

hearing this..." What the audience heard was logical, biblical argumentation (v. 29). Peter presents reasoning and supplies evidence demonstrating that biblical preaching has a *cognitive* aspect.

A Response of the Heart

Peter's preaching was promptly processed through the hearts of his audience: "...They were cut to the heart." His preaching, energized by the Holy Spirit, was directed pointedly to consciences. Biblical preaching has an *affective* aspect.

A Response of the Hands

Peter's preaching found expression in action: "...what shall we do?" The audience was called to *do* something; namely to repent and reform their lives. There is a volitional *aspect* to biblical preaching. We come, we listen and we leave? That's definitely *not* the "lot" of the Christian's life. We've been given so much more. In the careful preaching of the Bible, God speaks His word about Himself and the work of His Son through the helping ministry of the Holy Spirit. This word is directed to the heads, hearts and hands of believers for a very important purpose: that we would increasingly turn from our sins and toward God, thereby glorifying Him. That's why the preached word is a vital component of the pastoral ministry and of the Christian life. And that's why Peter's sermon should provide food for thought (and feeling and action) for both preachers and listeners alike.



WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN pastors Covenant Reformed Church (Carbondale, PA) and has previously taught in a Christian school and worked in residential construction. He and his wife Amy have three children.

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Carbondale, PA
Permit No. 25

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

A PUBLICATION OF:
COVENANT REFORMED CHURCH
47 S. Church St., Carbondale, PA, 18407
570.282.6400 | covenantrc@verizon.net
www.CovenantRC.org

Proclamation is Free upon Request. Please let us know of anyone who might like a subscription. To offer feedback or to be removed from the mailing list, please contact using information above. For archives, visit covenantrc.org

New Message on DVD



Sexual Integrity
Maintaining Honor Inside
and Outside of Marriage

Request a **Free Copy**
by writing to info@covenantrc.org

PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic Christianity
January 2010, Issue 19

A Model Sermon

Learning from Peter's Preaching

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

If you have young children or grandchildren in your family, perhaps you've seen the Disney-Pixar film, *A Bug's Life*. The movie imaginatively portrays life in an ant colony which is visited annually by a group of marauding grasshoppers who consume the food laboriously collected by the ants throughout the season. The only explanation given by the queen ant for this ongoing process is, "They come. They eat. They leave. This is our lot in life. It's not a lot, but it's our life." Only one ant questions the meaning of the ants' existence, thereby setting in motion the film's plot.

How often do we think about the meaning of our corporate worship existence? We come. We listen. We leave. And, if we're faithful, we re-

peat this pattern week after week, month after month, year after year. Why? To what are we listening? Well, one might say, "Preaching, of course!" But, what exactly is preaching? How do we know when we're listening to true preaching and not to self-improvement seminars, motivational talks or thinly-veiled entertainment? How critically do we think about what we're hearing while the sermon unfolds? How much does it impact us once we leave the worship setting? Is a "good" sermon one with lots of exciting stories and heart-warming illustrations? Beneath all these questions is this: "Can one objectively analyze a sermon or is their effectiveness merely based on whatever happens to "speak" to you or me on any given week?"



Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:14-39 is, in several ways, a model sermon which helps us to answer these questions.

First, it teaches us how to listen to a sermon. We shouldn't just be listening for the practical tips. Peter's sermon consists of explanation *and* application of Scripture; both are important.

Second, Peter sets a pattern for how to read, interpret and apply the Bible in other settings. Most Christians aren't preachers, but all Christians have been entrusted to rightly handle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) in personal devotions, family worship, Sunday school or elsewhere.

Third, this sermon provides guidelines for evaluating and encouraging the minister's preaching. If Bible exposition is one of the two central and indispensable duties of a minister (Acts 6:4) then the minister needs to preach biblically. How do we know if he is? Compare the preaching to Peter's. What can we learn from Peter's model sermon?

Preaching is Rooted in Scripture

This is fundamental. After all, power in preaching does not come from the minister himself, but from the Word he preaches. It's no wonder then, that Scripture dominates Peter's sermon. Just in terms of verses, 40% of his sermon is Bible. The rest is an explanation and application of the texts he has read.

