

Showing Your Work and Teaching to Fish

Introduction

Who is teaching your students how to approach God's Word?

I'm not just talking about who is teaching them the Bible. That's different. But who is teaching them the way that they need to approach the Bible for the rest of their lives?

Whoa... that's a pretty heavy topic, right? I mean you are talking about how someone reads and studies the Word of God, how they are going to grow into maturity, and how they will teach their children when they grow up. Yes. This is a heavy burden and you have signed up for this and it should be a joyful burden to carry.

Remember that in your discipleship of your students the most enduring aspect is going to be their continued growth in the Lord after they leave your ministry. This is what we are preparing them for.

My goal in this session is to talk about teaching/preaching the Bible through the lens of 2 word pictures: Showing Your Work, and Teaching to Fish.

Showing Your Work

What do I mean by this? And why is it important?

Remember when you were in a math class in school? You would take a test and your teacher would always be saying, “show your work”. If you are anything like me you would want to skip steps do them in your head and you’d be annoyed when you had the right answer but you didn’t show your work. And you’d get points taken off! The audacity... Thanks a lot Mr. Stockman!

But what was the point of showing your work? It was both a proof that you knew what you were doing and following the rules, but it was also a helpful tool for finding out where you went wrong.

So why would I use this illustration in teaching the Bible. I started thinking about this analogy after hearing John Piper’s most recent T4G message. He said something to the affect of, “Pastor, where are you getting your ideas!?! I’m looking up, I’m looking down, but I don’t see it. I like your ideas, I just don’t see where you’re getting them from.”

Wow, that’s intense. Do you see what’s happening here? So many times a pastor will get up to preach and will even say that he is preaching “expositionally” but then when you listen to what he’s saying, all he’s done is use the Holy Bible as a springboard to say whatever it is that he wanted to say in the first place. My brothers, this is a problem

What is your goal in preaching/teaching the Bible?

Are you trying to keep your students’ attention? Are you trying to give good, Christian words of wisdom? Or is your goal to “make the word of God fully known”?

Who's words are the most valuable?

Is it God's words? Or your words?

Of course, none of us are going to say that they believe their words are more important than God's, but does your preaching and teaching demonstrate that you value God's word above all else?

Let's approach this another way: Who determines the meaning of a text?

Throughout history there have been 3 leading answers to this question: the reader, the text, the author.

Time out: why is it important that we talk about this right now? You need to understand that our culture has embraced a fallacious method of getting to understanding the meaning of a text and it is pushing its way into the church.

Have you ever been in this situation? You are in a small group Bible study, you read a paragraph out of the Bible, and your small group leader says, "What does this mean to you?" Whoa! Alert! Alert!

This should sound alarms in your head.... wait... why? Because this assumes that you are the one that assigns meaning to the text. This is so important for us to remember in this current cultural climate because your students are being brainwashed into thinking that they are able to generate their own truth about any and everything. This simply is not the case.

Let's talk about this really quick then move on:

The reader response theory of meaning

This says that it doesn't matter what the author was intending, it is the reader that assigns meaning to the text. This is what your students are being fed in their education and it is absolute nonsense. Sure, it sounds cool on the surface but is totally self-refuting. What do I mean by that? What I mean is that you if you are trying to convince someone that the author's intention doesn't matter you are still assuming that they are understanding your (the author's) intention in telling them that the author doesn't matter.... See the glaring contradiction?

Just like you don't like someone drawing their own meaning out of your words, we need to be careful in telling people God's words.

The text determines meaning

This is silly, as if the text then has the ability on its own to do anything

The author determines meaning

This is the most commonsense, obvious and involves the intention of the author. This is why we need to work hard to understand what the author of Scripture is saying when He says anything.

N.B.

Sometimes we are just making a mistake in semantics. We say "meaning" but what we are really talking about are the "implications" and "significance" of a text. The significance will always be subjective

Scripture assumes a proper interpretation of the Bible

- 2Tim 2:15 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.
- Ps 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.
- 2Pet 3:15-16 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.
- Eph 4:11-13 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
- 2Tim 4:2-3 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,

This is where we have to put in the hard work

- This takes a lot of investment, but we need to remember that the dividends it pays are generational.
- You are going to need to understand the context of the passage you are preaching if you are going to be able to understand what the original author is trying to say to the original audience.
- You also need to pay attention to the literary context. What is this whole book about? What is this section about? How does this relate to what he just said and what he is about to say?
- And remember the whole Bible is about Jesus... but not in the same way. This is why you have to do the hard work. When you get to the land allotments in Joshua, what are you going to do? How is this about Jesus?
 - This is rock solid proof that God keeps his promises. God gives His people their inheritance. In the Old Testament we see that in the land, and it was really about the land, but it was also really about our Union with Christ and His New Kingdom.

2 Words of Caution

1. Beware of Word Studies
 - 1.1 Greek and Hebrew aren't magical languages. It's great to study to gain a more nuanced way that the author is expressing himself, but not necessary. We don't want to undercut the benefit our amazing English translations

- 1.2 Sometimes word studies will mess you up and get you further away from the authors intended meaning.
- 1.3 If you are going to do a word study try and confine it to the individuals writings. Like Jude's use of "keep". Or Paul's use of "flesh". Don't use 2 Peter as a commentary on the Genesis account to say that "day" means 1,000 years.
- 1.4 Every word has a semantic range of meaning, but it only means one thing in that context.
2. Don't try to force something into the text
 - 2.1 If every one of your sermons is 3 alliterated points then it's probably not what the original author intended
3. If your students know the text that you are going to preach then they should have a good idea of what the main points are going to be because that is what the Bible is actually trying to say.
4. Make sure that you have scripture to back up every point... Show your work

Teaching to Fish

When you are preaching and teaching God's Word think about that old saying about how if you give someone a fish you feed them for a meal but if you teach them to fish you are feeding them for the rest of their lives. That is what we should be doing in our handling of God's Word.

Our students should be learning how to study God's Word on their own from the way we are teaching

This is a big deal. I'm saying that the point in preaching and teaching is to take our study and do it in front of our students.

Our students need to be growing in their dependence on God and His Word, not us

- Are you cultivating a love of God and His Word, or a love for you and your student ministry? What's gonna happen when they go off to college.
- If their foundation is you, then they will fail. If it is God's Word then you have prepared them for the rest of their lives.
- This is exactly what happened in the Roman Catholic church and why we needed a reformation. The Church used a Latin text welded by the priests to enslave the people. We want them to be liberated to pursue God through His Word for the rest of their lives.
- Do you really believe in Sola Scriptura or are you promoting Solo Mio?

This is part of what it means to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. You need to teach them how to drink deeply of God's Word

Are you student's equipped to lead others in studying the Bible because you have exemplified it for them?

Conclusion

Show your work. If you are doing this faithfully then you will be teaching them to drink deeply of God's Word that will lead them into a deeper dependence on the living God of the universe.

Resources

- 40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible - Rob Plummer
- Exegetical Fallacies - D.A. Carson
- Interpreting the Pauline Epistles: Tom Schreiner