

What Is Appropriate in Preaching?

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Introduction

To the Corinthians Paul wrote: “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).¹ *Woe* is the usual term the prophets used to announce God’s judgment on nations, cities, and individuals. The Lord frequently employed this term in crying out against sin and error among the Jewish leaders, using it seven times in Matthew 23 alone (KJV). Paul used the term in 1 Corinthians 9:16 in recognition that he was under the threat of God’s judgment if he failed in his responsibility to preach the Gospel.

To ask what is appropriate in preaching is to imply that some behaviors and messages are appropriate, while others may be inappropriate. Our task is to discover and emphasize what Gospel preaching involves. While we will be thinking to a great degree of men who preach in pulpits and who devote their lives to preaching, the truths we will consider will apply in principle to every Christian. The New Testament confines to men public preaching that addresses mixed assemblies (1 Timothy 2:11–12); so no women may Scripturally devote their lives to this work. Of course, not all Christian men devote their lives to the work of preaching. However, there is a sense in which every child of God must be involved in “preaching”—communicating the Gospel to as many as possible. Though few may have been “preachers” in any occupational sense, when Luke described the mass of brethren who had to flee Jerusalem because of the fiery persecution Saul of Tarsus incited, he said “*they went about preaching the word*” (Acts 8:4).

Preachers Must *Preach* the Gospel

The word *preach* in 1 Corinthians 9:16 is from the Greek word *euangelizo*, and, according to the Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon, it simply means to “bring or announce good news.... mostly specif. of the divine message of salvation, the

Messianic proclamation, the gospel...proclaim, preach.”² In its various forms, this term is found fifty-five times in the Greek New Testament. Through the pen of Mark, Jesus commanded: “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation*” (16:15). The Greek word behind *preach* in this passage is *kerusso*, which, in its various forms, is found sixty-one times in the New Testament. Joseph Henry Thayer defined this word, in part, as follows: “to proclaim after the manner of a herald; always with a suggestion of formality, gravity, and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed.”³

One cannot read the history of God’s preachers in the New Testament without being impressed with how authoritatively they preached, as the aforementioned definition of *kerusso* indicates. They did not offer the Gospel message as one-among-several, good messages. They had not heard of politically correct religious pluralism. As the apostles began to execute the great commission, one is struck by the authority with which they preached the Gospel, beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–40). They boldly proclaimed—in the face of severe persecution—that salvation was in the name of Christ alone (4:12). The apostles instructed “second generation” preachers to preach in the same manner. Paul commanded Timothy to “*preach the word*” so as to “*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*” his auditors (2 Timothy 4:2). He ordered Titus to “*speak and exhort and reprove with all authority*” (Titus 2:15).

The Change-Agent phenomenon in the church has chosen worship as a major target (this matter will be discussed fully in other chapters). It has especially sought to undermine and weaken preaching, if not eliminate it altogether. The Change Agents know that they must get rid of forceful and faithful Gospel preaching if they are to fashion the church according to their denominational pattern. Precept precedes practice; practice follows doctrine. To change the practice, they must first silence the messenger or alter or replace the message. The outcry in the 1960s and 1970s against “negative” and “dogmatic” preaching was the seedbed of this effort. It was an attempt to remove the authority status that true Gospel preaching has enjoyed from New Testament times. It has succeeded to a remarkable and alarming degree.

The attack on authoritative Gospel preaching is clearly demonstrated in such things as: (1) eliminating an invitation that includes the plan of salvation; (2) moving the preacher from the pulpit down to auditorium floor level, (3) encouraging him to dress in casual, everyday (sometimes sloppy) attire, (4) replacing preaching with a panel discussion, (5) cutting the sermon time to no longer than fifteen or twenty minutes, (6) replacing the Sunday evening worship assembly (and its preaching) with small group meetings in homes, (7) replacing preaching with subjective “testimonials,” (8) ridiculing book, chapter, and verse (liberals sometimes call it “concordance”) preaching, (9) debunking “doctrinal” preaching in favor of preaching only on “grace,” “love,” “peace” (as they define them, of course), and “social” issues, and (10) substituting dramatic skits for preaching.⁴

Another way the Change Agents have dumbed down the Biblical concept of Gospel preaching is by slyly introducing the word *sharing* in reference to it. We do not read in God’s Word of preachers who “shared” the Gospel **with** their hearers, but of those who “preached” the Gospel **to** their hearers. As noted earlier, Christ commanded us to **preach** the Gospel and Paul commanded us to **preach** the Word. *Preach* is an authoritative word that implies an authoritative message—the Gospel. That is the reason the Holy Spirit employed it. *Share* is a good word in some contexts, but in the context of delivering the Gospel, it is a milque-toast term for a milque-toast approach. That is the reason the Holy Spirit does **not** use it.

