

Love the kids. Let the kids run up to you and hug you. Let them climb up on your lap and jabber about their puppies, their new toys, or other things that you can't quite translate. One little tot came up to me and proudly announced, "I got panties!" (Her mortified mommy explained that they were going through potty-training.) It's better to have them running to you than running away from you. Why is this important? Jesus said so, that's why! Besides, the easiest path to the parent's heart is through his or her child. Make sure the kids have a prime place in the big picture of your church.

Preach out loud but live quietly. Playing the amateur psychologist, I suspect that the reason some preachers constantly talk about themselves, dress extravagantly, and live largely is because they seek the affirmation and love that they were deprived of as a child. I highly recommend that you pour excellence into your ministry, but be demure about your personal life. Your attraction as a minister must be the Christ you preach, not the totally awesome person that you are. (Forgive my sarcasm.) A personality cult disguised as a church will only endure as long as the personality that drives it does.

Play no favorites in the congregation. A pastor cannot answer the call to minister to everyone if he bestows special attention on some select people in the congregation. If you go to a person's home for dinner, make sure it is for a particular spiritual motive and not just for fellowship. Nothing stirs up jealousy quicker than to hobnob with a few elite people and deny the same camaraderie to others. Go to an event if all are invited. Decline if it's not for everyone (special occasions being an exception). Turn to your peers in the ministry for your close fellowship.

Love lavishly; discipline sparingly. When you mingle with the crowd, your people need to see warmth, friendliness, and love in your eyes. Be a down-to-earth person; engage in small talk, and just hang out with people in the lobby (at least for a little while). Approaching a group of people should evoke responses like "Hi, Pastor!" not "Oh-oh. Here comes the pastor!" Avoid the temptation to scold people for every little thing, especially in front of others. When rebuke is necessary, it ought to be for a truly offensive or sin-

ful act, not for a pet peeve. Disciplinary action should be baptized in love and a genuine attempt at lifting and helping instead of a knee-jerk reaction to a problem.

Consistency is king. Psychologists tell us that operant conditioning that successfully changes behavior is based on consistent rewards or consistent denial of rewards. Whenever you begin a program or project, do your best to keep it up. Phase it out only if it has fulfilled its objective or if is an obvious failure and must be shut down. Neglect, inattentiveness, or sporadic participation should not cause the demise of an important function. Besides being a disappointment to those who were invested in the program, it casts a negative reflection on the leader. Consistent follow-through redounds to your credibility.

Do not be afraid of any person in your congregation. This is a big one. Depending on the clout of the person in question, bucking him or her could mean war. Nevertheless, the pastor who submits to a dominating personality in the congregation becomes a hireling or a lackey to power. In the end, the only things that will get done will have to be cleared with this person. A clever pastor may be able to handle this situation in a positive way (for example, consider “Claude” in Maxwell’s books). The pastor who values integrity and righteousness over personal welfare will lead the church in right ways, even at the cost of angering any particular member. This paragraph is included only to point out the problem. Resolving it may require much prayer, thought, backbone, and wise counsel.

Invest in a sufficient number of projects that have immediate and visible benefits. You may be involved in many noble projects, but if the benefits do not register on the congregation, unhappiness may set in. Some may think you are wasting your time in matters that don’t have anything to do with the church. Make sure that you focus the bulk of your time and energy on endeavors that pertain directly to your job description as pastor. Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. called this “stick to the knitting” in their classic book, *In Search of Excellence*. It’s also termed majoring on your “core competency.” The more people see what they expect to see in

the leadership of the church, the more they will respond positively to that leadership.

You can undoubtedly find books written on each of these observations. I will caution you that just because each paragraph is brief and the subject largely undeveloped does not indicate its lessened importance. I learned the value of most of these subjects only through considerable pain and much chagrin. One more wise saying to remember: Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan.



Chapter 2

Preacher, Avoid These Ten Mistakes

Everybody makes mistakes, but there are limits to what goes wrong and who does it. Attorneys who err in critical courtroom battles or airplane pilots who miscalculate landing their aircraft by a few feet do not have the luxury of a forgiving clientele. The old line about the surgeon who says “Oops!” is funny only to the audience at the comedy club; the patient is not amused. The consequences of mistakes by professionals are much worse than those made by amateurs because professionals “profess” expertise. Preachers should embrace their calling with the same level of professionalism as the most elite practitioners in society. For even one soul to be harmed or misled by a preacher means eternal consequences.

Now that I have sufficiently scared you to a near-death experience, I will safely predict that we will make mistakes. By the same token, I also firmly believe that we should be very cognizant of the dangers of mistakes by professionals, and strive to avoid them. No one may file a malpractice suit against you in this life (although you never know), but we will give an account to God for those placed in our care. Preachers who take their calling seriously will guard against malpractice in and out of the pulpit. Here are ten notorious errors (sins?) in preaching:

1. Misquoting a Bible verse. There are fewer excuses now for misquoting a verse than there have ever been. We have multiple Bibles lying around, electronic Bibles, Bibles on smart phones and iPads, audio Bibles on CDs, and Bible verses projected on screens while we preach. Also, remember that we have active Bible quizzers

in the congregation, plus scores of former Bible quizzers who have committed hundreds of verses to memory. Occasionally flubbing a preposition or an article may be overlooked, but a major gaffe indicates a lack of serious study. If you don't really know a verse, don't try to quote it. Say, "Put that verse up there on the screen so I don't misquote it!" People appreciate that more than they do barreling on through with some gross inaccuracy.

