

LIVING FAITH BOOKS
Books for Today's Life and Faith

This Volume—
TRUE PREACHING:
THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY

Preachers are always looking for helps and hints to aid them in their practice of preaching. The variety of preachers tells us that the art of preaching is by no means lost.

Perhaps it is the art of listening which needs to be improved. Listening is as much an art as is proclaiming. One stands to gain so much by good listening, and to lose so much by poor attention to what is taught.

This little book could be a help to listeners. It would assist them in understanding what their preachers must do in order to speak well, and to gain attention when they proclaim the truth.

Geoffrey Bingham—the writer of this little book—has been preaching for over fifty years. There is much that is wise and helpful in his dissertation on preaching. If preacher and listener alike study its pages they may be greatly helpful to one another. The best sermon is a dialogue, whether spoken aloud or not. Preaching and listening require us to work.

Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, missionary, writer, teacher and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.

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the Agony
and the Ecstasy

Geoffrey Bingham

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the Agony and the Ecstasy

Geoffrey Bingham



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General Foreword

The series *Living Faith Studies* was commenced in 1975, under the title of *Masters' Classes* which were intended as materials to be used by pastors and teachers. The idea was that I would gather together materials from available bibliography and add that dash of co-ordination and understanding that I possessed. The studies were put into note form, each one being bound.

Because the title *Masters' Classes* scared some who might otherwise have read them, it was decided to call them *Living Faith Studies*. Over a period of five years, fifty studies were formed. They were put out in A4 paper format, and hence difficult to display in bookshops. It was then decided to turn them into the present series.

For the most part the studies have not been greatly revised or reshaped, though doubtless they would benefit from revision and editing. I could not see myself having the time to do this in the light of other books I am presently writing. Our publishing company felt, nevertheless, that the materials available in this series have real value to readers who wished to have quick access to the themes they contain.

Thematic writing has its drawbacks simply because themes are abstracted from the Scriptures, where, in fact, they are not presented thematically. No one theme can be properly treated since its context is a holistic one. Even so,

much 'that is useful can be achieved by thematic research and presentation.

It is with the hope—and trust—that these books may be valuable to readers that we publish them. They require serious reading, the looking up of the biblical references nominated, and, where possible, the use of books nominated in the Bibliographies.

Geoffrey Bingham

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Foreword

I once heard that in a certain part of Great Britain a preaching competition or eisteddfod is held every year. ‘Eisteddfod’ means ‘a confess of (Welsh) bards’, so that the word may not here apply to a group of competing preachers. I was rather shocked by the idea, since true preaching can only happen as it is directly applied to a congregation which is assembled to hear the truth, and this, generally, in the context of worshipping.

Preaching is a calling long before it is an art. That is why Paul said, ‘How shall they preach, except they be sent’? No one should take such an office upon himself. Nor should a preacher be a kind of *prima donna* in his congregation. The preacher is there to witness to the truth, and primarily the truth of God in Christ. He has first been met in his heart, so that his theology is of the heart—not that it must bypass the mind, for the mind is part of that heart.

Having myself preached for well over fifty years, I know both the thrill and pain of preaching. One always has to live the message or sermon before he delivers it, and this is ‘the agony’. It may have some ecstasy when preached, but the agony can revisit. F. W. Robertson, the famous preacher of Brighton in England, spoke of ‘black Monday’, i.e. the day after the sermon when he worried about what

he had' said, and also about what he had not said. The sermon is like Ezekiel's scroll which, when eaten, was 'sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the belly'. Being afraid to preach, or being weary of the stress which attends preaching, a preacher will find, nevertheless, that he cannot desist. The word of God is 'a fire in his bones', and he is forced to speak. Only then does he have relief.

A book such as this small volume ought to be read by all who attend sermons, as also by those who give them. Congregations should understand the joys and stresses a preacher encounters. They should know that they can encourage him by the very way in which they listen. It is seldom a preacher says nothing of worth. For his part he must learn best how to communicate the great message he has to give. He is, in fact, a walking, talking medium. His eyes, the movements of his facial features, his body language, with the posture and movements of his being, all make for communication, no matter what the substance of his sermon notes or *ex tempore* utterances.

It is said that preaching is a lost art. I think not. In business today we have a host of quite brilliant—if not always sincere—preachers. They are men who are out to convince and persuade listeners to their way of thinking. Columnists are often moralists. Even our singers have elements of preaching and moralism in their songs. We may be sure that the day of preaching is far from over. It has even been said that we are yet to hear true preaching—preaching at its best. This could well be true, for no matter how much a preacher is moved by the material of his sermon, he has yet to see God in a way which surpasses

what he has seen of Him.

I hope then that we carry out the exercise of reading this book.* It should be able to help preachers and their congregations to understand the great privilege and responsibility of proclaiming the truth of the Living God. Preaching must be heart to heart, although always by means of the mind and its reasoning. This being the case, we pray for a new era in preaching, and a new era in hearing.

*Geoffrey Bingham,
Coromandel, August, 1988.*

* This small book was originally Living Faith Study Number 39, and was given to a Masters' Class in October 1979.

***SECTION ONE
THE PREACHER
AND HIS PREACHING***

1.

Introduction

What is preaching? What is biblical preaching? What does one preach, and how does one preach it? In this first section of our book we set out to examine these questions and endeavour to find the answers to such questions.

We may be tempted to think that finding answers is easy. Not so. The Bible is not a text book on preaching, although it says much about preaching. Certainly in it we are given a lot of material on the content of preaching, the reasons for preaching, and the fruits of proclaiming the word and truth of God.

The fact is that many think preaching is merely a matter of some enthusiasm, a dash of ability, an amount of training and that is it. Paul always seeks to find the basis for what he says in the Hebrew Scriptures—now called the Old Testament—since they alone authenticate what he teaches. He finds his basis in Isaiah 52:7, ‘How beautiful are the feet of ‘those who preach good news!’ What is this good news? The answer is, ‘Thy God reigns!’, i.e. the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

He states—from Joel 2:32—For, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” He then asks, (Rom. 10: 14), ‘But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?’ All of this is logical, but the next question is of extreme importance, ‘How can men preach *unless they are sent?*’

The key lies in being sent, i.e. being personally commissioned by God. *No man ought ever to take upon himself the task of teaching.* It is too high an office, too responsible a task, and too difficult a vocation, for in the proclamation of the word lies the life and death of many of those who hear. It is the word which brings life when it is heeded, and death when it is rejected. So responsible a calling is it, that the only moral right to undertake it is the command of God Himself.

This section of our book explores the many facets of preaching. It does not set out to tell its readers how they may become a preacher, or even how they should preach. It assumes that those who have a sense of calling to preaching will want to discover all they can about the ministry—and craft—to which God has called them. When we say ‘craft’ we do not mean preaching is purely an acquired ability or a native ability which is better for any further training it may undertake. Rather a true view of the vocation of God may help us to encourage one another, as we call upon each other to stand firm, and to proclaim the truth—no matter what the outcome. So many of the prophets quailed before the large task God

had given them or became downhearted at the terrible opposition which inevitably is the result of proclaiming the Word of God.

The facets of preaching which we mention include the content of our message, the formation of the message or *kerugma*, the purpose of its going out into the entire world, the need for the preacher to have come under—and constantly live under—the Word of the Gospel, and the character of the proclaimer which must be consonant with the very truth, itself.

All of these details and facets are found within the Scriptures. We have a great source and fund of materials by which we can learn from those who have gone before us. Some of them we admire as intrepid persons, but for the most part they were persons of clay—earthen vessels in which the transcendent glory glowed. The fruits of such ministry, and the high privilege of such a calling are more than our reward now, and the richer reward is yet to come.

2.

The Need of Preaching

Is preaching really needed? Cannot man be reached by other modes of communication? Is there a difference between teaching and preaching? Could teaching alone communicate the Gospel? These are questions which are often asked. This is primarily because we have an image of preaching connected with a church pulpit and a church person, usually an ordained minister, giving sermons. 'This', we say, 'is preaching'. If it is not, then what is true preaching?

In I Corinthians 1:21 Paul says, 'For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe'. The general meaning is clear: (a) Man's wisdom cannot save him. It is God's wisdom that man's wisdom cannot save him. (b) God's wisdom is that 'the folly of what we preach' will save man who believes. 'The folly of what we preach' must mean the Gospel itself. As Paul later shows, this which we preach is folly to the Greek and a scandal to the Jew (I Cor. 1:23). Of

course it is *intellectual* folly to the Greek, and because a religious scandal, it is also folly to the Jew.

