

**The Consequences of Non-expositional Preaching, Part 1**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-372

Well it was a number of years ago when we were going to be having here at Grace Church a special seminar for pastors. We have the Shepherds' Conference every year, of course, and we've done that, I think Clayton told me the other day, we've had 36 of them...Shepherds Conferences. In the early years we had two a year for a while. I don't know if that number is exactly accurate, but we've had many of them.

But also from time to time we have done some special conferences for pastors of a smaller scale. Sometimes pastors from America, sometimes pastors from Russia, sometimes pastors even from Korea and other places. But this was going to be a kind of small conference of about a dozen pastors. And I was asked if I would spend the opening day with them and if I would come up oh, say ten reasons why I preach expositionally. Now when I use the word "exposition" it is based on the verb *exposit*, that's a different verb than *expose*. *Expose* is a different thing. *Exposit* is to explain. Why do I always when I stand in this pulpit explain the Bible? That is Bible exposition, why do I do that? So they said, "Why don't you come up with ten compelling reasons why you do that."

So I tucked myself away in a little corner, got out my pad and wrote down sixty-one reasons...61 reasons and I stopped only because I realized that 61 was more than they wanted. It was more than I could possibly deliver.

Believe it or not, to that dozen men I managed to give those 61 reasons. In fact, I think that in that day-long session, I actually threw in a couple of extras. The bottom line for that is not to frighten you as if you would be able to endure 61 reasons why I preach the way I preach, but simply to let you know that there is almost no end to the compelling reasons why we teach the Word of God the way we teach it.

Christian ministry has one clear duty and that is to bring to people the truth of God revealed in the Scripture by explaining its meaning. The meaning of the Scripture is the revelation from God. I have no other responsibility in my duty to represent the Lord, to represent the Lord Jesus Christ than to explain to you the meaning of His revelation. God has revealed Himself in one book. We are ministers of this one book. In a sense, we are brokers of this one book. We disseminate its truths to people, both to the people who do not know the Lord, and to the people who do.

The simple instruction of 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word," sums up that duty. There is nowhere in Scripture where we are commanded to do anything else. We are to preach the Word, meaning the

revelation of God contained in Scripture. We explain the meaning of the Bible, that is what Christian ministers and pastors are called to do. To say that they get sidetracked is a vast understatement. They get caught up in all kinds of things other than this...but a pure devotion to the calling that God has given to us is to explain to people the meaning of Scripture.

Now this becomes for any servant of the Lord, a compelling calling. There is no calling equal to this. It is not, shouldn't be, confusing, it is crystal-clear, take this divine revelation which God has given to us and tell the people what it means. I've often said in talking to pastors around the world that it breaks down into some very simple things. First of all, what does it say? And secondly, what does it mean by what it says? And thirdly, what are the implications of that on my life?

We were talking about this a few weeks ago that I am an implicational preacher rather than an applicational preacher. I am more concerned that you understand the theological implication than that I try to make some personal application to everybody's life. The more focused I get on some personal application, the more people I eliminate. But what I do want you to understand that this is what it says and this is what it means and these are the implications that that truth comes to bring on your life.

Now I have tried to reduce these 61 to about a dozen, or fifteen, compelling reasons for Bible exposition. I want to turn it upside down, if I can, and operate on a negative basis. I want to show you the tragic consequences of non-expositional preaching, the tragic consequences of non-expositional preaching.

Now I want you to understand, I realize that you come to this church and you know what expositional preaching is like because it goes on here all the time. You know that everyone who stands in this pulpit is basically explaining to you the significance of Scripture revelation. But I want you to be able to understand why this is so compelling. And I think the force of understanding that will come across more strongly if I approach it from the negative side. So let me begin with the first and perhaps the overarching point.

The first negative tragic consequence of failing to preach expositionally is that it usurps the authority of God over the mind and soul of the hearer. And as a pastor, as your shepherd, as the one accountable to God for your care and your spiritual progress and your spiritual development, there is one very basic foundational reality that I want to establish in your life, and that is that God has total authority over your soul and over your mind, that God is sovereign, not me. That God's truth is sovereign, not my ideas. That God's Word reigns over your life, not my insights. It is critical to establish the authority of God over the mind and soul of the hearer. It is the question of authority.

