

VII. Christ's Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia—Seven Distinctives
“#3: Earnest Prayer and Expository Preaching, Part 2”
II Timothy 3:10–4:2
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In this study we will continue a look at the third distinctive of the church of Christ that he builds and its earnest prayer and expository preaching. We are convince of from the Word of God that Christ will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Secondly, Christ is the Architect and Builder of His church therefore it is important for us to understand what that church looks like through the distinctives Christ uses to build His church. These seven distinctives come in couplets that are related to each other and through this study I want to show you how they are revealed in God's Word as Christ builds His church.

It doesn't matter what time period or location this church is in, this is what the church is. Now when the church lands in its location it will adapt many things, such as the language of the people and the dynamics of the culture but first it's important to understand, not what a church looks like when it has contextualized (when it is in the world), but what a church looks like that is not of the world yet sent into the world for Christ. It is just like a believer. What are the marks of a true believer when they are serving Christ in the world but not of the world?

So in this study we will look at the second part of the third distinctive which is expository preaching. In the last study we looked at earnest prayer. Before I get into this study I'd just like to review a little the first couple of distinctives. The first distinctive is the church must be Biblically faithful and have confessional integrity. The Word of God says that the church is built upon the Word and that it is built as the foundation, pillar, support and buttress of the Word to proclaim the Word.

That is coupled with confessional integrity which through the Scriptures we see these small confessions throughout the early church. That leads to a more comprehensive confession, the Apostles Creed, which leads to the Nicene Creed, which leads to larger confessions such as those that come out of the Reformation. Some of those are the Westminster Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Old London Confession, and the Old Scots Confession. A number of these confessions whereby the church like the believer makes a common confession of the truth that we believe and we hold to that confession with integrity as we proclaim it to the world. The Word of God is inspired, inerrant, infallible and our only rule of faith and practice. The confession is not inerrant so it is constantly being addressed, shaped and matured just like a believer is being matured. This is what we believe or as the writer of Scripture says 'the things most surely believed among us' (Luke 1:1). This leads us to the second distinctive.

This is where the primary connecting tissue of all the Bible is the Gospel. Therefore the second distinctive is where the church is Gospel driven and if Gospel driven it will be Christ centered. Paul says in I Corinthians 15:3–4, [3] *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* Everything in the Bible is important but there are some things more important than others particularly in terms of our relationship with Christ, how to walk with Christ and for Christ. The most foundational of all in being faithful to the Word of God and our confession confesses it, is the Gospel, our saving grace in Christ which is He is the way, the truth and the life, no man can come to the Father but

through Him and all who are in Him will surely be brought into glory. So if the church is Gospel driven it will be Christ centered because it is the Gospel of Christ where Christ is the Center, the Substance, and Circumference of the Christian life and of the Gospel message.

That leads us to the third distinctive which are the two pillars of the church. In the last study we covered the first couplet of this distinctive which was earnest prayer. Now there are multiple kinds of prayers in the Bible. There are personal prayers and public prayers. Some will say that Jesus condemned public prayer but He didn't. Jesus condemned people who did their private prayers publically to be seen by men but the Bible supports public prayer. For instance, in I Timothy 2:8 Paul says, *[8] I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands... calling upon the Lord.* There is set prayer and there is spontaneous prayer. There is formal prayer and informal prayer. There is praise prayer and petition prayer. There are all kinds of prayers and that's why Paul says in I Timothy 2:1, *[1] First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.*

Yet there are two things that stand paramount about the church as the house of prayer. It is that we will intercede for one another praying on behalf of all men (intercessory prayer) and intentional persistent prayer for the success, progress and expanse of the Gospel in our lives, the lives of others and in all the nations. So there is persistent prayer for revival and awakenings and intentionally intercessory prayer whereby God's people pray for their leaders and the leaders pray for God's people. We have an adversary who prays against us. Satan prays specifically against leaders and believers. And Satan preys on leaders but praise God that Jesus prays for us and through Christ we can pray for one another.

We looked at Acts 6 where the church was going through a difficult time because the charge of racism was being made against the leaders. The leaders realized there was not an equitable distribution of the mercy ministry for the problem was not their racism or partiality but the church was so large and all these Hebrew elders only knew Hebrew widows. They realized they needed people who could give their attention to the administration, stewardship and mercy ministry of the church so they raised up seven deacons. So they realized they needed to solve this problem but could not create a worse problem of neglecting the ministry of prayer and the Word to solve this one. So they solved the problem to enhance their commitment to the ministry of prayer and the Word.