THE TWO WISDOMS

Paul, in I Corinthians 1:17-2:5, makes it clear that there are two wisdoms: (a) the wisdom of man, and (b) the wisdom of God. He says, 'The world through its wisdom did not know God'. In Romans 1:21 he says that men, when they knew God did not honour Him as God, and adds (v. 22), 'Claiming to be wise, they became fools'. Man's perspective of wisdom, then, is to reject the nature of God as He really is, because that nature brings a radical and devastating moral confrontation. It is too demanding.

Paul can call the second wisdom (the wisdom of God) the 'foolishness of God' (I Cor. 1:25). It is, however, only foolishness to man, but it is in fact the true wisdom of God, and proves to be saving wisdom. This is the wisdom of the Gospel, i.e. 'the folly of what we preach'. We are left with this conclusion, that man's wisdom leads him to ignorance of God, and so ultimate judgement and doom. The so-called 'foolishness of God' is God's true and saving wisdom and leads man out of folly into true salvation.

Our conclusion then is as follows, and it is a very powerful conclusion, namely, '**Nothing can save a human person but the Gospel. God has planned it that way. When man, in faith, believes the Gospel, he is saved. There is no other way of salvation**'.

We should observe one other thing. When Paul says,

‘The folly of what we preach’, he means this folly *has to be preached*. Whatever we mean by ‘preached’ (i.e. ‘preaching’) that is essential to saving men. The *content* of what we preach does not save men *of itself*. It has to be proclaimed in order to effect the saving of persons.

THE MEANING OF PREACHING

When Paul says, ‘The folly of what we preach’ he means two things: (a) the *content*, and (b) the preaching itself. He may have meant that the world thought it foolish to preach, but since the world did a lot of preaching itself—on various themes—this is hardly likely. When it comes to the *content* of preaching, both Greek and Jew had their objections. At Athens the Greeks had, for the most part, scorned Paul’s *content* and *method*, seeing both were closely linked. Likewise the hostile Jews had always scorned the preaching of the Gospel both as to *content* and *method*.

When it comes to the actual text of I Corinthians 1:21, Paul is really saying that the Gospel *is proclaimed*. He uses the Greek word *kerugma*. This word means ‘proclamation’. It comes from the Greek word *kerux* meaning ‘a messenger’ or ‘a proclaimer’. In fact the official *kerux* would stand in the market place and blow a trumpet, calling the attention of the crowd to the *edict* of the Emperor, and his proclamation was virtually a command, and it had to be obeyed. The *kerux* was called upon only to proclaim, and not to speculate about his message, or even

explain and justify it. The onus was upon the hearers *to obey it*. Paul then means by *preaching proclamation*, and what is preached is the content, i.e. the *kerugma*. This leads us on to the most important point, that proclamation is command.

THE KERUGMA (PROCLAMATION) IS COMMAND

Just as we have to recognise that much preaching today is vastly different from that of the days of the Acts, both as to style and content, so we must realise that changes have come in understanding the nature of the Gospel. In modern times some see it as entreaty, or promise, but not command. In the days of the early church it may have contained elements of entreaty or promise but primarily it was command. A strong example of this is Acts 17:30, ‘The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now *he commands* all men everywhere to repent’.

Whilst much of the apostolic preaching is declaratory and proclamatory, yet it always moves into the imperative, ‘Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ’ (Acts 2:38). ‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted’, (Acts 3:19, AV). In Acts 13:40 Paul warns against rejection, ‘Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets’. In Acts 16:31 Paul tells the gaoler, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’. In Acts 6:7 (AV) we read, ‘and a great company of the priests *were obedient* to the faith’. In Romans .10:16

(AV) it says, 'But they have not all obeyed the gospel'. In Romans 1:5 Paul speaks of 'the obedience of faith', and repeats this thought in Romans 15:18 and 16:26. In II Thessalonians 1:8 he speaks of the Lord Jesus, 'inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God, and upon those *who do not obey* the gospel of our Lord Jesus'. In his first letter (1:22) Peter speaks of 'your obedience to the truth', and in 1:2 of 'obedience to Jesus Christ' which is virtually obedience to the Gospel. Hence repentance and faith are responses of obedience to the proclamation of the Gospel, and in this sense the preacher is the *kerux* with the *kerugma*.

We have to add that the *kerugma* is not merely an unintelligible command. It has its own *rationale* which the preacher must present. However, its presentation always includes a danger to the *kerux*, for man—both Greek and Jew—reacts to the 'folly' and 'scandal' of its content, as well as the affront to him when he is commanded to repent and believe. We must not make the mistake of thinking the gossellers were aggressive. They displayed the love and grace of God in the promises they brought. Ultimately, however—though on the basis of the love of God—they issued the command.

3

New Testament Preaching of the Gospel

What we have said above explains two things to us: (a) why men do not accept the Gospel, and (b) why they do. Faith is required for saving belief. The Gospel, as the Word of God, carries its own power to draw men to belief (cf. Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:1-5). However, faith, as such, is not part of man's wisdom. He walks by what he calls sight, and not by faith. What the five senses convey to him, and what his own pursuits persuade him, that he believes. In accordance with Romans 1:18-32 man does not, in fact, walk by true sight, but by his own structured ways of thinking and seeing. This is why true faith is true sight, and false sight requires a 'faith' of its own, that is, that it is as man thinks the world is, or wishes to think it is. The great question is then, 'How can (or, does) the Gospel break through to where man lives in unbelief?' What we will have to do is to look at the facts as they are reported to us in the New Testament. Without any doubt this commences with the actual preaching of the Gospel.

THE APOSTOLIC PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

Pentecost and Jerusalem

In the passages which are accredited as ‘the great commission’ we see what Jesus directed his disciples to do and preach. In Matthew 28:18-20 they are directed to go into all the world, make disciples of all nations, baptising them into the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are to teach them the things Christ had said they should teach. In Mark 16:15f., they are to preach the Gospel to every creature (person) and to baptise them. The ones believing will be saved, and the ones not believing will be damned. In both these cases it is indicated that the risen Jesus will be with his workers. In John 20:19-23 it is the Gospel of forgiveness which is to be proclaimed, and in Luke 24:44f., both repentance and forgiveness are to be proclaimed—in all the world. In Acts 1:8 the statement is simply, ‘you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth’.

In his teaching on the night of his betrayal Jesus spoke of the work his Holy Spirit would do (John 16:7-11). He would convict *the worm* (i.e. those who had, and would oppose Jesus) of sin, righteousness and judgement. At Pentecost when the Spirit came, the message was given by (a) all the 120 on whom the Spirit came (Acts 2:1 I, ‘the wonderful works of God’, AV), and (b) Peter. Peter gives out the *kerugma*. As a result three thousand are brought

into the new fellowship. Later, at the Temple, another event (healing the crippled man) sparks off a listening crowd, and when the *kerugma* or *evangel* (*euangelion*, i.e. ‘gospel’, ‘good news’) is again preached with a rich response of belief. From that point the Gospel is spread throughout Jerusalem, and—we have reason to believe—all Judea (cf. Acts 9:31) and even to Galilee.

Samaria

Following the preaching of Stephen, which was not in accordance, really, with the classic *kerugma*, but which was an indictment upon the idolatrous hardness of Israel, Stephen himself was killed and many Christians were scattered by a subsequent persecution. Philip certainly proclaimed Jesus (Acts 8:5) and the Kingdom (Acts 8:12), and the people believed. With the coming of Peter and John they then received the outpouring of the Spirit.

‘Uttermost Parts’

In Acts 10-11 we read the account of Peter’s visit to Caesarea where he preached the Gospel to the household of Cornelius, all of which were Gentiles. Again his preaching was the *kerugma* given at Jerusalem, with slight differences. As a result all believed.

In Acts 11:19ff, the Gospel is preached firstly to the Jews and then to Gentiles by those scattered from Jerusalem. This is called ‘preaching the Lord Jesus’ (v. 20). A church forms, and from it later Paul and Barnabas are sent to Asia Minor.

In Acts 9:20 the newly converted Paul proclaims Christ in the synagogue at Damascus, teaching, 'He is the Son of God !' In subsequent chapters Paul preaches the Gospel in many countries. An analysis of his first sermon (in Acts 13:26-41) shows that Paul proclaims the classic *kerugma* such as Peter had preached (cf. Gal. 2:2; 6-10).

These events, with others, show us that the nature of the Gospel was clearly understood and presented, and effects great results. Preached in the power of the Spirit this *Gospel* was the cause of many churches springing into life, and further proclamation resulting.

We now proceed to analyse the nature and format of the message.

