**He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World**

**By Albert Mohler**

Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. serves as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books, including *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong*; *Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters*; *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth*; and *Words From the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the Ten Commandments*; and *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Mohler is a big proponent of expository preaching. From 1985 to 1993, he served as associate editor of *Preaching*, a journal for evangelical preachers, and is currently editor-in-chief of The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology. Furthermore, he is a contributor to the *Expositor* magazine, which is solely dedicated to the task of preaching.

Mohler wrote He is Not Silent because of his concern for the state of preaching today, which he believes is the worst and best of times. It is the best of times because he believes there is a resurgence of among younger evangelical preachers toward a deeper commitment to biblical exposition. It is the worst of times because according to his assessment, there has been a decline and eclipse of expository preaching (p. 16). Contemporary preaching, according to Mohler suffers because of five main reasons: 1) ﻿a loss of confidence in the power of the word; 2) ﻿an infatuation with technology; 3) from embarrassment before the biblical text; 4) from ﻿an emptying of biblical content; and 5) ﻿from a focus on felt needs.

The book is divided into ten separate chapters. Mohler begins the book with an emphasis on worship. He believes much of the issue surrounding a misplacement of priority for preaching and decline in the pulpit is because worship is not properly defined by some. Worship, in his opinion, must be centered on the proclamation of God’s Word. He writes, “﻿music is not the central act of Christian worship—nor is evangelism, nor even the ordinances. The heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the Word of God. (pp. 36–37). Above all, Mohler is concerned with offering a theological foundation for preaching. He contends the Trinity provides the ground for preaching. Furthermore, it is his belief that the theological foundation of preaching must be rooted in expository preaching. In fact, he spends two full chapters making the case that “﻿the only form of authentic Christian preaching is expository preaching (p. 49).

Mohler is a preacher writing to other preachers. For instance, he believes the preacher is a steward of God’s mysteries. Consequently, the preacher’s authority is God–given. He writes, “﻿The preacher’s authority lies not in profession, not in position, and not in personality. It lies in the Word of God alone.” Furthermore, he tries to make the case for pastors to be theologians (chapter 7), and he titles chapter nine “The Urgency of Preaching: An Exhortation to Preachers.” Finally, chapters eight and ten offer helpful insights for preachers who find themselves preaching to audiences ingrained in Postmodern thinking. Reading chapter five of Tim Keller’s *Preaching* can prove to be a great compliment to these two chapters offered by Mohler. Mohler believes that though the current challenges posed by Postmodernism are overwhelming for the church, God still speaks to his people through preaching, because, after all, God has spoken (p. 42).

He is Not Silent is in part Mohler’s attempt to encourage preachers to pay attention to the cultural challenges of our day, both within and outside the church. Because postmodern culture challenges the fundamentals of the Christian faith, preaching needs to be buttressed upon a solid theological foundation. By offering a clear and concise theological framework for preaching, Mohler helps the man who wants to indeed stand in the gap to faithfully preach God’s Word.

**Critique:**

Mohler’s book seeks to address the theological problem behind the decline in preaching in today’s pulpit. However, he does not address the hermeneutical issues preachers face when preaching from the Bible. So, his book is focuses less on hermeneutics and more on providing a theological foundation for preaching. Mohler does not hide his Christological bent when it comes to preaching. He writes, “﻿Every single text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of all, and therefore He is the Lord of the Scriptures too” (p. 96). However, there is a difference between pointing to Christ in one’s sermon and the fact that Christ is indeed not the impetus behind “every single text” in the Bible. Mohler does not clarify what he means in the book, but it seems he is using hyperbolic language.

The title of the book indicates a basic premise, God is not silent. In Mohler’s own words, “﻿All Christian preaching springs from the truth that God has spoken (p. 42).” So indeed, God still speaks through his Word, and Mohler implies his speech is carried forth through the preaching of the Word. Now, though Mohler is right to point to this reality, most of the book does unpack the concept in thorough detail. Furthermore, the subtitle of the book “Preaching in a Postmodern World” is also addressed, but not interwoven throughout the book, but rather only in two separate chapters.

