

The Forms of Preaching

II Corinthians 4:5: “*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.*”

I. Authoritative Preaching

Biblical Preaching

Jesus’ teaching style was unique in its authoritative nature, “for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28; Mark 1:22). Seeing as he mocked the scribes and Pharisees for not knowing the Bible often (Matthew 9:13; 12:3-4; 19:4; 21:16, 42; Mark 12:26; Luke 24:25), the source of Jesus’ authority was undoubtedly the word of God, “these sayings” (Matthew 7:28). When Jesus taught, the Bible says that “he preached the word unto them” (Mark 2:2), as it is written, “What a word is this!” (Luke 4:36). Authoritative preaching all stems from the Bible (e.g., Isaiah 28:9-10), but can be subdivided into preaching which is (A) *scriptural* and (B) *doctrinal*, and (C) *personally bold*. Thus, non-authoritative preaching is when the man is not using the Bible, not teaching doctrine, and/or not being bold.

- A. **SCRIPTURAL Authority:** Because the word of God has intrinsic power (e.g., Psalm 29), God commands preachers to “preach the word” (II Timothy 4:2). As with Jonah, God’s desired preaching is “the preaching that I bid thee” (Jonah 3:2). Preachers without God’s word in them are mere wind (Jeremiah 5:13); whereas false preachers will tell pseudo-revelatory dreams and use their own words, true ones will speak God’s word faithfully (Jeremiah 23:28-29), not using enticing words, but the Lord’s words (I Corinthians 2:4), “reasoning” “out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:2)
- B. **DOCTRINAL Authority:** A good preacher takes heed “unto the doctrine” (I Timothy 4:16), and does not—with the tide of the end times—fail to cause his congregation to endure sound doctrine (see II Timothy 4:1-4). The teacher Christians need will say to them, “I give you good doctrine” (Proverbs 4:2), and as prolific as the rain and dew shall be their showering instruction (Deuteronomy 32:2). Such men sympathize with Paul when he said, “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you” (Acts 20:20). Those proclaimers of the word who devote themselves to teaching people the knowledge of the holy may hear from their crowd from time to time, “what new doctrine is this?” (Mark 1:27), because they themselves are full of matter and their messages are full of edifying value.
- C. **PERSONAL Authority:** Not merely in content, but also in delivery, the authoritative preacher will be qualitatively unique in their presentation of the truth of God (“with great power”: Acts 4:33). In them shall be seen great *boldness*, fully confident in what they say and wholly unmoved by what their opponents shall say (Titus 2:15; see also Acts 28:31). Moreover, a preacher with personal authority shall demonstrate *sharpness*, with an edge of wit and emotion (Titus 1:13). Beyond that, because such a man will be very serious about the things of God, they will also display *soberness* (see Titus 2:6).

II. Hard Preaching

Negative Preaching

Being a “preacher of righteousness” (see II Peter 2:5; see also Psalm 40:9), holiness, godliness, and goodness means speaking against unrighteousness, unholiness, ungodliness and evil. Jeremiah said that every good prophet sent from God who preceded him preached negatively, “against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence” (Jeremiah 28:8). Those who refuse to spiritually smite others are not the preachers we need (see I Kings 20:35-37). As seen in God’s command to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 58:1), hard preaching is manifested in its (A) *anti-sinful* nature (“spare not... and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins”) and (B) *loud sounding* tone (“cry aloud... lift up thy voice like a trumpet”).

- A. **Hard Against Sin** (strong content): The essence of hard preaching is its godly goal to turn many away from iniquity (Malachi 2:6) and toward righteousness (Daniel 12:3). The man who stands in God’s counsel turns people from their evil way (Jeremiah 23:22), declaring to them their sin (Micah 3:8). As the kings of Israel and Judah were being overwhelmed with fair speeches from the many false prophets about them, Micaiah was summoned and gave a message of judgment (I Kings 22:5-28). Actually, the preacher who is doing his job right will be negative 2/3^{rds} of the time— “reproving” and “rebuking” at least as much as he “exhorts” (II Timothy 4:2), cursing twice as much as he blesses (see Deuteronomy 28 blessings: vv.1-14; curses: vv.15-68), and in speaking, going “to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down,” while he goes “to build, and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). Because it is “by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6; see also 3:9), hard preaching is the medium by which God can instill the fear of God into the hearts of his saints.

The antithesis of hard preaching is the more common and popularly desired peace-preaching, where preachers say “peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). Peace preaching is essentially a positive-only message of blessing, love, goodness, etc. This is the kind of preaching which worldlings crave and itch for, “smooth things” and “deceits” (Isaiah 30:9-11), not knowing that those who tell the wicked that “no evil shall come upon you” are actually the instrument of God’s judgment to bring calamity to them (Jeremiah 14:13-16; see Lamentations 2:14; see also Jeremiah 23:16-17). In Ezekiel’s ministry, he likened these peace preachers unto two things. First, he described them as men building an unstable wall with untempered mortar, which only gives the appearance of structural integrity, but is revealed to be unsound when the storm of God blasts upon it (Ezekiel 13:9-16). Second, Ezekiel targets the false women preachers whose preaching is equivalent to lulling persons into a spiritual slumber by covering their faces (“kercheifs upon the head”) and relaxing their bodies (“sew pillows to all armholes”) (Ezekiel 13:17-23).

Micah 3:5: “Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him.”

