

Centering on Ministry



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Preaching Resources From Our Heritage

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Are there resources in our heritage which might be helpful for us in our preaching today? We have to acknowledge that a vast difference exists between the beginning of a reform movement and its counterpart a century later. A reform movement draws its impetus from a critical attitude toward the "status quo" religion of the day. The preaching tends to be more militant since "business as usual" will hardly attract new disciples. Reform preaching appeals to the fundamentals of the Christian faith and fosters a spirit of idealism for a more perfect order. With the passing of time a reform movement usually moves away from controversy and toward accommodation. Yet many of the early convictions remain in the teachings of the church. They need to be called into the light of the new day. Let us examine some of the zeal and witness of the pioneer preachers in the Church of God and see if there are resources for us today in their life and message.

I

First, a look at the preacher himself. The pioneer preacher had a definite sense of call from God for the ministry. Although many of these ministers were untrained, they were moved by a deep sense of God's call to pick up and leave what they were doing to fulfill that call. Many of these early ministers "came out" from other churches. This meant that they had such strong convictions that they were willing to "take a stand" with the new church. These were courageous

men and women. Many left established positions in other churches or secular work. They stepped out in faith, often at a financial loss to themselves and their family as well as loss of esteem among family and acquaintances.

One strong affirmation that they laid claim to was the Bible as the Word of God. They rejected written creeds of men and sought to return to the basics of the Bible. They were innovators! The pioneer preachers found few churches open to them so they took to pulpits wherever they might find them. They preached in schools, in tents, in brush arbors, on boats, on courthouse steps, in train stations, on the streets, or wherever an audience might be gathered. They were a hearty breed with deep commitment to the new reformation.

II

Next, let us consider the message they preached.

Dr. Adam Miller notes four basic convictions held by our early ministers.¹

1. Back to the Bible.
2. Supernatural religion.
3. The Church as the Body of Christ.
4. The Vision of Christian Unity.

It is apparent that early preachers used the Bible almost exclusively. They sought to support the preaching of doctrine from the scriptures. There was much proof-texting, almost to a fault in this respect. They were zealous in their proclamation of the concept of sanctification and a

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holy life for the Christian. The emphasis on the unity of church was a needed teaching at that time. The attempt was to show a church that was not dependent upon man-made organization or structure for membership, but rather the uniqueness of God's gift of salvation as the basis for true membership. So keenly did the early followers believe and preach this message that some even referred to the Church of God Movement as "The Last Reformation".

Closely related with the teaching of holiness and the nature of the church was an emphasis upon divine healing. Several ministers were called to divine healing as the major thrust of their ministry in the new church.

There was a sense of urgency in the work that they were doing. They felt that the lost would perish if they did not hear the gospel and that many who were professing Christians in other churches would be lost if they did not see the light of the church. They were fervent in their appeal to the lost and unsaved. Their revivals were more in the nature of a crusade than a preaching mission. E. E. Byrum speaks of one of the services in a church as follows: "That night the Lord seemed to give special anointing for the preaching of the Word, and again the spirit of the Lord rested upon the people with conviction."²

III

What emphasis from our heritage is needed today?

The world has drastically changed from the day of D. S. Warner. We have moved into a new age in church life with Vatican II, mergers among several major denominations, the Ecumenical Movement, and more recently, the rise of the Charismatic Movement. Warner preached to the critical issues of his day. He did not address issues that were abstract or irrelevant. If Warner were here today he would, undoubtedly, address issues that confront us. Six of these will be noted.

1. An awareness of God's church as being constituted by true believers called of God to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Despite the great thrust toward unity and inter-church cooperation there has been a dulling of the concept of the church as the body of Christ. This is an emphasis that the pioneers stressed and which is still needed today.
2. Sound Biblical preaching. We are in a time considerable topical preaching which has

popular appeal but lacks the stamina of biblical preaching. True biblical preaching is rooted in the Scriptures with careful exegesis of the text, clear interpretation and positive proclamation.

