

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

## Preach the Word!

### Biblical Preaching and Congregational Renewal

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Bart Ehrman serves as a religious studies professor at UNC Chapel Hill. Although he teaches the New Testament, he does not believe it is actually God’s Word. In fact, as a professing agnostic, Ehrman is known for debating evangelicals about the inspiration of Scripture. Every semester he begins one of his courses with a class exercise.<sup>1</sup> He begins, “How many of you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God?” According to Professor Ehrman, the majority of students at UNC raise their hands. Then he asks, “How many of you have read [and he will select a popular novel] ... The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins?” Usually every hand goes up across the room, with only a few exceptions. Ehrman follows with a third question, “How many of you have read the entire Bible?” And virtually no one raises his hand. Then comes Ehrman’s punch. He inquires, “Now I can understand why you would read Collins’s book. It’s entertaining. But, if you really believed God wrote a book, then wouldn’t you want to read it?”

Ehrman exposes a major problem. He highlights how those raised in a culturally Christian setting have some major inconsistencies with what they say and with what they do.

We show what we believe about the Bible by how we use the Bible—not merely by what we say about the Bible. When it comes to preaching, we show what we believe about the Bible by how we use the Bible in the pulpit. A high view of the Bible should lead to substantive, biblical preaching. Paul moves from the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture in 2 Tim 3:16–17 (ESV) to the command to preach it in 2 Tim 4:1. It is a natural transition. If God wrote a book, then should you not want to preach it?

Strangely, many preachers today affirm the inspiration of Scripture, waving it in the air, claiming that the Bible is “infallible, inerrant, inspired” (and other “I” words!), but for whatever reason, they fail to deliver Word-driven, Bible-saturated, expositional messages. What’s more, others in the Christian community downplay the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> I have heard Ehrman use this illustration in public debates. I have also had seminary students tell me about being in Ehrman’s class and participating in this exercise personally.

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weekly, Bible-saturated, pastoral preaching altogether. They seem to have adopted the culture's negative view of preaching.

## PASTOR, DO NOT PREACH

Modern-day people have an increasingly negative vibe when hearing or talking about "preaching." Madonna used to sing "Papa Don't Preach," and today many are now saying, "Pastor, do not preach." Church inviter cards say things like, "Come to our worship service. Our pastor won't preach to you." The pastor is viewed as a speaker, a storyteller, or an advice giver, but not a preacher.

This spirit reflects a larger desire to keep Christianity from being so "strange" in the eyes of culture. But it will not work. Christianity is strange. Look at how Paul was viewed in the book of Acts (e.g., Acts 26). Look at how Paul talked about preaching in 1 Cor 2:1-5. It is a strange method, a strange message, and a strange man delivering the message.

An additional reason for this negative vibe concerns the definition of preaching itself. People associate preaching with yelling, agitating others, ranting, or shouting moral "dos and do nots." But furious moralizing is not preaching, and personal ranting is not preaching. One can rant about anything. One can yell and throw a fit about anything. What makes preaching "preaching" is the gospel message. Preaching is bound up with the announcement of the good news. Preaching is explaining what God has said in his Word and declaring what God has done in his Son and applying this message to the hearts of people. One may or may not yell, pace, or pound a pulpit in announcing the gospel. The Lord has used all sorts of styles and temperaments throughout history to proclaim his Word.

Further, some in the culture react negatively to preaching because of the overall antiauthority mood of the day. But this mood is not new. Just read the opening pages of Genesis. We must remember that our authority as preachers is a derived authority. Our authority comes from God's Word, and if we are heralding his Word, then we should not shy away from preaching.

Finally, some have a negative view of preaching because they have never heard good preaching. Sadly there is a great display of mediocrity in pulpits. Outsiders often view preachers as being boring (or fanatical), out of step with culture, and unaware of people's questions and worldviews. But in advocating biblical preaching, I am not advocating poor preaching. I am not advocating dry preaching. I am not advocating insensitivity to people nor being culturally ignorant. Good preaching takes truth to struggle. Good preaching shows an awareness of competing worldviews and cultural issues; it contextualizes the message to a given audience. It establishes points of contact with

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people and then makes points of conflict with people as a Christ-centered worldview is proclaimed and explained.