Communication experts in the secular world recognize the implications of the “sharing” approach in public speaking. *The Regan Report*, a newsletter for communications executives, observed several years ago that speakers who dote on “sharing” when they make a speech do not really do so at all. It states: “They are being manipulatively humble and phonily democratic. They pretend that we have come for dialogue, but instead they speak and we listen with the foolish pretense that we are **communicating with each other**” (emph. DM). Some time ago I was listening to the well-known Rush Limbaugh’s radio program and heard him discuss this very connotation of “sharing” and its frequent use by political and

philosophical liberals. He announced that he would thenceforth cease to use the term.

If this implication is true in business and other secular communication contexts, it is no less true in Gospel communication. *Share* is one of those grossly overused “in” words (not only by preachers, but by speakers in the world) that I would like to see become an “out” word, especially by Gospel preachers. I have to strongly resist the urge to turn off a preacher when he begins saying he has something to “share” with his hearers. The term is so overworked that one Sunday I heard a brother begin the announcements by saying, “I want to share a few announcements with you.”

Some may object that this distinction is more imaginary than real when it comes to preaching the Gospel. Indeed, it is not. *Preach* correctly implies that the speaker delivers an authoritative message to others who need it and who should learn from it. This is always the relationship between the saved and the lost, the informed and the uninformed, respectively. Contrariwise, *share* implies joint-communication, two-way exchange, dialogue between speaker and listeners involved, both of whom have a message needed by the other. This is obviously not the case between sinner and saint or the uninformed and the informed; the latter has what the former needs, but not vice versa.⁵ Thus the New Testament does not employ the idea of “sharing” (either verbally or conceptually) in the work of preaching the Gospel. Further, one will be hard pressed to find the “sharing” terminology used by the stalwart preachers of the nineteenth century and the first sixty years of the twentieth century.

The “sharing” concept in public speaking came a couple of generations ago from secular romantics and psychologists who did/do not believe in the existence of objective truth or in the presentation of an authoritative message. It was an early manifestation of the rampant “political correctness” in society today. First compromisers, followed by outright liberals among us, picked the term up and began using it, apparently thinking they could sort of “sneak up” on sinners without really preaching the Gospel plainly to them. The “sharing” terminology began to appear in our pulpits coordinate with the outcry against “negative” and

“dogmatic” preaching in the 1960s. More than coincidentally, the rapid numerical growth of the church began to decline at about the time this attitude began to take hold among preachers.

In recent years, “sharing” has become one of the “darling” words of liberals in the church whom some mistake for Gospel preachers—and with good reason. *Sharers* fits them far better than *preachers*. They do not even like to be **called** “preachers” because this word connotes Scriptural authority, which they despise. Just as they have rejected Scriptural boundaries for their own doctrine and practice, they shrink from emphasizing said authority to others. When they step into the pulpit, rather than preaching a Gospel sermon with some food for the soul, they must “share” an experience, a poem, a lesson, a story, or something else (maybe even a Scripture occasionally!) in a pitiful 15–20-minute talk. Hundreds of congregations are languishing in Biblical beriberi and spiritual scurvy because they are hearing little or no Gospel preaching from such men. Brethren are being “shared” to death spiritually by these fellows week after week.

I have never heard a liberal speak or write very long who did not feel compelled to “share” something. However, liberals are not the only ones who have adopted the “sharing” terminology. I frequently hear it in prayers and sermons (and announcements, as noted above) from sound and faithful brethren. Certainly, one errs in concluding that everyone who employs the “sharing” terminology is therefore a liberal. Faithful brethren who do so have been influenced by and are playing right into the hands of liberals without realizing it, however. I believe faithful brethren use the term out of habit, unconscious of either its origin or implications relating to public speaking in general and to preaching. I challenge such brethren to break the habit of “sharing” in the pulpit or even in teaching a Bible class. It simply does not belong in a Biblical vocabulary relating to the authoritative communication of the Gospel.

The world and the church need far more than sickening-sweet “sharing” of religious platitudes and pop-psychology. They need far more than a group of sissified, sanctimonious “*reeds shaken with the wind*” (Matthew 11:7) masquerading as Gospel preachers, who care more about social and

entertainment activities than they do for the Word of God and never-dying souls. The world and the church need to hear **preaching** by Gospel **preachers**. If one wishes to call me by some term he thinks I might consider derogatory, he will have to choose some term besides *preacher*. Paul said, *Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.*” The saying is quaint, but true: “God had but one Son, and He was a Gospel preacher.”