3. Preaching against sin. Karl Menninger ably pointed up this weakness in his book, *Whatever Became of Sin*.³ It is convenient to accommodate our preaching toward non-controversial subjects or pleasant homilies from the Bible. This would have been abhorrent to pioneer preachers whose messages echoed the "sound and fury" against sin.
4. Preaching on Holiness. There is need for preaching that involves the total person in response to the Gospel. Holiness, health, wholeness, and stewardship are bound up in a concept of what it means to be a new person in Christ Jesus. This is Christian commitment which seeks physical well-being, a stewardship of our resources in the environment along with the growth toward a holy life.
5. "Leaven in the lump." The major thrust of the ecumenical movement is to bring more churches into cooperative action. It may be that the Church of God can become "leaven in the lump" in lifting up the unity of God's people through a group of disciplined believers who are seeking to live out the teachings of Christ in their midst.
6. Spiritual zeal. If there is one thing we could catch from the early preachers that would stir us, it would be the spiritual contagion that was theirs. They were deeply moved by God's presence in their lives. They were irresistibly drawn to witness to that presence and its life-changing force. It was not an easy road for many of them. They paid a high price for their convictions! We in turn, have the singular task of picking up where they left off and adding our understanding to the continuing witness of the Church of God Reformation Movement in the world.

¹See his brief article on this page 42ff in the Church of God Heritage Series: *Time to Remember: Teachings*, ed. Barry L. Callen, Anderson, Indiana, Warner Press, 1978.

²Byrum, E. E. *Startling Incidents and Experiences*. Anderson, Indiana, Gospel Trumpet Co. (Warner Press), 1915, p. 260.

³Menninger, Karl. *Whatever Became of Sin?* New York, Hawthorn Booker, Inc., 1973.

Preaching Resources On Ethical Issues

Gene W. Newberry

Do we need to make case for preaching on ethical themes? Probably not, for we are really doing it frequently. Any time we put *belief* and *behavior* together we are preaching ethics. Any time we make a message current and applicational, we are preaching ethics. Any time we think, decide and act Christianity, we are preaching ethics.

Belief Determines Action

The writer gets some kidding from his Sunday School class where they say he stands with the Bible in one hand and Time Magazine in the other. They know we have had some exciting times taking the hottest news items and trying to interpret them with Christian meaning. We have some provocative debates, for we do not always find the clean, black or white, answer we seek, but rather some shade of gray. How about yesterday's (April 29) story in the Indianapolis Star? The AP story from Jerusalem tells of an Israeli mother who smothered her baby girl to stop her cries, and their detection by Arab terrorists who had killed her husband and other daughter. Surely the mother will have a troubled conscience the rest of her life. We who read the story ask ourselves if we agree with her moral decision, or ask what we would do under similar circumstances.

In preaching on ethical issues we try to distinguish between doctrines and principles on the one hand, and convictions and opinions on the other. The former appear eternal and non-negotiable, the latter less so. Recall battles years ago regarding movies, dress codes, cosmetics. If those were conscience questions then, such issues as racism, sexism and ageism have taken the conscience arena today. In either case, old or new, our beliefs about God and responsible obedience to Him determine our actions. Yes, belief determines ethical action.

Incarnational Theology

We will not preach helpfully on any ethical issues until we get over any hangups regarding two competing gospels, one personal and one social. That debate is as phony as a three dollar bill. Perhaps the biggest breakthrough in evangelical theology today is the espousal of social

and relational implications of the gospel. Read such writers as Leighton Ford and Senator Mark Hatfield and sample their wisdom. They do a good job of challenging us to apply Christian moral principles to life's practical and urgent problems.

A good handle for this kind of instruction and dialogue is to call it incarnational or involvement theology. In the incarnation of our Lord the God of creation came to our planet in the person of His Son, the God-man, to accomplish our redemption. He now invites us to come, to serve, to be involved with Him. This challenge to incarnational theology saved Christianity for a lot of young people in the nineteen sixties, and still does. Ethical preaching is one way to make faith relevant. Jesus gives us the model for it, right after His baptism and temptation, in Luke 4:18-21; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Resources

We do some ethical preaching when we keep faith with the Christian year and take Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day into account. These are fine opportunities for the sacred and the secular to meet.

There are a half dozen or so general areas which overtake us and demand some attention when we think of ethical issues. Ponder human rights, economics and politics, family life—divorce and remarriage, war and peace, vocation and work. Three authors who have helped me do honest thinking on ethical themes are T. B. Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, Bernard Ramm, *The Right, The Good and The Happy*, and Mark Hatfield, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. What is the Bible's and the Church's wisdom on abortion, euthanasia, birth control, homosexuality, capital punishment, commercial sports, ecology, poverty, pornography, prison reform, drugs and alcohol, and on and on? The mere mention of some topics makes our blood pressure rise. Our lives and families are touched by all these issues, and we are concerned and interested.

