

Precious Bible! What a Treasure*John Newton (1725–1807)*

Precious Bible! what a treasure,
Does the word of God afford!
All I want for life or pleasure,
Food or med'cine, shield and sword;
Let the world account me poor,
Having this, I want no more.

Food to which the world's a stranger,
Here my hungry soul enjoys;
Of excess there is no danger,
Tho' it fills, it never cloyes;
On a dying Christ I feed,
He is meat and drink indeed!

When my faith is faint and sickly,
Or when Satan wounds my mind;
Cordials to revive me quickly,
Healing med'cines here I find:
To the promises I flee,
Each affords a remedy.

In the hour of dark temptation,
Satan cannot make me yield;
For the word of consolation
Is to me a mighty shield:
While the scripture-truths are sure,
From his malice I'm secure.

Vain his threats to overcome me,
When I take the Spirit's sword;
Then with ease I drive him from me,
Satan trembles at the word:
'Tis a sword for conquest made,
Keen the edge, and strong the blade.

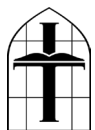
Shall I envy then the miser,
Doating on his golden store?
Sure I am, or should be wiser,
I am rich, 'tis he is poor;
Jesus gives me in his word,
Food and med'cine, shield and sword.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Elements in a Philosophy of Ministry: Biblical Exposition***Kevin T. Bauder*

Years ago my family and I moved to a large Southern city and were looking for a church home. We began our search as most people would, with a list of criteria for the church in which we hoped to settle. We searched week after week without finding an acceptable church. Then a funny thing happened: our list began to grow shorter. We kept looking for a Baptist church because we were convinced that Baptist distinctives closely reflect New Testament church order. We kept looking for a separatist church, which ruled out Southern Baptist churches (at that time, Southern Baptist institutions were still dominated by people who denied essential Christian teachings). Eventually, our list shrank to the point that it had only one other item on it. We wanted a church where, when the pastor got up to speak, whatever he said for thirty or forty minutes would have something to do with the biblical text that he read when he began his talk. Long did we search for such a congregation.

Preaching the Word of God has fallen out of style in many churches. Some churches pride themselves upon using the only acceptable (some would even say the “only inspired”) version of the Bible, but they hardly ever actually preach or teach it. Other churches have demoted or eliminated preaching in favor of video clips, holy skits, religious movies, sacred concerts, and other manifestations of religious vaudeville. These trends stand in contrast to the apostle Paul's final instruction to Timothy, whom he told to “Preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2).

Paul not only issues the command but also anticipates an objection that someone might raise. Indeed, people are still raising it. In some circles, supposed Bible believers suggest that we should change the medium without changing the message. The medium that they want to change is preaching. Paul, however, makes no allowances for downgrading the importance of preaching. He says, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim 4:2). In other words, Paul concedes that sometimes the preaching of the Word will appear to be effective and will produce results, while other times it will not. Whatever the circumstances, and whatever the perceived result, the preacher is supposed to keep doing what he is supposed to be doing: preaching the Word.



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How much of the Bible should a church preach? Paul also answered this question. The setting was his final interview with the elders of the church from Ephesus. He told them, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). Paul claimed that his conscience was clear because he had declared everything that God had said. That is what churches of every age are responsible to communicate. To preach the Word means to preach the *whole* Word.

For a year of my life I was a member of a church that prided itself upon preaching the gospel, and by the *gospel* this church meant the plan of salvation. In reality, it seldom even preached the entire plan of salvation: most of the time it simply preached an invitation for people to respond to a plan of salvation that it presumed they already knew. The only other messages consisted of exhortations for believers to abandon certain practices (such as women wearing pants, or people using the wrong Bible version) and to get busy in evangelism. This church failed to proclaim “all the counsel of God,” and in this failure it doomed its members to a stunted version of the Christian life.

Proclaiming the whole counsel of God means teaching everything that God has said. It also means teaching nothing but what God has said. As a private individual, a preacher has every right to his own opinions. As a minister of the Word, however, his duty is to insert nothing into his teaching except what Scripture teaches. In his public declarations, he has no right to express his own views on politics, economics, community events, or even the weather, except insofar as these views reflect the declarations of Scripture. He must never run the risk that people might confuse his private opinions with God’s authoritative declaration.

Nevertheless, it is his job to apply the teachings of Scripture to the realities of life. A preacher has no right to express political opinions, but when the teachings of the Bible intersect with political questions, they are no longer merely political. They are now moral questions, and the preacher has a duty to bring God’s Word to bear upon them.

Preaching the Word does include the application of Scripture to real-life situations, but correct application rests upon correct understanding. Preaching mainly involves the clear explanation of Scripture so that God’s people can know precisely what He has said. In principle, all believers can discover God’s message by simply reading the Bible for themselves. In practice, however, they need to be taught how to read the Bible, and every sermon is a lesson in biblical interpretation. Biblical exposition, which is to say the correct explanation of the text, is critical to correct application.

The only way to be sure of preaching the whole counsel of God is to preach the whole Bible. Of course, the whole Bible cannot be preached in one sit-

ting, or even in one year. It is an extended process that involves exploring a variety of literary genres. For this reason, exposition will not always look the same. A preacher cannot explain narrative in the same way that he explains poetry or apocalyptic, and he will not explain these like he explains didactic writing such as the New Testament epistles. The church’s mission, and the preacher’s duty, is to bring both Testaments together, exploring the depth and richness of the biblical text until all the teachings of Scripture have been exhausted. Sometimes this task will be performed at a simpler and more general level, and sometimes it will be pursued with greater detail. Always it will have the goal of introducing God’s people to all that He has said and to all that He requires.

To be sure, a congregation’s ministry must involve more than biblical exposition. Nevertheless, preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God is the foundation of all other ministry within the church. The whole counsel of God, rightly proclaimed and explained, is essential to the success of every other area of ministry.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
