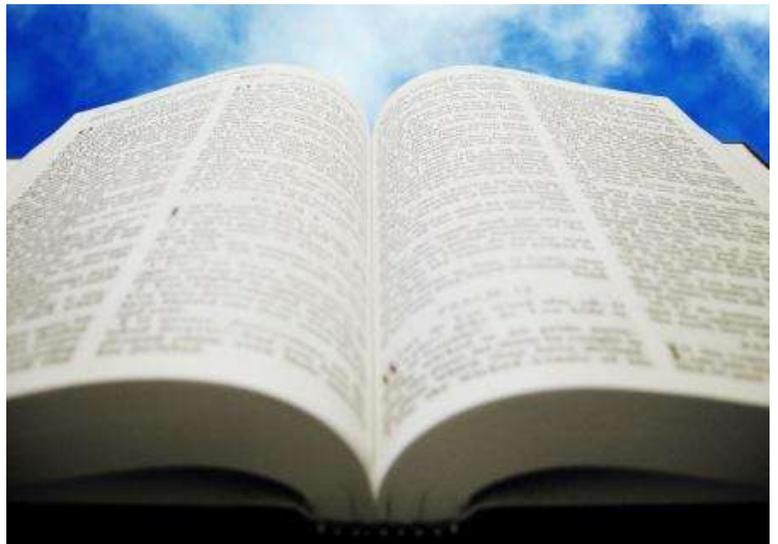


Biblical teaching and preaching

What is biblical teaching and preaching?

Before we can answer that question, we need to know what the Bible is and what it's for. This isn't the place for a full-blown explanation, but we hope these summaries will help:

The Bible is the Word of God spoken through the words of its human authors (2 Tim 3:15-16; 2 Pet 3:15-16). Therefore what they say God says. Jesus endorsed and obeyed the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God and his highest authority (Matt 4:1-11; Mk 7:1-13). He called and commissioned the apostles to be his eyewitnesses, and in so doing provided for and authorized the New Testament writings (Jn 14:25-26; 16:12-15).



It is vitally important to grasp that the Bible is about Jesus. You and I live in the 'last days' ...and God 'has spoken to us by his Son' (Heb 1:2). That revelation by the Son ... remains decisive, ultimate and final.

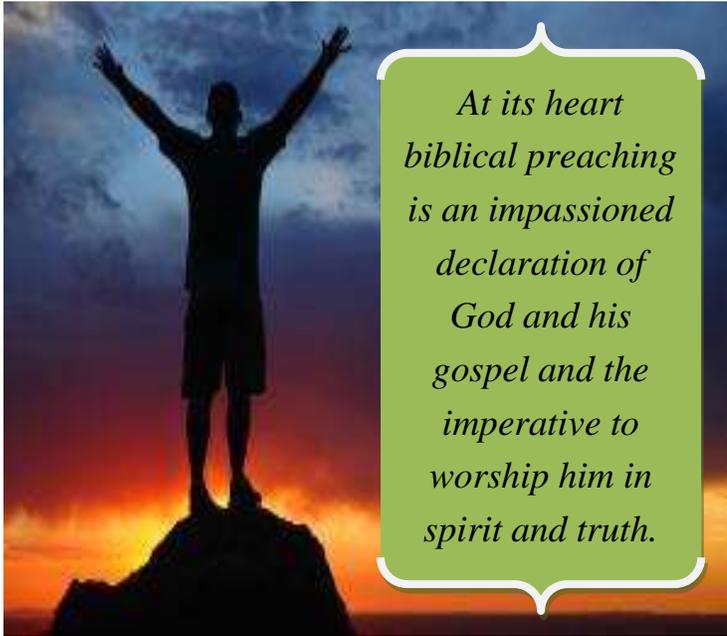
God has spoken in order to reveal himself and his gospel to the world. By this gospel God proclaims the Lordship and Kingdom of Jesus Christ and salvation in him. This message saves those who are lost and edifies those who are found – God's church (Isa 55:1-11; Jn 20:30-31). Jesus understood the whole of the Old Testament to be about him (Jn 5:39-47; Lk 24:25-27, 44-47); as is the New Testament – the four Gospels and the letters.

It is vitally important to grasp that the Bible is about Jesus. You and I live in the 'last days' (the period between the first and second coming of Jesus) and 'in these last days' God 'has spoken to us by his Son' (Heb 1:2). That revelation by the Son – of God and his salvation – remains decisive, ultimate and final.

Therefore...

Biblical preaching is a partnership between God and the preacher whereby God speaks by the proclamation of his Word about his Son through his Spirit for the salvation and edification of God's people (Rom 10:14-17; 1 Pet 1:22-25).

That's why the apostle Peter says to those in the local church who exercise a ministry of the Word: 'Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God' (1 Pet 4:10-11a).