Preachers Must Preach *Only* the Gospel

Paul could preach no other message and please God; neither can any man. Those who preach a perverted or changed (attention Change Agents!) Gospel have the damnation of God resting upon them (Galatians 1:7–9). It matters not if a man is the companion of presidents and rulers, has written fifty and sold forty million books, and preaches for a church with four thousand members. It matters not if one is president of a “Christian” university or is a tenured religion faculty professor with a half-dozen PhDs. It is of no consequence if one has a TV audience of millions, or can draw thousands to his metropolitan crusades. Nor does it matter if he mounts a pulpit in a building that still has “Church of Christ” on its marquee. **If he preaches anything different from the Holy Spirit-revealed Gospel, he is “anathema.”** The tragedy of the loss of the souls of such false prophets is compounded by the loss of all of those who follow them (Matthew 15:14).

We must preach **only** the Gospel, because it alone is the “*power of God unto salvation*” (Romans 1:16) and the sole means by which one is begotten of God (1 Corinthians 4:15; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). God therefore demands absolute purity in the Gospel message. In spite of this, preachers in religious bodies unauthorized by the Sacred Text waste their own time and souls and those of their hearers with discourses containing gross religious perversions. Many of them love to demonstrate their knowledge of psychology and philosophy, but evince little or no knowledge of the Word of God.

It is sad beyond expression that it is little better in some of our pulpits. Some “preachers” seem far more enamored with various wild speculations of

infidel theologians and silly theories of modernistic skeptics than with what the Bible teaches. Others (both elders and preachers), who have not gone that far, are caught up in the “grow at any cost” fads they have learned from the “community churches” and other denominational mega-churches with their “super-star,” “dynamic” pastors. Many in the pews are so Biblically ignorant, worldly, and materialistic in their thinking that they are willing to pay top dollar for such a man. Never mind the shallowness or outright error (in case they happened to recognize it) of the message, as long as the messenger is “dynamic” and can keep them awake with his funny stories for a few minutes on Sunday morning. This sorry situation is based on sheer emotionalism in both the preacher and the hearers.

Solid, plain, unvarnished preaching of the Gospel is repulsive to this class of spiritual-weakling pulpiteers and those who pay their keep. Such are those who think the congregation will die without a gymnasium for basketball, volleyball, and exercise classes. It just cannot have a successful “outreach” program without it! (*Outreach* is another one of those “in” words the liberals borrowed from the denominations and some faithful brethren have borrowed from the liberals. *Outreach* is another “in” word I would like to “out-throw.”)

Some congregations shamelessly show reruns of the *Andy Griffith Show* and *Mayberry RFD* and talk about the “family values” they include in place of what once were Bible classes on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. Some show movies (complete with pop corn) and invite the public in order to “win souls.” One congregation produced and performed in its auditorium the rock opera, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, as its major “outreach” effort of the year.

We have observed many imaginative gimmicks the last few years that bypassed Gospel preaching in an effort to produce numerical and/or spiritual growth. One fellow made rounds with his “Gymnastics to the Glory of God” show. (He may be old enough now that he has had to change it to “Geriatrics to the Glory of God.”) One brother put together an act called “Magic for the Master” about twenty years ago. He and I had a brief discussion about his work on one

occasion, and he handed me one of his calling cards as we parted. I later happened to turn the card over and found that he was multi-talented. The backside advertised “Juggling for Jesus.” These silly sashays into sensationalism fit right in with the “clown ministry” in some congregations. I would be pleased to learn where any such gadgets for the supposed purpose of evangelism or doing anything else pertaining to the Lord’s kingdom are authorized in the Scriptures.

Some congregations (most of them large and liberal in metropolitan areas) have so loaded themselves with “ministerial staffs” that one punster has referred to the phenomenon as a religious “staff infection.” The Richland Hills “Church of Christ” (a misnamed denomination that was a sound congregation thirty-five years ago) just north of Fort Worth, Texas, boasts the following list and photographs of twenty-two persons (three of whom are women) under “Our Ministers” on its Website:⁶

- Senior Minister of the Word
- New Member/Involvement
- Senior Minister of Administration and Finance
- Praise and Worship Minister
- Minister to Senior Adults
- Minister to Single Adults
- Youth Minister Coordinator
- Missions Minister
- Associate Youth Minister (3 of these)
- Adult Education Minister
- Minister of Outreach (2 of these)
- Body Life Minister
- Director of Counseling
- Minister of Evangelistic Small Groups
- Minister to College
- Minister of Recreation

- Senior Minister of Church Life
- Children's Minister
- Single-Parent Family Minister

Not to be out-done, a church bulletin in Atlanta, Georgia, listed a "Minister of Socio-Economic and Political Affairs," and another listed a "Minister of the Parking Lot."