THE APOSTOLIC MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

Undoubtedly the substance or content of any message must affect the way in which it is given. The early church can only be described as people gripped by the message. Moreover their message had to be authentic to those to whom they presented it. It was primarily presented to Jews, and in this sense had to be a *Jewish* message. A Jewish message would also have a lot to commend it to Samaritans, but not necessarily to Gentiles. As we have seen, it was scorned as foolish and irrelevant by many Greeks or Gentiles. However, a number of Gentiles had clustered themselves around Jewish synagogues, and so they too had enough acculturating to understand the message when it was announced.

The apostolic message can be gained from three sources: (a) the Gospels, (b) the Book of the Acts, and (c) the Epistles. The opening of Acts indicates that it is the continuation of the Gospel (i.e. of Luke). The epistles have a number of strands of gospel teaching that have to be taken from their contextual settings, but this can be done. Put together we have a rich presentation of what Paul calls 'the whole counsel of God '. However, we must understand that what is contained in the Gospels is material mainly dealing with the events and teaching of Christ prior to the Cross and Resurrection. Whilst the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension are described, it takes the 'apostolic doctrine' (Acts 2:42) to interpret them, indeed all the events of Christ. The epistles often enlarge upon the basic outlines of preaching given in Acts. Hence the task of separating the elements of the *kerugma* from these three sources is a long and detailed one. Nevertheless this has to be done. In fact, when we set about doing this we find ourselves to some degree interpreting elements within the Gospels by the statements of the Acts and Epistles.

KERUGMA WITHIN THE GOSPELS

One thing is clear: there is a gospel preached in the accounts of the Gospels. In fact Mark's Gospel opens with the words, 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. The Gospel (Mark's) is, then, not merely a biographical account concerning Jesus, but also itself proclamation. This is summed up by Peter (Acts 10:36-38),

You know the word which he [God] sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ... the word which was

proclaimed throughout all Judea how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, how he went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil...

In Luke 4:17f., we find Jesus quoting from Isaiah 6 1:1 concerning this anointing, saying he is sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to set at liberty them that are bruised and to proclaim the acceptable (i.e. liberation) year of the Lord. This is *the Gospel of the Kingdom*, so often mentioned in the Gospels (eg. Mark 1: 14-15). The Gospel of the Kingdom is the proclamation of God's reign coming, and this in the person of Jesus (cf. Matt. 12:28). In Luke 9:1-6 the twelve disciples are sent to preach this Gospel which requires them to bring release to their hearers who believe. Likewise in Luke 10:1-12 the seventy are sent out on a similar mission.

John the Baptist speaks of Jesus bringing in the Kingdom. He also speaks of a time when Jesus will effect the forgiveness of sins of all people (John 1:29), and his baptism of repentance has this in view (Matt. 3:6, Mark 1:4). He also promises the inauguration of the new age, i.e. the outpouring of the Spirit, and current Judaism linked the coming of the Spirit and the forgiveness of sins.

Throughout the Gospels the elements of what we now call Christology can be seen. Certain elements concern Jesus as being 'Son of man', 'Son of God', 'Son of David', 'Messiah' and so on. These presuppose the Kingdom of Daniel 7 ('Son of man'), the prophecies of Psalm 2 and Hosea 11: 1 (Matt. 3:17, 2:15—'Son of God'), whilst 'Son of David' is often overtly used of him. He is 'the prophet',

he is 'the suffering Servant' (cf. Mark 10:45), he is 'the Messiah' (Isa. 42:1; cf. Matt. 3:17). There are other important elements also, but they go together to etch a person who, whilst man, is also the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. If these elements were not apparent in the Gospels, they would scarcely be likely to be proclaimed or accepted in the Acts.

Much of Jesus' ministry was incognito. He veiled much of what he was and even much of what he was about. However, to his disciples he made many things plain. One was the indispensability of the cross and resurrection. In Mark 8:31, 9:31 and 10:33 he points them to this fact—indispensability. They, however, do not hear. He also clarifies much towards the end of his ministry concerning his work, and this especially on the night of his betrayal. In the last discussions he points to the matters of the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, the coming of the Holy Spirit. In addition to the things we have noted, John's Gospel has a developed Christology, mainly emphasising the relationship between the Father and the Son and showing how life comes through belief in the Son. Hence, summed up, the four Gospels have all the materials to form a full apostolic *kerugma*.

THE KERUGMA OF THE ACTS

If we allow for the revelation brought by the Holy Spirit to the church (cf. John 16:12-15) then the day of Pentecost was the day when the apostolic doctrine was formed (Acts 2:42). The apostolic doctrine was simply the events of

Jesus Christ in his incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension (with the promise of his ultimate appearing) interpreted in the light of the Old Testament Scriptures (especially the prophecies), and the Old Testament Scriptures interpreted in the light of the events of Christ. This formed the content of the *kerugma*. Added to this was the fact that the interpretation came from (a) Christ himself (cf. Acts 1:3; Luke 24:26-27; 44f.), and (b) the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-15).

In its simplest form the *kerugma* consisted of the following:

1. Jesus came in conformity with the prophets. What he did was in conformity with their prophecies.
2. His crucifixion, whilst arising from the sinful rejection of the Jews was not a mistake. It was in conformity with the will of God.
3. His resurrection was an actual happening, undeniable, of immense significance, i.e. Jesus by it is proved to be Lord.
4. His ascension is the sign of his acceptance and attestation by God.
5. Jesus, being now Lord, must be acknowledged as such. Such confession is saving to man.
6. Repentance and faith are required of men, and these (gifts) being exercised, men may receive the forgiveness of sins, and be cleansed.
7. The gift of the Spirit is promised to those who have faith and repentance.

This simple *kerugma*, is, as we have seen, not only a proclamation but a call to obedience, i.e. to believe and be saved. Added to it is the teaching that Jesus will come again. Inherent within it is the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Son of David, and the Messiah of God.

Peter is not shown as going beyond the above. Paul, however, whilst preaching these elements (cf. Acts 13:26-41), actually includes justification (Acts 13:38-39). In Acts 20:21 he speaks of 'repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ' and equates this with 'the Gospel of the grace of God' and 'preaching the Kingdom'. In 26:18 he speaks of this Gospel and its effects, i.e. to, 'turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me [Christ]'.

The apostolic band claims that it preaches nothing but what the prophets have spoken (Acts 26:22-23; 13:32ff.; 26: 19; 28:23). For this reason they refer to the prophets as confirming the status of Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah of the Kingdom.

THE KERUGMA IN THE EPISTLES

Here the material is so profuse as to demand prolonged study and classification. If, however, we concentrate on what the writers said was proclaimed, we can easily gather the main thrust (or, thrusts) of the proclamation. I Corinthians 1: 17-2:5 is a classical passage. *Paul* emphasises here *the centrality of the Cross*. In fact in preaching to the Corinthians he resolved to know nothing but Christ cruci-

fied. This is not to say he failed to do this elsewhere. However, he saw the ‘word of the Cross’ (i.e. the *logos* of the Cross) as the heart of the matter. It was that which had transformed the Corinthians from pagans to new creations. He so prized the message of the Cross that he dared not embellish or rationalise it to his hearers. The primitive *kerugma*, so to speak, did its own work, under the power of the Spirit. This is re-affirmed in Galatians 3:1-5 where the Cross was powerfully presented, and the understanding of it had also brought the gift of the Spirit. Elsewhere in the Galatian epistle (1:4; 2:20; 5:24; 6: 14), Paul speaks of the embracing work of the Cross to defeat all evil, sins, and the flesh of man, as also the world.

In I Thessalonians 1:5 Paul again speaks of the innate power of the Cross, a point well made in I Corinthians 1:18, and developed at great length in the epistle to the Romans. In passages such as I Corinthians 15:3-4 and Acts 17: 1-3, Paul shows the *kerugma* is rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. In Romans 10 he traces the false view of righteousness which the Jews held, and shows that salvation is by belief in, and confession of, the Lordship of Christ, for that Lordship is attested by the resurrection.

Peter also points to the Gospel the apostles preached. He relates regeneration to both the ‘word of truth’ and the resurrection of Christ (cf. I Pet. 1:3; 22-23), but at the same time refers fully to the crucifixion and its salvific effects (1: 18-19; 2:24; 3: 18). This is the Gospel ‘preached to you...through the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven’ (1:12).

John also has a powerful rationale of the Cross (I John

4:9-19). He, like Paul, speaks of propitiation. He also speaks of the cleansing and forgiving power of Christ’s work. Whilst Acts rarely refers to the victory elements of the Cross (i.e. the defeat of Satan, the world, and the principalities and powers), both Paul and John give these high exposition.

The elements given in very concise form in the *kerugma* of the Acts are embellished and further rationalised in the Epistles, which is, of course, to be expected. In spite of statements to the contrary these commentaries and extensions are not in variance with either the materials of the Gospels or the Acts.

