

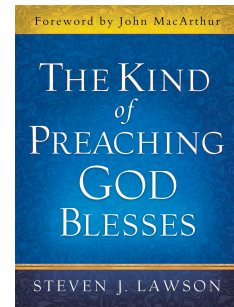
**BOOK REVIEW:**

**Lawson, Steven J. *The Kind of Preaching God Blesses*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013. 125pp.**

*Reviewed by:*

Geoffrey R. Kirkland, PhD

*Pastor, Christ Fellowship Bible Church (St. Louis, Missouri)*

**Summary of Book:**

Preaching the Word of God is nothing less than the thunder of God's voice powerfully working through the faithful man of God to achieve its appointed end. Preaching converts. Preaching points men to Christ. Preaching permits the power of God to pass through the proclaimer to God's people. In this post, post-modern era in which we live, preaching has found itself on a continual decline in churches. Many have exchanged preaching for sharing; they have replaced exposition with entertainment; they have discounted authoritative proclamation with relevant suggestions. It is for this reason that Lawson's work *The Kind of Preaching God Blesses* is so timely.

In this book, Lawson draws the reader back to the crucial text of 1 Corinthians 2:1-9 to show what kind of preaching it really is that God blesses.

**Layout of Book:**

Helpfully, Lawson begins the book by noting the conception of this book and how it all began with preaching expositionally through 1 Corinthians in the flock that he shepherds. Then from there he preached the same message at various conferences and venues around the globe. God seemed to specially bless this sermon.

The book lays out in the following manner. He first shows the poverty of modern preaching. Here in chapter 1 he solidly and convincingly unravels the *Christless Christianity* that often prevails today. He shows the current obsession with pragmatism and its displacement of Christ and the needed revivification of the bold proclamation of the supremacy of Christ and the high ground of Jesus Christ which pervades all of Scripture. Winsomely, Lawson reminds us: "God the Father honors the preaching that honors His Son. If our proclamation departs from this glorious focus, the blessing of God will be far from it. God will abandon the preaching that abandons Christ" (33).

Chapter 2 elaborates on the prohibition of worldly preaching. In this chapter, he speaks of what he calls: 'slick schtick.' Those in Corinth, where Paul preached and to whom he wrote this first epistle, would have earnestly desired beautiful oratory and smooth talkers. Yet Paul did not succumb to their wishes as he booms forth in 1 Cor 2:1 that he did not come with superiority of speech or worldly wisdom. Lawson emphatically shows at the conclusion of this chapter that "it

matters to God *what* is preached [a]nd it matters to Him *how* it is preached. No man is free to preach whatever and however he so chooses” (55).

The heart and soul of this book shines as a bright sunbeam in chapter 3: the preeminence of Christ in preaching. All preaching must — must! — center on one master theme, one major player, one major hero, and one preeminent object: Jesus Christ alone. Lawson chants: “the Lord Jesus Christ *alone* must have the central place in every sermon” (57). Paul came to Corinth with one determination, one resolve, one consuming-passion, namely, to know Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). Lawson proposes that preachers learn from Luther, a hero of old who said: “I preach as though Christ were crucified yesterday, rose from the dead today, and is coming back to earth again tomorrow” (61). So important is this point that Lawson unambiguously writes that “any sermon that failed to present Christ failed miserably” (62). Indeed, preaching Christ will produce divisions. The preacher will not prompt the divisions; the gospel does. The man of God who takes the Word of God and preaches the salvation of God must remember this: “there is no gospel preaching apart from preaching Christ crucified. The proclamation of the cross will always be a stumbling block to those who are religious but lost. To them, the cross is foolishness” (70).

