

“The Necessity of Dispensational Preaching in The Church”

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Illustration:

The theologian vs. village idiot

During a recession in the early 19th century, a big city mayor tried to impose new property taxes on its neighboring small town villagers. When locals got this discouraging news, they sent a refusal-to-pay notice to the city in protest. The big city mayor, unwilling to back down, offered a theological debate as a means to solve the tax problem. In this debate the villagers would select one person to go head to head with the city’s world-renowned theologian.

The Selection

Later that night the villagers called an emergency town meeting to select a representative to compete in the debate. Unfortunately, no one felt qualified to volunteer with so much on the line. After several hours of pleading from the village town manager, a hand went up in the back of the room. It was the village idiot. The villagers realized they had no choice, so they voted to send him to the city.

The Debate (Silent)

The day of the great debate came. The village idiot and the theologian sat opposite each other for a full minute before the theologian raised his hand and showed three fingers. The village idiot looked back at him and raised one finger. The theologian waved his fingers in a circle around his head. The village idiot pointed to the ground where he sat. The theologian pulled out a wafer and a glass of wine. The village idiot pulled out an apple. The theologian stood up and said, "I give up. This man is too good. No new taxes."

The Explanation

An hour later, the city council stood around the theologian asking him what happened. The theologian said, "First I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity. He responded by holding up one finger to remind me there was still one God. Then I waved my finger around me to show him that God was all around us. He responded by pointing to the ground and showing that God

was forever present with us. I pulled out the wine and wafer to show that God absolves us from our sins. He pulled out an apple to remind me of original sin. He had an answer for everything. What could I do?"

Meanwhile, the locals had crowded around the village idiot. "What happened?" they asked. "Well," said the village idiot, "First he said to me that we had three days to get out of here, if we don't pay. I told him that not one of us was leaving. Then he told me that if we didn't leave, they would round us up. I let him know that we were staying right here."

"Yes, yes,.. and then???" asked the crowd.

"He pulled out his lunch, and made me hungry so I took mine out, too."

In our postmodern world where everything is relative, there is a desperate need to correctly communicate God's Word as the absolute Truth. In addition, today, in our churches, where stories are being told from the pulpit as a substitute for sound biblical doctrine, there is a cry for Dispensational preaching.

Why is the Church in need of Dispensational Preaching?

1. Dispensationalism is the antidote to liberalism

You never hear of a "liberal dispensationalist"!

Dispensationalism is grounded in the reality that the Bible is God's Word, and that our goal is to understand what God intended when He spoke...to take His words at face value.

Allegorical interpretation began the process of reading into God's Word, of looking for meaning beyond the plain sense of the language. Ultimately, that's the hermeneutic of liberal theology. In both cases man becomes the arbiter for determining what is true...and intended by God.

At its worst, moving away from a dispensational hermeneutic leads us to the approach taken by Satan in the Garden of Eden: "Did God really say?"

2. Dispensationalism provides the biblical basis for racial harmony and reconciliation

The Need for "Oneness"

Dispensationalism understands that God's original call to Abraham and the children of Israel had a universal focus: "Through you all the nations will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3) The Dispensationalist understands the distinction between Church and Israel, mainly that the Church is not Israel, then it is clear that the promises of the Kingdom of Israel must come to pass.

"Dispensationalism builds on the fact that God has given unconditional promises to Israel, such promises as the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1–3). In that one God promised a land and a physical posterity to Abraham, wherein He would bless the descendants of Abraham. Dispensationalists believe these promises will be fulfilled literally in the future with Israel. Nondispensationalists spiritualize the prophecies and relegate them to the church.¹"

Dispensationalism recognizes that God's program for Israel is still certain because "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). The anti-Semitism of the Christian Fathers that led to horrible acts against the Jewish people as "Christ-killers" could have been avoided had the church not turned against a literal interpretation in the past.

And it is Dispensationalism that helps us understand that the "church age" and the reality of what it means to be part of the Body of Christ.

- We understand there is neither "Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28).

- While church growth experts push the "homogeneous church growth principle," a literal understanding of the Bible recognizes that true Christianity forces believers to get out of their comfort zone and recognize the racial and cultural differences that are a vital part of the body of Christ.

- We recognize that the goal of this age is to "make disciples of all the nations" ...not just among those who look and act like us. From Peter being challenged to go to Cornelius (Acts 10) to the announcement of the elders in heaven that God has purchased people "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9), dispensationalists have been at the forefront of the modern mission movement.

