

“In our day of widespread spiritual famine (Amos 8:11), the church desperately needs preachers who address the head, the heart, and the hands in a Christ-centred proclamation of the life-giving and light-giving Word of God. Michael Reeves articulates how such biblical preaching is rooted in theology proper, Christology, ecclesiology, and, ultimately, doxology. May the Spirit use this thought-provoking book to reform his church and raise a mighty army of reformed, experiential preachers in our generation!”

Joel R. Beeke, Chancellor and Professor of Homiletics & Systematic Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Preachers need a robustly biblical vision for the work before them. Any understanding of preaching that reduces it simply to a transfer of theological information has missed the point. In brief compass, Michael raises our eyes to something higher and grander—a truly God-centred vision for preaching. This volume will serve as a valuable primer for the would-be preacher and a timely encouragement for the experienced proclaimer of God’s Word. I commend it warmly to anyone concerned for the cause of preaching in the church today, and especially to those called to this matchless task.”

Jonathan Griffiths, Lead Pastor, The Metropolitan Bible Church, Ottawa, Canada

“I’ve not come across anything like this primer on preaching before. It humbled me as to the enormity of the task I’m undertaking each week, it encouraged me to keep going when I’m feeling weary, and it warmed my heart to the preciousness of the One that I have the privilege of proclaiming. A book for preachers on a Monday morning, as they look back on the day before, and get ready to go again.”

Tom Heasman, Pastor, Widcombe Baptist Church, Bath, UK

“Michael Reeves urges those who have been set apart for ‘Word ministry’ to embrace a high and holy view of preaching: an ‘assault on ... the very gates of hell, trumpeted forth so that sinners tremble and saints quake in wonder.’ The aim of preaching is ‘to reform hearts so that ... [people] love God, enjoy God, and glory in God.’

There are so many gems in the book that it was hard to write a short commendation. This is a timely book, setting forth a vision of preaching that too many of us—preachers and hearers alike—fail to see. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.”

David Johnston, Minister Emeritus, Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church, Bangor, Northern Ireland

“There is arguably no greater need in the church today than for the pulpit to be restored to its former glory. That is why this book by Michael Reeves is so greatly needed. In these pages, this gifted theologian, educator, and author presents a compelling case for a much higher view of preaching than what exists in most pulpits.

As you read this book, I believe your heart will soar with a greater admiration for this glorious calling to preach the Word. Here is a strong medicine to heal the present-day famine in the land for the hearing of the Word of the Lord.”

Steven J. Lawson, President, OnePassion Ministries; Professor of Preaching, The Master’s Seminary; and Lead Preacher, Trinity Bible Church of Dallas

“There is a great dearth in true understanding of the nature of preaching. Is it a sales job? Is it a lecture? Is it a mere moment of teaching? Other questions also quickly arise: What is ‘expository preaching’?

In this wonderful book, Michael Reeves winsomely, clearly, and persuasively articulates a vision for preaching that is centred on God.”

Josh Moody, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois, and President, God Centered Life

“Like workmen laying bricks with no grasp of the cathedral they’re constructing, many of us have learned ‘how to write a sermon’ without understanding the nature or goal of preaching. Mike Reeves has given us—with remarkable brevity—a theological clarion call. This little volume will re-orientate the experienced preacher and set the beginner on course to see Christ lifted up in the pulpit, and his flock fed.”

Jonty Rhodes, Minister, Christ Church Central Leeds, UK

Preaching

A GOD-CENTRED VISION

MICHAEL REEVES

**Union
Publishing**

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God Is a Preacher

Why do we preach?

Let's face it, preaching feels very old school. It's not a discussion. It's not a sound bite. The camera angles don't switch to keep our attention. Nobody gets to "like," "repost," or "comment." So why, in this modern age, do we keep at it?

It's not because of tradition or habit. Rather, Christians preach because God is a preacher. God is the ground of all being, and who he is shapes why we preach.

The God who speaks

The Bible opens with God speaking. In the beginning, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen. 1:1-3).

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God is light (1 John 1:5), and as it is the nature of light to shine, so it is the nature of God to reveal himself. He is a God who delights to make himself known.

But actually, even before Genesis 1, God was speaking already. Before all things, before anything was made by him, God had a Word to speak. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1–2). Here is a God who does not just *happen* to speak; by his very nature he *is* a speaking God. Speaking flows out of who he is.

Jesus gives us a fascinating insight in his Upper Room Discourse in John 16 when he tells us that the Holy Spirit only speaks “whatever he hears” (v. 13). According to Jesus, the Spirit is first of all a listener: he listens as the Father utters his Word.

This is a deep, eternal truth about God. Martin Luther put it like this:

Christ refers to a conversation carried on in the Godhead, a conversation in which no creatures participate. He sets up a pulpit both for the speaker and for

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the listener. He makes the Father the Preacher and the Holy Spirit the Listener.¹

It is as if, with the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit, there is in eternity a pulpit. In eternity, the Word was being held forth. The first sermon, then, was not Peter's at Pentecost, nor John the Baptist's at the Jordan. It was not even God's pronouncement of his Word in Genesis 1. God the Father has *eternally* been a preacher, continually speaking out his Word. And the Holy Spirit has eternally been listening. Before the heavens and the earth even existed, the Holy Spirit was enjoying the ultimate sermon.

This is what the living God is like: not silent or speechless, but a God who speaks.

Now, you could wonder if that is anything special, for are not other gods said by their worshippers to have spoken? To be sure, the idols "have mouths, but do not speak" (Ps. 115:5), yet haven't other gods had their prophets? Doesn't Allah have his Qur'an? But the Christian claim is quite different. The Bible does not present a God who just happens to speak. In the triune God of the Bible, we meet a God

1 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 24, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 364.

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who *cannot* be Word-less. Even in eternity, this God is not reserved or unforthcoming; he is so full of light and good news that he would share it.

The proclamatory nature of God is made even clearer when this Word becomes flesh in the incarnation of Jesus. At the very start of his ministry, Jesus reads out Isaiah 61:1–2 as his personal manifesto:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to *proclaim good news* to the poor.
He has sent me to *proclaim* liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to *proclaim* the year of the Lord's favor.
(Luke 4:18–19, emphasis added)

That is why Jesus then says to his disciples, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mark 1:38). Throughout his ministry, it would be his word that would bring his life to those around him. At his word, the centurion's servant was healed (Matt. 8:13). At his word, Jairus' daughter and Lazarus were raised from the dead (Mark 5:35–43; John 11:1–44). That is why Peter would

say to him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

This message of eternal life was the very same one that Jesus charged his apostles to preach (Matt. 10:5–7; 2 Tim. 1:11). It was the same message that the apostles then entrusted to others to carry on the work of preaching to the ends of the earth (2 Tim. 2:2; 4:2).

Preaching, then, is not some burden we must shoulder while God sits back in heaven. Human preachers are not the hired hands of a lazy or reclusive CEO. God is the first and primary preacher, the one whose very identity is to make known his life-giving Word. When we preach that Word, we are taking no initiative, but sharing in the life of God: we preach because he first preached to us.

The church: The creature of the Word of God

Christians have another conviction that leads them to preach: God creates his church through his Word. Before the church could exist, God had to speak. No word, no church. Just as in Genesis 1, God first created all things through his word, so it is God’s word that has brought the church into being (1 Pet. 1:23). God’s word comes first and serves as the foundation stone of the church. She is God’s new creation. That, after all, is the story of salvation: the word of God goes out to create a

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people for God. As sin came into being when Adam ignored God's word, so salvation happens when God's voice is heard. His Word is the life-giving manna that feeds and sustains his people (Matt. 4:4).

Following Jesus' statement that "the sheep hear his voice" (John 10:3), Martin Luther gave what is probably the simplest-ever definition of the church: "Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd."² It is that voice that establishes and guides the flock. This insight led to the most striking practical change to be seen in churches at the time of the Reformation: the rise and prioritisation of biblical preaching.

Seeing the vital importance of God's Word, the Reformers made the sermon the focal point of the church's regular worship, and they emphasised it architecturally by making the pulpit physically central and conspicuous. And while today we tend to think of the leading Reformers as theologians (and therefore not preachers), it was biblical preaching that normally defined and took up the bulk of their ministry. Preaching was the real engine-room of the

2 Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 315.

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Reformation.

Therein lies great comfort. For when we read all those horrifying statistics about current church drift and decline, it is easy to lose confidence in the simple preaching of the Word of God. It is tempting to look elsewhere for the silver bullet. But the Reformation demonstrated the astonishing, transformative power of the regular and clear preaching of God's Word. It stands as historical evidence that there is nothing inevitable about church decline. The spiritual darkness of our day can indeed be checked and turned back. It was, five hundred years ago—and by that Word which has lost none of its inexorable power.

