

Voices From the Past on the Matter of Preaching

1. **The Apostle Paul (d. ~ 65)**

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. (Colossians 1:28–29)



2. **Augustine (354 – 430)**

And so our Christian orator, while he says what is just, and holy, and good (and he ought never to say anything else), does all he can to be heard with intelligence, with pleasure, and with obedience; and he need and so far as he succeeds, he will succeed more by piety in prayer than by gifts of oratory; and so he ought to pray for himself, and for those he is about to address, before he attempts to speak. And when the hour is come that he must speak, he ought, before he opens his mouth, to lift up his thirsty soul to God, to drink in what he is about to pour forth, and to be himself filled with what he is about to distribute. For, as in regard to every matter of faith and love there are many things that may be said, and many ways of saying them, who knows what it is expedient at a given moment for us to say, or to be heard saying, except God who knows the hearts of all?

3. **John Chrysostom (347 – 407)**

For what says [Paul]? "If any man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work." Now I have not said that it is a terrible thing to desire the work, but only the authority and power. And this desire I think one ought to expel from the soul with all possible earnestness, not permitting it at the outset to be possessed by such a feeling, so that one may be able to do everything with freedom. For he who does not desire to be exhibited in possession of this authority, does not fear to be deposed from it, and not fearing this will be able to do everything with the freedom which becomes Christian men: whereas they who fear and tremble lest they should be deposed undergo a bitter servitude, filled with all kinds of evils, and are often compelled to offend against both God and man. . . . It behooves us, then, to be on the watch on all sides, and to make a careful search lest any spark of this desire should be secretly smoldering somewhere.

4. **Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)**

The doctrines of men, however admirable, fall to the ground, and with them the conscience that has built upon them. There is no help nor remedy. But the Word of God is eternal and must endure forever; no devil can overthrow it. The foundation is laid upon which the conscience may be established forever. The words of men must perish and everything that cleaves to them. Those who enter not by the door--that is, those who do not speak the true and pure Word of God, without any addition--do not lay the right foundation; they destroy and torture and slaughter the sheep.

5. **John Calvin (1509 – 1564)**

In his last will and testament:

I likewise declare, that according to the measure of grace and mercy which God has

vouchsafed me, I have diligently made it my endeavor, both in my sermons, writings, and commentaries, purely and uncorruptly to preach his word, and faithfully to interpret his sacred Scriptures.

6. **Richard Baxter (1615 – 1691)**

And for myself, as I am ashamed of my dull and careless heart, and of my slow and unprofitable course of life, so, the Lord knows, I am ashamed of every sermon I preach; when I think what I have been speaking of, and who sent me, and that men's salvation or damnation is so much concerned in it, I am ready to tremble lest God should judge me as a slighter of His truths and the souls of men, and lest in the best sermon I should be guilty of their blood. Me thinks we should not speak a word to men in matters of such consequence without tears, or the greatest earnestness that possibly we can; were not we too much guilty of the sin which we reprove, it would be so.

7. **John Bunyan (1628 – 1688)**

Upon being arrested for preaching:

Come, be of good cheer; let us not be daunted; our cause is good, we need not be ashamed of it; to preach God's Word, is so good a work, that we shall be well rewarded, if we suffer for that; or to this purpose.

8. **Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758)**

In like manner should ministers travail for the conversion and salvation of their hearers. They should imitate the faithfulness of Christ in his ministry, in speaking whatsoever God had commanded him, and declaring the whole counsel of God. They should imitate him the manner of his preaching; who taught not as the scribes, but with authority, boldly, zealously, and fervently; insisting chiefly on the most important things in religion, being much in warning men of the danger of damnation, setting forth the greatness of the future misery of the ungodly; insisting not only on the outward, but also the inward and spiritual, duties of religion. Being much in declaring the great provocation and danger of spiritual pride, and a self-righteous disposition; yet much insisting on the necessity and importance of inherent holiness, and the practice of piety. Behaving himself with admirable wisdom in all that he said and did in his ministry, amidst the many difficulties, enemies, and temptations he was surrounded with, wonderfully adapting his discourses to persons, seasons, and occasions.

