

STEVEN J. LAWSON
**PREACHING CHRIST
CRUCIFIED**

CONRAD MBEWE
**EVANGELISTIC PREACHING,
A LOST ART**

JOHN MACARTHUR
**THE CHURCH'S
ONE COMMISSION**

EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

EVANGELISM *in* *the* PULPIT

**GETTING THE
GOSPEL RIGHT**

Q&A

*theologian
R.C. Sproul
tells us
how*



ISSUE

03

JAN/FEB15



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MAKING CHRIST KNOWN

In his final letter, Paul charges his son in the faith, Timothy, “Do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5). With these words, the aged apostle establishes the timeless standard for pastoral ministry, not only for young Timothy, but for all pastors in every generation. His imperative comes with binding force and apostolic authority. All pastors must do the work of an evangelist. They must earnestly proclaim the gospel message, urging people to put saving faith in Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that pastoral evangelism is commanded. But where should it be exercised?

First, *every pastor must preach the gospel to himself*. Before any expositor can call others to repent, he himself must believe in Jesus Christ. Paul exhorts Timothy, saying, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Tim 4:16). Furthermore, every preacher must examine his own soul. The success of one’s evangelism is principally dependent upon the reality of Christ in one’s own life. As Charles Spurgeon writes:

A graceless pastor is a blind man elected to a professorship of optics, philosophizing upon light and vision, discoursing upon...the nice shades and delicate blendings of the prismatic colors, while he himself is absolutely in the dark!



He is a dumb man elevated to the chair of music; a deaf man fluent upon symphonies and harmonies! He is a mole professing to educate eaglets.

Second, *every pastor must preach the gospel to his family*. Evangelism continues in the home with an expositor’s wife and children. I will never forget an elders’ meeting in which one of our pastors shared that his wife had been converted the previous night. She was one of the nicest people in the church and yet, unknown to us, she was unconverted. How often is this the reality? To this end, every pastor must give attention to the spiritual state of his wife and children. Like Noah, he must get himself *and* his family on board.

Third, *every pastor must preach the gospel to his flock*. He must be aware that not all in church are in Christ. Every pastor’s evangelistic work includes regularly presenting the gospel with clear, decisive appeals. He must implore his congregation to believe in the message of the cross. As he exhorts, even pleads, for his flock to be converted, there will be urgency in his voice.

His gospel preaching will be characterized by bold proclamations of Christ crucified and warm appeals to come to Christ. These must come both in and out of the pulpit. Preaching the gospel to the flock involves loving appeals to be converted as well as severe warnings of eternal consequences where there is obstinate unbelief.

Fourth, *every pastor must preach the gospel to the world*. The strategies for outreach will differ from one man to the next, depending upon his gifts and opportunities. As a fisher of men, the pastor must go where the fish are. He must leave dry land, sail out into deep waters, and cast and draw his net. Pastors must regularly extend the free offer of the gospel and urge all people to believe in Christ.

The greatest joy in life is knowing Christ, and the second greatest is making Him known. May every expositor enter joyfully into this privileged task of doing the work of an evangelist and winning souls to Christ. ♦



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Every expositor should make much of his calling and impress upon others the fact that he has been delegated by God to preach the gospel. All preachers must do the work of an evangelist, earnestly proclaiming the gospel message, urging people to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

EXPOSITOR

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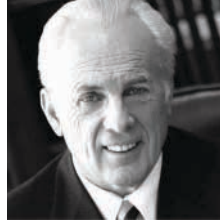


CONTRIBUTORS

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Steven J. Lawson is president of OnePassion Ministries, professor of preaching at The Master's Seminary, teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries, professor-in-residence with Truth Remains, and author of over twenty books.



John MacArthur is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and president of The Master's College and Seminary. He is the author of over one hundred books and author and editor of *The MacArthur Study Bible*.



Conrad Mbewe faithfully and powerfully proclaims the Word of God in Zambia from Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka. He is also the author of *Foundations for the Flock: Truths about the Church for All the Saints*.



Eric Alexander served for fifteen years as minister of a rural Church of Scotland parish in Ayrshire, and for twenty years as Senior Minister of St. Georges Parish Church in the center of Glasgow. He retired from St. Georges in 1998.



Geoffrey Thomas has been the pastor of Alfred Place Baptist Church, Wales, for over forty years. He is a graduate of University College of Cardiff and Westminster Theological Seminary and the author of numerous books.



Thomas R. Schreiner is Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Biblical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also pastor of preaching at Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville, KY.



John J. Murray has served congregations of the Free Church of Scotland in Oban, Argyll, and in Edinburgh. Since retiring he has been assisting in congregations of the Free Church of Scotland in the Glasgow. He is the author of numerous books and articles.



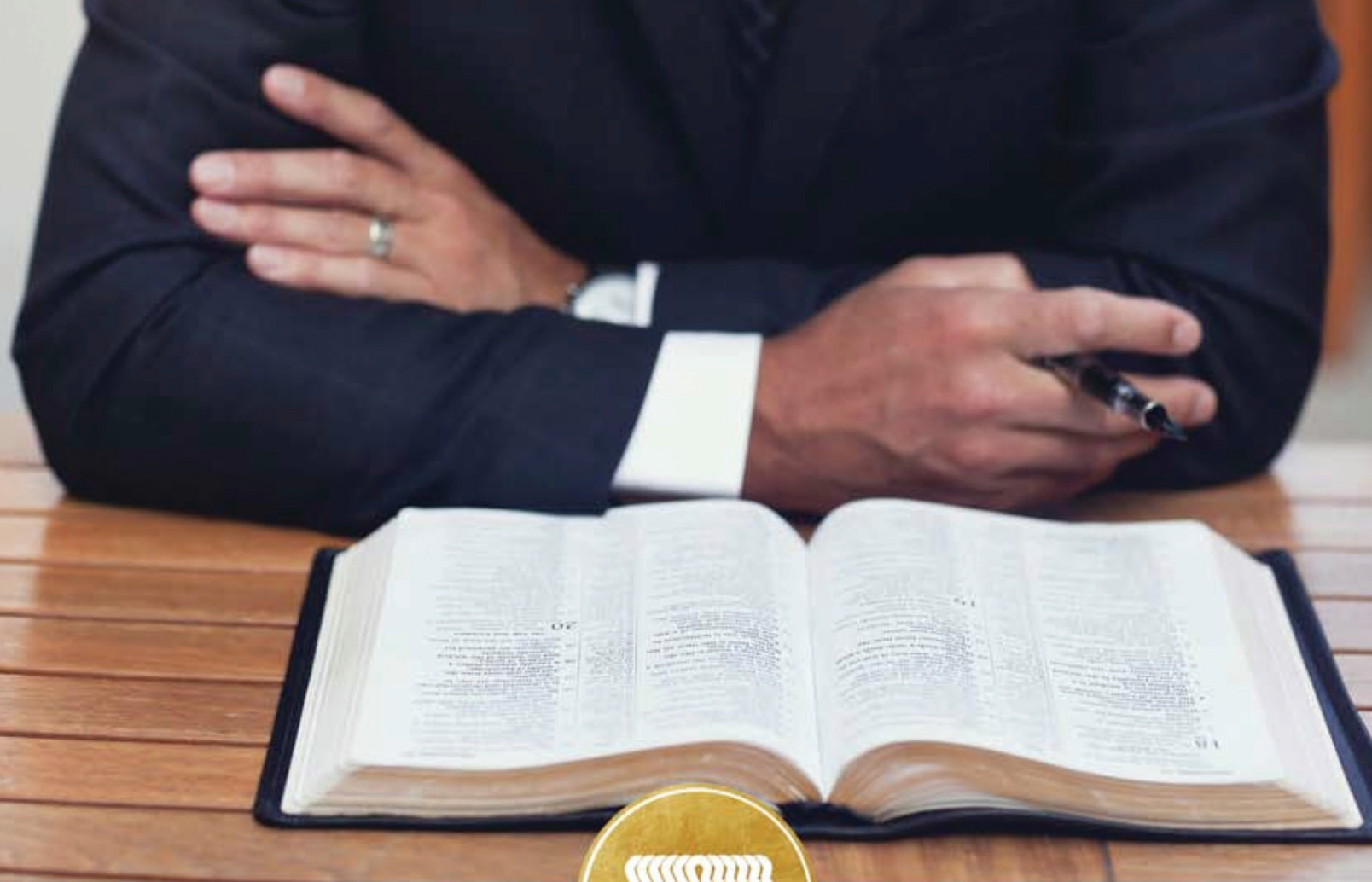
R. C. Sproul is co-pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, FL, and the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. His many books include *Chosen by God*, *Scripture Alone*, and *Everyone's a Theologian*.



Keith Essex received his D.Min. at The Master's Seminary and is now the Associate Professor of Bible Exposition and Associate Director of D.Min. Studies at The Master's Seminary.



Dustin W. Benge is the editor of *Expositor* magazine. He is also a Ph.D. candidate at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Associate Pastor at Christ Fellowship Baptist Church.



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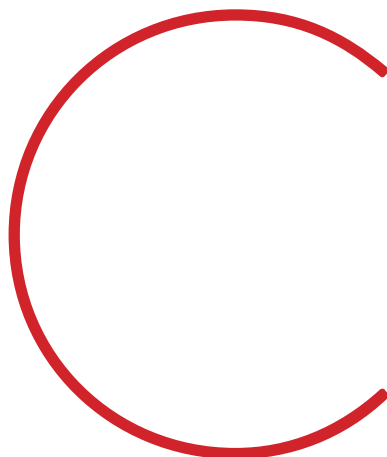
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PREACHING
CHRIST
CRUCIFIED

by Steven J. Lawson



Christianity is centered in Christ. The sum and substance of what it is to be a Christian is found in trusting Christ, knowing Him, and becoming like Him. The height of the Christian life is adorning Christ, the depth of it loving Him, the breadth of it obeying Him, the length of it following Him. Everything in the Christian life revolves around the person and work of Jesus Christ. Simply put, Christianity *is* Christ.

Since Jesus Christ is the heart and soul of the Christian faith, He must, therefore, be the overarching theme in our preaching. Every pulpit must be singularly devoted to magnifying the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prevailing message must be the all-consuming glory of His being.

The salvation purchased by Christ at the cross—His sin-bearing, substitutionary death—is the primary truth that runs throughout the entire Bible. From the first mention of Christ as the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15) until the climatic vision of Him as the exalted Lamb in heaven slain for sinners (Rev 5:1–14), Christ and Him crucified is the overriding truth that emerges throughout Scripture. Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly emphasize the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that takes away the sin of the world. Even so, this theme must be prominent in our preaching if we are to remain consistent with Scripture.

Jesus Himself affirmed this paramount sub-

ject when He announced, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (John 5:39). This is to say, the entire Bible is pointing to the One who spoke these words. When our Lord appeared on the road to Emmaus, He opened up the Scriptures and presented Himself to them: “Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). All parts of Scripture reveal Jesus Christ. Therefore, He is to be the dominant note in all of our preaching.

A Singular Focus in Preaching

This singular focus is precisely what the Apostle Paul asserts in the opening chapters of his first letter to the Corinthians. When he came to Corinth, he did so with only one purpose in mind: to make known the crucified Christ. In chapter one of 1 Corinthians, Paul succinctly states his primary message when he says, “We preach Christ crucified” (v. 23). Unashamedly, he announces that the epicenter of his preaching is the saving death of Jesus Christ. All the lines of his theology and exposition intersect in the saving death of Christ.

Preaching “Christ crucified” means proclaiming the person of Christ and the power of His cross. Such a bold declaration magnifies the sufficiency of His vicarious death in saving all guilty, hell-bound sinners who exercise faith in Him. No other emphasis in preaching must be allowed to detract from this primary truth. By this atoning death, Jesus has redeemed all who put their trust in Him. In this vicarious death, He did not merely make salvation hypothetically possible. Rather, at the cross, He actually saved a definite number of sinners. True preaching declares the exclusivity of the cross as the only way of salvation.

For Paul to preach “Christ crucified” meant that he must declare who this Christ is, namely, one who is fully God and fully man. Only the God-man could accomplish this saving work at the cross. This was the message entrusted to Paul by God, and he must never deviate from it. There must never be another primary message, nor a contrary emphasis. To this gospel truth, he must remain true.

DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, ALL PREACHERS WHO HAVE BEEN MIGHTILY USED BY GOD HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL HERALDS WHO MAGNIFIED JESUS CHRIST IN HIS SAVING DEATH.

Paul Was Determined

The Apostle Paul continues, “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). By this statement, Paul maintains that he is firmly resolved to be Christ-centered in his preaching. He cannot be turned away to a lesser subject. He does not care what his audience desires. He is not preoccupied with how he is received. He will not cater to their whims. Nor is he concerned with popular opinion. He will not be changed by the clamoring of others.

In the face of such dissenting voices, the apostle remains unwavering, fully determined to preach Christ crucified. Regardless of the stated or unstated demands of his listeners, Paul gives them Christ.

This myopic focus is captured in this one word, “determined” (*krinō*). This means “to judge in a solemn, judicial manner.” It carries the idea “to render a verdict,” or “to pass sentence.” In this context, “determined” means that Paul has issued an irrevocable verdict to pursue this course of action. He is steadfastly resolved and firmly anchored to this path. Paul has set his

mind to preach Christ. From this message, he cannot be diverted.

When Paul says, “except,” he means that he preaches nothing else, primarily, but Jesus Christ and the centrality of His cross. The essence of his preaching is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” To be sure, Paul preaches “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27), disclosing all the doctrines that God has revealed to him. Yet, he says, “I...know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him

crucified.” In other words, every area of divine truth is rooted and grounded in the primacy of Christ crucified.

Paul does not espouse the human wisdom of the Greek philosophers. He does not speak the worldly mantra of humanistic philosophy. He never teaches pop psychology or human sociology. He never declares the tenets of secular humanism or promulgates comparative religion. Nor does he resort to positive thinking or motivational pep talks. To the contrary, Paul is determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

At the heart of his preaching, Paul also proclaims the saving work of Christ upon the cross. The apostle announces that Jesus made a perfect sacrifice for man’s sins as He became a curse for sinners (Gal 3:13). He taught that the saving death of Christ upon the cross is sufficient for all who will call upon His name.

The Message That Divides

Earlier, Paul stated that “The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). Paul notes here that the

cross divides all humanity into two groups. To those who are perishing, the cross is illogical and even moronic. The preaching of the cross is always “foolishness” to the unconverted. It is a stumbling block to those who are of the world. But to those whose eyes have been opened by grace, the cross has an entirely different significance. To those who are being saved, the cross is the sole means of being rescued from divine wrath. Though offensive to the unbelieving mind, the cross is the power of God unto salvation to all who commit their lives to Christ.

Sadly, though, many contemporary preachers do not want to preach a message that will sound like nonsense to the unregenerate. Longing to be accepted, many trendy communicators today resort to “superiority of speech” as a way to win people over. Their aim is enlarge their crowds and to drive up their popularity ratings. They have adopted the world’s “wisdom” to gather multitudes. They cannot accept that the cross is sheer foolishness to the world. Nevertheless, our preaching of the cross must be nonsense to them.