An Encounter with God

When God speaks, he does not merely share information about himself: the Word the Father speaks *is* God himself. Thus, when he speaks, he communicates nothing less than his very self. How different this is with other so-called gods! Take Allah, for example: at most, his word, the Qur'an, only tells you something *about* him. In his word, he gives something *other than* himself: a mere deposit of information. Yet the living God gives himself.

No wonder, then, that when God speaks, light erupts into darkness (Gen. 1:3). No wonder he speaks, and it is done. For God's Word is the very power of God. Through his word, he creates, and through his Word, he redeems. When he

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sends out his Word, the very glory of God blazes forth: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). So it must be, for the Word by which he has spoken “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). He is the wisdom and light of God, bringing in himself the very presence of God. In the Word of God, it is God himself, in all his life-giving glory, who comes to be with us.

What, though, of the Bible, which is also the “Word of God”? It has the very same purpose. It is not a museum archive of old speeches. Rather, through it, we hear God’s voice today (Heb. 3:7). Just as the eternal Word of the Father goes forth in the power of the Spirit (Gen. 1:2–3; Matt. 1:18; 3:16; Luke 4:1, 14; John 3:34), so Scripture—which is the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17; Col. 3:16)—is breathed out by the same Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). The one God has one purpose in both.

In fact, the Word of the Father and the Word of Christ are so united that it can sometimes be hard to know which is meant. Take the famous words of Hebrews 4:12 that describe the “word of God” as “living and active.” Which is meant here? Christ, the Word of the Father, or Scripture, the Word of Christ? Leading commentators are divided on

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this. The great John Owen understood this “word of God” as referring to Christ, the eternal Word, yet John Calvin believed it referred to Scripture. The difficulty itself shows us something vital: that Scripture cannot be separated from Christ, the Word of God. When God speaks, he has one aim, which is not simply to disseminate facts about himself, but to communicate *himself*. God’s great redemptive goal, after all, is that “he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3). His intention in speaking is not simply that people might know *about* him, but that they might know and trust him, enjoy him—even be united to him. It is, as the Apostle Paul put it:

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17–19)

Exposing the Word of God

What does all this mean for preaching? It means that we

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must speak as God speaks, with the same content and the same goal. God's Word is primarily about him, not us. God does not speak to us to give us a moral self-help guide or a book of useful tips for the religious life. As the Spirit of truth bears witness about Christ (John 15:26), so preachers must bear witness to the Word of Christ. They are not to bear witness to themselves, to their own opinions, or to anything else, but to the Word of God. This is sometimes called "expository preaching."

Unfortunately, however, "expository preaching" is a term that can be misunderstood and therefore badly practised. Some take it that biblical exposition means nothing more than a running commentary on Scripture, explaining a passage verse by verse. Of course, it can and often does involve that, but on its own, that is a reductive understanding. Exposition fundamentally involves *exposing* Scripture so that people can see it clearly. It is the opposite of imposition, in which we impose other ideas that are not there in the Word of God. But expository preaching need not follow just one style. Faithful preachers may expose a word, a verse, a chapter, a book, or even a theme of Scripture.

Rightly understood, *all* preaching should be expository, in that it exposes the Word of God and makes that the food on which the church grows. Preaching that seeks to expound

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Scripture—and particularly that which seeks to expound the *whole* of Scripture—ensures that God’s Word, not one man’s ideas, sets the agenda and forms the diet that people receive.

However, when expository preaching is taken as nothing more than a running commentary, it can leave preachers with the impression that they are there simply to educate their hearers. I have often been welcomed to the pulpit with words that make me cringe: “And now our preacher is going to come and explain that passage to us.” As if that is it! As if our deepest problem is ignorance, and God’s Word is spoken merely to share information.

That sort of preaching becomes a matter of making our people experts in Scripture, creating scribes, not disciples. It fosters a cerebral people, liable to be puffed up with their biblical knowledge, not humbled by the glory and mercy of God. It nurtures the illusion that Scripture is an end in itself and that saving faith is nothing more than knowledge of Scripture. Jesus said of such “experts” in Scripture, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40).

So, preaching should be expository, but this is not the same as completing an English comprehension exercise.

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Preachers expose the grammar and logic of their text as a means to the greater goal of exposing the truth and reality that the text conveys. Ultimately, they must speak as God speaks: to hold out *him*.

Doing more than teaching

I teach heresy. Yes, it's true. When I teach my students at Union School of Theology, I teach them all kinds of heresy: Pelagianism, Arianism, Nestorianism, you name it. I want them to understand false teaching in all its forms, so I lay them out for my students to understand. However, I don't *preach* those things. And therein lies a crucial difference between teaching and preaching.¹ In teaching, I seek simply to lay out the necessary information clearly (setting the lies against the truth so that they hate the one and love the other). But in preaching, something far deeper and grander is going on.

When God speaks, light shines into darkness, and dry bones live (Ezek. 37:5–6). God's Word authoritatively *does* something and achieves what he sends it to do (Isa. 55:11). So it is, wonderfully, when preachers speak God's Word.

¹ For more on how the concepts of "preaching" and "teaching" overlap and yet are not identical, see Matt. 4:23; 11:1; Luke 20:1; Acts 5:42; 15:35; 28:30–31; Col. 1:27–28; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 4:2.

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In a Christian sermon, the preacher does not simply call some truth to mind and point to it. Rather, the people hear the very “oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), the imperishable seed that gives new life (1 Pet. 1:23–25). The Second Helvetic Confession puts it boldly when it says, “The Preaching of the Word of God *Is* the Word of God.”²

Of course, that doesn’t mean that the words of a preacher somehow have the same authority as Scripture. The preacher depends on Scripture in *its* supreme authority, whereas Scripture never depends upon the preacher. The Word heard from the pulpit is authoritative only insofar as it is a faithful proclamation of the Word of God. However, insofar as it is faithful, the people hear the very Word of God. This is a bold claim, but one we see in Scripture itself, where Christians are told to remember their leaders “who spoke to you the word of God” (Heb. 13:7). They did not merely *speak about* the Word of God: they *spoke it* in life-giving power.

Preaching on 1 Timothy 3:2 (“an overseer must be . . . able to teach”), John Calvin said,

When a man has climbed up into the pulpit, is it so

2 The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), part 1, *Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 1999), 5.004, emphasis added.

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that he may be seen from afar, and that he may be pre-eminent? Not at all. *It is that God may speak to us by the mouth of a man. And he does us that favour of presenting himself there* and wishes a mortal man to be his messenger.³

In other words, preaching is something more than speech about God. It is speech *by* God. God's life-giving voice is heard, and its reality is present. The listening congregation does not simply hear a preacher claim that God is gracious; right there in his Word, God is being gracious. Right there, God acts in redemption, effectively confronting people with the person of Christ. We preachers do not simply *discuss* Christ; we *bring* Christ to those who have assembled. We are "ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20).

That is why the old Reformers used to speak of preaching as "the keys of the kingdom" that Christ gave to Peter and the apostles (Matt. 16:19; John 20:23). Ambassadors speak in the name of their Master, wielding his gospel, which carries the authority to forgive sins and open the doors of

3 John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, 59 vols. Corpus Reformatorum 29–87 (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900), 53.266, emphasis added.

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heaven. Here is John Calvin again:

It is said that the ministers are sent to enlighten the blind, to deliver the captives, to forgive sins, to convert hearts. What! these are things which belong to God alone ... For there is nothing more properly his own than to pardon sins; he also reserves to himself the converting of the heart. Now, nevertheless it is the case that he imparts all these qualifications to those whom he appoints to convey his word and declares to them that he does not separate himself from them, but rather shows that he uses them as his hands and his instruments.⁴

All of which begins to make sense of what can seem like such an old-fashioned form of communication. Preaching embodies the grace of the gospel that is present: one person *gives* the others good news. Sinners do not sit down and work it out by themselves: the life-giving Word must be given to them. The Word is proclaimed, and they simply receive it.

To know that in preaching, God is not simply being talked about but heard and encountered must change our

4 Calvin, *Calvini opera*, 26.66⁸-67⁷.

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expectations. For the people, this must raise their anticipation. Instead of enduring some lecture while longing for a real encounter with Christ to be found elsewhere, they can enjoy encountering him right there in his Word.

And for the preacher, this reality must simultaneously humble and fortify. When he knows that he stands up as an ambassador and steward of his Lord, all dreams of showing off his brilliance must crumble, and all self-reliance becomes ridiculous. But at the same time, the nerves and knees of a shy preacher can be strengthened, for, however he feels, he can know he is a mouthpiece. Young or old, experienced or not, the preacher is God's instrument, for whoever sits there in the congregation is not there to look at him but to hear God speak.

