

What Can the Church Do to Improve the Quality of its Preaching Ministry?

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What do you do when the preaching at your church is weak (that is, when you're not edified, and not benefitting from it)? How can the church improve this area of ministry? By extension, what do you do if your church is set in its ways and makes no effort to improve?

The priority of quality preaching of the Word is neglected in many churches. A weak pulpit weakens the church. God disapproves preachers who do not rightly divide the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). His Word is to be handled accurately. That means a preacher of God's Word must be a careful exegete and expositor. Paul solemnly charged Timothy to "preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2). Further, Nehemiah 8:1-8 highlights timeless principles in preaching the Word: *take the Word, read the Word* distinctly, *explain the Word* so that people will be able to understand its meaning, and apply it. Today, we call this "expository preaching." "The God-ordained means to save, sanctify, and strengthen His church is preaching" (John MacArthur).

Let me make some practical suggestions:

1. *Study the Scriptures*

The first step to improve the quality of preaching is to study the Scriptures to see what it says about handling the Word in preaching and teaching. A Homiletical workshop to create this awareness among all who preach the Word is a desirable first step. The elders should take the initiative for it with the help of other capable and gifted teachers of the Word.

2. *Evaluate the Preaching Periodically*

Periodic evaluation of the weekly preaching in the assembly will make us more accountable and responsible in preaching ministry. It will be an added motivation for more preparation, prayer, study and total dependence on the Holy Spirit. This will also create an awareness of the solemnity of the preaching ministry. Lovingly, gracefully and truthfully, the elders and all others who have preaching responsibility should come together to pray, and honestly evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the sermons, and they must be willing to learn from one another. This should open the way for meaningful discussion and for any appropriate changes that should be implemented. Periodic evaluation of the weekly preaching will give us a better vision for this sacred task.

The most important guideline to bear in mind is that our ministry of the Word should edify (build up) the body of Christ. After each preaching/teaching, please ask these Scriptural questions: Did this ministry edify the body? If not, what are the reasons? What can we do to fix the problem? Preaching/teaching the Word is an indispensable part of pastoral ministry. But these guidelines are only possible and practical if the team

is respectful to one another; honest, open, and spiritually mature with a vision for the health of the assembly. They should be willing and ready to make appropriate changes, if necessary, in this most important area of the church's ministry.

3. Guard the Pulpit

The elders and pastoral leaders who plan the preaching schedule should prayerfully and responsibly decide on who are the ones to be given the responsibility of preaching the Word, as it is the most important ministry in the gathering of the local church. This should be done carefully and prayerfully. Feeding the flock is the primary responsibility of the elders/shepherds. When they assign the preaching responsibility to others, they must make sure that it is in the hands of qualified men, and their ministry will bless and benefit the body of Christ. It must be the collective decision of the oversight.

The usual practice in many assemblies of accommodating everyone and giving opportunities to preach without due consideration of their calling and giftedness is a total disservice to the people of God. This false system that is perpetuated for years in the name of "priesthood of all believers" (or "preacherhood of all believers") and 'New Testament Pattern' must be eradicated for profitable and edifying Word ministry. No church will be spiritually strong that does not give preaching its proper place. All preachers should remember the sobering words of James, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

4. Encourage Open Dialogue

The believers should exercise their congregational (spiritual) freedom to share their concern to their elders in matters related to the preaching ministry. This must be done respectfully and honestly, and not with a critical spirit. The elders are responsible to listen patiently to such concerns, evaluate them, and try to solve the deficiencies in this vital area of ministry.

5. Invest in Training and Mentoring

Another practical step is to have special training sessions for preaching, sharing from the Word, and exhortations for believers who have demonstrated interest, skill, giftedness, and commitment in this area of ministry. This can be done through some sessions on the basics of homiletics and expository preaching. Teaching others from one's experience and methods of disciplined study and preparation also can be very beneficial. After a period of careful mentoring, evaluation, practical suggestions and input by the elders and other mature brethren, some of these mentees can be encouraged to take the pulpit in the meetings of the church.

My suggestion is that they should start with small group settings, and weekday sessions, and other opportunities for brief exhortations, and eventually take the pulpit in the gathering of the church. But the main message/preaching times should not be training or rehearsal sessions. Sad to say, these practical and sensible suggestions are totally ignored in many assemblies (sometimes even considered as carnal). A casual and careless attitude to the proclamation of the Word will weaken the assembly and the

spiritual health of believers. Irreparable damage has already been done in many assemblies.

6. Pray for Your Preachers

The preaching and teaching ministry of the church need the prayers of God's people. We need God's special blessing in this area of ministry. The elders should motivate the congregation for fruitful and edifying ministry every time we meet. Let us pray earnestly for all those who handle the Word.

If the leadership of an assembly continues to take a very careless and casual attitude to the preaching and teaching of the Word, and not willing to make appropriate changes to honor the Word and edify the people of God (even after knowing about this issue from other concerned believers), one has only two options - Prayerfully endure this struggle, waiting and hoping for a change, and being satisfied with what you have - or prayerfully seek the will of the Lord, consider moving to another doctrinally sound assembly, Which upholds the solemnity of the sacred task of preaching the Word, where you can serve, meaningfully get involved, and grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

Remember, mist in the pulpit will always create a fog in the pew.