

Preaching the Gospel

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

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Reviewing the Basics of Sermon Preparation—

Keep Your Purpose In Mind

You have chosen a theme. It is, “Baptism is for the remission of sins.” Why did you choose this theme? What do you want to accomplish by preaching on it?

The answers to those questions will determine how you prepare and deliver the sermon.

Your purpose will depend on your audience. If you are preaching on the radio, your purpose will be to convince people who are in denominations that baptism is not just an optional thing, but essential to salvation. You will assume that the ones listening believe the Bible, and therefore you will use the Bible to prove your points. You will be clear and non-technical. You will try to construct your sermon to bring about the response—“I want to be baptized.”

If your audience is a group of mature Christians, perhaps with many preachers in the audience, your purpose will be to furnish answers to denominational quibbles on the subject. You will then go into Greek meanings and the arguments put forward by Baptists.

If you are preaching in a gospel meeting with unconverted people in the audience, you will want to use all the evidence you can to cause the unconverted to repent and be baptized.

In each case your purpose will be determined by the need of the audience, and the sermon will be shaped by the purpose.

Unfortunately, a sermon cannot be all things to all people. Many, many years ago I took a high school boy with me to the Florida College lectures. I was thrilled by the fine lecture of Homer Hailey, but my young friend was unmoved and got little out of it. Bro. Hailey was preaching the right lesson for his audience of gospel preachers and other mature Christians. Unfortunately, the high school boy did not fit into that group.

Think carefully about the reason for your sermon. Keep that purpose before you as you gather your material and form it into an outline. Make sure that all the material is arranged so as to accomplish the purpose, and write a strong conclusion.

Don't wander all over the place in your sermon. Don't try to accomplish several things at once. Keep to your purpose.

PREACHERS AND DEGREES

James R. Cope, *The Preceptor*, Vol. 1 No. 7, May 1952

Recently a young preacher said to me, "I am going ahead and get my degree." The background of his statement caused me to ask, "Why do you want a degree?" He replied, "Because it seems to me that it will be a very short time until a preacher will be forced to have a degree to be used by the churches."

I do not want to be misunderstood. I am in the school business and have been, in one form or another, for nearly twenty years. God knows there are too many ignoramuses now and I certainly have no objection to file against any person's going ahead with his education. The situation projected in the young man's statement, however, promises a sad day for churches of the Lord. A degree within itself is not wrong, and no premium is to be placed on a lack of training. In most instances academic degrees reflect a student's formal training and in many

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instances are an index to one's abilities. At least this is true along certain lines and in certain fields of endeavor. That degrees amount to anything in the kingdom of God, however, I emphatically deny. The obtaining of a degree for the degree's sake or the having of a degree because of the prestige it may give the preacher who possesses one or a dozen, is placing the emphasis in the wrong place. Such a disposition smacks at making a sheer "profession" out of that which should be New Testament evangelism. More than this, it reveals a state of mind which if followed to its logical end will result in nothing but a "clergy system" pure and simple. Still worse, this state of mind indicates a complete ignorance of the true mission of the preacher and the real essence of the religion of Christ.

We know of no person who objects to a preacher having a degree if he wants one, two, three, or all he can get and pay for. But it seems to us that when a degree is obtained it is high time for a gospel preacher to forget he has it. No academic degree necessarily reflects Christian character. No theological degree necessarily reflects a preacher's knowledge of the word of God, his ability to preach the gospel, or his soundness in the faith. No degree can add one cubit to any man's spiritual stature or his moral worth. When any man uses his degree to impress brethren with his spiritual attainments, either he is ignorant, they are ignorant, both of us are ignorant, or else both simply do not care about what God's word teaches on spirituality. We fear that in some instances the latter is the case.

Some years ago I was asked by an elder in a large church in a Southern city to recommend a preacher to work with the church where he was an elder. Before I could ask any questions he immediately impressed me with this point: They just had to obtain a man with not less than an M.A. degree. He said nothing about what kind of life the preacher led or whether he was sound in the faith, **but he must have a Master's Degree.** He explained that it was a college town and many of the people who would hear the preacher would be college personnel including many of the highly educated professors. The brother was obsessed with the idea of a preacher possessing a degree. Apparently he felt that the degree would immediately convert the whole college to Christ. I merely relate this incident to suggest a state of mind that prevails in some quarters.

Attainment in certain vocations and professions is conditioned upon academic achievement as this achievement is reflected in his academic degrees and honors. Medicine, law, engineering, and other professional and technical fields have certain standards which must be met for the aspirant to be recognized and get ahead in them. The church of Jesus Christ, however, is not one of these professional and technical fields, and the sooner preachers, elders, and brethren generally learn this lesson the better it will be for the kingdom of God.