## A RENEWED VISION OF PREACHING

What is more troubling than the popular opinion of the day is that many seminary students are pessimistic about the word preaching. When asking classes, “How many of you want to preach weekly in a local church?” the numbers are usually low. When I was in seminary, professors would try to talk guys out of preaching, but now we are trying to talk them into preaching!

Now I understand the term preaching can be used in a variety of contexts. Sidney Greidanus points out that the New Testament uses “as many as thirty-three different verbs to describe what we usually cover with the single word preaching.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there is a wide array of ways to make disciples by expounding the Scriptures—in villages, in coffee shops, in classes, in homes, in the marketplace, etc. (see Acts 8:4). I get it. I promote it. Many who are making disciples as campus ministers, village evangelists, or marketplace ministers are heroes. I am not discounting these ministries at all. What’s more, I think pastors should make disciples in these types of contexts from time to time as well. But still, pastors of churches should value and treasure the opportunity to preach the Word weekly in the context of the corporate assembly of the local church (1 Tim 4:13 ESV). And at this point we find many students shirking back not merely from preaching but from the pastorate and the local church. Many do not have a high view of the church, and they do not aspire to pastor.

While I certainly do not want to push the wrong guys into the pastorate, I do want to encourage those who aspire to pastoral preaching to own it and be devoted to it. We are in desperate need of a new generation of preachers who are passionate about preaching the gospel. The late British preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones said: “What is it that always heralds the dawn of a Reformation or of a Revival? It is renewed preaching. Not only a new interest in preaching but a new kind of preaching.”<sup>3</sup> We need to raise up millions of faithful, Christ-centered, people-loving expositors that expound the Word with accuracy and freshness, not ten more sensational conference speakers who say the same things at different events.

How might this happen? We must reaffirm our belief in the power of the preached Word. There seems to be a real absence of this belief. How many church conferences have you

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<sup>2</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 6.

<sup>3</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers, 40th anniversary edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 31.

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attended where little to nothing was said about preaching? Recently at a major church planting conference, with thousands in attendance, there was one breakout session on preaching. One! Might I suggest the need to emphasize preaching if you are emphasizing church planting?

Next, we must pray for the Lord of the Word, Lord of the cosmos, and Lord of the church to grant this movement. A renewal of preaching comes from the work of the Spirit.

Additionally, we would also do well to remember the sagely advice from William Perkins's classic work *The Calling of the Ministry*. The old Puritan lamented the "scarcity of true ministers," saying that "good ministers are one in a thousand."<sup>4</sup> He encouraged Christians to realize the importance of good schools and seminaries in order to help raise up competent pastors. Then he said something even more striking. He put the burden on pastors. He said: "Let each minister both in his teaching and his conversation work in such a way that he honors his calling, so that he may attract others to share his love for it."<sup>5</sup> In other words, to attract others to pastoral preaching, we must not settle for mediocrity in the pulpit and in the pastorate. We must inspire, emphasize, exemplify, and instruct people in the skill of engaging pastoral preaching.

So I would like to turn your attention to Paul's words to Timothy. We should remember that the best book on preaching the Bible is the Bible! John Stott rightly points out, "The secret to effective preaching is not mastering certain techniques; it's being mastered by certain convictions."<sup>6</sup> The Scriptures give us the central convictions we must have to develop and maintain a faithful and effective ministry of the Word.

## CONTINUE IN THE WORD OF CHRIST AND CHERISH THE CHRIST OF THE WORD

Timothy found himself in a situation like ours. Many are misguided. Many reject the claims of Scripture. Many scoff at miracles. Many hate our view of the exclusivity of the gospel. Many laugh at, or are outraged by, our view of marriage. Yet Paul does not tell Timothy to give up on preaching. Paul urges Timothy to "be different" ("But you," 2 Tim 3:10; "But as for you," 4:5 CSB). He urges him to preach the word of truth in a truthless world. Before making this charge, he reminds Timothy to continue learning and loving the inspired Scriptures:

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<sup>4</sup> William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying and The Calling of the Ministry*, reprint (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth, 2002), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Perkins, 96, emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982), 92.  
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But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14–17 ESV)

Timothy had learned “the sacred writings” from “childhood” (v. 15). Both his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice taught him from his early days (1:5). He also learned from the apostle Paul (e.g., 1:13; 2:2). Now he is charged to keep on learning God’s Word and living in God’s Word.<sup>7</sup>

