

## Are Sermons Biblical?

I recently came across an article that boldly claimed that sermons are not biblical and should be abolished. I usually ignore such articles, but I wondered how the author would try to prove this from the Bible. As an example, he claimed that the Sermon on the Mount was not actually a sermon; instead, when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up the mountainside to escape them, sat down with His disciples and taught them privately.

In general, the article was filled with factual errors, logical fallacies, and twisted Scriptures; the author could not find any examples of sermons or preaching in the Bible because he did not want to see them. Matthew 7:28-29 clearly shows that Jesus delivered a lengthy address to the crowd. He had climbed the mountainside to take advantage of the natural acoustics; the elevation allowed His voice to carry over the heads of the people. While Matthew 5-7 can be read aloud in just a few minutes, the Gospels were not tape recorded transcripts; the apostles only gave us the highlights of His activities (John 21:25).

In fact, the Bible gives us many examples of preaching and sermons. Moses frequently gave extended speeches to the congregation such as his farewell address in Deuteronomy 27-33. The prophets delivered extensive oral and written messages from God to His people (e.g., Jer 36:4-8). The priests and Levites were supposed to teach the Law to the congregation of Israel on a regular basis (e.g., Deut 31:10-11, Neh 8:1-7). In the first century synagogue service, “psalms were sung, the Scriptures were read, and [a] sermon was preached” (Manners and Customs of Bible Times by Ralph Grower). Jesus and Paul gave sermons in this kind of setting (e.g., Luke 4:14-21, Act 13:15ff). Peter, James, Paul and Jesus (Rev 2-3) sent epistles (written sermons) to be read to multiple congregations; we use audio CDs and DVDs to do the same thing today. Clearly, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with presenting information in a sermon format.

The author also claimed that sermons stifle two-way communication, learning and spiritual growth; but there is plenty of time for two-way communication outside of the sermon and there are plenty of options for participating in more interactive programs such as adult Bible classes, church youth programs, community service projects, seminary classes, and small group ministry. The author’s unfounded criticisms appear to be driven by an emotional bias.

The article displayed an attitude of arrogance and disrespect toward the office of the ministry. The Bible clearly explains that some, not all, are placed in the church to be pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11, James 3:1). The ministry is responsible for the welfare of the congregation as a whole (Act 20:28, Heb 13:17). They are expected to preach and teach the people that are under their care (1 Tim 5:17, 2 Tim 4:2, Tit 2:15).

A sermon is an act of moral and spiritual leadership. It is not just to teach people something new, but to remind them of their moral responsibilities. A minister is both a leader and a coach, and the sermon is a valuable tool to address general spiritual issues within the group. Often, those who find sermons boring are the ones who are being specifically addressed.

There is a reason why the sermon time is not a free-for-all debate. Members are expected to exercise a measure of respect toward those who lead them. Contrary to the opinion of the author, it is not about showing off how much smarter you are than the minister. Anyone who has been in a position of leadership would understand that.

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The author displayed no evidence of being trained in hermeneutics, homiletics or pastoral leadership; in short, he simply did not know what he was talking about. The entire article was a thinly veiled attempt to use the Bible to legitimize his preconceived notions. If you really think that anyone can get up at any time and preach a biblically sound message with no preparation or training, then please take several years to obtain a degree in Ministry, then spend several more years preaching before a large congregation and see if you still think the same way.

There is a crying need in many congregations for increased training for the ministry and for more full-time, paid ministers. Bi-vocational ministry leaves little time for additional training and can never be as effective as full time ministry. The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel (1 Cor 9:14). If you want better sermons, you have to pay someone to prepare them.

To be sure, there are times when a minister turns out to be incompetent or corrupt or both, but the solution is to replace such ministers with gifted, honorable and trained individuals who belong in the pulpit. The suggestion that we should get rid of the sermon altogether is simply an unbalanced overreaction. We need both preaching and teaching within the church and that is the true biblical example.