Paul is under divine mandate to preach this crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As a steward of God, Paul must deliver God’s message with unwavering devotion. He must resist any distraction that would pull him in another direction. Thus, the substitutionary death of Christ must always be the core truth he preaches. The eternal benefits of the death of Jesus are “wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). This is to say that the wisdom of God in the cross is the provision of Christ in securing perfect righteousness, cleansing sanctification, and redemption for those in bondage to sin and Satan. From this message of the cross, the apostle must never deviate.

Down through the centuries, all preachers who have been mightily used by God have been faithful heralds who magnified Jesus Christ in His saving

death. There are no exceptions to this timeless rule. In fact, if one is not a preacher of Christ crucified, he is not a true herald of heaven, but an impostor.

A Dominant Voice from the Reformation

In the sixteenth century, the German Reformer Martin Luther understood that Jesus Christ must be predominant in preaching. This towering figure believed that the true power of preaching is found in the power of the cross. In his Wittenberg pulpit, he continually magnified the glory of God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. If Jesus were to be removed from the heart of the message, Luther believed, the sermon would fall short of its mark.

Luther, in his typically direct way, once asked, “Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find left in them?” This rhetorical question implied a negative response: nothing of

value! A Christ-less Bible is devoid of any power. So also, he believed, Christ-less preaching is lifeless and without efficacy.

Riveted upon this chief focus, Luther determined that every sermon must exalt Christ. “The preachers have no other office,” Luther asserted, “than to preach the clear sun, Christ.” In other words, the Son of God must always be at high noon in every pulpit, shining brighter than ten thousand suns above.

According to Luther, the voice of the Savior is most distinctly heard when He is most prominently featured: “The gospel is essentially proclamation, Christ coming to us through the sermons.” That is, Jesus Christ Himself is most powerfully present when He is most clearly proclaimed.

With this Christocentric target in his sights, the Wittenberg reformer exclaimed, “A good preacher must be committed to this, that nothing is

dearer to him than Christ.” No truth should ever overshadow the preacher’s love for and proclamation of Christ. This must come through loud and clear in his preaching.

Sermons Full of Christ

In the nineteenth century, the same Christ-centered focus was found in the preaching of, arguably, the greatest preacher since the first century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. The inauguration of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England, in 1861 was a great moment in church history. On this momentous occasion, Spurgeon, only twenty-six years old, ascended the pulpit to preach the initial sermon in what was the largest Protestant house of worship in the world. Spurgeon addressed the grand theme of his entire preaching ministry—Jesus Christ.

The Prince of Preachers announced his text: “And every day, in the temple



and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). In this newly constructed facility, Spurgeon declared what was the predominate focus of his ministry. No matter what his passage, Spurgeon was relentlessly riveted upon Jesus Christ as the heart of his expositions.

In this first sermon, Spurgeon declared words that should ring true in the heart of every preacher. He asserted:

I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. . . . [I]f I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply—‘It is Jesus Christ’ . . . [T]he body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself for ever, God helping me, is . . . Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel; who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.

By this statement, Spurgeon maintained that all true preaching must have as its center of gravity the supreme person and saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. On another occasion, Spurgeon later stated, “This is the sum; my brethren, preach CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great all-comprehending theme.” For the preacher, Christ is everything.

Throughout his famed ministry, this Victorian giant in the pulpit sought to magnify Christ. Spurgeon thrilled in

extolling His name. He simply would not be diverted from preaching Christ. To this end, he exclaimed:

The best sermons are the sermons which are fullest of Christ. A sermon without Christ, it is an awful, a horrible thing. It is an empty well; it is a cloud without rain; it is a tree twice dead, plucked up by the roots. It is an abominable thing to give men stones for bread and scor-

IS JESUS CHRIST THE DOMINANT THEME IN YOUR PREACHING? AS YOU STAND BEFORE OTHERS WITH AN OPEN BIBLE, DO YOU MAGNIFY HIS PERSON AND WORK? IN YOUR PULPIT MINISTRY, DO YOU CONTINUALLY POINT YOUR LISTENERS TO HIM?

pions for eggs, yet they do so who preach not Jesus. A sermon without Christ! As well talk of a loaf of bread without any flour in it.

Surely, this Christ-centered focus sets the standard for every preacher, in every generation, in every place. Great preachers preach a great Christ. Wherever they may be weak, they are always strong in proclaiming the Lord Jesus. Regardless of the culture in which they serve, or the expectations of their listeners, faithful preachers relentlessly

uphold the unrivaled supremacy of Jesus Christ in His saving death.

The Dominant Note of Preaching

Christ-centered preaching must be the highest apex of every pulpit today. Wherever men stand to proclaim the written Word, the distinctive message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified must come through loud and clear. Apart from the substitutionary death of Christ, there is no gospel preaching—none whatsoever. Apart from His sin-bearing cross, there is no good news for those who are perishing.

In the preaching of Christ, there is life—spiritual life, eternal life, abundant life. Through preaching Christ crucified for sinners, raised from the dead, and exalted to heaven, there is true life imparted by God. The one who would have a living ministry must preach a dying Savior. But the one who withholds Christ has a dead ministry. Expounding the written Word necessitates exalting the living Word. These two are inseparably bound together. To preach the Scripture is to proclaim the Savior.

Is Jesus Christ the dominant theme in your preaching? As you stand before others with an open Bible, do you magnify His person and work? In your pulpit ministry, do you continually point your listeners to Him? Do you call people to commit their lives to Him? This is what God mandates of His heralds. ♦

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The background of the entire page is a photograph of a wheat field at sunset. The sun is a bright, glowing orb positioned centrally on the horizon, casting a warm, golden light across the scene. The sky above is a clear, pale blue, transitioning into a soft orange and yellow near the horizon. The wheat stalks in the foreground are in sharp focus, showing their intricate structure and the fine hairs on their awns. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

THE CHURCH'S ONE COMMISSION

by John MacArthur



Matthew records Jesus' parting instructions to His disciples in just two-and-a-half verses: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18–20). Those are Christ's marching orders for the church. The two main verbs in that text reflect how narrowly focused the mandate is: Go. Make disciples.

Though simple, the strategy our Lord outlines here is absolutely comprehensive. It is thorough—comprising every command and every doctrine He ever spoke. It is global—extending to the uttermost parts of the earth. And it is endless—delegating to Christ's followers a task that will not be finished until He returns. Furthermore (and note this well), the objective is to make disciples—not merely to collect professions of faith.

None of that takes anything away from the pinpoint sharpness of the Great Commission. As comprehensive as it is in its scope, content, and far-sightedness, our Lord's mandate is uncluttered and very basic. The gospel is both its starting point and its anchor. That's clear from Luke 24:47, where Christ (on the road to Emmaus) summarizes the Great Commission this way: "...that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be

proclaimed in [My] name to all the nations." Later, in His final words before ascending to heaven, Jesus tells His apostles, "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Plainly, the heart and soul of our mission is evangelistic.

Jesus wasn't sending His followers to redeem their culture, do social work, vanquish slavery and other injustices, or upgrade public morality. All those things gradually happened as the gospel permeated the Roman world, but they were side effects and secondary benefits. The apostles' clear objective was simply to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth and continue teaching everyone who responds in faith. Go. Make disciples. That remains the singular duty of the church. Jesus' final earthly instructions to His followers have not been revised or amended for these postmodern times.

We ignore that fact to our peril. Church history is full of lessons about the folly of wandering from the Great Commission. When the church is engaged in gospel-centered outreach and disciple-making, the people of God flourish and the impact of our testimony in the world is both far-reaching and long-lasting. When Christians get diverted from their real mission, their collective testimony suffers, confusion and false teaching move in, and congregations diminish, decay, and eventually die. The ones that don't die often become synagogues of Satan, peddling all kinds of false beliefs and ungodly values in the name of Christ.

By contrast, the saving power of the gospel and the sanctifying influence of faithful ministry are clearly evident in the record of the early church, starting at Pentecost. The church took root and grew wherever the gospel was proclaimed. As more and more people were discipled, faithful witnesses took the message to the far corners of the known world. Less than a generation after Christ first gave His Great Commission to the original Twelve, people in the far reaches of the Roman Empire were referring to the apostles and their cohorts as "these men who have upset the world" (Acts 17:6).

That wasn't meant as a compliment. It was the accusation of a mob in Thessalonica who incited a riot in opposition to the ministry of Paul and Silas. The fact that the church grew so quickly and reached so far in such a short time certainly does not mean the apostles found a way to make their message popular. The gospel was no more popular in the first century than it is today. The majority of people rejected and opposed the message—often violently.

Thessalonica was by no means the only city where the gospel unleashed a riot. Before Paul ever arrived in Thessalonica, he had already met fierce resistance in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Tim 3:11). In fact, he had been stoned and left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:9). In Philippi, he was attacked by a mob, beaten with rods, and thrown in jail (Acts 16:22–23). Even as the church grew, the hostility from the wider community did not diminish. Some four years after Paul was run

out of Thessalonica, Ephesus would respond even more angrily to the gospel (Acts 19:29).

What's significant about all this is that in the face of such opposition, Paul made no effort whatsoever to adapt his methodology in a way that might mollify his critics or avoid their reproach. Whenever he came into a new region, he would immediately seek out the local synagogue, go there on the Sabbath, and preach Christ to the gathered assembly.

That, in fact, is precisely where Acts 17 starts: "They came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (vv. 1-3).

That simple message—the gospel, proclaimed boldly and without apology—is what triggered all the antagonism against Paul in Thessalonica.

If Paul had been thinking like the typical twenty-first-century church-growth strategist, he might have put the gospel on a back burner and concocted some kind of "pre-evangelistic" strategy—trying to win the respect or admiration of influential citizens before proclaiming the gospel in a culture where most people clearly thought the message was both foolish and deeply offensive.

But Paul didn't do that. He went directly from Thessalonica to Berea and preached in the synagogue there (v. 10). When some hooligans followed him from Thessalonica and tried to provoke the citizens of Berea to riot, Paul moved on to Athens (v. 15), where yet again he took the gospel to

the synagogue on the Sabbath. He also proclaimed the gospel in the Athenian marketplace during the week (v. 17), stirring both interest and controversy there, too.

Paul Speaks at Athens

Acts 17 goes on to recount why Paul was summoned to speak to the elite minds of Athens at the Areopagus—the gathering place of philosophers and intellectuals. It was not because he had won their respect, but practically the opposite: The philosophers thought he would make an amusing

“WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, AS THOUGH GOD WERE MAKING AN APPEAL THROUGH US” (2 COR 5:20). AS SUCH, WE HAVE NO AUTHORITY TO EDIT OR AMEND THE MESSAGE WE ARE SENT TO DELIVER.

diversion—perhaps an easy target for some highbrow scorn. "What does this idle babbling wish to say?" (v. 18).

The apostle was himself an educated man, well versed in the philosophies and ancient writings of the Athenians. He was able to quote classic Greek poets to demonstrate that Greek beliefs were once closer to biblical truth than any of the philosophies commonly embraced by the elite minds of that first-century generation.

But Paul did not try to wow the erudite Athenians with abstract philosophical arguments or elegant oratory.

He began by declaring to them that their religious beliefs were rooted in ignorance and all wrong. He announced that God "is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (vv. 30-31). In other words, Paul preached Christ. He was about to expound the gospel more fully to these exalted Athenian intellectuals, but as soon as he mentioned the resurrection from the dead, the response was so much mockery, controversy, and crosstalk that the meeting broke up before Paul had an opportunity to finish his message to the Areopagites.

Again, the typical evangelical missional strategist today would no doubt wish to modify Paul's approach. Surely such a response—by now a predictable pattern in Paul's ministry—requires a revamping of the whole strategy. Right?

Wrong. Paul went straight from Athens to Corinth, where his strategy remained unchanged. "He was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

What kind of arguments did Paul use in Corinth? After such opposition in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, did he change his approach to suit Corinthian culture better?

He answers that question definitively in his first epistle to the Corinthians: "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:1-2). Paul stayed on message. Despite intense opposition everywhere he went (up to and including the real potential

of violent resistance), he never downplayed or deviated from the gospel.

That is the only valid model for biblical ministry and the only way to stay faithful to Jesus' simple mandate.

Paul clearly understood that. Don't think for a moment that he stuck to his simple strategy because he was naïve, unsophisticated, or inept. He understood the cultural context in which he ministered. He fully realized that "Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom" (1 Cor 1:22). He knew that the gospel is "to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness" (v. 23). But he didn't abbreviate the message in order to eliminate the stumbling block when he was in the synagogue. And he didn't augment the message to make it sound more sophisticated when he was in the Areopagus. He preached the same gospel that he preached in the open air of the marketplace.

In other words, he did not practice the kind of contextualization we hear so much about today. He had one message, and it was the same in every city: "We preach Christ crucified" (v. 23). To the Jews who sought signs, that was a stumbling block. To the Greeks who sought wisdom, it sounded foolish. Yet Paul boldly, straightforwardly proclaimed the gospel to both groups. Where's the missional ingenuity in that approach?

Pragmatic Strategies

Here is the problem with all the clever and pragmatic strategies for church planting and church growth that abound in our generation: Christ hasn't sent us into the world to see who can attract

and entertain the biggest crowds. He didn't instruct us to harness our collective clout to try to influence politicians or correct economic injustices. He didn't ask us to find a way to make Him seem more likeable or adapt His message to the tastes of whatever culture we are trying to reach. He sent us to make disciples—by preaching the unadulterated gospel and equipping and instructing those who believe it to observe all their Lord's commands.

"We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20). As such, we have no authority to edit or amend the message we are sent to deliver. Ambassadors are delegates and couriers for a higher power. They serve the head of state whom they represent. They don't get to make policy or invent communiqués of their own. They simply deliver the message they have been given.

Paul stayed faithful to that calling, no matter what it cost him personally. And it did cost him dearly. There were, of course, false teachers in the early church who banked everything on their personal popularity. They labored to win accolades and admiration where the apostle faced antagonism and hostility. Compared to them, Paul's *curriculum vitae* looked appalling. In 2 Corinthians 11:23–27, he outlined the difference himself:

Are they servants of Christ? . . . I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine

lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

From an earthly perspective, it would be easy to conclude that Paul was a monumental failure.

The truth was precisely the opposite. In every city where Paul was run out of town, he left behind a fledgling church. He continued to disciple those believers through his epistles, making return visits where possible, and sending his own protégés to oversee and continue the work where Paul himself was unable to go.

In the end, despite all the hardships he suffered and all the opposition the powers of darkness have mounted against him, the fruits of Paul's labor, as well as his simple missionary strategy, endure today as an example for us. His voice still speaks wherever the Word of God is heard: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). ♦





EVANGELISTIC
PREACHING,
A LOST ART



by Conrad Mbewe

“BUT YOU, BE SOBER IN
ALL THINGS, ENDURE
HARDSHIP, DO THE WORK
OF AN EVANGELIST,
FULFILL YOUR MINISTRY”
- 2 TIMOTHY 4:5

I am concerned. I am very concerned about the absence of evangelistic preaching today. In many pulpits what is called evangelistic preaching is basically an appeal to non-Christians tacked on at the end of most sermons. But where are the sermons that from beginning to end are reasoning from the Scriptures and explaining and proving that Jesus is the Christ (see Acts 17)? Where are the sermons that are prepared specifically to chase sinners out of every godless nook and cranny until they fall on their knees before the cross of Christ? Where are the sermons that will wrestle with darkened consciences until souls dead in their sins see their need for reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ? Where have the hellfire and brimstone sermons of a previous generation gone? Where are the likes of George Whitefield, the Wesley brothers, Howell Harris, Jonathan Edwards, and Asahel Nettleton today?

