

The Book of Acts—Life In the Spirit

Apostolic Principles from Acts

Acts 1:1-3 KJV The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, [2] Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: [3] To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Lesson 5 -- The Priority of Preaching

Acts 2:14-37 KJV But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: [15] For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. [16] But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; [17] And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: [18] And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: [19] And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: [20] The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: [21] And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. [22] Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: [23] Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: [24] Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. [25]

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: [26] Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: [27] Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. [28] Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. [29] Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. [30] Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; [31] He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. [32] This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. [33] Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. [34] For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, [35] Until I make thy foes thy footstool. [36] Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. [37] Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?

I. INTRODUCTION—THE MANDATE FOR BIBLICAL PREACHING

A. An Encouragement for Biblical Teaching

Just a few weeks ago at our General Conference (September 26-29, 2010) in Houston, Texas Bible College hosted a reunion of sorts for all TBC alumni. Part of the program allowed all of the past presidents of the college to address those who attended. I was particularly struck by the comments of former president James Hughes who was there in the late '90's after I had graduated. He gave a brief recount of the trends that started some 40 years ago with the beginning of the church growth movement.

He recalled the pressure suddenly being placed on pastors to “grow” their churches by all sorts of human means that were high on numbers but low on conversions. He noted that during this intense period of evangelism that the church moved away from teaching, giving up traditional Sunday school efforts and mid-week Bible studies in favor of very shallow “seeker” sermons. Because of the content of these “seeker” sermons, biblical content deteriorated and what was served up was basically spiritual cotton candy that warmed hearts and tickled ears but never confronted the sin issues in the human heart. Brother Hughes also attributed much of the instability in the lives of current church members due to a lack of solid biblical teaching. The responsibility of some of this rests solely in the hands of those men who stand in pulpits week-in and week-out among the churches. He encouraged a meeting room basically full of preachers to pursue the ministry of the Word as never before.

Just in case you may be wondering, solid, principled biblical preaching is hard work. Sermons and Bible studies do not just happen because a man decides that he wants to put a “lecture” of sorts of together. True biblical preaching is much more than a man getting into a pulpit and preaching. A man who is called to preach preaches with far more than just his words; he preaches with his life.

John Broadus

Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No other religion has ever made the regular and frequent assembling of masses of men, to hear religious instruction and exhortation, an integral part of divine worship. Judaism had something like it in the prophets and afterwards in the readers and speakers of the synagogue; but preaching had no essential part in the worship of the temple.

(From *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, John Broadus, p. 1)

Every apostolic church has to have a steady diet of the Word of God. Eugene Peterson, the author of the modern paraphrase *The Message* recently was quoted as saying, "Let me simplify the expectations that you have for me. I will preach to you and pray for you." He was saying this to a new family who had transferred to his church during an orientation process. If you read between the lines he was clearly stipulating the mandate to preach the Word. He was revolting against the idea of being a modern day showman, organizer, and motivational speaker that many pastors have had to adapt themselves to due to the increasing pressure to "grow" the church. What would happen to our churches if suddenly the sole responsibility of the pastor was to give himself wholly to this task of biblical preaching? I feel with certainty that spiritual growth *and* evangelism would take place because of the prevailing power of the Word of God.

B. The Example of Jesus Christ

Jesus, our leader, was a masterful preacher. Early in His ministry, He came preaching.

Luke 4:16-21 KJV And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. **[17]** And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, **[18]** The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, **[19]** To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. **[20]** And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. **[21]** And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

John 7:28-29 KJV Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. [29] But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.

John 7:37-38 KJV In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. [38] He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

His cry was powerful and urgent but in that cry was a tone of compassion. The model for preaching involves the proclamation of the Gospel. Furthermore it contains theological instruction for the Church. The call to conversion and then the systematic teaching of the Word of God brings about a spiritual maturity in the life of all believers. For those who scoff at preaching, it is doubtful that they have ever really been in the presence of truly great preaching. It is important to note that the weekly discipline of preaching has a great propensity to shape us in the direction that our lives are lived out for the Lord.

John MacArthur, Jr.

A godly man, gifted by the Spirit to preach the Word, has no equal in the presentation of God's truth. It is the God-ordained method for evangelism and edification. The weakness of the contemporary church is largely due to the decline in powerful biblical preaching.