- B. **Hard in Volume** (strong sound): A *hard* preacher will also often be a *loud* preacher. As surely as wisdom occasionally cries (or, shouts) and puts forth her voice (Proverbs 8:1), so shall the wise preacher do in like fashion. The reason for the high sound is straightforward: loud preaching calls

attention to, and matches the negative nature of, the message. Great preachers of the Bible were very audible:

- ☞ **Hosea** was instructed in his prophesying to “set the trumpet to thy mouth” (Hosea 8:1).
- ☞ **Isaiah** was told to “Cry” (Isaiah 40:6).
- ☞ **Ezekiel** was commanded by God, “Cry and howl, son of man” (Ezekiel 21:12).
- ☞ **Jonah** was bidden by God to “go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it” (Jonah 1:2; see 3:2).
- ☞ **Zechariah** was admonished, “Cry thou, saying” (Zechariah 1:14); afterward he was similarly told to continue in this volume, “Cry yet, saying” (Zechariah 1:17).
- ☞ **John the Baptist** was prophesied to be “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Matthew 3:3; see also John 1:23).

III. Clear Preaching

Applicative Preaching

Although Jesus did speak in intentionally dark sayings and occasionally only in the ears of the receptive (Mark 4:11-12), it was the “common people” that “heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37). The way Jesus spoke at the end of his ministry, the disciples were to speak throughout the whole of theirs—“now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb” (John 16:29, see also v.25). Jesus explicitly told his disciples, “what I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops” (Matthew 10:27). Therefore Paul, in describing the preaching style of the apostles, said, “seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (II Corinthians 3:12), and that it was a “manifestation of the truth” (II Corinthians 4:2). Even the world knows the need of certainty (e.g., see Acts 25:26-27). What you *do* say is more telling than what you *don't* say, and what people *understand you said* is more important than *what you actually* said.

In discussing the proceedings of the church services in Corinth, Paul spoke very strongly against the lack of clarity that speaking in foreign languages in the church introduced into the assembly (see I Corinthians 14). There he offers a series of three analogies which properly portray the foolishness of a form of preaching which is not understandable to the audience (in that case, “the congregation of the unlearned”: I Corinthians 14:16).

- **Unclear Music:** Who Shall *Sing*? – “And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?” (I Corinthians 14:7). When instrumentalists do not accompany the song with the proper notes and rhythm, the congregation of singers can be thrown off, and not know how they should sing the song. So also is unclear preaching, which produces a strange noise that cannot be followed.
- **Unclear Trumpet,** Who Shall *Prepare*? – “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (I Corinthians 14:8). In Israel, there were a multitude of unique sounds that one would make on the trumpet to signal alerts to the nation (e.g., for **gathering**: Numbers 10:2-4, 7; for **journeying**: Numbers 10:5-6; for **warring**: Numbers 10:9; **celebrating**: Numbers 10:10). To get ready for conflict, the soldiers of Israel needed to hear the alarm of war from the trumpets; unclear preaching is an indistinct sound which incites none to arm themselves for the battles of the Lord.

- **Unclear Language:** Who Shall *Understand*? – “Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me” (I Corinthians 14:11). Just as there are many different languages in the world, there are also different ways of communicating. The misunderstandings one has of another speaking in a foreign language are comparable to those which they have when the preaching they hear is not clear.

Habakkuk 2:2: “And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.”

Clear Preaching vs. Unclear Preaching

Clear preaching is (A) **organized**. As all things in the church are to be done “decently and in order” (I Corinthians 14:40), so should all preaching therein be the same, like Luke’s gospel, “in order” (Luke 1:1-3). There will be a logical flow to proper sermons, one which is easily followed. Clear preaching is (B) **understandable**. The joy that the Israelites had at the preaching of Ezra and the Levites was that “they had understood the words that were declared unto them” (Nehemiah 8:12). When preachers are too academic or erudite with the “excellency of speech or of wisdom” (I Corinthians 2:1), and not down-to-earth, they have failed to “condescend to men of low estate” (Romans 12:16). Clear preaching will furthermore be (C) **applicable**. Allowing the living word of God (Hebrews 4:12) to be relevant to the real world, good preachers apply the scripture to the situation. If the crowd is carnal, they will speak to them as unto carnal in order to make them spiritual (I Corinthians 3:1). Stephen did not just preach a sermon against the nation of Israel; at the end he told them that they were the subject of his message (Acts 7:51-53). Jesus did not merely preach from Isaiah 61, but described that it applies to his ministry (Luke 4:16-21). Instead of speaking, for instance, about “sin” in general, the clear preacher will name given sins; instead of talking about “serving God,” in vagueness, the clear preacher will list, say, soul-winning or church-attending as expected duties of the Christian. He does not say, “some think thus and so...” but rather, “XYZ false religion teaches this,” or “such and such a false teacher preaches this.” A good preacher is crystal clear on essential doctrines, and never makes murky statements, especially on doctrines like soteriology. Vague preachers will minister questions, but definitive preachers will minister godly edifying (I Timothy 1:4).

When Absalom’s forces were defeated by David’s army, the general Joab commissioned Cushie to report the news of the victory and the death of Absalom to David. Cushie knew exactly what tidings to bear, having a perfect understanding of what happened (see II Samuel 18:31-33), but Ahimaaz sought to bring the good news to David before him. Observe how hazy and inexplicit Ahimaaz’s report to David is:

- Ahimaaz **spoke in generalities**, stating that the Lord “hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king” (II Samuel 18:28).
- Ahimaaz **did not actually know what transpired**, telling David, “I knew not what it was” (II Samuel 18:29).
- Ahimaaz **introduced more questions than answers**, saying “I saw a great tumult” (II Samuel 18:29).