Let me grant from the outset that I am not in any way suggesting that we must all rise to such prominence in evangelistic fruitfulness as to find our names in the “Evangelists’ Hall of Fame.” That would be to expect too much. We have different gifts and different degrees of giftedness. Some are more gifted at evangelistic preaching while others do a far better job in ministering to believers. I do not doubt that. What I am, however, saying is that all of us who are called to the preaching ministry must do something to recover the disappearing art of evangelistic preaching before we lose it altogether. It is slowly becoming very difficult to find a preacher to handle a season of evangelistic preaching in our churches, whereas if you want someone to come and handle a series on successful Christian living, it is preachers galore!

Yet when one looks at the Apostle Paul’s parting words to

Timothy, a young pastor in Ephesus, there is no doubt that one duty that Timothy was implored not to neglect was that of evangelistic preaching. He is told to do the work of an evangelist as part of discharging all the duties of his ministry. We must do the same. In the midst of the arduous labors of teaching believers what to believe and how to live, we must also be busy in evangelistic labors. In the midst of leading the people of God in proper church life, we must also be leading sinners to Christ. It should not be one or the other. It should be both.

Why We Are Losing Evangelistic Preaching

I have no doubt that one reason why evangelistic preaching has been lost, especially in Reformed circles, is due to its association with Arminianism and the use of high-powered pressure tactics to get people “to the front.” Anyone concerned with maintaining a God-honoring ministry will want to keep away from that as far as possible. However, any basic study of church history will soon reveal that the altar call is a modern innovation that only goes back to the eighteenth century at the earliest. So, we do well to reject it as an essential component of evangelistic preaching. Yet, I fear that in rejecting the habitual altar call, we have abandoned evangelistic preaching altogether and have thrown the baby out with the bath water. Yes, we ought to abhor any form of manipulation. It only brings goats into the membership of Christ’s church and thus compromises the church’s witness in the world. But evangelistic preaching need not involve manipulation. Rather, evangelistic preaching is the very warp and woof of our calling to preach.



Sadly, the lost art of evangelistic preaching has resulted in the lost art of personal evangelism. Since church members are not seeing a passion for souls in the pulpit, they are losing it in the pews. As the pulpit goes, so goes the congregation. Also, the advantage of having regular evangelistic preaching in the pulpit is that Christians have a role model before them who demonstrates how to present the gospel effectively to non-believers. A church can never rise higher than its pulpit. If the pulpit is doing very badly in reaching sinners, the rest of the church will go the same way. This explains the dearth of soul-winning today. We preachers are to blame!

Although we should be concerned with evangelistic preaching “out there” where the sinners are (and perhaps in a future article I will need to address that subject), we should not overlook the need to preach evangelistically to those who attend church regularly. Some people feel that this is unnecessary because, they say, it is essentially believers who attend church. But is that so? Perhaps that might be so in some Western countries where the church is dying. What I have observed in Africa and in most parts of the world where I have preached is that a sizable number in church on a Sunday are unbelievers. These need to hear the gospel, not as an appendage to a sermon tailor-made for believers, but as a message specifically aimed at them. Evangelistic preaching also encourages church members to

invite friends and work mates whom they are trying to reach to church. They can be sure that, once the invitation is accepted, the invitee will hear the gospel.

Finally, evangelistic preaching is edifying and refreshing to the saints. The cross presented afresh with the appeal of evangelistic preaching has often made Christians say afterwards, “You know, if I were not a Christian, I would have given my life to Christ today!” They see once again the folly and emptiness of the non-Christian life. They see the fountains of love for Christ gush forth afresh at the sight of His bleeding form on the cross. The presentation of the milk of the gospel doctrines of redemption, the new birth, union with Christ, justification, and more, nourish the Christian’s soul just as much as the strong meat of the Word. So, true evangelistic preaching is good for Christians, too, as long as it is not the only diet they have to live on.

Challenges Facing Evangelistic Preaching

One of the challenges of evangelistic preaching is that you must aim your rhetorical cannon for the common man on the street. Preaching to believers has the advantage of the fact that you can assume their interest from the very outset. After all, they pay you to do the job! But the unbeliever’s attention has to be won. You have to win the right to be heard, and you have about ten minutes to do so! Also, you can

get away with a lot of religious clichés when preaching to believers because you read the same Bible—and sometimes the same theological works. But when preaching to unbelievers, what you have in common may be nothing more than the daily news stories and the TV. If you are going to communicate effectively, you will have to use ordinary, day-to-day language. This can be very difficult for someone who has been sheltered from the world by a religious environment.

One of the challenges that the Christian church is facing today, perhaps more than at any other time in its history, is the reality of other religions in a society that accepts all religions as though they were equally acceptable philosophies. The popular question today is, “In the light of the presence of other religions, isn’t Christianity just one of the many ways in which human beings can go to heaven?” The popular answer today is, “Yes!” Because of this, evangelizing those who are sincerely following their religion is now not only a lost art but also seen as an insult. Thus, any straightforward evangelistic preaching outside the four walls of the church that assumes that Christ is the only way to God is discounted. It seems safer to state an evangelistic message (briefly!) only in a sermon inside your church building.

The biblical answer, however, is that anyone without Jesus Christ is doomed. This statement is made despite taking cognizance of the religious pluralism of

today. We need to realize that religious pluralism is nothing new. In every stage at which pioneer missions have broken into new realms, this matter has had to be faced squarely. When Peter said of Jesus that, “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12), he was saying those words to the elders of a pre-existent religion!

Another challenge of regular evangelistic preaching is where to find texts of Scripture to sustain such a ministry every year. In this, the roving evangelist has the advantage of the fact that he can repeat his ten “most powerful” evangelistic sermons wherever he goes. As a resident pastor, you have no such luxury. How do we get around this? The error that most of us make is that we look only for those texts that have some clear redemption themes in them, e.g. the Passover, Rahab’s red ribbon, Moses’ bronze snake, etc. Once we have preached through these, and perhaps other texts that are clearly gospel-oriented (e.g. Isaiah 55), we become stuck and so abandon evangelistic preaching. That is most unfortunate. The truth is that the Bible has enough evangelistic material for a pastor to fill up two lifetimes of preaching! If space allowed, I would demonstrate this, but allow me to point you to a master on this subject. I recommend Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon* and especially his *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons* (both published by the Banner of Truth Trust). They are fine examples of how you can go to almost any text in both the Old and New Testaments and use it evangelistically.

Attaining a Passion for Evangelistic Preaching

The secret of persevering in an evangelistic preaching ministry is having a burden for the lost around you. This is what will keep you preaching the gospel specifically for their salvation and

this is what will also keep you groaning for their salvation until, one by one, God begins to draw them to Himself. The Apostle Paul said, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor 5:11). Or as Spurgeon once said,

If you want to win souls for Christ, feel a solemn alarm about them. You cannot make them feel if you do not feel yourself. Believe their danger, believe their helplessness, believe that only Christ can save them, and talk to them as if you meant it. The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved they will rest too; but if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy too. I hope you will get into such a state that you will dream about your child, or about your hearer perishing for lack of Christ, and start up at once and begin to cry, ‘O God, give me converts or I die.’ Then you will have converts.

Brethren, when we are convinced of what the world needs to be saved from, we will fully appreciate how vital evangelistic preaching is. The world around us needs to be saved from the blinding and enslaving power of sin, and the resultant guilt of sin. Remember, we are all born with a corrupt nature that blinds us so that we cannot see the things of God. This also gives us a propensity towards evil; hence, wickedness is its fruit. We are powerless to change this! We are born guilty before God because of Adam’s sin and our own sins; hence, by nature we are objects of God’s wrath. The power and guilt of sin make ours a hopeless case. These facts are not only biblical facts but are also discovered in experience.

It is in view of this dark picture that the apostles asserted only one source of

salvation—Christ! Instead of quarrelling with the uniqueness of the gospel, we ought to be surprised that salvation can be found at all! All we need to do is look at our past lives. See how we were fettered to sin. We may have tried one religion after another, but our conscience was never satisfied. The reason why all else must fail is that every other option begins with us as human beings trying (and obviously failing). This is like telling a slave or a prisoner to release himself. It is impossible! Salvation must begin with calling on God so that He can help you. This is what the Christian preacher alone offers in his evangelistic preaching.

This is where we see the absolute necessity of the gospel. It is not up to us to appease God. Christ has already done that through His death on the cross. He was “given to men” by His sacrificial death. He suffered God’s wrath as our substitute. His death both cleansed us of sin and removed God’s wrath from us. To show that God was fully satisfied with the payment, He raised Jesus Christ to life. He ascended to heaven, where He received the Holy Spirit who regenerates us, convicts us, points us to Jesus, saves us, and sanctifies us. Every preacher should proclaim this message at least once a week from his pulpit. We have a great Savior. He must be proclaimed!

This is why it is so sad that evangelistic preaching is fast becoming a lost art. You who have felt the pangs of your guilty conscience and found peace with God; you who have felt the unyielding chains of sin and found freedom at last in Christ—offer it to the lost and perishing! Stop wasting your time trying to compare religions. Why seek the living among the dead? Proclaim the unique gospel to your dying day. Let the world know that they can cry to Christ to save them and they can experience His saving power. Amen! ♦



THE KEY TO
EVANGELISTIC
SUCCESS

by Eric Alexander



During the early years of my life as a theological student, I encountered an article in a journal intended for candidates for ordination. It bore the title, “Evangelism and Election: friends or foes?”

To be honest, at that stage in my Christian life, if you had pressed me for an answer, I think I might well have said “foes.” Did not the doctrine of election teach that God had already chosen a people for Himself before the foundation of the world? And didn’t the wider doctrine of the sovereignty of God imply that God was in complete and final control of everything in the universe? Then what is the point of calling people to come to Jesus Christ for salvation?

Shortly afterwards, Dr. J. I. Packer authored a book entitled *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. It was the very book I needed, and I devoured it. Perhaps the most useful thing I can say in this article is that if you have not already done so, you should devour that book as well. It clarified to me that, far from being an obstacle to evangelism, the doctrines of divine election and divine sovereignty were the key secret to driving our evangelism and saving us from becoming discouraged and daunted in it. I will consider this theme in more detail below.

God’s Sovereign Redemption

Let me begin with the Apostle Paul’s experience in Acts 18. He is the evangelist par excellence, yet in Corinth he was facing blasphemous opposition to his evangelism. Paul was

discouraged, but the Lord spoke to him in a vision. “Do not be afraid any longer,” He said, “but go on speaking and do not be silent.” And then God gave him the reason for this encouragement: “I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9–10).

The striking truth is that these people of whom God is speaking had not yet believed the gospel. Many of them had not even heard it, but God declared that they were His. They had been, as Luke puts it in Acts 13:48, “appointed to eternal life.”

This is the doctrine of God’s sovereign initiative in salvation, but used in the way Scripture uses it. That is, not as a bullet to be fired by Calvinists, nor as a bomb to be dropped on Arminians, but as a bulwark for God’s people, to save them from discouragement, fear, and a lack of confidence in God and the gospel. Paul heard these words and “settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). As John Stott puts it, “This conviction of God’s sovereignty in salvation is the greatest of all encouragements to an evangelist.”

It is important to clarify why this is so. Earlier, in the fourth chapter of Acts, in a situation of even greater crisis, the apostles are driven into the presence of God in prayer. The word they use in addressing God is rightly translated in some versions “Sovereign Lord,” and they go on to ascribe absolute sovereignty to God in both creation and redemption.

Listen again to the way they describe what happened in the darkness of Calvary: “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27–28).

You see, the essence of the apostolic conviction is that the Sovereign Lord was the ultimate moving power behind everything in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. When human wickedness seemed to have reached its nadir, the sovereign, controlling hand was God’s. Jesus put the same truth to Pilate in this way in John 19:11: “You would have no authority over me, unless it had been given you from above.” In history’s darkest hour, the fact of God’s sovereign rule encouraged and enabled the apostles in two vital areas: prayer and preaching.

Prayer

Most of us have been involved in conferences focusing on the most effective evangelistic methods for our generation. What I often miss in these environments is an emphasis on the primary evangelistic method, which, of course, is prayer. Do you know these words of E. M. Bounds? I will never forget the day I first read them:

We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to

advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the Gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man, or sink the man in the plan or organization. God's plan is to make much of the man. This vital, urgent truth is one that this age of machinery is apt to forget, and the forgetting of it is as baneful in the work of God as would be the striking of the sun from his sphere. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods but through men. He does not anoint plans but men—men of prayer.

The searching question we need to ask in the light of that is, why then is it that in so many evangelical churches and ministries, prayer is supplemental rather than fundamental? Could it be that the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in salvation is not as fundamental and supreme as it should be? Or could it be that we do not really believe that God, and only God, can save the lost and raise them into new life in Christ? Of course, there are so many things we can do. We can persuade people intellectually, we can move them emotionally, and much else. But only God can regenerate them spiritually, and it is a work of regeneration that we are seeking, is it not?

Preaching

God, as sovereign Lord, also empowers us in preaching. Thus, when God takes a man up and uses him in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, the result should not be that people come out from the occasion saying, "What a man!" Rather, the most natural thing to escape their lips should be the words "What a God!", "What a Savior!", or "What a gospel!" It is for this reason that Paul says, "We do not preach our-

selves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5).

The doctrine of God's sovereignty does not ever inflate the human ego or make a man self-important and proud. By contrast, it humbles us from two sources. One is the nature of the biblical gospel which insists, as Archbishop Temple once said, that "the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my salvation is the sin which makes it necessary." The other is the teaching of Jesus about fruitful Christian service in John 15: "As the branch cannot bear

THE WORD OF GOD IN HOLY SCRIPTURE IS OUR ONLY INFALLIBLE AUTHORITY FOR THE SUBSTANCE OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

fruit of itself . . . neither can you unless you abide in me . . . apart from me you can do nothing." Of course, growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ is growing in genuine selflessness and humility, as John the Baptist saw so clearly when he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

In light of biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God, I suggest the following five principles as fitting guides for our ministry of pulpit evangelism:

First, the Word of God in Holy Scripture is our only infallible authority for the substance of the gospel message. One implication of that is that all our preaching should in some sense be

an exposition of Scripture. In pulpit evangelism, we shall, of course, be careful to expound in a way that is relevant to the people who are present.

Second, the gospel's theme is Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners (cf. Peter's preaching in Acts 2).

Third, the Christ who saves is the Christ who is revealed to us in the whole of Scripture. That means that we should find the Holy Spirit convicting and saving sinners through the message of the whole Bible and not just from a few "gospel texts." This is the example Jesus gives us in Luke 24:27 on the road to Emmaus, "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

Fourth, we must be clear that it is not the Bible which saves us. It is Christ who saves us. But the only Christ who saves is the Christ who is revealed in the Bible.

