

Compromise and Confusion

The church today finds itself assaulted from without and from within. Assaulted on both sides by a culture and worldview of untruth, anti-truth, and postmodern irrationality. In fact, I read an article which said, “. . . a majority of evangelicals [and we can put Baptist in the camp also] themselves reject the notion of absolute or objective truth. The seductive lure of postmodern relativism has pervaded many evangelical pulpits and countless evangelical pews, often couched as humility, sensitivity, or sophistication.” The truth of this can be seen in that the culture has the church in its grip, and many feel no discomfort.

The absence of doctrinal precision and biblical preaching marks the current trend of this age. Doctrine is considered outdated by some and divisive by others. The confessional heritage of the church is neglected and, in some cases, seen as an embarrassment to updated evangelicals. “Expository preaching – once the hallmark and distinction of the pulpit – has been replaced in many churches by motivational message, therapeutic massaging of the self, and formulas for health, prosperity, personal integration, and celestial harmony.”

Many voices suggest that the age of the expository sermon is past. In its place, some contemporary preachers now substitute messages intentionally designed to reach secular or superficial congregations – messages which avoid preaching from a biblical text, and thus avoid embarrassing confrontation with biblical truth. The current debate over preaching (can you image churches debating over preaching) is most commonly explained as an argument about the focus and shape of the sermon. “Should the preacher seek to preach a biblical text through an expository sermon? Or, should the preacher direct the sermon to the “felt needs” and “perceived concerns of the hearers?” Clearly, many now favor the second approach.

Some choose a text, but abandon the text without recognizing that they have done so. These preachers may eventually get to the text in the course of the sermon, but the text does not set the agenda or establish the shape of the message.

Shockingly, this is now the approach evident in many pulpits. The sacred desk has become an advice center and the pew has become the therapist’s couch. Psychological and practical concerns have displaced theological exegesis and the preacher directs his sermon to the congregation’s perceived needs.

The problem is, of course, that sinners (those who are not saved) do not know what their most urgent need is. They are blind to their need for redemption and reconciliation with God, and focuses on potentially real but temporal needs such as personal fulfillment, financial security, family peace, and career advancement. Too many sermons settle for answering these expressed needs and concerns, and fail to proclaim the Word of Truth.

Without doubt, few preachers following this popular trend intend to depart from the Bible. But under the guise of an intention to reach modern secular men and women where they are, the sermon has been transformed into a success seminar. Some verses of Scripture may be added to

the mix, but for a sermon to be genuinely biblical, the text must set the agenda as the foundation of the message – not as an authority cited for spiritual footnoting.

This is not something new, but something that has been brought to light in a new way. Authentic expository preaching takes the presentation of the Word of God as its central aim. The purpose of the preacher is to read the text, explain the text, and apply the text. Thus, the text drives the sermon from beginning to end. In fact, in too many of today's sermons, the text plays a subordinate role to other concerns.

Real exposition takes time, preparation, dedication, and discipline. The foundation of expository preaching is the confidence that the Holy Spirit will apply the Word to the hearts of the hearers. And this that is so vital to the people of God is missing or minimized in many congregations.

Summary: Find in your Bible what this is a mark of. Hint: It can be found in II Timothy.

Jerry W. Arnold
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