I came to faith in college. The Lord used a few teammates to lead me to Jesus. Before then I hated reading, and I had a reading problem. I had to get a tutor in college because I scored so poorly on reading exams. But when Jesus changed my life, he changed my interests, affections, and eventually my capacity to retain information. He made me a student of the Scriptures. As a newly converted sophomore in college, I knew nothing about the Bible. I remember attending Bible studies and asking dumb questions. The leader would ask things like, “What’s your favorite verse of the Bible?” But I did not have any verses! (I loved the maps!) But over time the Bible came alive inside of me. I wrote on the margins of my massive study Bible, “It’s alive!” Then I went to seminary. They told me, “You need to read books!” And so I did. Now, as a nearly forty-year-old pastor, I still need to continue learning the Bible. By God’s grace, on my dying bed I want to say like Paul, “Bring ... the books” (2 Tim 4:13 ESV).

Do not ever stop meditating on the Scriptures. Make sure the Word is driving you to preach rather than preaching driving you to the Word. The Word must pass through us before it passes from us. Resist becoming “The Sermonator,” mechanically churning out sermons instead of daily meeting with Christ in his Word first.

Notice something else in verse 14. Paul says, “Continue in what you have firmly believed” (emphasis added). He tells Timothy to be thoroughly convinced of the claims of Scripture. Timothy had become convinced of the truth of God’s Word, and now Paul urges Timothy to continue trusting in God’s powerful Word.

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<sup>7</sup> Aspects of this exposition can be found in my commentary on 2 Timothy. See Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 195–207.

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Do not adjust the Bible; trust the Bible. Regularly remind yourself of why you need the Bible. Continue believing that you need it. Paul tells Timothy three reasons he should continue seeking God's Word.

## *Because It Leads Us to Jesus*

When Paul speaks of the "sacred writings," he is referring to what we call the Old Testament. Paul adds that these Scriptures are "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15 ESV). In other words, the Old Testament points us to Jesus. Read the Bible with this fact in mind. D. A. Carson says, "The entire Bible pivots on one weekend in Jerusalem about two thousand years ago."<sup>8</sup>

The Bible is a book that leads us to Christ. Some are amazed that you could use the Old Testament to lead someone to Christ. But you can! Ask the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). The Bible does not tell us everything we want to know, but it does tell us everything we need to know. It is a book about redemption, of which Jesus is the Hero.

The apostles did pretty well with the Old Testament. Paul did not pass out "Four Spiritual Laws" or "Steps to Peace with God" tracts (as helpful as these may be), but instead he opened up the Scriptures and pointed people to the Messiah (see Acts 13:13–43; 17:2–3; 18:5; 26:22; 28:23; 1 Cor 15:3–4). From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a Christian book. God made no mistake in giving us a whole Bible, not just a New Testament. The whole Bible is pointing us to our Redeemer (cf., John 5:39, 46; Luke 24:27, 44). Even the best of men in the Bible fail. The narrative is pointing us to an all-sufficient Prophet, Priest, King, and Sage who never failed. Or, as Homer Simpson once said, "All these people are a mess ... except this One guy."<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, personally study to see Christ. Rest in and delight in the Messiah. Pastorally, walk the bride down the aisle to Jesus. Make the Hero of the Bible the Hero of your sermons (see Col 1:28).

## *Because God Speaks to Us from It*

Paul states that the Scriptures are inspired or "breathed out" (theopneustos) by God (2 Tim 3:16 ESV). Paul does not mean the Bible is "inspired" like an artist or an athlete is "inspired." Many things are "inspiring," but the Bible is "inspired." A better translation may be "expired." God breathed out his Word. We should remember that when we seek

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, *Scandalous* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 11.

<sup>9</sup> As quoted by Matt Chandler, "God Hears and Responds," TVC Resources, January 16, 2011, [https://d1nwfzrxi18dp.cloudfront.net/uploads/resource\\_library/attachment/file/581/201101161115FMWC21ASAAA\\_MattChandler\\_HabakkukPt2-GodHearsAndResponds.pdf](https://d1nwfzrxi18dp.cloudfront.net/uploads/resource_library/attachment/file/581/201101161115FMWC21ASAAA_MattChandler_HabakkukPt2-GodHearsAndResponds.pdf)



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God's Word, it's not only that God was speaking but that he also is speaking to us. When you open the Word of God you in a sense open the mouth of God! We should seek the Scriptures because we want to hear God speak.