THE APOSTOLIC MODES OF PREACHING

Their Understanding

If we are interested to understand preaching, then we must know what was apostolic preaching. If we wish to understand the ‘agony and the ecstasy’ of it, then we must enter into it. For this reason we must walk very closely to those who preached, and ‘sit where they sat’.

In order to do this we must understand their experience of Christ, from John the Baptist to the ascension and the coming of the Spirit. The Christology which we can draw from the Gospels, Acts and Epistles, was far beyond their expectations and comprehension at the time of the preaching of John the Baptist. The accounts of the Gospels show how little they understood of Jesus, his teachings and his actions (cf. Mark 4:13, cf. Matt. 13:10-17, cf. John 16:25,

29-30). Yet *the elements* to form that belief were all present. They had enough intimations and actions to know that no man had ever spoken like this! None had ever done what he did! Yet apart from Mary of Bethany none seemed to believe in his death, and they refused to hear his predictions concerning it (cf. Luke 9:43-45). His death to them was a fearful tragedy, and they did not believe he would rise.

It took his obvious resurrection, and his exposition of the Scriptures to get his followers to believe he was the Messiah, the Son of God (cf. Luke 24:26-27; 44f.; Acts 1:3). But the fact is they did believe, and the coming of the Spirit was the high point of full revelation. Now *they knew/It* is difficult for us to understand the ‘must’ of indispensability, i.e. ‘The Son of man *must* be crucified’, ‘Christ *must* suffer and enter into his glory’. However, this is what they came to understand, and so they began to preach with high intensity because they were gripped by the fact that *here*, in their generation, their lifetime, and their Palestine, Messiah had come. All the appearances seemed against him being the true Messiah, Son of God, Son of man, Suffering Servant, Davidic King, and so on, for a criminal’s cross (seemingly) negates all these. However, they discovered the Cross was at the centre of it all. So was the Resurrection. Both made him to be Lord over life, death, sin, Satan, the world and its powers, in fact over all things—every principality and power, every name that could be named! This is what they understood as they began to preach.

Their Experience

When Paul said, ‘the word of the cross... to us who are being saved is the power of God’ (I Cor. 1:18), he was meaning that every day the Cross is the power the believer experiences in his continuing salvation. In this sense Paul was always ‘under the Cross’. At the same time Paul said he wanted to know ‘the power of his resurrection’ (Phil. 3: 10), i.e. the power in release from guilt of sin, the power in release from fear of death, but also the power of Christ’s own (resurrected) life.

To put it clearly, the apostles did not preach something which they had not seen, heard, felt and experienced. The primary element of the *kerugma* was (and is) that ‘Jesus is Lord!’ That is, this person Jesus, is Lord over all history, all mankind, and over the powers of evil. They knew that Lordship. They also knew the impact of the forgiveness of sins of which they talked. They knew the amazing purification man experiences through the Cross (Heb. 1:3; 9: 14) and the transforming power of regeneration (I Cor. 6:9-11; Titus 3:3-5) through the Cross and Resurrection. They knew freedom from guilt through justification (Acts 13:39; Rom. 5: 1; 8:1). They knew the living Christ in them, and in their midst through the Holy Spirit. They knew the ontological fact of the redeeming Messiah. They knew the existential elements of his presence through the Spirit.

It is clear from Acts 11: 15-17 that Pentecost had been a total experience for them, and one by which they could assess the hand of God on others (cf. Acts 11: 15-17 and 15:7-9). Hence when the angel released the apostles from

prison he could say, in the early morning, 'Go... and speak to the people all the words of this Life' (Acts 5:20) and they could do so immediately, i.e. without preparation. That is to say that the 'Gospel of the grace of God' brought 'great grace...upon them all'. It was out of this that they preached with such power.

The Holy Spirit Upon Them

One thing that is inescapable in the Acts, is that the proclaimers are men of the Spirit, i.e. the Spirit is upon them. The proclamation at Pentecost is self-evident. All proclaim 'the wonderful works of God'. At the same time the Book of Acts so often prefaces a ministry of power by commenting, 'And he, being filled with the Holy Spirit...' (cf. Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 7:55 and 13:9).

In I Corinthians 2:4 and I Thessalonians 1:5, Paul puts down his powerful preaching to the Holy Spirit. Peter indicates the same idea in I Peter 1:12, and the writer of Hebrews in 2:4 and 6:4 (by reference). This work of the Spirit has at least three elements to it. The first is the revelation, illumination and experience of the Gospel which has come to the proclaimer in his own personal experience. The second is the same conviction, revelation and experience which the Holy Spirit communicates to the believing listeners. (We must remember they actually come to the belief by the ministry of the Spirit). The third is the accompanying elements which attend the Spirit's presence so often in the form of miracles, healings, signs and wonders (cf. Heb. 2:4, 6:4, the occasions when this happened in

Acts, the inference of Gal. 3:5, etc.). In other words, they 'preached the Gospel with the Holy Spirit who was sent down from heaven'. Paul could speak of being amongst the Corinthians in 'weakness and trembling' yet also in 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power'. Power was nothing to be ashamed of because the proclamation demanded more than ordinary human resources.

The Context of Proclamation

As we have seen it was, historically, Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. It was the context of Judaism, the hybrid-religion of the Samaritans, and the pagan world of the Greeks, Romans, and others. It was the context of the Roman Empire and of a society (Gentile) which was morally decadent.

As we have seen, the Jews opposed the Gospel of grace because it seemed to conflict with their religion of law. They opposed Jesus as the Messiah because he had been arraigned and executed as a common criminal. The hierarchy of the day opposed anything which threatened the stability of the Temple and the law of Judaism. The Romans opposed anything which seemed of the nature of revolution. The Greek (intellectuals) opposed what seemed to be drivelling foolishness.

The Full Modes of Proclamation

In modern terms we would say they 'told it like it was'. We cannot pin down any clear methodology. The apostles used the precincts of the Temple to proclaim Jesus as

Messiah. Opposed by the Sanhedrin they had to use times and places as they could. *The form* of their message was simple. They simply traced the facts and elements of the *kerugma*, i.e. the good news. Where they went, they went as the Holy Spirit led them, and sometimes forced them.

Modern missiologists have seen certain methods in Paul's manner and modes of ministry. They suggest he took central points such as a town or city from which the Gospel would fan out. This is probably true. We have every reason to believe the Gospel fanned out from the places where the apostles preached. At the same time we have to remember that the church was intent to hear what the Spirit said (cf. Acts 8:29; 10:19; 13:1f.; 16:6-7, etc.), and they went by this.

We need to remember that their doctrine of the Lordship of Christ was such that they saw him as Lord over all the affairs of the world. He was their King. They were proclaiming his Kingdom. So they just took opportunities as they came, and preached, and preached simply.

We know most about Paul's ministry. He seemed to stay as long as possible in any centre, teaching deeply. Without doubt he made the *kerugma* plain to the hearers, but he spoke of 'the milk of the word' and also of its 'meat'. I Corinthians 2:5-10 makes contrast of the initial *kerugma* and of a deeper wisdom which was for the more mature. Doubtless Paul always determined to declare 'the whole counsel of God'. It would seem that he did not think of 'initial evangelism' and later, 'deeper teaching' so much that he saw the whole counsel of God as both *kerugma* and enriching edification for all.

4

True Preaching: The Agony and the Ecstasy

THE CONSTRAINT

Without doubt we see, in the early church, the rich impact of the Gospel upon believing hearers. Very quickly churches begin to emerge and grow. Doubtless they have their problems, some of which are very deep. At the same time they are living. The same experience the proclaimers had known becomes that of the true hearers. The first chapter of I Thessalonians is proof of this. No proclaimer was needed from afar. They sounded out the Gospel throughout all Macedonia and Achaia. In Romans 15:18ff., Paul speaks of having fully preached the Gospel from Jerusalem to round about Illyricum—a vast tract of country. Doubtless he means churches sprang up in his wake as other enthusiastic proclaimers were born and shared the *kerugma* in many places.

Our problem is manifold. How do we recapture the agony and the ecstasy of the early church? How do we find

the power with which they preached? How do we effect the same dramatic changes in men and women? How do we make the same lasting impressions? These questions need answers, no doubt, but the facts are that in many places in the world the things of which we speak are in fact in operation. Such proclamation is being made, and its effects are dynamic and dramatic. Churches are growing up, and some quite rapidly. How, then, may we personally discover these principles and live within them, and so know and share the *kerugma*?

The Whole of Constraint

The second epistle to the church at Corinth largely concerns the ministry, and part of that is the ministry of proclamation. If we take I Corinthians 1: 17-2:14 then we will see that (a) Paul knows the power of the Gospel, and recognises that there is only one way of redeeming man, that is through the word of the Cross, and (b) Paul has seen this principle work, and has no doubt about it. When we come to II Corinthians, then we see the vast tensions that come with the constraint for ministry. Ministry must be one of total dedication.