Now we all understand that we live in a world that doesn't like authority. We live in a world that resists authority. We live in this post-modern culture where everybody wants to think that he or she is an authority unto himself, as if he had a right to believe anything he wanted to believe, or she to

believe anything she wanted to believe and therefore act in any way he or she wants to act without any recourse and without anyone stepping in and saying, "Wait a minute, that's out of bounds, that's unacceptable." The rejection of a universal law, the rejection of an absolute set of standards of morality, the rejection of a universal code of ethical conduct is part of our culture. Every person is a law unto himself. And, of course, if that sounds familiar it's because it's nothing new. It was the way the people of Israel behaved even in Old Testament times. And so, time to establish an authority in people's lives today is a challenging, challenging thing. God is that authority and His Word is the revelation of that authority.

When you come into this church, all I want you to understand is that God has spoken and this is what He has said. He has said...and here are the implications of what He has said on your life. In a sense, I want to pin you to the back wall with no way to escape the implications of the truth that I have explained to you. I want to show you what the Scripture says rather than tell you what it says. I want to make you a part of the process of explaining the Bible. I want to explain it in such a way that you're coming along with the explanation and buying into it because it's sensible, it's reasonable. It comes across as true. It has the ring of truth. It's verifiable.

Sometimes people ask me, "Why do you use so many cross-references?" Because they all support the interpretation of the given text so that you can see this is in fact what the Bible teaches, not just here but everywhere else. And the more you can sustain and support that throughout the Scripture, the stronger that impact of that truth on the heart and the mind.

The basic issue then is for you to recognize that the Bible is the Word of God who is absolutely sovereign and it brings to bear its authority on your life. Not just to command you, but to bless you. Not just to convict you, but to encourage you. Not just to make you feel guilty but to bring you comfort. All that comes through the Word of God is intended for your blessing and your benefit. But you must submit to its authority.

Every time you come here and someone stands to preach to you, or in your Sunday-School class, your fellowship group, to teach you, it is to bring to you the unsearchable glories of the Word of God because He alone has a right to be heard. If you go to a church, any church anywhere and you do not hear from God, then that is a ministry that has abandoned its sole responsibility.

A second thing to think about, a failure to preach exposition, a failure to preach the Word of God usurps the lordship of Christ over His church...usurps the lordship of Christ over His church.

You remember we have talked about the headship of Christ over the church, haven't we? That He is the Lord of the church, "I will build My church," we looked at that in Matthew this morning. He is head of the church repeatedly in the epistles of Paul, Christ is presented as the head of the church. We read it in Ephesians 4 today. He is the head of the church. He is Lord of His church. You remember

that wonderful text of Ephesians 1:17 and following, that God has made the One who is Lord over everything to be the head of the church.

It is such a foundational and such a basic reality to understand that. The only way the Lord can exercise His headship over the church is to be heard by the church. I think we all understand that leadership is communication. How can the head of the church communicate to the church unless He can speak to the church? And He speaks to the church through Scripture.

The battle over this issue has gone on for centuries...for centuries. Usually when I speak to leaders, I talk about this. Just last week in Nashville I spoke at the National Religious Broadcasters' Conference, I also spoke at the Nashville Conference on Church and Theology, and I talked about Christ as the head of the church. It may seem something basic to us, something non-controversial to us, but it has been a bloodbath battleground through the centuries. For example, the Pope says he's the head of the church. Many years in the Middle Ages, whoever was the king said he was the head of the church. And sometimes it was a battle between a king, like Henry VIII and the Pope as to who would be the head of the church. In Henry VIII's case in England, if you as a subject of Henry VIII did not affirm that he was the head of the church, you were burned, singed, taken down, chopped in pieces for a failure to acknowledge that he was the head of the church. There were many who died upholding Christ as the head of the church.