It was for this reason that Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) used to wear a preaching gown when he preached in Westminster Chapel in London. The practice felt dated even then, but the point of the gown was, as it were, to hide the individual behind the role. The reasoning was that people were not listening to Martyn Lloyd-Jones the man, but to God's appointed messenger, whoever he was. He knew he was not just a teacher or a salesman; he was a herald of God. He spoke not on his own authority, but as an ambassador, holding out the Word that brings life and light into being.

The Light That Proves Itself

Ambassadors of Christ? Heralds of the oracles of God? Isn't such weighty responsibility crippling? Won't it crush us? It certainly flattens all breezy carelessness in the pulpit. But here's the thing: the power in which the Word of God goes out is not that of the human preacher.

Scripture is "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19). The unfolding of its words gives light (Ps. 119:130), enlightening the eyes (Ps. 19:8) and giving a light to our path (Ps. 119:105). Those who reject it are called "those who rebel against the light" (Job 24:13). The preacher himself is not the light, nor is a church, of itself—after all, the Lord can remove the lampstand of a fallen church (Rev. 2:5). Rather,

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the church is called to be the pillar or support, the ground or buttress of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). It is to hold up the light so that the light may be seen. It is the pillar on which to set the light.

And so it is with preachers: they themselves are not the light but are there to bear up the light. Therein lies a humbling but relieving comfort for preachers who are all too aware of their weaknesses and shortcomings. Though they are feeble in themselves, the Word they wield is a glorious, illuminating light, shining with the majesty of its Author. The Puritan John Owen wrote that this light in Scripture “is nothing but the beaming of the majesty, truth, holiness, and authority of God, given unto it and left upon it by its author, the Holy Ghost—an impress it hath of God’s excellency upon it.”¹ As such, it needs no propping up from us, but only clear display. For Scripture not only *claims* to be the Word of God: it *proves* itself to be what it is.

Think of how light works: it does not need anything else to make itself known. The sun does not need spotlights. Light manifests itself (Eph. 5:13–14). Just so, the Word of God shines with a glory that proves itself divine in origin.

1 John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 322.

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That is why it can be called the “power of God” (Rom. 1:16), “living and active” (Heb. 4:12), “able to save ... souls” (James 1:21) and build us up (Acts 20:32). For just as all books reveal something of the character of their author, so Scripture bears the stamp of superhuman, divine wisdom. This was what C. S. Lewis meant when he said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”²

Across every culture, in every human temperament and circumstance, the Word of God convicts, humbles, diagnoses, and transforms. It describes what it is to be human, in all our glory and ruin, with an insight that no philosopher can match. It speaks of a God no human religion has proclaimed, above all imaginings yet infinitely more satisfying. It reveals a surprising secret to true happiness that no hedonist’s search has discovered. Who but a divine author would invent the doctrines of the Trinity, the Word becoming flesh and suffering death on a cross for us, or the new birth? “Consequently,” said John Calvin, “it is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of

2 C. S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in C. S. Lewis, *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 21.

human endeavor, breathe something divine.”³

Possible objections

What about other “holy” books?

One could object that all this is simply what a Christian *would* say. Don’t Muslims, for example, believe that their Scriptures are self-evidently divine in origin?

Yes, they might say so, yet they actually mean something quite different. Muslims commonly speak of the supernatural beauty of the Qur’an’s poetry as evidence of its divine authorship. But in the Bible, multiple human authors speak in quite different genres and styles, from poetry to history to personal letters. The divine character of Christian Scripture is not seen primarily in its choice and arrangement of words, inspired though they are. It is the meaning, the message, and the reality attested to that glows most brightly with heavenly glory.

As such, while it is good to study every word of Scripture intently, real confidence in its divine origin will not come simply by staring at a page or re-reading a favourite verse. Our appreciation of the divine glory of Scripture will grow

3 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1.8.1.

best through a broad reading of it as a whole. It is only when we read in this way that the multifaceted wisdom of its message will shine out most clearly. The people of God need the whole counsel of God for their faith to grow.

Why doesn't everyone trust the Bible?

The other obvious objection is that if Scripture is so self-evidently the Word of God, surely everyone would believe in it. So, why don't they?

This is not because of any defect in Scripture. We've seen that the Word of God is a lamp, but this does not mean that everyone can see its light, for light is not the same as sight. And this is precisely the problem for unbelievers: "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

By nature, we are born spiritually blind and cannot see the light of the glory of the Word of God. We need the Spirit to open our eyes so that we can see what is and always was there. That is why, as preachers, we must pray for the Spirit to work. We must pray for his enlightening as we prepare. We must pray that he stops our people's situations from distracting them and uses them instead to attract them to his Word. We must pray for eyes to be opened.

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And how does the Spirit open eyes to see the light? Let's take another contrast, this time with Mormonism. When Mormons try to win others to trust the Book of Mormon, they often say something like this: "Read it and pray. That's what I did, and God gave me this overwhelming feeling of happiness, and I just *knew* it was true." In other words, they had an entirely subjective experience. Seeking confidence that the Bible is God's Word, some Christians hope for exactly the same: assurance through a mystical experience or a voice in their heads. But that is not how the Spirit opens eyes so that we trust in Scripture.

When the Spirit opens eyes, he does not speak to us *of* the Word, but *by* the Word. He adds no new voice to Scripture but enables us to recognise the divine voice that is there. Instead of giving us some extra proof that Scripture is divine, he removes our natural blindness to see what was always there in the Bible for anyone with eyes to see. He enables us to perceive the light that is already shining. That way, we find ourselves trusting not an experience, but the glorious God we now discern in his Word.

How to build firm faith

A number of times in his preaching career, Charles Spurgeon used the following illustration to argue that preachers

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should let the Word of God prove itself:

The Word of God can take care of itself, and will do so if we preach it, and cease defending it. See you that lion. They have caged him for his preservation; shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes! ... O fools, and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter him? What does he want with your guardian care? Let the pure gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty, and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries.⁴

The point here is even more important than it appears at first sight. It touches on the most vital question to put to any preacher: in what will your listeners place their faith? In you, the preacher, or in God's Word? Will they put their trust in your wisdom or the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:1–5)?

John Calvin makes a fascinating argument for building firm faith in Scripture that clarifies the issue wonderfully. Over two chapters of his *Institutes* (chapters 7 and 8 of Book I), he

4 C. H. Spurgeon, "The Lover of God's Law Filled with Peace," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 42.

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looks at how we can get it all wrong. In chapter 7, he shows that Scripture proves itself, and that this provides the only true basis for real saving faith. In fact, he writes, “They who strive to build up firm faith in Scripture through disputation are doing things backwards.” Those who try to build faith in Scripture on their own arguments “will not at once imprint upon their hearts that certainty which piety requires.”⁵

Does this mean that Calvin thought all apologetic arguments for the trustworthiness of the Bible were useless? Not at all. In chapter 8, he goes on to say, “So far as human reason goes, sufficiently firm proofs are at hand to establish the credibility of Scripture.” He then lists a number of them: the antiquity and reliability of the biblical texts, their coherence, miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and more. His point is this: true faith must be built on the foundation of God’s Word, not on human arguments. However, once we have that faith, “those arguments—not strong enough before to engraft and fix the certainty of Scripture in our minds—become very useful aids.” In other words, true faith can only be built on the solid foundation of God’s Word. Apologetic arguments must not be our foundation, but they do very helpfully show, and give us comfort, that in trusting Scripture, we are being entirely

5 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

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reasonable. We are not out of our minds.

In the same way, we preachers must take great care not to do things backwards by trying to build firm faith in our hearers through our own wisdom or eloquence. We can be very useful aids, but we cannot provide a foundation for saving faith. That is found only in God's Word. It can prove itself if we will only bear it up and display it clearly. Knowing that should be enough to humble those aware of their talents (for the mightiest talent is no basis for saving faith) and enough to give relief to those all too aware of their weakness.

Preacher, you are not the light: only let the true lamp shine forth!

Sir, We Would See Jesus

Inside the pulpit in London where I learned to preach was a little inscription meant only for the eyes of the preacher as he stepped up to his task: “SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS.” Those words from John 12:21 (KJV) made clear what I was there to do. Yet simple as the message was, it was not shallow. Indeed, it reflected the deepest wells of Christian thought.

For Jesus Christ is the truth and glory of God; in him the grace and life and wisdom of God is found. In his face, we see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6). He is the revealing Word sent forth by the Father, and the One about whom the Spirit of truth testifies. Indeed, God breathes out the Scriptures through the Spirit precisely

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so that through the Word of Christ we might be made “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). That is why the law finds its fulfilment in him (Rom. 10:4) and why the prophets, the apostles, and all the Scriptures testify about him (Luke 24:27, 44–46; John 5:39–40, 46).

