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## Stott's "The Challenge of Preaching" (Book Review)

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## **The Challenge of Preaching,**

by John Stott, abridged and updated by Greg Scharf. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015. 144 pp. \$16.00. ISBN 9780802873354

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John Stott stands as one of the most respected and esteemed expository preachers of our time. His book *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*, first published in the USA in 1982, is an excellent treatise for anyone who wishes to preach or teach the Word of God with clarity and precision. This volume was also published in London in 1982 under the title *I Believe in Preaching*. John Stott takes his reader through the history and foundations of; the reasons for; the how-to; and finally the reasons why all preachers, regardless of denomination, should participate in expository preaching.

In Greg Scharf's abridged and updated work, he does an admirable job of bringing John Stott's thoughts into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He rearranges the material some but still emphasizes the same solid principles of preaching as bridge-building – connecting the Word with the world. He calls today's preachers to the same principles of study, prayer, and preparation. He reiterates the importance of sincerity and earnestness, courage and humility. What Scharf adds to Stott's work is the application of these preaching fundamentals to the world we live in today.

Both Stott and Scharf emphasize reading the Bible and allowing that to soak in but they also exhort preachers to read widely in order to gain greater insight and understanding of God's Word. And both writers explain that the only way to make God's Word relevant to those who hear our sermons is for the preacher to be very aware of current events, especially those things that are on the minds of our congregants.

Each author dedicates one chapter to sincerity and earnestness. Of course we all know what sincerity is and we generally can recognize when someone is sincere. It is not enough for a pastor to know the Word, he must also live the Word. A preacher cannot espouse right living from the pulpit but live a different lifestyle when out of the pulpit. Stott and Scharf go on to say that there is a step beyond sincerity and it is called earnestness. Stott says, "To be sincere is to *mean* what we say and to *do* what we say; to be earnest is, in addition, to *feel* what we say."

Stott and Scharf sum up preaching this way "preaching is meant to encourage a meeting between God and the people." Having been a preacher for the last 34 years, I say a heartfelt *Amen* to that summation. This book is very highly recommend to any and all who wish to answer the call to preach or teach the Word of God.