2. Misinterpreting a Bible verse. We preachers are charged with "rightly dividing the Word of truth." Every passage of scripture has an intrinsic meaning, but many passages also have multiple meanings for different times, places, and people. These meanings must be defined according to vocabulary, context, and corresponding Scriptures. Let the Bible speak for itself. Don't make a verse say what it doesn't say, even if your theme is valid. Embellishing, enhancing, liberally paraphrasing, or twisting Scriptures invariably make your case weaker, not stronger. Also, if you are not a Greek or Hebrew scholar, give attribution to an expert whenever you refer to these languages in your message

3. Misapplying a Bible verse. I heard a preacher take his text from the verse about the woman with the issue of blood. His title was "The Blood is Still the Issue." It was an unfortunate choice. There are many specific passages of Scripture about the blood of Christ that could have been selected, yet this passage, in an effort to be clever, was taken totally out of context. Subordinate your creativity to solid and proper application. Our core mission is not to be cute, creative, or shocking. It is simply to preach the truth.

4. Confusing Bible stories. Keep your stories straight. You may get by with a momentary lapse of recall, but if you continue to put the wrong name with the wrong character, or put an event into a different story or era of time, your credibility will suffer. Rehearse your Bible illustrations and stories until you know them forwards and backwards.

5. Using confidential incidents as illustrations. A breach of confidence by a preacher in an attempt to spice up his or her sermon inflicts wounds that may never heal. No matter how apropos the illustration may be, never yield to the temptation. Someone in

the audience may know who you are talking about. It may seem safe enough, but the risk is too great. Whenever you use a real life experience, get permission from the principle person in the story, or else change a substantial part of the story so no one can make the connection. Always tell your audience that you have made this change so they know that you are protecting someone and you are not misstating the truth. You are safest when you avoid referring to others altogether and limit your stories to personal examples.

6. Feigning knowledge. If you don't know about what you are preaching, don't say you do. First, you are being disingenuous. Second, you may be spreading an untruth. Last, there may be someone listening who really does know what you pretend to know. You've just given that person a huge reason to doubt you. Why would preachers act like they know something when they don't? It's either an ego problem or a work ethic problem. Anything worth including in your message is worth getting right.

7. Fabricating facts. It seems unthinkable, but some pulpiteers have made things up on the spot, and because they were able to sound authoritative, they got by with it. Anytime you are not sure of your facts, admit it. (Do your homework ahead of time and you won't find yourself in that situation!) Most people are fine with rounding, approximating, and even guessing if you are honest about it. They are not fine with manufacturing numbers and stories out of thin air when it is deliberate and calculated to deceive. If you want to preach about integrity, you have to demonstrate integrity.

8. Attacking individuals. Whether through righteous indignation, personal grievance, or a misguided attempt to set people straight, launching an attack against an individual from the pulpit is always out of order. (If an individual needs to be disfellowshipped, a specially called business meeting of the congregation is the only time to do it.) All preaching should be delivered at a high level of decorum, untainted by animosity. Your objective is to proclaim a timeless truth. Targeting a person trivializes the Word of God.

9. Sermonizing. The difference between preaching a sermon and sermonizing is that the former is done to serve God and people, but the latter is done to serve one's own self. If you focus only on

delivering a homiletically correct, oratorically excellent, perfectly poised sermon, you are sermonizing. Mount the pulpit with true sensitivity to God's Spirit and a concern for souls. Excellence is better found in the results rather than the performance.

10. Insincerity. The gravity of preaching precludes posturing, showboating, attempting to impress, entertaining, performing a duty, or any other dubious reason why preachers might preach. Understand that preaching has been ordained of God to save souls (I Corinthians 1:21)! The sincerity your hearers will perceive in your message will make up for any lack in composition or delivery. Souls who are thirsty for God desperately need a sincere, anointed preacher. If you are anointed, your message will be anointed as well.



Chapter 3

Preaching Ourselves

If “Christ and Him crucified” defines the parameters of preaching, then much of the rhetoric that passed for preaching in Paul’s day didn’t pass muster. Paul strongly implied that many preachers were preaching the Old Testament law, foolish questions, genealogies, philosophies, and deceptive topics. Others deviated into doctrines of devils and aberrant forms of the gospel. Some even used the pulpit for divisive politics. An alarm was desperately needed to call a halt to the drivel that was out of place in the preaching ministry. Paul’s pure calling and clear vision of the mission of the church made him the man to do it. Paul demonstrated extraordinary awareness of his own weaknesses when he declared his purpose in the content and style of his preaching. “We preach not ourselves, but Christ and Him crucified.” With his incisive intellect, his liberal arts education, and his mastery of Judaism, Paul could easily have become his own favorite subject. He did not. He enunciated this conviction so adamantly that one gets the sense he did not have just his own ministry in mind, but that he intended it to be a stern warning to other preachers of the gospel as well. His reasoning is evident. Given the latitude of content typically granted to a preacher, and noting the credibility the preacher assumes as he mounts the pulpit, Paul knew that the opportunity to speak to the church could be extremely dangerous. A preacher could usurp his privilege for purposes outside the strictures of the gospel message.

Two thousand years have passed since that warning, but preachers are still at it. Every day, a new, intriguing thought seems so interesting and so compelling to a preacher that he or she has to give it air time. Green energy, environmental exploitation, workers’