(From: MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Acts 1-12, p. 49.)

All of the focus on preaching and teaching the concepts of the Kingdom of God was actually started by Jesus Christ. Preaching appears to be a common practice that moves all the way through the book of Acts (3:20; 4:2; 8:5; 8:25; 8:35; 8:40;

9:20; 9:27; 10:42; 11:20; 13:5; 13:32; 14:7; 14:15; 14:21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:3; 17:13; 20:25; 28:31).

C. **Biblical Words for Teaching and Preaching**

One of the primary passages that a preacher receives the mandate to preach is from the Pastoral Epistles. Paul addressed Timothy, the young pastor at Ephesus, in 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

2 Timothy 4:1-2 KJV I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; **[2]** Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Paul instructs Timothy to preach and then there are three ways that he gives for Timothy to accomplish the task of preaching. He is to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. The first word is “preach.” The Greek word is KERUSSO κηρύσσω and has the idea of being a herald. Thayer’s Lexicon provides a good definition of this word. By implication it is to officiate as a herald, to proclaim after the manner of a herald, and always with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed. It can also mean to publish, proclaim openly something which has been done. It was used of the public proclamation of the gospel and matters pertaining to it, made by John the Baptist, by Jesus, by the apostles and other Christian teachers. This word occurs in Acts in the following places: 8:5; 9:20; 10:37; 10:42; 15:21; 19:12; 20:25; and 28:31. This Greek word appears 60 times in the NT, but only 16 of these times is used to translate the English word for preach. It is associated in the following ways; made proclamation(1), preach(16), preached(10), preacher(1), preaches(2), preaching(11), proclaim(8), proclaimed(6), proclaiming(6).

Another word that is associated with preaching is the word, EUAGGELIZO **εὐαγγελίζω** this word would primarily be associated with the concept of what an evangelist does when he is preaching the gospel. Thayer's Lexicon gives the following definition for this word: To bring good news, to announce glad tidings. It is used in the OT of any kind of good news such as the joyful tidings of God's kindness, in particular, of the Messianic blessings. In the NT it is used especially of the glad tidings of the coming kingdom of God, and of the salvation to be obtained in it through Christ, and of what relates to this salvation. In the book of Acts this word is used in the following texts: 5:42; 8:4; 8:12; 8:25; 8:35; 8:40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7; 14:15; 14:21; 15:35; 16:10; and 17:18.

Going back to Paul's instructions as to how it is to be done, three words are noted: reprove, rebuke, and exhort. Reprove comes from the word ELEGCHO **ἐλέγχω**. It means to convict, refute, confute. It is generally with a suggestion of shame of the person convicted or by conviction to bring to the light, to expose. It can also mean to find fault with, correct by word or to reprehend severely, chide, admonish, reprove. Furthermore it can be a call to account, show one his fault, demand an explanation or with the thought of a chastening or punishing. This is the hard part of preaching. It is with this understanding that the gospel message is always confrontational in its call for righteousness. This takes place when a preacher confronts sinful living and false doctrine. This sort of preaching does not fit in well with the modern day easy-believism crowd. While this word does not appear in Acts, it is used by Jesus in His preaching and it is present in the epistles: Eph. 5:11; 5:13; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9; 1:13; 2:15; Heb. 12:15; James 2:9; and Revelation 3:19.

The word rebuke comes from the word EPITIMAO **ἐπιτιμάω**. It has the following definition: to tax with fault, rate, chide, rebuke, reprove, censure severely and to admonish or charge sharply. This is another word that does not appear in Acts but can be associated with the idea of fellowship and teaching that occurs in Acts 2:42. It can be added that this type and content of preaching is not widely accepted in our day. Many have an opinion about what the Bible says but few really *know* what it has to say.

