

Unfortunately, there is much that passes as preaching which is not! New Testament preaching must be filled with “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27) calling for a righteous response from those who really hear (Rom. 6:17; Acts 2:42). The manipulative messenger should be barred from the ministry (II Cor. 2:16-17).

Scripture-saturated sermons that accurately reflect and direct the Word of God will elicit a Spirit-led response (Ps. 95:6-8). The only available cure for a culture corrupted by sin and uncertainty is the clear authority of God’s Word. “When the Bible speaks, God speaks” (Augustine). Good preaching requires the preacher to get out of the way so that the Word of God can do its work! In his book, *Preaching that Pleases God*, Tom Farrell points out that Ezra provides a model of what it means to really preach the Word of God in Nehemiah 8:

1. He exalted the word by “standing upon a pulpit of wood” (v. 4-5).
2. He expressed the word by reading it (v. 8).
3. He explained the word and “gave the sense” (v. 8).
4. He exhorted with the word “and caused them to understand” (v. 8).

PREACHING SHOULD BE SAVIOR-CENTERED (I Cor. 1:23). Every New Testament believer is to be a “witness” on behalf of Jesus (Acts 1:8). New Testament preaching should be Christ-centered even when the text considered is found in the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 44). “A truly expository Christ-centered sermon is not so concerned with the location of the cross in the message as with the necessity that each listener walk away from the sermon with a keen awareness of the personal import of God’s redeeming work. When the listeners depart do they focus on themselves or on their Redeemer? Do they look to their own works as their source of hope or to God’s work in their behalf? Has the message as a whole directed people to fuller understanding of grace” (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, Bryan Chapell, p. 300-301).

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Matt. 4:4



CONNECTING TO COLONIAL'S CORE - 3

PASTOR PHELPS

SCRIPTURE-SATURATED & SAVIOR-CENTERED PREACHING

Alan Wolfe is a social scientist who has been studying the American religious scene for years. In his book, *The Transformation of American Religion*, Wolfe notes that “religion in the United States is being transformed in radically new directions Talk of hell, damnation, and even sin has been replaced by a non-judgmental language of understanding and empathy. Gone are the arguments over doctrine and theology . . . More Americans than ever proclaim themselves born again in Christ, but the Lord to whom they turn rarely gets angry and frequently strengthens self-esteem.” Wolfe believes that in an effort to win over culture, American evangelicalism has stooped so low that it can no longer be distinguished from that culture. “Generally speaking,” says Wolfe, “preaching in evangelically oriented growth churches, however dynamic in delivery, has remarkably little content. Scripture is invariably cited but only as a launching pad to reinforce the message of salvation that Jesus can offer.” (Wolfe, p. 31-33) Alan Wolfe is a self-avowed unsaved man who says, “Watching sermons reduced to PowerPoint presentations or listening to one easily forgettable praise song after another makes one long for an evangelical willing to stand up, Luther-like, and proclaim his opposition to the latest survey of evangelical taste!” (p. 25)

The 21st century sermon is short, tactilely illustrated, electronically-enhanced, and doctrinally anemic. It is squeezed out of the order of service by the drama-team, sacred dancers, and praise choruses. Christ-centered, Scripture-saturated sermons are not only not the norm; they are increasingly unwelcomed, unwanted, and unknown but such preaching is part of Colonial’s Core because it is a true part of Christian worship.

CONNECTING

In John 4:23-24, Jesus says that the displeasing worship of the Samaritans and the Jews would be replaced by godly Christian worship balancing two essential characteristics:

1. “Spirit” – Real worship flows from the inside out (Rom. 1:9).
2. “Truth” – Real worship focuses on the revelation of God. Truth is a prerequisite of real worship (Ps. 145:18).

To worship in truth requires a right understanding of God’s Word (II Tim. 2:15). That is why Christ-centered, Scripture-saturated, expositional preaching is an essential part of Colonial’s Distinctively Non-negotiable Attributes. Preaching is an essential element of the worship of the New Testament Church.

