

## Is your church “word-centered”

By Bob Young

Here’s a little quiz. What role does the Bible play in the life of your church? (You can choose more than one answer in each area.)

*How is the Bible used in sermons?*

*Most sermons are topical, citing biblical texts to support the points of the sermon*

*Half or more of the sermons are textual so the message of the text is made clear*

*Half or more of the sermons are expository, covering large sections of Scripture in each sermon*

*The Bible is preached systematically so that sermons cover all of Scripture every 5-6 years*

*Is the Bible used in classes and small groups?*

*Most Bible classes and small groups use the Bible as a text*

*Most Bible classes and small groups are topical rather than textual*

*Most small groups use Christian literature or other books as the primary study resource*

*Bible reading in the assembly*

*The text is seldom read aloud in the assembly*

*Most worship assemblies include a Scripture reading*

*All Sundays include a Scripture reading, but the readings are randomized and short*

*All Sundays include Scripture reading, and the readings are focused and longer*

*The Bible is read systematically and methodically as part of the assembly*

*Focus on Bible reading for the church members*

*Bible reading is not mentioned or is seldom mentioned*

*A Bible reading plan is distributed but there is little or no follow-up*

*Multiple Bible reading plans are distributed so people can deal with personal reading preferences*

*There is a system for checking on Bible reading, for example, a count of Daily Bible readers*

*The sermons correspond to the assigned or suggested readings*

Many churches do not do well on the above quiz. Much of the preaching in our churches is topical (sometimes with a mix of textual sermons). When sermons seem to focus on Scripture, often the result is technically more topical than textual. Systematic Bible reading is seldom included in worship. Most churches do not consistently encourage members to read the Bible.

A church without a strong focus on Scripture as the word of God (and the word of Christ) will find it difficult to remain “Christ-centered.” At times, I have been criticized for my focus on Scripture. Some accuse me of “Bibliolatry.” Some of my tribe have listened to such charges and have lessened the place of Scripture in the local church. The turn away from Scripture is cause for concern. This article affirms the importance of the Bible in the life of the local church.

Focusing on the word of God is one way we honor God. We pay attention to his words; we seek his will and his way. Focusing on the word of Christ is a way to honor Christ, and the Bible says that Christ’s words will one day judge us. John’s Gospel makes clear that the words of the Father are the words of Jesus are the words of the Holy Spirit are the words given to the apostles are the words of Scripture.

Churches should use God’s Word as a constant resource; churches should use God’s Word in a healthy way. Consider various ways churches use the Bible.

- Some churches neglect the Word, others salute it periodically, some hold it up as an idol
- Some churches use the Bible as a snack, as a quick meal, or as an “eating out” experience
- Some churches are always eating breakfast, others thrive on lunch, dinner, or supper; some only provide snacks
- Churches can use the Bible in healthy ways or unhealthy ways
- Churches can overeat in certain food groups, some churches fail to eat a balanced Bible diet
- Some churches (and Christians) do a lot of binge-eating
- Churches can lack variety, every meal is the same, lack of variety in the menu

- Churches can get involved in fad diets
- Some churches provide a lot of supplements but not much real food (studying books about Bible subjects, studying about the word instead of studying the word, using artificial substitutes)

If you really want to grow in the word, I tell you that you must learn to feast on it, to dine on it regularly and heartily. Make it the centerpiece of your relationship with God. Learn what it looks like and feels like to seek God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit through the power of the word. Learn to receive nourishment, strength, and life through the word. Learn what it feels like to be satisfied with Scripture. Some are nutritionally deprived and do not know it.

The Christ-centered church will be centered on the word. In the same way that it is impossible to center on Christ without the church, it is also impossible to center on Christ without his word. The Bible is Christ's word; in the Bible we learn Christ's will. How will we grow in grace and knowledge except through the word?