

Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World, Part 1

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QUESTION: Over the course of your ministry, why have you remained committed to expository preaching over other preaching paradigms?

Well first, because it is a biblical mandate. It doesn't fluctuate with culture, with expectations, with times or seasons. Expository preaching is the best way to preach the Bible. If every word of God is pure, if every word of God is true, then every word needs to be dealt with. And expository preaching is only way you actually come to grips with every word in the Scriptures.

Secondly, expository preaching familiarizes people with the Scripture itself instead of simply giving them a speech, as true and as reflective of biblical teaching as that speech may be. With expository preaching, people become familiar with the Scripture. They can go back to the passages that have been addressed, and they can be reminded by the text itself of what it means. So you give people the Word of God in a way that has long-term impact, because it makes them familiar with Scripture.

Thirdly, it makes the authority unequivocal, and that authority is the Scripture. That's very clear no matter how powerful or gifted the preacher might be. In consistent, expository preaching, the people always know what the authority is. It's not about homiletics. It's not about personal viewpoints and insights. It's about relentlessly affirming the true authority of Scripture, which is the most critical thing that anybody can ever learn. It isn't about, "Wasn't that a great sermon?" It isn't about, "Wasn't that a great outline? Wasn't that clever?" It's always about, "What did the Word of God say?" And that makes it truly authoritative, because the Word is from God. No other preaching paradigm does this.

QUESTION: What are the unique challenges or difficulties of preaching to a postmodern culture?

First of all, you have to understand that when you talk about a postmodern culture, that's an academic assessment of the culture. The average Joe doesn't have any idea what that means. All he knows is he's pretty much free to think and do whatever he wants. That's how postmodernism filters down to the guy in the pew. It's not a philosophy--it's a lifestyle. The average guy just knows that the culture doesn't care what he does. The movies he sees don't make a moral judgment on anything except racism or somebody's intolerance. So he's free to do whatever he wants in the society, and nobody can tell him what to be or what to do, and the bottom line is that he should feel good about himself.

That's what filters down.

But all this goes completely against the grain of his conscience and his reason, and ultimately what he knows to be true. The unbeliever's conscience is a reality, and even reason tells him that there have to be some absolutes.

The bottom line is that expository preaching confronts the amorality of postmodernism with an authoritative message of absolute truth. It's not a question of debating. It's not a question of trying to find some way to sneak that in. It's an issue of confronting this kind of thinking with the absolute authority of Scripture and then letting the Spirit of God make the application to the heart.

QUESTION: What are the advantages of expository preaching in a postmodern culture?

Expository preaching is the only thing that is going to change anything. There isn't any other way to affect people positively aside from hitting them with that kind of authority. In my own preaching, my objective is not to court the postmodern mind. My objective is to confront it--to hit it stone cold in the face with truth. It's irrelevant to me how the person thinks. It's only relevant to me how they need to think. So I'm not going to play around with their sensitivities to postmodernism.

At a recent Bible conference, I spoke on the exclusivity of the gospel, and I set forth the distinctiveness of Christianity. And afterward some guys who were seminary students and philosophy majors came up to me and said, "What's really interesting about your message is that you gave us a philosophy of thinking, a worldview. But we've never heard anyone give that kind of worldview without a very intricate philosophical defense." And I said I didn't need to give an intricate philosophical defense, because this is exactly what Scripture says, and there is no need to defend it. You just proclaim it. See these guys were struck by the fact that what they heard was an absolute authoritative statement of a worldview that takes on postmodernism, without having to fuddle around and make all kinds of philosophical and rational arguments, and without having to answer every objection that arises.

So the advantages of preaching expositoryly and authoritatively in a postmodern culture are the same as they are in any environment where there is error--you bring an authoritative word to bear upon how people think.

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