Does not this list show a woeful respect of persons? Why did they leave out a "Minister of the Middle-aged," a "Minister of the Married," a "Minister of the Men," a "Minister of the Women," a "Minister of the Employers," a "Minister of the Employees," and others? "But that's ridiculous," someone says, "for the New Testament forbids such distinctions as men-women and rich-poor. We are all one in Christ." This is precisely my point, as Paul emphasized: *"There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28)*. Neither do we see any special attention given in the New Testament church to single folk, young folk, old folk, or other subgroups one might delineate. Such represents a specialization concept that is all right in the field of medicine, but that God never ordained for His church. Such artificial divisions tend toward segmentation of various groups within the local congregation. They imply a deficiency in the Gospel and the church as given by Christ.

To some it is not enough to preach only the Gospel and let it cause people to obey, thus letting the church grow as God gives the increase. They must attempt to stimulate artificial growth by various means. These misguided brethren run in a circle. They are offering social and recreational activities and services and employing psychological manipulation in their long litany of "programs" and "ministries." Such things have a strong appeal to the general public, especially to materialistic and worldly folk. When these freebies (which may have little or nothing to do with the Bible) start drawing the crowds, the manipulators say, "God must be pleased with what we are doing. Look how He is blessing us with

growth!” So they add some additional come-ons and gimmicks and even more people come.

They err, however, in crediting God for such “growth.” By their own scheming and promotionalism they attract the crowds, and any enterprise—secular or religious— could swell its clientele by such measures. Congregations that boast of great numerical growth by such means have little more of God and His Gospel in them than any other high-powered entertainment, social, or business operation. They simply hide behind a quasi-religious mask. Church growth that is thus artificially stimulated can only produce artificial growth. Whatever it takes to get the crowd there, it will take more of it to keep the crowd coming back. God said that rebellious Israel engaged in practices “*which I commanded not, neither came it into my mind*” (Jeremiah 7:31). I believe He would say the same thing about the practices described above. All such innovations go back to one starting point—a failure to preach (and practice) **only** the Gospel.

Preachers Must Preach *All* of the Gospel

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that while he was among them preaching the Gospel he “*shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27). The Lord promised the apostles He would send the Holy Spirit Who would teach them **all** things, bring to their remembrance **all** that He had taught them, and guide them into **all** the Truth (John 14:26; 16:13). God has inspired **all** Scripture so as to furnish us completely unto **every** good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Only when **all** of the Gospel is preached and received do we have **all** things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter. 1:3). Through God’s grace, He has given us the faith once for **all** delivered (Jude 3). A Gospel “in part” is a defective message; it is no Gospel at all.

We often hear of the need for “balanced” preaching. This is a worthy concern as long as “balance” is Scripturally defined. However, to some, “balanced” preaching is that which is never “negative,” confrontational, dogmatic, or authoritative, but which predominantly dwells on “grace” and “love” (as they

define them) and which is couched in terms of insipid suggestions. I suggest that the only way anyone can be sure he is doing “balanced” preaching is to preach *“the whole counsel of God.”* Ironically, to so preach nowadays is to be accused of doing “unbalanced” preaching by the liberal element.

Our age is cursed not only with having those who preach outright error. Many men stand in our pulpits who preach the Truth on the subjects they address. The problem is that they just do not ever “get around” to preaching on certain topics and themes. Thus, while they do not preach blatant error, they preach only a measure of the Truth. We must understand that to deliberately preach less than the entire Gospel message is but another means of preaching error—and the devil is pleased. Those who preach must, to the very best of their abilities, settle for nothing less than the whole message in their preaching. Those who listen must demand the whole message from preachers.

This problem is a growing one in the church, and it has a triple thrust: **First**, many in the church will not tolerate hearing all of the Gospel. Some want to parade in public almost nude, keep their refrigerators stocked with beer, commit suicide by smoking or dipping, visit the bars and dance halls when they please, and continue in their God-forbidden marriages. Others cannot bear to hear strong “doctrinal” preaching that exposes error and sets forth dogmatic Truth. The worst thing a preacher can do is to mention by name a man who is a false teacher. They would rather let their Baptist friends go to Hell believing Baptist doctrine than to hear their preacher identify the Baptist Church as a human order with no Biblical right to exist. Such brethren invented the sage advice: “Just preach the Gospel, and let everyone else along.” Another group in most local churches may be morally upright, but various ones among them are as stingy as Ebenezer Scrooge, forsake the assembly at will, or they have tongues that can curl a porcupine’s quills. These folk are completely comfortable as long as the preacher preaches on baptism, the church, or the Lord’s supper. They often get very testy, however, if the preaching reflects the *“whole counsel of God”* so as to address their cherished sins.

