

# 1975 Address to the Southern Baptist Convention

by W.A. Criswell

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*A preacher's message should be authentic, authoritarian, absolute, and apocalyptic, based on the immutable and unchanging word of God.*

**Duration:** 20:07

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1-2, Exodus 20:1-17, Joshua 1:1-9, Matthew 28:18-20, John 3:16, Acts 1:8, Revelation 21:1-4

**Topics:** "Biblical Authority", "Apologetic Preaching"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of delivering an authentic and apologetic message from the pulpit. He argues against speculative and problematic beliefs, stating that truth should be based on the five senses and logical explanations. The preacher also highlights the significance of the Bible as a serious book, countering the notion that it is filled with myths and legends. He shares a personal anecdote about a friend who faced doubts about his calling as a pastor, emphasizing the need for conviction and academic judgment in preaching.

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## Transcript

I'm surely glad to see demonstrated here what they have taught me in history, that democracy really began with our Baptist churches. We don't appoint our officers, such as we see in the presidency and the vice presidency of the United States. We elect them, and that's great, that's good.

Because of the passing of time, I thought I'd just begin in the middle of the message. Leave off the first part of it and start with arousal, which would be the preacher and his pulpit and the message that he delivers. The preacher's message is to be first of all authentic, that is not spurious or legendary or mythological.

For they say out of certain sections of the academic world you had as well preach Jason and the Golden Fleece as to preach Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. You had as well preach Hercules and the twelve great labors as to preach Moses and the twelve tribes. You had as well preach Agamemnon and the Trojan War as to preach Joshua and the conquest of Canaan.

You had as well preach Aesop and his moralistic as to preach Jesus and his theological parables. The whole book they avow to us is spurious. It's a piece of antique literature.

It is filled with legend and fable and myth. So some of our young people come back from the university and they say to me, we have given up the faith. We no longer believe in the Bible, much less the stories in Genesis.

For I have learned that I came from a green scum. Oh, I see. So you came from a green scum.

Yes, yes. I came from an amoeba or a paramecium, a tadpole or a frog or a fish or a fowl or a marsupial or an anthropoid ape and now I'm homo sapiens. Oh, I see.

Where did you learn that? And why am I so sure of that? I was taught that by a professor in the university. Oh, so you came from a green scum because you were taught so by a professor in a university. Indeed, indeed.

Once I was a tadpole beginning to begin. Then I was a foal with my tail tucked in. Then I was a monkey in a banyan tree and now I'm a professor with a peak D. So our book is a serious book full of myths and fables and legends.

How is the preacher to think in conviction and persuasion and academic judgment like that? May I reply? I have a dear friend who went to the University of Chicago to win a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Pedagogy. While he was there, he gained the friendship of a young man in the Chicago Divinity School. Upon the graduation of the young theolog, he said to my end in Pedagogy, he said, I don't know what to do.

I have been called a pastor to an old-fashioned Presbyterian church in the Middle West. One that believes the Bible is the Word of God. But I don't believe the Bible is the Word of God and I don't know what to do.

And my friend in the Pedagogical School at the University said to him, I can tell you exactly what you ought to do. And my young theolog up there at Chicago Divinity School eagerly said, what? And my friend replied, I think you ought to quit the ministry. I believe the same way.

If a man does not believe the Bible is the Word of God, he ought to quit the ministry. Our message is first of all to be authentic. It's to be genuine.

It's to be real. It's to be based upon the revelations of Almighty God. Number two, the man who stands in the pulpit delivering a message, it ought to be not only authentic, it ought to be authoritarian.

That is, not speculative, not hypothetical, not problematical. There are several bases for truth and for belief action. One can be the five senses.

I believe a thing because I can see it, or taste it, or touch it, smell it, or hear it. And the inevitable concomitant, nor do I believe anything that I cannot explain. Such a premise of authority is idiocy.

Like the old cliché, just how would you explain a black cow eating green rice, giving white milk out of which you turn yellow butter? You don't explain anything. There's no scientist, there's no academician, there's no student in the earth that explains anything ever. You just observe and write it down.

Explanation belongs to God himself. Another basis for belief and action can be subjective, internal experience. This is the existentialist with his incommunicable, un verbalized truth.

This is the neo-orthodox theologian with unpropositional truth, all of which is nothing but subjective judgment. The Bible and the truth of God is nothing but what I accept to be, or experience to be, as the truth of God. Not that it is a revelation from heaven itself.

It is all subjective and internal. I one time heard of a woman who went to see a famous artist, and there, looking at her, she explained, oh, oh, oh, what is this? Such depth of emotion, such harmony of spirit, such intellectual deception, what is this? And he looked and said, dear madam, that is the place where I clean my brushes. A basis of truth can be a horror.

