

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED

I have come to a conclusion, after years of observing and inquiry of a plethora of preachers, that there are about as many different study and sermon preparation ways as there are preachers. But one thing is certain—preachers must be students—students of the Word, of people, events and life in general.

How to “study,” is not really that easy to nail down when it concerns the work of the ministry. “To study,” when used in secular education is much easier to ascertain—the study of geography, for instance, would only require the student to focus on a certain set of materials without having to cipher in a lot of externals. But preaching is a whole new “world,” because it is not good enough to just give facts nor to even just quote verses—but a complexity of matters must come together in order to do the Lord’s service.

The preacher, whose job is to preach, will find that the function of preaching is multifaceted. The sing-song of Latin liturgies and the chant of the Islamic prayer beckoners, among others, all have death and decay reverberating from them because they are lifeless without any source of the Divine but Biblical preaching is first and foremost a living and divine impartation of God to man—and for it to become a reality God must make a preacher His student. The ways in which God makes a man His student may vary but “study to shew thyself approved” is a necessity.

So, with these things in mind perhaps we could start with some basics and then later broaden the spectrum. Some things should go without saying—there can be no flow without a connection—prayer, personal devotion, and correct motive are essentials—*open the heart before opening the Book*. Therefore, having a correct platform for construction is a must and volumes could be written on just that one premise alone but let us look at some basics beyond the “square one” of heart preparation:

Briefly, and again not so much as to set an a-b-c of order but rather to specify the ingredients in the study salad—individually (This is why I will not number the ingredients so as to prevent any set order or to limit the ingredients to a “this many and no more” situation—no doubt, other emphasizes can be added):

>>> Read, read, read the Word.

In order for God to “bring to mind” there must be Biblical data IN the student—and this is only possible by reading the Word. A casual and indifferent reader of the Bible is always a

casual and indifferent preacher with casual and indifferent sermons. Read to familiarize, read to recognize and read to have a starting place for the Spirit to strike a spark.

>>> **Remember that “words” are the preacher’s primary communication tool.**

“The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.” Ecc. 12:10

It’s such a popular axiom that the often-expressed phrase, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” has almost gained gospel status and a chorus of deafening “amens!” usually accompany its vocal expression (strange none seem to stop to consider that it took words to make it known). However, upon due consideration, that phrase is in direct opposition with the Biblical premise of preaching. As a matter of fact, it is not “A picture is worth a thousand words” but rather “It takes words to make a picture,” especially in spiritual matters—and this is what preaching is all about—*searching for acceptable words*.

In an “eye-candy” world such as we live in today it is no wonder that the popularity of true preaching wanes. A generation accustomed more to the eye gate than the ear gate expresses little admiration for the vocally propagated gospel—ear splitting crescendos of music (so-called) yes—but not heart smiting credos of gospel preaching. Therefore, it is understandable (not condoned, however) why so many churches have entered the “visual-extravaganza” realm with eye pleasing demonstrations of what they deem to be evangelization. Poor misdirected souls!

The preacher that does not have a constant searching for “acceptable words—even words of truth” has not only greatly misunderstood the call of God but also has perverted that call to venture beyond the vocal, as the primary element, into the glittering world of the visual. The first and foremost duty of the preacher is to “preach the word—in season and out of season” and to do it “instantly” or as the first response.

This “seeking out acceptable words” is the primary objective of any true God-called preacher. To seek it out through study and prayer—to have his heart, head and spirit filled with words when he mounts the sacred desk—this is what preaching is! A dog that cannot bark cannot be excused just because he can do a few visual tricks. God called men to preach—words!

Preacher don’t be intimidated by the status quo of today’s “show and no tell” follies. Keep searching out acceptable words—even words of truth to fulfill your calling!

>>> Never be without pen and paper!

As essential as having the Bible itself the student must always and at all times and in all places be prepared to note down the insights that may come either from spiritual musing on the Word or from stimuli from one's surroundings—externals that make illustrative points. In the car, on the night stand—everywhere be prepared to hear and see with ears and eyes of the student.

>>> Direction is vital.

All of God's revelations and insights flow FROM the Word outward not visa-versa. Inspiration, God breathed, lessons must have a Biblical foundation— "to behold the delight of Jehovah, and to inquire in His temple." Start at the beginning and go on from there. Beware of making the Bible a secondary instrument in preaching!

>>> It must be understood that not ALL Word study is necessarily sermon material.

In other words, we may learn "on our own" certain Biblical intricacies that aid us in better understanding and we may even delve into areas of the "silence of God" all for personal edification and for data but when the Spirit leads us to study in an area it is usually for the aid of others and therefore must be pursued with all reverence and fear as the Mind of Christ.

>>> The Divine Painter sees the overall picture.

God alone sees the big-picture and He desires to present the needed portion of His plan to the heart and mind of His preacher. But to apply it to the canvas of the preacher's heart and spirit it is usually applied in small brush strokes—each adding to the scene. God will usually have us wait on Him until He has applied enough strokes to make a picture. Don't, as they say, rush off with the just the brown paper bag without the lunch. Don't be an Ahimaaz—a runner without a message! Far too many young men seek the *thrill of the pulpit* over the *preparation of the pulpit*.