He is the Lord of Israel, the rock of Moses, the commander of the Lord’s army, the suffering servant, the end of the law, the true temple, and the promised Messiah. He has always been the one true object of saving faith, for he is, exclusively, the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through him (John 14:6). He is the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5), so that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of our salvation. He is the one we were made for. He is not the peddler of some other truth, reward, or message, as if *through* Christ we get to receive the *real* blessing, whether that be heaven, grace, life, or whatever. “Life” is not something to which he merely points the way. No! He is the Living One: the life and wisdom of the Father now shared with us in the Spirit. He is life, and life is to be found only in him.

For the preacher, the application is straightforward: if the

desire of the Father, the work of the Spirit, and the purpose of Scripture is to herald Jesus, then so must the faithful preacher. If the Son's great and eternal goal is to win for himself a bride, then his heralds must woo for him. They are like Abraham's servant in Genesis 24, commissioned to find a bride for his master's son. Only when we take our eyes off ourselves and herald him will we truly glorify God. But when we do that, we may be sure that our preaching will always be evangelistic and, at the same time, always edifying to the saints.

Preaching that avoids Christ

Of course, a good deal of preaching doesn't even try to preach Christ. Alternative messages or saviours are promoted, unbiblical "Christs" are proclaimed, or preaching is simply confused with moralising, entertaining, politicking, or grandstanding. Even those who know that Christ is the great theme of Scripture so easily slip into making it primarily about us, not him.

Thus, David fighting Goliath becomes a model for me to be a hero instead of a type of the Son of David who fights for us. The Word of Christ becomes a message of self-improvement or a manual to help us live more fulfilled lives—as if our greatest need is something other than Christ. We preachers

need to ask ourselves a vital question: am I primarily telling people what they must do, or am I telling them of Jesus and what he has done?

Martin Luther wrote a sparkling little tract on this called “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels.” The gospel, he said, is and should be nothing else than “a discourse about Christ, that he is the Son of God and became man for us, that he died and was raised, that he has been established as a Lord over all things.”¹ When we preach this gospel, Christ comes to us, and we are brought to him. But, he warned, we must not make Christ into a Moses, as if Christ did nothing more than teach and provide examples. For the gospel is not a set of commandments requiring deeds of us; it is a set of divine promises in which God promises, offers, and gives us all his possessions and benefits in Christ. Therefore, he wrote, the “chief article and foundation of the gospel is that before you take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize him as a gift.”²

There is another way in which we can fail to preach Christ, and it is one that even those who are most serious

1 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 118.

2 Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 35*, 119.

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about Scripture can fall into. We can treat Scripture as if there is life in the mere cerebral knowledge of the words, as if mere Bible knowledge is the same thing as faith in Jesus. Remember what Jesus said to the Jewish leaders? “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40). We too can preach in a way that looks impeccably biblical yet produces only students of Scripture, not worshippers of Christ. But Scripture is not Christ, and we must not confuse biblical knowledge with trust in Christ. The Scriptures do not have life in themselves, just as they do not point to themselves. They are the *Word of Christ*, written not simply that we might know *about* Christ, or even that we might merely consider him, but that we *come* to him for life (John 5:40).

Three remedies for preachers

For many of us preachers, though, we *know* we should preach Christ, and we *want* to do so. Yet we struggle. Why?

Let me suggest three remedies to three mistakes we can make even when we are trying to preach Christ.

1. Preach Christ, not an abstraction

The gravitational pull of sin downwards and away from faith in Christ means that our default mode is to put substitutes in the place of Christ, to have other objects of worship. One of the subtlest ways we preachers do this is by replacing the specific, actual person of Jesus Christ with an abstraction.

Now, any abstraction can do it, but the more theological it is, the harder it can be to spot it standing in the place of Christ and masking his absence. “The gospel,” “the truth,” “grace,” or “the Bible”: all can be treated as if they were saviours or gods in themselves.

Even “the cross” can be treated as an abstraction and stand as a substitute for Jesus. In fact, the cross is probably the place where this danger is subtlest. Preachers seeking to “preach Christ” can easily take this to mean nothing more than the need to rehearse the atonement in every sermon. But the atonement itself can thereby be presented as an impersonal machine for a “salvation” that has little to do with treasuring Christ.

To preach Christ involves preaching all the doctrines that set him forth. Yet no doctrine should be abstracted from him and made ultimate. Christ himself is, in person, the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He alone is the one to put forth as the glory and delight of the saints. He is the

Bridegroom that the bride is invited to enjoy. Without him, there is no gospel, grace, or truth.

2. *Proclaim the reality, not a mere idea*

“Preaching Christ from all of Scripture” has become a staple theme for evangelical books and conferences. In many ways, that is a good thing, but there is a danger that preaching Christ can become a mere hermeneutical game in which we work out how to “get to” him as the endpoint of the sermon. Christ becomes the preacher’s brilliant solution to the textual puzzle. In other words, Christ is presented as the right answer but not held out as the one to be adored.

With this mistake, it is not so much that Christ is replaced by some other truth; rather, he is treated as a dead specimen to be sliced and diced for our analysis. He is a logical conclusion, not our living Lord. This, of course, appeals to our pride. For, if Scripture is not mightily divine, living, and active but a dead artifact to be dissected for concepts, then we can stand over it as masters of the text. We need never face the discomfort of being confronted by it. But preaching then becomes a mere memorial to Christ: a tombstone.

Yet, when Paul wrote of his imploring as an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), he clearly saw a role greater than that of a schoolteacher whose only job was to revise theological

grammar. He did not merely give people information *about* Christ; he gave them Christ. Before the eyes of his people, Jesus Christ was placarded so that they might come to him, set their affections on him, and trust him. Through Paul's preaching, people encountered the risen Christ himself.

Just as the Father sends forth Christ for the redemption of the world, so preachers must send him forth so that people wonder, love, trust, and adore him. Just as Christ's great and eternal purpose is to win for himself a bride, so preachers must, as it were, woo for Christ. The Puritan minister Richard Sibbes put it like this: "It is the end of our calling to sue for a marriage between Christ and every soul. We are the friends of the bride, to bring the church to him; and the friends of the church, to bring Christ to them."³ Just as the Spirit bears witness to him, and not the mere concept of him, so must we.

3. Show, don't tell

If people are to cherish and treasure Christ, they cannot merely be *told* that he is good, true, and beautiful. They must be *shown*, so that they taste and see. He is, after all,

3 Richard Sibbes, "Bowels Opened," in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. A. B. Grosart, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 2.142.

truth itself, goodness itself, and beauty itself, and he is not faithfully proclaimed unless he is *shown* to be such.

Yet, showing is a much more challenging proposition for the preacher, for a sermon that shows cannot be aimlessly trotted out, nor can it come from a preacher who is not himself enjoying and adoring Christ. For those reasons, we preachers settle all too easily for telling. A classic giveaway is the sort of rhetorical questions you often hear from the pulpit: “Isn’t that a wonderful truth?”; “Isn’t Christ glorious?” Such questions sound pious, but in reality, they are just statements about how the preacher wants us to feel. Instead of *showing* how Christ is glorious and wonderful so that we feel it, the preacher is leaving the people to do the work of discovering it for themselves.

Showing is not just a challenge for the sermon itself; it involves the inner life of the preacher. For while a spiritually dry preacher may speak of Christ, if he does not himself enjoy Christ, he will not be able to present him as enjoyable.

Perhaps an example will help. Below are Charles Spurgeon’s last-ever words from the pulpit, dated June 7, 1891. As you read them, don’t worry about (or think of copying) Spurgeon’s own personal style. Notice instead how he holds out the person of Christ not as an idea, but as one to be adored. And notice how he does not merely tell us about

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Christ's graciousness: he makes us feel it for ourselves.

It is heaven to serve Jesus. I am a recruiting sergeant, and I would fain find a few recruits at this moment. Every man must serve somebody: we have no choice as to that fact. Those who have no master are slaves to themselves. Depend upon it, you will either serve Satan or Christ, either self or the Saviour. You will find sin, self, Satan, and the world to be hard masters; but if you wear the livery of Christ, you will find him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls. He is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was his like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulders. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in him. These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! and I have had nothing but love from him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased him. His service is

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life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! Amen.⁴

Preachers, lift up Christ, for when he is lifted up, he will draw all people to himself (John 12:32).

4 C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 323–24.

Light and Heat

Have you ever noticed that some sermons seem to be all about the head? Full of truth but failing to touch the heart and build people up in love, they are light without heat. And have you noticed that others are the opposite: exciting and emotional, but not enlightening? Hearing them is like eating a pack of sweets, with a quick sugar high but no long-term good.

How, then, should light and heat relate in our preaching?