A thing is true because the church, the palace, the legate, the pope, the cardinal say it is the truth. But for us, who stand in the pulpit of a Baptist church, what is the base of authority upon which our feet stand? It is the immutable and unchanging word of God. The pharaoh will not feed us, the Christ wither us, but the word of God shall stand forever.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but my word will never pass away. God's word is like God himself, the same yesterday and today and forever. Not only is the message to be authentic, and not only is it to be authoritarian, thus saith the Lord, but it is to be absolute.

That is haunting, not relative. It is forever grounded in the character of Almighty God. That is not strange that a man should stand in the pulpit delivering the absolute truth of the Almighty God, for all truth is that.

Truth is never relative or changing. It is forever the same. Mathematical truth, physics, optics, acoustics, mechanics, electromagnetics, thermodynamics, wherever truth is found, it is forever the same.

It is absolute. You don't understand that, sir. I'm a broad-minded man.

I believe in these narrow theological conceptions. I think truth can be broad and all-inclusive. I am a broad-minded soul.

Oh, so you are. Suppose you go to the bank and you tell the officer of the bank, I'm a broad-minded critter. I don't believe that 2 plus 2 equals 4. I'm broad-minded.

I believe 2 plus 2 can equal 6, or it can be 8, or it can be 10. Oh, yes. You know what they'll do? They'll examine your head and take you to the life form.

That's what they'll do. Truth is absolute and unchanging and never relative wherever truth is found. And it is more or less so with the truth of Almighty God, moral truth.

Moral truth is not what a man said it is. It's not what a judge affirmed it to be. It's not what a legislature made it to be.

But moral truth is founded in the character of God and never changes. There is no such thing as situation ethics or changing morality. Morality never changes.

What was right yesterday is right today, is right tomorrow, and is right forever. Truth, moral truth, is founded in the character of God. Political truth, which I haven't time to satiate all the political truth, is grounded in God.

What is right for the citizenry, what is right for the nation, what is right for the people, is forever right before God. And spiritual truth is just the same. Whoever shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God

shall take away his part out of the holy city.

And whoever shall add to the words of this prophecy, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book. I am to take my stand upon the immutable, unchanging, absolute, authoritarian word of God. And what I do, my feet may tremble, but the rock upon which I stand is unmoved forever.

Not only is my message to be authentic, not only is it to be authoritarian, and not only is it to be absolute without compromise, my message is lastly to be apocalyptic. Apocalyptic, an unveiling of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Watchmen, cries the world, what of the night? What of the night? What of death? And what of the grave? And what of the judgment? And what of eternity? What of the night? We who believe in the inspiration of this book, and we who believe in the great apocalyptic, the unveiling of Jesus Christ, we have a message for the world.

The same Lord God, who in the beginning revealed to us the creation of the universe and the earth on which we stand, no man was there to see it, God revealed it to us. The same Lord God revealed to us the great infinite confirmation of the age that no man can see without the unveiling of Jesus Christ. And when a man stands with an apocalyptic message, he stands with the Holy Spirit.

For us, for the soaring heart, God wipes away our tears, and we live in infinite faith and hope and conquest and triumph. Someday, by the word of the Lord, Satan shall be found. Someday, peace and sleep in the dust of the earth shall be raised from among the dead.

Someday, God's people shall be raptured from this earth of judgment and shall live in the presence of our Lord forever and forever. O glorious, apocalyptic, and final day, when the righteous are vindicated, when the kingdom shall come, and when Christ shall reign over the earth and all of creation, our blessed Savior. O, O, the day that is coming in the promise and in the word of the Lord, it may be at midday, it may be at twilight, it may be perchance that the blackness of midnight will burst into life in the blaze of his glory when Jesus comes for his own.

O joy, O delight, should we go without dying, no sickness, no sadness, no dread, and no crying, caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory when Jesus comes for his own. My brethren, in the process, I can tell you this, after forty years of experience, the man who will stand in that sacred place and deliver to his people an apocalyptic message shall have victory and triumph in the word that he brings, God's petus. As we stand there as God's messengers, with God's message, authentic, this is it.

Authoritarian, this is it. Absolute, this is it. Apocalyptic, this is it.

Thank you, Dr. Cripple. Thank you, doctor. You remember tonight, our service will start at seven o'clock.

We do hope that everyone will be here promptly at that time. I would like tonight at eight o'clock to pursue our practice conference, the new officers, and so if you'd get the word to these men who've been elected.

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