9. **John Wesley (1703 – 1791)**

In a letter to a fellow pastor:

What has exceedingly hurt you in time past, nay, and I fear to this day, is want of reading. I scarce ever knew a preacher read so little. And perhaps by neglecting it you have lost the taste for it. Hence your talent in preaching does not increase. It is just the same as it was seven years ago. It is lively, but not deep; there is little variety; there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this, with meditation and daily prayer. You wrong yourself greatly by omitting this. You can never be a deep preacher without it any more than a thorough Christian. O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not; what is tedious at first will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty, superficial preacher. Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your

cross, and be a Christian altogether. Then will all the children of God rejoice (not grieve) over you.

10. George Whitefield (1714 – 1770)

In a farewell sermon to a London audience, before his final trip to America:

I verily do believe from my inmost soul, (and that is my comfort, now I am about to take my leave of you,) that I am preaching to a vast body, a multitude of dear, precious souls, who, if it were proper for you to speak, would say, "Thanks be unto God, that we can follow Jesus in the character of sheep, though we are ashamed to think how often we wander from him, and what little fruit we bring unto him." If that is the language of your hearts, I wish you joy; welcome, welcome, dear soul, to Christ. O blessed be God for his rich grace, his distinguishing, sovereign, electing love, by which he has distinguished you and me. And if he has been pleased to let you hear his voice, though the ministrations of a poor miserable sinner, a poor, but happy pilgrim, may the Lord Jesus Christ have all the glory.

11. Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813 – 1843)

Take heed to thyself. Your own soul is your first and greatest care. You know a sound body alone can work with power; much more a healthy soul. Keep a clear conscience through the blood of the Lamb. Keep up close communion with God. Study likeness to Him in all things. Read the Bible for your own growth first, then for your people. Expound much; it is through the truth that souls are to be sanctified, not through essays upon the truth. Be easy of access, apt to teach, and the Lord teach you and bless you in all you do and say. You will not find many companions. Be the more with God. My dear people are anxiously waiting for you. The prayerful are praying for you. Be of good courage; there remaineth much of the land to be possessed. Be not dismayed, for Christ shall be with thee to deliver thee.

12. R. L. Dabney (1820 – 1898)

The preacher is a herald; his work is heralding the King's message.... Now the herald does not invent his message; he merely transmits and explains it. It is not his to criticise its wisdom or fitness; this belongs to his sovereign alone. On the one hand,... he is an intelligent medium of communication with the king's enemies; he has brains as well as a tongue; and he is expected so to deliver and explain his master's mind, that the other party shall receive not only the mechanical sounds, but the true meaning of the message. On the other hand, it wholly transcends his office to presume to correct the tenour of the propositions he conveys, by either additions or change.... The preacher's business is to take what is given him in the Scriptures, as it is given to him, and to endeavour to imprint it on the souls of men. All else is God's work.

13. Charles Spurgeon (1834 – 1892)

Ah, my dear friends, we want nothing in these times for revival in the world but the simple preaching of the gospel. This is the great battering ram that shall dash down the bulwarks of iniquity. This is the great light that shall scatter the darkness. We need not that men should be adopting new schemes and new plans. We are glad of the agencies and assistances which are continually arising; but after all, the true Jerusalem blade, the sword that can cut to the piercing asunder of the joints and marrow, is preaching the Word of God. We must never neglect it, never despise it. The age in which the pulpit is despised, will be an age in which gospel truth will cease to be honored.... God forbid that we should begin to depreciate preaching. Let us still honor it; let us look to it as God's ordained instrumentality, and we shall yet see in

the world a repetition of great wonders wrought by the preaching in the name of Jesus Christ.

14. Phillips Brooks (1835 – 1893)

Nothing but fire kindles fire. To know in one's whole nature what it is to live by Christ; to be His, not our own; to be so occupied with gratitude for what He did for us and for what He continually is to us that His will and His glory shall be the sole desires of our life...that is the first necessity of the preacher.

