

Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea For Preaching*, Morgan, PA, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 285 pp.

Author's Intent:

Given the editorial nature of this work and its eleven contributing authors, it is clear that Soli Deo Gloria Publications sought to collect and present a mosaic of God-honoring principles under-girding the practice of biblical preaching. In some ways, the book represents an orthodox alternative to the tidal wave of culturally driven, biblically anemic considerations espoused by mainline denominations and liberal theologians. In short, each contribution, chapter by chapter, is designed to offer Scriptural evidence, spiritual motivation, and practical reasoning to support theologically conservative, expository preaching. It is clear to this reader that the authors, both individually and editorially, intend to differentiate religious chatter from biblical preaching. Consequently, the hallmarks of God-honoring preaching are captured and presented against the back drop of biblical mandates, while simultaneously contrasted against many of today's ill-equipped alternatives.

The Book's Content:

One of the book's greatest assets is its comprehensive content. Moreover, because the topics are dispersed amongst some of the faith's most recognizable and gifted believers, a tremendous array of perspective is added to the fine tuned subject matter. Following is a list of the work's content, listed by chapter title and corresponding author. The Primacy of Preaching was written by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. The Foolishness of Preaching was offered by James Montgomery Boice. Derek Thomas wrote Expository Preaching. Joel R. Beeke penned Experiential Preaching. The Teaching Preacher

represented R.C. Sproul's contribution. Preaching To The Mind was added by John Armstrong. Preaching To The Heart came from Sinclair B. Ferguson. Don Kistler wrote Preaching With Authority. Eric Alexander covered Evangelistic Preaching. John Piper was the author of Preaching To Suffering People and John MacArthur finished the book with a chapter entitled A Reminder To Shepherds.

Striking Thoughts and Constructive Contributions:

- "...this book cries for substance in preaching"
- "...sometimes preachers are ejected and fired... That is simply one of the realities of pulpit ministry. Why? Because 'the Word of God' is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword... God uses the Word to rebuke and correct His people. And it is the preacher who must speak that word and reap the response."
- "I will go so far as to assert that if you are at peace with the world, you have abdicated your calling... To put it straight: you have been bought! If there is no controversy in your ministry, there is probably very little content to your preaching."
- "Paul makes the point... that the central purpose of ministry is the preaching of the Word."
- "Where the authentic preaching of the Word takes place, the church is there. And where that is absent, there is no church. No matter how high the steeple, no matter how large the budget, no matter how impressive the ministry, it is something else."
- "What we preach is not what the world expects to hear. It is not a message they will hear anywhere else."
- "We preach Christ as a three step process: first, proclaiming Christ, second admonishing every man, and third, teaching every man."
- "When you seek a minister for your congregation, look for someone who is determined to please God. You will be blessed."
- "Great preachers, like great golfers, follow basic rules. The more they practice these rules, the better they become."
- "The preacher is to make God's word known and make it understandable. He is to limit himself to it without adding or subtracting."
- "There is more to preaching than imparting information. Unless sermons address the affections, they have failed as sermons."
- "Experimental preaching stresses the need to know by experience the great truths of the Word of God."
- "Experimental preaching is discriminatory preaching. It clearly defines the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian, opening the kingdom of heaven to one and shutting it against another."

- “Heart knowledge does not lack head knowledge, but head knowledge may lack heart knowledge.”
- “We must be what we preach... Our hearts must be transcripts of our sermons.”
- “A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of heaven.”
- “You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed” (John Buyan)
- “Luther wasn’t interested in doctrine removed from life. For Luther, doctrine is life, because what a person believes is what determines his behavior.”
- “Luther said...the preacher needed to be sure of his doctrine... In this day and age we tend to put a premium on openness, and we don’t like a dogmatic spirit where people are too certain of that which they teach or preach. We almost expect the minister to be politically correct...”
- “Luther said... take away assertions, and you take away Christianity. The very mark of the Christian is that the Christian boldly makes assertions before the world.”
- “Luther said... The Holy Spirit is not a skeptic... Away with the skeptics! Away with the academics! Luther would have none of the spirit of those who are always learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth. The early truth was built on the blood of the martyrs, and the reason why it was so bloody was because the apostles didn’t go into the market place saying: ‘Well, maybe Jesus rose from the dead... No, they were bold in their assertions...’
- “We come to church to hear a word from God. We don’t want your opinion...”
- “Luther claimed that it is not the task of the pastor to entertain, but to nurture, to feed, and to be faithful to the Word of God.”
- “In a relativistic environment, you can’t hold someone responsible for anything.”
- “Don’t ever use the pulpit as your personal soapbox. If you want to proclaim the wrath of God, you’d better make sure its God’s wrath and not your own.”
- “Luther was convinced that preachers ought to preach the law as well as the gospel because, unless the law is set forth clearly and unambiguously, people will never have an appreciation for the gospel... People are not excited about the gospel because they tacitly assume that there is no great need for it.”
- “Luther said... before God will allow people to experience the sweetness and joy of heaven, He first dangles them, as it were, over the pit of hell so that they can see what their estate would be apart from the gospel.”
- “The law is what corrects, disciplines, and exposes our evil, and therefore, drives us to the gospel.”
- “If all you preach is the “good news,” and you never preach the “bad news,” the “good news” becomes “no news,” and it is not significant to people.”
- “It is our task to show people how to get to heaven.”
- “...the power is in the gospel, not our presentation of it.”
- “If we leave it up to the marketplace, we will see that the lowest paid professionals in America are teachers and preachers. Why? Because we don’t place much value upon the services they provide.”

