

Book Review

Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study by Jonathan I. Griffiths, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, editor D.A. Carson, Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2017, 152 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8308-2643-8. Cost: \$19.80.

Preachers should attempt to keep current with regard to the understanding of the ministry of the Word of God that they have committed their lives to accomplish. Griffiths' book helps define preaching the gospel by using the Scriptures themselves. This book contains some essential information that will help keep the focus on the ministry of preaching God's Word and eliminate distractions or substitutes. Preachers are not entertainers. Preachers are not out to please men. Preachers must be faithful to the Word of God in order to please God and represent accurately what God said and what God meant by what He said.

Preaching in the New Testament contains a series preface, author's preface, and abbreviations prior to the Introduction. Then, the Introduction is given. The book is further organized in three parts. Part 1 deals with foundational matters including: (1) the Word of God in biblical theology; (2) the language of 'preaching' in the New Testament; and (3) the word ministries of all believers. Part 1 also contains an excursus on the identity of the preachers in Philippians 1:14-18. Part 2 addresses exegetical studies and includes: (1) 2 Timothy 3-4: The Preacher's charge; (2) Romans 10: The Preacher's commission; (3) I Corinthians: The power of the gospel in authentic Christian preaching; (4) 2 Corinthians 2-6: Beholding the glory of God in preaching; (5) I Thess 1-2: Preaching the very words of God; and (6) Hebrews: Preaching to the gathered people of God. Part 2 also contains an excursus on biblical-theological connections between the New Testament preaching and Old Testament prophecy. Part 3 consists of the summary and conclusions. The book concludes with a bibliography, index of authors and index of Scripture references.

In the Introduction, Griffiths argues that while all of God's people are instructed to be involved in the ministry of the word, there is a special aspect of word ministry called "preaching" that is distinct from these other forms. He also attempts to characterize and define this type of preaching ministry based upon the words used in the New Testament for preaching. Griffiths is pursuing this area of study in the interest of establishing preaching as a permanent aspect of the work and mission of the church. Consequently, preaching is not optional, but integral to the work of proclaiming God's message to the world and to the church. It should not be eliminated just because the times change.

Griffiths is also concerned about addressing the issue of whether or not women should preach as well as men. If preaching is not a distinct aspect of word ministry and if all of God's people should be involved in word ministry, then how could one keep women from functioning as preachers? This question certainly has a bearing on gender roles in the church.

In chapter one, Griffiths shows that since preaching is a ministry of the word of God, then the characteristics of God's word have a relationship to preaching that word. There are three things emphasized in this chapter: (1) God speaks through His word; (2) God is achieving His purposes through His word; and (3) God is encountering His people through His word. Each of these things is true of preaching just as they would be of any other method of ministering the word.

In chapter two, Griffiths examines the words used for preaching in the New Testament. There are number of Greek verbs that are used in connection with the communication of God's

word, but Griffiths limits himself to a discussion of the words that specifically relate to preaching. He defines preaching as, “a public proclamation of God’s word” (p. 17). As the study progresses, he will refine this definition. He examines three words that are identified by Claire Smith as semi-technical terms for preaching: *euangelizomai*, *katangellō* and *kēryssō* (p. 17). Smith limited her study to four books of the New Testament, whereas Griffiths expands the study to include the entire New Testament. He also examines *apangellō* and *martyreō*.

Apangellō means to ‘announce’, ‘report’ or ‘proclaim’ and “lays emphasis on the speaker as an eyewitness with a responsibility, desire or compulsion to attest to the events or realities he conveys” (p. 18). *Martyreō* is a favorite term in the gospel of John to refer to the proclamatory ministry of Jesus. The term means, to ‘bear witness’ or ‘testify’ to a reality or event or the character of a person. Jesus is a faithful witness to the Father who speaks the words of the Father which He gave Him to speak. While the word is used to describe Jesus’ preaching ministry in the Gospel of John, it would not generally be translated “to preach” (p. 19).