Biblical preachers are therefore God's mouthpieces speaking to a dying world and living church. Preachers stand between the speaking God and their hearers, proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus (2 Cor 4:5) and the implications of his Lordship for our personal and corporate Christian lives, and for the seen and unseen world. Biblical preaching comes with a solemn charge. The apostle Paul says to preachers:

'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' (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

The words 'to preach' in that passage means to proclaim or herald or announce something. Therefore biblical preaching isn't mere explanation or teaching, though notice at the end of verse 2 that it includes teaching, as it does rebuke and exhortation. At its heart biblical preaching is an impassioned declaration of God and his gospel and the imperative to worship him in spirit and truth. Taking verses 1 to 5 together, Paul gives these reasons for persevering with biblical preaching and teaching:

1. The Lordship and Kingdom of Jesus the King (v.1)
2. The Return and Judgment of Jesus the King (v.1)
3. People's rejection of the truth and pursuit of false teachers who will tell them what they want to hear (vv.3-4)

Biblical preaching is just that

It is an exposition of the Word of God in its context that demonstrates the text's significance in our context, applying the text of Scripture to the congregation and to the mind, heart and will of its members. It is therefore not an occasion for ventilating opinions or pet topics; nor is it a dry verbal commentary, a systematic Bible study, or lecture. The preaching of the New Testament apostles themselves and the way they describe Christian preaching (as in the 2 Tim 4 passage above) affirm that biblical preaching is a passionate explanation of the Word of God that warns, rebukes, challenges, and encourages the people of God.



In his recent book, *The Living Church: Convictions of a lifelong pastor*, John Stott insists that 'authentic Christian preaching is both biblical and contemporary' (p.104). This essential task requires what Stott calls 'double listening' – listening to the Word of God and to the world, in order to faithfully expound the Word of God and relate it to the culture and world of our hearers. Christian preachers therefore need to be reading both the Bible and their congregations and culture, in order to understand both and to bridge both.

The importance of biblical preaching

Holding this orthodox and historic view of Scripture ought to shape and embolden our preaching and teaching ministry.

The practice of preaching through biblical books in context is evident among the best preachers of the early church, including Augustine and Chrysostom. It was recovered by the founding fathers of the Church of England, Bishops Latimer and Ridley, and the great Reformation preachers John Calvin and Martin Luther.

Biblical preaching has been devalued and even displaced in some Christian churches. There are numerous reasons for this. It can be argued that where the Bible itself has been devalued and even displaced in the life of a church, then biblical preaching suffers a similar fate. After all, if a church or its leadership does not believe that the Bible is the true and authoritative Word of God, then it is more likely to substitute other authorities and guides for the church.

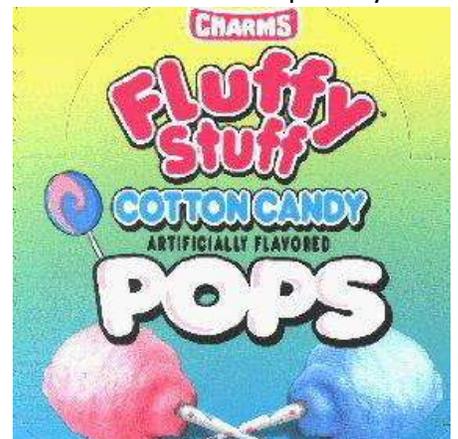
The Anglican Church of Australia's Constitution Act regards The Book of Common Prayer together with The Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons and the Articles of Religion (aka the Thirty-nine Articles) as the authorised standard of worship and doctrine in this Church. A quick reading of any of these will find a strong affirmation of the authority and centrality of the Bible in our Church. The Bible is acknowledged as being sufficient for salvation and authoritative for the teaching and life of the Church. The three historic Creeds are endorsed because they reflect the teaching of Scripture. Holding this orthodox and historic view of Scripture ought to shape and embolden our preaching and teaching ministry.

It will be unapologetically biblical and planned for and delivered carefully, faithfully, and enthusiastically. Further, these same Anglican formularies and authorities uniformly express and reflect a strong commitment to preaching the Word of God.

A related problem is a loss of confidence in the Bible to sustain and guide our church. This is especially true when our church is struggling to survive. However, reliance on resources other than the Bible starves our church of the very 'food' that it needs to survive and grow as an apostolic church.

In both creation and redemption – the world and the Church – God's Word is powerful and purposeful, calling life into existence and sustaining it (see Gen 1-2; 12:1-3; Jn 1:1-13).

In Isaiah 55:1-11, God addresses a church that felt it was dead, in exile in Babylon. This is the situation of many Western churches today: a minority people in 'exile' in a foreign post-Christendom world; feeling besieged, even defeated, weakened by its conformity to the culture, and vulnerable to false teaching and counterfeit gospels. In the Isaiah passage, God calls on his people to repent and to come to him and to listen to him that we would live again. He asserts that his Word is powerful and purposeful and will revive them.