Paul also affirms the total inspiration of Scripture saying that God breathed out "all Scripture." All of it is important—even Leviticus!

It is trendy today to say, "I'm into Jesus, but I don't like the Bible." But that will not work. When you submit to the lordship of Jesus, you must submit to Jesus's view of the Bible. Jesus quoted Scripture frequently, claiming it was divine and authoritative. He said many powerful truths about Scripture: "Man shall not live by bread alone; but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4 ESV); and "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt 24:35 ESV). Jesus also affirmed the authority of the Old Testament by his own use of it. And, as already mentioned, he taught that he was the fulfillment of it (Luke 24:44). Jesus told his disciples not only to avoid being ashamed of him but also to avoid being "ashamed of [his] words" (Mark 8:38 ESV). The fact is, you cannot have Jesus without his words. Try that with your spouse. "I like you, honey, but I don't want you to talk." It will not go so well. You cannot have anyone without his or her words.

In every age the nature of Scripture is questioned. Like Timothy, we must continue learning and believing in the God-breathed nature of the Bible and say with the psalmist, "My heart stands in awe of your words" (Ps 119:161 ESV).

## *Because God Matures Us by It*

Paul has already told us that the Bible is profitable for making us wise for salvation (2 Tim 3:15). But then he adds that it is profitable "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (v. 16 ESV). The Bible shapes our beliefs as well as our lifestyle. It relates to both doctrine and conduct, and it's totally sufficient to shape us into the image of Christ by the power of the Spirit.

Paul adds to his point on the sufficiency of Scripture, saying, "That the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (v. 17 ESV). Scripture is also profitable for equipping us. Stott says, "Scripture is the chief means which God employs to bring 'the man of God' to maturity."<sup>10</sup> The Bible grows us personally as we mediate on it, as we behold the glory of Christ in it (2 Cor 3:18).

We need to hear this call to personal, Word-driven godliness. It is a righteousness formed by the Word, enabled by the Spirit, focused on the Son. If we do not pursue godliness,

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<sup>10</sup> John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 103.

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then we will not have a ministry. I know a number of guys who are no longer in ministry because they failed to follow this fundamental challenge of continuing in the Scriptures personally and seeking God's power and grace desperately. They were gifted men. They were dynamic leaders. But it does not matter if you cannot keep your pants on; it does not matter if you love money more than people; it does not matter if you do not treasure the glory of God more than the praise of people; it does not matter if you do not delight in God more than power, success, and earthly pleasures.

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We must pursue a Word-driven life of godliness not only to be faithful to God and his calling but also in order to make up for our deficiencies. Most pastors have flaws. How do you make up for your weaknesses? While you can hire people to help you, one way to make up for your lack of great ability in the pulpit is by living a godly life. If you are pursuing holiness and you are trying to expound the Bible faithfully and lifting up Jesus more than yourself, then people will be blessed by your ministry, even if your sermon delivery is not that polished. People will listen to godly pastors who simply want to bless the congregation by feeding them God's Word. Some of the best preachers I know are not dynamic in delivery. They simply exposit the text faithfully, and they have a contagious walk with Jesus.

In Acts 6:4 the apostles give the pattern of devoting "ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (ESV). It seems simple and straightforward. Yet it is easy to do a full week of ministry and look back and realize that you have not prayed all week. One can have a full calendar, stay busy, and then on Saturday evening stop and realize that you have not personally mediated on God's Word all week. Let us not attempt to do the work of the ministry of the Word without being changed personally by the Word. Embrace the utter necessity of a godly life—a praying life—fueled and formed by the sufficient Scriptures.

This charge to continue learning, trusting, and believing the Christ-centered, God-breathed, totally sufficient Scriptures is followed with the charge to preach this life-changing Word.

## **PREACH THE WORD!**

When I was serving as the dean of the chapel at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, President Chuck Kelley gave me a wonderful little gift called a Torah Pointer. On the end of this little ink-pen-looking instrument is a little index finger. In Jewish settings these instruments are used in the reading of the Torah as a sign of respect and carefulness. Dr. Kelley gave me this gift before the audience saying, "Keep your finger on the text when you preach." I keep this little pointer on my desk as a reminder of this task. As I preach, I must be sure I am deriving my points and applications from the text

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of Scripture. I must not only preach. I must preach the Word. Paul charges Timothy with these classic words:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Tim 4:1–4 ESV)

Other religions have preachers. Other religions have missionaries. What makes our task unique is what we preach: the Word. Paul tells Timothy to preach it faithfully, consistently, pastorally, patiently, and theologically.

