

Preaching and the Affections

Application preaching is in demand. But what does application of the Bible involve? Does applicational preaching mean giving listeners lists of instructions to follow? How about the educational nature of biblical revelation? And what are we to make of the biblical emphasis on the human heart? This session will explore the contrast between our assumed internal mode of functioning and the biblical teaching on our spiritual anthropology. We will consider the role of emotions in preaching, looking at both healthy and unhealthy manipulative approaches to applicational preaching and the challenge of engaging the lives of listeners with the Word of God.

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I. Common Views

A. “Information Transfer” Preaching

1. Basic assumption: with the right information, people will be able to live the Christian life properly.
2. View of emotions in preaching: typically there is suspicion of emotion, since it can be used to manipulate. So the preacher will preach dispassionately in a somewhat detached manner.

B. “Pressure the People” Preaching

1. Basic assumption: assuming the right information has been communicated, the people need to be pressured by the preacher to live the Christian life properly.
2. View of emotions in preaching: often the same as above, but emotion is acceptable if the end justifies the means – i.e. a form of righteous indignation may be acceptable at times, and often a serious demeanour is fitting for the importance of the occasion.

C. “Enthusiasm Overload” Preaching

1. Basic assumption: essentially listeners need to be enthused about living the Christian life properly, so the preacher’s job is to convey boundless excitement for what they are saying so that others will get infected.
2. View of emotions in preaching: the end is supposed to justify the means in this category, so there is much less restraint.

There may be seeds of truth in each of these approaches, but is there a better way?

II. Theological Issue: Spiritual Anthropology

A. Stoicism and classical theism

1. Key features of this model:
 - a. There are three “faculties” at work in the soul:
 - i. The Mind (reliable if informed)
 - ii. The Will (damaged by sin)
 - iii. The Affections (distorted and untrustworthy)
 - b. The three faculties all provide motivations in generating decisions, so there is an internal conversation.
 - c. The mind and the will are more noble because they represent qualities found in God.
 - d. The affections are ignoble because they are the source of temptation (responding to external stimuli), and lack a counterpart quality in God who is necessarily “unmoved”
 - e. Living the Christian life is about the mind and will overcoming faulty affections in order to make good choices.
 - f. The will is enabled by grace so it can function properly.
2. Bottom line: **The person is essentially self-moved.**

B. Biblical anthropology

1. Key features of this model:
 - a. There are three “faculties” that work in specific ways:
 - i. The heart evaluates external stimuli and is the single source of motives, based on the affections.
 - ii. The mind uses the values from the heart to process information.
 - iii. The will applies the mind’s best judgments by taking action.
 - b. There is not an internal conversation, but a single flow from heart to mind to will. (What we do shows what we love.)
 - c. The Bible’s presentation of God’s affections is not consistent with the theology of the pagan philosophers.
 - d. The Bible recognizes the motivational power of the heart in humans (i.e. Mat.12:34; 15:18; Mark 7:21-23; Eph.4:17-18; Pro.4:23, etc.)
 - e. The Bible will often refer to the activities of the “instrumental faculties” (thinking and choosing), but any such passages, in their larger context, presume a heart-based anthropology.
 - f. The heart responds to stimuli, both good and bad
 - g. The heart’s response to God’s Word is faith, and the heart’s idolatrous affections (self-loving) are sin.
2. Bottom line: **The person is essentially a responder.**
3. Biblical example: Ephesians 4:17-24
 - a. Instruction related to outward behavior:

¹⁷ *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do,*

- b. Behavior explained by thinking:
in the futility of their minds.
¹⁸ *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them,*
- c. Which is explained by the state of their hearts:
due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ *They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*
- d. The inward to outward sequence is seen in the next verses too:
²⁰ *But that is not the way you learned Christ!—* ²¹ *assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,* ²² *to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,* ²³ *and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,* ²⁴ *and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* Spiritual

Questions: Are people responders or responsible?
How will this shape our preaching?

III. Probing Application

Anthropocentric Approach (Performance Mindset)	Theocentric Approach (Gospel Mindset)
Open Bible and look for life lessons	Open Bible and look for God’s self-revelation
See people in action and note their behavior (or harvest imperatives and make a “to-do list.”)	See people living in response to God and see God in action (keep the gospel in view as you consider sections of exhortation)
Determine to copy or avoid such behavior, or to obey instruction	Respond to the God who reveals Himself in the Bible (in whole books, not plucked out commands)
Try to apply the lessons learned in my own efforts to live well (outside-to-in)	Lives gripped by God are transformed from the inside-out
Bottom line: God resources and instructs me in the Bible to live my own life successfully	Bottom line: God reveals Himself, and my life is changed as I look to Him, not to myself

