

## **Preaching That Can Do Souls Good**

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I am honored to write a guest editorial for the inaugural issue of this expository quarterly magazine, The Pastor's Study. I pray God that this much-needed periodical will provide much practical guidance for a large number of hard-working pastors in their studies. In this short editorial, I would like to focus on one piece of practical advice: Each biblical, expository sermon we preach ought to aim to expound doctrinal, experiential, and practical truth that can do souls good.

Sound preachers from the Reformation era onward have underscored that biblical preaching must combine three essential elements—doctrinal, experiential, and practical. This subject was discussed by John Newton (1725–1807) and other evangelical ministers at one of their Eclectic Society meetings in London in 1798. John Clayton (1754–1843), an English independent minister, raised the question, “What are we to understand by doctrinal, experimental, and practical preaching?”

He pointed out that doctrinal preaching by itself tends to produce argumentative thinkers, experiential preaching can overemphasize our inward feelings to the neglect of truth and action, and practical preaching may become man-centered and self-righteous, belittling Christ and the

Gospel. Clayton said that all three components must have their place in preaching, quoting Thomas Bradbury as saying, “Religion is doctrinal in the Bible; experimental in the heart; and practical in the life.”

John Goode (1738–1790) said, “In the members of our flock, there would be sight, feeling, and obedience; and to produce these, all three—doctrinal, experimental, and practical preaching—must be combined in their proper proportion.” Newton declared the organic and vital unity of these three, saying, “Doctrine is the trunk, experience the branches, practice the fruit.” He warned that without the doctrine of Christ we say nothing more than pagan philosophers.

Thomas Scott (1747–1821) also warned that there is a false way to handle each

dimension of preaching: doctrines may not be biblical truth or may be only half-truths, which effectively are lies; experience may follow human prescriptions or be based on visions, impressions, or man-made schemes; we may substitute mere morality for evangelical or Gospel-empowered obedience.

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(John Newton)

In conclusion, before we leave our study and head for the pulpit, we should make sure that our biblical, Reformed preaching aims to bring together the doctrinal, experiential, and

practical dimensions as one unified whole in faithfulness to the particular text we are called upon to expound for each particular sermon. Though we must humbly admit that in our sermons we often do not attain the kind of balance and completeness we strive for, we must stress that we cannot neglect any aspect of preaching—doctrinal, experiential, and practical—without damaging the others, for each one flows naturally out of the others.