## *Preach the Word Faithfully (2 Tim 4:1–2a)*

Why should we be concerned with faithfulness to God? This opening verse tells us. We preach in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is the Judge of the living and the dead, who is coming back to set up his kingdom! We must, then, take the task of preaching seriously. While preaching is certainly a joy, it is also something that should make us tremble (see Jas 3:1; Heb 13:17).

This stunning introduction to preach the Word gives us a much-needed God-centered, Christ-exalting motivation for preaching. We preach in the sight of God. We are never unnoticed by God. We might be unknown by people. So be it. But God is present when we preach.

On one occasion I was scheduled to speak at an orphan-care event. The event was designed to shed some light on the theological motivations that undergird care for the fatherless and also provide practical resources and help to those considering various aspects of orphan care. Many testimonies were shared at the conference, and one was from Noel Piper, the wife of one of my preaching heroes, John Piper. She was sharing about their adoption story, and I was supposed to follow her by expounding Romans 8. When I heard the lineup at this conference, my immediate thought was, I wonder if John Piper will be there to hear my exposition of Romans 8? Then I realized how pathetic this question was. Who cares who is present when we open up God's Word! God is present! We must work hard in preparation, as unto the Lord, and preach for the glory of the Lord!

Consider a story about John Broadus—the massively influential preaching professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1865 the school had only a handful of

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students. Broadus had only one student in his preaching class—a blind student, Mr. Lunn. The student could not benefit from a written text on homiletics, so Broadus developed more detailed notes than normal. Broadus wrote to his wife saying, “Really, it is right dull to deliver my most elaborate lectures in homiletics to one man, and that a blind man.”<sup>11</sup> Yet the Lord used Broadus’s faithful labor. From the lectures in this course, Broadus laid the foundation for one of the most influential books ever written on preaching, still used today (though revised), *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*.<sup>12</sup> Whether we preach and teach to 1,000 or one, we should always labor faithfully for the glory of God.

In verse 2 Paul says, “Preach the word.” To “preach” means “to herald” or “to proclaim publically” (cf. 1:11). As preachers we herald the news. For us today this means the entire written Word of God. Throughout this section Paul uses various phrases to talk about the truth of God’s Word, such as “sacred writings” (3:15), “Scripture” (3:16), “sound teaching” (4:3), and “the truth” (4:4). We have the holy responsibility and unspeakable privilege of heralding God’s timeless truth to people. Like Ezra let us study it, obey it, and teach it (Ezra 7:10; Neh 8). Paul told Timothy earlier, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13 ESV, emphasis added).

When the Word of God is truly preached, the voice of God is really heard. Our job is not to provide new revelation but to repeat God’s revelation in Scripture so people may hear God speak. In the words of J. I. Packer, preaching involves “letting texts talk.”<sup>13</sup>

If we are committed to letting texts talk, then we must avoid ranting. Old school ranting involved lifting a phrase or a word out of the text and then building a sermon on that idea. Often it contained good content, but it was not rooted in context. New school ranting happens when you take a text, explain a bit of it, and then bounce out of the text to do twenty minutes of application on a subject that is not really related to the text. I have watched guys preach a sermon on John the Baptist and go on a thirty-minute rant about “manhood.” While I believe we must teach biblical manhood (and there is certainly a need to teach it today), we need to make sure our application is established in the text. Otherwise, we fall prey to what Haddon Robinson called “the heresy of application.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Thomas J. Nettles, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 219.

<sup>12</sup> Nettles, 219.

<sup>13</sup> J. I. Packer, *Engaging the Written Word of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 246.

<sup>14</sup> Haddon Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” *Leadership* (1997): 21.

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To put it in my mentor's words, there's a difference between "good stuff" and "God stuff."<sup>15</sup> These rants might contain some good stuff, but what we have been called to deliver is "God stuff," that is, biblical truth. Let us be more than just good speakers on biblical topics; let us be committed expositors of God's Holy Word.

## *Preach the Word Consistently (2 Tim 4:2b)*

Next, Timothy is told to persist in his faithfulness to God's Word and to "be ready in season and out of season" (v. 2). This charge speaks of urgency and readiness.

