

A Biblical Case for Expository Preaching



By [Mike Bullmore](#)

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What is expository preaching? A sermon is expository if its content and intent are *controlled* by the content and intent of a particular passage of Scripture. The preacher says what the passage says, and he intends for his sermon to accomplish in his listeners exactly what God is seeking to accomplish through the chosen passage of his Word.

Preacher, imagine God sitting in the congregation as you preach. What will be the expression on his face? Will it say, "That's not at all what I was getting at with that passage." Or will it say, "Yes, that's exactly what I intended."

The biblical case for expository preaching starts with the connection between the gift the ascended Christ has given to the church in pastor-teachers ([Eph 4:11](#)) and the biblical injunction for pastors-teachers to "preach the word" ([2 Tim 4:2](#)). Those who preach should preach their Bibles.

Perhaps the best place to begin demonstrating the legitimacy of identifying preaching and preaching the word is the book of Acts. In Acts, the phrase "the word of God" is regular shorthand for the substance of the apostolic preaching. In [Acts 6:2](#), for example, the apostles say, "It is not right that we should give up the preaching of the word of God" (see also [Acts 12:24](#); [13:5, 46](#); [17:13](#); [18:11](#).) The phrase also frequently appears as "the word of the Lord" (8:25, 13:44; 15:35-36; et. al.) and not infrequently it is shortened to "the word" (cf. 4:29; 8:4; 11:19). In the book of Acts, there is a clear and consistent identification between the apostolic preaching and the phrase "the word of God."

While the substance of the apostolic preaching was the good news of reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus, that message was delivered and explained almost invariably by means of an exposition of Old Testament Scripture. So preaching in New Testament times involved the preaching of "the word of God," and an essential component of such preaching was the exposition of the Old Testament. This in turn leads us to the conclusion that the Old Testament Scriptures must be included in our conception of "the word" to be preached, a conclusion confirmed by both the direct (e.g., [2 Tim 3:16](#); [Rom 3:2](#)) and indirect claims (e.g., [Rom 15:4](#)) of the New Testament.

So this "word" is the word about Jesus, as anticipated in the Old Testament and now explained in the apostolic preaching. This is the word that is "spoken" ([Acts 4:29](#)), "proclaimed" (13:5), and to be "received" (17:11) as "the word of God." This same identification is maintained throughout Paul's letters. Without hesitation, he calls the message he proclaims "the word of God" ([2 Cor 2:17, 4:2](#); [1 Thes 2:13](#)) or simply "the word" ([Gal 6:6](#)).

Even in the context of Paul's charge to Timothy to "preach the word" there is confirmation of this identification between preaching and preaching the word of God. Timothy would have known immediately what "word" Paul meant. As Timothy's biography highlights, it surely included both the "sacred writings" and the apostolic message—"what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it" ([2 Tim 3:10-17](#)).

The conclusion we are to draw from all of this is that the "word" we are to preach is the body of truth consisting of the Old Testament Scriptures and the apostolic teaching regarding Christ—i.e. the New Testament. Thus, identifying the "word" with our Bibles is appropriate. *This is what those commissioned as "pastor-teachers" are to teach.* Our job is to proclaim "the word" which God has spoken, preserved in Scripture, and entrusted to us. The spiritual life of God's people depends on this

word ([Deut 8:3](#)). That is why a young pastor is charged to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" ([1 Tim 4:13](#)). If this charge makes any claim on us today, and it does, then the source of our preaching is to be entirely coextensive with our Bibles.

What will this look like? In our sermon preparation, it will look like taking defined passages of God's Word and studying them carefully so that we "rightly handle the word of truth." In the pulpit, it will look like the picture we see in [Nehemiah 8:8](#): "They read from the book . . . clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." God has both purposed and promised to use this kind of preaching to accomplish one of his great aims—the gathering and building up of his people.

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