- When Scripture is applied in correctly, it creates unity in the Body. "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that

¹ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 521.

they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20–21).

3. **Dispensationalists recognize the imminence of Christ's return...and its impact on our day-to-day lives**

The Need for a Dispensational Kingdom Mindset

Paul announced that at Christ’s return for His church, the dead in Christ would arise and we that remain would be caught up in the air to meet them. Paul expected Christ to come back in his own lifetime, and it helped propel him forward in his missionary efforts.

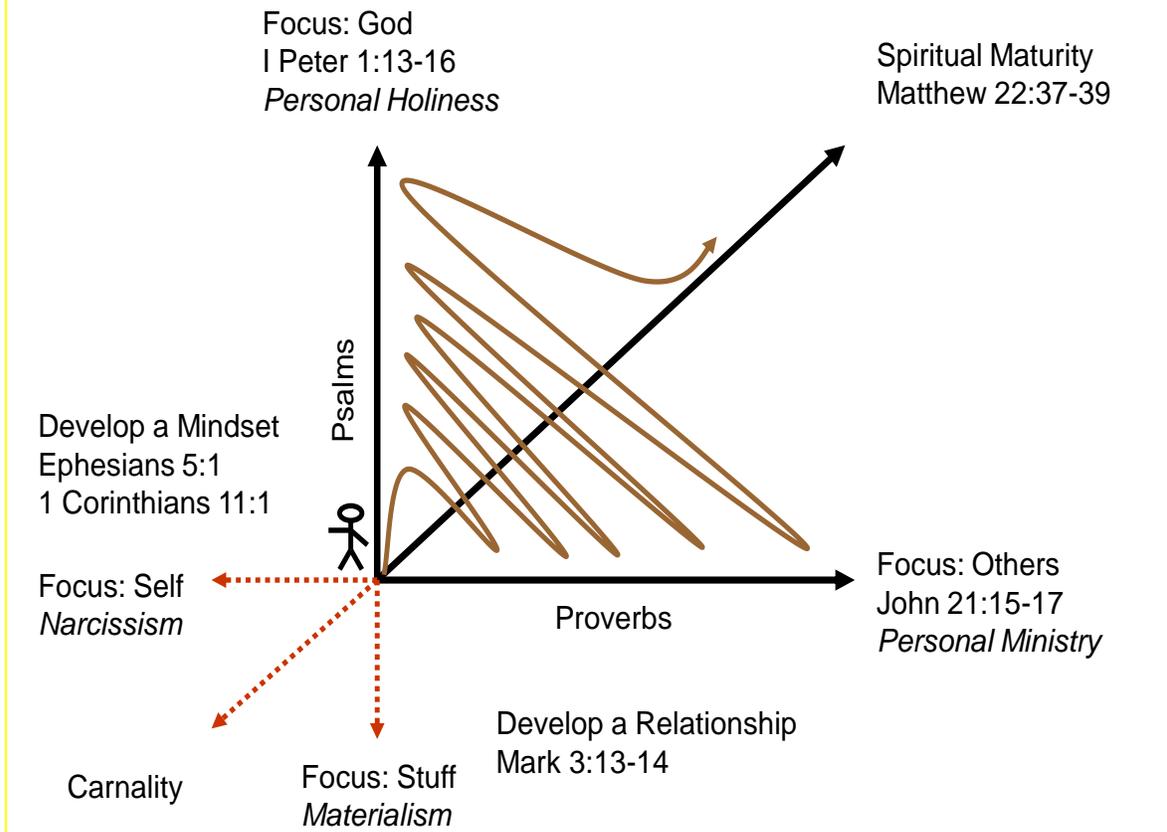
Those who don’t take the Bible literally tend not to focus so strongly on the imminence of Christ’s return...or see the importance of Bible prophecy. But every prophetic statement in the Bible is followed with a practical application for day-to-day living.

Dispensationalists are not “so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.” But they do recognize that there is more to life than just this life...and that Christ can return at any time. It impacts their approach to wealth and possessions, their approach to evangelism, their approach to world events.

The Christian who is not eagerly looking for Christ’s Second Coming and living his life in accordance with Christ’s will is too tied to this earth. But according to God’s Word, only those believers who have an eternal perspective, who are truly heavenly-minded, can be of service to Him on earth, because they are freed from the earthly desires and motivations that hinder the obedience of many of His children. Faithful believers are fruitful believers, and they know that their true citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and that their inheritance is a promise of God (Heb. 6:12), who cannot lie and who is always faithful to fulfill His promises.²

² John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 445.