Let us look at some Old and New Testament

Resources For Preaching On The Old Testament

George Kufeldt

Preaching on the Old Testament, in its best sense, does not happen in a smorgasbord style which the preacher simply dips into the text and finds something about which he might preach. An approach like that is little more than "using" the text in a very subjective manner, to suit one's own purposes. True preaching on the Old Testament (or New Testament) really grows out of the preacher's living in and with the text to such an extent that its message literally cries out to be heard. The real source of the preacher's preaching is thus beyond his own subjectivism and is in a real sense something that is laid on him by the reality of the Old Testament itself as God's Word.

Just how the message of the Old Testament is to be discovered and then proclaimed through preaching is thus the logical question which brings us to the matter of resources for such preaching. In other words, how does the preacher go about proclaiming the message which his living in and with the text reveals? What are some of the possible approaches and forms for such

proclamation of the divine word?

A basic principle of solid Biblical preaching is the fact that it is rare that such preaching grows out of one verse of Scripture (much less only a part of a verse). Verses in isolation can too easily be used to express one's own biases and opinions which may be somewhat different than the larger context would really allow. Even if one verse is emphasized, as it often should be and will be, the preacher must be sure that the meaning of the verse which he gives is fully supported by the total context, whether that context be a paragraph, chapter or book.

It is out of this conviction that solid Biblical preaching will have a broad contextual base that the following suggestions regarding resources for such preaching will be presented here. These suggestions are, however, not intended to be exhaustive in scope.

1. *Biographical Preaching.* This kind of preaching obviously requires that the preacher literally live with the Bible personality that he is to preach about. He must know everything about

texts that may open the door for thinking and preaching ethical themes. We will need the best concordances, lexicons and commentaries to satisfy our personal hunger for wisdom, as well as resources for preaching. How about building our people up for these topics by inviting participation with us in dialogue and sharing, both before and after the sermon? They are making moral decisions all the time and their input will be helpful.

Genesis 15—God's covenant with Abraham.

Leviticus 19:9-18—The requirements of a holy God.

Deuteronomy 5—The Ten Commandments.

Psalm 15:1-5—Requirements of an ethical religion.

Isaiah 1:10-17—Righteousness preferred to ritual.

Hosea 6—Love is better than sacrifice.

Amos 5:10-27—Let justice roll down.

Micah 6:6-15—The basic demands of true religion.

Matthew 6:19-34—The disciple and material possessions.

Matthew 19:3-12—Marriage and divorce.

Matthew 20:20-28—Greatness in the kingdom.

Matthew 22:34-40—Love, the greatest commandment.

Mark 10:23-31—The rich man, the camel, and the needle's eye.

Luke 20:19-26—Things that are Caesar's.

John 15:1-17—The fruitful life.

Romans 13:1-7—The Christian and secular power.

Romans 14:1-3, 13-15—The weak and the strong conscience.

I Corinthians 7:1-16—Family relations.

Galatians 5:16-26—The Fruit of the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:1-17—The Christian Walk.

Ephesians 5:22-6:4—Relations in the homes.

Colossians 3:1-14—The resurrected life.

I Thessalonians 4:3-12—The Sanctified life.

James 2:1-13—Respect for persons within the church.

James 2:14-26—Faith and works.

I Peter 2:13-3:9—Subjection for the Lord's sake.

I John 4:7-21—The centrality of love.

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this person that the Bible and perhaps other sources can tell him. The preacher must be thoroughly acquainted with the times in which this person lived, and how he either influenced or was influenced by his times. Knowledge about his geographical and sociological situation is necessary for the understanding of this personality.

Sometimes there will be so much material about a particular personality (such as Abraham, Moses or David) that there is no way in which one sermon can do him justice. It certainly would be unwise to try to include everything about such a person in one sermon. If only one sermon is desired, then it will be necessary to be selective in one's choice of information or materials. The materials selected usually will tend to fall in line with a particular theme or emphasis in the person's life.

One suggestion seems necessary here: Since the "famous" personalities are frequently subjects of sermons, the preacher should make a special effort to study the lesser known, even generally unknown Old Testament personalities so they too can give their unique or special messages to today's people.

2. *Preaching on An Old Testament Book.* This probably is one of the least practiced approaches to preaching from the Old Testament, or when it is done, it often is not done well. The main reason in both cases is the bulk of material involved in such a book, even in the case of the shorter books. It is not easy to discover the most important themes in a book, and as a result often too many themes are included in a specific sermon.

The basic solution to both problems again is living with the particular book until its general content and its specific emphases are a part of one's self. Even then, most likely and especially in the longer books, some real selectivity will have to be exercised in the choice of emphases. The preacher must be content to emphasize one or two basic themes in a particular sermon, and then file away the others for later sermons on that same book.