In I Corinthians 9:16-27 Paul shows his complete dedication to the ministry of proclamation: ‘...that I might by all means save some...’ First he insists that there is no credit to him. ‘For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’ This may be interpreted as either he will miss out on something if he

does not preach, or that there will be judgement upon him if he fails to preach. The latter is the most likely. In Acts 20:26-27 he says, ‘I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God’. This is an obvious reference to two passages in Ezekiel, namely 3:16-21 and 18:25-32. The former passage is the primary one. If the prophet warns both the righteous and the wicked against evil then he shall save his soul, but the one who does not warn will have the blood of those he did not warn upon his own head.

In II Corinthians 5:11-15 Paul shows the sources of constraint. One is the fear of the Lord, ‘knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men’. He does not say whether it is his fear of the Lord, or the fear which men will know if not saved, but in any case it is fear which constrains him. Again, he says, ‘the love of Christ controls [constrains] us’. He points out that the very love of the Cross calls man to, and binds him in, obedience, especially in the matter of ministry. If we refer back to the I Corinthians 9:16-27 passage we see that Paul fears to be ‘unapproved’ by the Lord, at the last. He has this deep constraint upon him to preach. Hence, as we say, ‘the agony and the ecstasy!’

Further, if we look at the suffering passages of Paul’s ministry, especially II Corinthians 4:7-12, 6:3-10 and 11:21-29, then we see that the constraint of love and the fear of the Lord had gripped him so deeply that it was impossible for him to escape the obligation laid upon him. On the one hand it was anguish for him, and on the other hand, delight.

It is simple enough to say that the love of God kept him

constrained, and that the Holy Spirit within him as the Spirit of love and of obedient sonship kept him fresh in that love and burning to proclaim, but the matter is not so simple. The truth surely lies in what we have just said, but its implications as also its ramifications are so many and so wide, that we need to go more deeply to understand the full power of such a constraint.

Constraint Lies in True Knowledge

It is evident from the Scriptures, as from life, that man can have either the constraint of God upon him, or the constraint of man. In the Gospels Jesus is shown as saying, 'I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished'. His baptism was a baptism of death, but the outcome was to be 'fire upon the earth'. He was constrained to go forward until the goal was accomplished. This constraint came out of his knowledge of God's will, and that involved the whole of the plan and purpose of God, not only for Israel and the Gentiles but for His own name's sake. A study of Ezekiel 36:16-32 shows that God Himself is constrained to do what He does for His own Name's sake.

When man knows the constraint of man he seeks to vindicate himself by what he does, so that man will receive him. He seeks, as Jesus said, 'the praise of men more than the praise of God'. When a man is justified by God he is loosed of human constraint. Yet he must have that knowledge of God, His creation, and His plan for His

creation, as will bring true constraint upon him, the man, to fulfil the will of God.

The Knowledge Which Brings True Constraint and True Preaching

Only a whole theology will bring a full constraint. Much modern evangelism springs from structured methodology, or rather, is expressed in structured methodologies. Certain patterns are developed to effect certain decisions. Such—whatever their merits or demerits—do not require a full theology. What, then, do we mean by a full theology? We mean the true knowledge of God, that is, knowledge of the ontological, but primarily knowledge that is personal relationship with the living God, that is the receiving of the love of God, and so, knowing God.

This theology demands within it the knowledge of God, the knowledge of His being—as man is both permitted and required to know it—that is such knowledge as is essential to man, and revealed to man. More than that is not laid upon him. Less than that is not enough for him. He must know God as Creator, as Father and as King. He must know Him in His great Being as love, goodness, truth, righteousness and holiness. He must know Him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Son as very Son of God. He must know the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Holiness. Moreover he must know the Trinitarian work of the three Persons in creation, redemption, and glorification. Wherever his knowledge is weak so will his constraint lessen, and he will flinch from the agony whilst

wanting the ecstasy, but then there is no true ecstasy without the agony, for the thing which true man knows is that God's glory is always linked with suffering. He Himself has endured all the suffering that mankind has known, and knows and is yet to know.

The Living Elements of Constraining Knowledge

When Christ came as the Son he was like the Father, 'full of grace and truth'. This truth and grace will be demeaned unless the holiness of God be known and unless His righteousness be exalted. We mean that to make His grace a gratuitous offering from His simple mercy is to forget the dreadful nature of evil and its rebellion. It is to ignore the holy Person of God. It is to minimise His wrath and make it a passing indignation upon sin. To see His holiness as though nothing of man since the Fall were pure, and to see His righteousness as though the mountains of man's guilt were heaven-high, is to faintly begin to understand why God is every moment wrathful in the age of sinful man, and why nothing can possibly touch the conscience of man and quieten it but the very programme and offering which the Father constitutes in the Son. Even then we are well beyond our limits of understanding.

When we know the dark reaches of dread and guilt, the grey, wraith-like *angst* of the fearful human heart, then we can understand what God must do to purge away every stain, and to dissolve the enormous clouds of wrath that lie over the human heart to trouble it up to death and through

all eternity. All of the Old Testament tells us the truth of God's pure goodness, His completely demanding righteousness and His holiness which is fierce upon every trace of pollution, let alone the dark sullen tides of man's perpetual impurity. It takes a prophet Isaiah to cry out in his agony when confronted with the sheer holiness of God, and it takes the searing white coal off the altar to burn away the dross of his impurity.

We mean that the true preacher has no *kerugma* before him which sketches out seven points of doctrine, or a mere *schema* of theology. He has burned upon his heart, his memory, and deeply down in his depths, the true holiness of God which cannot look upon iniquity without punishing it. He must have no need to justify God in His wrath or explain away such wrath to others in 'plausible words of man's wisdom'. He must face the cringing, hating world with the unadulterated truth that God is wrathful when they violate His creation, and confront His holiness with their pollution.

This preacher, then, has not only a thinking knowledge of these things, but a living experience of them. He has been drawn down into the depths of intolerable shame. His own heart has been deeply convicted by the evil of the human heart, and he has long ago acknowledged the perfectness of God in His wrath upon evil. If he so much as minimise God's wrath on sin one iota, or maximise the good of man one degree then he shall lose sight of overwhelming grace which works out on the Cross the full meed of wrath, and the full exercise of love and mercy. God-in-Himself deals with the anguish of man's evil and

his alienation from the Father-Creator, and reconciles the world unto Himself. The wonderful dimensions of this are what bear down on the human heart and liberate it, and make it love God and agree to do all that He requires, not only in moral obedience, but in the obedience wrought by grace and love to tell others of the God of love. This living, pulsing, warm and palpable thing in the heart is the true *kerugma* which the preacher knows. In a manner of speaking it is 'blood of his blood, breath of his breath, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone'. This is the true constraint, and the passing over it, many times, of pain, loss, and persecution will not prevent the kerugmatic utterance, 'God is love!'

It is not that the preacher requires a formalised theology, although that will be no burden at all to carry, but he must have a theology of the heart. His theology of the heart must not simply be one of the emotions, although emotions there must be. It will also be a knowledge of the head. He must know for example the whole nature of the Gospel, and how it fits the creation of God, and how redemption can redeem that creation, and how glorification of the same creation is right and proper, and fits the character of God, and the final, fullest need of man. For this reason we will try to spell out some of the elements he must know.

Functional Creation: Functional Redemption: Functional Glorification

The 'faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19) must also redeem what, having been created then falls into evil. By 'redeem'

we mean on the one hand ransom that which responds to His grace, and on the other purge that which does not. Creation is functional (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 3:11; Prov. 16:4). When man becomes malfunctional or dysfunctional he has already sought to pervert God's universe. He has made his own idols, thus demeaning God, the universe, and himself. Judgement is the only possible outcome. Within man, conscience will never let him go, no matter how he may try to pervert conscience. Deeply down the nemesis is working.

Nothing will satisfy God but a total obedience of mankind, and total purging of the evil done to His creation. This is what the conscience of man tells him. Not even the covenant of grace will rescue man unless the grace is worked out on the basis of satisfaction. 'Satisfaction' is the word the old theologians used in order to indicate that something could satisfy God in love, goodness, holiness, truth and righteousness. Man's attempts—were he to really attempt—would be fine blasphemy, for none can satisfy God.

The Cross satisfies at once both the conscience of man and the conscience of God. P. T. Forsyth said, 'That which goes deepest to the conscience goes widest to the world'. 'The conscience', he said, 'makes... us eternal'. We know evil has eternal connotation, that is for judgement. We also know that love and grace have eternal connotation, that is for redemption. Redemption is not the afterthought of a God surprised by failure in His creation, but is planned from before time to reveal the God of grace in time.

