

Preaching Clinic for Elders
First Reformed Presbyterian Church (PCA)
The Rev. Dr. Dennis J. Prutow
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Session #1 – A Definition of Preaching

Preaching is God [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] communicating His Truth in our world to people in the pew through human instruments in order to change their thinking, bridle their emotions, and alter their wills, for the purpose of converting sinners, sanctifying saints, and preparing people for heaven.

Preaching is God [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] communicating...

See Pages 3-4: "Preaching is a Form of the Word of God"

See Steven Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, 28-29, 35. (1)

His truth..... As we will see, obtaining the central truth of a passage of Scripture is crucial to preaching. This central truth, we call the Exegetical Point of a text is the Truth of God.

See W.G.T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, 129-130. (2-3)

In our world... See R. C. Sproul in *A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, 98. (4)

To people in the pew.... Sinclair Ferguson in *A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, 110-111. (5)

See Steven Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, 85 and 104. (6-7)

Through human instruments.... R. C. Sproul in *A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, 79. (8)

See also, Andrew Blackwood, *The Preparation of Sermons*, 13. (9)

The more proximate purposes of preaching involved the mind, emotions, and will. Our aim is therefore to

Change thinking.... See the Westminster Shorter Catechism pages 2-3.

Bridle emotions... See the Westminster Shorter Catechism pages 2-3.

Alter the will... See the Westminster Shorter Catechism pages 2-3.

See Steven Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, 105. (6)

See *A Passionate Plea for Preaching*: Derek Thomas, 38 (10); Joel Beke, 57-58 (11); R. C. Sproul, 73, 87-88 (12-14); Sinclair Ferguson, 107-108. (15-16)

See *Of Preaching the Word of God* in the Westminster Assembly's "Directory for Public Worship." (17-18)

Preaching works at changing thinking, bridling of emotions, and altering wills, for the purpose of:

Converting sinners... See 1 Peter 1:3 with 1 Peter 1:23.

Sanctifying saints.... See 1 Peter 1:5 with 1 Peter 1:22.

Preparing people for heaven.... See 1 Peter 1:4 with 1 Peter 1:25.

See again the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Note the biblical distinction between preaching and teaching.

Preaching is declarative in nature. The messenger declares the words of the King. See Isaiah 52:7. Teaching is the methodical impartation of information. It is the stance of lecturing. We do teach in our preaching. We also sometimes preach in our teaching. The accent in preaching is upon our declaring the good things of God.

"The preacher is a *herald*, and his function is proclamation" (Shedd, 79).

See "The Preacher's Stance" in *Preaching with Purpose* by Jay Adams, 43. (19)

See Sinclair Ferguson in *A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, 107 (15), and 110. (5)

See also Sproul, 98 (4), and Lawson 104 (7).

Note this distinction between preaching and a sermon.

Preaching is an activity. We preach. A sermon is the material, the composition, we preach.

We must order the material and construct the sermon in a way that fulfills the requirements of biblical preaching. Preaching is an oral presentation. We write a sermon to preach so that people will listen. This is not like writing a paper for someone to read. Listening and reading are two different activities. We must therefore not only prepare our sermons, we must prepare ourselves for the preaching task by developing *communication skills* and *biblical spirituality*.

Note the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Question 31: What is effectual calling?

Answer: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

Question 32: What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

A. They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.

Question 36: What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?

Answer: The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

Question 37: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united in Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.

Question 88: What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?

Answer: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Question 89: How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

Answer: The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Preaching is Styled the Word of God¹

Preaching is God, Father Son, and Holy Spirit, communicating In its essence, preaching is the activity of the Triune God. We ought not to think of the involvement of only the Father in the preaching moment. The work of the Spirit and the work of Christ are of equal importance and relevance. Since preaching is God communicating, we rightly speak of preaching as *the word of God*. Sixteenth century Puritan, William Perkins, goes so far as to say, "Preaching the Word is prophesying in the name and on behalf of Christ."² Few of us on the contemporary scene equate, even earnest preaching, with prophesying. Stephen Marshall drafted the section on preaching in The Directory for Worship. He declares, "The preaching of the Word is the *Scepter* of Christ's Kingdom, the *glory* of a Nation, the *Chariot* upon which life and salvation comes riding"³ Marshall then laments, "What little care hath the State in general taken to provide that *Christ* might ride in Triumph upon his *white horse*: that the Word of God might spread into every corner of the Land?"⁴ Marshall has in mind the first of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. James Durham, a contemporary Puritan, comments on Revelation 6:2. "By this type, is understood the flourishing estate of the Gospel, and the spreading estate of the church by it after our Lord's Ascension, as it were, Christ in the Ministry of His Word, going out to conquer souls and prevailing."⁵ Thomas Goodwin, a Westminster Divine, is of the same

¹ Dennis Prutow, "God's Powerful Purposes in Preaching," From a Paper Presented at the RPTS Westminster Conference, June 2008, 4-5.

² William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 7.

