

## A PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE: "Preaching for Life Change"

Preaching should produce life change. It sounds obvious, but much confusion surrounds the purpose of preaching. Many people in our churches do not suffer from information deficit. Rather, they suffer from *application deficit*. Preaching is partly to blame for this phenomenon. The apostle Paul helps us navigate the relationship between information and application.

Paul wrote letters to churches with real people and real challenges in their real-life contexts. It would be an oversimplification to say Paul just wanted his audiences to get their doctrine straightened out. To state this idea differently, the more time spent with people, the more practical preaching becomes. People care about how Scripture blazes a trail toward healing, wholeness, purpose, and ultimately, intimacy with God. Indeed, biblical confidence grows out of seeing biblical truth applied. For Paul, application was the direct by-product of thinking correctly about doctrine.

Let's use Romans as an example. Even if Romans was written to get the gospel correct (see chps. 1-11), the last five chapters is where Paul applies the gospel in very dramatic, very gritty detail. He was making his case from chapters 1-11, not to codify good doctrine, but to get the Jews and Gentiles to start acting like the gospel really was good news for all people! Paul's purpose and our use of chapters 1-11 should run parallel—to live out the gospel in the very dramatic, very gritty details of life.

Here are a few ways that may help improve applying the Bible when preaching it. First, don't beat yourself up because exegesis comes easier to you. Different skills are used when digging deep into the text compared to articulating relevant applications. There is always room for improvement. Resources are also available that address application directly like the NIV Application Commentary series and works by authors (e.g., Andy Stanley) who excel at application.

Second, find a couple practical sections that most people could benefit from meditating upon frequently. Texts like Romans 12:9-21, Ephesians 4:25-5:2, Philippians 4:4-9, and Colossians 3:12-17 are worth repeating in sermons, counseling sessions, and conversations. They not only reflect good doctrine, but provide much to master in the day-to-day life of a Christ-follower.

Last, make sure the texts we preach have touched our hearts and minds before we preach them. Its very easy to allow the work of God *around* you to replace the work of God *within* you. If your sermon preparation doesn't cause reflection on your relationships with Jesus and others, it may not touch your listeners either.

As Paul closed his majestic letter to the Romans, he ended with a hopeful benediction: "[that] all the Gentiles might come to the *obedience* that comes through faith..." (emphasis mine; 16:27). He preached for life change. He hoped for life change. Life change should also drive our preaching and prayers.

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