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon."

[Ian Pitt-Watson, "Every sermon should be *ruthlessly unitary* in its theme. 'This is the first and greatest commandment!'" ]

### **Working it out . . .**

1. *Only an outline (skeletal notes* of the sermon) is needed in the pulpit, which enables the preacher to *maintain eye-contact*. More importantly, it permits the preacher to *remain open to the dynamic promptings of the Holy Spirit* – which are *critical* to true preaching!

*Reflection:* Good preaching is usually *extemporaneous* so sermons should *not generally be read verbatim* from notes. Writing the message out before preaching it however *is* an excellent practice.

*Reflection:* Charles Simeon, "Bring your text to a *simple proposition*, and lay that down as the warp; and then make use of the text itself as the woof; illustrating the main idea by the

various terms in which it is contained. Screw the word into the minds of your hearers. A screw is the strongest of all mechanical powers . . . when it has turned a few times, scarcely any power can pull it out" (*Christian Observer*, December 1821).

2. The *last* (not the first!) step of the sermon is making an outline which should *naturally arise* out of the Bible-paragraph. Artificially imposing an "alliterated grid" *forces* the text and should be stridently *avoided!* Few (if any) people remember our *sermon outlines* (even the next day!) – so *preaching the Word* (itself) is what matters, not *our* comments ("take") *about* the Word.

### ***In brief***

Solid preaching *remains anchored to the biblical text* which *supports a thesis* – a proposition which puts all "the pearls on *one string*." This gives a sermon *unity and progress*.

[Biblical sermons should always be characterized by *unity* generating *progress*.]

*Example:* When the text (paragraph) of the sermon has five verses, the preacher should *not* deliver *five different (distinct) sermons!* The *proposition unifies* the message (main points) for the listener. Usually, the number of main points should not be less than two, and not more than five.

Having an outline is very helpful, but it is the *last* part of sermon preparation. It should be crafted only after the preacher becomes *full of the truth of the text*.

*Reflection:* *Preaching the Word of God (Scripture)* is very different than merely being "*scriptural*." True preaching actually shares the *content* of the Bible (drawing it out verse-by-verse) – not merely alluding to (talking "*about*") the Word.

Chrysostom (about AD 400) used over 7,000 quotations from the OT and 11,000 from the NT in his recorded sermons.

[...]