

Grace to You :: esp *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why I Still Preach the Bible

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:2–4

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Sadly and ironically, in its attempt to achieve cultural relevance, mainstream evangelicalism has become essentially irrelevant. As Os Guinness points out, [1][Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), pp. 64–67] the seductive promise of “relevance” is, in reality, the road to irrelevance. When the church markets itself like the world, the distinctiveness of its message is lost and the gospel is irretrievably compromised. The entertainment value may be high, attracting throngs each week; but the eternal value is conspicuously absent, as those same people go home unchallenged and unchanged.

Besides, the quest for cultural relevance is contrary to everything Scripture teaches about church ministry. Preachers are called to preach the Word of God, unfiltered by notions of political correctness, undiluted by the preacher’s own ideas, and unadapted to the spirit of the age.

That is how I have approached ministry from the beginning. My father was a pastor, and when I first told him years ago that I believed God was calling me to a life of ministry, he gave me a Bible in which he had inscribed these words of encouragement: “Preach the Word!” That simple statement became the compelling stimulus in my heart. It is the one thing I have endeavored to do above all else in my ministry: preach the Word.

Pastors today face relentless pressure to do everything *but* preach the Word. They are encouraged to be storytellers, comedians, psychologists, or motivational speakers. They are warned to steer clear of topics that people find unpleasant. Many have given up biblical preaching in favor of shallow talks designed to make people feel good. Some have even replaced preaching with drama and other forms of staged entertainment.

But the pastor whose passion is biblical has only one option: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2).

When Paul wrote those words to Timothy, he added this prophetic warning: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Clearly there was no room in Paul’s philosophy of ministry for the give-people-what-they-want theory that is so prevalent today. He was no “man pleaser” (Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 6:6). He did not urge Timothy to conduct a survey to find out what his people wanted. He commanded him to preach the Word—faithfully, reprovably, and patiently.

In fact, far from urging Timothy to devise a ministry that would garner accolades from the world, Paul warned the young pastor about suffering and hardship! Paul was not telling Timothy how to be “successful”; he was encouraging him to follow the divine standard. He was not advising him to pursue prosperity, power, prominence, popularity, or any of the other worldly notions of success. He was urging the young pastor to be *biblical*—regardless of the consequences.

Preaching the Word is not easy. The stringent discipline required to interpret Scripture accurately is a constant burden, and the message we are required to proclaim is often offensive. Christ Himself is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8). The message of the cross is a stumbling block to some (1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11) and mere foolishness to others (1 Corinthians 1:23).

But we are never permitted to trim the message or tailor it to people’s preferences. Paul made this clear to Timothy at the end of chapter 3: “*All Scripture* is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, emphasis added). This is the Word to be preached: the whole counsel of God (cf. Acts 20:27).

In chapter 1 Paul had told Timothy, “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me” (2 Timothy 1:13). He was speaking of the revealed words of Scripture—all of it. He urged Timothy to “Guard . . . the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Timothy 1:14). Then in chapter 2 he told him to study the Word and handle it accurately (2 Timothy 2:15). He then brings the epistle to its summit by urging him to proclaim God’s Word no matter what. So the entire task of the faithful minister revolves around the Word of God—guarding it, studying it, and proclaiming it.

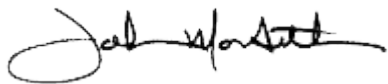
In Colossians 1 the apostle Paul, describing his own ministry philosophy, writes, “Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, *so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God*” (Colossians 1:25, emphasis added). In 1 Corinthians he goes a step further: “When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). In other words, his goal as a preacher was not to entertain people with his rhetorical style, or to amuse them with cleverness, humor, novel insights, or sophisticated methodology. He simply preached Christ crucified.

Faithfully preaching and teaching the Word *must* be the very heart of our ministry philosophy. Any other approach replaces the voice of God with human wisdom. Philosophy, politics, humor, psychology, homespun advice, and personal opinion can never accomplish what the Word of God does. Those things may be interesting, informative, entertaining, and sometimes even helpful—but they are not the business of the church. The preacher’s task is not to be a conduit for human wisdom; he is God’s voice to speak to the congregation. No human message comes with the stamp of divine authority—only the Word of God. How dare any preacher substitute another message?

I frankly do not understand preachers who are willing to abdicate this solemn privilege. Why should we proclaim the wisdom of men when we have the privilege of preaching the Word of God?

With that in mind, over the next few days and weeks I want to give you ten reasons I’m still preaching the Bible after forty-five years of pulpit ministry. This is not an exhaustive list, but I trust it will encourage you to be faithful to proclaim the Word of God to the people of God through the power of

the Spirit of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from [*The Master's Plan for the Church*](#).)

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