The word exhort is from the word PARAKALEO **παρακαλέω**. It can be associated with encouragement and inspiration. Its definitions can be noted as follow: To call to one's side, to summon. It can mean to address, speak to, which may be done in the way of entreaty, comfort, and instruction. It can also be associated

with admonishment. Other words to consider would be to beg, entreat, beseech or to strive to appease by and earnest request. It can also mean to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, and to comfort. To receive consolation, be comforted, to encourage, strengthen. Lastly it can mean to instruct and teach. It occurs numerous times in the book of Acts: 2:40; 8:31; 9:38; 11:23; 13:42; 14:22; 15:32; 16:9; 16:15; 16:39-40; 19:31; 20:2; 21:12; 24:4; 25:2; 27:33-34; 28:14; and 28:20. This word is by far the most prominent of all the words used in the New Testament in association with preaching.

So we understand that by these three ways Christian growth and maturity takes place in our lives.

What is important to understand about true biblical preaching is that there will be a body of material or words within the sermon. This is where the actual doctrine is defined. All true preaching will have an element of teaching and exhortation in it. Without teaching a saint is ill-equipped to handle the constant spiritual attacks that will take place. Paul spent two years in Ephesus in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). Some historians believe he was there for five hours a day. So in the neighborhood of thirty-five hours a week, Paul was teaching the Word.

D. The Preaching In Acts

Before going into the content of the actual sermon that Peter preached at Pentecost (which will end up being in the next lesson), the following chart shows the importance of preaching in the book of Acts.

The Major Sermons in Acts

PREACHER	TEXT	HEARERS
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Peter	2:14-26	Jews in Jerusalem
Peter	3:11-26	Jews in Jerusalem
Peter	10:34-43	Cornelius's Household
Stephen	7:1-53	Jews in Jerusalem
Paul	13:16-47	Jews in Antioch
Paul	17:22-31	Greeks in Athens
Paul	20:18-35	Church elders in Ephesus
Paul	22:1-21	Jews in Jerusalem
Paul	24:10-21	Felix and his Court
Paul	26:1-29	Agrippa and his Court

Perhaps the greatest call to preach is summed up in 1 Corinthians by Paul:

1 Corinthians 1:17-25 KJV For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. **[18]** For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. **[19]** For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. **[20]** Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer

of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? [21] For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. [22] For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: [23] But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; [24] But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. [25] Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Despite that understanding of what preaching is about, there are many things in the modern church that is working to replace preaching. The church needs to stand and say, "We want the Word!" There is nothing that can substitute for a holy man proclaiming the Word of truth. Social work and even pastoral work can never take the place of a powerful voice preaching in a pulpit. If the priority of preaching is emphasized in a local church, it will grow people who long to hear the Word of God.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 KJV I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; [2] Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. [3] For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; [4] And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. [5] But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Where are the preachers? Where are the men who are just simply pipes or channels for the Word of God? Where are the men who are so saturated with Scripture that it literally pours out of them? Where are the men who get lost in the Word of God? Great men of God are those who preach the Word with power, conviction, and passion. All of the great revivals in history have always been preceded by great preaching (not necessarily great preachers) because it turned the heart of the people toward God and His Word and ways.

When a pastor is reduced to an errand boy for the congregation or an organization, it won't be long until the spiritual health of the local church will begin to sag. When a pastor reduces his preaching to motivational messages or becomes an organizer for covered dish suppers, the church will become sickly and anemic and easily overtaken by error and wolves. The way to treasure preaching is for the local church to champion the cause for the priority of preaching. When that happens, the people will desire to hear the Word of God because they love the law of God (Psalm 119:97).

It should never be forgotten that a pastor is not a life coach, a motivational speaker, nor a cultural architect, he is a teacher, an evangelist, a missionary, and a man who has the cry of a prophet lodged deep down in his soul. That calling demands that he turn the spotlight on Scripture so that a church can see what God has to say about the matter.

II. WHAT IS PREACHING FOR?

Preaching *must* be more than just another venue of entertainment although admittedly within Pentecostal circles there is a tendency sometimes for preaching to devolve into a form of "worshiptainment." We should not come to church every week expecting the preacher to put the Scriptures in a blender, pureed into liquid form to be poured down into the soul. The emphasis of preaching must be discipleship which means that the hearer goes away and *DOES* something. The Word of God is given to us to correct, rebuke, train, and reprove so that we become independent and functional agents of God in this world (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Spiritual maturity is ultimately what all biblical preaching should be aiming at. Our spiritual effectiveness greatly depends on how much we allow the Spirit of God to work with the Word of God to in spiritual transformation (Romans 12:1-2).