In generations past, such folk would either repent or leave the congregation, but the last few years it has become increasingly common for them to stay and try to oust the preacher and/or the elders who dared make them feel guilty. “We’ll take our money and go elsewhere if you don’t tone that preacher down. After all, he’s just a hired hand.” Those who will not tolerate the whole Gospel are exercising increasing dominance in local churches, and more and more good preachers are being fired because of their influence. It is not uncommon for congregations to keep the sinners and ask the preacher to leave, rather than vice versa.

Second, it seems that preachers in ever-growing numbers are unwilling to preach all of the Gospel anymore. Far too many are content to ignore the morass of worldly behavior and liberal and denominational thinking characteristic of their respective congregations. Some of them have openly embraced the liberal lies, while others have just become pulpit puppets who are determined to keep their jobs at whatever compromise necessary. We should not confuse Gospel preachers with these “semi-gospel sharers.” These fellows are sanctimonious spiritual sissies who profess to be too “loving” and “kind” to get down in the trenches and wage war against the doctrinal errors and sins that have taken control of hundreds of congregations. They are more likely to excuse, defend, and embrace false teachers, rather than name and expose them. In doing so, they set themselves up as superior to the Lord, the apostle Paul, and indeed to all of God’s prophets of both the Old and New Testaments.

Paul, in his powerful prophecy that fits our time so well, rebuked both preacher and hearer who could not tolerate all of the Gospel:

Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables (2 Timothy 4:2–4).

Third, some congregations and schools are so far gone they intentionally recruit these “semi-gospel sharers” to fill their pulpits, classrooms, and

lectureship rosters. To such erstwhile brethren, the cardinal sin is for the preacher to offend the most sensitive or liberal soul who hears them. (Of course, they care not if the Lord and other lovers of all the Truth are offended by their corrupted message.) Such folk would not knowingly let a plain-spoken Gospel preacher within five miles of their bailiwicks. Yet these same ones openly embrace, support, and even honor false teachers and factionists who long ago proved themselves to be Trojan horses in the kingdom. Elders and preachers in such congregations would never question any member's marital situation nor think of withdrawing from the most blatant sinner. The only thing that might move them to withdrawal of fellowship would be some "troublemaker" who insisted on hearing the whole Gospel from the pulpit and the classrooms.

One will not pursue his determination to preach all of the Gospel very long without being tested for doing so. He will perhaps even be tempted sometimes by the rich, by the powerful, by friends, or even by family, not to preach it fully, but he must not yield. To be Gospel preachers we must remain committed to preaching not merely some, much, or even most of the Gospel, but **all** of it. We labor under the woe of God if we do anything less.

Preachers Must Preach the Gospel *in the Right Way*

There are right and wrong motives, spirits, and manners with which one may preach the Gospel. Paul wrote of such in his time: "*Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one do it of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel; but the other proclaim Christ of faction, not sincerely...*" (Philippians 1:15–17). Every man who decides he wants to preach should carefully examine his motives for this decision, and he should continue to examine his motives during his preaching life. Further, all of us who preach should strive at all times to preach in a manner and spirit that comport with those of the inspired men. What elements can we glean from the way in which these men preached?

We Must Preach Out of Love

Any lesser motive would have soon failed the Lord and the apostles, given the trials and perils their preaching provoked. The love that moved them was two-fold, and rightly ordered. Most of all they loved God, followed closely by their love for the souls of men (Matthew 22:37–39). Paul reminds us that, even if we can speak (preach) fluently in the languages of men and angels and prophesy powerfully, without love our preaching amounts to noise-making (1 Corinthians 13:1–2).

One should also preach in a loving manner, as Paul urged: “*speaking the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15). If one’s motivation to preach is love, it is likely that his manner of preaching will follow suit. Love will not allow one to intentionally and unnecessarily offend those who hear him just for the sake of offending them. However, the same love will not allow him to withhold the Truth his hearers need for fear of offending some of them. The Old Testament prophets, the Lord, and the apostles often offended those who heard them preach. To preach in love does not mean mere softness or sweetness. The inspired men of old often spoke in terms that were neither. “Love” must never be used as an excuse for compromising the Gospel or ignoring sin and error. Contrariwise, Biblical love demands, rather than prevents, the proclamation of the Truth in a straightforward, uncompromising manner. If we bowed to the demands for “loving” preaching as some define it, no sinner would ever learn his need of a Savior. **Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel out of love.**

We Must Preach with Simplicity

The Gospel is basically a very simple message. Admittedly, it is deep and complex in some of its subjects and parts, but men tend to complicate its simplest features. Paul possessed education and ability to the point of eloquence, as various portions of his epistles prove. However, when he addressed the erudite philosophers of his day in Athens, his message was a model of simple, direct terms (Acts 17:23–31). Paul could have addressed the citizens of Corinth (also a seat of learning and culture) with “*excellency of speech*

or of wisdom,” but instead made the crucified Christ his theme (1 Corinthians 2:1–2). Later, when these brethren were fussing over the gift of tongues, he wrote them that he would rather speak five words that they could understand than ten thousand words they could not understand (14:19). Both Peter and Jude warn that a trademark of false teachers is the use of “*great swelling words*” (2 Peter. 2:18; Jude 16).