³ Stephen Marshall, *A Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons, at their Public Fast, November 17, 1640* (London: J. Oaks, 1641), 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ James Durham, *A Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation* (Willow Street, PA: Old Paths Publications, 2000), 432.

mind regarding Revelation 6:2. "That in the first seal is the 'going forth'—the preaching of the gospel—'conquering and to conquer'. . . ."⁶

Preaching is prophesying. It is a form of the word of God. Preaching is Christ riding forth in triumph. But how is preaching a form of the Word of God? That is, in what sense do the Westminster Divines view preaching as God communicating? William Gouge answers. "That which ministers do or ought to preach is styled the word of God in a fourfold respect."⁷ First, after dealing with extraordinary ministers, Gouge says, "As for ordinary ministers, they have God's word written and left upon record for their use. . . . They therefore that ground what they preach upon the Scripture, and deliver nothing but what is agreeable thereunto, preach the word of God."⁸ In this same vein, William Greenhill, another Westminster Divine, connects preaching and prophesying. "If men preach or prophesy anything which is not from the Spirit, but from themselves, it is not acceptable to God, neither should be entertained by us."⁹ In addition, when men preach what is agreeable to the word of God it necessitates a high regard for "the subject-matter which they preach, which is the will of God," a high regard for "the end of preaching, which is the glory of God, and making known 'the manifold wisdom of God,' Eph. iii. 10," and a high regard for "the mighty effect and efficacy thereof, for preaching God's word is 'the power of God unto salvation, Rom i. 16."¹⁰ Preaching is therefore styled the word of God when it is agreeable to Scripture and sets forth the will of God, for the glory of God, in the power of God. Greenhill therefore makes this observation. "*God's word shall not be in vein, which is given out against hard-hearted sinners.*"¹¹

In this light, recall God's presence and purpose to apply His covenant word to His covenant people in the context of worship. Preaching on the words, "The LORD is with you when you are with Him" (2 Chronicles 15:2), Stephen Marshall reminds his listeners, "[T]he *presence* intended in this text is God's presence in the *Covenant of Grace*, in which he is so joined with a people, that they also are joined unto Him." One of the means God uses to join His people to Him in His gracious presence is preaching or prophesying. Ezekiel 37:10 reads, "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived." William Greenhill makes this observation.

Here was prophecy used, but that did not work without God: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and ye shall live." God could have done this without prophecy, but that was the means he would use and work in or by. We must not neglect means, and leave all to God, that is tempting the Most high; neither must we trust to means when used, that is to idolize a creature: but we must use means and look to God to be all in them (for without him nothing is done); and if we make him all in the means, we shall make him all after them.¹²

Preaching agreeable to Scripture setting forth the will of God, for the glory of God, in the power of God *is* the word of God. Preaching is God communicating His truth. We do not speak metaphorically.

⁶ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, An Exposition of the Revelation* (Eureka, CA: Tanski Publications, 1996), 3:30.

⁷ William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 1072.

⁸ Gouge, 1072.

⁹ William Greenhill, *An Exposition of Ezekiel* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 299.

¹⁰ Gouge, 1072-1073.

¹¹ Greenhill, 521. Italics added.

¹² Greenhill, 741.

✠ DISTINCTIVE NO. 2: DIVINE PRESENCE

Calvin's unwavering belief in biblical inspiration led him to maintain that when the Word is preached, God Himself is actually present. He believed there is a unique manifestation of God's presence in supernatural power through the public exposition of the written Word. "Wherever the gospel is preached," Calvin declared, "it is as if God Himself came into the midst of us."¹⁵ He added:

It is certain that if we come to church we shall not hear only a mortal man speaking but we shall feel (even by His secret power) that God is speaking to our souls, that He is the teacher. He so touches us that the human voice enters into us and so profits us that we are refreshed and nourished by it. God calls us to Him as if He had His mouth open and we saw Him there in person.¹⁶

The Holy Spirit, Calvin said, is actively at work in the preaching of the Word, and this powerful ministry of the Spirit was the sine qua non of Calvin's expository ministry. He stated that during public proclamation, "when the minister executes his commission faithfully, by speaking only what God puts into his mouth, the inward power of the Holy Spirit is joined with his outward voice."¹⁷ In fact, in all preaching, he affirmed, there must be an "inward efficacy of the Holy Spirit when He sheds forth His power upon hearers, that they

may embrace a discourse by faith."¹⁸ He believed God was not heard if His Spirit was not at work. This truth led him to say:

Let the pastors boldly dare all things by the Word of God, of which they are constituted administrators. Let them constrain all the power, glory, and excellence of the world to give place to and to obey the divine majesty of this Word. Let them enjoin everyone by it, from the highest to the lowest. Let them edify the body of Christ. Let them devastate Satan's reign. Let them pasture the sheep, kill the wolves, instruct and exhort the rebellious. Let them bind and loose, thunder and lightning, if necessary, but let them do all according to the Word of God.¹⁹

On the other hand, Calvin noted that any dead orthodoxy on the preacher's part invites the judgment of God. The power of the Spirit, he said, is "extinguished as soon as the Doctors blow their flutes . . . to display their eloquence."²⁰ In other words, the Holy Spirit works through a preacher upon the listener only to the extent that the Word is taught correctly and clearly.

Not surprisingly, this belief in God's powerful presence in preaching had a profound influence on Calvin's view of the pulpit. He wrote, "The office of teaching is committed to pastors for no other purpose than that God alone may be heard there."²¹ A life-transforming pulpit ministry, for Calvin, required the divine presence in power.

spoken, will naturally keep the mind and heart more or less active, still there will be need of more than this ordinary wakefulness, in order that the preacher may do his best work. Such a general preparation, it is true, will prevent the sermonizer from being a dull and lethargic man, but he will need some more immediate stimulation than this, in order that he may compose with the utmost energy and vigor possible. As, in the chemical process of crystallization, a smart stroke upon the vessel, in which the solution has been slowly preparing for the magical change from a dull fluid to a bright and sparkling solid, will accelerate the movement, and render the process seemingly an instantaneous one; so, a sort of shock given to the mind, filled as it is with rich stores, and possessed as it is by a homiletic habit, will contribute greatly to the rapid and vigorous construction of a sermon.

