

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5 PREACH THE WORD

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”¹

“**L**et your conscience be your guide. If it feels good, do it. Follow your heart.” Sayings such as these have gained a place in modern Canadian folk wisdom. Maxims such as these are commonly accepted, if only unconsciously, as providing direction for our lives. Adages that become common within a given population reflect the received knowledge of that society. It is almost as though such aphorisms are a polite way of saying, “everybody knows.” Such saws justify the attitudes and actions of far too many Canadians, including the professed people of God.

Just so, a sort of McNugget theology has replaced preaching in modern churches. McNugget theology gives a few spicy thoughts instead of demanding intellectual rigour. Christians increasingly demand entertainment. To a distressing extent, this desire to be amused is seen in the demand for multimedia presentations to replace exposition of the Word of God. This expectation is increasingly evident in the choice of praise music on the basis of rhythm and musical titillation at the expense of doctrinal accuracy. It does not seem an impossible task, in my estimate, to have both musical excellence and doctrinal accuracy; but if a choice must be made, let us always seek doctrinal fidelity.

The Apostle warned that the time is coming, “when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” Over five decades ago, A. W. Tozer witnessed churches attempting to amuse people into the Kingdom of God. He decried elders and deacons who insisted that if churches would only show movies, provide “Christian” dance, present lively music the lost would flock to the churches. At that time Tozer wrote, “Pastors and churches in our hectic times are harassed by the temptation to seek size at any cost and to secure by inflation what they cannot gain by legitimate growth. The mixed multitude cries for quantity and will not forgive a minister who insists upon solid values and permanence. Many a man of God is being subjected to cruel pressure by the ill-taught members of his flock who scorn his slow methods and demand quick results and a popular following regardless of quality. These children play in the marketplaces and cannot overlook the affront we do them by our refusal to dance when they whistle or to weep when they out of caprice pipe a sad tune. They are greedy for thrills, and since they dare no longer seek them in the theatre, they demand to have them brought into the church.”²

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² A. W. Tozer and James L. Snyder, **Tozer on Worship and Entertainment: Selected Excerpts** (WingSpread, Camp Hill, Pa 1997) 101–102

Such plain language explains why he was no longer sought as a conference speaker in later life. What at first was refreshingly honest became tiresome as listeners resisted the Word and its impact in their lives. At one point, it was said that Tozer had addressed more Christian conferences than any other speaker then serving among the churches. By the end of his ministry, he was excluded from almost all those same conferences. Prophetic preaching was unpopular among the churches at that time. Time has not changed the popular assessment—prophetic preaching is still unpopular.

THE CHARGE — “Preach the word.” Paul testified to the Corinthians, “God was pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:21].³ Paul’s use of the phrase, “the foolishness of preaching” is fascinating; it is lively and evocative. Because this phrase also occurred in the KING JAMES VERSION of the Bible, I have been familiar with this particular phraseology since my earliest days as a Christian.

The phrase, “the foolishness of preaching,” conveys a concept that can be misunderstood. In 1 CORINTHIANS 1:21, it is *kerugma*—the message heralded, that is rejected. In 1 CORINTHIANS 1:23, it is *kēruxis*, the act of heralding, that is ridiculed by the world; the proclamation is declared to be “moronic” [*morían*]. The Greek indicates that it is both the content of the message that is preached and the event of preaching itself that is considered to be folly by those outside the Faith. Both the message and the act are offensive to the unconverted; and since the churches of Christendom are increasingly composed of unregenerate people, we should not be surprised that those in attendance at our services find strong doctrine offensive.

I love Christian music. It is of small moment to me whether I am singing the great hymns of the Faith, black spirituals or whether I am singing lively contemporary praise choruses, music is intimately a part of worship for me. I find myself moving as the music grips my soul, and it would be easy for me to break into joyful dance as God is glorified. However, God has not chosen to use music as the primary means for presenting His message of life. The fact that some may be redeemed through considering the words of a song emphasises the exception instead of establishing a norm. It is the preaching of the Word that builds saints and transforms the soul of lost mankind.

