

## **Seminar Notes - Preaching and Preachers**

Shalom Church (Reformed Baptist), Singapore held its fourth church leaders' conference called Preaching and Preachers (2007), a series of eight seminars for men, who preach or have an interest in preaching which was led by Stuart Olyott. The aim of the conference was twofold, to equip church leaders to rightly handle the Word that glorifies God and edifies saints and to call church leaders to the rich doctrines of grace. Those doctrines are sufficient to deal with every pastoral and church issue. The conference themes were based on Stuart Olyott's books Preaching pure and simple and Ministering like the Master.

The topics for the seminars were:

1. [What Preaching is](#)
2. [Exegetical Accuracy](#)
3. [Doctrinal Substance](#)
4. [Clear Structure](#)
5. [Vivid Illustration](#)
6. [Pointed Application](#)
7. [Spiritual Urgency](#)
8. [Conducting Worship](#)

These notes are from a similar series of seminars done by Stuart Olyott in 2000. The last talk is different 'Conducting Worship' on the notes following and 'Boring Sermons' on the sermon mp3's, but we believe these will prove helpful alongside these talks.

# Seminar 1 - What Preaching Is

If we are not clear about this, we will be confused in everything else we discuss.

## 1. The History of Preaching

There is an inextricable connection between the prosperity of God's cause and the speaking, by human lips, of His revealed truth. They are Siamese twins. Whoever is concerned for the cause of God will be interested in the revival and improvement of preaching.

## 2. The Core of Preaching

Preaching rests upon this single conviction - that God reveals Himself by His *Word*. In the Bible, preaching rests not just on new revelations today; so *our* dependence is entirely on the inscripturated Word.

## 3. Four New Testament Terms for Preaching

*kerusso* = to proclaim as a herald

*euangelizo* = to announce good news

*martureo* = to bear witness to facts

*didasko* = to spell out what the message means practically

In the New Testament, when someone is doing *one* of these things he is doing *all* of them. All preaching is to be marked by these characteristics, wherever it may be done, whoever it may be addressed to.

## 4. Some Key Features of New Testament Preaching

*Compulsion*: men were moved as they did this work

*Plainness*: the New Testament insists on an open statement of the truth

*Christ-centredness*: for He is the sum and substance of divine revelation

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Are there any other points concerning *What Preaching Is* which you think should have been included in the introductory address?
2. Seeing that the cause of God and preaching are so obviously married, how is it that preaching has become so devalued - even in our circles?
3. What practical steps can be taken to remedy the situation?
4. Who is entitled to preach? Can any believer take this work upon himself or is some form of authority required?

### First Books on Preaching:

- Preach the Word by Denis Lane. Evangelical Press
- Truth Apparent by Jay Adams. Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co
- Power Through Prayer by E.M. Bounds. Whitaker House.
- The Preacher's Portrait by John Stott. Inter-Varsity Press.

## Seminar 2 - Exegetical Accuracy

We are preachers of God's inscripturated Word.

Nothing is of more importance than that we should get its meaning right!

### 1. Some Inadequate Methods:

Superstitious - the search for hidden meanings.

Allegorical - the moral becomes more important than the intended sense.

Dogmatic - the passage is made to 'fit' the theological system.

Rationalistic - the supernatural and 'unreasonable' is rejected.

Mythological - the supposed mental-images of the writers are discarded.

### 2. Some Foundation Principles:

A right approach: "*God has spoken here*".

What is the grammatical meaning of the words?

In what particular literary style are they found?

What is the immediate and wider context?

What is the historical setting?

What particular and general light is thrown on this passage by other parts of the Scriptures?

### 3. How Can we Help Ourselves to be Better Exegetes

By improving our Bible knowledge - It is clear that there can be no true understanding of any *part* without a thorough knowledge of the *whole*.

By appropriate reading - For accurate exegesis, we need to be crystal-clear about the progress of events (Bible history) and the development of special revelation (Biblical Theology).

By the development of skills leading to an understanding of the text - Everyone can learn to use textual tools.

Without exegetical accuracy there can be no true preaching, and the cause of God and truth must inevitably suffer.

### Questions for Discussion:

#### 1. Helping ourselves:

(a) What methods have you found most useful in your systematic personal study of the Bible?

(b) What books have helped you to get a grasp of Biblical history and of Biblical theology?

(c) What books would you recommend to those who want a thorough introduction to the content of individual books and their backgrounds?

(d) What tools have you found helpful in getting to grips with the precise meaning of the Biblical text?

2. Many men simply do not have the time for thorough exegetical study before the preach. *Should* they preach?

3. How should commentaries be used? Is it not arrogance to neglect them altogether? Is it not laziness to rely on them entirely?

4. Is there anything else that you personally would have said in a basic address on *exegetical accuracy*?

## Seminar 3 - Doctrinal Substance

We are preachers of God's inscripturated Word.

Nothing is of more importance than that we should get its meaning right! When we have done this, we must still be found to have *taught* something.