The only way, as I said, that Christ can articulate His headship in the church is to be heard by the church. I would never be so bold as to replace the authority of God in the church with mine, or to replace the headship of Christ in the church with mine. I don't want to stand between God and His church. I don't want to stand between Christ and His church, except to be a channel through which the Word of God and the leadership of Christ can come to the church. The only way I can do that is to let God speak and let Christ speak, and that comes through your understanding of Scripture.

Thirdly, and necessarily, and sequentially, a failure to preach exposition hinders the work of the Holy Spirit. It hinders the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes you turn on your television, this is probably the only way you're going to get this experience, and you see some massive crowd of people gathered together listening to a so-called preacher who never explains the Scripture, but only talks about things that he thinks the people want to hear about, gives his own ideas and etc., etc. The assumption is that some great spiritual work is going on. The reality is, there is no spiritual work going on whatsoever because the Holy Spirit works only through the Word.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God as the means of saving. We are begotten again by the Word of Truth, 1 Peter 1:23. The Spirit uses the Word to sanctify, "Sanctify them by Thy Truth, Thy Word is Truth." The only tool the Spirit has is the Scripture. And where the Scripture is replaced by anything else, the work of the Spirit of God is hindered.

There might be a large crowd, they might be having a great time. They might enjoy the rock and roll concert that usually precedes the insipid, inane talk. But that's not where the Spirit of God is working. The Spirit of God works through the Word, saves through the Word, sanctifies through the Word, comforts through the Word, instructs through the Word, edifies through the Word. And so, if we want a full Trinitarian power display in the church, we teach the Word so that God's authority dominates Christ's headship, His pervasive and the Spirit works with great power.

There's a fourth reason why we preach expositionally and these are interlocking, interweaving, as you will recognize. But a failure to preach expositionally manifests a lack of submission to Scripture...a lack of submission to Scripture. Now that is unthinkable for a Christian, is it not? You heard one of the folks in Baptism tonight quote that verse, that if you belong to Christ, you will obey Him, John 14. It is unthinkable that a believer would not submit to Scripture.

It is even more unthinkable that a preacher would not submit to Scripture. That reveals an inferior, inadequate love for God, understanding of His glory and His authority, an inadequate and inferior recognition of the honor and glory of Christ and an inadequate and inferior understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is amazing to me how many preachers seem to have no interest in bringing the Word of God and demonstrating thereby that they themselves submit to it.

The heart of all true preaching is that the preacher submits to the Word. There's nothing else. My life in that sense is very simple. I submit to the Word of God, trusting that in the disciplines of study, the process of digging into the Word of God and seeking the help of the Lord in the process that I will come to understand it, submit my own heart to it fully and then tell it to you.

You know, it's a frightening thing to think about not submitting to the Word of God. His message is revealed in Scripture. Nowhere else. The massive rift known as the Reformation basically came from Luther's conviction that the Roman Catholic Church did not submit to Scripture. That was the issue. Therefore it could not speak for God.

How could we expect absolute obedience from people, absolute submission to the authority of the Word of God if that's not true in our own lives? And so, we teach only the Word of God, explaining it.

One of the...one of the wonderful old past generation American preachers was a man named R.L. Dabney. And reading him is always refreshing. He's like a Puritan out of his time and out of his place. And Dabney said, "All the leading Reformers at the time of the Reformation were expositors." Of course...of course. All the leading ministers throughout history have been expositors. They've all been submissive to Scripture. He said, "The power of the Great Revolution that we know as the Reformation was the restoration of Scriptural preaching. It came with the authority of God. It came with the power of the Holy Spirit. It came under the clear leadership of Christ and people submitted to the Word of God in the pulpit and people followed and submitted to the Word of God in the pew."

And Dabney then goes on to draw a little kind of a paradigm that helps us to understand this. He said, "The golden age of preaching is Scripture truth in Scripture dress," that's the words he used. Scripture truth in Scripture dress...that's the golden age. That is all the truths of the Bible presented in their biblical context as the Holy Spirit wrote them, had them written by inspired writers. Scripture truth in Scripture dress.