Mohler clearly wrote the book with evangelicals in mind. The term “evangelical” or “evangelicalism” appears several times in the book. However, Mohler does not provide a definition for what he means by evangelical. One thing is for sure, both preachers and lay people alike are able to understand the main premises laid out in the book. Mohler’s use of language is simple and precise. His book is not academic in nature, but can serve the academy, especially in places where there’s lesser emphasis on preaching Christ well.

Perhaps chapter three is the most helpful chapter in the book. Many preachers fail to articulate their own theology of preaching. However, one’s theology of preaching shows up in the pulpit every time a preacher delivers his sermon. One of Mohler’s most significant quotes is, “﻿A theology of preaching begins with the humble acknowledgment that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of His revealed will for the church” (pp. 39-40). In other words, preaching is not a human invention. Hence why it should be taken seriously and be earnestly applied. Churches should pay close attention to how their preachers exposit God’s Word. Mohler is right to point out that, “﻿the health of the church depends upon its pastors functioning as faithful theologians—teaching, preaching, defending, and applying the great doctrines of the faith” (p. 105).” The question, however, Mohler left unaddressed is how preachers are held accountable by their congregations for their preaching.

It is clear that Mohler makes the case that the authentic way to preach is the expository method. He adamantly declares, “In fact, I believe that the only form of authentic Christian preaching is expository preaching” (p. 49). But one is left to wonder whether all other types of preaching are illegitimate. Certainly, one can preach topically in an expositional manner. It just depends on what is meant by topical, which Mohler spends very little effort to explain. Mohler contends that preachers need to teach, preach, defend, and apply the great doctrines of the faith, but can all doctrines be preached from specific texts alone? Perhaps, topical preaching that aims to instruct God’s people about the great doctrines of the faith can occasionally aid in this task. Mohler’s book is not meant to instruct pastors on how to preach from a pragmatic standpoint. Rather, it offers good insight into the importance of developing a proper theology of preaching while being attentive to the challenges preacher face when preaching the Word of God in a postmodern world, of which they too are subject to acquiesce.

