

# Pastoral Preaching

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There has been a good deal said and written about “expository preaching,” “Christ-centered preaching,” “redemptive-historical preaching,” etc., but very little has been said about “pastoral preaching.” Pastoral preaching is certainly expository, Christ-centered, and it always takes redemptive history into account, but it goes much further. Pastoral preaching is intensely personal and directed to a particular local church. It requires Christlike holiness of the preacher and aims to shepherd a church in the same. Consider some of the following qualities of a pastoral preacher.

1. The pastoral preacher’s sanctification is his main task in sermon preparation.

Certainly, the preacher needs to study his text and do all of the technical work required to prepare to preach the Word faithfully. But the pastoral preacher understands that his strength and sincerity in the pulpit is tightly tied to his own life of communion with Christ. He prepares to preach Christ, not as a detached academician, but as one who is growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ personally. All week long, he prepares as a “whole man,” loved, taught, and ruled by Christ in his mind, heart, and will in every part of his life. During particularly busy weeks, when he’s had less time to study for his sermon, God will often carry him in the pulpit, if he has been faithful to walk with Christ. His sincerity, love to Christ, and love to the church is basic to pastoral preaching.

2. The pastoral preacher’s first responsibility during sermon delivery is his own personal holiness.

While preaching a sermon, the pastoral preacher aims to love God and love men. That is, he strives to obey both tables of the Ten Commandments by humble faith in Christ. Practically speaking, this means that while he’s preaching, he’s self-forgetful in the pulpit and that he lovingly thinks about the good of the church and the glory of God. His faith and love issue in sincere conviction and humble boldness. He refuses to make a show of himself, his gifts, his intellect, or his personality; rather, his goal is to love the people and to love Christ, not himself. He’s unpretentious. He refuses to put on a “preaching voice;” instead, he preaches as he would talk to ordinary people in ordinary conversation. He doesn’t pretend to be something he’s not. If he’s depressed, he doesn’t pretend to be happy. If he’s emotionally flat, he doesn’t hike up his feelings in pretense. The pastoral preacher doesn’t try to change his personality, but seeks to preach Christ in whatever personality the Lord has given him. His goal is to drift into the background, while Christ alone stands in the foreground. He wants people to leave saying, “what a great Savior,” not, “what a great preacher.” The pastor’s holiness in and out of the pulpit, coupled with his faithful Christ-centered exposition, is absolutely necessary to pastoring the church that is before him.

3. The pastoral preacher trusts that the effectiveness of preaching depends on God’s sovereign grace alone. The pastoral preacher realizes that he has no power whatsoever to change people. He understands that he is responsible to speak the truth with conviction, clarity, and love. But he also understands that the Spirit must add His blessing if the Word of God is to have any effect on people. That is, he believes that God alone is God, and he abandons any attempt to do what God alone can do. Therefore, the pastoral preacher’s highest goal is not to change people, but to love and honor Christ, no matter how people respond. This frees the pastoral preacher from trying to “set those people straight” or “get them in line” in an authoritarian way. It also frees him from trying to play on people’s emotions through cheap sentimental appeals, and from trying to entertain people intellectually so

that they leave feeling impressed with something other than Jesus. Understanding God's sovereign grace also increases the pastoral preacher's sense of responsibility to pray. Preaching will only change hearts and lives by the work of the Holy Spirit; so, the pastoral preacher prays diligently that the Spirit will work in the hearts of the people. This disposition of trust in God's sovereign grace protects the sheep under his care from authoritarianism, intellectualism, and emotionalism. It leaves them with nothing but Christ, which is the essence of true shepherding.

4. The pastoral preacher preaches to the particular local church in front of him. Faithful preaching is never disconnected from pastoring. That's because a pastoral preacher is not merely concerned with the meaning and theology of the text, but also with the particular people to whom he's preaching. Faithful preaching brings the whole counsel of God to bear upon the particular lives and circumstances of a particular people. Not a single sermon or letter in the New Testament was directed to the universal church. Rather, every sermon and every letter was directed to an identifiable audience and addressed the providences, temptations, sins, and trials of those people. That means a faithful preacher must know the people of his local church. He must live his life among them, study their souls in light of God's Word, pray for them, identify with them, rejoice and weep with them, labor among them, and preach Christ to them as they really are.

Pastoral preaching is not possible if the preacher takes a distant CEO approach to his position in the local church. Rather, pastoral preaching is fed and supported by true pastoral relationships with God's beloved people. The preacher must be among his people in visiting, counseling, in performing funerals and weddings, and in personal conversations. Only in this way can a pastor truly know the condition of the flock and preach the truth according to their true spiritual condition.

If someone wrongly argues that faithful preaching is merely explaining the Bible, or merely showing how each text fits in redemptive history and points to Christ, then pastors of local churches don't need to preach at all. They might just as well broadcast sermons from other skillful preachers who are capable Christ-centered expositors. But if faithful preaching necessarily involves pastoring, as Scripture teaches that it does, then all preaching must be pastoral preaching, and it must be lovingly aimed at a particular people.