

## TOPICAL PREACHING

There is definitely a need for topical preaching, i.e., preaching on BIBLICAL topics. Any subject in the Bible can be preached on with great effectiveness, but it must stay within the bounds of the Scripture, not our conjecture. Texts must be selected with care so as not to "wrest the Scriptures to our own destruction." We should not attempt to prove anything which the Bible doesn't prove. We must not force our ideas on the sacred and holy words of God. Topical messages are O.K. if they are rooted in biblical foundations. A text out of the Bible does not make a message biblical!

I recently heard a message by a good man using a great text, but his sermon was completely divorced from the context, and this is not unusual for this man. As someone forcefully and clearly pointed out *"A text divorced from its context is a pretext."* The message I heard was exactly that - a pretext to allow the preacher to say what was on his heart, not what was in the scriptures – a pretext to present his views. While his views may have been O.K., it was wrong to present them under the guise of a biblical sermon. To paraphrase the quote above, allow me to say that a message divorced from the Word of God is a speech, not a sermon. Or, to put it another way, a sermon divorced from the Bible is a secular talk. The content of any topical message must come from the context of the passage of Scripture being used. Taking words out of the Bible to build a sermon is O.K. as long as the context is biblical. Preaching your own views, philosophy, unbiblical or psychological principles is not preaching the Word. As a pastor I would often say *"What I just said was Fedena's philosophy, not 'thus saith the Lord'"* whenever I introduced something that was not biblically based. What I said may have been truth, but was not necessarily God's Word on a given subject. By the way, using a text out of the Bible does not make the message biblical. Simply because the topic is truthful or accurate doesn't make it sermonic fodder. Liberals preach truth at times, but rarely does their truth have its roots in Scripture. For example someone may preach something mathematically or scientifically true but it has no place in the pulpit. It may be O.K. for an illustration, but it is not preaching the Word. Using the Bible to project your pet peeves, hobby horses, political concepts, etc. is not what preachers are commissioned to do. ( I confess to being guilty at times. The temptation is always there since we have a more or less captive audience.)

While the congregation may agree with you as you "preach" and give hearty amens you have abdicated your responsibility to preach the Word and feed the flock. The pastor's primary responsibility is to feed the flock. Many congregations are completely ignorant of sound doctrine because they never hear it preached! They are fed a few scraps of truth but are biblically malnourished. My heart aches as I hear a great passage of Scripture read at the outset of a sermon and then never hear it referred to again in the message. I am awaiting spiritual food and I get the equivalent of "fast food" which may have a good taste, but little or no nourishment.

Topical messages are much easier to prepare and require little real Bible study. But isn't that what the pastor is supposed to do? Shouldn't he use his time daily to labor in the Word and study to show himself approved? He has the time which the average lay person lacks due to a work schedule, pressures of family and social life, etc. According to the farewell address to the elders (pastors) at Ephesus in Acts 20:28 the pastor's responsibility is to "take heed" to himself and to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has given him the oversight. He is then to "feed the flock of God" and "lead" them as their overseer. To take heed, feed and lead is the primary burden of any God called preacher! The failure to feed the flock the spiritually life sustaining and growth formula given to God's people in His Word is to fail the flock, not feed, lead or take heed to the flock.

While some men may be gifted orators who can spellbind a congregation with their eloquence regardless of the content of what they preach, they may fail miserably in the primary task they have been called to accomplish. Perhaps young preachers hearing these gifted men attempt to emulate their style to the detriment of their call to the ministry. Some have even adopted the style of the orators and their mannerisms but have failed miserably in their study of God's Word and presentation of sound doctrine and their mandate to feed the flock with spiritual nourishment. They may have even been taught in Bible college that exposition of Scripture is wrong. One famous preacher proclaimed that he only had 22 subjects he preached on. I am sure there are many more subjects in God's Word. In fact, there are at least 66 books of the Bible and nearly every chapter contains varied subjects!

We need a return to hours of study and preparation and prayer before we mount the pulpit. We should serve up hearty spiritual meals, not appetizers or dessert. We need to present food, not fluff when we preach. The challenge to "feed the flock" should not be taken lightly and the faithful pastor who does so will find that his flock will be spiritually healthy and growing in the grace and the knowledge of the Word of God living and written.

What is written here is not meant to be harsh or critical, but rather an encouragement for men of God to do what they were called to do. That means textual, expository, contextual preaching of the Word. An in depth study of preaching as recorded in the Bible and in church history of those most used of God is in order. It is the Word of God which God has promised to bless – not our ideas or private interpretations. Let's get back to the Book!

**In the book *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, Donald Sunukjian writes, "The Bible is God's voice, spanning the ages. The role of the biblical preacher is to echo that voice in this generation." Right on! The preacher is not to create his own message, he is to deliver the one entrusted to him in God's Word. Instead of discussing preaching by categorizing it into neat compartments: topical, textual, expository – the real issue is not the length of the passage but rather how that passage is dealt with. The preacher must be true to the intent of the original writer – both the human and the Lord. The true biblical sermon is not simply "a convenient peg to hang a ragtag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said." (*Between Two Worlds*)**

**It must be the desire of the biblical preacher to identify the subject of each passage of God's Word he preaches and expound on what God has to say, not what he has to say. It is the Central Idea of the Text ("CIT" – Heartland Baptist Bible College) which is important. It is the preacher's job to stand before his congregation and say "Listen to what God has to say to us!" *That* is preaching the Word.**

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