

Our Philosophy of Preaching

What are the different kinds of preaching?

The Definitions

- **Anecdotal** - a sermon in which the preacher primarily tells engaging stories with a moral lesson.
- **Biographical** - a sermon in which the preacher traces the life of a biblical character and draws contemporary moral implications.
- **Topical** - a sermon that has a topic in mind prior to consulting the text, and then searches for one or more biblical texts that address the topic chosen beforehand.
- **Textual** - a sermon that refers often to a particular Biblical text, but does not take the main point of the text as its own.
- **Expositional** - a sermon which takes the point of the text as the point of the sermon
...a sermon which simply seeks to uncover, explain, and apply the divinely intended meaning of the text.
...a sermon which simply seeks to uncover, explain and apply what the biblical author meant by what he said to whom he said it.

In this sense, expositional preachers are modern day prophets, serving merely as conduits through which the Word of God may flow into the people of God in order to do the work of God in them.

The Dangers

- **Anecdotal Preaching**
 - The congregation may go away entertained, but will they go away having been fed on the Word of God? *Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Matt 4:4).
 - Large numbers may be attracted and entranced, but do the anecdotes have the sanctifying, transforming power that people need for growth in their personal discipleship? *Sanctify them by your truth; your Word is truth* (John 17:17).
- **Biographical Preaching**
 - Most often (especially when it comes to the OT) the biblical author's intention was not for us to draw contemporary moral implications from the life of the biblical character. Instead, it is showing us the progress of God's history of redemption.

- **Topical Preaching**
 - The preacher is never surprised or thereby challenged by the text, but simply ends up studying and preaching on his own favorite topics. *For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God* (Acts 20:27).
 - Therefore, the congregation never grows past the knowledge or maturity level of the preacher. *The unfolding of your word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple* (Ps 119:130).
 - Topical preaching often leads to “cherry-picking”, i.e. taking individual verses out of context and using them as proof texts to say what the preacher wanted to say all along.
- **Textual Preaching**
 - Often referred to as “spring board” preaching. This type of sermon uses the text to spring board into a particular application, doctrine, etc. but completely misses the main point of the text.
 - Usually what the preacher is saying is biblically and theologically true, so the congregation nods their head in agreement. However, what the preacher is saying is not what the biblical author of that passage was saying or the main point he was trying to make.

The Difference (between Expository preaching and the other kinds of preaching)

- **Expository Preaching is primary because it’s authoritative.**
 - Pastoral authority is directly related to Authorial intent. The preacher only has authority from God to speak as His ambassador as long as he remains faithful to convey the Divine Author’s intentions.
 - This means that the further the preacher strays from preaching the intention of the text, the further his divine blessing and God-given authority are eroded in the pulpit.
 - Expository preaching is the only kind of preaching that, by definition, ensures that the agenda of the sermon is determined by the agenda of the text.
 - Therefore, a long-term commitment to expository preaching is the most helpful way for a preacher to discipline himself to remain faithful to God’s Word over a lifetime of ministry.
- **Expository preaching is primary because it’s prophetic.**
 - To say that preaching is prophetic is *not* to say that it is either predictive or ecstatic utterance - preachers are ambassadors, not prognosticators; and their source of revelation is God’s mediated *written* word, not His immediate verbal word. It is rather to say that preaching is about receiving God’s word and communicating it to God’s people in a way that is faithful to God’s intention.

- Preaching is prophetic because it conveys God's Word to God's people. Exposition best handles the prophetic nature of preaching because the expositional sermon is unique for taking the point of the passage as the point of the message. It is therefore the best way to remain faithful to the content and intent of God's Word in any given text.
- **Expositional preaching is primary because it's performative.**
 - God's Word is the conduit of God's power that accomplishes God's purpose. The power is not in the preacher himself, his stories, his illustrations, or his technique. The power is in God's Word - the message preached.
 - This means that if the Christian preacher is to preach with real Spiritual power, he must discern what God has said in His Word, and then be faithful to say it. In other words, the point of the text should be the point of the sermon.
 - This also means that as preachers, we are striving not to say something new, but rather to re-speak God's speech. We are to discover and then make His point, not our own.
 - So the Word of God accomplishes the purposes of God among the people of God. And if our preaching is to be used of God to effect sanctifying change in people's lives, the point of the text must be the point of our sermons.

A Positive Example: Nehemiah 8:7-8

...the Levites explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading(Nehemiah 8:7-8).

- The **content** of their preaching is God's revelation, not their own ideas. So their preaching is prophetic - they receive God's word and give it to the people.
- The **method** of their preaching is to explain the meaning and significance of a portion of God's Word to God's people. This is the heart of expositional preaching.
- The **effect** of their preaching is that the people understand and obey. This is the goal of expositional preaching - that the people hear and heed the Word of God.

A Negative Example: Jeremiah 23:16,18, 21-22

Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the Lord. But who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? I did not send these

prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds" (Jer 23:16, 18, 21-22).

