

# ***BIBLE INSIGHT***

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)*

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## **The Hardest Thing About Preaching by David McClister**

<http://palmettochurchofchrist.org/>

Sometimes I am asked “what is the hardest thing about preaching the gospel?” I realize that a few people expect an answer like “Nothing at all,” because they think preaching is not that difficult in the first place. Well, if you are dedicated to it, it does not seem that difficult (but that is true of everything else as well). Some preachers have said that the hardest thing is knowing what to preach from week to week – keeping your finger on the pulse of the congregation and knowing what lesson will meet the needs of the group this week. I would agree that is certainly a challenging part of the work. Some preachers set such a hectic schedule for themselves that they say the hardest part of the work is the time, the long days that are required. There is truth in that as well. Yet some other preachers would say that the hardest part of the work of preaching is the preparation that has to go into every lesson that is presented. I can see that point also. Preparing two Bible classes and two sermons each week can easily take more than 40 hours in a week.

For myself, I would suggest that the hardest thing about preaching is *getting people to change*.

Preaching is not just information-giving, and no preacher who is worth his salt is content just to address a problem. We want to see the change come about, we want to see the exhortations (and the rebukes) bear some fruit, we want to see the teaching put into practice. For example, Paul was not content just to know that the Corinthians had heard the gospel. He was concerned that they continued to follow the truth. So he wrote them letters and made personal visits to them to get them to become the kind of church God wanted them to be. He did not want to think on the Day of Judgment that he had labored with them in vain. Or, to use his metaphor from 1 Corinthians 3, Paul had tried to build a solid structure on the foundation of the truth. If the Corinthians became unfaithful, it would be as if the structure Paul had built collapsed, making his labor in vain.

This gets us to the Biblical concept of what it means to “hear” the gospel. It does not just mean that someone explained it to you, or that you were at church one time when it was mentioned in your presence, etc. To hear, in the Biblical sense, means to take the

message in, to accept it and receive it. It is as Paul commended the Thessalonians, who had *received and welcomed* the word of God when it was preached to them (1 Thes 2:13). This is exactly why Jesus told His disciples to shake the dust off their feet as they left a city or village that would not hear the gospel of the kingdom of God (Matt 10:14). It was not enough just to show up in a town and do some preaching. The Lord expected them to work at getting people to accept and “hear” the gospel, and if their audience refused to hear (accept) it, if they refused to conform to its demands, then the disciples were to go and preach to others. The disciples were not responsible for making people hear, but they certainly were to work with the audience hearing the message as their goal.

This, I suggest, is the hardest part of preaching the gospel – getting people to hear, getting people to take the message in and use it to change their lives.

Getting this result *in the correct way* requires two things. First, it requires courage on the part of the preacher. Now I know that it is not the preacher’s responsibility to change people. But it is the preacher’s job to speak the whole truth of God, including those parts that are challenging and upsetting and contrary to our habits. Preaching, by its nature, is partly criticism (the Bible calls this reproof and rebuke), and we all have a natural aversion to criticism, even when it is delivered in the best ways. The preacher is to reprove and rebuke when needed with the goal that people will change their lives; that is, people are to take the message that is preached and use it to change their own lives. If someone will not change and correct their faults, deficiencies, or sins, they will have to answer to God for it, and if the preacher has sounded the warning and spoken the truth he will not need to be ashamed or afraid when he stands before the Lord himself. But he must have the courage to say what needs to be said.

This brings us to the second thing required of preachers: humility. It is a constant temptation to a preacher to think “If I present this lesson really well, then it will have the right effect.” But the power to change people lies not in the presentation or oratorical skills of the preacher. The power lies in the gospel. A preacher’s job is to preach the gospel *and not get in the way*. Now it is perfectly fine for a preacher to be emotionally “connected” to his message – in fact, he should be. But what I object to is the use of things that can be described best as “theatrics” in the attempt to evoke a response to the gospel (using sales methods falls under this same umbrella - I do not mean to suggest that the job of selling products to others is inherently theatrical, hypocritical, etc. My point is simply that we do not need to use the methods we would use to sell a product to preach the gospel.)