Christian drama can certainly move the soul and glorify the Lord Christ. Throughout the years of my pilgrimage I have been privileged to view a number of excellent dramatic presentations that were deeply moving. However, it was not drama that God chose to build up the saints and to redeem the lost. It is the message of life proclaimed by one’s fellowman that transforms the individual, bringing the lost to life.

Without doubt, the graceful movement of men and women as they perform an interpretive dance can transfix observers; but the message of Christ is conveyed most effectively and with the least possibility of being misunderstood through the open proclamation of the Word of God by one appointed to his task by God.

Though the message today applies to every Christian in that each believer is responsible to declare Christ at every opportunity, in particular it is those who have received appointment as elders who are held responsible by this charge. Moreover, the congregations that receive those elders whom God has appointed, are responsible to hold the elders accountable for the divine task of proclaiming the Word of God.

³ The NET Bible, New English Translation, Biblical Studies Press, 2003. All rights reserved.

The **NEW ENGLISH BIBLE** translates **VERSE TWO** of the text before us in a scintillating and exceptionally clear manner; the translators beautifully capture the Apostle's ardour. "Proclaim the message, press it home on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient."⁴ The man of God must seize every opportunity to declare the message of Christ the Lord, whether those about him wish to hear the message or whether they wish only to be entertained. It is of no consequence whether the man of God proclaims the message of life in a public forum or in private, in a mass meeting or one-on-one, the burden of God is that he must proclaim the message. Moreover, if a church will truly be a Baptist church, that congregation will exalt the act of preaching, adhering to the apostolic Word.

I particularly enjoy visiting church buildings, and especially historic church buildings. I enjoy seeing where God's people meet for worship week-by-week. I make no claim to being architecturally, but I have nevertheless made some observations concerning church buildings. I have taken note of the design of church buildings used by different communions and I have witnessed the emphasis of those churches. Churches holding a sacramental view of worship almost always place the pulpit to one side of the chancel and before the nave. These same churches usually situate the altar, and perhaps the baptistery, at the centre of the chancel, effectively saying that the sacraments, rather than the preaching of the Word, will be central to their worship.

Baptists, however, are neither sacerdotalists nor sacramentalists. Rather, Baptists have always been distinguished by an emphasis upon preaching the Word of God. Accordingly, Baptists place the pulpit at the centre and before the congregation. There, the Bible will be read and the message of life delivered. This arrangement of the furniture in the auditorium is an unconscious affirmation of the centrality of preaching—the pulpit, or the lectern, being central to worship. Whenever a church ceases to make preaching central to worship, it will cease to be a Baptist church.

Baptists have, historically, been distinguished by expository preaching. We emphasise doctrine—the truths that God has presented in His Word. This doctrinal emphasis is expressed through sound biblical exposition. When I say that Baptists have distinguished themselves by expository preaching, I mean that we have carefully adhered to the text. The great preachers of the Faith have used a portion of the Word of God, whether a verse or a chapter or some particular pericope, and they have provided exposition of that portion of the Word. As they provide exposition of the given portion of the Word, they will carefully explain what the original hearers or readers would have understood the writing to mean, and then they will apply the intent of the Scripture to the present generation. The Baptist message has throughout history always been defined as, "Thus saith the Lord!"

It should be no great surprise that I enjoy reading the messages of the great preachers of years gone by, just as I enjoy reading the messages preached in some of the great pulpits of this day. During the course of my reading, I have made an observation concerning great preachers and their impact on the great churches of history. There has never been a great preacher who made a lasting impact for the Faith who was not an expository preacher. Perhaps a church would make a temporary stir in the Christian community when the preacher was a topical preacher or when the preacher was a textual preacher, but expositors of the Word build strong churches and create great saints.