Some agitation and concussion is requisite, in order to the most efficient exercise of the understanding. The mental powers need to be in an aroused condition,—so to speak, in a state of exaltation,—in order to work with thoroughness, and energy. Hence, some very distinguished literary men have been wont to resort to the stimulus of drugs, or of alcohol, to produce that inward excitement which is needed, in order to the original and powerful action of the intellect. Poets and orators, in particular, feel the need of this intellectual fermentation, and hence the instances of such artificial

stimulation of the intellectual powers are most common among these. The preacher is precluded by Christian principle, from the use of such means of rousing and kindling his mind, even if the lower prudential motives should not prevail with him. For the mind, like the body, is fearfully injured by artificial and unnatural stimulation. Minds which have been accustomed to it, and have been forced up in this unnatural way to unnatural efforts, show the effects of such treatment, in premature debility, and commonly in final insanity or idiocy.

The true and proper stimulant for the intellect is *truth*. There is no sin in being excited by truth. There is no mental injury in such excitement. The more thoroughly the intellect is roused and kindled by a living verity, the more intensely it is affected and energized by it, the better is it for the intellect, and the man. In order, therefore, that the sermonizer may produce within his mind that excitement which is needed in order to original and vigorous composition, let him possess it with some single truth adapted to this purpose. And this, from the nature of the case, should be that leading idea which he proposes to embody in his discourse. Every sermon ought to be characterized by unity,—a unity arising from the presence, and the presidency, within it of some one leading thought. The *theme*, or *proposition* of the sermon should, therefore, be that particular truth by which the sacred orator should excite his intellect, and

TO GIVE PLACE TO THE TRUTH.
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TO GIVE PLACE TO THE TRUTH.

W. G. T. SHEDD

awaken his powers to an intenser activity. If the preacher is not able to set his mind into a glow and fervor, by his subject, let him not seek other means of excitement, but let him ponder the fact of his apathy, until he is filled with shame and sorrow. Let him remember, that if he is not interested in the truth, if divine truth has no power to quicken and rouse his intellectual faculties, he lacks the first qualification for sermonizing.

But the sermonizer who has made that great general preparation for his work, of which we have spoken, will find all the stimulation he needs, in his theme. It will be taken from the circle of truths in which he has become most interested, both by the habits of his mind, and by his general culture. It will be suggested to him by his own spiritual wants, and those of his audience. It will have direct reference to the supply of these wants. Let the preacher, then, so far as intellectual excitement is concerned, so fill his mind with the particular idea of the discourse which he is about to prepare, that all inaction and lethargy shall be banished at once. Let him, before beginning the construction of a sermon, set all his mental powers into a living play, by the single leading truth he would embody in it.

But, besides this intellectual awakening, some more than ordinary enlivenment of the *feelings* and *affections* is needed, in order to vigorous and eloquent composition. And this is especially true of

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preacher
prepare
himself!

the composition of sermons,—one main purpose of which is, to reach the affections and feelings of the human soul. Without that warm glow which comes from a warm heart, the purely intellectual excitement, of which we have spoken, will fail to influence the hearer, in the way of emotion and action. A purely intellectual force and energy may arrest and interest an audience, but taken by itself, it cannot persuade their wills, or melt their hearts. The best sermons of a preacher are generally composed under the impulse of a lively state of religious feeling. If preachers should be called to testify, they would state that those discourses which were written when they were in their best mood as Christians, constitute the best portion of their authorship.

The sermonizer, therefore, should seek for a more than ordinary quickening of his emotions and affections, as he begins the work of immediate preparation for the pulpit. It is difficult to lay down rules for the attainment of this state of feeling, that will be suited to every one. Each individual Christian is apt to know the best means of rousing his own mind and heart, and hence it is better to leave the person himself to make a choice, out of the variety that are at his command. Generally speaking, however, any thing that contributes to awaken in the soul a livelier sense of the excellence of divine things, any thing that tends to stir and quicken the Christian affections, will furnish the

Preaching the Text

A caveat, however, is in order here. Though it might be a touch subtle, there is an important distinction between preaching to the mind and preaching erudite, heavy, and intellectually challenging sermons. One of the ways we get confused on this is in missing the first part of the grammatico-historical method. That is to say, when a pastor faces the temptation to demonstrate the power of his brain, the tack he is likely to take is to forget that he is exegeting literature. With all due recognition of the technicalities and complexities of moving from ancient literature to modern ears, in the end, Paul wrote letters, David wrote Psalms, Isaiah made prophecies, and so forth. None of them gave us biological samples that belong under a microscope. If you find yourself preaching for six months on a single verse of the Bible, enthraling your audience with your mastery of the original languages, your precision of logical inference, your breadth of knowledge of the ancient Near East, you have forgotten the first thing—it's a letter, a psalm, or a prophecy. We are to preach the text as it is written.

When we preach to the mind, we remember the battle. We remember that we are at war with the Serpent and his seed. We equip our hands for war by renewing our minds. This means that the foolishness of preaching must include preaching foolishness. We are not, of course, to speak our own foolishness. We are, however, to expose the wisdom of the world for the foolishness that it is.

As we practice a grammatico-historical approach, we face two challenges. First, we want, of course, to understand the original intention of the original author to the original audience. That is, we want to come to the Bible looking through the eyes of the children of Abraham. The challenge is we are not first-century Jews. But the second challenge is that we are twenty-first-century Westerners. We do not have the mindset and culture of the original audience, while we do have the mindset and culture of our own audience.

Thus, the first strongholds that must be torn down are in our own minds. They are the unexamined presuppositions that shape our thinking and our doing. They are our failures to be deliberate. Preaching to the mind, then, targets our own errors, our own blind spots. It does so by seeking to understand the "wisdom" of the age. This does not mean that a faithful preacher must spend his time and energy immersing himself into his own culture. The point isn't that we must know

who the latest pop stars are so that we can be "relevant." It may mean, however, that we are aware of the broader dangers of pop culture and how those dangers seduce God's soldiers. Preaching to the mind will clear this kind of debris from our minds so that the Word can find fertile soil in which to take root. In other words, we need to remember that in the great war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent, both sides actually fight. We are to aspire to think God's thoughts after Him, but the Serpent seeks to encourage us to think his thoughts after him.