Pastors are human, and we will not always feel like "bringing it." But we must remember that the power of our sermon does not lie within us. Powerful preaching happens when the Spirit and the Word work to change lives. Martin Luther described how the Word did the work during the Reformation saying, "I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing.... I did nothing; the Word did it all.... I did nothing; I left it to the Word.... But it brings him [Satan] distress when we only spread the Word, and let it alone do the work."<sup>16</sup> Preach the Word faithfully, and believe that it will do the work.

At times preaching can feel like a hopeless exercise. But we must trust God on this matter. In Acts 19:10 we read that Paul taught daily for two years in the Hall of Tyrannus. What good could come from a little guy pointing people to Jesus from the Scriptures in the powerful city of Ephesus? Read Acts 19–20 and you decide! The gospel changed the lives of people across Asia, and it changes lives today. God has always used the passionate preaching of the Word to stimulate spiritual awakening. John Calvin preached once each day of the week and twice on Sunday during the Genevan Reformation.<sup>17</sup> Through the Spirit-empowered, consistent preaching of God's Word through the reformer, the city was transformed.

## *Preach the Word Pastorally (2 Tim 4:2c)*

The pastor-preacher should apply the Word to the lives of his flock in a variety of ways. Paul gives us three ways of doing it: "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" (4:2). Pastors should know their sheep by name and by need. They should smell like the sheep (cf. Acts 20:17–35). As they understand the needs of the congregation, they should seek to apply the

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<sup>15</sup> Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Eyster Jacobs, ed., *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company and the Castle Press, 1915), 2:399–400.

<sup>17</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, "No Little Disturbance," accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.monergism.com/content/no-little-disturbance-acts-191-20>.

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selected text to these needs. Rebellious sheep need to be rebuked. Wayward sheep need to be corrected. Fearful, anxious, burdened sheep need to be encouraged.

I often tell students that no matter how big your church gets, you need to stay involved in people's lives: have them over to your home, spend time with them on Sundays, and do some measure of counseling. You should do this not only to be a good pastor but also to learn how to apply the text. Pastoral preaching is different from preaching on the conference circuit because your hearers are not an "audience." They are "your flock" (and you are under the Chief Shepherd). Your job then is not to wow a crowd with a "homerun" each week but to feed, lead, protect, and guide God's people with God's Word.

## *Preach the Word Patiently (2 Tim 4:2d)*

Here is perhaps the most challenging and encouraging part of this charge. We must preach the Word with "great patience" (4:2 CSB). I am so glad this phrase is in the Bible. Pastors often feel like they are making little progress in the lives of people. But we must remember that sanctification is a slow process. As C. J. Mahaney once said we should probably adjust our expectations and "be amazed that those who heard you last Sunday come back the next Sunday!"<sup>18</sup> It takes time for people to understand, apply, and grow.

So let us trust in the cumulative effect of biblical preaching. Over time, by God's grace, understanding deepens, change is experienced, and the congregation is renewed. I cannot see a big difference in my kids from one day to the next, but when I look at last year's pictures, I am amazed at how much they've grown! So it is with faithful preaching. We do not always see visible results each week, but eventually growth occurs.

How can we grow in patience as pastor-preachers? Since patience is a fruit of the Spirit, then the simple answer is to walk by the Spirit. Commune with God. Abide in Jesus.

As you spend time in God's presence, in unhindered and unhurried prayer and worship, meditate on God's patience with you! The psalmist says, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps 145:8 ESV). A lack of patience with God's people reveals pride and self-righteousness in my own life. So work the gospel deeply into your heart daily. Reflect on God's amazing patience. Then, by his grace, display his fatherly patience to his people.

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<sup>18</sup> C. J. Mahaney, "Ordinary Pastors," T4G 2010, <http://t4g.org/media/2010/06/ordinary-pastors-session-ix-3>.

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## *Preach the Word Theologically (2 Tim 4:2e-4)*

Paul also adds that Timothy must proclaim the message “with ... teaching” (v. 2). Interestingly, one of the most famous verses in the Bible about preaching also calls for “teaching.” This is important to note because some want to make too sharp a distinction between preaching and teaching, saying preaching is for evangelism while theological teaching is for the discipleship of believers. This is helpful, but it can be pressed too far.

