

Teaching the Word

Martin Luther made this astonishing statement: *If I could today become king or emperor, I would not give up my office as preacher.* The German reformer obviously understood something of the enormous privilege and stewardship associated with a call to teach the Bible. Even the most prestigious of earthly vocations paled in comparison in his estimation.

At Orlando Grace Church we place a similarly high value on the importance of biblical exposition. At this writing our people have under consideration ten core values that capture the essence of what drives our motivation in ministry. One of them reads: We value **Spirit-anointed exposition** from the pulpit. God has sovereignly ordained the preaching of His inspired word in the power of the Holy Spirit as a primary means of grace whereby His church may grow and flourish toward spiritual maturity. Therefore we will give ourselves humbly to the hearing of biblical preaching that aims for nothing short of expounding the whole counsel of God toward communicating the clear meaning of texts, their harmony with the rest of Scripture, and their relevant application to every facet of our lives.

A survey of Paul's pastoral epistles in the New Testament reveals why the church of Jesus Christ can ill afford to neglect such a value. **Over thirty times** throughout the course of First and Second Timothy and Titus, Paul hammers away at the importance of teaching, preaching, exhortation, instruction, and sound doctrine. The concept pervades the content of these manuals for ministerial practice from start to finish. From them we derive four reasons why we must excel as a church in the matter of teaching the word.

The first reason pertains to the **critical concern of false teaching** and its deleterious effects on the body of Christ. Right out of the chute in First Timothy 1:3 Paul speaks of so-called teachers purveying *other doctrine*. In chapter four of the same book he reminds Timothy of the Spirit's prediction of widespread apostasy in the latter days where some give heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. Second Timothy 4:3 says people will not endure sound doctrine but will prefer teachers who tickle ears instead of nurture souls. Paul tells Titus in chapter one of his book to appoint elders qualified to teach because of the presence of deceivers in Crete who threaten the well-being of whole households (verses 5-16). The sheer volume of false teaching and heretical doctrine peddled in all manner of media today demands the church make a priority of rightly dividing the word of truth (Second Timothy 2:15).

The second reason pertains to the **repeated commands to teach sound doctrine** and to labor hard in all its disciplines. Over and over again the apostle exhorts his delegates, Timothy and Titus, to fulfill their ministry as teachers and preachers of the word. *If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ* (First Timothy 4:6). If careful instruction makes for a good minister, then sloppy or neglected instruction can only make for a bad one! Verse 13 of the same context says *give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*. Maximize, don't minimize these elements. In Second Timothy 4:2 Paul commands: *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching*. In verse one of that context, Paul lays up, one after another, asseverations of such magnitude that should make us wonder how anyone would dare ignore the command of verse 2 – *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom*. Paul throws the weight of the Godhead, eternal judgment, the second coming and the kingdom of heaven behind the command to preach! No wonder Titus adds, *Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine* (Titus 2:1).

The third reason pertains to the **crucial content of the Scripture** and its all-sufficient utility for those who minister its truths to others. Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that the Scriptures come to us as the inspired, literally God-breathed, revelation of His will down to the very words themselves. They and they alone equip a man of God for every good work. No wonder Paul goes on in chapter four to extol the virtues and command the disciplines of preaching that same word! With so precious a content delivered to us by the Holy Spirit Himself how can we possibly do anything but elevate the value of biblical teaching to an extraordinarily high level? John Piper puts it this way: *There is no other organization on earth that deals in matters of eternal life and eternal death -- matters about God and his Son and his Spirit, matters about salvation and judgment. . . . This means that there is a form of speech that . . . fits the*

greatness of that truth -- namely, preaching. We must not hide so glorious a content under any bushels of neglect. Rather we must shout its truths from the housetops for all to hear and savor.

Finally, the fourth reason pertains to the **staggering consequences related to biblical instruction** and the risks attendant to its abuse or neglect. In First Timothy 4:16 Paul exhorts his charge: *Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.* What is at stake on the average Sunday morning from the average ministerial pulpit? Eternal salvation! Paul argues for faithful continuance in preaching of the word of God based on the fact that eternal welfares hang in the balance – his and his hearers. Indeed the Scriptures make us wise for salvation (Second Timothy 3:15). Only a fool would prefer stories and jokes over the inspired text when he considers he will give an account for the eternal state of his listeners.

Few things matter more than the teaching of the word at Orlando Grace Church. If we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, as our Lord Jesus declared in Matthew 4:4, then let His church excel in feeding His sheep until they adorn the doctrine of God our Savior (Titus 2:10).