In Scripture, light is constantly associated with the glory of God.¹ When God shines forth his light, he does not

¹ Ezek. 1:26–28; Isa. 60:1–2; Luke 2:8–9; 9:32; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 21:23. For more on this, see Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), ch. 5.

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broadcast abstract information: he imparts the glory of his personal presence. That is why when the sun of righteousness shines, the saints “go out leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal. 4:2). For his light brings the invigorating warmth of life. So, the light of God’s glory cannot be separated from the heat of worship.

This is precisely what we see in the Son, who is the glory of his Father. Rejoicing in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21), he did all he did “so that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14:31). He glorified his Father as he gloried in his Father, and he would not have glorified God if he had not gloried in him. So it was too with the Apostle Paul when he shared the light of the gospel: he could not keep himself from bursting forth in praise (Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:33–36; 16:25–27). So again, no true light without heat.

More than information

There is a light that shares biblical knowledge but does not foster saving faith. Even the demons can share such knowledge (James 2:19). But that light is not the light of the gospel, for gospel light does not puff people up but causes a humbling change of heart, so that people taste and see that the Lord is good, and take refuge in him (Ps. 34:8). The light of the gospel brings about a faith that gives glory to God (Rom. 4:20).

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Preaching, then, must be more than sharing biblical knowledge. It can be no ordinary speaking. When the New Testament describes preaching, it uses three main words: *kerysso* (“herald”), *euangelizomai* (“preach good news”), and *katangelo* (“proclaim”). Preaching is a proclamation or heralding of the good news with an appeal. With the Apostle Paul, we proclaim that

in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. (2 Cor. 5:19)

And with him we therefore make our appeal:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (v. 20)

This explains why Charles Spurgeon told his students, “Give us sermons, and save us from essays!”² For a sermon must not be confused with a simple lecture. The Word of God is

2 C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 347.

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described as being itself “the fear of the LORD” (Ps. 19:9): it cannot be trotted out as if it were merely an interesting story, a Sunday recreation, or some sort of absorbing trivia. Oh no! It is a heart-shaking assault on darkness and the very gates of hell, trumpeted forth so that sinners tremble and saints quake in wonder.

More than emotion

On the other hand, preaching cannot be all heat and no light. It involves a proclamation, after all, and a very specific proclamation too: the good news of Christ. “Holy affections are not heat without light,” wrote Jonathan Edwards, “but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge.”³ The heat we seek is not an emotional froth stirred up by something other than the Word of God. That is the way to insincerity, with preachers affecting emotion to tug at the heartstrings of their hearers, causing them to place their faith on the shaky ground of passing sentiment. The warmth of true spiritual life can grow only under the light of the gospel.

3 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 266.

Preaching for worship

Paul preached with the appeal that we might be reconciled to God, so that we share the life that is in him. But what *sort* of life is that?

As we have seen, God the Father is an eternal preacher, ever holding forth his Word. That Word is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). He is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). He is the mirroring forth of the Father, so that in him God is rightly conceived.

Yet, God does not only *know* this perfect Image. He *loves* his Image. The Father loves the Son in the fellowship of the Spirit. And just as the Father sends forth his Word that he may be known, so he sends forth his Spirit that he may be loved. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). As the Word of God is the revelation of God, opening our eyes to the truth of God, so the Spirit of God is the Spirit of love, turning our hearts to adore the truth. The life of the triune God involves *both* knowing *and* loving God, and we do not share in the life of God unless we have both.

In his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus said to his Father, “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, *that the love with which you have loved me*

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may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26, emphasis added). The Son comes to us from the Father to share with us his life in the Spirit. It is a life of knowing the Father, being loved by the Father, and loving the Father in return. He does not merely know about God: he knows and loves him. He finds pleasure in him.

Now, if that is what God’s life is like, we do not have it if we do not worship and heartily adore him. We might say that the triune God, who is love, is not truly known where he is not truly loved. God is not interested in abstract knowledge or enforcing a passionless moral performance. His delight is to share his life, to encounter us in all his grace and glory, so that we are unmade and remade in his likeness.

John Calvin put it like this: “We are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.”⁴ Without that heartfelt, Spirit-fuelled adoration, we cannot say we really know God, for God is so glorious he cannot be known without being adored. Faith that is not aroused to love God is no faith at all (John 8:39–47; Gal. 5:6).

Preachers, then, must be concerned for both the heads

4 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.9.

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and the hearts of their listeners. They share the light of the knowledge of God in order that those who hear may share the life of God. They share a knowledge of God that cannot be separated from a love of God. Preaching should foster worship. And just in case any pragmatic preacher thinks this is all a bit abstract, let's be clear: it is precisely that heartfelt worship that is most practically transformative for Christians. Love for God, after all, is exactly what enables true love for neighbour (1 John 4:7–21). The first table of the law (concerning worship) is the foundation for the second (concerning love for neighbour). No preaching, no worship; no worship, no Christian living.

Therefore, preachers, lift up the sun of righteousness—the one with healing in his wings—so that the saints go out leaping like calves from the stall (Mal. 4:2).

Radical Renewal

Why is it that so much preaching today lacks impact? Ultimately, it is because it is shallow. Admittedly, this may not seem to be the case, for a sermon can be deeply learned, highly entertaining, morally zealous—but still be shallow. And it is shallow because it fails to go to the *radix*, the root, of our problem.

The Pharisees are classic examples of this learned and devout superficiality. Being such diligent students of Scripture, they knew well the first and greatest commandment: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart” (Deut. 6:5). Yet, they never understood it. They failed to grasp what the Lord meant by “love” and the “heart.” They thought it simply meant right performance and activity. So they

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zealously cultivated their behaviour. Outwardly, this made them look good. But Jesus called them “hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’” (Matt. 15:7–8). They failed to see that their problem was deeper: not in their behaviour as such, but in the desires of their hearts that drove their behaviour (Matt. 15:18–20). And so, their religion collapsed into a hollow, outward show.

Preachers today can make the same mistake. We can preach as if what people really need is better conduct. And if that is the case, then that is something we know they can achieve with just a bit more effort. In other words, we’re sinners, but we can solve our own problem. We hardly need a redeemer. Just like the Pharisees, we can fail to discern that the demands of the law go far deeper. The law does not prescribe self-improvement but says, “You shall *love* the LORD your God.” So, it places a demand on the very desires of our hearts.

But the trouble is, we don’t naturally desire God, and that desire is not something we can just switch on. For while we always freely choose to do what we do, we find we are unable to choose what we desire. Instead, we are driven through life, making our every choice “lured and enticed by [our] desire” (James 1:14). We are motivated in everything by what

we love. And yet, while made to love God, we have loved ourselves and anything but God. It is those deep desires that then give “birth to sin” (James 1:15), because we naturally love the darkness (John 3:19) and live “in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind” (Eph. 2:3). No amount of self-improving effort can change that, for our problem is not lack of willpower, but hearts that desire wrongly.

What we need is a radical renewal: a change of heart.¹

Change from the inside out

The change the Spirit brings works in exactly the opposite way to how the Pharisees thought. They hoped that they could manufacture their own goodness by external improvements and so change *from the outside in*. The Spirit, on the other hand, changes people *from the inside out*. He takes those who are “hostile to God” (Rom. 8:7) and turns them so that they cry with joy, “Abba! Father!” (v. 15). In other words, the Spirit changes us by transforming what we *enjoy*. He alters our tastes, so that we who once relished sin come to find a greater pleasure in God. That transformation

1 For more on this, see Michael Reeves, *Evangelical Pharisees: The Gospel as Cure for the Church's Hypocrisy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023).

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makes us want differently, and therefore behave differently.

Understanding how the Spirit changes us must entirely shape faithful Christian preaching. “Remember,” Charles Spurgeon told his students, “you are not sent to whiten tombs, but to open them.”² What he meant was that if we simply seek to alter behaviour, we will only end up creating outwardly moral and religious hypocrites. As ministers of the new covenant and of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6), our aim must be that of the Spirit. We preach to reform hearts so that they desire differently—so that they love God, enjoy God, and glory in God.

Elsewhere, Spurgeon said, “The object of all true preaching is the heart: we aim at divorcing the heart from sin, and wedding it to Christ.”³ While of course Spurgeon wanted to see godly behaviour in his congregation, he saw that mere calls for better living would not produce it. True godliness is a deeper matter of the loves that shape us. As John Owen put it, “Nothing renders us so like unto God as our love

2 C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle: Second Series*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1889), 230.

3 C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 27 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881), 530.

unto Jesus Christ.”⁴ If we are to be truly holy, our very affections and desires must be turned away from their naturally cherished sins to Christ. Only then will the vicious become peace-loving and upright, the proud humble, the greedy generous, and the addicts free.