Griffiths returns to a study of the three words used as semi-technical words for preaching. He proposes to examine these words with regard to who the speaker is, the context where the word is found and what can be discerned from the content of the address. On pages 20-32, charts are presented on each of the three words and the different areas of consideration are given attention for each passage of Scripture where the word is found. This represents a valuable aspect of the book. Griffiths gives a summary of his conclusions: (1) the words are aptly described as semi-technical because there is some variety in their use, but they are used frequently to refer to the ministry of preaching the word. This regular use of these words in the New Testament means that preaching is a distinct form of ministry of the word involving the public proclamation of God’s word by a strong leader. (2) The bulk of the occurrences of the three ‘semi-technical’ verbs are found in the context of evangelistic proclamation to non-Christians. “This is no surprise given that the New Testament book with the most frequent occurrences of the vocabulary is Acts which is dominated by accounts of pioneer evangelism” (p. 34). A number of occurrences of the verbs in the New Testament are found in contexts where the edification of believers occurs (Rom. 1:15; I Cor. 9:14; Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 4:2). Preaching benefited both Christians and non-Christians. (3) Preaching as denoted by the three verbs, is usually carried out by figures of recognized authority. There is generally a command or a commissioning of them to a preaching ministry (see p. 36). (4) None of the three semi-technical verbs for preaching the gospel are used anywhere in the New Testament to frame an instruction, command, or commission for believers in general ‘to preach’ (p. 36). (5) While *euangelizomai* and *kēryssō* are used almost interchangeably in many instances in the New Testament, there is a difference between the two terms. *Euangelizomai* has the normal meaning “to preach the gospel” (good news), but sometimes it is used in a less formal sense and so has a wider semantic range. *Kēryssō* has a more limited semantic range in the New Testament. At the center of the range of meaning of *kēryssō* is the act of authoritative public proclamation (p. 38). The term, with very few exceptions, is used in contexts indicating that it speaks of the public proclamation of an authoritative message by a person of recognized authority (p. 39).

In Excurses 1, Griffiths explores the identity of the preachers in Philippians 1:14-18. He presents arguments on both sides of those who say that it refers to “brothers” in general and those who hold that the “brothers” are particular co-workers with the apostle Paul. He concludes based on the use of *katangellō* and *kēryssō* in 1:14-18, that the passage refers to particular co-workers of the apostle Paul and not Christians in general (p. 43).

In chapter three, the author addresses the ministry of the word by all believers. Griffiths is careful to state, “Nowhere does the New Testament call or instruct believers as a whole group to ‘preach’, but it does call them to minister the word to one another, and does so using language that can also describe preaching.” (p. 49). “The instructions for believers to engage in word ministry that we have seen above are framed without using the three ‘semi-technical’ preaching verbs identified in chapter 2” (p. 49). These facts uphold the distinction between ‘preaching’ and other types of ministering the word of God.

With the transition to chapter four, Part II begins. In Part II, Griffiths considers several key passages in the New Testament that focus on preaching. Chapter four examines II Timothy 3-4 -The Preacher’s Charge. Griffiths makes the following affirmations: (1) II Tim. 3-4 is a pattern for the preaching ministry. Paul’s instructions to Timothy serve as a bridge from apostolic to post-apostolic preaching. Paul is aware that the ministry of preaching the gospel must continue throughout all the generations until Jesus comes again (II Tim. 2:2). Paul tells Timothy to follow in his footsteps (II Tim. 1:13-14). (2) Timothy is to make an authoritative proclamation of God’s word. Timothy is to preach the word (Scriptures, the Gospel). The Scriptures are sufficient for this ministry of the word (II Tim. 3:16-17). The charge is comprised of five verbs in the imperative: preach, be ready, reprove, rebuke, and exhort. (3) Timothy’s preaching is to address the believers in Ephesus. This shows that preaching is not limited to unbelievers, but is also directed toward believers. Through preaching the church is edified. (4) Timothy is a commissioned and authoritative speaker of God’s word. Paul regards Timothy as a man of God (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Tim. 4:2). Griffiths gives an interesting connection between the use of this phrase by Paul in II Timothy and its use in the Old Testament to refer to God’s appointed leaders of his people (p. 58-59).

Griffiths introduces the second excursus considering the Biblical-theological connections between New Testament preaching and Old Testament prophecy. The Christian preacher stands in a line of continuity with the Old Testament prophet (p. 61). John the Baptist serves as a link between the Old Testament prophets and preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. John is the first preacher encountered in the New Testament. John like Jeremiah would be set apart from his mother’s womb (Jer. 1:5) and like Samuel, he would be consecrated to the Lord (I Sam. 1:11). John was given the Holy Spirit just like many of the Old Testament prophets (I Sam. 10:10; 2 Kgs. 2:9-16; Ezek. 11:5). John had the spirit and power of Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6). John did the work of a prophet in calling God’s people to repentance and to turn to the Lord. John’s ministry was a precursor to Jesus’ ministry. Jesus also came in the power and role of a prophet of God (Luke 4:18-19). While Jesus bears a similarity to Old Testament prophets, He also stands out from them in His nature, authority and power (Heb. 1:1-3). Griffiths concludes that “New Testament preachers are not exact equivalents of Old Testament prophets” (p. 66). However, the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament finds continuity in the preaching ministry of the New Testament.

