

# Fourteen Incontrovertible Arguments in Favour of Expository Preaching

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[If John Maxwell can be incontrovertible about Leadership I don't see why I shouldn't be incontrovertible about Preaching!]

In his book *"The Contemporary Christian"*, John Stott describes the preacher's task as follows: "To preach is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and God's people obey him". I want to argue that best [but not the only] way of preaching is Expository Preaching – that is preaching and teaching through books of the Bible one by one.

I'm not arguing for boring Expository Preaching, nor do I think that the expository method will by itself ensure that the full message of the Bible is heard. I am arguing that as a general practice Expository Preaching makes sense and is of great value to the preacher and the congregation.

Expository Preaching is the preaching of the message of a book of the Bible, usually verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, by explanation and application of it to the congregation. It was the preaching method of the Reformers, and that of Early Church preachers like Augustine and John Chrysostom.

Here are 14 Incontrovertible Arguments in favour of Expository Preaching:-

- (1) Preaching through the books of the Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, respects and reflects God's authorship. God did not give us a book of quotable quotes, nor a dictionary of useful texts, nor an anthology of inspiring ideas. When God caused the Scriptures to be written the medium that he used was that of books of the Bible. If that was good enough for the author it should be good enough for the preacher.
- (2) Expository Preaching reflects God's respect for human authors. One of the most beautiful features of the Bible is the way in which God causes his truth to be written and yet does not over-ride the individual writer, but respects their place in history, their vocabulary, their spoken and literary style. If God is so careful to respect the human authors of the Scriptures we should endeavour to do the same by reading, studying, preaching and teaching their books in the order in the way in they wrote them.
- (3) Expository Preaching respects the historical context of each part of the Bible. The Bible is not a set of timeless truths removed from historical context, but each book of the Bible is firmly rooted in history, and the perspective of its human author. We do most justice to this historical context when we preach texts in their context, that is in the writing in which they occur.
- (4) Expository Preaching respects the context of salvation history. The unfolding drama of salvation is brought to us within salvation history; and each text, verse, chapter and book has its place within that salvation history. The best way to preach these books is to link them to their place in salvation history, not to extract from them trans-historical, theological, pastoral or devotional themes.
- (5) Expository Preaching preserves Biblical shape and balance. It gives the same focus and concentration that God gives in the Bible. Other people's topical preaching inevitably misses this balance. It is more difficult to see the same imbalance in our own topical preaching!
- (6) Expository Preaching ensures that we preach on difficult topics, verses and books. I would not choose to preach from the text 'I hate divorce' unless forced to do so by a sermon series on Malachi. I would not choose to preach on Romans 9-11, but preaching my way right through Romans forces me to do so. Lectionaries are no help, because modern lectionaries seem to go out of their way to avoid difficult topics, even cutting poems and stories in half to avoid embarrassment. Expository Preaching will at least make us preach on the difficult parts of the Bible.
- (7) Expository Preaching saves time in preparation and presentation. Preachers need to do a lot of work in preparing their sermons and finding the historical context, and need to convey the context of verses in which they preach in the sermon as well. If we move from text to text as we move from sermon to

sermon, or if we move from text to text within sermons, we will be less and less inclined to give the context of those texts and more and more inclined to take them out of context. [Of course 'the text' is actually the whole book: only preachers think of 'the text' as a short extract!]

- (8) Expository Preaching provides a good model of exegesis. We ought to preach and teach the Bible in a way in which we hope people will read it. People should pick up good models of using the Scripture from us. We do not want to encourage people to flip through the Bible, picking out verses that look encouraging or inviting. If we want people to read the Bible as it is written, that's the way we should preach it.
- (9) In Expository Preaching each sermon forms part of a divine sequence. The sequence is that of the writer of the book of the Bible. Following this sequence means that our teaching and their learning is cumulative as each sermon prepares the way for the next, and each sermon summarises the message of the last and shows its sequence in biblical thought.
- (10) Expository Preaching makes sense! Even the most convinced post-modernists among us still read books from beginning to end. This is because it's a remarkably sensible way of reading a book. Why would we adopt a different model in our reading and teaching of the Scriptures?
- (11) Expository Preaching teaches people the Bible. Its assumption is that the Bible is relevant and effective as it comes from the mouth of God. It assumes that the information in the Bible is important for us; that these things were 'written for our learning'.
- (12) Expository Preaching provides an accessible, useable and safe model of Bible teaching and preaching. If one of our tasks is to encourage lay people in ministry, then the best thing to do is to provide them with a model of teaching which they can use at any level. It is a good work to show the people a model of Bible teaching that they can use when they teach others.
- (13) Expository Preaching helps people to avoid repeating their ten favourite themes. Every preacher has ten sermons. The difficulty comes for the preacher and the congregation when they are repeated for the tenth time. Of course, no method can stop the determined preacher from mounting a hobby horse and riding it to death!
- (14) Expository Preaching follows God's syllabus for us. One helpful way of viewing the Bible is to see it as God's syllabus. In it God lays out the way of salvation and what human beings need to learn in order to turn to Jesus Christ in faith and obedience. The Bible is the syllabus that God has provided – why would we replace it with another of our own invention?

'A Fruitful exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture' from *The Book of Homilies* includes the following memorable words: "let us reverently hear and read Holy Scriptures which is the food of the soul. Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament and not run to the stinking puddles of men's traditions, devised by man's imagination."

Why is it that those who are so enthusiastic in theory about the centrality and importance of the Scriptures, have in many places given up on the serious educational task of teaching them to their people and of using them in evangelism?

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