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We need to see how these two pastoral activities work together. Preaching is heralding the facts, while teaching is explaining the facts. When you say, “The tomb is empty! The throne is occupied!” then you are heralding the news. Teaching must follow these news headlines and explain who Jesus is, why Jesus was crucified and buried, and what it means for him to be the King. In other words, if we want to practice verse 2, then we will do both heralding and explaining throughout the sermon.

We desperately need a generation of preachers who preach the Word theologically. The spirit of our day is not unlike that of the first century. Paul says in the next two verses, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (v. 3 ESV). In their fallen condition people drift from healthy teaching. They wander away into myths. Examples of this reality abound today.

### FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE

My seminary president Danny Akin often says, “What you say is more important than how you say it; but how you say it has never been more important.”<sup>19</sup> I agree with this statement completely. We could end the discussion with 2 Tim 3:14–4:4 because what we say is most important. We must preach the Word. But allow me just to give a few concluding thoughts about how we say it. How can we be both faithful and effective? How can we reach out without selling out? While this subject deserves another chapter, I will simply conclude with some considerations for further investigation.

First, anticipate biblical cluelessness. We can no longer assume that people share our worldview and perspective. Take some time to state your basic framework before dealing with your text and subject. As you prepare, imagine that a person who never entered a Christian worship service will be present (happens regularly at our congregation). Start from the ground up. Assume people will have different ideas about basic concepts like

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<sup>19</sup> I have heard Dr. Akin say this on many occasions, including our cotaught seminar at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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creation, truth, sin, love, salvation, etc. It is not uncommon for highly educated people to be ignorant about basic biblical beliefs and stories. Prepare for them.

Second, prepare to preach to your old self. This tip may not work great for every pastor, but as a guy who started following Jesus later in life, this helps me tremendously. You do not have to water down anything, but you should back away from your sermon and ask, “Would I have understood what I’m about to preach this week?” The longer you preach, the greater tendency to preach to your peers. But they are not there! I try to consider that roughneck twenty-year-old who has an interest in the Bible but does not know anything about it or that educated skeptic or the Indian student who is sitting in her first worship service ever. You do not have to be simplistic, but you do need to be clear and compelling.

Third, address the unbeliever in the introduction and periodically throughout the message. Tim Keller and Mark Dever have taught me much about this need. Try to get everyone on the bus in the introduction. Do not give the outsiders the impression that your sermon is merely for insiders. Classical expository preaching neglected the outsider until the invitation. Seeker preaching neglected the Bible (in many cases). Attempt to do evangelistic exposition. Edify and evangelize throughout the message.

After the introduction, have some asides in your sermon that address the unbeliever. Say things like, “Now, if you are an unbeliever, you might be thinking ...” and then speak to them. You do not have to spend a ton of time on this, and you do not have to answer all of their questions. But you should work to build a culture in your church that says, “We will speak to unbelievers intelligently and respectfully.” When you do this, you will find that unbelievers will start showing up. This will happen mainly because the believers will start bringing their unbelieving friends. And you will also be indirectly equipping your people to speak to outsiders.

Fourth, illustrate relevantly and deal with important questions in application. Throw sermon illustration books in the trash. Read widely and get engaged in the community. Your best illustrations (and applications) will come from your daily interactions with people. Coach sports. Volunteer at schools. Talk to neighbors. Participate in local events. Be aware of film and music trends. All of these things (and others) are connected to sermon preparation. You tend to preach to the people you talk to each week. So diversify your people context, and in so doing you will begin to illustrate in ways that engage outsiders and help insiders learn how to engage their communities.

Related to this idea, you may even consider having a Q&A time after your sermon. You can do this in a variety of ways: (1) on the spot after the sermon, (2) at a postsermon luncheon, (3) via text message, or (4) via e-mail. Consider using outsiders’ questions as a means of creating an evangelistic culture.



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Finally, keep the Life Changer at the heart of the sermon. We will not preach life-changing sermons if the Life Changer is not at the core of every sermon. If we want to see renewal through preaching, then exalt Jesus Christ, the Hero of Scripture each week. Look for the innerbiblical connections that culminate in Jesus and make much of him.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Merida, T. (2019). "Preach the Word! Biblical Preaching and Congregational Renewal." In *The SBC and the 21st Century: Reflection, Renewal & Recommitment*. B&H Academic.