In *Between Two Worlds*, John Stott says, “Word and worship belong indissolubly to each other. All worship is an intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God, because it is the adoration of his Name. Therefore, acceptable worship is impossible without preaching. For preaching is making known the Name of Lord, and worship is praising the Name of the Lord made known. Far from being an alien intrusion into worship, the reading and preaching of the Word are actually indispensable to it. The two cannot be divorced. Indeed, it is their unnatural divorce which accounts for the low level of so much contemporary worship. Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor. But when the Word of God is expounded in fullness, and the congregation begins to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before His throne. It is preaching which accomplishes this, the power of the Spirit of God. That is why preaching is unique and irreplaceable (p. 82-83).

EXAMPLES OF PREACHING AS THE CHURCH WORSHIPS

From the outset, believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). This was no incidental happening, it was an intentional habit. Pastor Timothy was reminded of the need to, “Preach the word” to the church at Ephesus. He was to “be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” The 1st century pastor was told of a time when professors “will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (II Tim. 4:2-3).

Paul’s testimony is that of a man committed to preaching the word to believers (Acts 20:7-9).

EXHORTATIONS TO PREACH AS THE CHURCH WORSHIPS

I Timothy 4:13 makes it clear that New Testament worshippers must hear God’s Word, “Till I come, give attendance to (public) reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” There is a threefold role of Scripture in the public worship service: The Bible is to be read aloud. This reading should be accurate and purposeful.

Then, Paul speaks of two aspects of the ministry of God’s Word that comprise a single event in the worship service that naturally follows the reading. There is to be “exhortation and doctrine (teaching).” In other words, the Bible is to be preached! Every sermon is to include:

1. Teaching – [“doctrine”] – What people should know.
2. Application – [“exhortation”] – What people must do.

Peter’s preaching on the Day of Pentecost contained both of these essential ingredients. “And with many other words did he testify [teaching] and exhort [application]” (Act 2:40).

God’s word is “breathed out” in order to make God’s people “perfect” (II Tim. 3:16-17). The ravages of sin are remediated by the power of God’s Word. God’s Word is designed to “correct what is wrong in the lives of people and supply what is missing” (Gary Reimers, *The Glory Due His Name*, p. 46).

ESSENTIALS IN PREACHING AS THE CHURCH WORSHIPS

Bill Hybels of The Willow Creek Church tries to interest unbelievers by focusing on “their marriages, their priorities, their emotions, their finances, their parenting, their quest for fulfillment, their sexuality” (*Rediscovering Church*, p. 174). Yet, in the same book, he warns, “Watch out for going overboard with ‘felt-need’ or ‘helpful’ messages. When you’re involved in a seeker ministry, it’s tempting to go for long periods of time on what I call junk-food preaching diets. In other words, giving people biblical wisdom to improve their relationships, smooth their emotions, deal with their daily problems, and put some zip back in their marriage The reality is that you’ll never grow up fully devoted followers of Christ on a spiritual diet of Twinkies” (p. 185).

“Worship is certainly not merely an emotional exercise with God-words or musical sounds that induce certain feelings. Worship is certainly not a mystical catharsis of human passion detached from any rational thought or biblical precept. True worship is a response of adoration and praise prompted by truth that God has revealed” (*Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, MacArthur, p. 162).

Some preachers specialize in scuba-diver preaching. “They go down deep, they stay down long and they come up dry.” Some preachers specialize in sky-scraper sermons. “They place one story upon another and in the end come to no point.” Expository preaching exposes the Spirit-given meaning of the text, giving the meaning of the context, the words, and the history in order to bring forward the instruction that changes lives.

PREACHING SHOULD BE SCRIPTURE SATURATED. The preacher is commanded to “preach the word” (II Tim. 4:2). Personal opinion, philosophical musings, and political meanderings have no place in the pulpit. The power of the pulpit is the power of the word (Is. 8:20). The minister of God’s Word stands as an ambassador of heaven and delivers the message of God (II Cor. 5:20).