Why were they so conscious of that, that it would be repeated twice in Acts 6? I believe they realized it because the roots of it were found back in the Old Testament temple. There the temple housed the teaching ministry and we saw this in people like Ezra. Jesus also reminded them that this was His Father's house and that it was a house of prayer for all people. The temple is fulfilled in Christ. We see in Christ's life that he teaches and prays, prays and teaches. Then the local church is called a temple of the Holy Spirit so the local church should be committed to prayer and the Word. Furthermore, the very church at Jerusalem that is walking through this time remembers that the church was conceived in a prayer meeting as we see in Acts 1 with 120. Then it was birthed to 3,000 and more with a sermon in Acts 2 by prayer and the Word. The church also matured as they gave themselves to the Apostles teaching, to the ministry of the Word, to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Prayer and the Word were crucial and the church builds this into its life. These are the two pillars that support the church for Jesus Christ.

Now let's look at this matter of the ministry of the Word (expository preaching). The Apostle Paul writes 13 epistles but 14 if you think he wrote Hebrews. I don't think he wrote Hebrews but I think someone close to him did. I think Luke did but I won't go into the reasons

here why I think Luke wrote Hebrews but I know that Paul wrote 13 epistles. The last epistle he wrote before he died was II Timothy. We talk a lot about I and II Timothy and Titus being pastoral epistles and I understand why but I see them as very specific pastoral epistles telling Titus and Timothy how to do revitalization work in the church at Ephesus and at Crete. Yet there is one very general pastoral epistle and that is II Timothy. II Timothy is like the Apostle Paul like Elijah, putting his mantle upon his Elisha, Timothy. He explains to them what ministry is all about. Let's look at these concluding words of Paul in II Timothy.

II Timothy 4:2a says [2a] *preach the word*. Or it could be translated expound the Word, proclaim the Word, declare the Word. Paul is giving this imperative to Timothy. The 'you' is not there in the verse but it is understood. I would suggest that he is saying the messenger is important because God uses them. Preaching comes from God through a person. Secondly, Timothy you're the messenger and the method is preaching. Thirdly, there is only one thing for you to preach and that's the Word.

So I believe in expository preaching. Most of the time that works out for me in working through books of the Bible. One of the reasons I like expository preaching is that when you work through a text you may have to deal with things you may not want to deal with but the text makes you deal with it because it's the next thing up. Secondly, I believe God builds balance into His Word and so then balance will come from preaching His Word. I believe preaching the Word is the safest and most effective way to mature believers in general and the church in particular with a mature, holistic understanding of the great doctrines of who our God is, what He has done and what He has done for us, in us and through us.

I also believe there is a place for topical expository preaching. For instance, we are looking at a topic in this study of what Christ's church should look like through His design yet we go to passages of Scriptures to support each of these distinctives. So it is going to a text and developing a text to affirm, elucidate and illuminate for us what our Lord is saying about that topic. We come to this when we have an election season and so many times I'll preach on the Christian duties of citizenship and issues that are before us from the Word of God. I even think there is a place to do something topical in general but by in large the preaching pulpit ministry should be expositional with seasons of topical expository preaching. Overall we call it *lectio continua* (Latin for continuous reading) and that is to take the text and preach its continuation as you work your way through it. That is what I believe Paul is saying to Timothy here in this verse, preach the word. This is what He calls us to.

A delightful moment in life not long ago was when a man who was visiting our church came to me and said 'Are you Harry Reeder?' I said, 'Yes, I'm he.' The man said 'I've been listening to you on the radio and found out you were right here in Birmingham so I wanted to come visit.' I said 'Praise the Lord!' I then introduced him to my wife. He said 'I've been looking all over this area for a suppository preacher.' One of the reasons I laughed is because that may be closer to reality than I would like to think.

Expository preaching is you preach the truth from the text (the Word) with application to God's people. I believe the Bible was designed so that it is preached with exposition. In this study I want to show you this from God's Word itself. From this II Timothy passage I want to look at the surrounding context of that imperative of 'preach the word.' Let's look back where Paul begins this call to Timothy of a preaching ministry. Remember Timothy is the messenger. The method is through preaching and the message is the Word. So Timothy is given the charge to preach the Word expositionally.

II Timothy 3:10–15 says [10] *You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, [11] my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. [12] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [13] while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. [14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

What in this text did he just tell us about the expositor, the preacher, the messenger? He said that preachers have to be disciplined and trained in preaching. We see that Timothy had learned from Paul. Timothy followed his teaching, his conduct, his aim in life etc. Timothy had a model and a mentor in Paul. Those who preach expositionally must be those who have been trained by expository preachers. So this is the first thing we see about an expositor who is committed to expository preaching. He has humbled himself to learn from others.