Fifth, 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 makes clear that there are two elements in the preaching of the message of the gospel. The first is proclamation: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (v. 19).

The other is appeal: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (v. 21). Don't miss the remarkable truth here: as Christ is the agent through whom God achieves the reconciliation of sinners, so we are the agents through whom He appeals to them, or "begs" them. We are nothing less than God's ambassadors. As John Stott puts it with typical neatness, "There must be no proclamation without appeal, and there must be no appeal without proclamation."

My own impression is that while most of us would be confident that we know what the proclamation involves,

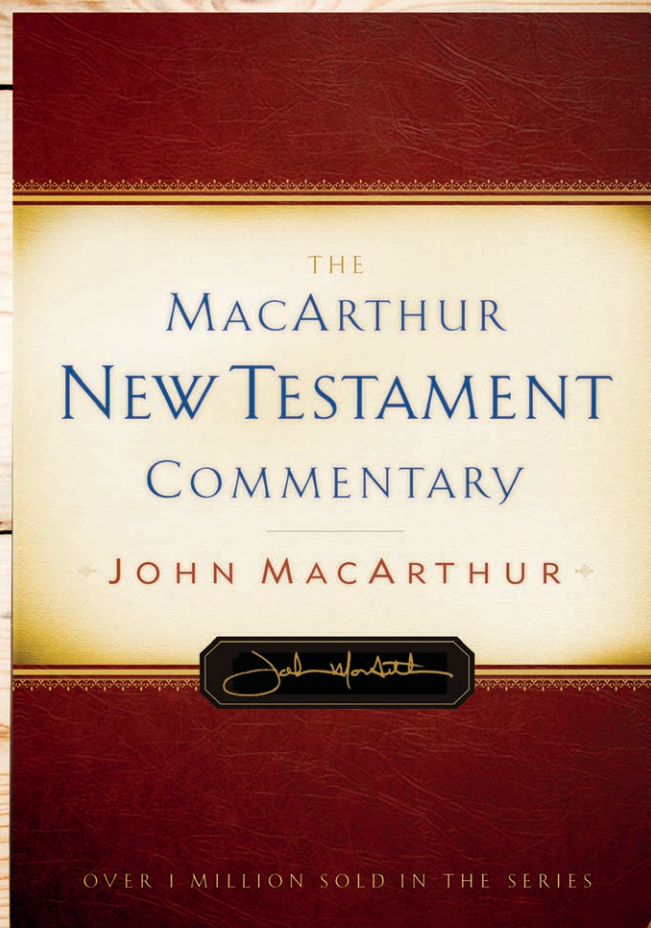
we are less certain about the appeal. This is partly because the word “appeal” is associated with a procedure (seen at evangelistic occasions in many parts of the world) that involves asking individuals to come to the front of the meeting space at the close of the service. Whatever we think of that kind of public “going forward,” it is certainly not what Paul is referring to. What he is speaking about is an appeal to the heart and conscience of his hearers to receive by repentance and faith the

riches of God’s grace in Christ. While Scripture makes it clear that both repentance and faith are gifts from God, it is equally clear that God does not repent or believe *for* us.

But that must never diminish the idea that it is God Himself who implores sinners through our preaching to lay aside all forms of resistance, and to come gladly and eagerly to Jesus Christ to receive the salvation He has gained for us at the cross. We must never get used to the mystery that the sovereign

Lord of the universe should stoop so low as to make redeemed sinners His ambassadors.

What differences should resting on this doctrine make to the man in the pulpit? Chiefly two: First, it should make him an intercessor even more than an expositor, and second, it should make him quietly confident, but not self-confident. ♦



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THE MASTER'S SEMINARY
WE TRAIN MEN BECAUSE LIVES DEPEND ON IT



REVISITING THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST

by Geoffrey Thomas

In the final chapter of his Gospel, Matthew records some of the last words that the resurrected Son of God would speak to His followers. The farewell was not tearful. What Christ said was breathtaking. Our Lord gave His followers an extraordinary challenge, mapping out what was to be the future of all His disciples.

The Lord's commission was couched in terms of the highest theology; it is the greatest New Testament statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. Here is plain teaching that there is one God, with one divine name, and that that name belongs equally to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, so that each of these different persons is divine: each one is God, and each one is equally God. As a result, the name of the triune God, "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," is conjoined with our evangelism (Matt 28:19).

The passage also is notable because of what it tells us of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. He makes the claim that all authority and power has been given by God the Father to Him in heaven and on earth (v. 18). We are told that He reigns supreme over the beings who are in heaven, and over the demons of hell, and "all people that on earth do dwell." He is the preserver and governor of all His creatures and all their actions. His sovereignty and control lie behind everything that occurs in human history.

The Lordship of Christ

The relevance of Jesus' Lordship to his disciples' evangelism is plain enough. As Peter later wrote to a church, "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts" (1 Pet 3:15–16). The most fundamental element in witnessing to Christ is that we are in a right relationship with the Son of God, that He is Lord over everything in our lives—over

every interest, every concern, and every affection. We must make sure that we acknowledge that He reigns on the throne over our hearts. Witnessing is not a matter of gaining people's attention by some striking ploy, dramatic words, a technique, or a method. There is something more fundamental than that. Are we right with God? Because if we are, then nothing will prevent our speaking a word for Him, and if we are not, we will be incompetent and disinclined to bear witness. Our guilty silence will not be due to the absence of a dramatic hook on which to hang our words, or our failure to take a course in witnessing, or our lack of a quick wit, but to the fact that we are not right with God. The way to sort that out is to consider afresh the glory and greatness of the Christ who saved us and see where that relationship has gone wrong.

Wordsworth once gave a famous definition of poetry. He said that it was the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Of course, that definition can be disputed, but there is no question that this is something essential to Christian witness. It is the spontaneous overflow of the dynamic place Christ has in our lives. The light shines because it is the light. The lips speak because there is something they love and can't be silent about. There is gratitude for sins forgiven. Deep, experiential religion is the foundation of effective evangelism.

Why were some men such as Luther, Bunyan, Whitefield, Spurgeon, and Lloyd-Jones such examples of Great Commission preachers? Their evangelistic fervor was not simply a matter of intellect, natural gifts and talents, personal industry, and self-denial. All of those graces were present in their lives, but that is not why they were effective.

They were effective because their deepest feelings concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit overflowed in their preaching and in their ministry. What we should be crying out for, then, is not better techniques, but that in our hearts we have sanctified, or set apart, Christ as the Lord.

The Nature of Christian Evangelism

The Lord Christ tells us what the nature of Christian evangelism is: the church's commission is to go and teach

reputation and was found in fashion as a man, taking the form of a servant, humbling Himself to the death of the cross (Philippians 2). Then the exhortation comes from the apostle to the whole church, "Let that mind be in you!" The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, made His long journey to earth to teach fishermen and peasant farmers about the kingdom of God, after living anonymously for thirty years in Nazareth.

Is Christ's mind in you? Where are you going, and what are you doing, to let fellow sinners know of the grace of Jesus Christ? The magnificent truths of Scripture should motivate us to fulfill the Great Commission.

Yet in many ways this Commission is a paradoxical undertaking, because the world does not want the church's gospel. There is no universal demand for it; there is no sympathy toward it; and in the heart of men there is no natural comprehension of it. And so the danger is that the professing church should become desperate in luring people to attend its meetings, including men and women

who don't want to attend.

Our places of worship are being infantilized to make them accessible to people who would rather be anywhere else. Our meeting places are being destroyed by believers in the Trinity and the deity of Christ who are marginalizing many truths that Jesus taught, truths He asks us to pass on to the world. Many professing churches are judging Jesus' teaching to be unacceptable to the outsider—the reverence it inspires, the prayerful spirit, the silence and the godly fear. For the true believer, these aspects of worship are not off-putting, but attractive.

Almost all the churches I visit are

THE MAGNIFICENT TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE SHOULD MOTIVATE US TO FULFILL THE GREAT COMMISSION.

every nation on earth everything that Jesus taught His disciples. What is fascinating is to see how this mighty theology concerning the Trinity, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ, is used in the Great Commission to motivate believing sinners to speak to people about their Savior.

This is a characteristic of the New Testament. Think of the church in Philippi and how divided it was because of a dispute between two women who each knew their rights. Paul brings to bear the most glorious doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God on that division. Our Lord knew His rights, and yet He made Himself of no

warm, comfy, free, brief, and welcoming. The good news they have to share with the world is the most incredible and life-changing truth that could ever be heard. How much more accessible can you get? The real problem isn't parking or moving people about. The real problem is that the message of the Great Commission can sometimes be swamped due to an all-consuming desire to appeal to people who don't want to be there in the first place.

Millions of disciples appreciate hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ without Sunday morning worship clutter, but they are having their delight spoiled by the church's desperate attempt to appeal to people who are not in the least interested in such things.

Sanctifying Power

If the Great Commission is to become effective in many of our congregations, another essential is in order. Peter joins to the sanctifying of Jesus as Lord the maintaining of a good conscience. There is not a word about technique or methods. But all the time, heart matters dominate the thinking of one who heard the Great Commission from the lips of the Lord Himself. Peter is telling us that we are to make sure that there is nothing in our relationship with Christ that is a barrier—some idol we are clinging to, or some unmortified sin. We are also to make sure that there is nothing in our relationship with our neighbor that makes it impossible for us to bear witness to him.

How difficult and delicate such relationships can be. Often, tensions have nothing to do with religion but rather with trivial matters. But when tension exists, we cannot share with others a word about God. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to speak to them about God?" The answer is not to find some juniper tree and lie in an untidy heap underneath it, but to get our conscience right with God, to have the sin dealt with. Then our former boldness

will be restored.

"But how can I personally share with others the things that Jesus said?" What an important question! "Invite them to church" is one answer, but if public indifference to Christianity results in a permanent dumbing down of our worship, then mere church attendance is no guarantee that they will hear the gospel. The entire framework of our worship has to serve everything that Jesus said. The indifferent world must have explained to them all the things that Jesus said about such things as what is coming out of the heart of man, the reality of the judgment of hell that awaits the unconverted, and the universal need of a birth from above.

What goes on before the preacher announces his text serves to clarify and endorse this explanation of Jesus' teaching. In other words, the preparation in praise and prayer for the climactic proclamatory aspect of worship also has to drive home the message of the same God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Should the church become a concert, a debating society, an series of endless trailer announcements for the "real" meetings which are going to take place during the week? Should it highlight B-list celebrity interviews, or center on the performance of witty personalities, with jolly handovers between worship leaders and preachers? When it does, it becomes more difficult to carefully explain all that Jesus said, and to apply the consequences of His serious words to all the congregation.

We expect serious places to be serious, and so, just occasionally, a little dull. If that dimension of awe is extracted, then a church has lost its point, and the Great Commission cannot be effectively fulfilled. The church does not desire its leaders to extract the reverence and godly fear from hallowed places in the name of accessibility. Instead, we wish the church leadership to take very, very seriously the words of the Great Commission.

Girded with Truth

The Great Commission can be effectively joined to Proverbs 15:28: "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers." This is a warning about blurt-ing out religion. If we take our Commission seriously, we will study. We will weigh our words. We are not all called to be academic theologians, but we are all called to weigh our answers.

The Christian soldier girds himself with truth. He is able to wield the sword of the Spirit (see Ephesians 6). He makes time in his life to be alone with God. He ponders the Lord's words, and assimilates them and imbibes the truth. God's Word is his meditation day and night. He immerses his soul in the arguments of Scripture.

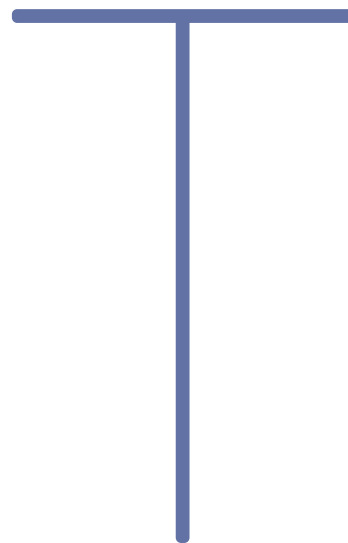
The people of God need to be taught. Sometimes today the evangelical church drives a great wedge between evangelism on the one hand and theology on the other. Surely God's order is that we must study if we are to give an answer for the hope that is in us (1 Pet 3:15). We must know what we believe and why we believe it. We must be able to tell people the reason for our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and why we think they also should trust in Him.

Most of all, we are to cultivate a dependence on the Holy Spirit, to invoke His help, and at every moment of crisis to seek for His energy and insight. There will come many occasions when we are facing situations we've not foreseen. We have no prepared answers. We lack any formulae. The answer, then, is to know what you believe and to learn to depend on the Spirit of the living God to give you words and tell you what to say. Without Him we can never fulfill the requirements of the Great Commission. With Him we can do more than conquer; we can gather new recruits who will speak for Jesus far better than we do ourselves. ♦

PAUL: AN
EVANGELISTIC
MODEL

by Thomas R. Schreiner





Those of us who read Paul's letters frequently can become so entranced with Paul's theology, which is truly wonderful, that we can sometimes forget that he was a missionary and an evangelist. Yet Paul's three missionary journeys and his constant sufferings as an apostle (cf. 2 Cor 11:16–33) attest to his heart for evangelism. None of us is an apostle like Paul, but we are called as pastors to imitate (1 Cor 11:1) his evangelistic heart for the nations.

Paul's Passion for Evangelism in Romans 1:14–16

Perhaps a good place to start in considering Paul's passion for evangelism is the letter to the Romans, for it is generally acknowledged that Romans is his *magnum opus*. Paul tells us three things about his role as an evangelist and a missionary early in this letter. First, he is "obligated" to proclaim the gospel to all, to both "the wise and the foolish" (Rom 1:14). The term "obligated" indicates that we aren't called upon to preach the gospel only when we feel like doing so or when we are "in the mood." Proclaiming the gospel is a duty; it is a holy and sacred responsibility. Paul speaks of his obligation as well in 1 Corinthians 9:16, saying, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."

Just as Paul was called by God to proclaim the gospel (Gal 1:15–16), we must also herald the great salvation in Christ Jesus. Virtually every Sunday there are unbelievers sitting in our churches. We don't need to linger long on every occasion, but

IF WE DELIGHT IN THE GOSPEL, WE WILL NEVER TIRE OF ANNOUNCING THE NEWS THAT GOD SENT HIS SON TO SAVE SINNERS.

at least part of the sermon should unpack the gospel for unbelievers who are present. They should not leave without knowing that forgiveness of sins and justification are ours through faith in Christ Jesus and not on the basis of our works. They should hear from us, even if briefly, that Christ on the cross has taken the penalty sinners deserve.

One reason we have a duty to preach the gospel is that people can't be saved without hearing it. Paul clearly teaches that people are not saved through general revelation. In other words, just seeing God's power and might in nature doesn't deliver us from sin, because we all without exception suppress the truth given to us through the natural world (Rom 1:18–25). The created world proclaims the glory of God (Ps 19:1), but we turn away from that glory and worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). The only pathway to salvation, therefore, is through special revelation, i.e., through the word of the gospel. Faith only comes through hearing the preached Word (Rom 10:17). Hence, it is incumbent upon us to declare this Word and to send out preachers to the ends of the earth, for people won't put their faith in Jesus if they don't hear about Him (Rom 10:14–15). What an awesome duty and privilege we have as preachers to proclaim that salvation is in no one else except Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), and to encourage some in our congregations to go the ends of the

earth, to every people group, to declare the unsearchable richness of Christ.