### 1. What we mean by 'doctrinal substance':

We mean that our sermons are *full* of doctrine and theology. We recognise that the Bible teaches a *system* of doctrine and truth. This system is beautiful in its unity and symmetry. So we refuse imbalance and lopsidedness, and seek to set every individual facet of truth into the context of the whole spectrum of divine truth.

We therefore look upon each sermon, not just as the explanation of a given passage, but as a means of bringing our hearers to grasping that total *system* of truth taught in the Bible.

### 2. What happens where preaching is not doctrinally substantial?

- God is not worshipped or loved as He should be.
- The Trinitarian nature of salvation is not admired.
- Believers are unaware of their privileges.
- Believers are confused about their priorities and their daily behaviour.
- Personal witness is impoverished.
- The way to holiness is obscured.
- Church life is not ordered.
- Prayer is superficial.

*Non-doctrinal preaching spells the ruin of the church!*

*What are we going to do about it?*

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What has been most helpful to you in sharpening your own doctrinal understanding?
2. What advice would you give to a young preacher who was not very clear about biblical doctrine?
3. What place, if any, is there for *thematic* teaching of doctrine from the pulpit?
4. Once a preacher has an accurate [exegetical](#) understanding of his text, and stands on a clear doctrinal foundation, he tends to be very dogmatic. What do you honestly feel about dogmatism in the pulpit?
5. In being *doctrinal*, how do we stop ourselves becoming *doctrinaire*?
6. How can we best help those who are afraid or suspicious of words like *doctrine* and *theology*?

## Seminar 4 - Clear Structure

We are called to preach God's Word with exegetical accuracy and doctrinal substance. All our labours will be lost if our hearers cannot follow what we are saying. "Order is heaven's first law". The question of clear structure is of paramount importance.

### 1. The Introduction

**Definition:** Opening remarks which lead into the truth to be taught.

**Purpose:** To awaken interest and overcome all obstacles to it.

**Suggestions:** An approach road, not a side-track; modesty; a single thought; variety; not too long; careful preparation.

**Sources:** Anything which will interestingly get the people to be enthusiastic about the subject in hand.

### 2. The Discussion

**Definition:** the truth to be taught, to *this* people, *now!*

**A plan essential:** Let God's people (and others) see what God's truth *is*.

**The helpfulness of divisions:** They discipline the preacher; make the argument followable; and help memory.

**Some rules about division:** Distinct; order; movement; progress; cumulative; comprehensive; natural; few; proportionate; orderly; attractive.

### 3. The Conclusion

**Definition:** The ending of the sermon in a way worthy of the truth presented.

**Importance:** It makes or mars the sermon's usefulness.

**Suggestions:** Careful preparation; brevity; variety; personal; pointed; crisp.

How is God glorified, how are the saints edified, how can the lost be saved, if God's truth is presented in a way which cannot be followed and cannot be retained?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Some people argue that as the Holy Spirit is the Divine Instructor, and He alone makes the things of God plain, there is no need whatever to be concerned about a sermon's structure. What do you think about such an opinion?
2. Does not attention to structure hem a man in, unnecessarily inhibiting and hampering him? Does it not prevent a man from being his true self in the pulpit?
3. Is there a *biblical* case for attention to clear structure, or are the arguments for it merely pragmatic?
4. What advice would you give to a preacher who finds it genuinely difficult to structure his sermons clearly?

## Seminar 5 - Vivid Illustration

We are called to preach God's Word with exegetical accuracy and doctrinal substance. All our labours will be lost if our preaching cannot be followed or remembered. Clear structure is of paramount importance. And so is *Vivid Illustration*.

### 1. The Value of Illustrations

Illustrations are windows which let the light in. They are essential for those who are poor at abstract logic but good at visual thinking.

- They explain the truth and give it a certain argumentative force.
- They make the truth attractive, and also impressive.
- They make the truth memorable.

### 2. Sources of Illustrations

- Scripture
- Observation
- Invention
- Etcetera - literature, art, science, poetry, publications, history, biography.

*All of us could illustrate better if we tried harder and for longer.*

### 3. The Selection of Illustrations

Illustrations should be:

- Subordinate: serving the truth, not ruling it.
- Clear: not involved.
- Brief: never drawn out.
- Dignified: avoiding all bad taste.
- Varied: rather than stilted.
- Accurate: both factually and theologically

*Let's put the lights on and let our people see the shape of what we are talking about!*

Questions for Discussion:

1. Can what has been said today be substantiated *biblically*?
2. A friend of yours is in trouble. He is a preacher who badly wants to illustrate. He works hard at it but gets nowhere. What *practical* advice are you going to give him?
3. Another friend illustrates easily and liberally; but people who listen to him say that he is just a story-teller. What are you going to say to him?
4. Are there some dangers in this area that we have overlooked?
5. Is it *really* that important?

## Seminar 6 - Pointed Application

We are called to preach God's Word with exegetical accuracy and doctrinal substance. It is essential to be understood and remembered - clear structure & vivid illustration. The Word must also be *applied* - our people must actually *adorn* themselves in the truth which we prepare for them.