⁴ Samuel Sandmel, **The New English Bible with the Apocrypha, Oxford Study Edition** (Oxford University Press, New York, NY 1976)

I enjoy Chicken McNuggets. Truthfully, three McNuggets are seldom enough to satisfy my hunger; I want a full-meal deal when I eat. I am concerned about my health; I want to balance my diet with vegetables, grains and dairy products in addition to the meat I crave. No mother would approve of her child eating three McNuggets and calling it a meal. Certainly, she wouldn't permit that to go on day-after-day.

In the same way, a few ethical nuggets here and there are insufficient to create strong Christians; but a full course of expository preaching will with time create strong Christians. Unfortunately, we live in a day when far too many professed saints of God are dyspeptic because they have been fed a steady diet of moral or ethical nuggets. Christians will never regret encouraging the preacher to "Preach the Word."

THE URGENCY OF THE CHARGE — "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word" [2 TIMOTHY 4:1, 2a]. Baptists live in the shadow of eternity; because we are a people of the Book, we are convinced that Jesus Christ the Lord shall appear momentarily to judge wickedness and to usher in righteousness. Our Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself once as a sacrifice for sin, and now we await His promised appearing a second time. At this present time, we await the fulfillment of this glorious promise.

I am personally convinced that one day I shall stand before the Son of God to give an account for the ministry I was assigned [see HEBREWS 13:17]. I fear God, and that holy fear impels me to make every effort to fulfil the ministry He assigned to me. When I appear before Him, I do not believe that He will ask how many quarrels I settled, or how many nights I worked late in the study, or even how many visits I made to disgruntled saints. He will, however, ask me to account for what I have preached. Did I keep watch over the flock, teaching the Word of God accurately and passionately? Did I feel the weight of eternity as I prayed for souls, holding men to account through the preached Word? These are the issues that the Saviour will demand of me and of all who labour as teachers of the Word while they wait for His appearing.

How terrifying for a shepherd confronted by the Risen Lord of Glory to be asked, "Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock" [JEREMIAH 13:20]? The flock belongs neither to me nor to any cabal operating within the assembly. The flock does not belong to mere mortals; rather, the flock belongs to Christ Jesus, the Son of God. This is the basis for Peter's admonition. "I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" [1 PETER 5:1-4].

Shepherds may be unreliable, so God warns, "As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them" [EZEKIEL 34:8-10].

The preacher who will please the Master always labours in light of the knowledge that the Son of God must soon appear. Every message, every visit, is conducted with the weight of this truth weighing on his heart. Likewise, the church that will honour the Son of God always conducts her ministry in full knowledge that He is coming soon.

Do you believe this? What difference does this knowledge make in your life? Do you demand that the preacher carefully study the Word, expecting that He will be diligent both in study of the Word and in application of the same? Does this knowledge impel you to seize the opportunity to warn your loved ones of the peril faced should they delay in trusting Christ the Lord?

In our services we want to worship well, but perhaps we should ask what role doctrine plays in worship? Does doctrine—sound, healthy teaching—really rate in our worship? How we choose to live—our speech, the manner in which we dress, the way we treat one another—all reflect our doctrine. Our doctrine defines who we are—it shapes our lives. Therefore, doctrine must be at the core of our worship. Worship that fails the doctrinal test is unworthy of Christ and frankly is displeasing to Him. Doctrine is not esoteric; at His coming, we shall give an account of what we tolerated!

There is coming a day when Christ Jesus the Lord will return. The author of the Hebrews Letter spoke of this awesome time that lies somewhere in the immediate future. “Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” [HEBREWS 9:27, 28]. Our Master is coming to judge the living and the dead. At the Rapture, when the Faithful are removed from this earth, all who have named the Name of Christ will appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ. Paul cautioned that “We must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:10; see also 5:11].

One great, overriding concern that guides me as I serve this congregation is that I will be prepared for that day by living *now* in the presence of the Living Lord. By that, I mean that I make it my goal to live as though I will momentarily see His face. Each message I prepare is vetted against the knowledge that what is said reflects on the glory of the Living Son of God. Each statement I make either magnifies His glory or detracts from His Majestic Person. I am not merely performing a job, I am a herald of the Kingdom of God, and I serve as an ambassador of Heaven. This knowledge causes me to tremble at the thought of His scrutiny and frees me from fear of the opinion of mere men.

