

WHY I PREACH WITH AN OPEN BIBLE.

Geoffrey R. Kirkland
Christ Fellowship Bible Church

Blogs and articles abound in promoting myriads of ideas relating to preaching and of being relevant to the audience and clever in the delivery. My commitment has been and will continue to be simple: to open the Bible, to read a biblical text, to explain that biblical text, to press home its application to the hearer's heart, and to proclaim the saving gospel and call sinners to repent and believe. In doing this, I preach with an open Bible -- always. I've compiled a few reasons why I preach with an open Bible.

1. it conveys my only authority.

When the preacher speaks, he has only one authority -- the voice of God that goes forth in the declaring of divine truth as it is sourced in the written Word. Other than that, the man has nothing to say. When I open my Bible and preach from it, it conveys to the congregation that my only authority to stand before them and speak is simply and solely is the written and sufficient Word of God. I want it to be seen. I want the audience to understand I'm a man under divine authority as I speak God's truth to His people.

2. it models biblical hermeneutics.

Preaching is hermeneutics publicly spoken. To preach the Word means that a man has prayed and studied and done all the hard work so as to present biblical truth in a clear, compelling, and understandable way. I preach with an open Bible because I want to model biblical interpretation -- good hermeneutical principles and practices -- even in the act of heralding God's Word. I don't want people to ever come away and say "I believe this because Pastor Geoff said it!" Rather, I want people to leave convinced of theological truths because they say: "I see this in the Bible!" I want to model for them the art and discipline and proper methods of arriving at the proper meaning of the biblical text. And preaching with my open Bible aids me in this endeavor.

3. it prevents self-contrived ideologies.

Preaching with an open Bible prevents me from inventing self-contrived ideas and self-promoting messages. How easy it would become to start tickling the ears of the audience and fall into the cunning trap of people-pleasing. But to preach with an open Bible prevents me from creating and crafting my own fabricated ideologies and sermonettes and it causes me to preach what God wants me to preach in the following paragraph as I preach expositively and sequentially through entire books of the Bible. I don't want to be in charge of what I say or preach; I want God to dictate what and how I preach. And to prevent my own ideas infiltrating in, I believe that having an open Bible on the pulpit before me and constantly referencing verses in the Bible helps prevent self-contrived ideologies.

4. it visualizes the Headship of Christ

Jesus rules His church. I don't think very many people would argue with that. But when you observe much of American Christianity you see something vastly different. One way, I believe, to emphatically show that Jesus rules *this* church is to preach from an open Bible on the pulpit so that all the congregation knows and hears and understands that *Jesus Christ speaks to us now*

through the exposition of sacred Scripture as it is read and expounded through God's appointed messenger. I don't want to neglect anything that would downplay the headship of Christ. I don't want to pick and choose verses and paste them on a screen. I want people to see the truth in *their own Bibles.* I want people to see me hold my Bible. I want the congregation to see me point to my text of Scripture. I want them to see my authority comes from Christ as it is codified and revealed in the inerrant Scriptures.

5. it proclaims its own sufficiency

Preaching with an open Bible in front of me is a simple proclamation in and of itself. It declares the sufficiency of the Bible. I don't need gimmicks, or dramas, or entertaining techniques. I don't need visual aids or clever anecdotes or humorous stories to catch people's attention. God does that. So in opening my Bible, reading it, explaining and applying it, and pressing it home to people's hearts and consciences, I believe that this testifies to the Bible's own power and sufficiency.

6. it enhances frequent cross-referencing

One key principle of rightly interpreting the Bible is the *analogy of Scripture* -- comparing Scripture with Scripture and interpreting texts in light of other biblical texts that speak to the same truths. When I preach, I want the congregation to all know that the Bible -- though containing 66 uniquely inspired books -- comprises a glorious unity of divine wisdom. Nothing ever contradicts itself. No part of Scripture will ever diminish or negate or eliminate another. So in my preaching, I want my Bible to be open so that I can readily tell the congregation: "turn to...", or, "let's see this further in another portion of Scripture..." So in the open Bible before me as I herald, I want the freedom and readiness of turning to many Scriptures throughout the entirety of the message to aid and serve the message going forth. An open Bible helps with this.

7. it reminds me of my grave responsibility.

Quite simply, preaching is a sober calling and a majestic task. In a sense, the preacher always fails when he preaches because he can't do justice to the beauty and glory of the God that is being presented, nor can human words adequately convey the splendor of Christ and the efficacy of His atonement. Nevertheless, all biblical preachers fearfully and joyfully take up the divinely-given call to preach. No greater joy exists in the world than to open God's clear word and explain its meaning to the people God has brought to hear it. Preaching with an open Bible serves as an ongoing reminder that my responsibility is great and my duty is lofty. I am a mouthpiece, a messenger, an ambassador, a prophet-like man, to take God's given revelation and speak it faithfully, unchangeably, and powerfully to all who have assembled. Having an open Bible serves to continually bring the weight of sobriety on my soul that I am a man under obligation, a man devoted to God, a man enslaved to Christ, a man in love with souls. Thus, I preach God's Word to God's people with an open Bible with joyful trembling and sober expectation that God will work in and through the going forth of His word to accomplish His perfect will.