Perhaps one of the most neglected areas of homiletics is the role of God the Spirit in preaching. Truly, preaching is both an art and a science. Yet the real power, the dominant power, in all preaching comes from the Spirit of God when the Word of God goes forth accurately. Ironically, the man of God does not stand tall with his head up with self-confidence to receive this power. Paul came to the Corinthians with weakness, fear, and trembling (1 Cor 2:3-5). Yet every man of God must hear this continually: “no preacher is any stronger than when he is weak. Only then does he trust in the power of the Spirit” (78). Preaching is desperation. The man of God has the Word of God and is resolute to proclaim the riches of what he has studied. Yet the man of God is entirely insufficient and inadequate in and of himself to accomplish one whit of anything good. The man of God can never be too weak to be used by God but he can be too strong to be used of God. Lloyd Jones underlines this important feature of preaching in the Holy Spirit as he writes: “all true preaching is energized by the power of the Spirit” (84). This chapter so winsomely and convictingly compels the man of God to fall to his knees and desperately ask God the Spirit to fill him, fuel him, and fan his soul into flame as he proclaims the gospel of Christ. Lawson concludes the chapter with these captivating words: “A dependence upon the Spirit is an absolute necessity for every pastor. It is in his dire weakness that the Spirit makes him strong. In the pulpit, he must prostrate himself before Almighty God in order that He might raise him up. As he dies to self, the Spirit grants power. This is the paradox of preaching” (88).

Chapter 5 speaks of the predestination of the Father in preaching. Lawson here examines 1 Cor 2:6-9 and shows how God’s sovereignty must influence, impact, and be present in every sermon. The eternal wisdom of God is found in the wisdom of the cross. And this is the very message the man of God must herald. Lawson notes that “this lofty message of God’s predestining purposes in the cross has been entrusted to all whom He has called to preach His Word. The high honor of declaring the unimaginable wisdom of God in the cross has been committed to such privileged

men. This profound truth is far beyond the intelligence of any man to conceive. It is the sacred word entrusted to those divinely commissioned to preach” (109).

The book concludes with a final chapter in which he expounds a grave need in today’s preaching — trinitarian preaching. He says that Jesus Christ, the preeminent subject in preaching must be repositioned as the glorious theme of all biblical preaching. Second, Lawson accurately shows that God the Spirit alone is the supernatural power in preaching. No one can proclaim the gospel effectively apart from the Spirit’s unction [*supernatural, Spirit-infused power*]. And finally, it is the Father who predetermined wisdom in preaching. The man of God must remain steadfast in proclaiming the gospel message in its entirety and thus be heralding the wondrous beauty, the glorious gospel, and the costly call of Christ.

### **Review of Book:**

The greatest part of the book is the Christological focus and the Christocentric focus of preaching. Lawson beckons every biblical preacher to learn from the crucial text of 1 Corinthians 2:1-9 and to resolve to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

An oft-neglected and yet a necessary feature of all biblical preaching is the power of the Spirit filling the man of God, speaking through the man of God, causing the spoken Word to go forth powerfully, and effect exactly what has been ordained. The man of God must be endowed with power from on high. And this only comes when the man refuses to bow to culture’s wishes and culturally relevant methods and as he unshakably stands on the word of the cross.

Though it is brief, and though the chapters are quite short, the book convincingly shows what kind of preaching it is that God blesses. Indeed, when the herald remembers that God cares not only *what* he says but also *how* he says it, this should drive him to labor relentlessly, study diligently, and trust confidently in the power of the Spirit as he unveils the glory of Christ to the glory of God.

Every preacher should learn from Lawson’s example, who points to Charles Spurgeon at various points in this book, to live to tell about this gospel of Jesus Christ. Taking the words of Spurgeon, Lawson delivers a compelling exhortation that every preacher receives the same marching orders as Spurgeon did:

“I received some years ago orders from my Master to stand at the foot of the cross until He came. He has not come yet, but I mean to stand there till He does. If I should disobey His orders and leave those simple truths which have been the means of the conversion of souls, I know not how I could expect His blessing. Here, then, I stand at the foot of the cross and tell out the old, old story, stale though it sound to itching ears, and worn threadbare as critics may deem it. It is of Christ I love to speak — of Christ who loved, and lived, and died, the substitute for sinners, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (111).