THE REASON FOR THE CHARGE — “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4]. It is not difficult for me to imagine that we have now reached a time when people will not endure sound teaching. Throughout the years of my ministry I have often been advised, even admonished, to soften my message.

I know that I am forthright, and I know that I have a well-deserved reputation of being “in your face.” However, I am convinced that I have an obligation to be clear in my declarations and in the instruction I present to the people of God. I know that I do not have permission to be coarse or rude or needlessly harsh, but I am obligated to be truthful and clear in teaching the truths of God’s Word. I know that I am not to “beat” the sheep, but I am responsible to warn the flock and to protect the sheep.

An Area Minister of a Canadian Baptist denomination urged me to “tone down” my message. If I would only do so, he asserted, I could serve in any church among those over which he exercised oversight. He was not the first denominational leader who considered me to be too “plain spoken.” It was a plea to be less confrontational since I was seen as too doctrinally demanding, too precise in naming sins tolerated and even embraced among the professed people of God.

As that denominational leader spoke to me, I recalled the ancient words written by the Prophet from Tekoa.

“The lion has roared;
who will not fear?
The Lord GOD has spoken;
who can but prophesy?”

[AMOS 3:8]

I endeavour to ensure that my preaching equates to the standard set by the Apostle Peter. “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” [ACTS 4:20]. In my own service before the Master I have accepted God’s charge to Isaiah.

“Cry aloud; do not hold back;
lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.”

[ISAIAH 58:1]

On one occasion I heard Vance Havner as he quoted Joseph Parker, “The preacher whose little message is ‘Repent,’ had best pledge his head to Heaven.” “Sound teaching” is demanding teaching; it is not welcomed by the masses or by polite religionists. “Sound teaching” is not always pleasant to hear. “Sound teaching,” healthy teaching, demands that the hearer interact at a personal level, bringing herself or himself into line with the straight doctrines of the Faith. Years ago, one scholar commented on what was coming, “In periods of unsettled faith, scepticism, and mere curious speculation in matters of religion, teachers of all kinds swarm like the flies in Egypt. The demand creates the supply. The hearers invite and shape their own preachers. If the people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf-maker is readily found.”⁵ Perhaps that is what we now witness in the succession of preachers among modern churches, or in the outward show of seeking out so many “teachers.” Modern hearers too often become church tramps, going from one church to another in search of something to please them.

In a sobering verse recorded in Jeremiah’s prophecy, the Lord laments of religious leaders, “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes” [JEREMIAH 5:30, 31]? The difference between ancient Israel and religion described in the last days is but a matter of degree. The churches Paul foresaw and warned against would deliberately seek out and exalt false teachers, whereas Israel simply embraced error.

⁵ Marvin R. Vincent, **Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 4** (Scribner’s, New York, NY 1904) 321

After Jeremiah wrote that distressing assessment of religion in ancient Israel, another prophet received a similar pitiful assessment concerning God's people. God warned Ezekiel, "They come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it" [EZEKIEL 33:31, 32].

Like Luke's assessment of the Athenians at the time Paul was penetrating Europe with the Evangel of the Risen Christ, contemporary church goers seem often to be best described as those who "spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" [ACTS 17:21]. Those who will honour God must remember, as Calvin has written, "The theologian's task is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable."⁶

The Apostle's words contain a warning that is not readily apparent in our English tongue. Notice in **VERSE FOUR** that those who accumulate for themselves "teachers to suit their own passions," are said to *turn away* from listening to the truth and to *wander off* into myths. The verb translated "turn away" is active; the verb translated "wander off" is passive.⁷ Religious dilettantes of the dreadful day Paul describes deliberately refuse to listen to sound teaching, and as a result they are easily led into error. These religious abecedarians (for that is what they actually are) do not set out to embrace error, they merely want to be "reasonable" concerning what is taught! They don't want to hurt anyone's feelings by saying something that someone may find hurtful. They want to affirm others; they can't tolerate confronting or being confronted. They will not tolerate what is right, and as result they are led astray by what is wrong. Perhaps you have heard the old saw that warns that those who will not stand for something will fall for anything. Nowhere is that more apparent than among the churches of this day.