Preaching on Old Testament books can be a great challenge, especially when the book involved is one like Obadiah or Nahum, one which is almost unknown to many laymen and sometimes to some preachers. The brevity of the books added to the seemingly irrelevant (to us) content make these challenging books, but they can be very rewarding as materials for showing how the Old Testament still speaks today.

3. *The Chapter Sermon.* As is true of the book ser-

mon, this kind of sermon lends itself very well to a series of sermons. One might choose significant chapters from a list of Old Testament books, or simply pick out or highlight several significant chapters in one book. Again, the context, which is the total book in which the chapter is found, must always be kept clearly in mind. The careful preacher will always remember too that many of our chapter divisions are a bit unfortunate since they often break into the stream of thought or meaning. For a classic example, note how the content of Jeremiah 8:18-22 actually continues on through 9:3. As noted in the footnotes in the RSV, even the ancient divisions in the Hebrew original are not quite as consistent as they could be.

4. *Preaching on Old Testament Themes.* This kind of preaching can easily become topical in nature, unless the preacher is always careful to relate the theme to the Old Testament context and setting rather than using it as a springboard for a personal bias or opinion. This means, then, that such thematic preaching requires a rather thorough knowledge of the total Old Testament, which enables the preacher to see how the theme is expressed or reflected throughout the Old Testament and in the life of ancient Israel. One may begin such a study by using a concordance, but this approach is quite superficial, usually, and thus not completely satisfactory. Obviously, such sermons should have a long period of incubation and development.

For starters, the preacher should investigate a few of the great themes such as Covenant, Steadfast-love (RSV) or Loving-kindness (KJV), Man, Sin, Know or Knowledge. Again, the preacher will have to be selective in the number of texts he deals with, thus giving adequate treatment to or exposition of a few basic texts. As always, the context, both general and specific, must form the background of the sermon itself.

5. *Preaching on the Geography of the Old Testament.* This kind of approach may sound more like a mechanical device, but it can be the means of tying together various personalities, events and themes in a way that no other method allows. This approach could include geographical aspects such as mountains, gardens, roads, cities, rivers, etc. For example, one might explore what happened on the road from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran to Canaan (involving a number of experiences in the life of Abraham). Or, various gardens such as the Garden of Eden, Naboth's Vineyard, God's Garden (Isaiah 5), and then even carry it over into the New Testament with

Resources For Preaching In The New Testament

Harold L. Phillips

On the morning of this writing a group of I-hope-to-graduate-this-year School of Theology seniors are sweating out a three-hour written examination in New Testament interpretation. At first glance, the typical question might not seem too overwhelming and three hours might seem to be ample time. In practice, however, the last half-hour becomes a frantic race with the clock and the final product gets scamped at some point for lack of sufficient time or perhaps resources.

A typical question for such an examination might go about like this: "Discuss the linguistic, cultural, historical, and doctrinal implications of Philippians 2:5-11." Each of those students sits for an hour of oral review over this and other written examinations before a panel of four seminary professors. Whether or not a student has mastered sound techniques of interpretation and whether he or she can bring to bear resources from many different disciplines in Bible interpretation becomes inevitably evident. In a way it is a sort of "judgement day" and not everyone passes!

I

A good many ministers fall into the habit of taking a convenient "motto" text on the beginning of their sermons and then departing into whatever topic is at hand and whatever it is they wanted to say without having really wrestled with the text and dredged up its essential meaning for sure. It makes for thin preaching and culminates in that "I've-run-out-of-anything-left-to-preach" feeling and tends in the direction of greater and greater reliance upon the "Handy-Homiletic-Hints" type of preaching resources

the Garden of Gethsemane and even the garden with the twelve kinds of fruit at the end-time. Bible mountains with significance would include Mount Sinai, Mount Horeb (Elijah), Mount Zion, etc. One must keep in mind that these geographical aspects are only incidental to what happened in connection with them.

These are only a few suggestions regarding resources. Any creative preacher can come up with many more approaches and techniques as he daily lives in the Old Testament and as its message and meanings become second nature to him.

which in turn makes the preaching even thinner and on and on goes a vicious circle.

These students taking their Bible exam today have been taught to come at a Bible passage in depth, to ask and answer many key questions before presuming that the heart-meaning has been uncovered. They bring to any passage questions such as these: Who is writing here? Who is being addressed here? What are the meanings of the key words used and the grammatical structure used? Is there any problem with the text? What can be learned from the original language and/or a wide variety of translations? How can the heart of what is being said here be phrased in a single sentence? What do competent commentators say? How does this passage intersect with felt needs in our own times? And on and on. For those who learn to approach the Bible in this fashion the preaching resources of the Bible are endless, bottomless, forever rich, and new light keeps breaking decade after decade.