One of the greatest sounds in a church is hearing the pages turning in the Bible. The pastor who works diligently at his calling will develop a church that has a love for the Word of God. The Bible is a very relevant book but it has to be unleashed one verse at a time. Comparatively speaking it is like a mighty lion that has to be let out of a cage.

A. To Encourage Biblical Knowledge and Understanding

One of the reasons that we preach is to encourage knowledge of the Bible. The members who are reading their Bibles are those who are having spiritual growth to take place in their lives. It has to become a consistent and regular element of the disciplined spiritual life. It is essential that a saint read, memorize, study, and meditate on the Word of God. If you are *in* the Bible, spiritual growth will take care of itself. In fact, you are going to find that there are questions that are in your mind that will be answered if you will just *read* the Bible. Biblical illiteracy is prevalent in our day and the only way to overcome it, is to have a personal commitment to grasp God's Word through the Bible.

There are important ways that preaching can cause us to honor and revere the Word of God. A preacher should encourage people to bring their Bibles to church. There should be a custom of the public reading of Scripture in every service. This is primarily done when a preacher calls out the text that he is going to preach from in that worship service. It is a mistake to rely on video projectors and screens as a primary tool to get Scripture into the heart of the listeners.

I recently heard a pastor tell of a married couple that he had known for years who went to a Sunday morning worship service in one of the major denominations in the United States. This denomination is now in decline because it has been swept with liberalism, doctrinal indifference, and a lack of godly priority that it was once known for. Over 200 years ago, this denomination had its roots in the holiness movement led by the Wesley brothers. However on this particular day, this

couple dropped in on a Sunday morning worship service that was attended by 800 or so. They lamented the fact that there were only five Bibles that they counted throughout the whole congregation. They also lamented the fact that they were the only ones who had even dressed up even in a casual sense of the Word compared to the vast majority of that congregation. The entire experience was categorized by this man and woman as superficial and inane. *This is what happens to worship when it degenerates into worldly venues and is driven by worldly philosophies that derive success from numbers, programs, and facilities.*

The Word of God has to be in the forefront of every church that expects to be spiritually viable and effective for what God has called us to do.

B. To Encourage Living for God Evangelistically

Preaching will inspire us to evangelism and it will encourage us to get involved in the church. A church is a community of sorts of called out people from the world. We are different and we have to make a concerted effort to become part of the church. Preaching becomes a call for our own personal commitment. Biblical preaching that calls for commitment has a way of creating an identity for us as we live out our daily lives wherever that may be.

Going back to the Bible causes us to become gracious in our lives, holy in our actions, pursuing evangelistic efforts in our living, and ultimately making a difference for God in our world.

III. CONCLUSION—HOW TO GET INTO THE WORD

I am always in the hunt looking for new ways to inspire my own personal habits at just reading the Bible. Recently when I was out of town, I ran across an article about personal Bible study that listed the following recommendations. I have never worked with my Bible in this way but I intend on incorporating it into the way I read Scripture.

Be careful in using study Bibles because you can get very distracted with all of the notes and footnotes that are listed there. You want to give the biblical text the priority and not the notes that are listed in the margins.

The author recommended that you read with a pen and a highlighter. The things that are highlighted are things that you might put up on the refrigerator or a memo board. The underlined phrases are the things that show places that are needed to be changed in your life. The highlighted things are the things that you like and the underlined areas are what need to be fixed by the grace of God.

The article also encouraged that the Bible be read consistently. What that means is that you read the Word of God without it becoming a point of legalism and pride in your life. If you miss a day the world is not going to come to an end nor will you be cast into hell. On the other hand, if you read it every day for 43 days in a row, there can be a subtle sense of pride to begin to develop and instead of the Bible transforming your life; it merely becomes a list that is checked off so you can see how great you are. Obviously these previous statements are to be taken a bit tongue-in-cheek however there is a nugget of truth in what is being brought out.

Whatever way that we can digest the Word of God and have spiritual growth to take place is crucial in our days. Don't let the enemy minimize the place of a godly preacher and the importance of the Word of God in your life.