You teach the Bible from the Bible. You teach Bible truth in Bible texts. That's the golden age. That's what we endeavor to do...to teach Bible truth from Bible texts. You say, "What else would you do?"

Oh, well. The second and declining age is to teach Scripture truth in cultural dress. This is where you say, "Well, here are the scriptural truths, we know them but people don't really want to go through Bible study, the Bible is an old book, it's out of date, it's antiquated, it's boring, etc., etc. We're not abandoning the faith, we still believe in the things that are true in Scripture, we still affirm the great theological realities, but we understand that you can't communicate to people Bible truth in Bible dress, so you communicate to them Bible truth in cultural dress. Now by that I don't mean the clothes the preacher wears, although that's a part of it. But rather that you disassociate yourself with the Scripture as the context out of which you teach and you find some location in the culture. God's truth molded to cultural moods.

And then comes the third in the declining steps. First is Scripture truth in Scripture dress. Then Scripture truth in cultural dress. And third is cultural opinion without Scripture...no Scripture. Dabney pled for Bible truth and Bible dress.

And here we are celebrating 40 years of ministry here, actually the church, over 50 years, and this church is doing what its always done. The culture shifts and ebbs and flows so fast, we can't even keep up with it. Churches that try to keep up with it and put Bible truth in cultural dress eventually because of their devotion to the cultural context, abandon the truth and end up with a cultural message without Scripture. Or they become obsolete because they've identified themselves with one point of the culture which passes so fast that it's kind of like planned obsolescence. The objective, of course, is to bring you into submission to Scripture, not just the things that Scripture affirms, but the Scripture itself.

Number five, here's another thing that happens if we do not do Bible exposition. A failure to preach expositionally, a failure to preach the Scripture from the Scripture, Scripture truth from Scripture context...this is so important...severs the preacher personally from the sanctifying grace of Scripture.

You know, I'm very aware of this. James says, "Stop being so many teachers, theirs is a greater condemnation." The writer of Hebrews says, "We have to give an account to God." Paul says, "I beat my body into subjection because I don't want to become disqualified." In 1 Timothy and in Titus there

are requirements for someone who does this. And the first one is that he be above...what?...reproach, that he have no public shame, that he has not brought some kind of scandal on himself and on the church and on the name of the Lord. How does someone who has engaged in this for years and years and years and years, how does someone who does this and is regularly attacking the kingdom of darkness and I'm sure those who through the years and even now are faithful have excited the forces of hell, Satan himself and the demons, who would want to bring down any faithful preacher...how does one survive through all of that? How does one survive all the impulses of the flesh? All the assaults and attacks that come from the inside and the outside through the years and years of ministry. And I will tell you this, that the way you survive is to be a Bible expositor and it's to your benefit to stay in the same place and do it, then you are forced every week of your life to expose yourself to the sanctifying work of the Word in your own heart.

I'm no surprised that pastors who don't do this fall into some sin. I'm not surprised when pastors spend three or four years in one place, or five and a few more somewhere else and a few more somewhere else, and just take their little bag of sermons from place to place to place to place. Some of them certainly survive and some of them are faithful in their own time in the Lord and time in the Word.

But I understand that week by week by week by week, year by year, intensive study of Scripture exposes the soul to the power of the truth. And I will just tell you this that the things that I tell you the Word will do in your life is exactly what it has done in my life, the work of the Word in my own heart...I would be afraid to be a pastor who has to think up a sermon out of nowhere or invent something, or be creative, or as many do today, have a committee of people out of the church put the sermon together which he then preaches. I think it is very dangerous.