If we would seek to preach to the mind, we also must encourage those in our hearing to receive the Word preached with their minds. The habits of their hearts will be shaped by the habits of their minds. If, strangely, they listen only to check the preacher's level of orthodoxy, if they seek only to have their intellects tickled, if they attend to preaching only that they might show forth their own erudition, it is not their minds but their egos that are not being preached to. Just as a deep and complex sermon, rather than a simple and straightforward one, can be a sign of a preacher getting in the way, a deep and complex analysis of a sermon by the adept layman can be a sign of a congregant getting in the way. Our minds always need to be exhorted to beware our propensity for ego.

This kind of problem leads not to a healthy and godly mind, but to a clogged mind. While we are indeed called to preach to the mind, we must remember as well that as a man thinks in his *heart*, so he is. The mind will not be preached to if it is still in bondage to sin, if it is not being fed by a heart made new by the Spirit of God. The mind in turn will not feed the heart if it is clogged by pride. We cannot get to the heart without going through the mind, but we can get to the mind and foolishly stop there.

Our minds ought to be staggered by the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This trait is evident in perhaps the greatest preacher of the church, the apostle Paul. No one could argue that Paul, in his epistles, was simple. No Christian would ever suggest that you can check your brain at the door when reading Paul. Even Peter himself acknowledged that Paul's epistles were not always easy to understand (2 Peter 3:16). But Paul was no dry classroom teacher. His heavy theology is punctuated always with outbursts of doxology. Paul begins to expound on the atonement of Christ and breaks into song. He begins to explain the fruit of the gospel, our end, and breaks into glorious praise. Paul was a man whose mind and heart were intimately connected. The next chapter of this book looks at the call to preach to

COMMUNICATING
PREACHING

WORLD OF
BIBLE WORDS
CULTURE

occasion, He divided His hearers into four categories and likened them to different kinds of soil distinguished by their receptivity to the cultivation of seed: the hard-packed soil of the pathway, the rocky soil, the weed-infested soil, and the good soil (Mark 4:1-20).

It would make a fascinating academic study of the ministry of Jesus to take this parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils as a lens through which to examine, categorize, and analyze His preaching. For preachers, too, it is a fruitful exercise to consider the ways in which He applied His message to the four spiritual conditions to which He saw Himself speaking.

Is it because expository preaching is such a demanding activity, and we are so consumed by its demands, that some of us pay so little attention (or at least too little attention) to the spiritual condition of those to whom we are preaching? If so, we need to reconsider our approach.

If it is important that we know the condition of the hearts of our hearers, the best place to begin is, of course, with our own hearts. If we apply the Word there, we soon will learn to be like surgical attendants: our exposition of the text will become like sterilized knives, perfectly tool-ed, that we hand to the Spirit for the precise spiritual surgery that our people need.

A further feature that characterized our Lord Jesus' preaching was that the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). We ought not to dismiss this with the cheap comment that they soon changed their tune. They immediately and instinctively recognized the difference between the book learning and authority-citing style of the scribes and the applied biblical wisdom and heart knowledge displayed in Jesus' preaching. The scribes and teachers of the law spoke about the Bible in a manner removed from daily experience. Jesus, in stark contrast, seemed to speak from inside the Bible in a way that addressed their hearts.

Sadly, some of our preaching carries with it the atmosphere of being "about the Bible" rather than conveying a sense that here the Bible is speaking, and indeed God Himself is speaking. This will be changed only when we come to Scripture in the spirit of the Servant of the Lord: "The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back" (Isa. 50:4-5).

SEE ALSO JAY ADAMS RE REAGAN'S STANCE

4. *The use of the imagination.* Preaching to the heart is aided by our recognition of the true nature of our task. The great question is: How, through the work of the Spirit, can I best get the Word of God into the hearts of the people?

Those who do this with the greatest fruitfulness and success are marked by many gifts and characteristics, often very diverse. But one thing all of them seem to have in common is imagination—an imaginative creativity that bridges the distance between the truth of the Word of God and the lives of those to whom they speak.

In some preachers, this is most evident in the imaginative power of their illustrations. George Whitefield's use of illustrations was sometimes so vivid that people thought they were actually caught up in the events he was describing, confusing what they were hearing with reality. By contrast, the congregation of St. Peter's Church in Geneva listened to John Calvin preach an average of five 40-minute sermons a week during the course of his lengthy ministry, but with virtually no stories or illustrations of that kind.

Like most of us, Calvin did not possess Whitfield's imaginative power (or his magical voice). Nevertheless, his sermons *lived* and had the power to stir young men to be willing to suffer martyrdom for Christ, for Calvin had an ability to use language with such imaginative power that his preaching bridged the gap between life in ancient Judah and Israel and life in sixteenth-century Geneva, Switzerland. He expressed and applied the truth in a way that was saturated in the language of the daily life of his hearers, bringing the Word of God right into the nitty-gritty practicalities of their experience.

Similarly, Richard Baxter preached in such a way that his sermons so connected with life in seventeenth-century Kidderminster, England, that the truth he spoke exploded during the week like time bombs planted in his congregation's memories.

The Spirit is able to use different sets of imaginative skills employed in different contexts but producing similar effects. But clearly the ability to imagine the Word being taken from the Scriptures and implanted into the minds of the hearers is common to all lively exposition.

Scripture itself employs different metaphors to help us grasp how important it is to "see ourselves into" the hearts and situations of those to whom we preach. Here are some drawn simply at random: the preacher is a sower of seed; a teacher of students; a father of children; a mother giving birth; a nurse feeding infants;

work within the laws of hermeneutics to discover the meaning of words and their relationships. If he breaks these laws, no matter what else he might do right, he is not practicing true exposition.