Although Paul was obligated to proclaim the gospel (it was his duty and responsibility), he was also “eager” to proclaim the good news to all (Rom 1:15). Duty isn't enough in preaching the gospel; it must also be a delight.

If we only proclaim the gospel out of obligation, our preaching will grow cold and dull. But if we delight in the gospel, we will never tire of announcing the news that God sent His Son to save sinners. We will not lose our delight if we continue to see our own sin and the wonder of the forgiveness God has granted us. Paul never forgot that he was “the foremost” of sinners (1 Tim 1:15), and so he never forgot the wonder and beauty of the gospel.

Finally, Paul tells us that he is “not ashamed of the gospel” (Rom 1:16). He doesn't shrink back in embarrassment from the message God gave him. He knows that the gospel is “God's power for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). The “word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). The world may ridicule the message that salvation comes through a crucified man, but we know that God is “pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21). Yes, to the world, our gospel is foolishness, but truly, it is the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor 1:24). Sinners are raised from the dead through the message of grace we proclaim (Eph 2:1–10), and hence we don't hesitate to voice it, despite opposition from the world.

Paul's Practice of Evangelism

How did Paul practice evangelism?

We know that Paul always declared to those around him the salvation that was in Jesus Christ. When he was on trial before the procurator Festus and King Agrippa, the conversation turned (not surprisingly!), so that Paul was entreating King Agrippa and all those present to become Christians (Acts 26). Paul constantly and everywhere proclaimed, “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20), and he reminded his hearers that such reconciliation was based on the penal substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Forgiveness of sins is available through Jesus Christ as the Crucified and Risen Lord (1 Cor 15:1–11).

One of my favorite stories of Paul's evangelistic practice is recorded in Philippians 1. Paul was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel, but the gospel was irrepressible in Paul. Soon all those who were present and the imperial guard in Rome knew that Paul was imprisoned for Christ's sake (Phil 1:13). Preachers have often noted that even though Paul was the prisoner, it was probably the guards who felt chained to him when they were on watch. It is obvious that Paul didn't spend his time conversing about the weather and the upcoming Isthmian games in Corinth. No one could be chained up with Paul for long without hearing about the gospel. So, we are not at all astonished to read at the end of the letter that “those of Caesar's household” gave a special greeting to the believers in Philippi (Phil 4:22). Apparently, a good number of them were converted through Paul's evangelistic ministry.

Paul's Passion for the Unreached

As an evangelist, Paul also had a passion for the unreached. He planned and strategized so that those who had never heard the gospel before would hear it. Paul says in Romans 15:20, “I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation.”



Paul's ambition here wasn't theoretical. He lived this principle out in his ministry. He reminds the Corinthians that he was the first to bring the gospel to them (2 Cor 10:13–15). Paul's missionary journeys reflect his ambition to preach Christ in untouched areas, and as we see in Romans 15, even at the end of his life, Paul was planning a new venture to Spain.

Now, we as pastors aren't apostles as Paul was, so how does this apply to those of us who proclaim the gospel week after week to a settled congregation? Paul's passion suggests at least two lessons for pastors. First, in our preaching we must encourage the congregation to pray about going to the nations, to seek God about whether He wants them to go to an unreached people. Second, we must remind every member of our church that in virtually any locale there are some in the community who haven't heard the gospel of Christ. Every Christian has the privilege in his or her neighborhood, school, extended family, and work of declaring the good news about Jesus Christ. The responsibility of telling others about the gospel isn't limited to pastors! Pastors are called by God to remind the

church of her joy and responsibility in announcing the good news to others.

Evangelism through Suffering

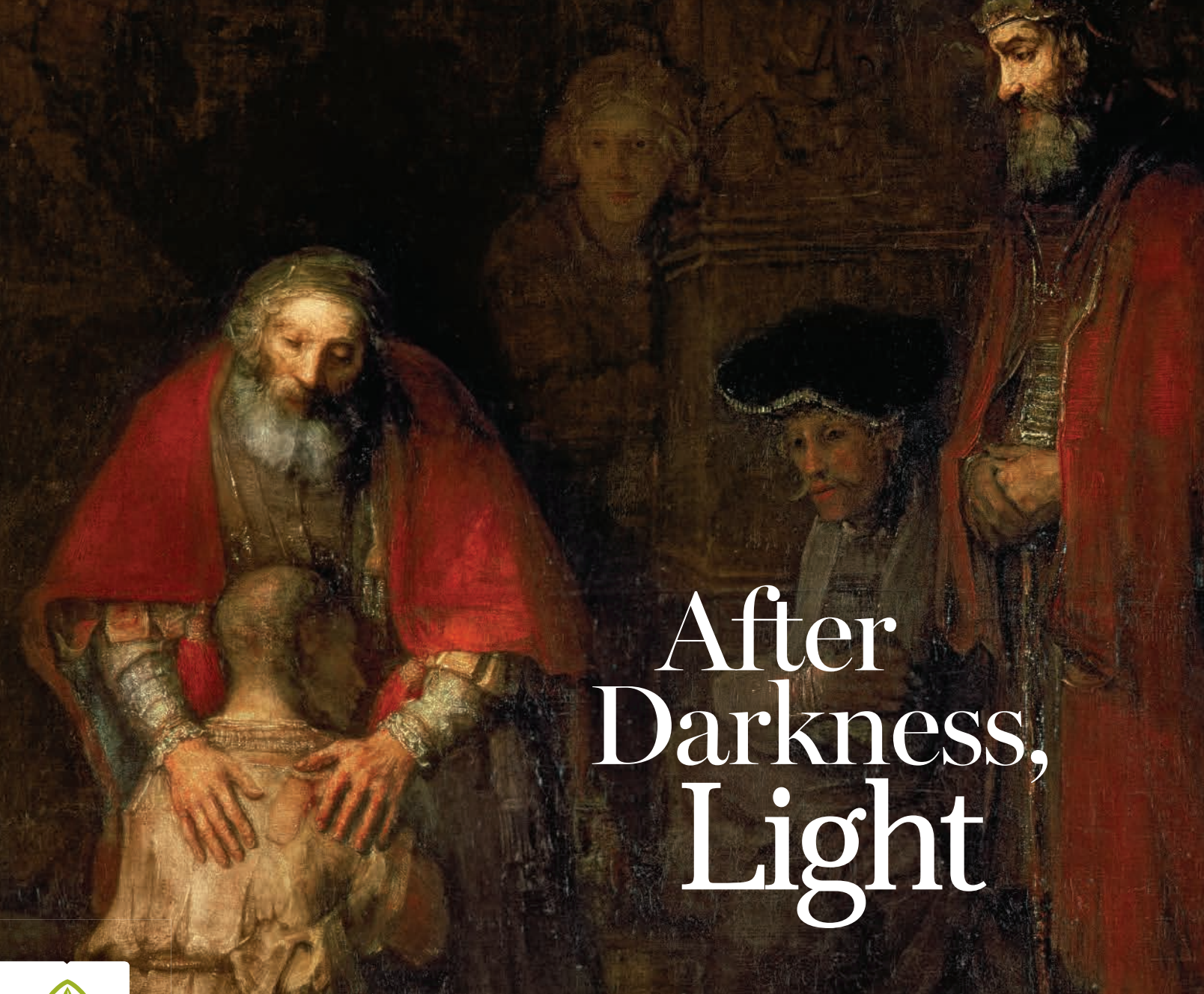
Another principle of Paul's mission, and especially of his evangelistic preaching, is that his preaching was accompanied by suffering. When we read the Acts of the Apostles, we repeatedly see the suffering Paul and his coworkers experienced as they proclaimed the gospel of Christ. Such suffering wasn't accidental. Paul informs the Colossians, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col 1:24). Paul isn't teaching here that Christ's atonement was deficient. Indeed, the very message of Colossians is that Christ is all-sufficient; in Christ believers have everything they need, including forgiveness of sins (cf. Col 2:11–15). Paul's sufferings, then, don't add to what Christ has done, but they are the means God uses to extend the all-sufficient message. They are the means to make the message fully known. Paul's sufferings are the corollary to the gospel, so that the message he proclaimed

was often declared in and through his sufferings, and his sufferings underscored how precious and valuable the message is.

Again, we have to distinguish our pastoral ministries from that of the Apostle Paul. Paul suffered uniquely as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Still, there is a principle here that applies to pastors. Our proclamation of the gospel message often involves suffering. We may face opposition and slander from some in our community. Or perhaps we will suffer at the hands of immature believers or even those who only claim to be believers but are still in darkness. But if we continue to proclaim the Word faithfully in the midst of opposition, the beauty and loveliness of our message will be all the more highlighted. If we are willing to suffer for the gospel, the world will recognize that we love the gospel more than life. The Holy Spirit uses such to arouse interest in our message and draw listeners to faith in Christ.

Lifestyle Evangelism

Paul also teaches that the godly life of believers sparks evangelism. We read in 1 Thessalonians 1:6–8,



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You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

When believers are willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel, the world can't help but notice, especially if we suffer with joy. A joyful response is contagious, revealing that the gospel is our greatest treasure.

We also see in Ephesians that the lives of believers attract others to the salvation available only in Jesus Christ. We read in Ephesians 5:11–13, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes

visible” (ESV). As believers, it is shameful for us to participate in the works of darkness. Paul emphasizes that such works are unfruitful and do not bring life. Rather than participating in evil works, we are to expose them.

Some think that Paul has in mind here the idea of reproving those who do evil works, so that we point out to them their error by confronting them. But it is more likely that he has in mind exposing the evil of unbelievers by the way we live. The true nature of evil works becomes clear when they are contrasted with the godly and beautiful lives of Christians. That is what Paul means when he says that when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible. The lives of Christians clarify and shed light on the evil works of unbelievers. What Paul emphasizes here, then, is not our verbal witness but our lifestyle witness. We know from other scriptural texts that a verbal witness is important, but a verbal witness means little if it is not backed up by our lives. Michael Green remarks in his book on evangelism, *One by One*, that 70 to 80 percent of those who are

converted are won to Christ through a friend.

God certainly uses verbal witness without friendship to bring people to Christ, but it is no surprise that He typically uses the witness we develop through friendship as well, for in friendship, the people to whom we witness see our lives. Many people are selling something today, and most are suspicious of salespeople. They suspect that the salesperson is out to benefit his interests, not the buyer's. But the beautiful lives of Christians, the new people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, is irrefutable testimony to the truth of the gospel.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul serves as an example of evangelism for us today, in both his words and his deeds. He suffered for the sake of the gospel and he gladly told those who had never heard the message about Jesus Christ as the Crucified and Risen One. As pastors, we are called upon to proclaim this same gospel to our hearers. ♦





DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND EVANGELISM

by John J. Murray

The history of the church makes it clear that there are different approaches to the work of evangelism. These differences stem from theological convictions about the nature of the gospel and can broadly be divided into two perspectives: that of Arminianism and that of Calvinism. It was at the time when an Arminian-based evangelism was prevalent in the 1950s that there came a re-discovery of the doctrines of grace. As one of those affected by the change, Dr. J. I. Packer wrote an introduction to *Death of Death* by John Owen. In it, he clearly set out the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism. In what he calls “the old gospel,” the center of reference was unambiguously God, but in the “new gospel,” the center of reference is man. Packer was to demonstrate this further in his classic work *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.

Discerning the True Gospel

Arminian teaching denies the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty in the work of salvation. It holds to the view that the only “election” to be found in Scripture consists in God’s foreseeing that certain sinners will of their own accord believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the individual must make a decision of the will to accept Christ. It is claimed that he has the ability to do so and thus must be persuaded by all means to embrace the offer of the gospel. The outcome of this is that if and when he does come to believe in Christ, some of the glory has to be ascribed to man for his part in it. This view entails belief in a God who enables man to save himself.

The Calvinist teaching clearly sets forth the triune God who saves completely. Its starting point is the view that God’s design is to glorify Himself and to show to the whole universe what an infinitely glorious being He is. “For of Him

and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever” (Rom 11:36). He will not give His glory to another (Isa 42:8). God has created the earth as a theater for the display of His glory. That glory is displayed most fully in the outworking of redemption. For this purpose sin was allowed to enter the world. For this purpose there was the covenant of redemption between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, designed to save and gather an elect people from the fallen human race. God’s election is free, sovereign, and unconditional.

Presenting the True Gospel

In the light of what we believe to be the true biblical message, how do we go about presenting the evangel in the pulpit? There are several things to be considered.

1. *We must preach the whole counsel of God.* Professor John Murray makes this clear when he writes:

The message of evangelism is the whole counsel of God as revealed in the Word, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Too often this commonplace statement is not accepted or, if accepted, not appreciated or followed. The cause of evangelism has been greatly prejudiced and hindered by the supposition, far too prevalent, that for the lost the message has to be restricted to the central elements of the gospel, namely, sin, redemption by the blood of Christ, and the demand for faith and repentance.

It is clear that lost sinners are in need of having the whole counsel of God preached to them, encompassing all of God’s

message of grace and love to them in Christ.

2. *We must begin with the nature and character of God.* In presenting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must begin where the Bible begins: with the nature and character of God. Paul calls it “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11). R. C. Sproul has said:

How we understand the nature and character of God himself influences how we understand the nature of man, who bears God’s image; the nature of Christ, who works to satisfy the Father; the nature of salvation, which is effected by God; the nature of ethics, the norms of which are based on God’s character; and a myriad of other theological considerations, all drawing on our consideration of God.

3. *We must emphasize the desperate plight of man.* In preaching the evangel we are faced with the fact that no sinner is going to be saved until he is made aware of his lost condition. That is Paul’s approach in his fine statement of the gos-

pel in the Epistle to the Romans. The evangel is only good news in the light of the bad news. Therefore, it is our duty to preach the law of God that sinners may be convicted of their sin. The preaching of the law was strongly emphasized by the Reformers, Puritans, and great evangelists such as George Whitefield and Charles Spurgeon.

4. *We must herald the free offer of the gospel.* Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient Savior, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. “What is offered to men in the Gospel?” asks Professor John Murray, and he answers:

It is not the possibility of salvation, not simply the opportunity of salvation. What is offered is salvation. To be more specific, it is Christ Himself in all the glory of His person and in all the perfection of His finished work who is offered.

Grace must not be detached from the person of Christ, who is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The focus of gospel proclamation is Christ Himself, clothed in the gospel. And the offer must be presented to sinners without conditions. Samuel Rutherford stated:

“The reprobate have the same warrant to believe in Christ as the elect.” God presents His gospel offer to sinners, even to Jerusalem sinners whose hands are filled with the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:23, 38–39).

Evangelicals have been prone to regard “evangelistic” meetings and “evangelistic” sermons as special occasions, different from the ordinary run of things. This is surely an indictment of our normal preaching services. If we were to hold that the essential work of evangelism lies in holding meetings of a special type, we would simply prove that we had failed to understand what our regular services are for. “The Lord Jesus Christ,” said Robert Bolton, “is offered most freely and without exception of any person, every Sabbath, every Sermon either in plain, and direct terms, or impliedly, at the least.” And so it inevitably is, wherever the Bible is preached biblically.