When we know the doctrine of creation and redemption,

then we know God as the God of covenant. Often His covenant is called ‘the everlasting’ for it is from everlasting to everlasting. God has revealed Himself in covenant. Yet this doctrine is not complete until we know that He works for the voluntary surrender of those who are now ‘rebels with weapons in their hands’. He did not plan that they should find their fullness even in being obedient creatures, but He planned that redeemed from disobedience they should be designated to glorification. This was His deepest wisdom (I Cor. 2:6-10).

Finally—in this brief theological sketch—we should see that everything must fit with everything. Man must be holy like God, and good and true, and righteous and loving. But where God is Creator he must be creature, perfectly mirroring the grace of creation. He must be a son, reflecting the Fatherhood. He must be a subject, manifesting the King. Yet he must never be man-in-himself for ‘the way of a man is not in himself’. He must be in God, but then be in family and together be ‘family’ so that the whole being of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit is reflected.

All of these things we call ‘functional’ and if salvation is truly known then it must be known that God has eased man into the eternal functional ways of His nature, for these the universe declares.

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY

Preaching is a Faith Thing

The Judaic-Christian faith is based upon revelation. For this reason the believer trusts what is revealed. He does

not find it to be nonsense, and he accepts the biblical world-view. This world-view is nonsense in the eyes of those who do not know the revelation and who do not accept it. Hence the preacher is always bound to faith. If he recedes into ‘faithless reasoning’ as against ‘reasoning faith’, then for that time he has failed to live, to see, and to proclaim, by faith. Powers of evil are always assaulting the mind and person of the believer, telling him that faith is ‘blind belief’ or even a leap into the dark, whereas the revelation of the Word tells him such statements are nonsense. If the proclaimer tries to verify (and authenticate) the things of faith by ‘faithless reasoning’ he is in an impossible situation. For this reason faith is essential for true preaching.

Romans 10:17 says, ‘Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ’. If the preacher does not utter in faith, then there will not be true communication of faith. Even if sovereignly God uses the words of a faithless preacher, yet it is ‘the word of Christ’ that primarily evokes faith. The Spirit is never absent from the true ‘word of Christ’, for the word of Christ is his works and his person, and these are saving. Galatians 3:1-3 shows that the word of the Cross evoked faith, and faith received salvation and the gift of the Spirit.

For our part we think of faith as being necessary in the face of the attempts of evil to recapture the mind, and to recondition it so that man thinks with the world-view of the rebel. This is set out for us in Romans 1: 18-32. Romans 12:1-2 (cf. Eph. 4:23; Col. 3: 10) speaks of the renewing of the mind by inner transformation, and it is for this faith

battles, and by this is faith renewed. Not only is evil-conditioning to be contested, but the direct impact of evil is to be resisted.

In this regard, the passage of *II Corinthians 4:7-18* should be studied. Already we have spoken of Paul's physical sufferings, which were doubtless paralleled in others. However, in this passage before us, Paul is speaking of constant and unremitting pressures which face the proclaimer. 'We are *afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed*' (vv. 8-9). In this pressured situation Paul still lives. He goes on to show the cause for such pressure, '... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies' (v. 10). What does he mean by this strange way of talking?

Some have seen it to mean that Paul is constantly dying to sin through the death of Christ, and renewing in life by his resurrection, but this cannot be sustained. It must mean that Paul never fails to proclaim the death of Christ, and this proclamation is so much anathema to his hearers that they seek to kill him. As Jesus was put to death, so would others put his followers to death. Hence I Corinthians 15:31 —Paul dies daily, not to sin, but is subject to others, every day seeking to put him to death. Romans 8:36 says, '... we are being killed all the day long'.

That is why in this II Corinthians passage, Paul continues, 'For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh' (vv. 11-12). He adds, 'So

death is at work in us, but life in you'. He means, 'When we are subjected to death through the preaching of the Word it is life which comes to others, and the very life of Jesus'.

This is not the end. Paul then says, 'Since we have *the same spirit of faith* as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke", *we too believe and so we speak*' (v. 13). The reference is from Psalm 116:10, 'I kept my faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted"'. Paul means that by faith one can persist in preaching.

Faith, then, is essential for maintaining the biblical view and word, and for resisting the pressures which come against one when preaching the *kerugma*. Nothing is assured for faith but its object—God! We mean that the preacher must constantly live in the conflict between faith and human reasoning. It is tension he would wish to do without but he cannot do without it. He must relate to those who feel the same tension. His struggle will ensure them that he is real and his faith *a continually tested faith*. This alone keeps him in humility and understanding that all men are—even in grace—weak. This *reality* will be reflected in his preaching. It will not permit *hubris* (overweening pride) to develop. He will not convince the intellect only of a man but will convince his heart. This is the true meaning of the statement 'Preaching is a faith thing'. It is the conflict he is called to live in.

Preaching is a Grace Thing

Doubtless Paul and others saw their salvation as of grace, and as of nothing else (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2'. 8-10; etc.).

Doubtless, too, they saw their ministry as a grace gift, hence Paul's statement, 'To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph. 3:8). Even more grace is needed to exercise the ministry, for faith and grace go together. One does not need to go beyond the measure of faith God has given, when one proclaims, but then grace is that enablement, *not only to believe, but to do*. II Corinthians 12 is the classic passage where God tells Paul His grace is sufficient for Paul, and that Paul's weakness is no problem, for God's grace is made (manifested) perfectly in that weakness.

Concerning grace we speak of the immense problem that faces the preacher. It is not merely the attempts of evil to condition him, or to make him afraid by persecution. It is the predicament and dilemma of man which constantly confronts the preacher. Paul speaks in Galatians 4: 19, 'My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!' He means he once went through this agony, and because of their present situation he may need to repeat the anguish. The matter is clear: he has had, so to speak, birth pains to bring them forth. The preacher is always being confronted with man's fall, his sin, his rebellion, his hardness, his self-justifying mechanisms, his blindness, his refusal to see the incredible grace of God in the glorious work of the Cross. The preacher aches when the love of God is passed by. He knows the tears of Jeremiah, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?' (Lam. 1:12, AV).

Without the grace of God he cannot sustain preaching.

Yet the very grace which both saves and sustains him comes through in the act of being dependent upon it. Otherwise he would become angry, bitter, resentful and cynical. Under grace he becomes none of these things. It is grace which makes his ministry winsome, even if it is to him a thing of perpetual anguish.

Preaching is a Thing of Contingency

Nothing is assured in preaching. The Word is invariable; the Spirit is always present. Christ is present in the suffering and life of the preacher. Yet preaching is contingent upon the Word, the Spirit, and Christ. The preacher cannot reach a point where all is assured. He may, so to speak, perfect his theology. He may even work patiently at modes of preaching, and assess the minds and spirits of his listeners so that he can handle their situation, but nothing is thereby guaranteed. Methodologies may seem to meet the need of his hearers, but only a true communication which is revelation will really grip the listener.

Training colleges and seminaries may bring tranquillity to the preacher. His exegesis of the biblical text may be superb. His powers of exposition may be good. His delivery may be crisp and clear, and his ability to persuade may be commendable. Yet—all that given in—he may not be preaching in the biblical sense of the word. P. T. Forsyth, in his *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* has said, 'Revelation is the self-bestowal of the living God... God in the act of imparting Himself to living

souls'. He adds, 'Preaching is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself'.* It must, then, mean that it is God who is speaking. Hence I Peter 4:11, 'whoever speaks, as one who utters the oracles of God'. This is why the prophets cried, 'Thus saith the Lord...' It is also why the apostles kept on claiming they were speaking the word of the Lord. It was not their own word.

The deep agony, then, of preaching is to live where God lives. Whilst Isaiah 55:10-11 claims that the word of God is totally effective, it is, nevertheless, 'My word... which goes forth from My mouth'. Only when the mouth of the preacher is the mouth of God will the word be effective. Jeremiah lived in continual anguish because of the power of the Word. In Jeremiah 23:29 the Lord asks, 'Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?' It is, and the utterer of the Word feels the power of the Word as it makes demands upon him. The 'little scroll' which St. John the Divine takes from the hand of the angel is sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly. In Ezekiel 2 and 3 the writer-prophet has the same experience. The word of the Lord is sweet to the eater, but bitter for the proclaimer, for the listeners will not have it. Therefore a man must always be contingent. He must be at one with God in the utterance otherwise his utterances, though brilliant in content and techniques are drivelling, piffling and trifling. They are words without true love, and they are empty. The preacher must remember always that 'The way of a man is not in himself. It is not in a man to direct his own footsteps'

* Pp. 10 and 3 respectively. Volume published by Independent Press. London. 1907.