What you believe is reflected in how you live. Likewise, what you believe is influenced by what you are taught. Preachers are responsible to ensure that they provide a steady diet of sound teaching. Our example is the Lord Christ Himself. He presented Himself as "The Good Shepherd" [see JOHN 10:1-18]. His shepherding is described in the **TWENTY-THIRD PSALM**. There, we see that the Shepherd provides opportunities for rest, rich nourishment for the flock, refreshing water and safe guidance through the dark passages of life. Rest, nourishment, refreshment and safety are provided through the Word of God, through "sound teaching."

The way to determine if the teaching you receive is healthy is to search the Scriptures to assure yourself that the teaching adheres to what is written in the Word of God. What you say you believe as doctrines of the Faith is far less important than is the impact of what you have believed in your life. If you are seeking self-exaltation, you will treat the church with contempt. If you are seeking self-fulfillment, you will use the people of God for your own purposes. If you are seeking to glorify Christ the Lord, you will humbly accept the Word of God as authoritative for faith and practise, and you will make every effort to glorify Christ the Lord in the way in which you live.

⁶ John Calvin, **Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2**, John T. McNeill (trans.), **The Library of Christian Classics** (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2011) 164

⁷ For a discussion of this point, see John MacArthur, **The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Timothy** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1995) 182

Throughout my ministry before the Lord, I have greatly appreciated the wit and wisdom of Vance Havner. The well-salted saint had a pithy manner of speaking that left listeners breathless. The curt comments flew whenever the preacher delivered a message, and listeners were compelled to listen fast. One sermon that Havner delivered that focused on the act of preaching made an indelible impact on me as a young preacher. In that sermon, Havner said, “You can’t preach it like it is if you don’t believe it like it was. If you don’t believe that the Scriptures are God-breathed and that Jesus Christ was virgin born, that He died for our sins and rose bodily from the grave and is coming again, you can’t preach it like it is. You can’t preach ‘Jesus Christ the same yesterday’ today, if you don’t believe what He was yesterday. For what He was then He is now.”⁸

Paul warns those who read this letter, “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4]. It is one thing to imagine that professing Christians have become practical atheists; but could anyone imagine that professing atheists would ever occupy the pulpits of congregations identified as Christian?

Among movements currently working to infiltrate the churches are groups identified as atheists. Included among these groups are “The Clergy Project”⁹ and “Recovering from Religion.”¹⁰ These groups exist to assist clergy who have come to realise they are actually atheists. Most of those they “help,” have left the ministry. Overwhelmingly, the majority continued to preach for varying periods before finally realising that it was impossible to ride horses racing in opposing directions. One minister, however, continues as the resident minister of a church here in Canada. Her denomination has twice sought to dismiss her, but they lack the moral stamina to do so.¹¹

While the various stories speak of the relief these individuals profess to have found, I confess that I grieve for them—how sad they must be and how conflicted that they deliberately deceived people for so long. I grieve for the answer they must give to Holy God when they must stand before that Great White Throne. I grieve for the people who once looked to them for guidance and for hope, only to see their trust dashed and debased. They have lived a lie and destroyed the faith of others both through sprinkling rose water on a cancer in the form of their preaching and in destroying the trust of others.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHARGE — “Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” [2 TIMOTHY 4:2]. In the first two verses of this text, there are five imperatives—reprove, rebuke, exhort, preach and be ready. Reprove, rebuke and exhort are the immediate means of ministry assigned to the preacher, and he is to perform his duty by being ready whether the time is convenient or not. However, the commands that follow are all based on this one singular command to “preach the Word.”

