

# The Preacher Is Accountable to God

Article by:

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I am convinced that the highest, holiest, and hardest calling for the man of God is to preach the Word of God. Certainly the God-called evangelist should be a mighty preacher for God.

Since preaching is God's idea, and it is He who has put us in the ministry (1 Timothy 1:12), our greatest desire in preaching should be to please Him! I have no desire to be a "seeker sensitive" preacher, but I do have every desire to be a "Saviour sensitive" preacher.

Second Timothy 4 lays out the principles for that kind of preaching. Paul declared, "*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*"

God's first and foremost method for communicating His Word to this generation is preaching. Titus 1:3 says, "*But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.*" God has not chosen drama, movies, and concerts, but preaching as His primary means of revelation.

First Corinthians 1:21 reminds us that, "*It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" There is no question that preaching pleases God. The question is does *my* preaching please God? No doubt the two best books ever written on preaching are Paul's epistles to Timothy. You might even entitle 2 Timothy *Encouragement from Death Row*. The faithful Apostle was preparing to die for his faith and the preaching of it when he wrote 2 Timothy. I am convinced that his counsel to a young preacher in the first century is still valid for every preacher in the twenty-first century. He gives us a detailed description of preaching that pleases God.

## **Preach with the Awareness of Christ**

*“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”* Proverbs 15:3

*“Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.”* Ephesians 5:10

*“For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”* Galatians 1:10

I'll never forget the first time I preached with my dad in the audience. Needless to say, my pastor/father had a sobering effect on me.

The awareness of his presence both inspired and intimidated me. He was my preaching hero and I definitely wanted his approval. How much more important is it to live in the constant awareness that Almighty God is at every preaching event!

If you were to go into the choir room in my home church, you would see plainly the sign that reads, “Sing for the audience of ONE.” Preachers, we must preach for the audience of One. I often remind myself, “I have nothing to prove, I have one Person to please.” Repeatedly I have announced to teenagers, “You can be a crowd pleaser or a Christ pleaser, but you cannot be both.” Do you practice the presence of God every time you stand to declare the Word of God?

## **Preach for the Assessment of Christ**

Your ultimate accountability for the sermon is not to the deacons, congregation or your alma mater, but to Christ. It is Christ who enlisted you, empowered you, and will one day examine you. Romans 14:12 is plain, *“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”* Barnes writes,

“That is, of his character and conduct; his words and actions; his plans and purposes. In the fearful arraignment of that day, every work and purpose shall be brought forth, and tried by the unerring standard of justice. As we shall be called to so fearful an account with God, we should not be engaged in condemning our brethren, but should examine whether we are prepared to give up our account with joy, and not with grief.”

The Apostle James cautions preachers, *“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation”* (James 3:1). The judgment seat of Christ will be an amazing event for every believer, but the strictest, strongest, and severest judgment is reserved for the preacher or teacher of the Word of God. Extreme caution must be taken to preach for Christ alone. Often I say to myself, “You are not preaching for them, but for HIM! Keep your eye on the THRONE when preaching to the throng!”

The phrase, “at his appearing” was used of a Roman emperor who would come to visit a town. Months of preparation were made before his arrival or appearing. It was the event of a lifetime. The greatest event in the future of a preacher is the appearing of Christ and His assessment of the preacher. Paul put it this way, *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire”* (1 Corinthians 3:11–15).

Years ago I preached a message entitled, “There is Fire in Your Future.” There is not only the fire of Hell for the unbeliever, but the fire of the judgment seat for the believer.

I have often wondered if the fire there may be the scrutinizing eyes of our sovereign Saviour examining our motives and methods of preaching. It is my privilege to preach over five hundred times yearly somewhere in this world. Rarely do I stand to declare the Word of God without thinking, “Will this message be fireproof?” Fellow evangelist, is your ministry fireproof? Oh my preacher brethren, we must preach accountably.

