

The Necessity of Expository Preaching in Christian Worship

By a former Thistlebend participant and current high school student

For the next few minutes, I want to grab your heart and ears, and cause you to think about one thing, Expository preaching. My goal is that you will walk away changed, and I hope that you may agree with me that expository preaching is the only kind of true preaching. Also, my prayer is that after I share my thoughts with you, you may be informed and persuaded and truly feel differently about preaching.

What is expository preaching? The word expose in (expos | itory) means to make something visible or known. Its synonyms are *to uncover* and *reveal*. In this case it means to uncover or reveal the meaning of scripture so the hearers may understand what the text means. It also involves application. An expository preacher takes the text of scripture and applies it to real life. Alistair Begg, a pastor to Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio, says that expository preaching is “unfolding the texts of scripture in a way that makes contact with the listeners’ world while exalting Christ and confronting them with the need for action, it is Bible based, Christ focused and life changing.” Pastor Tony Rose at LaGrange Baptist Church personally said to me, “Expository preaching is a human being telling another human being what God has said in the Bible and applying it to the listeners’ lives. He continued and said, “There is not only one set way to approach it, some preach line by line and others pull from different places. For example the preachers in Acts did not preach line by line but it was still expository and it was still preaching.” Dr. Mohler said in his book *He Is Not Silent*, expository preaching is this: “read, explain, and repeat.”

I want to expand on Begg’s quote; what does he mean by Bible based? The base of something is the starting point or foundation and from the foundation that thing or idea expands. This means that an expository sermon never starts with anything except the Bible’s exact words. Everything else is based on that scripture and from that it expands in meaning, depth, conviction and exhortation. A preacher is not to start with a scripture passage and then talk about whatever he wants regarding the subject of the verses he first read, but a sermon is to be saturated with scripture from beginning to end. This is in response to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:6 when he says that he will not go beyond what is written.

What does Begg mean by Christ centered? All scripture points to Christ and the gospel. Jesus appears to two disciples after he had risen from the dead. In Luke 24:25-27 he says, “Oh foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scripture the things concerning himself.” Jesus says “concerning himself” meaning that all scripture even from beginning of the Old Testament points to him.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:2, “For I decided to know nothing among you except the cross of Christ and Him crucified.” Paul knew that Christ was the only way to salvation and that is why he refused to preach anything other

than Christ. Nothing else was to be center. If the death and resurrection of Christ is the only way to have peace with the father and freedom from the wrath of God then why would anything else be center to Christian preaching? As Jesus said, "No one comes to the father except through me." Christ focused preaching is exalting Christ for what he has done for all sinners and while doing that God is glorified.

Which leads me to my next point, what does Begg mean by life changing? In those verses in Luke 24 Jesus tells them, "Oh foolish ones, and slow of heart to *believe* all that the prophets have spoken..." This is why the exposition of scripture is Bible based, Christ focused and life changing because when a preacher has done his job in unfolding scripture from the bible while pointing to Christ, one is forced to ponder and consider one question, and that is, "Do I *believe* in Christ and the saving power of the gospel or not?" The word "heart" in these verses is very important because it shows us that while listening with our ears is good it takes grace that has entered into our hearts by the holy spirit to truly believe the good news. Scripture is heart changing, heart penetrating when it is preached. John Piper says in his book *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, "Preaching teaches the mind and reaches the heart." Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the *heart*." The disciples go on in Luke 24:32 and say, "Did not our *hearts* burn within us as he opened to us the scriptures." When Paul is preaching to the church in Rome he explains to them in Romans 2:15 that though the Gentiles were not given the law they may still live by it because they show that the law is written on their *hearts*. It's so, because the gospel is a heart changing matter as Paul also says in Romans 2:29, it is a matter of the heart and not only something that is heard or read. If someone walks away from a sermon and is not forced to think on his decision to either accept or reject the gospel then what he heard was not a God filled sermon. Why? Because the word of God is alive and active and Christ and the gospel are intertwined all throughout God's written word from beginning to end. So if the living word of God was "mentioned" but not come under submissively by the preacher, and uncovered, then more than likely the gospel was not preached. Preaching is life changing because the gospel is life changing.

If expository preaching is Bible based, Christ focused and life changing then what is it not? Expository preaching is not a nice looking man coming up to the stage and saying, "Good morning everyone. Glad you could make it. Boy am I glad that the cards won last night. This morning after we tell a few jokes I want to tell you why you should bring your friends to church." Expository preaching is not topical, meaning that preaching does not begin with a topic that someone picked because he saw a need for it or because it fit in with the latest trends like, "How to make Jesus your best friend again or highlights from Romans." It is not these things because real God centered preaching is God glorifying and not man glorifying and the call of a preacher is not to be an entertainer. John Piper says in his book, "Because of the rebellion in the hearts of men towards God, God sends preachers into the world

to restore himself to the hearts of men...” Preaching is not to be entertainment, or fun. Is not a mere Jesus fill up so that you can continue to have a “Jesus” bumper sticker on the back of your car and feel good about the week ahead, and expository preaching is not storytelling.