>>> Balance.

The importance of balance cannot be overstated. Human nature is by nature a tangent seeker—a guided missile toward its likes and a fleer from its dislikes. Therefore, this tendency must be avoided by the honest Bible student else he will pursue only the subjects that interest him personally and avoid the ones he is uninterested in. Tangents in a man's ministry comes about when there is not sufficient input from other areas of study.

The Bible deals with mankind through many diversities of subjects, therefore, a Bible student must not channel himself to a single area of study overall. Some subjects that a church needs may not be the preacher's favorite topic—but God never instructed the preacher to only deal with his likes but rather what God wants declared. "Speak that which I have placed in thy mouth." Preaching is not a "preach to feel good" but rather an obedience to the Mind of God—whether you enjoy it or not. God does use certain men in certain ways for certain reasons, but this is no excuse for neglect of the whole counsel of God.

Balance in prayer and study—cannot be equated on percentages. Often times the prayer portion must eclipse the study time and then at other times the study portion eclipses the prayer time. The important thing is that it takes both—and a preacher must balance them in the fear of God.

>>> Don't go to the Bible to just find a message.

Go to the Bible to know Jesus Christ. One of the gravest mistakes, I think, is that we can make is to begin to use the Bible as "Toastmaster's Compendium" to find "something" to say. There is a lot of intimidation among preachers to "come up" with "stem-winders" and "masterpieces" and as a result the quest is for more "spell-binding" sermons. While every minister should minister according to the ability that God has given—1Pet. 4:11 *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."* However, to be students of the Word is to be students of Jesus Christ. As Paul we must also seek "to know Him and the power of His resurrection." To preach is to preach Jesus Christ. In other words, *know Him to know the message*. Once anyone separates The Christ from the study they go forth with only words and not The Word. The message will come when we come to Him.

>>> Always seek the partner.

Since the correct way of Biblical doctrine is "line upon line and precept upon precept" we ought never to extract a single verse and seclude it from its partners. Error is quick to come to those that forget this principle. Not only should we consider context but also to be considered is proper conjunction.

There is a wonderful picture of this illustrated in Isa 34:14-15 *"The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate."*

And then notice how verse 16 ties this “mate” process directly to the Word of God:
Isa 34:16 *“Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.”*

Always seek the mate(s) of verses and principles. Building a message on a single verse is against Bible instruction. The honest student will “study” to show himself approved—a workman that needeth not to be ashamed!

>>> **Make it yours.**

Paul states three times in Romans 2:16; 16:25 and in 2 Timothy 2:8 possessively “according to my gospel.” While we understand that the gospel he is referring to is the gospel of Jesus Christ we also must understand that that gospel was both committed to and engrained within the Apostle.

One of the necessities of learning any subject is possession. True Biblical study is a process that not only fills the mind with facts but also the heart with the subject matter. If someone must use a calculator or some other method of gaining the sum of 12 times 6 then it can be deduced that that person does not own the multiplication table. Much the same is true of the preacher that must rely on another for doctrinal answers. There is a time of learning (the process that leads to understanding—you don't own it till you understand it) “With all your getting get understanding” and then there is the time when from the doctrine and the message passes from the head to the heart—and the student possesses it.

The Berean heart of the student makes it his. When this ownership is lacking then usually the premise of “Buy the truth and sell it not” means little—but to those that buy it at any cost and sells it not for any price—these are true the Bible students—the workmen of Scripture.

>>> **Run — but run with a Message.**

And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. Hab. 2:2

Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? 2 Sam. 18:21-22

When the Apostles were told not to think beforehand what they should say when brought before kings and governors it was not instruction to them as to how to preach but rather

instruction to the disciples as to how to witness in special situations. Sadly, there are some preachers who never learned that unique difference.

Simply put, preachers are not at liberty to go into the pulpit without having something to say to the people. There must be proper preparation for the pulpit. A preacher must understand the subjects he intends to present to his congregation. If this is not the case, though he has much emotion, he will not in fact deliver the Mind of Christ. Motion and commotion are not the same as message and communication.

Truly, nothing even deserves to be called a sermon which does not spring forth from the Word. If such a situation is not in effect, why should a preacher announce a subject at all if he has no subject? Apparently, some preachers give more diligence to naming a sermon than they do to the essence of a sermon.

Like the advice of the seasoned pastor gave to his young preachers when he stated to them, “Think of your sermon as a special strain of the flu and if when you preach it and no one gets infected, then you obviously didn’t get close enough to make contact with them!” Haven’t we all heard preaching of this kind? Getting the people to cheer is not the same as getting the people to change.

What? Why? What then? Are some of the major questions the preacher should ask himself about the sermons he preaches. What is the point of the sermon? What does the Word say to the situation? What does it teach? Why is the point important? Why should it matter? And finally, What should be done? What happens next?

Preachers should preach Word-driven sermons... not meaning just a plethora of Scripture quotations, but rather sermons that utilize the Word as the prime mover in the salvation of men. Preaching that is Word anointed rather than wrestling animated. Preaching, first and foremost, is to deliver a divine intent from God to the heart and mind of man—an intent which was meant to impact in a lasting way—not merely an impulse that dissipates within a few pulses.