I look at my own life and I look at all the sermons I've preached, I don't know how many thousands times I've preached, I look back at some of my heroes, John Calvin prepared ten sermons every two weeks. In a two-week period he would preach ten different sermons, all of them expositions of Scripture. He did it from 1536 to 1564...except for a three-year period in there when he was exiled. And you know the story, when he came back three years after being exiled, he picked up at the next verse. It wasn't easy for him to do that. His wife died. He was sick. He was spitting blood. He had gout and hemorrhoids, kidney stones, persecution. He had nine children without a wife, some his own, and some dropped off for him to care for that he was raising. The disciplines were just astonishing to preach ten times in two weeks. But he was a product of the sanctifying grace of all of that study.

And then there was Luther who at Wittenberg on a Sunday preached his first sermon at 5 A.M. That, friends, is the early service...5 A.M. when he would preach an epistle. Ten A.M. he would preach from a gospel, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Five P.M. he would preach the Old Testament. In a four year period from 1520 to 1524 he wrote 700 works...massive exposure to the Word of God has

great sanctifying power. And the minister who fails to expose himself to the Word of God, fails to expose himself to its sanctifying work.

Number six, failure to preach expositionally removes spiritual depth and transcendence from the souls of people...failure to preach expositionally removes spiritual depth and transcendence from the souls of people. That is to say it cripples worship...cripples worship, both personal worship and cooperate worship.

What do I mean by that? Well let's take it from a positive side. When you come on a Sunday, or you go to a Bible study, or you go to an opportunity to be taught the Word of God, you are taken down into the depths of Scripture inevitably to places you haven't been, right? You say, "Well, I've read that many times, I didn't see that." You know when your teacher has prepared. You know when your pastor has dug down deep and there's an exhilarating experience when you discover these great deep truths. And they grab your soul because they're not just clever insights. You know, there are a lot of people who just go from Sunday to Sunday and hear a clever story and somehow the clever story sticks. But it has no real power. It may titillate a little bit but it doesn't have any power.

What has power is a truth concerning God, concerning spiritual reality that takes you to a depth you've never been to before. But gives you an insight you've never had. And as a result of this depth of understanding, there's a transcendent knowledge and that shows up in your worship. If you understand the full nuances of the doctrine of justification, and you sing hymns about justification, you infuse those hymns with exuberant joy because you get it. That's why I always say, "I don't like over-simplified repetitious songs." I love hymns because they have nuances that only the really informed grasp. And then when you grasp them because they're rich, they're nuanced, there are subtitles in there, there is magnificent language that you understand because you understand the doctrine and your worship is enriched and enhanced. Now I've said this many times, you have to take people down into the Word to discover the rich truths that are there so that they can go up in transcendent worship. Most churches just kind of live on the flat land in the middle. Don't think deeply about anything, and therefore their worship is very mundane and it's nothing more than emotional stimulation. Churches like that get filled up with entertainment because the people really can't worship. They're not lost in wonder, love and praise. They're not in awe of God His glory and His mighty work and His majesty. They sort of trip along in their little casual world with their simplistic ideas.

Number seven, a failure to preach expositionally, and this is very important, prevents the preacher from fully speaking for Christ whom he serves. A failure to preach expositionally prevents the preacher from fully speaking for Christ whom he serves.

In First Corinthians 2:14 to 16, we are reminded of a very important spiritual truth and I've just been quoting Scriptures up to this point, but this one I want to read. "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him. He cannot understand them because they are



spiritually appraised.” So mark it down, folks, an unconverted natural person doesn’t get it...doesn’t understand the things of God. In fact, one of my grandchildren was telling me today that on a U Tube where there’s reruns of some of my times on the Larry King show, people blog and comment on me and they’re not favorable...they’re not favorable. This grandchild was saying to me, they say, “This is a sad, unhappy miserable person, this MacArthur guy. He has to be to come off with that kind of stuff.” So we understand that, that they do not comprehend the things of God. And that is to be expected as a response. But that doesn’t change what we do because it says in verse 16, “We have...end of the verse...the mind of Christ.”

You know, that’s an outstanding thing. Prior to that, quotes from the Old Testament, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” We do. You can ask that question and I’ll say we know the mind of the Lord. What do you mean you know the mind of the Lord? Well, the Lord has revealed His mind here.

