

IMPROVING WORSHIP #4: Preaching

When the brethren in Troas assembled on the first day of the week to observe the Lord's Supper, Paul preached to them (Acts 20:7). The incident with Eutychus shows it would be a mistake for someone to believe that only the preacher has a role to play in improving this aspect of the worship service. That being said, we would make the following observations about what both the preacher and the hearers can do as some of the things to improve the preaching period in the worship.

It goes without saying that the preacher is obligated to preach the truth, only the truth, and all the truth. That is the most important thing, but not the only thing about preaching. If a man is unable to communicate the truth, it matters little how well he knows it. When time and opportunity make it possible, I have made it my routine through the years to practice the sermon I am to deliver out loud and in front of a mirror. That may seem a little silly, and one may be self-conscious about it at first, but it helps. I do that several times with each sermon. It helps to establish firmly in one's mind the best way to express the more difficult points in the sermon. It also helps the preacher to be aware, beforehand, where he needs to use his voice or hand gestures to emphasize certain points. Preachers, we are usually not speaking to a room full of PhDs, so the advice I received years ago is good for us all, "If you put it down where the calves can get it, the cows will, too." Sometimes, there are words that have to be used that may be unfamiliar to some who are present. When that is the case, define those words in more familiar terms. The rest of the time, try to use words that are common to most people's vocabularies.

The preacher needs to develop a good pulpit presence that excludes any habits, facial expressions, or other distracting practices that can cause the audience to lose concentration. For instance, one thing I have to be aware of and avoid is the habit of putting my hand in my front pants pocket and jiggling my keys or change. Fortunately, I have a wife who often reminds me when I do that.

While this is not the occasion to teach sermon preparation, we nevertheless need to point out that to have the sermon outlined properly with very distinctive main points is paramount to keeping the attention of the listener and making the sermon understandable and easy to apply. Poor sermon construction leads to rambling, which will put folks to sleep, and when that happens, it is our fault, not theirs. If we have Eutychus today, we have no Paul to raise him from the dead!

The hearer can do things to improve the preaching service, too. Did you know that you, as a member of the audience can do things distracting the preacher, causing him to lose his train of thought? It happens. Preachers with experience can often cover that up where the audience may not know it happened, but he knows that it prevented him stating a point in the most effective words.

Why would anyone come to the worship service without bringing a Bible? Maybe a better question is: Why **do** so many attend without bringing a Bible? To have your Bible and follow along with the reading of the texts helps in understanding and in keeping your attention on what

is being said. A member in the pew without a Bible is like a boxer stepping into the ring without his gloves.

I have often heard other preachers encourage the audience members to bring a pencil and paper and take notes. It is my opinion that we ought to leave that up to the individual. It helps some people to keep their attention to take notes, but with others it prevents them from listening as well. I believe it would be better to leave that up to the members. As a member in the pew, you may need to try both and see which is more helpful to you.

Parents need to exercise judgment in the control of their small children. Some parents will jump up and take the child out with the first whimper. Others sit and let the little one cry throughout the entire sermon. Both of those are the wrong solution. The first raises the possibility that the parent is disinterested and looking for a way to leave, and the second doesn't show the respect for the ability of everyone else to listen. Obviously, there is no exact rule to follow, but use good judgment in this matter.

Outside of sickness or certain ongoing physical conditions, there is no excuse for a grownup to get up and leave during the worship, including during the sermon. Take care of anything that needs to be done, before you sit down.

Preaching is an important part of our worship service, because the sermon tells any visitors who are not Christians what they must do to be saved. It also instructs and encourages the members in how to live their daily lives. It is important that the people in the pew avoid doing anything that distracts the speaker or fellow hearers. It is also important that the preacher prepare and deliver the sermon in a way that is clear and understandable, as well as making sure the content is consistent with the Word of God.

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