### 1. What Pointed Application is

#### **Definition**

"Application, in the strict sense, is that part, or those parts, of the discourse in which we show how the subject applies to the persons addressed, what practical instructions it offers them, what practical demands it makes upon them" (J. A. Broadus)

#### **Importance**

The sermon becomes a strange *message* and a summons.

### 2. How Pointed Application is to be Made

#### **Be Specific**

"Preaching, in order to be effective, must be reduced from vague generalities, to a tangible, individual character - coming home to a man's business and even to his bosom." (Charles Bridges)

See Matthew 19:21, John 4:15-23, Mark 7:20-23, Galatians 5:16-18, 1 Timothy 1:9-10.

#### **Be Discriminating**

Realise that there are various classes and sorts of persons present, and show how the truth preached applies to each particular sort.

#### **Be Persuasive**

Demonstrate that it is both feasible and worthwhile to live by the truth preached. Show what spiritual good comes from obedience. Address the mind and emotions of each person, so that they will be moved to *action* and the truth preached may become a truth *practised*.

Questions for discussion:

1. Where in the sermon should the application come? Should it be announced?
2. What pitfalls are to be avoided in this area?
3. It is obviously easier to apply your message to a congregation that you know well. What advice would you give to someone who is about to preach to a congregation that he hardly knows at all?
4. Can we overdo it?

## Seminar 7 - Spiritual Urgency

*Spiritual Urgency* is the delivering of the message with urgent concern - and spiritual power. Without it, all that we have learned so far will be a waste of time. Will a man without urgency ever succeed in warning others of their danger? How much *more* is this necessary in spiritual things!

"Nothing is more indecent than a dead preacher speaking to dead sinners the living truth of the living God" (Richard Baxter).

Such spiritual urgency is the fruit of two convictions:

1. **The eternal destiny of my hearers hinges on their reaction to the truth that I am preaching.**

- If you believe this, you will speak well enough.
- Psalm 116:10, 2 Corinthians 4:13, Acts 4:20
- "He who cannot but speak, will speak to people who cannot but hear".
- It is because there is so much hard-heartedness in the pulpit that there is still so much in the pew.

2. **This message can accomplish no spiritual good without the Spirit of God**

- We *must* have divine influence. Isaiah 53:1, John 12:37-40, 6:44,65.
- See Acts 11:21, 16:14, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2:13.
- Humans are depraved. Our hope lies in Zechariah 4:6.
- We must set aside all that grieves the Holy Spirit.
- We must set forth Christ as portrayed in His Word - the Spirit owns nothing less.
- And we must give ourselves to earnest, persevering prayer i.e. we must give ourselves to our duty, whether God blesses it or not.
- If He does not: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight."

So, in these seminars, we have seen what preaching *is*.

We have also considered six of its most important ingredients.

If *all* of these are present, we shall indeed have seen a return to true preaching!

Questions for Discussion:

1. If I find that my heart is cold and unstirred, and that I have no awareness of spiritual power:
  - Should I preach?; and
  - What, if anything, can be done about my condition?
2. We don't want to bring discredit on the Lord and His Word, so how do we avoid giving the impression that we are "raving fanatics"?
3. What needs to be said about the Preacher's prayer life?
4. Mr F. Asa Pancake has been preaching for years, but, as far as you can see, does so without any emotional engagement. How would you help him?



## Seminar 8 - Conducting Worship

Questions for discussion:

1. There are two views about what may be included in public worship:
  - Only those elements which Scripture expressly warrants.
  - Those elements which Scripture warrants, plus those elements which Scripture does not expressly forbid.Which view is correct? Why?
2. In the light of this principle, what elements may be legitimately included in public worship? Justify your answer from Scripture.
3. What should we do when the church where we are preaching has elements in the service which are not biblically justifiable?
4. Should we be bound by the suggested order of service, and by local custom relating to the length of the service and the length of the sermon?
5. The reading of Scripture: When? What principles should govern our choice of passage? What advice needs to be given about public reading? What about accompanying remarks?
6. Prayer: What should be included? How do we avoid becoming repetitious? In what other ways can our public prayer be improved? At what point(s) in the service? Length? What language should be used and avoided? Anything else?
7. The singing of praise: Can hymn singing be justified? What are the characteristics of a good hymn? What principles should govern their choice for a particular service? How should we announce them? Who should choose the music, and on what basis?
8. Pulpit decorum: Is it important? What should be avoided in the pulpit? Does it matter how I dress? How I speak? What about public private-devotions? How do we deal with misconduct in the congregation? "I" or "We"? Anything else? What about going to the door afterwards?
9. Should visiting speakers administer the Lord's Supper?

### The Final Seminar

God Willing, the final seminar will take place on Saturday 25th November. As usual, coffee will be served from 9.30am, and the seminar will run from 10am to about 12noon.

The last seminar will be a Preachers' Question Time. We will try and tackle questions raised by the seminars themselves, and also discuss areas that we have not been able to cover. So please come with your questions ready! We will start with the questions which are handed in in writing. There will be no panel, so we will all be involved in answering them.

After the question time we will be having lunch together. We are very grateful to Swindon Evangelical Church and Bible Institute for organising this, and also for their hospitality throughout this series of seminars.