But there is more to preaching than the science of proper interpretation. An expositor also must take up the art of preaching. Here, the issue is not *what* is said but *how* it is conveyed, not the *substance* but the *style*. There is room for diversity from one preacher to another. Exposition allows for differences of personality and temperament in the pulpit, for differences among congregations and how they may be addressed, and for differences of occasion. While there is only one correct meaning to a passage, there are multiple ways of conveying that meaning in a sermon. This difference accounts for the *art* of preaching.

John Calvin mastered both the science and the art of biblical preaching. As we saw in the last chapter, he was devoted to the pursuit of careful exegesis. His chief aim was always substance before style. But it would be wrong to assume the Genevan Reformer had no style. Although some think of him as stiff and awkward in his pulpit ministry, Calvin was well-equipped in the creative aspects of effective communication. Although he was certainly not a great orator, he was more than just a skilled exegete. Standing in the pulpit with an open Bible, Calvin skillfully painted with many bold brushstrokes of colorful human language. The resplendent hues of effective communication were on his preaching palette, ready for

his use. At his disposal was an array of vivid figures of speech, rhetorical questions, biting sarcasm, compelling language, colloquial expressions, and the like. Such are the tools of the art of vivid preaching, and their effective use often separates mediocre exposition from good and even great pulpit work.

This chapter considers some of the potent colors that flowed from Calvin's tongue in his preaching. What was the Reformer's style of communication? What factors influenced his choice of words? What were his favored expressions? How did he employ questions, restatements, quotations, and transitions? Here are a few distinctives of the Reformer's picturesque communication.

✠ DISTINCTIVE NO. 18: FAMILIAR WORDS

Calvin possessed a strong command of language. The Reformer wrote his first book in Latin and preached in his native French from either a Hebrew or Greek Bible. Also, his education in classical literature enhanced his effective use of language as he preached, lectured, and wrote. But despite his remarkable learning, Calvin chose to employ simple words and understandable language in the pulpit. As a preacher, Calvin's primary aim was to communicate to the common person in the pew. He was not seeking to impress his congregation with his own brilliance, but to impact them with the awe-inspiring majesty of God. To this end, Calvin chose to preach "in the vernacular tongue, which may be . . . understood by the whole congregation."² Using simple language that the common people could easily grasp and

Preaching For Change

THE EXPOSITORY GENIUS OF JOHN CALVIN

Boice notes, "Calvin was pre-eminently a preacher, and as a preacher he saw himself primarily as a Bible teacher. . . . He saw his most important work to be preaching."² From his pulpit, he addressed real people who had real needs, so he spoke to them right where they lived. The goal was to bridge the gap from the text to everyday life by showing its practical relevance. Calvin rightly believed that he did not need to *make* the Bible relevant—it *was* relevant. To simply reveal its life-changing power and press it home to his listeners was his mandate.

As a preacher, Calvin was resolved to fulfill this task through every divinely prescribed means—encouragement, motivation, rebuke, reproof, correction, consolation, challenge, and so on. He knew that "merely to convey sound doctrine or correct exegesis to the mind is not preaching."³ And he fully understood that hearing without doing was insufficient (see James 1:22). Listeners, he said, should cultivate a "willingness to obey God completely and with no reserve."⁴ The Reformer added, "We have not come to the preaching merely to hear what we do not know, but to be *incited* to do our duty."⁵ For this reason, Calvin believed it was incumbent upon him, as a preacher, to make careful application. He saw it his pulpit responsibility to connect the Word to those allotted to his charge.

Thus, Calvin did not fire over the heads of his people while answering the aberrations of other theologians. He did not misuse the pulpit to rebut his numerous critics. Instead, Calvin remained intent on nurturing the spiritual development of his people. He preached primarily to edify and encourage the con-

2 BOICE, FORWARD TO CALVIN'S SERMONS ON PSALM 119, OLD PATHS, VIII.
3 PUBLISHERS INTRODUCTION, CALVIN'S SERMONS ON EPHESIANS, BANNER OF TRUTH, XV.

APPLYING THE TRUTH

gregation God had entrusted to him. In short, he preached for changed lives. As John Leith observes:

Just as Calvin explicated Scripture word by word, so he applied the Scripture sentence by sentence to the life and experience of his congregation. Hence, his sermons always have a strong note of reality. They move directly from Scripture to the concrete, actual situation in Geneva.⁶

Of course, Calvin could be a polemicist when necessary. He often sounded a warning against Roman debauchery, the pope's hellish religion, and other swirling dangers of the hour. Antinomianism, semi-Pelagianism, and the fanaticism of the Anabaptists were often the objects of his rebuke. A pure gospel was his aim, to the end that unconverted souls might be regenerated. Thus, Calvin endeavored to guard the truth from all attacks. Such a defense required his constant vigil and most piercing words. But Calvin was never needlessly harsh or domineering with his own congregation, at least not intentionally. Rather, he was typically moderate in tone and gentle with his words. His objective was to build his congregation up in the things of the Lord, not tear them down. As a caring pastor, he brought the Word of God to bear on his people's lives, all for God's glory and their good.

This chapter focuses on the types of application Calvin used in the course of his sermons. How did he encourage his

However, the temptation to turn the pulpit into theater and the church building into a place of entertainment is not a new phenomenon. It was also a problem with which Luther struggled in the sixteenth century. When he preached his most powerful sermons on justification by faith alone, Luther noted that people fell asleep in his congregation. He reckoned that the people in the parishes came to church merely to be entertained. Even in the sixteenth century, during the middle of the Reformation, the pastors were struggling with the demands of their congregations that they entertain them with their preaching. Luther declared that it is not the task of the pastor to entertain, but to nurture and feed the flock in faithfulness to the Word of God. He said it is the task of the minister to protect the flock from heresy and from error. Today, if you preach against heresy and error, you are entering into the arena of the politically incorrect, because we live in a culture that has been captured by the spirit of relativism. Relativism says that truth is what you perceive it to be, and what is true for you may be false for somebody else.