IV. Preaching & Passions: Problems and Pointers

	Potential Danger	Unhealthy Approaches	Healthy Approaches
God	Domination of listeners by a distorted deity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Imposing a stoic “no affections” god on the Scriptures. 2. Imposing a monadic “self-obsessed” power god on the Scriptures. 3. Imposing a “made in your image” god who just reflects your values. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the Bible as a whole to get to know the personality of God 2. In your passage, and its broader context, be sensitive to how God’s heart is revealed. 3. Present a God-centred message that invites response, rather than pressuring listeners with their responsibility (or manipulating a false response).
Bible	Abuse of twisted Scripture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ignoring the tone and mood of the writer in order to add your own emotion. 2. Treating the Bible text as pure information, so you seek to add emotion by your delivery or by your moving illustrations. 3. Making human characters a source of example or warning that is moralism and pressure. (Also done by applying commands and instructions without relational context.) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be sensitive to the writer – his content, his tone, his choice of genre, etc. 2. Recognize the “emotional” function of each Scripture type – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Narrative: Plot tension and identification (+/-) – Poetry: Imagery and overt emotion – Discourse: Speaker/ writer’s passion for recipients in situation 3. Combine writer’s purpose with the need of your listeners for appropriate tone and emotional content. (eg. Gal. 1; Ezek.34)
Preacher	Performance of insincere preacher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assuming preaching to the passions requires “passionate preaching” (i.e. shouting, anger, etc.) 2. Presentation of insincere emotion. 3. Any sense of performance (different person when not preaching) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be sure to have genuine heart to heart relationship with God. 2. Be sure to genuinely care about your listeners. 3. Look to preach as a real person – vulnerable, honest, enthusiastic, genuine.

Listener	Manipulation of vulnerable listeners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beware of any attempt to get response through added material. 2. Do not present a moving story and then attach a spiritual truth to it. 3. Beware of any attempt to get response by subconscious atmosphere influences (i.e. emotive music during altar call) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preaching to reach the heart of the listener requires that you know your listeners well. 2. Seek to apply the text appropriately to all three levels of application: Affection (Heart) – their values, love, feelings, etc. Belief (Head) – their knowledge, thinking, etc. Conduct (Hands) – their actions, behaviour, etc.
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Recommended resources

* Nine articles on The Preaching Triangle, BiblicalPreaching.net, March 6-16, 2012.

* Regular articles on aspects of Biblical Anthropology on www.CorDeo.org.uk

- Ron Boyd-MacMillan, *Explosive Preaching* (Paternoster, 2006)
- Darrell Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Regent, 2002)
- Ray Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change* (Authentic, 2005)
- Andy Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* (Multnomah, 2006)
- Kent Edwards, *Deep Preaching* (B&H, 2009)

www.biblicalpreaching.net – regular posts from Peter Mead relating to sermon preparation, delivery and the life of the preacher.

www.cordeo.org.uk – weekly posts from Peter Mead and Ron Frost relating to spiritual formation and applied theology.

Appendix – Four short articles

Article 1. Troublingly Distant

I enjoyed a conversation with a church planter recently. He made a comment that I’m hearing more and more. There is a trend, not new, but seemingly on an upswing, toward distant preaching. That is, preaching that is safely removed from any hint of emotional appeal or accusations of manipulation. It is a manner that reveres the intellectual, but makes little or no attempt to touch the heart. It is cold, distant, removed, disaffected.

Somehow proponents seem to think that this kind of preaching leaves room for the Holy Spirit to work out the impact in listeners’ lives. It protects the speaker from accusation of manipulation. It keeps the main thing the main thing and allows the truth to stand unsullied by any emotional appeal.

On the other hand, perhaps it abdicates the preacher's responsibility to fully engage either the text or the listener. Perhaps it provides for a prideful presentation of knowledge. Perhaps it protects the preacher from any responsibility when listeners do not respond, since that, of course, is the Spirit's concern, not theirs.

I find it concerning that this kind of preaching is coming up more and more in conversation. It is a sort of expository preaching corrupted. Expository preaching is not simply about presenting the truth. It is about presenting the truth of the Scripture in an effective communication manner that emphasizes the relevance to the contemporary situation of listener and seeks response. Every element of the preaching preparation and presentation should lean fully into God's work by His Spirit, but that offers no excuse for abdication on the part of the preacher.

Am I faithfully representing the text when I neuter it and remove all affective appeal? Am I really showing pastoral care for the flock when I turn the multi-dimensional appeal of Scripture into an intellectual exercise? Am I really honouring God when I act as if I, as His representative, am doing my job by simply informing? Am I really avoiding manipulation when I give the impression that Christianity is primarily about the commodity of knowledge and I am the dispenser of it?

There's more to say, but I don't want to lose the focus on that last sentence . . .

Source: <http://biblicalpreaching.net/2010/11/11/troublingly-distant/>

Article 2. Exhort, Educate . . . Manipulate?

Some preachers think that there are two legitimate options in preaching, but to go further would be wrong. Legitimate would be to exhort listeners – that is, to appropriately pressure their will to obey the Lord, respond to the gospel, etc. Legitimate would be to educate the listeners – that is, to feed information to their minds so that they know more and can therefore make better decisions.

But the next step? Well, many people think the next step beyond the will and the mind is to address the emotions, and that, of course, would be wrong. It must be wrong to address the emotions since that can so easily seem like manipulation. I would agree that it can become manipulation. I would agree that manipulation is wrong. But I still think our preaching has to go deeper than mind and will. How?