15. E. M. Bounds (1835 – 1913)

The real sermon is made in the closet. The man -- God's man -- is made in the closet. His life and his profoundest convictions were born in his secret communion with God. The burdened and tearful agony of his spirit, his weightiest and sweetest messages were got when alone with God. Prayer makes the man; prayer makes the preacher; prayer makes the pastor.... Prayer is with the pulpit too often only official -- a performance for the routine of service.... Every preacher who does not make prayer a mighty factor in his own life and ministry is weak as a factor in God's work and is powerless to project God's cause in this world.

16. G. Campbell Morgan (1863 – 1945)

Nothing is more needed among preachers today than that we should have the courage to shake ourselves free from the thousand and one trivialities in which we are asked to waste our time and strength, and resolutely return to the apostolic ideal which made necessary the office of the diaconate. [We must resolve that] "we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the Word."

17. Arthur W. Pink (1886 – 1952)

The great work of the pulpit is to press the authoritative claims of the Creator and Judge of all the earth—to show how short we have come of meeting God's just requirements, to announce His imperative demand of repentance. The sinner must throw down the weapons of his rebellion and forsake his evil way before he can trust in Christ to the saving of his soul. Christ is to be received as King to rule over him as well as Priest to atone for him, to surrender to Him as his rightful Lord ere he can embrace Him as his gracious Saviour.

Such a task as we have briefly outlined above is no easy one, and only those who are called and qualified by God are fitted to discharge it. To preserve the balance of Truth so that the requirements of righteousness and the riches of grace are equally poised, to avoid Arminianism on the one side and Antinomianism on the other is an undertaking far beyond the capacity of any "novice" (1 Tim. 3:6). It requires a "workman" and not a lazy man—a student and not a slothful one—who studies to "show himself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 9:15) and not one who seeks the applause and the shekels of men. Nor can any human education or self-development of the intellectual faculty impart this capacity. No indeed: only in the school of Christ can this accomplishment be acquired. Only as the Holy Spirit is his Teacher can any man be furnished unto such an undertaking. The preacher must first be taught himself, taught experimentally and effectually, taught in his soul to love what God loves and hate what God hates, and then be given wisdom from Above to express the same according to the Scriptural pattern before he is ready to show unto others the way of Life.

18. R. B. Kuiper (1886 – 1966)

The minister must always remember that the dignity of his office adheres not in his

person but in his office itself. He is not at all important, but his office is extremely important. Therefore he should take his work most seriously without taking himself seriously. He should preach the Word in season and out of season in forgetfulness of self. He should ever have an eye single to the glory of Christ, whom he preaches, and count himself out. It should be his constant aim that Christ, whom he represents, may increase while he himself decreases. Remembering that minister means nothing but servant, he should humbly, yet passionately, serve the Lord Christ and His church.

19. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

As preachers we must not forget this. We are not merely imparters of information. We should tell our people to read certain books themselves and get the information there. The business of preaching is to make such knowledge live. The same applies to lecturers in Colleges. The tragedy is that many lecturers simply dictate notes and the wretched students take them down. That is not the business of a lecturer or a professor. The students can read the books for themselves; the business of the professor is to put that on fire, to enthuse, to stimulate, to enliven. And that is the primary business of preaching. Let us take this to heart. ... What we need above everything else today is moving, passionate, powerful preaching. It must be 'warm' and it must be 'earnest'.

20. James Montgomery Boice (1938 – 2000)

A sermon is not a lecture. It is an exposition of a text of Scripture in terms of contemporary culture with the specific goal of helping people to understand and obey the truth of God. But to do that well the preacher must be well-studied. To do it exceptionally well he must have exceptional understanding of (1) the Scripture he is expounding, (2) the culture into which he is expounding it, and (3) the spirituality and psychology of the people he is helping to obey God's Word. These understandings do not come merely from native abilities or mere observance of life. They come from hard study as the preacher explores the wisdom of both the past and the present to assist him in his task.