**Significant Quotes:**

* ﻿To a large degree, that remains true as we consider the state of preaching today. Whether it is the best of times or the worst of times depends largely upon where one chooses to look. (p. 15).
* ﻿On the one hand, there are signs of great promise and encouragement … ﻿On the other hand, the last few decades have been a period of wanton experimentation in many pulpits. (p. 15–16).
* ﻿Since preaching is itself a form of “mental transport,” any loss of confidence in the word leads to a loss of confidence in preaching. (p. 17).
* ﻿The audacious claim of Christian preaching is that the faithful declaration of the Word of God, spoken through the preacher’s voice, is even more powerful than anything music or image can deliver. (p. 17).
* ﻿The power of the Word of God, spoken through the human voice, is seen in the Bible’s unique power to penetrate all dimensions of the human personality. (p. 18).
* ﻿… many of these preachers simply disregard and ignore vast sections of Scripture, focusing instead on texts that are more comfortable, palatable, and nonconfrontational to the modern mind. (p. 18).
* ﻿Urged on by devotees of “needs-based preaching,” many evangelicals have abandoned the text without recognizing that they have done so. (p. 20).
* ﻿These are indeed the best of times and the worst of times. I am thankful for a renaissance of expository preaching, especially among many young preachers. (p. 22).
* ﻿My concern is that the issue of worship will define not only our church services but also our theology and our beliefs about God. There is no more important issue for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ than that we worship God as He Himself would have us to worship. (p. 23).
* ﻿Thus, we should be reminded that the purpose of the theologian—and the preacher—is to serve the church so that the people of God worship Him more faithfully. (p. 24).
* ﻿Our confused worship corrupts our theology, and our weak theology corrupts our worship. (p. 27).
* ﻿Scripture makes clear that worship is something we do, not just something we attend. (p. 28).
* ﻿But isn’t there a great deal of the cringe factor in Scripture? If you are going to remove the cringe factor from Scripture, then you are going to end up with a very thin book. (p. 32).
* ﻿True worship requires seeing the true and living God, and then seeing ourselves as we actually are in our sinfulness. (pp. 34–35).
* ﻿I realize it might seem bold—and maybe even shocking to some—to say that preaching is the central component of ﻿Christian worship. But how could it be otherwise? For it is primarily through the preaching of Scripture that we come to a true vision of the living God, recognize our own sinfulness, hear the declaration of redemption, and are called to a response of faith, repentance, and service. (pp. 35–36).
* ﻿Music is not the central act of Christian worship—nor is evangelism, nor even the ordinances. The heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the Word of God. (pp. 36–37).
* ﻿Michael Green pointedly put the problem like this: “This is the age of the sermonette, and sermonettes make Christianettes.” (p. 38).
* ﻿A theology of preaching begins with the humble acknowledgment that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of His revealed will for the church. (pp. 39–40).
* ﻿True preaching begins with this confession: We preach because God has spoken. (p. 40).
* ﻿God has called the church to speak of Him on the basis of His Word and deeds, and therefore all Christian preaching is biblical preaching. (p. 41).
* ﻿All Christian preaching springs from the truth that God has spoken in word and deed, and that He has chosen human vessels to bear witness to Himself and His gospel. (p. 42).
* ﻿The neglect of the work of the Holy Spirit is a symptom of the decline of biblical Trinitarianism that marks our age. (p. 45).
* ﻿The glory of preaching is that God has promised to use preachers and preaching to accomplish His purpose and bring glory unto Himself. (p. 48).
* ﻿I want to argue that the preaching that is central to Christian worship is expository preaching. In fact, I believe that the only form of authentic Christian preaching is expository preaching. (p. 49).
* ﻿Rather, we should define exactly what we mean when we say “preach.” What we mean is, very simply, reading the text and explaining it—reproving, rebuking, exhorting, and patiently teaching directly from the text of Scripture. If you are not doing that, then you are not preaching. (p. 51).
* ﻿The heart and soul of expository preaching—of any true Christian preaching—is reading the Word of God and then explaining it to the people so that they understand it. (pp. 51–52).
* ﻿If you are not confident that God speaks as you rightly read and explain the Word of God, then you should quit. (p. 57).
* ﻿Preaching is therefore always a matter of life and death. The people in our churches depend for their very lives on the ministry of the Word; therefore our preaching had better be nothing less—and nothing other— than the exposition of the Bible. (p. 63).
* ﻿Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible. (p. 65).
* ﻿When it is done rightly and faithfully, authentic expository preaching will be marked by three distinct characteristics: authority, reverence, and centrality. (p. 69).
* ﻿Of this we can be certain—no congregation will revere the Bible more than the preacher does.
* (p. 73).
* ﻿Reverence is the only appropriate response to the acknowledgment that the Bible is the Word of God and that preaching is the proclamation of that Word to God’s people. (pp. 73–76).
* ﻿In the end, the church will not be judged by its Lord for the quality of its music but for the faithfulness of its preaching. (p. 76).
* ﻿Rarely do we hear these days of a church that is distinguished primarily by its faithful, powerful, expository preaching. (p. 78).
* ﻿The preacher’s authority lies not in profession, not in position, and not in personality. It lies in the Word of God alone. (p. 81).
* ﻿Every single text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of all, and therefore He is the Lord of the Scriptures too. (p. 96)
* ﻿Every time we preach a text of Scripture, we are accountable to that text. We must read and explain accurately to our people what that text means and how it applies to their lives. (p. 96).
* ﻿The Bible’s storyline consists of at least four great movements that are absolutely necessary: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Without these four movements, we cannot understand ourselves as human beings or our place in God’s work. (p. 97)
* ﻿Every time we preach, we need to create dissonance in the minds of our hearers. We need to declare our wretchedness, our sin, and our powerlessness, and we need to admit frankly that we can’t solve this problem. And then we proclaim the gospel. (p. 101).
* ﻿Nevertheless, the health of the church depends upon its pastors functioning as faithful theologians—teaching, preaching, defending, and applying the great doctrines of the faith. (p. 105).
* ﻿As Martin Luther rightly affirmed, the preaching of the Word of God is the first mark of the church. Where it is found, there one finds the church. Where it is absent, there is no church, whatever others may claim. (p. 112).
* ﻿It is not enough to preach salvation without pointing to judgment. (p. 130).
* ﻿If I understand the gospel, it is this: I deserve to be lost forever; the only reason why I should not be damned is this, that Christ was punished in my stead, and there is no need to execute a sentence twice for sin.” (pp. 167–168).