In our society, you're perfectly free to believe whatever you like, but the one thing you may not do is deny its antithesis. You can say, "I believe that this is true." But you cannot say with impunity that that which opposes your belief is false. A whole generation of Christians has been brainwashed by the spirit of relativism, so they're completely hesitant to say, "I deny that error over there." We don't have heresy trials anymore because, in relativism, there is no such thing as heresy.

In the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election, when the Supreme Court was brought in to decide the matter, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor raised a question about voter responsibility. She commented that each voter had directions that told him or her how to operate the voting machines, and that the instructions warned each voter to be sure the stylus penetrated and no loose chads were left hanging. These things were the responsibility of the person who went in to cast a vote. One of the news commentators heard her question and declared that O'Connor was assuming that in America it is a privilege to vote, and that with that privilege comes a corresponding responsibility. But he asked, "Doesn't she understand that in our culture there is no such thing as responsibility?" In a relativistic environment, you can't hold someone responsible for anything.

Even before relativism became fashionable, Luther had to deal with the responsibility of the shepherd to protect his sheep from false teaching. Luther understood

that in Old Testament Israel, the greatest threat to the security of the nation was not the armies of the Syrians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, or the Philistines. The people of Old Testament Israel were crushed by the false prophets within their gates. Jeremiah stood before God saying: "Lord, I quit. I will speak no more in your name. I am in derision daily." Every time Jeremiah opened his mouth to proclaim the Word of God to Jerusalem, a hundred false prophets would answer him by telling the people, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. The people didn't want to hear the bad news that Jeremiah was prophesying, so they heaped to themselves false teachers. They went to hear the teachers and the preachers who preached what they wanted to hear. When Jeremiah complained about that, God reassured him, saying, "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28a).

In the metaphor of the sheep, the false prophet was the wolf in sheep's clothing. He was the one who came in and preached in a religious setting to the sheep (i.e., the household of God). The content of that preaching was to the people's everlasting destruction and ruin. The true prophet, one who is a good shepherd, puts his life on the line for his sheep. There is a reason why the shepherd has that rod and staff—they are to protect the sheep from the wolves who would come in to ravage them. Luther said that the false teacher is the worst of all possible criminals, because he spreads a poison that has everlasting consequences. The pastor must protect his sheep from such spiritually criminal behavior.

Finally, Luther said that it is the task of the preacher to defend not his own honor, but the honor of God and Christ. That is where the preacher rises to defend the truth. He does not seek to protect his own opinion or his own reputation, but the truth of God. That is the duty of the pastor, because the honor of God has all but been wiped away in our day, not from outside the church but from inside. I tell my seminary students: "Don't ever, ever, ever preach your own anger. If you're angry about something, recuse yourself from preaching on that issue. Don't ever use the pulpit as your personal soapbox. If you want to proclaim the wrath of God, you'd better make sure it's God's wrath and not your own. You should be clear that your concern is the honor of Christ and not your own honor." Every minister brings his flesh with him into the pulpit. It is a sacred thing to heed the spirit of the Word of God while guarding against the flesh.

Remember, we are hungry in statements.

CHAPTER I

The Work of the Preacher

PREACHING should rank as the noblest work on earth. The man called of God to proclaim the gospel ought to stand out as the most important man in the community, and all that he does for Christ and the Church should head up in his preaching. In the pulpit he can do much of his best work for time and eternity. As a rule we ought to employ superlatives sparingly, but not when we discuss the work of the preacher.

What do we understand by preaching? It means divine truth through personality or the truth of God voiced by a chosen personality to meet human needs. Divine truth comes largely from the Scriptures but it also comes from other sources. Human needs spring mainly from sin but also from other roots. The man in the pulpit looks on himself as called of God to use these truths in meeting those needs one by one. Such a way of thinking goes back to Phillips Brooks. In the best series of Lyman Beecher Lectures so far,¹ he described preaching as "the bringing of truth through personality," and as "the communication of truth by man to men." Everywhere in those Lectures, and in his ten volumes of sermons, the Boston pastor showed that he wished to help the friends who filled the pews of Trinity Church.

From another point of view preaching calls for the interpretation of life today in light that comes from God today, largely through the Scriptures. This way of approaching the subject accords with the ideals of John Bunyan, who has taught us to think of the minister as dwelling in "the house of the interpreter." There he learns to employ the truths of God in meeting the needs of men. Both up in the pulpit and out in the parish he strives to interpret the will of God for the friends who look to him for guidance.

¹ See *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1898), chap. I.

“ protection of them that do well, the terror of all that do evil, and the great good of the whole church, and of all his kingdoms; for the conversion of the Queen, the religious education of the Prince, and the rest of the royal seed; for the comforting of the afflicted Queen of Bohemia, sister to our Sovereign; and for the restitution and establishment of the illustrious Prince Charles, Elector Palatine of the Rhine, to all his dominions and dignities; for a blessing upon the High Court of Parliament, (when sitting in any of these kingdoms respectively,) the nobility, the subordinate judges and magistrates, the gentry, and all the commons; for all pastors and teachers, that God would fill them with his Spirit, make them exemplarily holy, sober, just, peaceable, and gracious in their lives; sound, faithful, and powerful in their ministry; and follow all their labours with abundance of success and blessing; and give unto all his people pastors according to his own heart; for the universities, and all schools and religious seminaries of church and commonwealth, that they may flourish more and more in learning and piety; for the particular city or congregation, that God would pour out a blessing upon the ministry of the word, sacraments, and discipline, upon the civil government, and all the several families and persons therein; for mercy to the afflicted under any inward or outward distress; for seasonable weather, and fruitful seasons, as the time may require; for averting the judgments that we either feel or fear, or are liable unto, as famine, pestilence, the sword, and such like.