The power of God to save the souls of men has been deposited in the gospel (Rom. 1:16). Regardless of the methods and manners employed no power will save the sinner except the gospel. One may be well versed in all the academic learning and wisdom of men this world affords and yet be a failure in the kingdom of God if he fails to deliver that which the Lord has commissioned his disciples to preach. When private teaching or public discourse is so saturated with human philosophy that the word of God is hidden, the professed teacher of the word has defeated the very purpose of his existence and has reduced the divine message to the level of human learning.

The language of inspiration on this very point is appropriate: "And I, brethren when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 21, 2). "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

[Gospel Sermon Preparation and Delivery Advice](#) [\(especially for new speakers\)](#)

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1. Before any attempt to speak in public, unless in a training class, one needs to "sit at the feet" of Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, etc., for some time and learn from them (See Lk.10:39; Acts 2:42; James 3:1; Heb. 5:12).
2. Also, it would be good for you to be taught by "faithful men" (See 2 Tim.2:2); even by a located evangelist with some experience, consistency and organization in his teaching. (One of the problems with a "mutual ministry" concept is that there is little balance and consistency with the teaching program).
3. Prepare well (like a good cup of tea it is much better when it has time to steep); if you can't take the time to prepare you have not earned the right to speak or to take the time of the audience.
4. First write out rough notes and then add more thoughts to those notes over the steeping period (this might even take few weeks).
5. When you think the lesson in petty well steeped, put it in a more formal outline with points and spaces (your notes will be easier to pick out).
6. Choose a certain topic and stick with it (there will be other times to speak on other topics; in other words don't ramble all over the place).
7. Choose a simple topic that you know quite well or that you will take the time to research - to know well (this will require a Bible, a Concordance, a Bible Dictionary and a lot of study to get it right and to have an intelligent, organized and presentable lesson).
8. Chose a subject that, if possible, you might be able to give a couple of personal short stories about (this may not always be possible to do).

9. Give an illustration or two somewhere in your material (this may not always be possible to do; but try).
10. Don't choose a subject that is "over your head." Rather, prepare and then present simple lessons. Don't try to be novel!
11. As a new speaker on any subject don't speak too long: 15 or 20 minutes is usually enough (as you become a more accomplished speaker the length of the sermon can be expanded somewhat).
12. A speaker's audience is a captive audience; don't take advantage of it (like "this is the word of God I am speaking...you will have to listen till I am finished!")
13. Don't think that you have to speak until you fill out the full hour/time.
14. Realize that you cannot give the audience all the Bible at once (there will be other times to speak even on the same subject).
15. Don't use more than one or two scriptures to make a point (a few select scriptures are often better than a dozen).
16. "Preach the word" (See 2 Tim.4:2).
17. And preach nothing but the word (See 1 Cor. 3:1-2).
18. Be confident, but not arrogant.
19. Speak with conviction on the subject you speak on (Acts 4:13).
20. Preach your lesson as though the audience had never heard it before.
21. Don't choose lessons that belittle or that unfairly criticize the church. (Often, it seems, a trait of young speakers is that think they know exactly how should be).
22. Speak, as it has been said, "when you have something to say; not because you want to say something."
23. Always "speak...the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15); not with harshness or sarcasm.
24. Don't let your voice trail off (if it is important enough to say, say it loud enough that all can hear). On the other hand there is no need to shout.
25. Speak with a certain amount of authority and boldness (Acts 4:13; Eph.6:19; Mt. 7: 28-29). (But don't give your opinions).
26. Use fitting hand and body gestures but do not flail the arms or rock the body or pace back and forth (this is distracting and unnecessary).
27. Learn to use some fluctuation in your voice (see Gal. 4:20). Learn to pause when appropriate, etc., to add emphasis.
28. As your confidence grows work on giving some eye contact (Mk. 3:5).
29. Any love for speaking to an audience must be motivated only by a love to declare the truth (see Jn.8:32) and of having a love to reach souls (see 2 Cor. 5:14), and not because we love to be before an audience.
30. Realize that it is a great honour and a wonderful privilege to address an audience (you own the audience everything).
31. You might like to put tabs in your Bible for the verses that you have chosen or fold over the corner of the pages (this adds confidence and helps relieve any nervousness).
32. Don't look for praise after you speak; if it comes don't let it go to your head.
33. Dress with dignity and speak with reverence; remember, you are a messenger of the King of kings and Lord of lords.
33. Finally, good speakers "stand up, speak up and shut up."

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