

# Plain Words for Young Preachers

*by Bryan Gibson*

Please don't take this article the wrong way. I've still got a LOT of room for improvement, and I sure don't know everything, not even close. But, older preachers have sure helped me through the years, and I sincerely hope this will help you. Frankly, I was a bit slow to learn some of these lessons, so here's hoping this will help you do better. I've got too much to cover in just one article, so we'll conclude this next week, Lord willing.

Some of you young guys possess great talent, which may have already generated some "buzz" about your preaching. That's not necessarily bad, but it's not necessarily good either. It could be that you're entertaining more than you're edifying, that you're gaining more points for style than for substance. Apollos was eloquent, but he was also "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24), and if that's what you're featuring, you should be commended.

Don't think you have to wow people with every sermon, which is easy to do if you preach nothing but inspirational, motivational, and devotional type sermons. Read carefully through the New Testament epistles. They inspire and motivate (and we all love those passages), but they also inform and educate (not always as exciting). Aim for that balance in your preaching, the same balance seen in the sermons recorded in the Book of Acts. Very detailed lessons on subjects like establishing authority, and on the work, worship, and organization of the local church won't always have people on their edge of their seat, but they are important nonetheless.

Speaking of details, don't say what I've heard some say, "If we can just teach people to love God and love others, everything else will take care of itself." Sorry, but for our love to "abound...in knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9), we've got to know the details. Love, just like zeal and sincerity, needs a partner, and that partner is the truth—in all its fullness (read 2 John). So again, preach the devotional elements found throughout Scripture, but preach the details, too. Well informed, well grounded, and well balanced Christians will be the result.

Doctrinal purity matters to God—in a big way (Matthew 15:9; Acts 2:42; Romans 16:17; et al), so be sure you spend some time refuting religious error. And you can't do that simply by preaching the truth and hoping they'll see the difference. To make it crystal clear, you'll have to use the same method Jesus used—"you have heard that it

was said...but I say..." (Matthew 5). Of course, we would change the "I say" to "Jesus says." Many will not appreciate this approach, perhaps even some of your own brethren; but that's okay, because it's not about pleasing men, it's about saving souls.

Move beyond the "elementary principles" (Hebrews 6:1) to "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), but don't be afraid to come back to the elementary principles, even if brethren have heard them time and time again. Let a generation grow up without this foundation, and we'll have a mess on our hands. "For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe" (Philippians 3:1).

Preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2), and that means more than just an occasional or passing reference to it. Make it the featured attraction, and make sure every conclusion, every application is derived from it. Preaching certainly involves reasoning and persuasion; just make sure you reason and persuade from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2), not apart from them. Good illustrations have their place, too, but it's easy to get carried away. Don't let them overpower the message of Christ and turn too much attention toward you (2 Corinthians 4:5). You want your audience to glorify the word (Acts 13:48), for their faith to "not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5).

Don't be like tabloid journalists—too eager to break something new, too eager to give some never before thought of slant on a difficult passage. Slow down, study thoroughly and meticulously, harmonize your understanding of difficult passages with plain ones, and make sure you can prove each and every point you make. Case in point, we're hearing a number of assertions made about the work of the Holy Spirit, but what we're NOT hearing is clear, solid proof. What we're hearing in some cases is actually contradictory to what is plainly taught in other passages. Not yet sure of your conclusions—don't preach them. Once you unsettle souls (Acts 15:24), it's hard to get them settled again. Accuracy is paramount (2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 18:25), so make it your aim to become a very careful Bible student.

Seek, pray for, and take advantage of every open door to teach the lost (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3). Just make sure in your haste to convert people to the Lord that you don't compromise the truth. Concealing portions of it, watering it down, compromising it any way will pad the numbers, but it won't make true disciples. This ear tickling approach is actually an insult to people who want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. With patient teaching (2 Timothy 4:2), good and honest hearts (Luke 8:15) will repent of anything contrary to the truth;

they'll be just as eager as the eunuch to be baptized into Christ (Acts 8:35-39); and following that, will be eager to do all the Lord has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). "Buy the truth, and do not sell it..." (Proverbs 23:23).

"Be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5), and be sure it's real, because it will be tested in numerous ways, including how you handle correction and rebuke. You will likely make some mistakes, and someone will likely rebuke you or correct you (just like Aquila and Priscilla did Apollos—Acts 18:24-26). How you react to this correction will likely make you or break you. "The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding" (Proverbs 15:31-32). "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid" (Proverbs 12:1).

Current culture has led many to express distaste for any kind of negative or corrective preaching. People in droves have bowed the knee to the god of positivity. By all means, be balanced in your approach (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Timothy 4:2), but don't be afraid to use the word to correct, warn, and rebuke (Titus 2:15). Do that and you'll be in good company—with Old and New Testament prophets, with the apostles of Jesus, and even with Jesus Himself. Hard hearts will be offended, but poor and contrite hearts will be eternally grateful.

READ THE BIBLE, the only infallible source of religious truth (Psalms 119:160). Remember, Bible authors are inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17); men and women who write books about the Bible are not. Quote Jesus and His apostles on salvation, on grace and faith, and any other subject, and you'll know you're teaching the truth. Fill your mind with the popular religious literature of the day, and there's a good chance you'll be teaching something that's not. It's happened to a number of people already; please don't let it happen to you.