My sense is that manipulation occurs when I, as a preacher, utilize my ability to make a mark in the emotions that is distinct from the content of the biblical text. After all, the text is boss in an expository sermon, so if I am representing that text appropriately, then it should not be manipulation. But when I resort to “techniques” – stand-alone tear-jerking stories, turns of phrase, emotional outbursts of my own, etc. – that aren't representing the message of the text, then I am on dangerous ground.

If we remember that our role is to herald the Word of God, then we represent (re-present) the text of Scripture. In so doing we need to represent a Word that targets the heart very often, and is

seldom focused purely on exhortation or education. We should be wary of manipulation, but not so that we ignore any textual targeting of the heart. If we fall into the trap of performing, then manipulation creeps in so easily and we can corrupt the pure Word of God.

Preach to the will, certainly. Preach to the mind, of course. But be sure to preach to the heart, the Bible does!

Source: <http://biblicalpreaching.net/2009/12/15/exhort-educate-manipulate/>

Article 3. We Don't Need To De-Affect The Text

Recently I wrote a post on preaching as a matter of life and death. In the good discussion that followed I made this comment – *God has communicated in His Word (and calls us to preach that Word), in such a way as to move the heart/affections, as well as informing the mind, urging the will and so on.* One reader asked the helpful question – *If the moving of hearts and affections is the work of man (the preacher) then the results will surely be temporary?*

Such an important question deserves more than a quick answer . . . so hopefully this is helpful:

Thanks for the comment and my apologies for the delay in approving it. You are right that the moving of hearts and affections is the work of the Holy Spirit. If we make that our task we can easily fall into manipulation and the achieving of temporary results. What I am saying is that God's Word is not simply an information transfer from God's mind to ours. Rather, God's Word is that and so much more. It was designed and written to move the affections, to captivate the heart, to instill values, to draw people to God, etc. Since the Bible is not mere information transfer, but carefully written communication that functions on various levels (i.e. through word choices, sentence structure, genre decisions, etc.), our task is to faithfully preach the Bible text as it stands. That means not flattening it into mere information. (My parenthetical statement in the previous comment "and calls us to preach that Word" should probably be moved to the end of the sentence for clarity!)

For instance, a Psalm may be highly emotive, full of moving imagery, authorial passion, etc. If we simply dissect that information and talk about it, then I think we are failing to faithfully represent the text. Rather we should present the Psalm in such a way that listeners feel the full force of the communication that is there – the images, the emotion, the passion, the truth, etc. Certainly there is explanation, but also more than that, there is something of experiencing the text as well. Thus we are to say what it says and appropriately do what it does. This does not take on the burden of transforming listeners, for that should always remain the work of the Spirit of God. However, since God is not an "information only" being (as some seem to suggest by denying any genuine affections in God), then there is no reason why we should "de-affect" the text and make it information only. Did God inspire the information in the Bible, or did His inspiration go much further? That is, did God inspire every word, every genre choice, every tone, etc.?

I believe our task in preaching is to be genuinely and deeply faithful to the preaching text, “re-presenting” it to the best of our ability (study ability, message formation ability, delivery ability), while always resting fully on God to achieve any life change in the listeners.

Source: <http://biblicalpreaching.net/2009/07/18/we-dont-need-to-de-affect-the-text/>

Article 4. Manipulation in Proclamation

As preachers we are called to do more than inform the mind. We are not lecturers. We are not called to achieve a stated goal by any means possible. We are not salesmen. So how are we to navigate the pulpit so that we fulfill our calling, but don't overstep the mark and take on tasks that are not ours?

1. Preach to the heart. It is important to understand that people are not just mind and will, but first and foremost are heart-driven. The Bible teaches this, even with all the gymnastics some teachers go through to avoid what the text says. The heart is more than mere emotions, but it is not merely the mind as some suggest. In Ephesians 4:17-18 Paul urges the believers not to function like the unsaved Gentiles. They do not act well because of their minds, thinking, and understanding. But there is another issue. Their minds are the way they are because their hearts are hardened. The heart is central, critical and very much in control. So, as preachers we must address the heart and not take a short cut to just the mind or will.

2. Don't stir the emotions and then attach spiritual content to that. Since the heart includes emotions, it is tempting to merely stir the emotions and then attach our message to that emotional reaction. You can tell a moving story about the little boy who finally hit a home run (for Brits think of a boy hitting a six), then as people feel themselves filling up, drive home the application of the sermon. “You too are standing at the plate, Jesus is asking you to commit to this challenge this week, will you commit? Will you swing the bat?” This is riding on the back of imported emotion to “achieve” something while preaching. This is manipulation.

3. Allow the text to reach the heart. The solution is not to merely preach an intellectual sermon and avoid the heart. The key is to preach the text well so that the text itself and the message of the text can do its job. If the passage is moving, let it move people. If the passage is stirring, let it stir people. When the text itself and the message itself stir the emotions, great. Don't feel you have to import a moving story to get the job done. Make sure that emotions are stirred by the text, the message, the idea itself.

Source: <http://biblicalpreaching.net/2007/07/30/manipulation-in-proclamation/>

Other similar articles are available on BiblicalPreaching.net

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