The Truth did not sweep like a prairie fire across the frontier of the fledgling United States in the first half of the nineteenth century on the shoulders of theologians with PhDs. Without question there were intellectual giants such as Alexander Campbell and J.W. McGarvey, Moses E. Lard, and others who contributed much. For the most part, however, the restored church grew so rapidly mostly from the preaching of men with little formal education, but who possessed a great zeal and love for the Bible.

It may come as a shock to many that they used the King James Version. The excuse so many give for wanting to produce, introduce, and/or use recently published, “modern-speech” versions of the Bible is that the King James Version is too difficult for moderns to understand. Poppycock! From its general acceptance in 1644 until 1885 it was the only English Bible in circulation. It was the Bible of the men who heralded the great plea for restoration. Were they more literate than the recent generations? Although I use the 1901 American Standard Version in my studies and preaching, I nonetheless count the King James Version as reliable and worthy of great respect. There will doubtless be millions in Heaven who learned and obeyed the Truth from that impossible-to-understand version.

Those who argue that the modern versions use simpler words have a point. In fact, some modern versions have “simplified” much of the Truth right off of the page. I would much rather explain to my grandchildren the meaning of such terms as “*wot not*,” “*to wit*,” “*Holy Ghost*,” “*compassed about*,” and others in the KJV text than to attempt to explain why such terms as “*sinful nature*,” “*Saturday night*” (observance of the Lord’s supper), “*faith alone*” (as sufficient for salvation), and other such errors are in a book with *Holy Bible* on its cover. Those

who excuse publication of the unending and confusing plethora of new versions often allege the “inability” of people to understand such older versions as the KJV and the ASV. However, the dirty little secret of the real driving force behind the incessant publication of versions is money from their sales. I oppose the extremists who anathematize every version besides the King James. But I also oppose the extremists who would cast it on history’s ash heap as a relic which modern man has outgrown. If our great-great-great-grandparents could read, understand, obey, and preach from it, surely we can today.

Many theologians are as bad about using “theologese” as lawyers are about using “legalese” when they speak and write. Consider the following example from one who for seventeen years was touted as one of its “scholars” by Abilene Christian University:

There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the son of God, but who differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism, ecclesiological matters such as congregational organization, or soteriological matters such as whether baptism is “for” or “because of” the remission of sins.⁷

I do not know how much it cost this man to get his doctoral degrees from Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tennessee, and from St. Andrew’s in Scotland, but I believe he more than wasted his money. *Eschatological*, *ecclesiological*, and *soteriological* are hardly words that come down the pike most of us live on every day. Even if his readers know what they mean, however, what he said about them was nothing short of heresy. He is teaching that premillennialism and anti-ism should not be fellowship issues and Baptist doctrine on the purpose of baptism is just as good as Bible doctrine. While it was not true that Paul’s “*much learning*” had made him mad (Acts 26:24), I am not so sure that these words do not fit this apostate brother and his elitist comrades. (Imagine the destructive influence this man has had as he has taught precious young people for seventeen years.)

We should never oppose true scholarship or the thirst for more knowledge. Preachers must continue to study and learn as long as they have the

mental capacity to do so. However, the notion that one has to have a PhD degree from a theological seminary or divinity school to be a Bible scholar is sheer folly. In fact, a large percentage of brethren who have gone to such schools have come back fuller of doubts, skepticism, and denominational ideas and terminology than of the Bible. Such men have proved to be a veritable curse to the church of the Lord. They have been a major source of the Change Agent movement in the schools and congregations over the past generation.

The Lord revealed the very words of Scripture through the Holy Spirit to inspired men (1 Corinthians 2:10, 13). One does not love the Truth very much who is uncomfortable with its terminology. We will not stray from the Book as long as we hold dear the time- and battle-tested slogans that admonish us to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where there Bible is silent and to call Bible things by Bible names. Paul's warning is ever current: *"I fear lest by any means your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:3). **Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel in simplicity.**

We Must Preach with Boldness

Luke used *boldness* or some form of it eight times in Acts to describe the preaching of the apostles and others. Paul used it eleven times in his letters in reference to his own behavior or that which he urged on others. Boldness is the opposite of cowardice, reticence, timidity, or undue reserve. Boldness is not mere loudness, but it will cause one to speak up and speak out with the Truth and to stand one's ground in the face of opposition, threat, or danger. To be bold is to risk offending others in order to save them. To be bold also means to risk reprisal and ridicule, both from brethren and from those in the world. Paul described his boldness when he wrote: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel"* (Romans 1:16).