Motivation in Preaching the Gospel

As we are sent to preach the gospel, we must be conscious of a spiritual battle. We are proclaiming the gospel to sinners who are in a state of total depravity. It is clear that they can do nothing to save themselves. It is also true that



we are dealing with fallen man, who has a blinded mind and so is unable to grasp spiritual truth. With his perverse and ungodly nature, a man who hears the gospel instinctively disbelieves and disobeys it. Paul tells us that Satan is constantly active in keeping sinners in their natural state. So, apart from the sovereignty of God, no one can possibly truly respond to the message.

Yet, even in such a context, we know that we do not labor in vain. God has an elect people who will respond. The Lord assured Paul in Corinth that “I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9–11). The God who has appointed the end has also appointed the means. He has ordained that the gospel be preached, that Christ be offered to sinners, and that they be called on to believe and accept. The preacher does not know who the elect are when he goes forth with the gospel to call sinners, as responsible creatures, to repent and believe. The sinner is accountable to God, and the gospel comes to him as a command to obey as well as an invitation to accept.

What is to motivate our proclamation of the gospel?

1. *We must be motivated by the command and call of God to evangelize.* The command is there: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:19); “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). Paul could say: “I was appointed a preacher...and a teacher” (2 Tim 1:10). The Lord has called and commissioned preachers. The love of Christ compelled Paul to be an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor 5:14).

2. *We must be motivated by a desire for the glory of God.* We should delight to tell the world the great things that God has done for the salvation of sinners. We should desire to gain worshipers for the triune God. B. B. Warfield says it well: “Calvinism, the product of an overwhelming vision of God, born

from the reflection in the heart of man of the majesty of a God who will not give His glory to another, can not pause, until it place the scheme of salvation itself in relation to a complete world-view in which it becomes subsidiary to the glory of the Lord God Almighty.” The design of the gospel is “for His name.” Professor John Murray says: “It is not the advantage of the nations that is paramount in the promotion of the Gospel but the honour and glory of Christ. And the ambassador of Christ must have his own design in promoting the Gospel oriented to this paramount concern—his subjective design must reflect God’s own antecedent and objective design.”

3. *We must be motivated by love to our neighbor and the desire to see our fellow men saved.* The second table of the law obliges us to love our neighbor as ourselves. George Whitefield wrote that “we can preach the gospel no further than we have experienced the power of it in our own hearts.” As we experience the saving efficacy of the gospel, we desire others to share in that blessedness.

Expectation in Preaching the Gospel

The knowledge of the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. Our evangelistic work is the instrument that God uses for this purpose, but the power that saves is not in the instrument; it is in the hand of the One who uses the instrument. If we forget that it is God’s prerogative to give results when the gospel is preached, we shall start to think that it is our responsibility to secure them. To do that is to intrude into the office of the Holy Spirit and to exalt ourselves as agents of the new birth. The point that we must see

THE GOD WHO HAS APPOINTED THE END HAS ALSO APPOINTED THE MEANS.

is this: only by letting our knowledge of God’s sovereignty control the way in which we plan, and pray, and work in His service, can we avoid becoming guilty of this fault. For where we are not consciously relying on God, there we shall be found relying on ourselves.

In relying completely on God for success, our preaching must be undergirded with earnest prayer. Our God-appointed weapon in evangelism is preaching that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, accomplished while dependent upon God in prayer. Thus, the evangelist must be a man of prayer in his preparation and in the pulpit. He must be solicitous, as Paul was, for the prayers of the people of God. How frequently we find the apostle asking for prayer—see, for example, Ephesians 6:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, and Colossians 4:3. As the saying goes, the church makes her most significant advances when she is on her knees.

We conclude with the words of J. I. Packer, “Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time than to preach the Christian gospel.” It is equally true that God is entirely sovereign in matters of salvation, and that preachers must make every effort to spread the gospel message as they rely on God to bring in the harvest. ♦



GETTING THE GOSPEL RIGHT

with R. C. SPROUL

You have written a book entitled *Getting the Gospel Right*. Perhaps the best place to begin is, what is the gospel?

There is probably no term used more loosely in the church than the term “gospel.” You hear preachers say all the time that they are “ministers of the gospel” or that they “preach the gospel,” but many times they have no idea what the gospel actually is!

During my years teaching seminary, one of the D.Min. classes I taught was on justification. What I would characteristically do is put the word “gospel” on the blackboard and ask the ministers who were present to give me a definition of the gospel. They would say things like, “getting peace in your life,” “being reconciled with God,” “gaining purpose and self-es-

teem.” All of those things were true to a degree, but none of them qualified as a definition for the gospel. Several years ago, Michael Horton conducted a survey of one hundred people at a convention for Christian booksellers asking the question, “What is the gospel?”. These were people who were seriously involved with Christian education. Yet when their responses were evaluated, only one adequate answer was provided.

To answer the question “What is the gospel?” is rather simple. The gospel is Jesus, the person and work of Christ—who Jesus is and what He did. The gospel also describes how the benefits of His ministry are subjectively appropriated. That’s why the doctrine of justification by faith alone was so pivotal at the time of the Reformation, because it wasn’t a secondary matter but rather had to do with the gospel. Essentially, the pressing question that the gospel answers is, “How can an unjust person become just in the sight of God?”



R. C. SPROUL is founder and president of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, FL. Dr. Sproul’s teaching can be heard on the program *Renewing Your Mind*, which is broadcast on hundreds of radio outlets in the United States and in more than 40 countries worldwide. He is executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine and general editor of *The Reformation Study Bible*. Dr. Sproul currently serves

as the director of *Serve International* and co-pastor of Saint Andrew’s in Sanford, FL. He is the author of more than eighty books and scores of articles. Dr. Sproul has produced more than 300 lecture series and has recorded more than 80 video series on subjects such as the history of philosophy, theology, Bible study, apologetics, and Christian living.

Another way of approaching the question is to examine the apostolic preaching, particularly the preaching in the book of Acts. Historically, when speaking of the gospel message, we have made a distinction between the *kerygma* and the *didache*. The *kerygma* was the proclamation the early church made to the world, and once people respond to that they received the *didache*, or the teaching. When Paul went to Athens and preached, he didn’t have time to start with Abraham and go all the way through Malachi. Yet he was able to present in a nutshell the message of the truth of God and of the history of redemption, which culminates in the person and work of Christ.

If we analyze that *kerygma* found in the book of Acts, we will see the message that this Man was born of woman, of the seed of David, according to the Scriptures. He lived a sinless life, made a sacrificial atonement on the cross, was raised by God from the dead for our justification, and ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, where He is crowned Lord of lords and King of kings, from where He will

return and judge the world. The benefits of this are reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, and justification, from which we get peace with God, which is received by faith alone. That is the gospel.

One of the biggest problems we face in the church is preaching to people who are unconverted but think they are converted. They have made a profession of faith by walking an aisle, raising their hand, or signing a prayer card, and they think because they have done those things they have been truly converted. But just because we profess to have faith doesn't mean that we have it.

I think can of two classical sermons that address this same theme. One was from Gilbert Tennent, "The Danger of the Unconverted Clergy," and the other was from Jonathan Edwards, "A Warning to Professors." This was Jesus' great warning: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me" (Matt 15:8). He ends the Sermon on the Mount by saying, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matt 7:21–23).

For me, it is liberating to be a pastor in a single location for a long time, because that allows me to preaching verse-by-verse through whole books of the Bible. I don't have to lie awake thinking about what verse I should preach; the text dictates that for me.

Preachers are accountable to preach the whole counsel of God. So, if I'm not bound to preaching through books, I can intentionally or unintentionally fall into the "hobby-horse syndrome" of preaching only the texts I like or want to preach. But when the preacher is dedicated to verse-by-verse exposition, he can't avoid preaching the whole counsel of God.

Within expository preaching more broadly, I have found it tremendously encouraging to preach through the four Gospels. I enjoy this so much, because it is an excellent opportunity to tell people as much as I can about Jesus. Every single night, I pray for an awakening in our church. Getting the Gospels in front of people as much as possible allows their minds to be filled with Christ, that the Spirit might bring them all to a saving knowledge of Christ.

What are some of the distinguishing marks of preaching with a desire for conversions?

Sunday morning worship is primarily for the believer. I don't establish our worship on the needs or desires of "seekers," because no one seeks after God by his or her own initiative. Instead, I establish our worship for believers. But, at the same time, as Augustine said, the church is always a "mixed body." This idea did not originate with Augustine but with Jesus. So, we know that on any given Sunday morning, the odds are great that there are going to be unbelievers present at our worship service.

On the one hand, if you preach an evangelistic sermon every Sunday morning and focus your attention on the unbeliever exclusively, you have missed the point of corporate worship. The church is there to grow into the maturity of Christ through learning from the expounded Word of God. On the

other hand, at the same time that my primary focus is on expounding the text for the benefit of the believer, I am also acutely conscious that there are unbelievers present. As a result, I almost always make an evangelistic appeal to unbelievers, letting them know that if they died tonight they would wake up in hell. There are many ways to make evangelistic appeals without spending the primary time doing so.

I do not believe I personally have an extraordinary anointing of God during my preaching like

some men such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and others experienced during their ministries. Therefore, I struggle with the inadequacy of my preaching. This struggle is exacerbated by the fact that I am not always privy to the response that goes on in people's hearts in response to the Word of God. I am burdened that people will respond to the Word, whether they hear it through my preaching or somewhere else. That is why I pray all the time that God will move the people listening to the preaching of His Word.

Even though I often feel very inadequate, I am fully and completely confident in the power of the Word. The Word is not going to return void. When I preach the Scriptures, week in and week out, in an expository manner, people may not remember what I preached on several weeks ago, but there is still a cumulative effect that is building up in their lives. The power of the Word is what changes and transforms the hearts of people.

As Spurgeon ascended to his pulpit, he would repeat over

PREACHERS ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO PREACH THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD



and over to himself, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit.” As I am walking up into the pulpit of my own church, I remind myself, “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord” (Ps 121:1). God has revealed Himself in His Word, and there is no substitute for that.

I am reminded of the well-known illustration of Vince Lombardi’s picking up a football before his players and saying to them, “This is a football, am I going too fast for you?” Before today’s modern preachers, I sometimes long to pick up a Bible and say to them, “This is a Bible, am I going too fast for you?” In other words, when we start anywhere other than with the Bible, we go every way but the right way. I am not providing a technique for success. This is the job and duty of the preacher of the Word of God. Forget your entertainment and other gimmicks, and preach the whole counsel of God!

All biblical preaching puts Christ at the center of the message. Why do we say the message we preach is an exclusive message?

I cannot imagine an affirmation that would meet with more resistance from contemporary Westerners than the one Paul makes in 1 Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This declaration is narrow and downright un-American. We have been inundated with the viewpoint that there are many roads that lead to heaven, and that God is not so narrow that He requires a strict allegiance to one way of salvation. If anything strikes at the root of the tree of pluralism and relativism, it is a claim of exclusivity to one religion or one God. A statement such as Paul makes in his first letter to Timothy is seen as bigoted and hateful.

Paul, of course, is not expressing bigotry or hatefulness at all. He is simply expressing the truth of God, the same truth Jesus taught when He said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Paul is affirming the uniqueness of Christ, specifically in His role as Mediator. A mediator is a go-between, someone who stands between two parties that are estranged or involved in some kind of dispute. Paul declares that Christ is the only Mediator between two parties at odds with one another—God and men.

Why, then, does Paul say there is only one mediator between God and man? I believe we have to understand the uniqueness of Christ’s mediation in terms of the uniqueness of His person. He is the God-man, that is, God incarnate. In order to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity, the second person of the Trinity united to Himself a human nature. Thus, Jesus has the qualifications to bring about reconciliation—He represents both sides perfectly.

People ask me, “Why is God so narrow that He provid-

ed only one Savior?” I do not think that is the question we ought to ask. Instead, we should ask, “Why did God give us any way at all to be saved?” In other words, why did He not just condemn us all? Why did God, in His grace, give to us a Mediator to stand in our place, to receive the judgment we deserve, and to give to us the righteousness we desperately need? The astonishing thing is not that He did not do it in multiple ways, but that He did it in even one way.

Notice that Paul, in declaring the uniqueness of Christ, also affirms the uniqueness of God: “There is one God.” This divine uniqueness was declared throughout the Old Testament; the very first commandment was a commandment of exclusivity: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). So, Paul brings all these strands together. There is only one God, and God has only one Son, and the Son is the sole Mediator between God and mankind.

In thinking through the narrow terms of the exclusivity of Christ and of the Christian faith, let me ask you to think through the ramifications of putting leaders of other religions on the same level as Christ. In one sense, there is no greater insult to Christ than to mention Him in the same breath as Muhammad, for example. If Christ is who He claims to be, no one else can be a way to God. Furthermore, if it is true that there are many ways to God, Christ is not one of them, because there is no reason one of many ways to God would declare to the world that He is the only way to God.

There is much discussion today about the role of the law in preaching the gospel. What is the relationship between the law and the Christian?

“O how I love your law!” (Ps 119:97). What a strange statement of affection. Why would anyone direct his love toward the law of God? The law limits our choices, restricts our freedom, torments our consciences, and pushes us down with a mighty weight that cannot be overcome, and yet the psalmist declares his affection for the law in passionate terms. He calls the law sweeter than honey to his mouth (Ps 119:3).

What is it about the law of God that can provoke such affection? In the first place, the law is not an abstract set of rules and regulations. The law reflects the will of the Lawgiver, and in that regard it is intensely personal. The law reflects to the creature the perfect will of the Creator and at the same time reveals the character of that Being whose law it is.

When the psalmist speaks of his affection for the law, he makes no division between the law of God and the Word of God. Just as the Christian loves the Word of God, so we ought to love the law of God, for the Word of God is indeed the law of God.

The second reason why the psalmist has such a positive view of the law is that the law, by revealing God’s character, exposes

our fallenness. It is the mirror that reflects our own images—warts and all—and becomes the pedagogue, the schoolmaster that drives us to Christ. The law does not drive us out of the kingdom but rather ushers us into the kingdom by directing us to the One who alone is able to fulfill its demands.

The most wonderful function of the law, however, is that it shows us what is pleasing to God. The godly man is the one who meditates on the law day and night (Ps 1:2), and he does so because he finds his delight therein. By delighting in the precepts of God, he becomes like a tree planted by rivers of living water, bringing forth its fruit in its season (Ps 1:3). Our Lord said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15), but we cannot show that love for Him unless we know what the commandments are. A knowledge of the law of God gives to us the pattern of loving obedience. If we love the Lord, we must also love His law. To love God and despise His law is a contradiction that must never be the profile of the Christian.

God gives us His law not to take away our joy, but rather that our joy may be full. His law is never given in a context of meanness, but in the context of His love. We love the law of God because God loves His law and because that law is altogether lovely.

As expositors, we are responsible for preaching and presenting the message of the gospel. Our responsibility stops there, for it is the work of the Holy Spirit to draw the soul to Christ. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation?