- The **content** of their preaching is from their own imagination. Speaking primarily from our own anecdotes and illustrations displeases God. Expository preaching disciplines us to constrain our words to the parameters of God's Word.
- The **method** of their preaching involves a refusal to stand in God's council to hear and obey His word. An expositor's first task is to stand in God's counsel by bowing under God's Word.
- The **effect** of their preaching fails to turn God's people back to God's ways, but rather lead them into futility. An expositor's goal is to speak God's Word to God's people so that they will walk in God's ways.

What are the common misconceptions about expository preaching?

Misconception #1: Expository preaching is any sermon in which the Bible is opened.

- Just because the Bible is open or even quoted does not mean that the preaching is expository.
- Only if the point of the passage is used as the point of the message does a sermon qualify as expository.

Misconception #2: Expository preaching is always a slow, verse by verse progression through a text.

- There are more ways to preach expository than plodding through one phrase or sentence at a time. The length of the text is immaterial to the question of whether or not the sermon is an exposition.
- As long as the point of the passage is used as the point of the message, a sermon qualifies as expository - length notwithstanding.

Misconception #3: Expository preaching always feels like a dry lecture devoid of application and amounting to nothing more than a running commentary on the text.

- If you hear a sermon like this, it is a poor excuse for an exposition, if it is even an exposition at all.
- The point of any Biblical text is to accomplish God's purposes in the hearts and minds of God's people. So if the sermon amounts to no more than a wordy commentary devoid of application, it has missed the bull's eye at which true exposition always takes aim.

What are the benefits of expositional preaching?

Benefits for the Pastor

- Releases the pastor from Saturday Night Fever - the dreaded dilemma of what text to preach tomorrow morning.
- Increases the likelihood of the pastor preaching the whole counsel of God over time.
- Increases the pastor's command of the Word by forcing him to study difficult or often-neglected texts for himself.
- Increases the Word's command of the pastor by giving him a broader exposure to the probing sword of Scripture, deepening his continued repentance and faith, incrementally increasing his knowledge of God, and therefore enhancing his Spirit-produced ability to please God in every way (Heb 11:6; Col 1:9-12).
- Increases the pastor's God-given prophetic authority in the pulpit by grounding his preaching in the divinely intended meaning of the text.
- Increases the pastor's God-given blessing in the pulpit by remaining faithful to the intention of the One who sent him to preach a specific message.
- Increases the trustworthiness of the pastor's preaching in the eyes of the congregation.

Benefits for the Congregation

- The congregation is released from slavery to the preacher's hobbyhorse texts and topics.
- The applicational intention of the text is released to do its creating, convicting, converting, and conforming work in their lives.
- Increases their knowledge of God and His word by broadening their exposure to all the different parts of Scripture.
- Increases their trust in the inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture.
- Increases their trust in the pastor's preaching and teaching.
- Decreases their likelihood of being deceived by false teaching.
- Functions for them as a responsible model of personal Bible study.
- Ensures for them that they will hear what God says.

Expositional preaching in the life of our church

- We will primarily focus on preaching expositorially through entire books of the Bible.

- However, this does not mean that each and every week we will be preaching through a book of the Bible. Occasionally, we will preach expositionally through a passage of Scripture that focuses on a specific subject matter or possibly topically on a certain doctrine.
- When preaching through a book of the Bible the goal will be to deal thoroughly with the text seeking to understand each week what the biblical author meant by what he said to whom he said it. However, we will be very sensitive to not getting bogged down in a book for too long and allowing our people to come up for air to breathe.
- This means that we will take longer or shorter lengths of Scripture to preach from depending upon the type of literary genre. In doing so the focus remains the same - making the main point of the sermon the main point of the biblical text. We agree with the philosophy of Mark Dever who writes, *“Our preaching often becomes like taking pictures with a disposable camera - no zooming, no panning, focus isn't guaranteed, and panoramics are unlikely. Exposition preaching is like graduating to a telephoto lens - it gives you the ability to take a wider diversity of Scriptural snapshots from new angles and more perspectives with higher resolution, richer texture, and variable scope. Since an expository sermon is one in which the point of the passage is taken as the point of the sermon, we are just as free to ask "what is the point of Romans?" in one expository sermon as we are to ask "what is the point of Romans 8:1a?" in another. Proceeding from panoramic to microscopic, then, we may legitimately preach a single expository sermon on the whole Bible, a whole testament, a whole book, a whole narrative or parable, one paragraph, one phrase, or a single word - as long as we are preaching the intended point of the selected meaning unit.”*
- We will also seek to preach from all the different types of literary genres in Scripture. This will provide a good balanced diet for the congregation as well as the preacher.

*Most of this information was taken from Mark Dever's 9 Marks, "Expositional Preaching"; accessed June 21, 2010 from <http://marks.9marks.org/mark1>