When a few brethren in about 1960 began to convince others that our fathers in the faith had been too bold with the Gospel, that was the very time that the dramatic growth of our congregations began to dwindle. We will not regain the growth pattern of yesteryear on any solid basis by borrowing the silly

gimmicks and errors of false teachers, as some seem to think. We will not regain it by mouthing ambiguous platitudes, polite little speeches, or quasi-religious pop-psychology pep-talks. We will not regain it by delivering insipid sermonettes that could be delivered in any denominational pulpit without causing a ripple. We will not regain it by so speaking and acting toward denominational error and division as if we have no problems with their errors or that we are in cahoots with them. We will not regain it by trying to appear to worldlings that we have little or no objections to their fornication, drinking, dishonesty, selfishness, and general denial of God in their utter secularism.

If I read the New Testament aright, the only kind of growth that pleases the Lord and that is true and lasting is that which comes from Paul's inspired formula: *"I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase"* (1 Corinthians 3:6). Both Paul and Apollos preached the Gospel boldly and uncompromisingly and allowed God's powerful Word to do its work in good and honest hearts. **Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel boldly.**

We Must Preach with Humility

When God commissioned Jeremiah to be His prophet, he responded: *"Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, I know not how to speak; for I am a child"* (Jer. 1:6). Some have been critical of Jeremiah's attitude. Rather than criticizing Jeremiah for his reticence, I believe we should praise him for his humility and modesty. Perhaps he was not so much trying to avoid doing what God commanded as he was wondering aloud how, knowing his own limitations, he would ever be able to accomplish it. Hardly any character trait so beautifully adorns the personality as humility. This seems especially so in preachers.

Because our Lord, the greatest preacher of all, was *"meek and lowly in heart"* (Matthew 11:29), He washed the disciples' feet (John 13:14) and urged His followers to follow His example (v. 15). Surely, preachers are not exempt from His beatitude: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (5:3). When Paul preached in Ephesus, he did so in *"lowliness of mind"* (Acts 20:19). His warning to all certainly includes those who preach: *"Doing*

nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself" (Philippians 2:3). As mentioned earlier, in spite of such warnings and exhortations, Paul tells us that there were self-centered, ego-maniac preachers in the first century who preached out of envy and strive (1:15). Unfortunately, they are not extinct.

Pride is a temptation of special severity to preachers because people approach them for answers to their questions, seek their counsel, and publicly praise them. If they do not take care, they can begin to believe all of those nice things people may write or say about them. (Of course, wives, elders, and certain self-appointed critics usually help keep them down to earth!) Few things are more disgusting to right-thinking people than a preacher who touts his own ability, education, influence, or importance. Solomon's advice in Proverbs 27:2 is especially valuable for all who preach: *"Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips."*

I am convinced that pride is what has led some to abandon the Truth and adopt the liberal slop of theological pluralism. I am also convinced that some have adopted and continue to propagate strange, quirky heresies in order to feed a bloated ego that craves extra attention. As described above, some among us who have attained advanced degrees (many of whom are on the faculties of our schools) look down their "ivory tower" noses at the "unscholarly" fellows who have no more sense than to study and preach the Bible. These self-proclaimed "scholars" are for the most part the leaders in the determined effort to cast the church of our Lord in the denominational mold. In their pride they cannot stand for their denominational academic peers to accuse them of being "narrow" in their concepts of fellowship, the conditions of pardon, worship, and like subjects.

However, one does not have to be a doctrinal fruitcake, a theological liberal, or someone educated beyond his intelligence to fall prey to pride. Those who are sticklers for the Truth can also succumb to this deadly sin. It seems that some preachers are not content to let "cream rise to the top." Some, in their youth, allow ambition to drive them as they openly seek position and prominence that have come to others only after decades of faithful and difficult work.

I know a young man with exceptional ability who preached for a few years and who has an almost unbounded ambition. He cannot stand to be bested, even in a game of Monopoly. Whenever corrected, he has some excuse or rationalization. He plays up to those through whom he hopes to gain some advantage, while treating with rudeness and/or ridicule those he considers to be his inferiors (especially children and women). He craves attention and makes himself obnoxious in its pursuit. He knows all of the answers. He goes out of his way to impress people (in pulpit and classroom and on a personal level) with what he considers to be his superior knowledge. He is pushy, selfish, and impudent, frequently touting his own talents (of which he admittedly has many). He was doctrinally stalwart during his preaching years. He eventually deserted his family and the church, quit preaching, and remarried. There is no chance he would ever recognize himself in the foregoing description—he is far too egotistical to do so. Pride was his fatal downfall.