⁸ Vance Havner, **The Kind of Preaching We Need**, sermon, http://www.thebaptistpage.com/Distinctives/preaching/Havner_Sermon.htm, accessed 28 January 2005, (this is now a dead link, apparently no longer accessible)

⁹ <http://clergyproject.org/>, accessed 15 June 2016

¹⁰ <http://www.recoveringfromreligion.org/#home>, accessed 15 June 2016

¹¹ Ashifa Kassam, “Atheist pastor sparks debate by ‘irritating the church into the 21st century,’” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/24/atheist-pastor-canada-gretta-vosper-united-church-canada>, accessed 15 June 2016; <http://clergyproject.org/gretta-vosper/>, accessed 15 June 2016

We have discovered through our excursus today that preaching lies at the heart of worship that honours God. Moreover, the preaching that is demanded must declare the whole counsel of God, applying it to each particular situation. The proximity of our Lord's return imposes on each preacher and on each church an urgency to ensure that this plenary declaration is fulfilled. Moreover, there will be a progressive distaste for this aspect of worship as the end of time nears.

Daniel Wallace made an observation that should disturb every thinking saint. Wallace provided his assessment concerning the situation confronting us as Christians. "Even with the proliferation of Bibles today, Christians are reading their Bibles less and less. I believe the evangelical church has only 50 years of life left. 50 years left of evangelicalism because of marginalization of the Word of God. We need another Reformation! The enemy of the gospel now is not religious hierarchy but moral anarchy, not tradition but entertainment. The enemy of the gospel is Protestantism run amock; it is an anti-intellectual, anti-knowledge, feel-good faith that has no content and no convictions. Part of the communal repentance that is needed is a repentance about the text. And even more importantly, there must be a repentance with regard to Christ our Lord. Just as the Bible has been marginalized, Jesus Christ has been 'buddy-ized.' His transcendence and majesty are only winked at, as we turn him into the genie in the bottle, beseeching God for more conveniences, more luxury, less hassle, and a life without worries or lack of comfort. He no longer wears the face that the apostles recognized. Or, as Erasmus remarked, 'When you read the Greek New Testament, you can see the face of Jesus more clearly than if you were one of his disciples!' A bit of hyperbole, but the point is worth underscoring: The God we worship today no longer resembles the God of the Bible. Unless we return to him *through* a reading and digesting of the scriptures—through a *commitment* to the text, the evangelical church will become irrelevant, useless, dead."¹²

Corporate worship at its core includes the elements of reproving, rebuking and exhorting. The job of the pastor entails patiently and carefully using the Word to build the saints into mature children of the Living God and protecting against the wolves that seek to make havoc of the flock. There will always be people who follow the latest novel approach to worship—testing the methods first at this church and then testing the degree of entertainment at that church. We pray for such people and seek no harm for them, but we know that we are responsible to worship according to what is pleasing to God.

We will always have some who test our programme for a while and then leave for what seems to them to be a more exciting programme. I recall speaking to one woman who told me that she was seeking something more "fulfilling." At that time, we were the latest in a succession of churches for her and her family. I told her there was no harm in changing the label on an empty bottle. At least she was bold enough to speak with me.

I am not suggesting that we cease seeking to adapt the methods used in worship to make our time together more meaningful, but I am reminding you that we are always responsible to ensure that the message of Christ is fully proclaimed as we worship. I acknowledge the need to work hard to ensure that the elements of our worship speak to our hearts and to our culture. Whatever the elements that are ultimately included in worship, be assured that if it is pleasing in the sight of the Lord, preaching will be central.

¹² Daniel B. Wallace, **The History of the English Bible: Part IV: Why So Many Versions?** http://bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1825, accessed 15 June 2016

If this truth is displeasing in your sight, is it because you have yet to know Christ Jesus as Saviour and Master? If you have yet to make Him Lord of your life, you need to heed the call issued in His Word. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved... ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13]. Believe this message and be saved. Amen.