- "...that which makes the deepest and most long-lasting impression on people is concrete illustrations. For Luther, the three most important principles of public communication are illustrate, illustrate, illustrate."
- "The substance of the Word of God must be communicated in simple, graphic, straightforward, illustrative ways to the people of God."
- "I'm so glad I met Jesus before I met the theologian."
- "Preaching the truth is the apostolic method for church planting. This can be observed again and again in the book of Acts..."
- "Could you prove Jesus is the Messiah from the O.T.? You do this by proving and explaining that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead..."
- Lloyd-Jones' definition of preaching: "Preaching is logic on fire and eloquent reason... Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire."
- "God doesn't make suggestions. He gives commands."
- "Preachers are one of the love gifts of the ascended Christ to His body, the church."
- "A preacher is just a sinner saved by grace. But, like everything else, when God sets a common thing apart for a sacred use, it is for that time no longer a common thing."
- "Preachers must preach for conviction and change."
- "...remind yourself... God is pleased to use His whole Word toward the salvation of sinners."
- "...sin makes its approach and appeal through human appetites... but the new order of grace makes its appeal through the mind (and heart)."
- "...both repentance and faith are gifts of God. But, God does not repent for us, nor does He believe for us."
- "It is the sinner who exercises saving faith, having been enabled to believe by God."
- "...preaching must aim, week in and week out, to help people be satisfied in God while suffering."
- "We must help them count suffering as part of why they should be satisfied in God. We must preach so as to make suffering seem normal and purposeful.."
- "Coming to Christ means more suffering, not less, in this world."
- "Our aim in preaching is not to help our people feel treasured, but to help them treasure God."
- "There are things to see in the Word of God that our eyes can only see through the lens of tears."
- "If you look for a human explanation for Paul's success, there isn't one."
- "God is still passing by the elite, the hard-hearted, non-listening, proud intellectuals..."
- A.T. Robertson quoted James Denney: "There always have been men in the world so clever that God could not use them. They could never do His work; they were so lost in admiration of their own."
- "We ministers are weak, common, plain, fragile, breakable, dishonorable, and disposable clay pots who should be taking the garbage out – but instead we're bringing the glory of God to our people."

Points of Disagreement:

My only bone of contention with the book came from Piper's contribution on suffering. In my opinion, in his effort to make a valid point (that suffering is to be expected... as opposed to the "health and wealth," "name it and claim it," movement that is deceiving so many these days), Piper goes over-board on the subject. My reading of his work left me with the impression that Piper is so pro-suffering that he holds it out as a near litmus test for authentic ministry. Moreover, he espouses suffering as a sought-after goal more than a realistic consequence. Consider the following excerpts from his chapter. "...the preacher must suffer and the preacher must rejoice." (248) "Christ makes suffering part of our ministry and, in great measure, the power of our message." (249). He goes on to say on page 260: "...our boldness must be brokenhearted boldness, and our courage must be a contrite and lowly courage." Lastly, on the next page Piper, I fear, gives license to those in the congregation who see the pastor's (and his family's) calling as being synonymous with impoverished living when he says: "God ordains the suffering of preachers to show the all-surpassing worth of Jesus..."

Assessment of Book's Value:

My assessment of the book is best read on the nearly three pages of captured "striking thoughts and constructive contributions." In short, I found the book to be incredibly insightful, positively challenging, and equally enlightening to powerful issues of principle. I will revisit this review frequently to peruse the captured bullet points noted above. I found this book to be similar to Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor* in so much as it contains countless truths that will serve to sharpen my spirit for years to come. I have no doubt this book will help shape my ministry and improve my preaching.

– Jeffrey Pearson