The Structure for Accomplishing My Purpose:



Personal Holiness

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:13–16)

An eternal perspective looks at earthly realities through heavenly lenses. As believers examine their lives, challenges, and struggles from a biblical worldview, their priorities are then shifted toward God’s kingdom agenda.

Eternal perspective is a way of thinking, and the way believers think is critical to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Richard L. Mayhue puts it this way: “A human mind that (1) is redemptively focused on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Rom 8:5-8) plus being renewed regularly by Scripture (Rom 12:2) and (2) is then receiving a quality education (formal or informal) from the perspective of a Christian worldview will be the mind that achieves the

greatest gains and experiences the least waste (Ps 119:97-104).”³ Ralph L. Keiper, in *The Power of Biblical Thinking*, comments that “In His Sermon on the Mount, our Divine Lord again emphasizes the necessity of knowing God’s Word if we are to be the people God intends us to be.”⁴ J.P. Moreland writes,

That the mind is the crucial component in the spiritual journey cannot be accurately denied. The apostle Paul’s writings are probably the most complete set of biblical instructions about what individual and corporate discipleship are and how they are to be attained. Arguably, the most important text he ever penned about spiritual transformation is Romans 12:1-2. In this wise and tender admonition, the devotional master, Paul, puts his finger on the very essence of how we grow to become like Jesus: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,’ he tells us, ‘but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”⁵

4. Dispensationalism provides practical benefits to the Body of Christ.

Practical Benefits of Dispensational Preaching

Why do you think that an expositional approach to preaching is especially critical in African American and/or Hispanic Communities?

Expository preaching is the proclamation of God’s special revelation based on exegetical theological and homiletical interpretation delivered to the needs of a particular audience for the purpose of life transformation. For preaching to be considered expositional it must be true to the text preached, clear in understanding, interesting in delivery and relevant to the lives of the particular audience.

With this in mind, it is critical to the African-American context in the following ways.

³ Richard L Mayhue, “Cultivating a Biblical Mind-Set,” *Think Biblically!*, ed., John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 2003): 37.

⁴ Ralph L. Keiper, *The Power of Biblical Thinking* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1937), 27.

⁵ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 65.

- It guides us in understanding the truth of God’s Word and embracing its authority for our lives. In other words expository preaching helps us see that all of life is guided by Scripture (not our history, culture or cultural heroes) and all issues and endeavors must be submitted to the scrutiny of Scripture.
- It helps us guard ourselves against false ideas. Expository preaching debunks the historical (and sometimes contemporary) myths of black inferiority and white superiority. Because it is centered in truth, we can know what God really thinks about us and we are no longer be bewildered as to how a Holy God could ordain and legislate such a cruel plight as American slavery, Jim Crow and discrimination. Socially, it helps us avoid adopting reactionary approaches to injustice and abuse (i.e. black liberation theology, nation of Islam, Islam, etc.). Expository preaching helps us see the truth of not only how others are to react to us, but how we are to react to others and more importantly to God. Finally, it guards us against over depending on a political ideology as the solution to societal and public policy issues. Ultimately, societal problems and issue are rooted in man’s sinfulness. Thus we should not be duped by nor too tied to any party or political ideology that claims it has all the answers to our or the nation’s issues.

What Impact do you believe that the biblical teaching and training has had on African-American and/or Hispanic communities in Houston?

- Increased educational achievement and expanded educational pursuits:

Many are getting degrees here at CBS who would not otherwise do so. They are going further in their education pursuits – seminary degrees at Dallas Seminary, Houston Graduate School of Theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, The Master’s Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary.
- Expanded ministry opportunities:

Many (especially women) are involving themselves in various types of new and different ministries. These ministries include national and international missions, counseling, chaplaincy, student venture, campus crusade for Christ, young life. Some have developed their own ministries as 501(c) for prison ministry, nursing home ministry and women’s ministry.

- Prepared and abled teachers and preachers:
I have had several pastors throughout the city express appreciation for equipping their teachers or preachers with the skills for developing and delivering effective Bible lessons and message.

What stories can you share about CBS students who have been significantly impacted by the training on biblical hermeneutics and expository preaching?

