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Preaching the Word Part 2

In our last issue we talked about the reality of Jesus as the Word of God and the calling to preach him. To preach the Word of God is to announce to humanity the good news of what Jesus has done with them, regardless of what they may believe about that announcement.

We can think of this in terms of “objective” and “subjective” reality. The word “objective” refers to that which is factually true about a person. The “subjective” is what a person believes to be true about himself or herself.

So, for example, a 98 lb. anorexia patient may subjectively think of herself as “fat”. Objectively, however, she is dangerously thin and unhealthy. She may believe that she is fat, but she is not. Her subjective belief does not change the objective truth about her. However, her subjective belief is way out of line with the objective reality and this disconnection threatens her very life.

Objectively, all are in Christ. Subjectively, some believe this and some don't. Our subjective view of ourselves has no impact on what is objectively true of us, but the quality of our eternal life depends upon getting our subjective view of ourselves into line with the objective reality about ourselves. Just like the anorexia patient, we will experience life as misery and hell if we believe a lie about ourselves.

One of the greatest temptations to error that we face as preachers is the danger of preaching from the subjective instead of the objective. If we focus our proclamation of the Word on the repenting, believing and trusting that our listeners need to do then we will lose sight of the objective reality we have been called to proclaim.

The Word of God is objectively real and the salvation he has given humanity is objectively real. It is the objective reality of what he has done that we are called to proclaim as preachers of the Word. In fact, there is no subjective experience of God without there first being an objective truth and experience!

The task of preaching is the proclamation of the good news of this objective reality: humanity has been adopted into the life the Son shares with his Father.

The subjective issue centers around the questions of “do you believe this truth?” and “what is stopping you from believing this truth?” These subjective issues are better dealt with in counseling, in small groups, and in question/answer sessions. When we preach the bulk of our time needs to be spent proclaiming the Word.

Here are some examples of what it might sound like when we preach the Word, focusing on the objective reality and announcing the good news of who Jesus is and what he has done.

1. *You are forgiven, whether you believe it or not!*
2. *You are included in the life the Son shares with his Father. I say that regardless of who you are, what you've done or not done, or even whether you believe it or not. The Word of God says you belong to the Father and the Word never lies.*

3. *You are in Christ and Christ is in you. You can believe it or not, love it or lump it, enjoy it or hate it, but it won't change the truth. You live and move and have your being in him and he will never let go of you.*

4. *You are an adopted child of the Father. It doesn't matter whether you have been baptized or not, whether this your first Sunday in church or your 1,000th Sunday in church. When he died, you died; when he rose, you rose; when he ascended to heaven, you ascended to heaven.*

Statements such as these are the proclamation of the Word and I believe they need to characterize about 75% of our sermon content.

Here are some examples of the subjective issues that arise. These questions and answers form the follow-up to our preaching of the Word but they are not the preaching of the Word itself. I believe answering these questions should take up 25% or less of our sermon time (even if they are 100% of our counseling time!)

Q. If Christ is in everyone then why do some people go to hell?

A. People in hell are as included in Christ as people in heaven, but they refuse to believe and celebrate the salvation they have been given.

Q. Why evangelize if everyone is okay with God?

A. The vast majority of humanity doesn't know that they are okay with God. Evangelism is needed to tell people the truth about who they are so they can live accordingly.

It is our calling to proclaim the Word of God. Our listeners are bombarded with messages of judgment, exclusion and fear every day of their lives. When we finally get a chance to speak the Word into their lives we need to be bold, clear and refreshing – just like a good beer at the end of a hot day! If we focus on the subjective reality then we are only reinforcing people's fallenness.

The way to help people believe the truth is to keep talking about the truth. Speaking constantly about their need to change their beliefs only reinforces the idea that their beliefs have power to alter reality. Speaking constantly about Jesus reinforces the truth that he is reality and it is what he says and does that determines who we are. That's what it means to preach the Word.

~ Jonathan Stepp