(Jer. 10:23). The Word of the Lord must come from the Lord Himself, even if the preacher is the means.

We have said that the deep agony of preaching is to live where God lives, but it is also to live where man lives, and both at the one time. Man has to live in the stream of his time, but God's events, which are also in time must always be contemporary to man. Hence Robert Mounce has written, 'As the preacher proclaims the divine act of redemption, the barriers of time are somehow transcended and the supreme event of the past is once again taking place.'*

He quotes John Knox, 'Preaching does more than recount and explain the ancient event. The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event even now transpiring, and the preaching is the Spirit's action in doing so. In the preaching, when it is truly itself, the event is continuing or is recurring. God's revelating action in Christ is, still or again, actually taking place.†

Preaching is a Thing of Relevancy

We must never seek to make the Gospel relevant to modern man. We must, however, declare and show its relevancy. Contingent preaching will do just this since it will be God speaking to man in what we call the 'now-time', but then with the equipment of the 'then-time' and the 'time-to-come'. That is, preaching is buttressed with history, and fortified with dynamic hope. Whilst it may be

* The essential Nature of NT Preaching, Eerdman's, Michigan, 1960 p. 153.

† The integrity of Preaching, (Quoted by Mounce, op.cit., p. 153) p.92.

claimed that man has come of age, and whilst his history may have added sophistication to his other accomplishments, the bare truth is that man has changed little, if at all. Theologically he is a rebel. Culturally he has just worked out his rebellion in various forms.

It is not enough to say that man's basic anthropology has not equated with the biblical anthropology of man. This is to be expected. He is a rebel and works as he will. Hence man is basically as the Bible depicts him. He is in the image of God, but he is a rebel, and this is the most devastating combination. Man is existentially awry in his own universe. He is not himself in creational reality, but a contradiction in his universe. For this reason the Gospel does not seem rational to fallen man, nor relevant to his situation. In fact it is, and that is his problem. The Gospel tells him that he is sinful, a rebel in the creation of the King. He absents himself from the family of God. He refuses the authority of the Creator-Father-King. He is dislocated as a person, dysfunctional as a creature, rebellious as a son, disjointed and awry as an existent. He needs the grace, forgiveness, regeneration, and transformation which comes only with the Gospel of holy love. Because this demands repentance, humbling, and conversion of the whole man he insists it is not relevant. Curiously enough he is seeking help for his psyche from the psychologist, sociologist and psychiatrist and he will make confession to these, or rather have them penetrate his hidden depths and bring up the things which the Bible calls sins, and to which he gives an assortment of different names or classifications.

Forsyth's point about conscience amounts to this, 'That which can give peace to the conscience is that which will prove most universal'. The Cross alone, designed by God, executed by Christ, and communicated and applied by the Holy Spirit is the most relevant thing of all. Happy, then, is the preacher who knows how to communicate these things of the Cross and Resurrection, and bring the unhappy sinner to peace, and a quieted conscience. Thus everything becomes powerfully relevant. Faith, repentance, conversion, forgiveness, cleansing, justification and sanctification are all functionally necessary to man. Through them he is re-created, and comes back to the all-impelling image of God, and heads towards his great goal of purpose, ultimate glorification, membership in the people of God, and service for God in all eternity. Then he is a complete creature, son, and servant of the Most High. Then he is at peace.

Of course with this *general relevancy* must come an applied *particular relevance* so that the one approaching regeneration, and the one coming under regeneration can see—on the widest canvas—the particular relevance of the Gospel to man, his history, his social being, and his personal needs. The high but simple skill of the preacher is needed here. The beauty of the matter is that he does not have to force such relevancy. It is there, but he must discover it. Any attempt to relevelate to sinful man's 'things-as-they-are-because-he-has-so-made-them' will end in disaster because the truth is 'things-as-they-essentially-are'. This is the truth, which once known, makes a man free.

Preaching is Teaching

The proclamation of the apostle was one thing. It may have been, at the one time, both prophetic and evangelistic, but the apostle was primarily structuring and communicating the apostolic truth or deposit. *Prophetic ministry* is the ministry of direct confrontation. It is a 'Thus saith the Lord...' i.e. 'He says it now. I confront you with God. This confrontation demands an answer [whether of acceptance and action or of rejection] now'. *The evangelist* was gifted to bring men to repentance and faith, and so to God and Christ.

The teacher had to tell many things, supplementing the apostolic, not necessarily being prophetic or evangelistic. He had to feed the flock. However, apostle, prophet, evangelist and pastor-teacher were all preachers, proclaiming the *kerugma* and its implications. Teaching was never the mere impartation of information. It was the living impartation of truth, and truth in its various aspects.

Not all proclamation is teaching, but there cannot be proclamation which does not teach. The prophets are always proclaiming and teaching. So are the evangelists, however different may be their slant. The teacher who only imparts information but who does not confront, demand, call for decision is no true teacher. One must teach the action which comes from response. Hence all teaching must have the strong central element of preaching. Preaching whether primarily prophetic or not must be confrontation.

THE MODES, MANNERS AND CONTEXTS OF PREACHING

It is rarely, if ever, that the preacher has come to a situation ideal for his proclamation. The Gospel is 'Good news for bad men, and bad news for good men'. The bad men are not always ready for their healing, and the good men rarely know they need such healing. The apostles were faced with the Jewish problem. This was a mixture of traditional Judaism, zealotism, and legalism. Some Jews were men of grace, and awaited the grace of the Messiah. Gentiles, as we have seen, would consider the Gospel to be Jewish, foolish, and irrelevant. By the time of the writing of Revelation the churches had absorbed docetism, gnosticism, elements of the occult, and were confused on many major theological issues as well as practice of the faith.

At the time of the Reformation the Reformers needed a theology which was the resurgence of New Testament teaching but its expression was polemical. The Pietists protested against a merely intellectual justification or an antinomianism. Sometimes they were nomians. The Puritans sought to see the fruits of regeneration, and the power of holiness for life, whilst holding firmly to Reformation principles. The Wesleyans sought a new holiness related to the Cross and the baptism of the Spirit. Their successors, the pentecostal and charismatic children, sought power for proclamation and gifts to effect the purposes of God. For these reasons the Gospel has rarely had, so to speak, a virgin soil in which to be planted. Polemic seems to be

born with every movement, or rather every movement is born within polemic.

Contextualization

This word covers a number of factors. Originally used simply for true use of textual context, it is now used for wider purposes. One must understand Scripture contextually, first in its local (textual) context, and then in a much wider panoramic context or perspective. However, one must also contextualize socially and culturally. The use of thoughts, images, references, must be made with cultures in mind, and current social structures. That is, one must understand the *mores* of a people, their culture, and their approach. There must also be an understanding of *class* for each group addressed. Within classes there are other factors obtaining, namely the economic and sociological. So runs the idea, and it is certain these factors must be considered. The way one approaches the faith, and proclaims the *kerugma* must have in mind the audience. Animists require a different approach to those in the great religions such as Islam and other revealed religions. Philosophical religions have developed a certain pattern of thinking, whilst animists live their lives in a world in which the supernatural is always present.

Contextualization may have to be even finer in its sensitivity. A happening in a nation may bring about a changed mood. Events within a locality may bring on a special mood. Within the ebb and flow of all these factors the preacher must preach. Whitfield is accepted in

England, Scotland and America. Wesley is not wanted in Ireland. Moody, they say, will be rejected at Cambridge, but he is accepted. A church of liberal trend will generally reject a fundamentalist. Some churches with racist associations will reject all but the preacher of their colour. The preacher lives in these vagaries, and there is a truth in contextualization.

However, that is not all the truth. Suddenly a fundamentalist gate-crashes a liberal congregation and is espoused. A black man grips the hearts of whites; staid Scots take an emotional preacher to their breasts and charismatics are enthralled by the solid teacher of reformed doctrine. These are the vagaries of which we speak. Basically, focally, the truth of I Corinthians 1:21 still stands—only the true proclamation of the *kerugma* will save men. Even when culture is not understood, and comical blunders are made, the authority of the Word and the Spirit will break through. Yet as we have said there will be no ecstasy without previous agony.

Preparation

This booklet does not deal with the mechanics and techniques of homiletics. The *style* of a man has been described as ‘working with a clean brush and never admitting confinement’. A man’s style will develop, come wind, come weather. Time, success and failure will teach a man how to approach his subject and his people. Peter, Stephen and Paul would be howled out of a seminary or college for their homiletical approach. There is nothing

wrong with developed style, practised techniques, applied patterns, or the like. They may all have their value, and may indeed be part of true preparation, but preparation must be of the whole man.