The gospel message itself has the power, it has the elements within it that can touch and stir the human heart like no other message in the world. It needs no help from those who preach. It is benefited nothing by theatrics and is, in fact, only degraded by such tactics and methods. People will change their lives based upon their reception of the gospel. Any other motivation will be shallow and will not sustain. I have personally known people who responded to the gospel because of an exceptionally emotional or

theatrical presentation by a gospel preacher. As soon as that particular gospel preacher is gone, they lose interest and become unfaithful.

Now let me ask you, while you have been reading this article, what do you think I have meant by the term “preaching.”? While everything I have said certainly applies to the job of being an evangelist working with a local church, it has another, equally significant and valid application. The reason I have written about the difficulty of preaching is not to try to get some sympathy from you, but to raise your awareness that the thing that is difficult about being an evangelist with a local church is the same thing that is difficult when about telling the gospel to others individually, when you try to tell it to your co-workers, friends, neighbors, and family. There certainly is a (limited) sense in which every Christian is an “evangelist” – one who proclaims the gospel to others. If you hope to get them to hear the gospel, it will require that you too have courage to say what needs to be said (always in love, of course), and simply to be a humble messenger of the truth.

How often have we fallen into the (false) notion that telling the gospel to others requires some special set of tricks or methods that we must learn before we can do it? How often have we told ourselves that we cannot spread the gospel because we don’t know *how*? Well, friends, it is not a matter of how, not at all. The power lies in the gospel, not in you. You don’t need to learn some special “tricks” to do it (there are none anyway). You just have to have the courage and the humility to do it. God will bless the effort if we stay out of His way.

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**BIBLE THOUGHTS by Jim Yopp** (<http://www.geocities.com/jameslyopp/>)

### **"Let no one in any way deceive you..."(II Thessalonians 2:3)**

The apostle of Christ is warning those who would be led away from the truth. The ultimate result of the deceptions that Paul warned about would be manifest in the corruption of the Lord's church in the following centuries. The apostate church rose to prominence among foolish men as they refused to follow the standards set forth in the New Testament of the Lord.

Deception is a tool of Satan. His efforts have led many into believing in doctrines that are not found in the Law of Jesus Christ. Over a process of time, error is accepted and the truth is rejected. How unfortunate that men will deceive others and how unfortunate that those whom they deceive will not take the time and effort to determine what the scriptures teach.

Leaving the faith is, most of the time, a gradual process. Ordinarily, one is not a faithful and dedicated disciple one day and an apostate the next. Often, human reasoning is one of the culprits that will cause one to drift away from the Law of Christ. "I do not see anything wrong with it" is used many times to soften the heart and will of the person who is gradually moving away from a respect of the scriptures. Such may happen to any Christian, even preachers and teachers. Only a strong commitment to the teachings

of the New Testament and a profound respect for the authority for God's word can keep a disciple from weakening one's faith. Let each of us hold to the faith through diligent efforts to follow only that which is found in the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

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### **I Believe in a Liberal Church**

The Hebrews of the Old Testament were taught "*The liberal soul shall be made fat*"(Proverbs 11:25). There were several areas in which the Lord expected the Jews to make various types of offerings to the service of the Almighty. Some of these were small offerings; others were to be in abundance. In all, the Lord wanted them to be liberal in their giving, whether it was time, effort or funds. The passage in Proverbs contains the promise of God to the Israelite who was willing to make abundant sacrifices to the Lord and His cause. The liberality was determined by the willingness of the person to share with the Lord that with which he has been blessed.

The principle of liberality has been taught in the New Testament. When Paul addressed the Corinthian church concerning the needs of others, he commended their attitude. "*...seeing that through the proving of you by this ministration they glorify God for the obedience of your confession unto the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution unto them and unto all*"(II Corinthians 9:13).

The churches of Macedonia had, in spite of their circumstances, "*...how that in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality*"(II Corinthians 8:2). The Lord never expected one to do what is impossible. However, he expects each disciple to do as one can in sacrificing. Such is not limited to money, but time and effort can also be included. Without the Lord, we would not have that which we possess. Without the Lord, we would not have the time to accumulate the things of this life. Without the Lord's kindnesses and help, we would be miserable creatures, lacking in the possessions that we hold dear to our hearts. Let us remember that all blessings come from the Lord and praise him as the giver of all good things.

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### **MONTHLY BIBLE READING: Acts**

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### **QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS**

*BIBLE INSIGHT* is published for the members of, and visitors to, the Church of Christ at Beverly Shores, Leesburg, Florida, USA.

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