>>> Preach Jesus Christ.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. (Acts 5:42).

That which separates the truth from a mere religion is that the truth concerns a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. This may seem a trite and worn out phrase, but it is true that salvation is a Person. The doctrine, of Jesus Christ, is the teaching of the things of God that enable us to

better understand the essence of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Every biblical doctrine enforces the power of this relationship, just as Acts 2:38 offers a beginning of this glorious relationship.

Truth is, in some ways like a jigsaw puzzle. A jigsaw puzzle is made up of many parts, each one important. The puzzle could not be complete if any individual part were missing. Yet, we all realize that the value of such a puzzle does not lie in the individual pieces, but in the image that is created when all these pieces are joined together in their proper relationship. Even though an unassembled jigsaw puzzle contains the very same materials and pieces as an assembled one, we recognize that there is a great difference between the two: the assembled puzzle gives us an image, a picture to enjoy and understand. An unassembled puzzle is just a box of unconnected cardboard pieces.

The truth of God is similar: It is made of many parts, each one important. Yet the value of these parts lies not in themselves, but in the image they create when "assembled" through preaching. All the doctrines of the Scriptures are pieces of a Divine "puzzle" which, when assembled, provide us with an image of the Lord Jesus Christ. One may emphasize the various individual "pieces" of this puzzle, and become quite expert in them, and never see the image which they were designed to create. As the Lord said to the Pharisees: *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."* (John 5:39)

The Pharisees were expert in the "pieces" but utterly ignorant of the image they made. When the Scriptures speak of "preaching Jesus Christ," they mean:

That all preaching is to be done with the purpose of revealing Christ in order that men may see Him, believe on Him, obey Him, and worship Him. The goal of all the apostles and their successors has been to make Jesus Christ known in truth. The correct preaching of Acts 2:38 reveals the person, work and desire of Jesus Christ as well as outlining the plan of salvation.

Preaching Jesus Christ means to view all Scripture as a revelation of Him and interpreting it according to that rule, not being satisfied with the mere "pieces" of truth but determined to learn and declare how each piece fits into the "puzzle."

Preaching Jesus Christ will deliver us from becoming a mere religious movement. Someone once said that all organizations go through three stages: "the Man (who founded it), the Movement (an organization that carries on under the momentum the man generated), and the Monument (a dead organization which may bear the name of the founder but has little or no connection to him or his vision.)" The only thing that preserves the church from such a fate is that "the Man," (in this case, the Man, Christ Jesus—God manifest in the flesh) is continually revealing Himself from generation to generation. And this revelation is accomplished through the preaching of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ is preached, the Spirit of God brings revelation. Preaching Jesus Christ will deliver us and our hearers from dry and lifeless sermons. Preaching Jesus Christ protects the preacher from pride and the hearers from idolatry. Those who hear the preaching of Jesus Christ will love and respect the man that preached to them; but they will worship Jesus Christ! Those who preach Jesus Christ will rejoice in the results that are obtained by it but will glorify Jesus Christ for those results. The glory of Acts 2:38 is in its effectual working to SAVE the lost! Therefore, we glory in the cross of Jesus Christ!

Preaching Jesus Christ glorifies Jesus Christ. Dare a preacher aim for less?

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PREACHING IS

Preaching is truth on fire.

Preaching is the Word of God in the hand, the fire of God in the heart and the zeal of God in the soul.

Preaching is the gift of God wrapped in an excited voice.

Preaching is the soul of the church.

Preaching is teaching with a tear in the eye.

Preaching is demolition of error.

Preaching is doubt's healing balm.

Preaching is the Holy Ghost's amplifier.

Preaching is worship's entree.

Preaching is the adornment of the Bible.

Preaching is the power of God unto salvation.

Preaching is revival's forerunner.

Preaching is the church's heart.

Preaching is doctrine clothed in excitement.

Preaching is love's smile.

Preaching is sin's greatest adversary.

Preaching is frustration's funeral.

Preaching is doubt's demise.

Preaching is fear's failure.

Preaching is depression's death.

Preaching is disappointment's decline.

Preaching is faith's food.

Preaching is vocal light.

Preaching is profundity delivered in simplicity.

*Preaching is the mender of broken relationships.
Preaching is the healer of broken hearts.
Preaching is the revival of broken dreams.
Preaching is Hell's greatest enemy.
Preaching is the sinner's best friend.
Preaching is the saint's dinner.
Preaching is a rebel's doom.
Preaching is genius with a halo.
Preaching is fire in the pulpit that melts the ice in the pew.
Preaching is God's chosen vehicle of salvation.*

Preaching saved Nineveh, ignited Pentecost and turned the Judean wilderness into a Holy Ghost revival.

*When the man of God approaches the pulpit, let angels stop flying, let Heaven's hosannas hush, let adults hearken and children listen, let young people be alert, let all ears pay attention, let Heaven respond, let Hell tremble, let the church wait in holy expectation, let all eternity tremble, let Satan and his angels be anointed with fear!
As the preacher opens his mouth as he opens the Book ... to preach!*

—Author Unknown