New affections

Jonathan Edwards considered this at length in his *Religious Affections*, in which he argued, “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”⁵ By this he meant that true Christians are not those who merely acknowledge the right beliefs and do the right things. Their hearts beat differently, desire differently, and love differently. And this, wrote Edwards, is why God has ordained preachers:

And the impressing divine things on the hearts and affections of men, is evidently one great and main end for which God has ordained, that his Word delivered in the holy Scriptures, should be opened, applied, and set home upon men, in preaching. And therefore it

4 John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 146.

5 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 115.

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don't [*sic*] answer the aim which God had in this institution, merely for men to have good commentaries and expositions on the Scripture, and other good books of divinity; because, although these may tend, as well as preaching, to give men a good doctrinal or speculative understanding of the things of the Word of God, yet they have not an equal tendency to impress them on men's hearts and affections. God hath appointed a particular and lively application of his Word, to men, in the preaching of it, as a fit means to affect sinners, with the importance of the things of religion, and their own misery, and necessity of a remedy, and the glory and sufficiency of a remedy provided; and to stir up the pure minds of the saints, and quicken their affections, by often bringing the great things of religion to their remembrance, and setting them before them in their proper colors, though they know them, and have been fully instructed in them already (II Peter 1:12–13). And particularly, to promote those two affections in them, which are spoken of in the text, love and joy.⁶

Preaching, then, is more than instruction, more than

6 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 115–16.

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exposition, and more than exhortation. God has ordained it to “quicken ... affections” by setting the things of the gospel before the people “in their proper colors.”

We need to be clear here that this is not at all the same thing as emotional manipulation or indulging in emotionalism. Emotions, while important, are fickle. They rise and fall with blood sugar levels and hormones. Play a heavy drum-beat or some aching string music, and you can very quickly shift how people feel in the moment. Affections are deeper and more constant: they make up the very grain of the heart and its inclinations. Take a Christian’s pleasure in Christ: it should steadily, if inconstantly, grow as she matures. Now, put her in a cold room without any food and she, like anyone else, will start to feel low. That does not mean her affection for Christ has dimmed, only that her immediate context is gloomy. Her affections will shape her emotions, but they are not the same thing.

Deep, heart-level change is not the same as a superficial swing of the emotions. Preachers should not seek to whip up the crowds, as if raised pulses are necessarily the same thing as changed hearts. We do more weighty work: we hold out the light of the gospel in such a way that the basic desires and deepest loves of our hearers realign—and realign not to us and our words, but to him and to his.

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Preaching to the affections does, however, mean that we seek to be *affecting*. People should not leave indifferent. Many preachers are wary here, remembering Paul's words that he did not come "with lofty speech or wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1). But that does not mean Paul never sought to persuade or appeal (2 Cor. 5:11). Rather, he explains, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). He would not use his words for any other purpose. But he would season those words carefully for that end: to placard Christ clearly before their eyes (Gal. 3:1).

As God does, preachers must use their words to exalt Christ, to reason and persuade, to capture the imagination and desires of their people. Dullness does not express the beauty of a heart-winning Saviour. We must, as J. C. Ryle put it, turn our hearers' ears into eyes and make them clearly *see* what we speak of.⁷ For it is by beholding the glory of the Lord that they will be transformed (2 Cor. 3:18).

7 J. C. Ryle, *Light from Old Times; Or, Protestant Facts and Men* (London: Charles J. Thynne, 1903), 407.

Only the Gospel

If we preachers are to share the Spirit's aim of inside-out change in our hearers, we need to know *how* he changes hearts. In a sense, the answer is very simple: he uses "the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16). In the gospel, "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*" (Titus 2:11–12, emphasis added). Yet it is all too easy to overlook what this means practically for preaching.

In Scripture, we hear both commands (law) and promises (gospel). To be effective, we preachers must know how each works. The Puritan preacher William Perkins wrote,

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The basic principle in application is to know whether the passage is a statement of the law or of the gospel. For when the Word is preached, the law and the gospel operate differently. *The law exposes the disease of sin, and as a side-effect stimulates and stirs it up. But it provides no remedy for it. However the gospel not only teaches us what is to be done, it also has the power of the Holy Spirit joined to it.*¹

So, the law is good and useful. It shows us our need for the gospel, how we fall short, and it shows us what holiness looks like. Christians, as they mature, will increasingly *want* to know how to live in godliness. However, the law will not change their hearts or create that desire. Only the gospel of Christ has the ability to effect that sort of radical transformation; it is the gospel that changes our hearts so that we *want* to walk in Christlikeness. As Jesus said, it is those who love him who keep his Word (John 14:23).

Good parents quickly learn the importance of both law and gospel in nurturing their children. On the one hand, young ones need to be told that there are certain things

1 William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 54, emphasis added.

they cannot do. “Don’t run out onto the road!” “Don’t bite your brother!” Such commands help keep them safe and let them know what behaviour is unacceptable and acceptable. However, such commands only act as fences around their actions; they do nothing for their hearts. In order to grow healthily, children will also need promises. They will need to know that they are loved.

In the same way, the law is useful for Christians, but it cannot bring about what it commands: it will never bring someone to love the Lord their God with all their heart.

The look that brings life

In John 3, Jesus describes how the Spirit changes hearts. He tells Nicodemus that he must be born again of the Spirit (vv. 1–8). Completely baffled, Nicodemus asks, “How can these things be?”, to which Jesus replies, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (vv. 9–10). Clearly, Nicodemus should have understood, for Jesus was speaking of the scriptural promise of the new covenant, which Nicodemus knew:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone

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from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

But Nicodemus does not understand, so Jesus immediately goes on to speak of his redemption:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:14–16)

It is that gospel that will melt and renew hearts of stone. It is that sight of the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross, proving the love of his Father, that realigns affections. There we see the full gravity of our sin in what it cost him. There our blithe hopes of self-righteousness die. And there we see a love in God's heart beyond our wildest fantasies. Where once we had dreaded God as an awful judge and delighted in sin, on the cross we see an entirely unexpected goodness and kindness in God. And it is that revelation that wins us.

No longer do we shrink from him, but seeing his Fatherly love, we find our hearts welling up with love for him in return. We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). The sin that pleased us becomes odious. The God we flinched from becomes entrancing.

At first, the good news of our forgiveness and redemption might only make us grateful. But God's grace acts as a breadcrumb trail, leading us from the gift to the Giver, from marvelling at what he has done for us to marvelling at who he is in himself. When it begins to sink in how kind and merciful God reveals himself to be, the forgiven find themselves, like the sinful woman in Luke 7, not only *thanking* much, but *loving* much (Luke 7:47).

The law, by contrast, cannot have that effect. Because sinners naturally love their sin, we cannot simply command people out of it. Such demands might bring about a gratifying change of behaviour, but unless people are brought to love differently, that good behaviour will merely be the fruit of their self-dependence and self-righteousness. Only the grace of God and the gospel of Christ's redemption can win affections away from sin to Christ. As John Bunyan wrote, "There is nothing in heaven or earth that can so awe the heart, as the grace of God. ... Nothing has that majesty, and commanding greatness in and upon the hearts of the sons of

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men as has the grace of God.”² Why? Because it is through the gospel that the Spirit opens our eyes to see the loveliness of God. It is only when we see his compassion and kindness in the gospel that we are drawn to him.

This was at the heart of Martin Luther’s discovery of the gospel in the Reformation, and he explained it like this:

I could not have faith in God if I did not think he wanted to be favorable and kind to me. This in turn makes me feel kindly disposed toward him, and I am moved to trust him with all my heart and to look to him for all good things ... Look here! This is how you must cultivate Christ in yourself ... faith must spring up and flow from the blood and wounds and death of Christ. If you see in these that God is so kindly disposed toward you that he even gives his own Son for you, then your heart in turn must grow sweet and disposed toward God ... We never read that the Holy Spirit was given to anybody because he had performed

2 John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 3 (Glasgow: W. G. Blackie & Son, 1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 546–47.

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some works, but always when men have heard the gospel of Christ and the mercy of God.³

Preaching that cultivates Christ

If it is the good news of Christ the gracious Redeemer, and only this good news, that turns hearts from cherishing sin to adoring God, then that is the message that must suffuse all our preaching. We cannot make a sharp distinction between evangelistic preaching and preaching for discipleship, for the gospel is the one means the Spirit uses both to convert and to build up in faith. It is not that the Spirit merely uses the gospel once to give us new birth before then leaving us to sweat out our sanctification by pure self-exertion. It is *always* the gospel that does the deepest plough-work in our hearts. Indeed, as John Owen wrote, “Holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing and realizing of the gospel in our souls.”⁴ Without that gospel, even mature Christians will feel the daily pull of sin outweighing their love for God. Out of earshot of the message of God’s kindness, they will quickly

3 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 44: The Christian in Society I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 30, 38–39.