A few years ago a preacher I know reportedly asked some fellow preachers how one went about getting an invitation to speak on “one of those lectureships,” for he would surely like to be on one. As a lectureship director, I have had some men over the years have recommended themselves and offered their services as speakers or writers. I have always thanked them politely—and not invited them. Such brethren remind me of a twelve-year old fledgling song leader who tries to lead “The New Song” or of a new convert wanting to begin an immediate study of Revelation.

Though they may not have a string of degrees after their names or be the greatest orators, those men who preach God’s Truth in humility and at great sacrifice because they would rather die than compromise it are nonetheless great in the eyes of God: *“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted”* (Matthew 23:12). Jeremiah was just such a man. The proud man asks, when charged with great responsibility, “I thought you would never call.” The humble servant, as Jeremiah, asks, “How can one of such mean ability possibly be equal to the task?” No suit of clothes ever looked better on a Gospel preacher than the suit of humility! Let us cultivate the

beautiful and commendable trait advocated in Romans 12:3: *“For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.”*

An unknown poet wrote:

How ready is the man to go,
Whom God hath never sent!
How timorous, diffident, and slow,
God’s chosen instrument!

Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel in humility.

We Must Preach with Urgency

When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he reminded them that while among them he had *“ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears”* (Acts 20:31). Later, Timothy was in Ephesus when Paul instructed him: *“Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching”* (2 Timothy 4:2). Jude describes the urgency of our saving the lost as *“snatching them out of the fire”* (v. 23). The obedient responses of sinners to the Gospel were immediate (i.e., *“there were added unto them in that same day,” “what does hinder me to be baptized?” “the same hour of the night,”* et al.), implying the urgency their teachers conveyed to them.

We need to preach so as to provoke decisions in those who hear—decisions to make whatever changes or take whatever steps necessary, privately or publicly, to comply with the infallible standard, the Word of God. Those who preach, but who have no sense of urgency about their work may need to consider some other kind of work. We dare not rob the Gospel of its power by leaving our hearers with the impression that it is a “ho-hum,” “take-it-or-leave-it,” inconsequential message. We preach not merely a life-or death-message, but a

Heaven-or-Hell message. **Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel with urgency.**

Conclusion

Those of us who preach must **preach** the Gospel, **only** the Gospel, **all** of the Gospel, in the **way** the Scriptures dictate. Furthermore, those who occupy the pews (especially elders) must demand no less of those who preach. Woe is unto us if we fail to do so. God's order to Jonah is still His order to all who open their mouths in His name: "*preach...the preaching that I bid thee*" (Jonah 3:2). All who would dare to preach are under the obligation Micahiah iterated when summoned by the wicked Ahab: "*As Jehovah liveth, what Jehovah saith unto me, that will I speak*" (1 Kings 22:14). We dare not soften, sweeten, or shave it to appeal to the vanities and vices of men. To do so will fail to save the sinner and damn the preacher who dares do it.

Endnotes

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

² William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1974 ed.), p. 317.

³ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Co., n.d.), p. 346.

⁴ These remarks should not be understood as criticism of or opposition to employment of visual aids in preaching. Perhaps thousands have been converted by preachers of bygone generations who made use of blackboards and/or bed sheets for charts of their sermons. More recently, film projectors, flannel boards, magnetic boards, and hook and loop boards have been used to re-enforce powerful sermons. Currently, some preachers have learned to use computer technology to help their hearers follow and remember the Truth they are proclaiming. All such devices are a part of the preaching itself, rather than substitutes for it. I simply raise the caution that, in the use of such tools, one must take care not to allow the method to overshadow the message.

⁵ While I am specifically addressing the setting in which a man stands before others in an assembly and delivers a Biblical message, no one should infer that I am seeking to limit all teaching to one-way communication (i.e., preacher to listener) in every circumstance. Dialogue or back-and-forth exchange (as in the case of a debate or a class situation) is certainly Biblical and is often very effective. My intent is to call attention to the de-emphasis on the authority of Scripture and the one preaching it that is inherent in the pseudo-humility "sharing" approach, whether in the pulpit, the classroom, or in private study with another person.

⁶ www.rhchurch.org/index.html

⁷ Carroll D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993), pp. 90–91.

[*This MS originally appeared in a slightly different form in Some Questions About Worship, ed. Jeff Sweeten (Odessa, TX: Eisenhower Church of Christ, 2005), pp. 119–41.*]