Secondly, he is an unstoppable learner. Preachers are not know-it-alls. Preachers are those who want to know it all and are constantly learning. When one stops learning then one must stop preaching. Throughout my life I have been able to draw from other expository preachers and one of those has been Dr. Frank Barker. Almost every time we would meet one of his questions to me was ‘Harry, what are you reading that you think would be good for me to read?’ And he still does it. Expository preachers are learners. They are insatiable and that is why they learn to ask questions instead of always wanting to talk and give answers.

When my kids were growing up we would give them this card when they were prone to talk that had the ‘wait’ written on it. Wait was an acronym for ‘why am I talking’ because there is one time in life you know you are not learning and that is when you are talking. So why not ask a question and listen? Then you will actually begin to learn. I would suggest that when you go meet with someone have this card with you and write out three questions that you would like to ask them that you can draw from them. Expository preachers must be learners and have models and mentors as well as good books to learn from.

Thirdly, learning is a way of life in which they are drawing from and not just a moment in life. Paul tells Timothy in II Timothy 3:14 to continue in what he has learned. So you learn from someone, always learning and do this as a way of life. Learning is a lifestyle that continues throughout all of your life.

Lastly, Paul points to himself, not a perfect man of God and preacher, but he does point to his perseverance. Preachers have to persevere in their relationship with the Lord and in their calling. They have to learn to stay the course if they are going to be expository preachers. So now that we have learned about the messenger let’s see what the text says about the message.

II Timothy 3:14–17 says [14] *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

You are preaching the Word and from the text we see seven things about our message. One, the message of expository preaching is a Gospel message for it is able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Secondly, it is a Christ centered message. Again, it is able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith **in** Christ Jesus. Let's say we are teaching on marriage, how does this apply? Ephesians 5:25 says [25] *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* We are right back to the Gospel here, aren't we? Ephesians 5:22 addresses the wives, [22] *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* The wife's relationship with her husband reflects her relationship with the Lord and is based not upon her husband but upon the Lord. There is where her confidence lies, not in his perfection but the Lord's.

What about leadership? I Peter 5:2–4 says [2] ***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; [3] not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*** Our example is the Chief Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep at the cross and we are right back at the Gospel. The Gospel works in and through all the Scriptures because it is the connecting tissue. When you are preaching the message you are going to be preaching the Gospel and the Gospel is Jesus – through faith in Christ.

Thirdly, you preach a God given message. All Scripture is inspired by God so the message we preach is God given. It is not our message, it is His message. God gave it to us.

Fourthly, because expository preaching is Gospel saturated, Christ exalting and from God's given Word then it is profitable in life. When I pick up a book I may or may not find something profitable. When I pick up the Bible everywhere I look in the Bible it is profitable. There is nothing superfluous.

Fifthly, the message we preach is life transforming. It teaches, reproves, corrects and trains in righteousness.

Number six, is that it is an equipping message. In verse 17 it says the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. They are equipped to worship, evangelize, disciple, love, etc. The Word of God equips you as to how you are to live.

Number seven is the message we preach is sufficient. It equips us for *every* good work. So we have learned about the message through these seven things and now I want to peel back the curtain.

You will find out every sermon that I have preached if you look at II Timothy 3:16–17. In expositional preaching you first start with the text. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable. Number two, you draw out what the text is teaching, for the Scripture is profitable for teaching, sound doctrine. Thirdly, comes application and first the application is negative because it is for reproof. The reason it starts off with reproof is because we don't start out in neutral. We are sinners and then the application goes to correction. We see this in Scripture when it says to put off the old man (reproof) and put on the new man (correction). Then comes training. What does it look like when we put off and put on? I call them takeaways.

Paul also does this in Ephesians 4:29 which says [29] *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths (reproof), but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion (correction), that it may give grace to those who hear (there is some serious training).* When I put off and put on and it effects my communication as a Christian so then one I choose the right words, not polluting words but good for building up. Proverbs 25:11 puts it this way, [11] *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.* Even when you have to deal with sin you can still do it by building people up. This is the ability to tear down sin while building people up.

Then you speak in the right way with the right tone with the right purpose and for Christians this is not to get something off of my chest.

People may come up to you and say ‘I just have something I need to tell you.’ But maybe I don’t need to hear it or maybe I don’t need to hear it at this moment. I think Job’s friends said the right things but I just think they picked the wrong time to say them. When you are self-centered in your communication you could care less. I had an elder in my church in Charlotte who was very adept at this. He would say to me ‘I think there is something you need to hear’ and that moment he took himself out of the middle and put me at the point where his speech was about to become a means of grace, not a means of personal gratification. It was a means of ‘other’ edification and that is a means of expository preaching.