“ And, with confidence of his mercy to his whole church, and the acceptance of our persons, through the merits and mediation of our High Priest, the Lord Jesus, to profess that it is the desire of our souls to have fellowship with God in the reverend and conscionable use of his holy ordinances; and, to that purpose, to pray earnestly for his grace and effectual assistance to the sanctification of his holy sabbath, the Lord's day, in all the duties thereof, publick and private, both to ourselves, and to all other congregations of his people, according to the riches and excellency of the gospel, this day celebrated and enjoyed.

“ And because we have been unprofitable hearers in times past, and now cannot of ourselves receive, as we should, the deep things of God, the mysteries of Jesus Christ, which require a spiritual discerning; to pray, that the Lord, who teacheth to profit, would graciously please to pour out the Spirit of grace, together with the outward means thereof, causing us to attain such a measure of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and, in him, of the things which belong to our peace, that we may account all things but as dross in comparison of him; and that we, tasting the first-fruits of the glory that is to be revealed, may long for a more full and perfect communion with him, that where he is, we may be also, and enjoy the fulness of those joys and pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore.

“ More particularly, that God would in a special manner furnish his servant (now called to dispense the bread of life unto his household) with wisdom, fidelity, zeal, and utterance, that he may divide the word of God aright, to every one his portion, in evidence and demonstration of the Spirit and power; and that the Lord would circumscribe the ears and hearts of the hearers, to hear, love, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save their souls; make them as good ground to receive in the good seed of the word, and strengthen them against the temptations of Satan, the cares of the world, the hardness of

“ their own hearts, and whatsoever else may hinder their profitable and saving hearing; that so Christ may be so formed in them, and live in them, that all their thoughts may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and their hearts established in every good word and work for ever.”

We judge this to be a convenient order, in the ordinary public prayer; yet so, as the minister may defer (as in prudence he shall think meet) some part of these petitions till after his sermon, or offer up to God some of the thanksgivings hereafter appointed, in his prayer before his sermon.

Of the Preaching of the Word.

PREACHING of the word, being the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel, should be so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him.

It is presupposed, (according to the rules for ordination,) that the minister of Christ is in some good measure gifted for so weighty a service, by his skill in the original languages, and in such arts and sciences as are handmaids unto divinity; by his knowledge in the whole body of theology, but most of all in the holy scriptures, having his senses and heart exercised in them above the common sort of believers; and by the illumination of God's Spirit, and other gifts of edification, which (together with reading and studying of the word) he ought still to seek by prayer, and an humble heart, resolving to admit and receive any truth not yet attained, whenever God shall make it known unto him. All which he is to make use of, and improve, in his private preparations, before he deliver in public what he hath provided.

Ordinarily, the subject of his sermon is to be some text of scripture, holding forth some principle or head of religion, or suitable to some special occasion emergent; or he may go on in some chapter, psalm, or book of the holy scripture, as he shall see fit.

Let the introduction to his text be brief and perspicuous, drawn from the text itself, or context, or some parallel place, or general sentence of scripture.

If the text be long, (as in histories or parables it sometimes must be,) let him give a brief sum of it; if short, a paraphrase thereof, if need be: in both, looking diligently to the scope of the text, and pointing at the chief heads and grounds of doctrine which he is to raise from it.

In analysing and dividing his text, he is to regard more the order of matter than of words; and neither to burden the memory of the hearers in the beginning with too many members of division, nor to trouble their minds with obscure terms of art.

In raising doctrines from the text, his care ought to be, *First*, That the matter be the truth of God. *Secondly*, That it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence. *Thirdly*, That he chiefly insist upon those doctrines which are principally intended, and make most for the edification of the hearers.

The doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms; or, if any thing in it need explication, it is to be opened, and the consequence also from the text cleared. The parallel places of scripture, confirming the doctrine, are rather to be plain and pertinent, than many, and (it need be) some-what insisted upon, and applied to the purpose in hand.

The arguments or reasons are to be solid, and, as much as may be, con-

vincing. The illustrations, of what kind soever, ought to be full of light, and such as may convey the truth into the hearer's heart with spiritual delight.

If any doubt obvious from scripture, reason, or prejudice of the hearers, seem to arise, it is very requisite to remove it, by reconciling the seeming differences, answering the reasons, and discovering the seeming causes of prejudice and mistake. Otherwise it is not fit to detain the hearers with propounding or answering vain or wicked cavils, which, as they are endless, so the propounding and answering of them doth more hinder than promote edification.

He is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.

In the use of instruction or information in the knowledge of some truth, which is a consequence from his doctrine, he may (when convenient) confirm it by a few firm arguments from the text in hand, and other places of scripture, or from the nature of that common-place in divinity, whereof that truth is a branch.

In confutation of false doctrines, he is neither to raise an old heresy from the grave, nor to mention a blasphemous opinion unnecessarily: but, if the people be in danger of an error, he is to confute it soundly, and endeavour to satisfy their judgments and consciences against all objections.

In exhorting to duties, he is, as he seeth cause, to teach also the means that help to the performance of them.

In dehortation, reprehension, and publick admonition, (which require special wisdom,) let him, as there shall be cause, not only discover the nature and greatness of the sin, with the misery attending it, but also shew the danger his hearers are in to be overtaken and surprised by it, together with the remedies and best way to avoid it.

In applying comfort, whether general against all temptations, or particular against some special troubles or terrors, he is carefully to answer such objections as a troubled heart and afflicted spirit may suggest to the contrary.