4 John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 370–71.

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crawl away from God in guilt and dread.

Preachers, if you would turn hearts to God, you must *always* give people the one message with the power of God to win their desires. Now, that is not necessarily straightforward, for sometimes our text is all law. And it is good that we preach on such texts, for the law convicts, guides, and shows us God's holiness. But the law cannot change hearts. So, when our text is all law, we must preach it *within its broader biblical context*, where the gospel is taught. Only then can our hearers live with integrity, loving the Lord their God and not merely whitening their tombs.

Let people see the sheer beauty of Christ. Show them how he is better and more delightful than all the idols that entrance them. Open their eyes, and so win their hearts with the gospel.

Preaching like Christ

Jesus Christ is not only the preacher's subject; he must also be the preacher's model, shaping how we should speak of him. Quite simply, if preachers are to set forth Christ faithfully in the full colours of his glory, we must, like him, delight in God and love the sinners we address. That was why Paul told Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself *and* on the teaching" (1 Tim. 4:16, emphasis added). It is why he told the Ephesian elders, "Pay careful attention [first] to yourselves *and* [second] to all the flock" (Acts 20:28, emphasis added). It is why the Scottish preacher James Stewart wrote, "The inner life makes the preacher."¹

1 James Stewart, *Heralds of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), 191.

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Without even meaning to, the preacher will smell of whatever he truly glories in. Also without even meaning to, the people will read Christ's character off his. Thus, a spiritually hollow preacher may speak of Christ—and do so with eloquence—but what people will sense is his ego or lovelessness or bitterness of spirit. And these they may then map onto the Christ he proclaims. The ambassador cannot be divorced from his message. For good or ill, then, the heart of the preacher is itself a sermon.

The fact is, we will not preach the gospel any better than we have experienced it ourselves. Anyone can coolly articulate some biblical truths, but we are unlikely to bring others to fear, love, and delight in God more than we do. Therefore, as Richard Baxter warned,

Take heed to yourselves lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach; and lest, while you proclaim the necessity of a Saviour to the world, your hearts should neglect him.²

2 Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 56.

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Preachers must prepare more than sermons: we must prayerfully prepare ourselves. This is the deeper, long-term preparation that faithful preaching requires. Only then will we find the right tone in which to convey God's Word and share it with the aroma of God's own intent. Without Christlikeness, we cannot be authentic ambassadors for Christ. Indeed, as the godly Scotsman Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."³

What Christlikeness looks like

There are two essential aspects to Christlikeness in preaching. Just as Christ both loves his Father and loves sinners, so faithful preachers of Christ must: love God, and love the people.

Love God

The first distinguishing mark of truly Christlike preaching is that it seeks to glorify God and not the preacher, the listener, or anyone or anything else. It boasts in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31)

3 Andrew Bonar, *The Life of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1844, 1962), 282.

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and in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14). Like John the Baptist, it points unerringly to the Lamb of God while saying, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). No preacher can serve two masters: our sermons will trumpet either God’s glory or our own.

Christlike preaching that aims at the glory of God has some unmistakable effects. The first is quite strange and unexpected: having a large view of Christ actually enables us to find our own voice in preaching. Without this, we run the risk of superficially mimicking those human preachers whom we admire. But when Christ looms larger than our heroes, we speak out of the overflow of our own hearts.

Second, a zeal for God’s glory will enable us to preach with a striking, supernatural combination of authority and humility. The youngest preacher can preach to the most senior saint with authority—but it is the authority of the Word of God. We can preach God’s Word with conviction; we need not falter or hesitate as if we are merely sharing our own opinions. And, when our perspective is shaped by the glory of God, we will not be so swayed by the opinions of others; we can preach God’s Word with courage. At the same time, the most seasoned preacher who longs for God’s glory will preach with humility, for our delight is found in him, not ourselves. Moreover, those who have seen the Lord in

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his exalted glory cannot help but cry, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5).

Third, a heartfelt love of God will crush all glib insincerity in us. Just as zeal for God’s house consumed Jesus (John 2:17), so when we treasure Christ, we will not trifle with people. We will not play the clown or tailor our words to gather approval or applause. That does not mean we will be dreary, for how would that ever display the beauty of Christ? But it does mean that we will be joyfully earnest and intent in our purpose to lift up our Saviour in all his grace and loveliness.

Nothing can move people to rejoice in God like such authentic, authoritative, humble, earnest preaching. A proud preacher cannot do that, but will only steal God’s glory for himself. And proud words cannot produce humble people. As James Denney put it, “No man can give the impression that he himself is clever, and that Christ is mighty to save.”⁴

All of this means that we must prepare and preach with the same devotion and prayerfulness that we aim at in our hearers. Prayerless preaching is loveless preaching. It betrays a low view of God, as if he were absent, unreal, or unworthy.

4 Quoted in John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 325.

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It will necessarily give the impression that God is an intellectual game or a trivial pursuit. By contrast, preachers who worship God will be driven to their knees, and those who sense their own spiritual coldness will be compelled to cry out for a renewed appreciation of his allure.

Devoted preaching also requires us to be fresh in our own awareness of the glory of God. Ironically and perhaps surprisingly, this is not easy for those who spend their lives in ministry. By sheer familiarity with spiritual things, we can easily become hardened into a mechanical professionalism. The constant busyness and machinery of inboxes and diaries dries us out. For our own health, and the health of those we shepherd, we must therefore prioritise our own time at the deep well of living water; we must feed our own minds and souls. For as long as we serve, we must continually fight stagnation with study: studying of all God's Word, and studying good theological books that enrich our adoration and knowledge of God.

Love the people

"See how he loved!" the people said of the friend of sinners (John 11:36). His very look at the rich young man was full of love (Mark 10:21). He loved his own who were in the world, and he loved them to the end (John 13:1). If we are to preach

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like Christ, we must share his affectionate care and love for those we serve. And when we do, it will bring a divine aroma to our words; it will lend them a transformative weight. Thus, Charles Spurgeon told his students:

It is not every preacher we would care to talk with; but there are some whom one would give a fortune to converse with for an hour. I love a minister whose face invites me to make him my friend. ... An individual who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living. ... When a man has a large, loving heart, men go to him as ships to a haven, and feel at peace when they have anchored under the lee of his friendship. Such a man is hearty in private as well as in public; his blood is not cold and fishy, but he is warm as your own fireside. No pride and selfishness chill you when you approach him; he has his doors all open to receive you, and you are at home with him at once. Such men I would persuade you to be, every one of you.⁵

5 C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: A Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875), 183–84.

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When people sense that their preacher is kind, and loves them, it opens the doors. For so many, the preacher is seen as an alien being who must live on a different planet. Love undoes those barriers and makes the preacher human. Likewise, guilt and shame make many assume that the preacher is against them, so they raise their defences. Learning and oratory will not lower such defences, nor will confected substitutes for love, like staged “authenticity.” Only love. Even hard truths, like the fact of our radical sinfulness, people will take more easily from a preacher who evidently cares for them.

Love means that we will serve the people and not ourselves with our sermons. Just like Christ, who for all his wisdom used words that could be readily understood, so we must wear our learning lightly. Not that we should lay aside any actual wisdom; it is simply that we use it all to serve our people and not our egos. We must aim to be clear, not clever. Deep, yes, and not trivial. But clear. It is the god of this world who keeps people from seeing the light of the gospel. We must not take his side.

Love also means compassion. Love that is genuine rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep. It is never haughty or judgmental, but welcoming, bearing with the weak to build them up (Romans 12–15). We see

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this in Jesus, whose love was always so heartfelt and tender. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). For he is a merciful high priest, able to sympathise with our weaknesses and “deal gently with the ignorant and wayward” (Heb. 5:2). Christlike preachers share that kind compassion, not breaking bruised reeds nor quenching smouldering wicks (Matt. 12:20). Now, “compassionate” does not mean “tame.” Christ was a fearless preacher, never dithering or hesitant. But he was not abrasive or overbearing. He was endlessly kind and tenderly merciful. So must his ambassadors be.

Such kindness is immensely appealing, but it is not natural to us. It is not a temperamental advantage some are born with. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”: this is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). We must therefore keep in step with the Spirit—and pray for those we serve. Private intercession for people is a powerful means to grow in love for them, for it is hard to hold them up in our hearts without also having them in our hearts.

Preaching like the Word of God himself, like the one who perfectly loves God and loves his neighbour: who is sufficient for these things? Not one of us in ourselves. But this is

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just what throws us onto him. Then, we will decrease, and he will increase.