So, what is my responsibility, that whenever I speak I speak the mind of Christ? How can I do that if I don’t know what is in the book, if I haven’t submitted myself to it?

Many are shallow, lack knowledge of Scripture. They may know the culture. You know, they may be funny, they may be clever. They want people to like them. But they can’t speak for Christ. And that’s what I’m committed to. I don’t ever want to be caught in a situation where I’m asked about something in which I cannot give the mind of Christ. That’s my responsibility.

Many, many years ago when we were thinking about starting to ordain men here at the church. And we’ve ordained many through the years. They said, “What should be the criteria by which we ordain a man?” Well certainly the necessity of his spiritual gifting and having proven himself, and all of those things.

But I said, essentially, anybody that receives ordination from Grace Community Church as a minister of the Scriptures, must know the Scripture. How basic is that? You must know the Scripture.

So I put together a pretty thick book of things they had to know. If they are to be ordained and these things are still in place as I understand it now, although I’m not always involved in every ordination, you had to be able on your feet without any help to outline every book of the Bible. That’s pretty basic, right? You don’t want to be guilty of malpractice, and if you don’t know the truth of Scripture, you have to start there.

So, you should know the basic content of every book in the Bible, give a brief outline of the book and kind of the flow...the flow of the logic of the book. And then you should know every key chapter in the Bible and what that key chapter is about and you should know key verses or a couple of verses and what they’re about. And then you should know every main doctrine Scripture reveals and you should be able to explain that doctrine, give a defense of that doctrine in a brief fashion that is crystalized and clarified in your own mind. Because of all things that someone who goes into ministry should be able to do, it is to reveal what the Scripture says. That’s the mind of Christ on everything.

And then there are issues that we used to ask them: Describe what the Bible teaches about divorce. Describe what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. Describe what the Bible teaches about corporeal punishment. Describe what the Bible teaches about capital punishment. What does the Bible say about this and that and the other? And that's the foundation. We are people of the Book and we have to be able to say this is the mind of Christ, this is the Word of God on that subject. And if you don't spend your life digging in to the Word of God, you're not going to be able to do that.

You know, it's...it's one thing to prepare a sermon and you've got all your notes written, it's something else to have to answer those questions when you're somewhere else and you don't have your notes. And somebody asks you such penetrating questions as people ask me all the time, sometimes on television, on radio, they hit me with questions that I could never ever anticipate, never. But if I am going to be a minister of Jesus Christ, I need to be prepared to speak as if it were Christ Himself...I stand in His place.

Let me give you one more and I've left some for next Sunday night. A failure to preach and teach expositionally depreciates by example the spiritual duty and benefit of studying Scripture...depreciates by example the spiritual duty and benefit of studying Scripture. If the pastor doesn't do it, why in the world should I do it? If it's not valuable to him, how could it be valuable to me? If you don't need to study the Scripture to be the preacher, you sure don't need to study the Scripture to be the parishioner. If the Bible is not the consuming passion of the pulpit, why would we expect it to be the consuming passion of the pew?

To model a superficial attitude toward Scripture in the pulpit is horrendous because like people, like priest, right? Hosea. People aren't going to rise any higher than the leadership. If you're not committed to an intense and faithful and diligent study of the Word of God, don't expect your people to be either. You've just cut them off from their spiritual life because man doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. If it doesn't even interest you, why would you interest anybody else?

You're sending a terrible message to people. The Bible doesn't matter. The Bible isn't interesting. There are things better than the Bible. My insights, your insights. Don't get caught up in Bible study, I certainly don't. This is horrific. On the other hand, when the Bible is taught and when it is the passion of the pulpit, it inevitably becomes the passion of the pew.

Well, that's a lot to process in 50 minutes, but I think it makes sense, don't you? And I think it holds up under scrutiny.

I...well I gave you eight, so next Sunday night I'll give you 53...(laughter)...no, I wouldn't do that to you.

Father, thank You for Your truth, thank You for Your Word. We're so profoundly enriched by it, indescribably blessed. Our hearts are filled with gratitude. We give You thanks. Amen.

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