

# Preaching the Gospel

**A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.**

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## Preach the Old Themes

A long time ago in Tampa, Florida Helen and I spent a Sunday afternoon with Bro. and Sis. H. E. Phillips. It was the first and last time we met, an occasion I will not forget. Bro. Phillips was in his 70's and in poor health and he told me that he was in pain every day. Yet he was not depressed or morose, and we had a wonderful conversation.

But what I will never forget was the sermon he preached that evening to the congregation where he regularly preached. I was surprised that he chose to speak on the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, a topic which every beginning gospel preacher uses. He preached it with conviction, earnestness and simplicity, and I was enthralled with the sermon, even gaining new insights into some points.

I got a lesson from that experience. Bro. Phillips had no doubt preached on that conversion countless times during his long life as a gospel preacher. Yet the subject was still as fresh and important to him as ever, and he preached it that way. As a result it helped us in his audience very much. We got much good from hearing his sermon based on that wonderful story.

I have often thought about that evening, and one lesson which impressed me was—Don't be afraid to preach on the old themes. Don't try to be clever with something "new" all the time.

Peter wrote:

"Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established in the truth which is present with *you*. I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my *earthly* dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind." (2 Peter 1:12-14)

Your audience will be made up of older Christians who need reminding, newer Christians who need instruction which will help them teach others, and non-Christians who need the first principles of the oracles of God. We all need **the old themes!**

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## **A Warning to Preachers: Comments on Crisis-Preaching and Culture-Preaching**

Warren E. Berkley

**CRISIS:** While our preaching must respond to any crisis (involving any sin or error), our crisis-response-mode may tempt us to neglect other things (about which there is no present alarm). If today, for example, I preach on marriage, divorce and remarriage with such repetition and frequency, I neglect other things taught in the Scriptures, I have fallen under an undue influence. In such a time as this, we must preach what the Bible says about God's law of marriage. We should be anxious to tell people what Jesus said, and warn of the consequences of ignoring **Matt. 5:32** and **Matt. 19:9**. But if we do this in some sort of obsessive manner, we may betray our commitment to preach the whole counsel of God, neglecting things of equal essentiality.

**CULTURE:** There is another, very different, influence that may put us in position to violate our commitment as preachers. I'm talking about what the culture or market demands. In our time there is great interest in sermons known for their perceived practicality, popular style, brevity and emotional value. Generally, people have little interest in sermons delivered to respond to some sin or error. There is greater interest in vague, good advice, social commentary or the fashionable, ecumenical approach.

Though it may seem unlikely, there is the possibility of preachers falling into both of these pitfalls at the same time! {The devil can easily use the unlikely to slowly accomplish his purpose.} If you preach on marriage, divorce and remarriage over and over - then use the rest of your time catering to itching ears, you leave out a huge bulk of Biblical truth that holds great significance and need. When is the last time you delivered a sermon about the Lord's church, the Holy Spirit, the difference between the covenants, the error of premillennialism, etc., etc., etc?

The solution? Let your preaching be governed by one thing... The Word!

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (**2 Tim. 4:1-5**).

Doy Moyer wrote this, that fits the topic well:

### **Balance in Preaching**

Preaching is not the easiest task in the world. The preacher knows that he must address subjects that are difficult and, sometimes, offensive to some. His job is to preach the word, in season and out, reproofing, rebuking, and exhorting with great patience and instruction (**2 Tim. 4:2**). He knows that there will be those who do not want to hear the truth, but would rather heap up teachers who will say those things they want to hear. And there are plenty of ear-ticklers available.

The preacher must be bold, uncompromising of truth, and plain-spoken so as to be understood. He knows that he cannot water the message down so that it loses its power and focus. He realizes that he has a great responsibility toward himself and those who hear what he has to say (**cf. 1 Tim. 4:16**). When he confronts sin, he must rebuke it. When he faces false teaching, he must be courageous. In all things, the true preacher knows that he answers to God first, and is not in the business of pleasing men (**cf. Gal. 1:10**).

But there's another side to this. Sometimes, in our fervor to "preach it like it is," we overstep our God-given boundaries. In the name of hard preaching, it is easy to "go past Jerusalem" and start getting downright mean. In order to win arguments and make ourselves look good, it is

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tempting to ridicule those who are in opposition to us. We can become rude, unkind, and abusive. Sarcasm (or better, irony), may have a proper place, but not when it is at the expense of gentleness, love, and respect. We can become careless in how we speak to others, and about others with whom we disagree. We may even begin to thrive on being offensive. We boast about our little debating techniques: "Did you see how I got him?" But this is a manifestation of self-righteousness and, ironically, shows a disregard for God and His Word.