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Similarly, the Word of God read, explained and applied to God's post-exilic people gathered brought deep confession of sin, repentance and renewal (Neh 8-9). The New Testament attributes the same divine character, power and purpose to the Scriptures, affirming that they save people (2 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 1:22-25), sustain, exhort and encourage God's people (Matt 4:1-4; Rom 15:4; 16:25; 1 Thess 4:18; 5:11), and train and equip them for discipleship and ministry (Eph 4:11-16; 2 Tim 3:14-17).

The importance of biblical preaching and teaching also becomes clear when we understand the Bible's intended audience – the gathered people of God. For the most part, the Bible is addressed to God's people gathered together in community, not to individuals: the assemblies at Mt Sinai, in the Temple, and the new Christian congregations throughout the Roman Empire. It follows, then, that the Bible is best heard and heeded within the Christian community, which at once makes clear both the importance of the public reading and teaching of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13) and its primary purpose – sustaining, maturing, leading and equipping the congregation (Eph 4:8-16; 1 Cor 14). However, the congregation is made up of individuals, and another reason for the importance of biblical preaching is to model to them the right way to read and understand the Bible in their own lives.



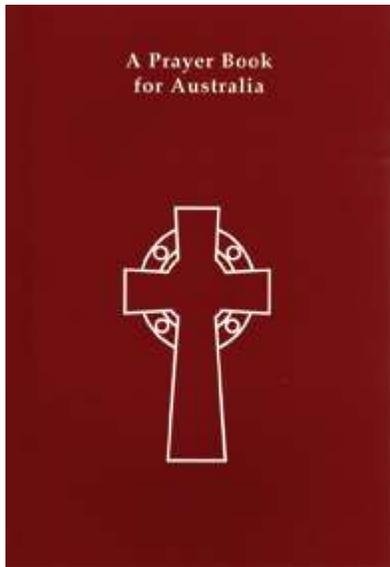
There can also be a loss of confidence in the medium of preaching to effectively communicate truth to people living in a visual and visually stimulating environment.

Can and should a monologue-based medium be the main pattern for preaching in church?

Yes, because God has appointed preaching as the central (but not only) means of communicating his truth to his church. Pictures and images (including stained-glass windows) cannot explain what they are depicting, cannot teach theology, and cannot easily apply it. Preachers and preaching are given to the church not only to convey what the biblical authors said but also what they meant by what they said, and to carefully apply that to the congregation (Ac 11:23; 13:15; 17:3; 19:8,9; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1-2; Heb 3:1-4:16).

As we saw above, biblical preaching is an impassioned declaration of God's good news and an exhortation to respond to it (1 Cor 1:18; Heb 1:1-2:4).

This requires a preacher who knows both God and the congregation, and through whose personality, life experience and spiritual understanding, God speaks his truth.



Preaching, then, is not a lecture or verbal commentary on a text (merely conveying information). It is a unique transaction between God, the preacher and the congregation, whereby God speaks to his people through both his Word and his preacher; and they speak to all our faculties: to our heart, mind and will. As we have seen, Scripture is God's truth spoken through human words and personalities in order to reveal God and elicit a response. It should not surprise us that biblical preaching can be thought of in the same way. There is therefore something unique and vital about preaching.

Faithful Christian preachers/teachers are used by God to procure the salvation of God's people and to keep them in that salvation (1 Tim 4:16; Ac 20:17, 28-32; and see the recognition of this in the Ordinal – the service for the ordination of presbyters)! In other words, people's eternities are at stake in this ministry.

The reading and preaching of the Scriptures is an integral and indispensable part of our Anglican services. This ministry of the Word provides the grounds for our corporate response to God of prayer, praise, confession and affirmation of 'the faith' in the Creeds. It is significant that none of our Anglican Prayer Book services is without this vital ministry of the Word. It is possible to meet without celebrating Holy Communion but it is not possible to meet without hearing the Word of God.

But...

In our visually stimulating and interactive media environment, it is perhaps more important than ever that our preaching be passionate and engaging. The unforgivable sin in preaching is to bore our hearers and create the impression that the Word of God is boring and irrelevant. Preachers must work hard in their preparation and delivery to engage their hearers from the sermon's first words to its last words. Martyn Lloyd-Jones rightly called preaching 'logic on fire!'

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We can preach in such a way that though technically a monologue, we are in fact dialoguing with our hearers. Any or all of the following can facilitate this:

- maintaining eye contact and speaking with, not at, the congregation;
- asking questions (literal and rhetorical ones, but only literal ones if the dynamics of the congregation allow);
- anticipating objections and questions (including articulating them) and answering them;
- using appropriate visual media (sermon outlines, Scripture text, photographs, video clips and images on PowerPoint or OHP, physical objects and props);
- either mid-way through or at the end of the sermon, have people form small groups of two or three to discuss a point you have made or to explore its application to them/the congregation;
- pointedly applying the text as you go rather than at the end;
- having a question and answer time at the end, which should continue to explain and apply the text.



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