

The church preaches Christ, not self. It is essential to recognize postmodern trends that deny the Lord Jesus Christ will build His church by the agency of the Holy Spirit and by the power of the Gospel. Very simply, it is the Word of God building the church. The preacher exposit the point of the biblical passage to speak with the authority of God so the church may hear and heed God's Word. Preaching is only with God's authority as the Word of God is handled aright. The church is continually conforming herself to God's mind. One must recognize the authority of God over the heart, mind, and soul. Whenever anything is substituted for the accurate teaching of Scripture, God's authority is usurped. Pride must never allow this, nor must it elevate one's own thoughts, or even using scores of illustrations and stories that are unrelated to explaining the meaning of Scripture and the mission of the church. Preachers are stewards who are to explain the meaning of the text of Scripture and exhort people to obey it. The problem is that many pastors fail to preach and teach the Word of God, and therefore, they abandon their authority from God. As a result, the church is not confronted with a word from God and the authority of God is not in the preaching, which is why the message receives little more than a yawn. What the church needs is more biblical, disciplined thinking through the preaching and teaching of God's Word. Western Christendom especially needs a deeper, more biblical knowledge of God.

When the accurate preaching and teaching of the Word of God is neglected, the work of the Holy Spirit is hindered. The church will be catapulted into the future only as she is carefully governed and powerfully driven by the Word of God. There is always a strong relationship between doctrine (orthodoxy) and application (orthopraxis) in Scripture. The foundation of orthopraxis is orthodoxy. If ever there is a problem with orthopraxis, it is inevitably a problem with orthodoxy, which is why the church needs more expositional preaching. Expositional preaching is the communicating of God's truth by God's servant to meet the needs of God's people and to confront a godless culture. The church grows quantitatively and qualitatively through the systematic teaching of God's Word. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains the church by the Word of God (2 Kgs 22—23; Neh 8—9; Isa 55:10-11; Ezek 37:1-14; Matt 4:4; John 1:1, 4, 14; Acts 19:20; 20:32; Rom 1:16; 10:17; 1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12; Jas 1:18, 21; 1 Pet 1:23, 25). It is crucial to teach the church that God's chosen method to bring new life is to use His Word, that is, the enunciation of God's words.

The Church and the Word of God

The church is an organism of the Word of God. The Word of God guides individuals to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ, and in life after they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and are made willing to trust in Christ alone for salvation. The Word of God gives the church life, direction and source for its message, and direction and source for its mission and ministry. In his work, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, Dr. Walter Kaiser Jr. has stated,

In 1742 John Albert Bengel observed: "Scripture is the foundation of the Church: the Church is the guardian of Scripture. When the Church is in strong health, the light of Scripture shines bright; when the church is sick, Scripture

is corroded by neglect; and thus it happens, that the outward form of Scripture and that of the Church, usually seems to exhibit simultaneously either health or else sickness; and as a rule the way in which Scripture is being treated is in exact correspondence with the condition of the Church." After more than two centuries we can affirm the validity of Bengel's warning. The Church and the Scripture stand or fall together. Either the Church will be nourished and strengthened by the bold proclamation of her Biblical texts or her health will be severely impaired.

The work of the pastor in the pulpit is of utmost importance to the overall proclamation ministry of his church, and, indeed, to the overall health of his church. The proclamation work of other staff members and church members will be affected by the quality of the pastor's pulpit ministry. Dr. Kaiser also stated correctly, "Should the ministry of the pulpit fail, one might just as well conclude that all the supporting ministries of Christian education, counseling, community involvement, yes, even missionary and society outreach, will likewise soon dwindle, if not collapse."

There is an important feature about the pulpit ministry of the local pastor that can be neglected, or it can be used as it is designed to be used, for the edification and equipping of the church to do the work of ministry. In his *9 Marks of a Healthy Church*, Dr. Mark Dever noted, "Too many churches misunderstand the priority that they are to give to God's revelation and to the nature of the regeneration He [God] offers therein. . . . The first mark of a healthy church is expositional preaching. It is not the high mark; it is far and away the most important of them all, because if you get this one right, all of the others should follow" [i.e. biblical theology, the Gospel, a biblical understanding of conversion, a biblical understanding of evangelism, a biblical understanding of church membership, biblical church discipline, a concern for discipleship and growth, and biblical church leadership].

The Seriousness of the Pastorate

The seriousness of the pastorate should not be underestimated, and should not only be undertaken with the conviction and evidence of God's calling, but also with the utmost seriousness as the shepherd of God's sheep. Who would want a doctor to perform surgery who has only gained experiential training? Is not the pastor a surgeon when he exegetes the living Word of God in the original languages? "The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword." Without a knowledge of the original languages, one is left to interpret Scripture from a pragmatic base drawing on the accuracy of one's best conclusions. Supplementing the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, the knowledge of the original languages provide a theological skeleton that is formed on the rigors of sound exegesis and is pounded out in dedicated study. . . .

The church today has grown less interested in depth and fidelity to the Word of God. The new breed of pastors is being driven by passion, but a passion that is lacking in deep theological truth. The antagonism toward men being formally

trained for ministry neglects the fact that so often popular Christianity is driven by subjectivity rather than a narrowly defined theology that identifies the Christian faith and stipulates the sort of academic and sensible relations that Christianity has with the world. Through God's grace, Christians should not only outlive non-Christians, but should also outthink them.