Dear preachers, if you would preach like Christ himself, love God, love your people, and say with the psalmist:

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! (Ps. 115:1)

Study Guide

Welcome

Welcome to this short, interactive study guide, which is designed to help you engage more fully with what you have read. We really want you to remember this God-centred vision and why it matters hugely for the future of the church.

For some of you, this book enables you to see preaching in a whole new light.

For others, this book articulates truths that you knew already but couldn't really express or explain with confidence.

For others, this book is a glorious affirmation of what you already knew—and have known for years—and now

STUDY GUIDE

you long to share it with friends and colleagues so that they too might embrace a biblical vision.

Whether you belong to any of the above categories or none, it is our prayer at Union Publishing that you will be so captivated by this God-centred vision that it will shape your praying, your preparation, and your preaching in the decades ahead. We long to see transformation in the church worldwide.

Suggested contexts for use

- Colleges
- Training conferences
- Next-generation training / internships
- Fraternal
- Away days
- Study groups
- Sabbaticals
- Personal preparation and reflection

Suggested format

- Read
- Discuss
- Apply
- Pray

General questions on preaching

1. “There is a great dearth in true understanding of the nature of preaching. Is it a sales job? Is it a lecture? Is it a mere moment of teaching? Other questions also quickly arise: What is ‘expository preaching?’”

Consider Josh Moody’s statement above in the light of your own (and others’) experience. What are the most common misconceptions about preaching that you read or hear? How do you usually define preaching?

2. “In our day of widespread spiritual famine (Amos 8:11), the church desperately needs preachers who address the head, the heart, and the hands in a Christ-centred proclamation of the life-giving and light-giving Word of God.”

This conviction, expressed by Joel R. Beeke, outlines the urgency of the problem, as well as the solution. From your own perspective and in your own words, how would you describe the problem and the solution with respect to preaching and the church?

STUDY GUIDE

3. “This is a timely book, setting forth a vision of preaching that too many of us—preachers and hearers alike—fail to see. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.”

Do you agree with these words from David Johnston? If so, how can you enable others to “see”? What chapter or section of the book stands out to you as most crucial to illuminating a God-centred vision of preaching?

4. “As you read this book, I believe your heart will soar with a greater admiration for this glorious calling to preach the Word.”

Does this thought from Steven J. Lawson resonate with you? If so, can you think of someone whom you could encourage, even as you yourself have been blessed and encouraged?

Specific questions, by chapter

Chapter 1: God Is a Preacher

1. How does the reality that God is a preacher shape our understanding of the purpose and significance of human preaching? What does it imply for our role as

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- preachers today?
2. How should the fact that the church is created through God's Word influence contemporary preaching practices and our approach to worship and teaching?
 3. What lessons can be learned from the Reformation regarding the transformative power of preaching? How might a renewed focus on biblical preaching address current challenges and contribute to church renewal?

Chapter 2: An Encounter with God

1. In what ways does the author argue that Scripture, as the Word of God, has the same purpose as the Word of Christ? How are these intricately connected?
2. What is the primary purpose of preaching? What is the distinction between teaching and preaching? How does preaching, when misunderstood, risk creating a congregation focused on knowledge rather than a relationship with God?
3. How should the preaching of God's Word go beyond the communication of information and play a transformative role in the lives of listeners in the congregation?

Chapter 3: The Light That Proves Itself

1. How does the author argue for the divine origin of the Bible in the face of objections that other religious texts might make similar claims?
2. Preachers themselves are not the light but are there to bear up the light. How does this perspective shape the preacher's understanding of his role and responsibility? How does the Word of God prove itself to be divine in origin?
3. Calvin suggests that while apologetic arguments are useful aids, true faith must be built on the foundation of God's Word. How can preachers present persuasive arguments for the Bible while ensuring that faith rests ultimately on the Word of God itself?

Chapter 4: Sir, We Would See Jesus

1. This chapter emphasises the centrality of preaching Christ. How does the simple message "Sir, We Would See Jesus" (see John 12:21) shape the preacher's understanding of his task? The author discusses the dangers of preaching that avoids Christ, such as promoting alternative messages or turning Christ into an abstraction. How can preachers ensure that their sermons consistently and authentically herald Jesus?

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2. Luther's perspective on the gospel highlights the importance of presenting Christ not just as an example, but as a gift. In what ways can preachers avoid the temptation to turn Christ into a mere moral teacher and instead present him as the ultimate gift of salvation?
3. This chapter identifies three potential mistakes preachers can make when attempting to preach Christ. How do these mistakes manifest themselves, and what remedies are suggested for each mistake? The author discusses the idea of "showing" Christ rather than just "telling" about him. How can preachers effectively demonstrate Christ's goodness, truth, and beauty in their sermons, ensuring that believers not only hear about Christ but also experience the richness of his person?

Chapter 5: Light and Heat

1. This chapter addresses the common imbalance in sermons where there is too much emphasis either on intellectual understanding (light) or on emotional appeal (heat). How can preachers ensure that biblical knowledge leads to genuine worship and transformation of heart?

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2. The author makes a distinction between light that imparts biblical knowledge without fostering saving faith and the light of the gospel that brings about a humbling change of heart. How can preachers ensure that their sermons go beyond imparting knowledge and lead to transformative faith on the part of their hearers?
3. The text mentions three main words used in the New Testament to describe preaching: *kerysso*, *euangelizo-mai*, and *katangelo*. How do these words shape our understanding of what preaching should be?

Chapter 6: Radical Renewal

1. Drawing parallels with the Pharisees, the author criticises preaching that focuses merely on external conduct without addressing the deeper desires of the heart. How can preachers avoid falling into the trap of promoting a superficial morality instead of heart transformation?
2. The Holy Spirit is described as changing individuals from the inside out, altering their desires so that they find greater pleasure in God. How can preachers align their messages with the transformative work of the Spirit, aiming to reform hearts rather than mere behaviour? How can preachers be affecting without resorting to emotional manipulation in order to ensure that

transformation is deep and lasting?

3. Preachers should aim to “quicken ... affections” by presenting the gospel in its proper colours. How can they effectively communicate the beauty and significance of Christ in a way that involves the affections of their hearers?

Chapter 7: Only the Gospel

1. The author emphasises the distinction between law and gospel in preaching. How does the law expose sin, and why does the gospel alone possess the power to transform hearts? How can preachers communicate the grace of God effectively in their sermons in order to foster heart-level change?
2. The text refers to Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John chapter 3, highlighting the transformative power of the gospel. How does the gospel, particularly the sight of Christ lifted up on the cross, realign affections and win hearts for God?
3. The author argues that the gospel is crucial not only for conversion but also for building up faith in Christians. How can preachers maintain a focus on the gospel in all their sermons, even when the text contains primarily elements of the law, continually cultivating Christ in

the hearts of their hearers?

Chapter 8: Preaching Like Christ

1. It is important for a preacher's character to reflect Christ. How can he ensure that his inner life aligns with the message he proclaims in order to avoid a disconnect between his character and the Christ he preaches? How does the preacher's genuine delight in God and love for sinners relate to the effectiveness and authenticity of his preaching?
2. Richard Baxter warns against preachers neglecting their own spiritual growth while at the same time proclaiming the necessity of a Saviour to others. How can preachers minister to their congregations while maintaining a vibrant personal relationship with God?
3. Christlikeness in preaching involves both loving God and loving the people. How does the author describe the distinctive characteristics of a preacher's love for God and the impact it has on his preaching? The author notes that compassion and kindness are integral to Christlike love for the people. In what ways can preachers cultivate genuine compassion, especially when delivering hard truths, in order to ensure that love is evident in their preaching?

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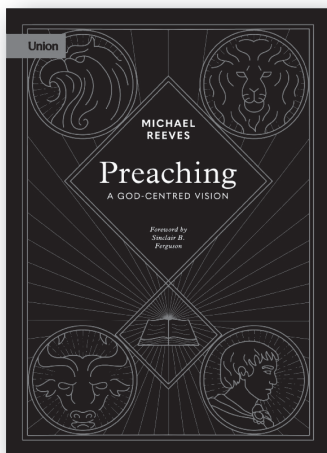
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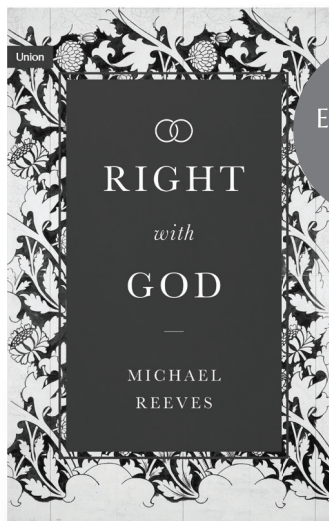


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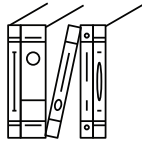
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