It is also sometimes requisite to give some notes of trial, (which is very profitable, especially when performed by able and experienced ministers, with circumspection and prudence, and the signs clearly grounded on the holy scriptures,) whereby the hearers may be able to examine themselves whether they have attained those graces, and performed those duties, to which he exhorteth, or be guilty of the sin reprehended, and in danger of the judgments threatened, or are such to whom the consolations propounded do belong; that accordingly they may be quickened and excited to duty, humbled for their wants and sins, affected with their danger, and strengthened with comfort, as their condition, upon examination, shall require.

And, as he needeth not always to prosecute every doctrine which lies in his text, so is he wisely to make choice of such uses, as, by his residence

and conversing with his flock, he findeth most needful and seasonable; and, amongst these, such as may most draw their souls to Christ, the fountain of light, holiness, and comfort.

This method is not prescribed as necessary for every man, or upon every text; but only recommended, as being found by experience to be very much blessed of God, and very helpful for the people's understandings and memories.

But the servant of Christ, whatever his method be, is to perform his whole ministry:

1. Painfully, not doing the work of the Lord negligently.

2. Plainly, that the meanest may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; ab-staining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words; sparingly citing sentences of ecclesiastical or other human writers, ancient or modern, be they never so elegant.

3. Faithfully, looking at the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at his own gain or glory; keeping nothing back which may promote those holy ends, giving to every one his own portion, and bearing indifferent respect unto all, without neglecting the meanest, or sparing the greatest, in their sins.

4. Wisely, framing all his doctrines, exhortations, and especially his re-proofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail; shewing all due respect to each man's person and place, and not mixing his own passion or bitterness.

5. Gravely, as becometh the word of God; shunning all such gesture, voice, and expressions, as may occasion the corruptions of men to despise him and his ministry.

6. With loving affection, that the people may see all coming from his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good. And,

7. As taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teacheth is the truth of Christ; and walking before his flock, as an example to them in it; earnestly, both in private and publick, recommending his labours to the blessing of God, and watchfully looking to himself, and the flock whereof the Lord hath made him overseer: So shall the doctrine of truth be preserved uncorrupt, many souls converted and built up, and himself receive manifold comforts of his labours even in this life, and afterward the crown of glory laid up for him in the world to come.

Where there are more ministers in a congregation than one, and they of different gifts, each may more especially apply himself to doctrine or exhortation, according to the gift wherein he most excelleth, and as they shall agree between themselves.

Of Prayer after Sermon.

THE sermon being ended, the minister is "To give thanks for the great love of God, in sending his Son Jesus Christ unto us; for the communication of his Holy Spirit; for the light and liberty of the glorious gospel, and the rich and heavenly blessings revealed therein; as, namely, election, vocation, adoption, justification, sanctification, and hope of glory; for the admirable goodness of God in freeing the land from antichristian darkness and tyranny, and for all other national deliverances; for the reformation of religion; for the covenant; and for many temporal blessings."



THE PREACHER'S STANCE

I write you a letter asking you to help me to obtain the position of associate pastor in your church. You read the letter closely, noting exactly what each word and phrase means. You find out all about me and the circumstances under which the letter was written. Then, after all this effort, and much more like it with which I shall not bore you, you say, "Well, I've finally got it. I understand what this letter is all about: Adams wants to be my associate pastor." And that's it; that's where it all ends!

Strange? Of course. Absurd? Naturally. We don't ordinarily do things like that. I expect a certain kind of response to my request, and you, surely, would give me one. The purpose of the letter was to elicit a yes or no response, which would lead to further action on my part and might also lead to further action from you and from the church. The letter could cause a number of changes.

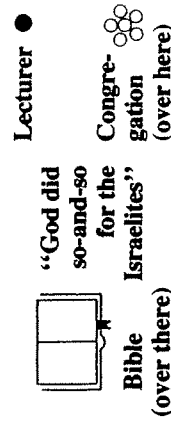
We are continually concerned about the lack of change that preaching brings about. One of the reasons there is no more response is the stance the speaker takes toward the Bible and his congregation, and the stance he urges them to take toward the Bible. When his stance is wrong, he can expect theirs to be wrong too. No wonder so little

change takes place; much so-called "preaching" does not require it. Much "preaching" is every bit as inappropriate as your hypothetical response to the letter mentioned above. The preacher does a good job of considering the historical-grammatical exegesis of the preaching passage, considers it theologically and rhetorically, and then—simply tells his congregation what it means. His response, and consequently theirs as well, is to say, "Well, now I understand it," and that's that! That is not preaching. True preaching does all of the above, but it also identifies the *telos* (purpose) of the passage, builds the message around it, and *calls on the congregation for a response that is appropriate to it*. It works for change.

Preaching that stops short of asking for change that is appropriate to the Holy Spirit's letters to His church is not preaching at all; at best, it is lecturing.

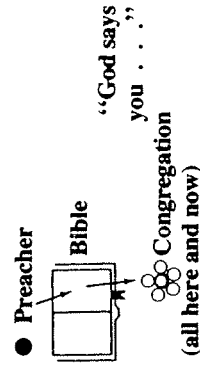
The lecturer speaks *about* the Bible; the pastoral preacher speaks *from* the Bible *about* the congregation. He tells them what God wants from them. These are two distinct stances. Let me see if I can set these two distinct stances over against one another so that the contrast between them will be even more apparent. I shall first set them out in diagram and chart form; then I shall discuss them with you.

LECTURE STANCE



Lecturer talks to cong.:
 —about the Bible,
 —about what God did long ago and far away to the Israelites,
 —in 3rd person (he, they),
 —in unemotional, uninvolved reporting style.

PREACHING STANCE



Preacher talks to cong.:
 —about themselves *from* the Bible,
 —about what He is doing and they ought to be doing,
 —in 2nd person (you)
 —in an emotionally involved but controlled style.