So this is how I go about preaching a text. I read the text and then what is that text teaching you and me? The expositor goes to the grammar, the context, the history of it and how the Old Testament brings me to that text and how the New Testament take me back to the Old Testament. How is Christ exalted in this text? Where is the Gospel in this text? What are the implications of it in this text? How does it profit me by reproving, correcting and training me in righteousness? So here is the text, the doctrine, the application and the takeaway. Every now and then I’ll kind of mix those around lest you get used to it but that is what expository preaching is engaged in doing. When you walk away what does the text say? I believe that is what gives authority to preaching, not the gift of the preacher or the timeliness of the preacher but it is the Word of God, thus says the Lord and the Word of God applied.

Peter in Acts 2 preached from Joel 2 and then they basically asked Peter to get to the life takeaway for they interrupted him and said ‘what must we do to be saved?’ Peter responded this way in Acts 2:38–39, [38] *And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”* So we have covered the messenger and the message, now let’s turn our attention to the method of preaching.

II Timothy 4:1–8 says [1] *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: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [3] 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, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. [5] As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

[6] *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. [7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

So here are seven things about preaching. One, is when you preach you preach under the eye of God. You do not preach under the eye of men and women or your congregation. It doesn’t mean you are insensitive to your congregation but you preach under the eye of God.

Two, you preach knowing that Christ is coming soon. Verse 1 says ‘by His appearing and His Kingdom’ for every time you preach it may be your last sermon. Today I spent probably an hour talking with a man about when Jesus is coming again. The Prophets of the Old Testament understood the Gospel but they wanted to know who and when. We are on the other

side of that for we not only know who, Jesus but when He came. So they wanted to know who and when He was coming the first yet now we know who is coming again but we still want to know when the second time, even though the Lord tells us it is not for us to know when (Acts 1:7). So we tend to constantly talk about it because it is on our hearts and minds but the preacher knows that the sermon they are preaching may be the last one and Jesus may come again. The preacher may not get another sermon.

Three, if He is coming then that means you preach with the surety of the Judgment Seat. For according to this text the One who is coming is coming to judge the living and the dead. All will face Christ one day and you have the only message that can deliver them in that day. So preach under the eye of God and feel the eyelash of God brushing against you and you ought to hear the footsteps of Jesus for He is coming. You ought to also hear the gavel at the Judgment Seat consigning men either to the lake of fire and hell or to a new heavens and a new earth.

Fourthly, you ought to always be prepared and persistent in your ministry. Be ready in season and out of season, why? It is because in the name of religion churches will have pick-me-up talks and all kinds of talks that will draw a lot of people but don't get sidetracked just preach the Word. There will come a time that they will accumulate those who will tickle their ears, not those preaching sound doctrine, but you stay the course and be faithful. Don't get mad just stay focused. To be persistent and prepared in your ministry as preaching and you are preaching, you must never preach for the smiles of your people. If you preach for their smiles you will stop preaching when they frown. You need to preach for the smile of God. Love your people and keep preaching the Word of God.

Fifthly, you are to be sober-minded and temperate. I think it's great as preachers to have all kinds of hobbies and loves in life and even be noted or known about some of those but people ought not to think that anything takes our allegiance and affection but Christ if you are to be an effective preacher. There is a sober-minded and temperance about Christ being our allegiance and affection.

It's interesting to note that the Gospels document every human emotion in the life of Jesus except one. The Gospels never say that Jesus laughed. Please don't take this as I said Jesus never laughed because that is not what I'm saying here. How in the world can you be on a three year road trip and not laugh? I'm sure He laughed and perhaps there was even a twinkle in His eye about a camel going through an eye of a needle. I'm just saying that the Bible never documents Him laughing. I think it is trying to give a message. Preachers are not comedians. There is a place for laughter but you are not called to be a comedian. You are called to be a preacher. You are a physician of the soul and you are dealing with matters of eternity. It is not about you. It's about God's glory and those who hear.

Finally you are to pray for preachers that they preach with endurance and with full commitment. So Paul says he has fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith but the one I love is when he says I am already being poured out as a drink offering. Notice he doesn't say 'I've given myself as a burnt offering' for with a burnt offering there are ashes left over. With a drink offering there is nothing left because it is poured out, you have given everything. I believe those are the marks of expository messenger, the preacher, the expository message and expository preaching. Now you see your Paul.

Paul says I haven't been called to baptize but to preach the Gospel. He knows baptism is important but he knows it loses everything if he doesn't preach. I Corinthians 1:21 says [21] *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.* Paul also says in I

Corinthians 2: 1[1b] *When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.* Paul didn't come as a philosopher or an orator but he came to preach Word. I'm going home. So Timothy carry it on. You preach the Word. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. We pray You would seal Your Word into our hearts and in our lives that we might know You, love You and serve You. Please continue Your work of grace to raise up preachers of the Word who proclaim the glorious majestic testimony of the whole counsel of God with that thrust of the spear point of the Gospel and the exaltation of Christ preeminent. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.