II

In the January term, a small group of seminarians spent four weeks in the book of Colossians, two and a half class hours per day and many hours of individual study. In that term a student can take only one course and gets totally immersed in it. It is a *depth* experience.

In order to foster good habits of Bible study and to come out with a permanently helpful resource on this biblical area, each student was required to prepare a personal commentary of some twenty-five to forty pages in length. Again, for the purposes of learning good approaches to in-depth study a particular form was required for the material. Each student took standard 8½ x 11 sheets of blank paper and marked them into quarters with a vertically-centered line and a horizontally-centered line. Following a carefully prepared outline, segments of the text in sequence were placed in the upper-left quarter page on each of the sheets. This served as a guide to a sequence of study approaches.

The upper-right quarter of each page was reserved for word interpretations, explanations of any textual problems involved, and for comparative translations. The idea was to get the exact text clearly in mind. The lower-left quarter of the page was devoted to commentary material, both comments prepared by the student and

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carefully selected quotations from a wide variety of competent interpretive resources. The last quarter of the page, the lower-right, was used to answer the question of what might be done with this passage in terms of preaching today. It was exciting and fruitful and it reinforced the basic idea that those other steps of study-in-depth need to be taken *before* the homiletical question gets asked.

Try it some time! Try it on one of the shorter New Testament letters. Put such a study approach alongside your current sermon-preparation efforts. It will seem to double the work for just a bit but eventually you will find preaching resources multiplying on your hands rather than being a desperate week-to-week search effort "two more." Such procedures might transform your preaching and give you a new lease in the pulpit!

III

In Chapter XIII of a recently published volume (Eerdmans) entitled *New Testament Interpretation*, one of the writers describes some common approaches to New Testament interpretation, for example, there is the "dogmatic" approach which in extreme form tends to see the New Testament chiefly as an arsenal of proof-texts for a particular doctrinal viewpoint already held. Brushing aside all matters of literary form, historical context and maybe even the actual theological matter under discussion in the passage, an interpreter of this type tends to make any passage say what is wanted that it should say rather than what it actually says when studied carefully.

Another example given is the "impressionistic" approach. Here, the reader "equates the message of the passage before him with the thoughts that fill his mind as he reads" (p. 221). Again, the meaning is brought to the passage by the reader rather than discovered in it. Much of this kind of interpretation went on among the "Jesus people" of the last decade. Their Bible-study approaches, to the writer claims, were much too shallow and the difficult demands of sound interpretation were not taught or followed. Bible study was stressed but in ways that failed to produce sound conclusions in many instances.

Again, what is stressed here is the need for in-depth Bible study, following sound approaches and methods and answering the key questions necessary to uncover original intent and meaning. When this has been done, then it is time to

ask what the application for today might be and what preaching possibilities are there.

IV

Another way of getting at new resources for preaching in the New Testament is to have an in-depth encounter with a new translation. This often uncovers exciting homiletical possibilities. What is suggested is not "faddism," hopping always to the newest and the latest, but rather using a new translation as a stimulus to fresh Bible study. Here are a couple of possibilities, not necessarily in a one-two order. One is the *New International Version*, published by Zondervan. It is the outgrowth of a translation project supervised by the New York International Bible Society. This is not a revision of an existing translation but a brand new venture undertaken by evangelical Bible scholars from many English-speaking countries in the world. Some are claiming it is likely to become the most widely read of the newer translations within a decade. The other is the *New American Standard Version*, published by Nelson, a revision of the *American Revised Version* of 1901, long recognized as a highly accurate piece of translation work.

V

Here and there it is noticed that some Church of God pastors are trying their hands at preaching their way through whole New Testament books in connected series. It used to be done more than it is done today. Maybe his would be an exciting venture but it is recommended that you plot out the series rather carefully and make the in-depth book study *before* you announce the series! There are obvious choices, of course—the Gospel of John, shorter New Testament letters such as Colossians or Philippians, longer books such as Romans, or even the Acts.

The big thing is to find a fresh handle and the intention here has been to suggest several—more disciplined and substantial Bible study, getting acquainted with a new version, trying your hand at sequential preaching from a selected New Testament book.

The New Testament resources themselves never run thin. Thinness and dryness happen in us. Recovery from such a state is possible. If it happens to at least a few preachers as a result of what is written here the time spent will not have been in vain. Have fun! Have inspiration! Have resources! They are yours for the uncovering.

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