By way of contrast, much contemporary Bible teaching consists of finding an interesting story and using it for a lesson that just isn't there. An example of this was a sermon I heard from 2 Kings 6:1-7 called "Losing your Spiritual Edge." An ax does figure in the story, but the text

has nothing to do with losing your spiritual edge. It's about God validating Elisha's prophetic ministry by making a borrowed ax head float.

Peter provides a different pattern of interpretation and proclamation. He does the difficult work of exegeting (or drawing out) the meaning that *God Himself* has given to the passage. He makes plain the point that the Holy Spirit is making in those verses rather than finding a passage and using it to make his own point.

Preaching that is not a careful, faithful, accurate presentation of what God has said in the text is less than biblical.

Preaching is Explicit about Sin

Listen to Peter: "You have taken by *lawless* hands, have crucified, and put [Christ] to death" (2:23). Repent, trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your *sins* (v. 38). That sounds like bad news!

But, if a sermon does not draw attention to man's fallenness and sinfulness, it has no business introducing a solution. Notice how Peter's focus on sin creates a crisis that only the gospel can solve. His audience was cut to the heart by their guilt and needed gospel healing.

This is the same approach Paul takes in his letter to the Romans: "...for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed..." (3:20).

Preaching Focuses on God's Work

A majority of Peter's sermon is about God. That's appropriate since the gospel itself is primarily about what God has done. The gospel is the finished work of God in Christ on behalf of needy sinners. Through this gospel God gives believers a new, right standing before him (justifi-

cation), changes our relationship to sin (sanctification) and transforms us for heaven (glorification). Although we participate, the work of salvation is a work of God from start to finish.

It is amazing, then, how much preaching that goes by the name "Christian" can leave out both God and the gospel itself. Instead, listeners hear self-accomplished moralism: "Here's what you need to do to better. Of course, we must repent of our sins. We must strive for holiness; Peter includes these concepts as well but they aren't the gospel; instead they are our response to the gospel.

Peter emphasizes what God has done, is doing and will do, and that must be a central part of preaching.

Preaching Centers on Christ

Peter quotes two Psalms (vss. 25-28; and vss. 34-35) and interprets them both as finding their fulfillment in Christ. Peter learned this approach from Jesus himself. "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27, Cf. Mark 12:36).

If Christ is the glory of God and the glory of God's word, then true preaching should show forth that glory. One of the functions of Christian preaching is to speak about Christ in such a way that those who have spiritual eyes are amazed, encouraged, and strengthened by his riches.

Preaching Depends on the Spirit

Peter knew that he was speaking through the unction of the Holy Spirit (v. 17, ff). His boldness strikes a vivid contrast with the cowardice he showed at Jesus' trial

and proves what Christ said earlier, that the Spirit would help the apostles preach in the face of opposition (Mark 13:11).

So, too, in his preaching Peter exalts the Spirit's work of prophesy (vv. 17,18). John Calvin spoke of every sermon having two ministers. There is the visible, human speaker. But if the words are to have any beneficial effect, they must be winged along to the hearts of the listeners by the Holy Spirit.

Such an understanding helps pastors avoid pride in their own wisdom or abilities and, instead, humbly trust God for the ability to speak for Him and be ever dependent upon Him.

Preaching Confronts Experientially

Peter wasn't just feeding people information. He preached in such a way that his hearers *experienced* the truth of what he was saying. He drove home the point that they needed to respond to the message because their lives were out of harmony with God's will.

"Let me speak freely (or plainly; openly)" he says (v. 29). Following Peter, the English Puritans' plain sermons also evoked powerful responses. The Puritans were suspicious of showy oration that was common among many of the Anglican preachers of the time. Like Peter, they counted plainness of preaching a virtue.

Every sermon which meets the criteria discussed thus far *demand*s a response *and* will actually *produce* a reaction in each listener's heart. Peter's audience gave a three-fold response.

A Response of the Head

Peter's preaching made contact with his audience through their minds: "After