The monergistic work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit is

an immediate work. It is immediate with respect to time, and it is immediate in the sense that it operates without intervening means. The Holy Spirit does not use something apart from His own power to bring a person from spiritual death to spiritual life, and when that work is accomplished, it is accomplished instantaneously. Here we have a classic either/or situation. A person is either born again, or he is not born again. There is no nine-month gestation period with respect to this birth. No one is partly regenerate, or almost regenerate. When the Spirit changes the disposition of the human soul, He does it instantly. A person may not be aware of this internal work accomplished by God for some time after it has actually occurred. But though our awareness of it may be gradual, the enacting of it is instantaneous.

When the Holy Spirit regenerates a human soul, the purpose of that regeneration is to bring that person to saving faith in Jesus Christ. That purpose is effected and accomplished as God purposes in the intervention. Regeneration is more than giving a person the possibility of having faith; it gives him the certainty of possessing that saving faith.

The result of our regeneration is first of all faith, which then results in justification and adoption into the family of God. Nobody is born into this world a child of the family of God. We are born as children of wrath. The only way we enter into the family of God is by adoption, and that adoption occurs when we are united to God’s only begotten Son by faith. When by faith we are united with Christ, we are then adopted into that family of whom Christ is the firstborn. Regeneration therefore involves a new genesis, a new beginning, a new birth. It is that birth by which we enter into the family of God by adoption. ✦





EVANGELISTIC PREACHING IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

by Keith Essex

Evangelistic preaching has a rich heritage. The first evangelistic sermon of the Church Age was preached by the Apostle Peter nearly 2,000 years ago on the Day of Pentecost. Luke records the essence of Peter's message in Acts 2:14–40. Luke reports five more evangelistic messages in the book, two by Peter (3:12–26; 10:34–43) and three by Paul (13:16–41; 14:15–17; 17:22–31). In addition to these six sermons, Acts states several times that the Word was declared (4:31; 8:4, 25; 11:19; 13:5, 49; 14:25; 15:35, 36; 19:10), without giving the specific content of the sermons. Acts is a book that emphasizes evangelistic preaching.

However, the purpose of Acts is not to prescribe a model of evangelistic preaching for the church. Acts was written under the direction of the Holy Spirit by Luke to a man named Theophilus, a Gentile believer in Jesus Christ, "so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4). Through an accurate historical narrative in two volumes (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), Luke demonstrates to Theophilus how the gospel message initiated by Jesus had come to the Gentiles through the ministry of the Apostle Paul and his ministry team, which included Luke (Acts 16:10). Gentile Christians such as Theophilus could be certain that it was God's plan that the gospel come to them and that the gospel to which they had responded was the true gospel. Therefore, Luke gives special attention in Acts to the gospel preached first by Peter and then by Paul, verifying that they both preached the same message. Thus, there is in Acts a special emphasis on evangelistic preaching.

The first two sermons preached by Peter in Jerusalem are addressed to "Men of Israel" (2:22; 3:12). In each, he specifically indicts both the leaders and the people of Israel for the sin of killing their Messiah (2:23; 3:13–15, 17). But despite their hostility, through the resurrection (2:24–32; 3:15) and the exaltation (2:33–35; 3:21) of Jesus, God has validated that Jesus is not only Lord and Messiah (2:36), but also God's servant (3:13, 26), the Holy and Righteous One (3:14), and the

Prince of Life (3:15). All of this has taken place in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (2:25–28, 30, 34–35; 3:21–25). The house of Israel thus needs to repent, which involves a change of mind so that it acknowledges its sin and comes to regard Jesus as Lord and Savior. This repentance will result in different conduct (2:38; 3:19) and the personal response of baptism repentance (2:38). It will be accompanied by forgiveness of sins (2:38; 3:19), the receiving of the Holy Spirit (2:38), and salvation (deliverance) from the coming judgment (2:40).

The third evangelistic message preached by Peter is to the relatives and friends of a God-fearing Gentile named Cornelius (10:1–2, 24). The Lord had prepared Peter to go to the Gentiles through a vision concerning unclean food (10:9–16, 34). Even though Cornelius had renounced his pagan idolatry and had embraced Israel's God (10:2), he still needed to hear what God had done through His sending of Jesus who proclaimed peace (10:36; cf. Luke 2:11, 14), with His message validated by His miracles (10:37–38). This Jesus died and was raised from the dead (10:39–41) and had been appointed by God as the Judge of all men (10:42). As the Old Testament prophets have testified, through faith in Jesus comes the forgiveness of sins (10:43). At this point, Peter's message is interrupted as the Holy Spirit falls upon these Gentiles who have believed the message (10:44). Baptism and fellowship with the Jews who had accompanied Peter follows (10:45–48). Later, in Jerusalem, the belief (faith) of the Gentiles in Jesus is equated with the repentance which leads to life (11:17–18).

The three evangelistic messages preached by Paul have many parallels with the three sermons of Peter. The first, like Peter's Day of Pentecost sermon, is also addressed to "Men of Israel," though Paul adds "and you who fear God" since there were Gentile God-fearers like Cornelius in his audience at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (13:16). Paul begins the sermon by stating the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah, which culminated in the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist for Jesus (13:17–25). He then uses the more

affectionate address, “brethren” (13:26; cf. 2:29), adding “sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God.” Paul, like Peter, directly indicts the Jews for killing Jesus (13:27–29; cf. 2:23); but God has raised Him from the dead (13:30; cf. 2:24–32) with the apostles as witnesses (13:31; cf. 2:32; 3:15; 10:39–41). Paul confirms Jesus’ resurrection by quoting Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10 (13:32–37; cf. 2:25–32). Through Jesus comes the proclamation of forgiveness of sins (13:38; cf. 2:38) and justification (13:39). If the message of salvation in Jesus is not heeded, there will be certain judgment (13:40–41; cf. 2:40). This sermon reflects what Paul consistently preached in the Diaspora Jewish synagogues, and Luke shows that both Paul and Peter preached essentially the same evangelistic message to the Jews.

Paul’s second evangelistic sermon follows a similar trajectory to Peter’s second message. Each sermon is preached to a crowd that has gathered after the healing of a man lame from his mother’s womb (14:8–13; cf. 3:1–11). But while Peter addresses Jews, Paul, along with Barnabas, speaks to pagan Gentiles at Lystra (14:14–17). The sermon recorded by Luke is a sample of how Paul addresses Gentiles. He indicts the pagans on the basis of creation and urges them to turn from their idols to the one true God. The basic outline included here is more fully developed in Paul’s third evangelistic sermon in Acts 17:22–31.

As before, Luke parallels his account of Paul’s third message with Peter’s. He provides a narrative background describing how Paul came to speak in Athens just as Peter had in Caesarea (17:16–21; cf. 10:1–33). In both cases, the apostles found themselves invited to speak before an assembly gathered to hear them. But Paul was to address intellectual pagans, not God-fearing Gentiles.

Paul begins his sermon by noting that the Athenians acknowledge a God of whom they are ignorant (17:22–23). This is the God of creation, who cannot dwell in mere human temples and cannot be represented by idols made by human hands (17:24–29). Even Greek writers such as Epimenides and Aratus had inferred the latter (17:28). This God of creation has now commanded all men to repent and think differently of idolatry, or they will face certain future judgment. This judgment is assured by the resurrection of a man from the dead (17:30–31). Like Peter, Paul’s third message was interrupted, not by a response of faith (10:44), but by a response of unbelief regarding the resurrection (17:32). Thus, Paul left

the assembly before all of the Athenians had embraced Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, though a few did believe (17:34).

What does the contemporary evangelistic preacher learn from the narratives and sermons recorded in Acts? Primary is the truth of the sovereignty of God in evangelistic preaching. In each case cited above, it was God who arranged the circumstances for the preaching. Miracles gathered the assembled crowds (2:1–13; 3:1–11; 14:8–13) to whom the preachers spoke, or the preachers were invited to speak by others (10:33; 13:15; 17:19). In none of these cases was the preaching the direct result of speaker’s initiative; instead, God brought about the preaching event with those He had determined would hear the message. Further, it was the Lord who had called and commissioned the preachers Peter (1:2) and Paul (9:15), and God who brought about the response (2:37; 4:14; 11:18; 13:48; 14:18; 17:34).

Also significant is the consistency of the evangelistic message. First, there was a clear statement of the hearers’ sin. The Jews were indicted because their sin culminated in their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had rejected the revelation of God in creation and turned to the worship of idols. Second, there was confirmation that Jesus was God’s instrument of salvation. This was validated by the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy for those who knew the Scriptures and by the resurrection of Jesus for Jew and

Gentile alike. Third, there was a call for sinners to repent of their sins and to respond in faith, embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Fourth, there was a reminder that those who did not repent and believe, that is, those who rejected Jesus as the one way of salvation, faced certain judgment in the future. This was the message that Theophilus had heard and believed, and Luke likewise affirmed that it was true. This is the same gospel message that the evangelistic preacher proclaims today, and it is as true today as it was in the first generation of the church. ♦

GOD HAD BROUGHT ABOUT THE PREACHING EVENT WITH THOSE HE HAD DETERMINED WOULD HEAR THE MESSAGE.



WILLIAM TYNDALE: THE FATHER OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE, PT. 3

by Steven J. Lawson

In November 1530, Thomas Cromwell, the chancellor to King Henry VIII, commissioned Stephen Vaughan, an English merchant sympathetic to the Reformation, to find Tyndale. Vaughan was instructed to offer Tyndale a salary and safe passage back to England. Upon his arrival to the continent, Vaughan dispatched three letters to Tyndale, each addressed to three different cities—Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Marburg. Surprisingly, he received a response from Tyndale. As a result, a series of secret meetings were arranged in Antwerp in April 1531.

Vaughan attempted to persuade Tyndale to return to England. The tenacious translator agreed to return to England, but only on one condition. The king must choose someone else to translate the Bible into English. If he agreed, Tyndale would return to England, cease his translation work, and offer his life in service to the king. Similar promises of safety had been made earlier to John Hus and Luther, but were broken. Tyndale knew the king's promise would be severed.

Vaughan wrote from Antwerp on June 19 these simple words: "I find him [Tyndale] always singing one note." In other words, Tyndale refused to change his tune. He would not promise to cease writing books or return to England until the king commissioned a Bible in the English language. Vaughan returned to England empty handed. Tyndale was undaunted in his mission and could not be diverted from fulfilling this singular passion of his heart. In defiance of the English throne, he chose to continue his daring pursuit.

Aggressive Attacks upon Tyndale

With attempts to apprehend Tyndale failing, Cromwell devised an even more aggressive strategy. Sir Thomas Elyot, a new emissary, was dispatched to Europe to apprehend Tyndale. His marching orders were to find Tyndale and bring him to the King, whatever it takes. Elyot searched high and low, but his concerted effort yielded no positive results. Elyot returned to England without the despised renegade.

In 1531, Tyndale issued a treatise in response to the attacks

by More's *Dialogue*, released in 1529. It was entitled *Answer*, a work in which he exegetically defended his translation of selected biblical passages that More claimed would lead people away from Catholic theology and practice. Tyndale contended that the Scripture was clear enough to be understood without church leadership imposing its twisted, man-made tradition. More countered in 1532 and 1533 with his six-volume work, *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*. Close to half a million words, *Confutation* was the most imposing of More's polemical works, written as an imaginary dialogue between More and Tyndale with More addressing each of Tyndale's criticisms of Catholic rites and doctrines. These weighty tomes alleged that Tyndale was a traitor to England and a heretic of the church. Despite More's vicious attack upon Tyndale, the Reformation was spreading across Europe and, now, England.

Undercover in Antwerp

In the early months of 1534, Tyndale moved into a house of English merchants in Antwerp as the guest of Thomas Poyntz, a wealthy English merchant. Poyntz took Tyndale into his protection, even providing a stipend as he worked on his translation project and other writings.

The chaplain of this English house was a man by the name of John Rogers. As a consequence of Tyndale's instruction and influence, Rogers became a loyal supporter of Reformed doctrines. Eventually, Rogers would produce his own English Bible in 1537, known as the *Matthew Bible*. This famous edition contained Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, Pentateuch, historical books of the Old Testament, and Jonah, with minor changes. The rest of the Old Testament was drawn from the *Coverdale Bible*. In 1555, Rogers would become the first Protestant martyr under Queen Mary Tutor, also known as "Bloody Mary."

Feeling more secure, Tyndale set himself to complete the revision of his New Testament translation, which has been called the glory of his life's work. This revised second edition appeared in 1534, eight years after the first. It contained some

4,000 changes to the 1526 edition, though some claim it had as many as 5,000 edits. These numerous corrections were the result of his further study of the original language and feedback he received. A short prologue was placed before each New Testament book, except Acts and Revelation. In addition, Tyndale added cross-references and explanatory notes to the biblical text in the outside margin. Further, on the inside margin, Tyndale labeled each paragraph alphabetically, designating each literary unit within a book. Within a month, all 6,000 printed copies of Tyndale's revised second edition of the New Testament sold out.

A third edition would follow in December 1534 and early 1535, but with significantly fewer corrections. By this time, Tyndale's mastery of Hebrew was as advanced as his Greek. This afforded him the ability to translate the next section of the Old Testament, Joshua through 2 Chronicles. This season of Tyndale's life proved to be extremely prolific. But all was about to change.

Betrayed by a Friend

In England, a native Englishman, Henry Phillips, found himself in a disastrous situation after gambling away a large sum of money his father had given him to pay a debt. A high official in the church, possibly the Bishop of London, John Stokesley, became aware of Phillips' desperate plight. Phillips was viewed as a perfect accomplice for another devious strategy to arrest Tyndale. He was offered a large sum of money to travel to Europe and locate Tyndale. Like Judas, Phillips took the offer to deliver Tyndale.

Motivated by greed, Phillips arrived in Antwerp in early summer of 1535. He made the necessary contacts among English merchants and followed the trail that led him straight to Tyndale. Phillips diabolically established a supposed friendship with Tyndale. Despite the warning of Poyntz, Phillips secured Tyndale's trust and lured him into a narrow ally, where soldiers awaited to arrest him. After twelve years as a fugitive, the elusive Tyndale was, at last, apprehended and taken into custody. Upon his arrest, the bulky manuscript of his most recent translation work, Joshua to 2 Chronicles, escaped confiscation. His close friend and companion, John Rogers, most probably gathered it up for safe possession. It was Rogers who would subsequently undertake Tyndale's cause and have his final work printed in the *Matthew Bible*.

Imprisoned in Vilvoorde

Upon his capture, Tyndale was imprisoned six miles north of Brussels in the Castle of Vilvoorde. With an imposing moat, seven towers, three drawbridges, and impenetrable walls, the Castle of Vilvoorde was a fortress of confinement. Shivering in the cold, damp dungeons of this castle-prison, Tyn-



dale waited over a year for his trial, which was a mockery of justice. During this five-hundred-day confinement, Tyndale wrote another treatise, *Faith Alone Justifies before God*. To the end, Tyndale was defending the seminal truth that lay behind his imprisonment.