Second Timothy 4:2 says, “*Preach the word.*” The word *preach* means “to herald the truth.” The idea is to “declare authoritatively.” First, we are to preach accountably. Second, we are to preach authoritatively. Listen to the definition of a herald. He is an “imperial messenger who goes through the streets to announce the laws, government policies and decrees, or the appearing of the Emperor; he is commissioned to declare them in a loud, clear voice so they all can hear. He is not a negotiator but a proclaimer of the truths of the Emperor.”

We have no right to dilute, delete, diminish, or dummy-down anything that God said in His Word. We are to declare it exactly the way He said it. A man stopped me one night years ago and said, “You are too dogmatic.” I said to him, “Sir, do you know where the term *dogmatic* came from?” He said, “No.” I said, “Well it came from the word *dogma*. Do you know what the word *dogma* means?” He said, “I am not sure.” I said, “The word *dogma* literally is the word *doctrine*. The Bible is doctrine.” He said, “I agree.” I replied, “Then why would I give pious platitudes? Why would I simply suggest a truth that is a settled doctrine and ought to be preached with a sure declaration?”

In Jonah 3:1–2 we read, “*And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.*” In other words, “Jonah, you tried to run from Me once. You ended up in whale seminary and got some good theology concerning My omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Now that you understand Me, make sure that you go where I told you to go and say what I told you to say.”

Matthew 3:1–2 reads, “*In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” Repentance is not an option; it is an obligation. Matthew 4:17 adds, “*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” How are we going to do this? You will remember that when Jesus chose His twelve disciples in Mark 3:14, “*He ordained twelve that they should be with Him.*” There is a key to this verse: with Him, then for Him. You will be afraid to teach authoritatively unless you spend a lot of time with the Authority. You will be intimidated by the crowd unless you are spending intimate time with Christ.

The Bible says, “*He ordained twelve that they should be with Him and that He should send them forth to preach.*” The word *sent* is recorded one hundred twenty-three times in the New Testament. It is a military term that was used for the commanding officer issuing orders to his soldiers. The King of the universe has commanded His preaching disciples to stand and declare the Word of God without fear or favor.

In Matthew chapter seven our Saviour concludes the Sermon on the Mount. The Bible says that, “*The people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.*” There are too many scribes in the pulpits today. We need more prophets. Dr. Vance Havner said, “There are so few prophets in our modern day Baptist churches that we can now declare the church a ‘non-prophet corporation’.” When we preach the Word of God we are not to imply or suggest; we are to declare, not arrogantly but authoritatively, what God said and the way He has said it.

Some may say, “Well, preacher, you don’t understand the times in which we are living.” Let me remind you about the age in which Paul and Timothy were living. You could die for preaching authoritatively. That is what happened to Paul. You see, the Roman Empire hated authoritative preaching. The Jewish nation hated authoritative preaching. But God liked it because He is the Authority of all authorities. Somebody said to me, “Well, preacher, it is the twenty-first century, and I just don’t think you can confront like you used to.” The buzz word in some seminaries today seems to be “connect.” Well, I would like for somebody to tell me through all of the connections we have made, where is revival? I think we better get back to authoritative preaching that confronts people exactly where they are, and tells them exactly what God said, if we ever expect to see God flow through our ministries and into the lives of people.

May I ask my readers a thought provoking question: “When has it ever been acceptable to preach confrontationally with authority?” I don’t remember any place either scripturally or historically when strong, prophetic, confrontational preaching has been popular.

Still others may argue, “It is my temperament. I just can’t stand and preach dogmatically as you might.” We are not comparing preaching styles, my friends. I am talking about principle not personality. There are some people who will be more demonstrative with authority and some a little more quiet. Some a little louder, some a little more subdued. But authority allows the people in the pew to know that the commands of God are not an option but an obligation. You see, Timothy had a different temperament than Paul. It appears that he may have had some kind of stomach trouble. The crowds may have intimidated him. He was a young man with older people sitting in the congregation, but Paul still wrote to him and said, “Preach the Word.”

This God-hating, sin-saturated society needs authoritative preaching! As it was in the days of Isaiah, “*The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God to the wicked*” (Isaiah 57:20-21). It is time for all of us to heed the words of our Sovereign to the prophet, “*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins*” (Isaiah 58:1).