Carl Isaac—Sr. Pastor of First Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church (for 32 years) took my Bible Study Methods class and gave this testimony:

- Professor Brown, there are few people more critical of preacher’s preaching than a pastor’s wife. My wife who is brutally honest about preaching (mine included) told me something Sunday that touched my heart. She told me that since I’ve been taking your class my preaching has gotten better. She said that the people have noticed it too. She told me that I was helping them understand the Word and how to apply the Word.
- This story is one of my favorite and most touching to me because Pastor Isaac has been serving the Lord longer than I’ve been alive.

Renee Gensheimer was a home-school mom who drove to my Bible Study Methods class 2 ½ hours round trip with her young adult daughter from Hockley, Texas. The following quote reflects how the class impacted her:

- Rev. Brown’s class has impacted my life in ways that I never expected. As a result of learning his methods and techniques, I now feel equipped for service in Christ. Scripture no longer reads like a foreign language but like a favorite book that I not only understand but love. I encourage all those who desire to make God’s Word come alive in their lives to take Rev. Brown’s class. You will finish his class as a well-equipped soldier for Christ.

Gary Higgins, Pastor of HOUSE International Worship Center took four expository preaching classes. While introducing me for the first time at his church he stated “this is the man that I’ve been telling you about. This is who changed my preaching.” Before he could finish introducing

me the church body stood and gave a thunderous ovation. He shared the following thoughts related to the impact of the expository preaching classes on his church and preaching ministry.

- Since I've disciplined myself to be an expository preacher doing exegetical, theological, and homiletical outlines every week, as well as observation and application questions, and etc., my ability to present the text has been totally transformed. I have the ability to take major concepts and break them into bite size nuggets where they are clearly understood. In the past because I had no format on how to prepare a message, my sermons were buck shots hoping that the people would glean something from the information, but I am able to confidently hit the bull's eye every time due to being able to develop a Theological Big Idea and purpose statement. I no longer have to choose substance over form, but can be both inspirational and educational. It allows me to exhort as well as edify solely revealing the eternal truths found within the historical facts, grammatical structure, and literal meaning of the text.
- Many of the members who were there before and now after my expository class say while they enjoyed my preaching before they enjoy them even more now because of the clarity while newer members say unlike many churches with high energy preaching like myself they not only get the information but they get the inspiration as well. They leave saying they enjoyed the message, understood the text, and know how to apply it to their lives. And they like the fact that they could follow along in their Bible and see what I'm saying as they read along. While other forms of preaching may talk about the text, expository preaching gives interpretation of the grammar, explanation of the culture, and application to life.

Joseph Eaglin who was a lay leader at the New Faith Church gave the following thoughts regarding the impact that the Bible Study Methods class had on him:

- If you are ready to be equipped with the right tools to combat Satan this class is the Full Metal Jacket!

How has the CBS/DTS training on biblical hermeneutics and expository preaching personally impacted you?

My first preaching professor at Dallas Seminary was Dr. Timothy Warren. He was known as the hammer. It was my intention to avoid his class at all costs. Somehow the course schedule was changed and he ended up being the professor for the class of which I had already enrolled. At the end of class after I had preached, he called me back into the classroom. He asked, "Who taught you to preach?" It took 10 minutes for me to answer that question. I did not want him

to have high expectations of me for the rest of the semester. He said, "It's obvious somebody taught you. You do it too well." Finally, he pried the answer out of me. I told him that D.Z. Cofield taught me to preach at Houston Bible Institute (CBS). He said simply, "It figures." He intimidated me more so by telling me that he wanted me to take all my preaching classes from him. During my time at Dallas I was selected for the teaching preaching program and was a teaching assistant for the preaching department. As far as preaching is concerned Dallas (especially Dr. Warren) equipped me with the skills of crafting biblical messages from every genre of Scripture and the freedom to preach from my own unique approach to delivery.

Although certainly my skills in interpreting and preaching Scripture matured at Dallas, I learned to preach at HBI (CBS). I learned to outline here... to study here... to manuscript here. Bible Study Methods and Preaching at HBI (CBS) facilitated every bit of my growth and success at Dallas and thus my ministry to day.

Conclusion

So why is Dispensational preaching and teaching necessary?

It provides the correct antidote to liberalism that is impacting our churches worldwide. It provides the biblical basis for racial harmony and reconciliation that is desperately needed in our world. In addition, it allows all believers to recognize the imminence of Christ's return...and it's impact on our daily living. Finally, Dispensational Preaching provides practical benefits to the Body of Christ that gives us hope.