In chapter five, the author looks at Romans 10 and the preacher’s commission. Griffiths develops four observations: (1) preaching reflects the nature of the gospel as something given and received; (2) Christian preaching stands in a line of continuity with Old Testament prophetic proclamation; (3) Preaching rests upon and involves the activity of Christ; and (4) Preaching involves a commission, but is not restricted to the apostles. Paul asks, “And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” The preacher is a spokesman for another and not someone with his own message authorized by himself.

In chapter six, Griffiths examines I Corinthians and the power of the gospel in authentic

Christian preaching. The author focuses on chapters 1-2, 9, and 15. Paul defends the character of his preaching ministry. Preaching was the central function of Paul's Corinthian ministry. Preaching is distinct from other forms of oratory in its style and source of power. Paul refrained from 'lofty speech' and 'words of wisdom'. God stands behind the gospel message and empowers it. Preachers have a special identity and role within the church. While Paul had the right of material support from the Corinthians, he did not claim this right and instead, worked with his own hands to provide his support. Paul teaches that the Lord himself commanded that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (I Cor. 9:14). Paul recognized that preaching the gospel was a stewardship responsibility and that he bore a heavy responsibility to preach the gospel so men could be saved. Christian preaching is the delivery of the received gospel of Christ. Paul preached what he had received from the Lord through revelation. As a steward of the gospel, Paul realized he must pass it on faithfully (I Cor. 15:1-5). Preaching requires a believing response and leads to salvation. The Corinthians had received this message, were saved by and must hold it fast. The preached word was instrumental in their salvation.

In chapter seven, 2 Corinthians 2-6 is the exegetical passage to be studied. Griffiths emphasizes beholding the glory of God in preaching. Paul's ministry was a public ministry and a shared ministry. The ministry of preaching is grounded in the word of God. The Triune God is at work in the ministry of preaching. God's glory is revealed through preaching the gospel (I Cor. 3:16-18). Those who fail to see God's glory in preaching are blinded by the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4). As Christ's glory is beheld through preaching, the people of God are transformed into the image of the Lord. Preaching is essential to transformation in God's people. New covenant preaching is compared and contrasted by Paul to old covenant proclamation. There are similarities: both were grounded in God's word; both were public; both were ministries of proclamation and both reflected something of the glory of God. A central contrast between the two ministries is the differing degree that God's glory is manifested in each (pp. 89-90). Moses put a veil upon his face and guarded the people from the fullness of God's glory. Paul freely communicated God's glory as seen in Christ. This aspect of preaching the gospel brings about transformation in God's people as they are developing from 'glory to glory'.

In chapter eight, Griffiths addresses I Thess. 1-2 and shows that preaching involves the very words of God. Griffiths considers the backdrop to these passages provided by Acts 17:1-9. He shows that Paul preached publicly and authoritatively a message from God. Paul reasoned, explained and proved from the Scriptures in his proclamation or preaching of the gospel. Paul shared this ministry with other capable men (I Thess. 1:1). The gospel was proclaimed by approved agents of God (I Thess. 2:3-6). Paul and his associates were aware that God stands behind His word and God works through His word. Those who hear it are affected by it and as in the case of the Thessalonians transformed by it becoming Christians (I Thess. 2:13).

Chapter nine presents the book of Hebrews as a recorded sermon intended to be read aloud in the public assembly. This is based on Heb. 13:22 where the self-descriptive phrase, "a word of exhortation" is used. This is the phrase used to describe a proclamation given in the synagogue (Acts 13:14-15). Griffiths adds that the book of Hebrews is no ordinary letter. He identifies the book as "arguably the earliest extant full-length Christian sermon (p. 105). As such, the book provides a model for use in shaping Christian preaching.

Part III is a summary and gives conclusions from the study on preaching in the New Testament. The summary is a 'glimpse' of the material presented in the book and the conclusions are drawn from the exegetical studies. Griffiths upholds the importance of preaching to the advancement of the gospel and to the church. Preaching is irreplaceable and

indispensable to the growth of the kingdom of God. He does make a theological distinction between preaching and other types of word ministry which, according to his thoughts on page 4, would indicate that eliminating women from the preaching ministry is justified because of its authoritative proclamation of God's word. Women would stand in violation of I Tim. 2:12 where they usurped authority over men in the public worship assembly. It seems that Griffiths wants the reader to draw this conclusion which he does not state emphatically. Also, Griffiths makes a distinction between preaching and prophesying (p. 66). This distinction may help differentiate between preaching in the New Testament and other types of word ministries and so help justify a distinction between preaching in the assembly being restricted to men and other types of word ministries that women could participate in accomplishing. Personally, I would have liked to see Griffiths be more transparent in his views on complementarianism.