During the harsh winter of 1535, Tyndale wrote in a final letter, "I suffer greatly from cold in the head, and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh [discharge], which is much increase in this cell . . . My overcoat is worn out; my shirts are also worn out." He requested "a lamp in the evening; it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary . . . permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study." These months were "a long dying leading to dying." As Tyndale sat in prison, John Foxe writes that he "was affecting his very . . . enemies" as "he converted his keeper, the keeper's daughter, and others of his household." Though cold and suffering within the bowels of this stone prison, like the Apostle Paul in his Roman prison, Tyndale's heart was still ablaze with gospel truth and undeniable joy.

Condemned and Degraded

In August 1536, Tyndale stood trial before his accusers, who leveled a long list of charges against him. His offenses included asserting that justification is by faith alone, that human traditions cannot bind the conscience, that the human will is bound by sin, that there is no purgatory, and that neither Mary nor the saints offer prayers for us, nor are we to pray for them. All this made Tyndale an enemy of both church and state. He was condemned as a heretic.

During a public service, Tyndale would have been excommunicated and stripped of his priesthood. According to historical records of such ceremonies, Tyndale would have emerged before a large gathering wearing his priestly robes. He would then be forced to kneel as his hands would be scraped with a knife or sharp glass, symbolizing the loss of all privileges of the priesthood. The bread and wine of the Mass would be placed into his hands and then removed. He would be stripped of his vestments and reclothed as a layman. He would then be delivered over to the civil authorities for the inevitable sentence of death. Forced back to his dungeon cell, a steady stream of priests and monks came to harass him and seek a recanting.

Lord, Open the King's Eyes

On October 6, 1536, Tyndale emerged from the castle and was paraded to the southern gate of the town, where his execution stake awaited. A large crowd assembled behind a barricade. In the middle of a circular space, two great beams were raised in the familiar form of a cross. Hanging from the top of the central beam was a strong iron chain. Brushwood, straw, and logs were bundled and piled at its base. In great pomp and pharisaical splendor, the procurer-general and the great doctors took their seats as spectators. The massive crowd parted, allowing the guards to bring Tyndale closer to his execution.

Tyndale proceeded to the cross. The guards bound his feet to the bottom of the cross as the chain was fastened around his neck, pulling him tightly to the beam of wood. The wood was rearranged around the prisoner to encase him in combustible material. Gunpowder was sprinkled thoroughly on the brush. The executioner stood behind the cross, awaiting the signal from the procurer-general to carry out the sentence. At this moment, most likely, Tyndale gazed into the heavens and cried forth in prayer, “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes.”

Strangled and Burned

The procurer-general gave the signal and the executioner quickly tightened the iron noose, strangling Tyndale. The crowd watched Tyndale gasp for air as he suffocated and died. However, his mere death did not satisfy. The procurer-general grabbed a lighted wax torch and handed it to the executioner, who threw it on the straw and brushwood. The blazing

fire caused the gunpowder to explode, blowing up the corpse. What remained of the limply-hanging, burnt body of Tyndale fell into the glowing fire.

God ultimately answered Tyndale’s dying prayer. In the year he was martyred, 1536, an English Bible—unknown to Tyndale—was already circulating in England. This work was predominately drawn from Tyndale’s own translation. The first of these Bibles was the *Coverdale Bible*, printed in 1535. A second English translation of the entire Bible, the *Matthew Bible*, would come as a result of the efforts of John Rogers in 1537.

Less than a year after Tyndale’s death, Thomas Cranmer, who had become the archbishop of Canterbury, and Oliver Cromwell persuaded Henry VIII to approve the publication of an official English Bible. When King Henry saw the *Coverdale Bible*, he emphatically proclaimed, “If there be no heresies in it, then let it be spread abroad among all the people!” In September 1538, the king issued a decree that a copy of the Bible in English and Latin should be placed in every church in England. The permissible copies of the Bible were the *Coverdale Bible* and the *Matthew Bible*, both flowing, in large measure, from the influence and pen of William Tyndale.

Historian D’Aubigné writes that after Tyndale’s death, the stream of English Bibles into England was “like a mighty river continually bearing new waters to the sea.” As these printed English Bibles became accessible to the common man in England, Tyndale’s “plowman” was, at last, reading, discussing, living, and proclaiming the truths of the Bible among his relatives, friends, and countrymen.

Almost five hundred years later, the river of Scripture continues to flow mightily across the face of the globe. Tyndale was the guiding force for every subsequent English translation that has spread to the farthest corners of the earth. Today, English translations are numerous, yet they have their single origin in Tyndale’s foundational work. Publishers of English Bibles continue to stand upon the sturdy shoulders of Tyndale’s pioneering efforts. Given that English is an international language, the far-reaching influence of William Tyndale extends throughout the world.

As the current of truth surges forth in this present hour, may the truths of God’s Word inundate our hearts and the swells of sovereign grace flood our minds. May there be a renewed commitment to the sufficiency and exclusivity of this bloodstained Book. ♦

Excerpt from *The Daring Mission of William Tyndale* by Steven J. Lawson, to be published by Reformation Trust in 2015.

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AUGUSTINE: REKINDLING OUR APPROACH TO PREACHING

by Dustin W. Bengé

From its inception, preaching has held a prominent place within the life and advance of the church. A current revival of expository ministry is being cultivated throughout the evangelical world. However, such renewed awareness and commitment to an expository pulpit ministry has been nurtured with a notable lack of historical awareness. To help us restore such awareness, specifically from the patristic era of church history, is one purpose of Peter Sanlon's new work, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching* [Fortress Press, July 2014; 200 pp.]. Sanlon comments on the advantage of having a historical familiarity with preaching as follows:

Learning through and from preachers in church history develops a deeper self-awareness about the practice and possibilities of preaching. Getting beyond a superficial imitation of past preachers to the timeless convictions and debates bequeaths tools and confidence for the task today.

A graduate of Cambridge University, Peter Sanlon is currently the vicar of St. Mark's Church, Royal Tunbridge Wells in Kent, and distance-education tutor in systematic theology at St. John's College, Nottingham. According to Sanlon, scholarship has emphasized Augustine as the philosophical theologian, the refuter of heresy, and the contributor to doctrinal clarity, but the recognition of Augustine as a biblical preacher has been abandoned. In addressing this scarcity, Sanlon's timely contribution to Augustinian scholarship has been welcomed by all who are interested in developing a historical theology of preaching based on the works of this patristic theologian.

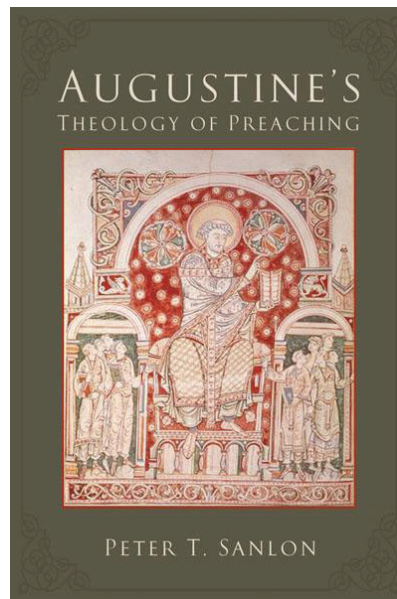
Augustine's friend, Possidius of Calama, once remarked

that "those who read what Augustine has written in his works on divine subjects profit greatly, but I believe that the ones who really profited were those who actually heard him and saw him speak in church." Augustine was a virtuoso orator. The surviving corpus of Augustine's sermons is staggering, yet it likely represents only a small portion of what he actually delivered. It includes the 124 sermons of his *In Johannis evangelium tractatus* (*Tractates on the Gospel of John*) and the 10 sermons of his *In epistulam Johannis ad Parthos tractatus* (*Tractates on the First Letter of John*). It also includes his massive *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (*Expositions of the Psalms*), which preserve at least one sermon on each of the 150 psalms. His largest collection is his *Sermones ad populum* (*Sermons to the People*). Over 500 of Augustine's sermons have been discovered and authenticated, some complete, others fragments. The painstaking work of recovering lost sermons still continues.

After an introduction presenting five areas of contemporary homiletical importance for today's preacher, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching* begins in chapter one with an exploration into the historical context of Augustine's preaching ministry in North Africa during the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In addition, Sanlon

provides brief introductions to Ambrose, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Peter Chrysologus, showing both their influence and the differences between their preaching and that of Augustine.

Chapter two proceeds to set Augustine within an oratorical context. Sanlon investigates the impact and influence upon Augustine of antiquity's greatest orators: Gorgias, Plato, Cicero, Quintilian, and Apuleius. Beyond great oratory, Augustine came to the conviction that simple persuasion techniques were not enough to convince men to do as one asks. Instead,



he believed an ultimate authority must be appealed to in order for people to acknowledge and appreciate the truth and therefore be persuaded to live by it. Augustine settled upon the ultimate authority of God's Word revealed in the Scriptures as the only sufficient means through which the truth may be revealed to the heart of man. The Word of God was Augustine's only authority throughout his life as a preacher.

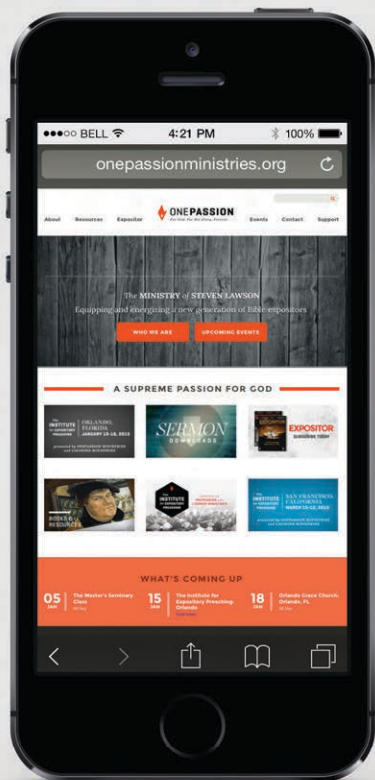
In chapter three, Sanlon discusses *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Teaching*). Augustine felt his training in pagan oratory was insufficient for the event of preaching and therefore wrote a training manual to help instruct preachers in the art of holy rhetoric. Again, the Bible was Augustine's ultimate authority for this work regarding sacred rhetoric. Chapter four of Sanlon's work gives us a set of hermeneutical glasses through which we can better view Augustine's approach to preaching by defining interiority and temporality.

The final chapters move from a discussion of Augustine as a preacher and focus upon his actual preaching. Chapters five through seven engage in an analysis of the *Sermons* concerning the issues of riches and money, death and resurrection, and relationships. Sanlon's goal is to have the reader see how Augustine applied interiority and temporality to scripture as he addressed the congregation of Hippo. This is not an exhaustive treatment of the *Sermons*, but the taste provided here may prepare the way for readers to later explore the *Sermones ad Populum* for themselves through the lenses provided by Sanlon.

Sanlon's work evokes a two-fold desire in its readers. The first is to investigate further the preaching ministry of one of

the stalwarts of the Christian church, and the second is to seek to emulate Augustine's passion and zeal for the authority of Scripture in all of life and ministry. Augustine's preaching ministry teaches the contemporary preacher that he is not to set himself over Scripture in judgment as if to control and manage its power. Quite the contrary, the modern preacher must approach Scripture expecting that God will, first of all, address him. Augustine constantly sought out Scripture's mysteries and obscurities, "in the hope that God's surprising voice would warm his heart and motivate him to draw others into the experience of hearing God speak" (175).

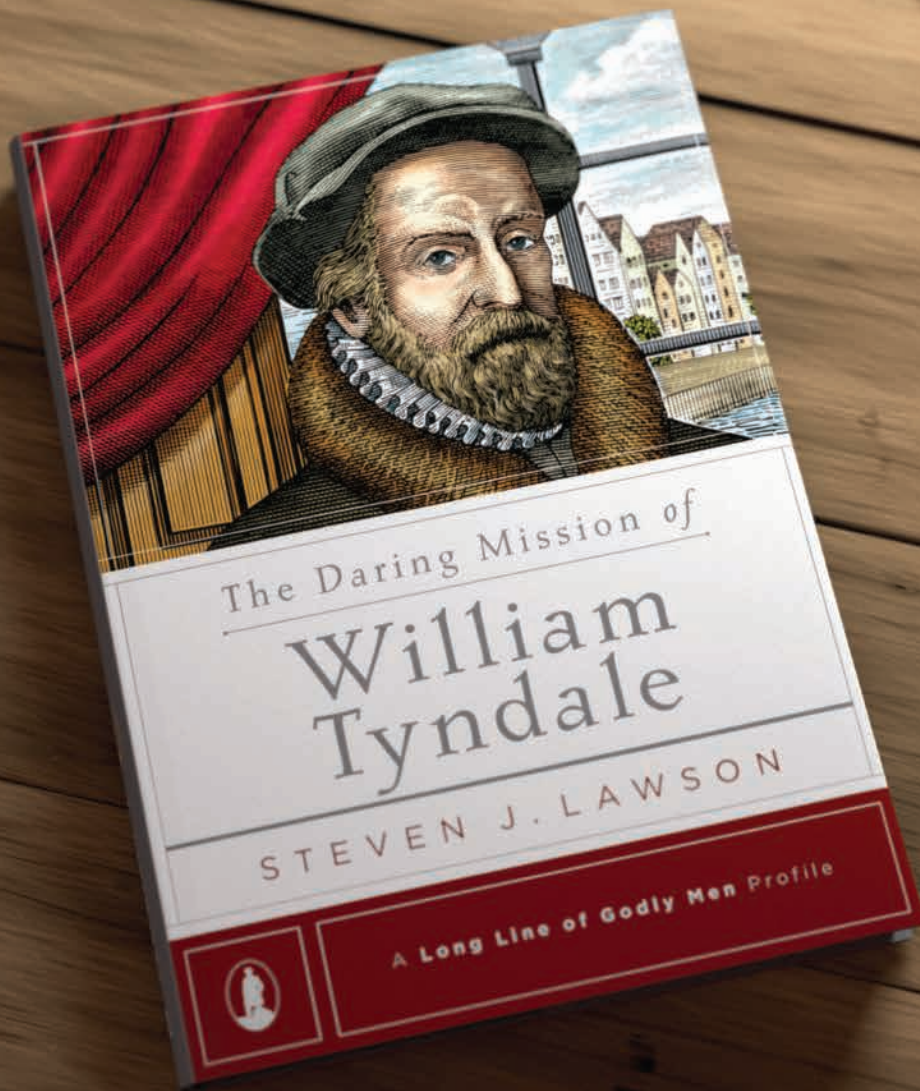
Augustine's Theology of Preaching is an excellent resource for the student and preacher alike who desire to more fully understand preaching in a historical and theological context. Sanlon's understanding of the hermeneutical keys of Augustine's preaching provides fresh insight into one of the most important figures in church history. This book is not shrouded in academic nuance and is very accessible to the modern reader. Throughout, Salon examines the life of Augustine in such a way as to provide application to the contemporary preacher in both his ministry and preaching. While Augustine was an "expository" preacher, in that he took a text and provided his audience with running commentary, Salon makes clear that Augustine's greatest contribution to the current preacher is his passion and zeal for God's Word. The life and preaching ministry of Augustine is a clear reminder that the preaching of the gospel should set the world alight with passion for God. ♦



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