How so? Because, while in stressing certain commands and steadfastly exercising our duty to reprove and rebuke, we may ignore other commands. We are to speak the truth in love (**Eph. 4:15**). Our speech is to be "with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person" (**Col. 4:6**). We are to be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving, and devoid of bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor (**Eph. 4:31-32**). With those in opposition, we are to correct with gentleness (**2 Tim. 2:25**). These are just as much commands of God as any other! To ignore these in the name of "sound" preaching is not only Pharisaical, it is

just plain sinful. Contending for the faith does not equal being contentious and ugly.

Just remember, there is a difference between kind and mushy, between graceful speech and that which compromises truth. We need to learn these differences if we will really be faithful servants of God. The spirit in which we do something is every bit a part of the doctrine of Christ as those more difficult issues that we so often struggle with. Teach the truth, but let's do it in the way God has told us to do it. Keep the balance.

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**Editor's comment:** When the preacher feels that one particular issue needs a lot of attention, he can use the weekly church bulletin to teach on that subject. In the 1960's I was accused of preaching on institutionalism constantly, but the judgment was based on what I wrote in our bulletin. I judged that the subject needed constant examination, for members of the local church and for those who received our bulletin in other places. The bulletin articles fulfilled that purpose. Today the webpage can be used in this way.

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**In *Abundant Life*** ([www.justchristians.com](http://www.justchristians.com)) Mark Roberts recommends the English Standard Version translation of the Bible. Does anyone else know anything about it?--PKW

## **T. B. Larimore Started On Time!**

T. B. Larimore was a popular preacher about 1900. Emma Page wrote:

He never waits for an audience to assemble, never comments on the tardiness of any who may be late; but he sometimes gives an object lesson on the importance of being on time, as related in the following letter:

“I’m preaching twice every day and three times on Sunday, and baptizing between times. Good audiences, but the people have not, till within the limits of the present week, been taught to be prompt, they say. The three meetings on the first day were well attended. Just as the moment arrived for the first sermon of the second day to begin, the aged sexton (caretaker), with black face and white head, entered the house and opened the stove door, preparatory to kindling a fire, I presume—for we needed a fire. He and I were all alone—yet not alone. Presuming we could not sing sufficiently well to satisfy even ourselves, we kneeled, I prayed, and I presume he prayed, too. Then, after reading a chapter, I selected a lesson for our special consideration, preached to my ‘brother in black’—we both belonged to the universal brotherhood of man—about fifty minutes, extended a gospel invitation to him, gave him a few seconds to consider the question, delivered the benediction, and all was over for that time—no song—simply a sermon. At the end of that service, the house was well filled; but I confined my tongue and attention strictly to my subject and the sexton, from the beginning to the end of the discourse. I never alluded to anyone’s being late; but the people have been prompt, always on time, from then till now—a thing never known in this town before, so ‘the oldest citizens say.’”

--*Letters and Sermons of T. B. Larimore*, edited by Emma Page, 1904, page 46. This is a book which belonged to my wife’s grandfather, J. L. Broad, who was a gospel preacher.

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**Also from a letter of T. B. Larimore**— . . . a man who had probably forgotten more than I knew came to me and said, in a modest, quiet, humble, way, “Will you please show me, in the Bible, where it says Noah was a hundred and twenty years building the ark?” I said, “Yes, sir, I’ll show you,” stepped back, got my Bible and tried to find it; but he said, “You needn’t hunt it now—there are others wanting to speak to you—just wait, look it up at your leisure, and, when you find it, tell me where it is, please.”

If I ever find it, I’ll tell him where it is, too, if I can find him. Only about thirty-three years have come and gone since then; and I haven’t had time yet to find, in the Bible, that, or anything that remotely resembles it. I have had the time, however, to find that, if there is anything the Bible does not teach, that’s it. The Bible clearly teaches that, when God first mentioned the deluge and the ark to Noah, he talked to him about his wife, his three sons and their wives. Each of the three sons of Noah, then, was blessed with the companionship of a wife when God first mentioned the deluge and the ark to Noah; and Gen. 11 teaches, plainly and positively, that Shem, who was a married man when the deluge was first mentioned to Noah, was just one hundred years old when his son Arphaxad was born, two years after the flood. That settles that with those who believe the Bible. No mortal can prove that it took Noah five years to build the ark. If it had taken him one hundred and twenty years to build it, unless it had been miraculously preserved, the foundation would have rotted away before he was ready to tack the roof on. -- p. 34 of the same book as above.

Well, I am an old man, but I am not too old to learn. Thank you, Bro. Larimore.—PKW