In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul charges Timothy with these 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* [John 1:14 pointing back to Jesus Greek: *logos*]; be ready in and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” The word that Paul charges Timothy with when he says “preach” is derived from the Greek word (*kerux*) meaning *to proclaim* and *herald*. He was also to do it as Christ himself had done it, with complete patience and teaching. Paul was not saying this to Timothy with a gentle tone in his voice but he was commanding Timothy to be herald of the good news whenever he may need to preach the gospel to unbelievers and exhort, or encourage believers. To herald would be similar to a town crier, he was one who makes his proclamation in the streets, loud and clear so that all may hear. He always had something to say when he spoke, his words were never useless, petty or irrelevant. That is what Timothy was to be, a herald proclaiming “hear ye, hear ye the king has a word, repent from your sins for there is hope...” This command was not only to Timothy, but it is the calling of all preachers. He is not to be an entertainer or a counselor, but a herald of the good news that though all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and worshipped the creature rather than the creator, there is still hope and his name is Jesus Christ. Paul said that the only thing that he would preach about and command Timothy to preach about is Christ and Him crucified, because he knew that Christ’s death and resurrection was and still is the only hope for all the world. He knew that it was nothing but the blood of Jesus. And that is something worth proclaiming!

That is why preaching is not to be petty, laid back or conversational because the state of one’s heart while still abiding in flesh and sin is not a mere conversation. Real sanctifying faith cannot be sustained by a weekly fill up of petty narratives and motivational speaking. Yes, our hope is alive but do you truly know why you *need* hope? Why do you *need* a savior? Why do you *need* expository preaching? For one to see their need for a savior is to see their sin and not only see it but to feel the weight of it upon their hearts. A.W Tozer says in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “The gospel can lift this destroying burden from the mind....but unless the weight is felt, then the gospel can mean nothing to the man; and until he sees a vision of God as high and lifted up, there will be no woe and no burden.” This is why expository preaching is essential for the Christian, because when Christ is center and the Bible is humbly come under, then the Kerygma or the heart of the gospel is presented which the apostles knew was not only “the thing to preach on” but the most important thing for all Christians is the gospel. If there is not the gospel then there is not a Christian and until one sees and feels his sin the name Jesus will mean nothing to him or even to you.

Which leads me to my last point: where do you and I fit into all of this and should you care. A.W Tozer says, “What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.” That’s true not only because our view of our creator is very important but also, how we think about God and see him will show in the way we worship him. Do you think that God cares how we see him and how he wants to be worshiped? The answer is yes, but the only way we may know how to worship him and see him is in the bible. Dr.Mohler says, “If you want to see what a church believes about God then watch how they worship him.” If the Bible wasn’t the foundation of a worship service on a Sunday morning then why would it need to be in the foundation of your life? We will follow our leaders whether we think we will or not. To sum up my point, if we are not being fed the word of life, our faith will die. We will only view God as we are taught to view him and from that understanding we will worship him and where our understanding is incorrect our daily worship will be incorrect and thus our spiritual lives will starve to death.

For the believer: Do you know that when God looks at you he sees a new creation and the righteousness of Christ? Have you ever sincerely thought about how to follow your God and submit to his Lordship over your life? Do you know how to carry your cross? And to those who are not saved: Do you know that Adam is your earthly father by nature and the devil is your Lord? But do you know that the only hope is the risen Christ and his grace upon your life? I don’t ask you any of these things to discourage you or to make it sound like I know everything. I only ask you these questions to cause you to think and help you see that all of the questions that you have about your faith and faith itself are in the Bible. This is why scripture being preached and unfolded before us by a man who has the mouth of a herald and the spirit that raised Christ from the dead inside of him, is the only way that we may not only hear the gospel but also how we may be encouraged in our faith and know how to live it out. Without scripture guiding our worship, while being the foundation and only source of truth in the sermons we hear, then we may believe in anything that someone says because we do not have a firm foundation. How would you know anything about truth unless someone preaches the truth to you? As Paul says in Romans 10:14, “How can they call on the one they have not heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them?” You see, we must hear the truth.

I hope and pray that this paper has opened your minds and hearts to the necessity of expository preaching in your own life. I also hope that along the way you have been informed about what it is and why it is that expository preaching is the only kind of Godly preaching. Also, through learning the call of a preacher, as a herald, I hope that you have come to see that the pulpit is not a playground!