We have seen that part of this preparation is to live, simultaneously, where God lives and where men live. Each preacher must be 'the Word made flesh'. It is not merely that he is fluent in utterance, and fully theological in his material and presentation. He must be prepared in the heart. This will require *much prayer*, more prayer than any other ministry. That prayer will not only be in the closet where much of it must be, but it must be in life. The people will be on the preacher's heart, not only the people of last Sunday and the Sunday to come, but of all the Sundays and especially of the week-days. He must bear them upon his heart, as Paul said, 'Always having you all in remembrance'. He must bear the human race in his heart for the message is not only to persons as individuals but to the race as corporate members.

This prayer will keep fresh the Word. The Word must be bathed in prayer, and prayer bathed in the Word. Such a man lives before God and men continually. When then he comes to preach—wherever that may be—he will have the dew of the holy sanctuary on his person. He will not come out fretting about his 'thises and thats'. He will not be concerned with his success or otherwise as a preacher, but his honesty and boldness of presentation. He will sound as the oracles of God.

His preparation will be his whole mode of life—his relationships with the saints and the sinners, the good and

the evil, the just and the unjust. His failures will not depress him, nor his successes puff him with pride. Grace will always cover his extremities of failure and success. He will know that to preach grace the preacher must know the extremities of sin and pollution.

Of course there will be *message-preparation*. The man will use the modes most congenial, most helpful, most understood. The modes will not determine his success or failure. They are his skills, dedicated to the Lord. It is the heart which expresses itself through the modes and the skills, or which remains silent within them. At the same time there will be *audience-relationship*. He will be removed from the congregation sometimes, even though he is spatially close to them, and at times being spatially far away will be in their hearts. Local conditions may affect the rapport but they cannot kill the word. A man's fluency may kill the word before his native inability to speak may cancel it. An honest and a good heart may effect more from stuttering lips than a brilliant exposition from a hollow preacher. Nevertheless the preacher must hone up his weapons, and keep their edge cutting sharply. He must improve every skill of style, manner, and communication. Yet in all this he must make way for the word and not impede it with his brilliance or competence.

The Mode of Love

God's love is strong and holy love, chastising where it is necessary, and healing where the wound needs it. The preacher, before all other things, must be a lover of God

and man, for the two are inseparable. His love must be holy. When he has gone through the crucible of the Cross, he can take others with him.

This love is a strange thing. It is that which makes him thunder against evil, declaim against Sin, and yet which gives him rapport with the sinner. For some he will be strong and unbending. For others he will yield to the point of entreaty and tears. Never will he use the matters of the wrath of God and the hell of judgement to lambast and batter and bludgeon. Like Christ he will weep over his Jerusalems, and like Christ, when they crucify (so to speak) he will pray for their forgiveness and understand their irrational behaviour.

Love will take him beyond the pulpit in the stadium and rostrum in the club, and the lectern in the church. It will take him to where people are. He will share fully with them from the lectern only because he has been with man where he is during the week. Sometimes he does not have to move out of his study to do this, and often when he does he knows them less than when he is in the Book.

Love is actional. Man's deepest needs are spiritual, but often material gifts tell him the preacher loves him, and so that God loves him, and his needs are met at a deeper level than the material. The preacher is a man who loves wholly. He will not necessarily have to soften his voice in the pulpit or anxiously seek rapport, if his heart genuinely loves in life. The love of God will come through, implicitly anyway, at every utterance—whether in the pulpit or the public place.

5

Conclusion: The Fruits of Preaching

We have said that there are different forms of preaching, varied contexts, and different gifts. We mean that not all proclaim the *kerugma* alone. According to the gift of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, or even the elder who is 'apt to teach', the preaching may differ. Yet, at the core of it all, is still the *kerugma*. Everything said relates to that, for around it is woven the whole counsel of God, and this is for all God's people, all the time.

For this reason one is said to till, one to sow, another to water and tend, and yet another to reap. Yet the one who sows also reaps, even though he has sown in tears. He shall reap in joy though another does the actual acts of reaping. Preaching—given in both its agony and its ecstasy—is a gift from God. The word which is sharper than any two-edged sword, the word which is at once a fire and a hammer that breaks the rocks of men's hearts, is the word which accomplishes the purposes of God. To be privileged

to be the communicators, the proclaimers, the exhorters is a priceless gift. In his famous passage of II Corinthians 4, Paul sums up his sufferings caused by preaching the word and says, ‘... this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory *beyond all comparison*’. Again the Psalmist says, ‘He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing [sowing] precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him’ (Ps. 126:6, AV). Most of all the enacted word of the Cross by the Living Logos Himself is that which is fruitful, ‘he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied’ (Isa. 53:11).

It may well be that we see little of the fruit of our preaching, and sometimes this is good for us. We learn more to live in faith. We are protected from the further temptation to pride. However, we know that nothing of suffering can be unfruitful. A ‘slight momentary affliction’ is a small investment which rewards us with ‘an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison’. We do not even mean the glory we may receive, but the glory of men and women who, having received the word, are redeemed, justified, sanctified, and with us—at the last—glorified.

SECTION TWO ***THE PREACHER AND*** ***THE PAIN OF PREACHING***

1

Introduction

I once heard of a country in which they have a yearly preaching eisteddfod. That is incomprehensible to me. Preaching is something which is not primarily a matter of technique, nor even of native ability. It is certainly not mere oratory. Whilst we must never despise the deliberate honing up of given abilities and attained human skills, yet the thought that our preaching of itself is anything is unacceptable. We do not persuade out of our powers of reasoning, or by an appeal to human emotions. The message is itself the persuasive force. It may even be the dissuasive force where that is required. It is possible that human eloquence could interfere with the message, and certainly human persuasiveness might attempt to sell the Gospel rather than make a free offer of a salvation that can only be of grace, but which yet requires the genuine response of repentance and faith.

There can be no question that preaching will always be a matter of pain, and this more so where there is no compromise set before the people. The matters involved in

the Gospel are such that they immediately confront human pride. Grace may sound gentle and generous but in fact it is an affront to the human spirit, especially where it is avowedly humanistic in its philosophy. The principle of:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy Cross I cling.
Naked, come to thee for dress,
Helpless, look to thee for grace.
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
ash me Saviour or I die,

is anathema to human flesh. This is why the Cross is an offence to those who have not come to the end of their tether—those who have not been forced to apply to God for relief from their human guilt and shame.

Many a prophet and preacher has been puzzled to find himself rejected. Many are discouraged by the constant barrage of opposition which they encounter. Some feel that had they been more diplomatic than enmity would not have been roused in the hearers. This is not necessarily so. Because the message is unacceptable to our human flesh we must live with the consequences of proclaiming it.

There is another reason why we must suffer as we proclaim. It is simply because the message is one of suffering, one of love. Love cannot be known apart from suffering, and so we must suffer along with the truth we proclaim. Paul says, 'Death works in us, but life in you'. In this way we are identified with the very happening of the Cross, and its principle shows livingly in us.

For this reason we ought to read Section Two.

2

The Preacher and the Pain of Preaching

THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS

When we read I Corinthians 1:18-2:5 we realise that for Paul everything of the Gospel lay in the Cross, i.e. the Atonement—the work of the death and resurrection of Christ. We have seen (Section One) that the *kerugma* whilst majoring on the Lordship of Christ showed that the Resurrection was the basis of this Lordship. We saw that the Cross was in fact a thing of shame, and the apostles sometimes referred to it as 'the tree' in order to bring out the curse and stigma attached to it in accordance with Deuteronomy 21:23; 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree' (Gal. 3:13). The Cross seemed to be some terrible mistake, but the apostles showed that it was part of God's plan—indeed the very heart of the plan—and so was according to the plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23; 3:18; 17:3; I Pet. 1:10-20). Doubtless they drew on a passage such as Isaiah chapter 53, but there were also

suggestions in other Scriptures (Ps. 2: If.; Acts 4:23ff; cf. I Pet. 1: 10-12).

The Jews were outraged by the Cross, because they had condemned Christ. Human sacrifice was an abomination. They could find no rationale for such a death, and their rage did not permit them to understand and apply the appropriate Scriptures to Jesus. In any case—as Paul pointed out—‘the Jews demand signs’. These signs would mean more to them than the Scriptures, but when Christ gave signs they did not *read* them and so allow themselves to be conducted to the truth. Likewise the ‘Greeks seek wisdom’, and to them the word of the Cross was foolishness. How could a man crucified as a blasphemer be the Son of God and Redeemer of the world?

Behind the seeking for signs and the wisdom was the demand to know God in ‘the natural’, i.e. without faith, and within the capacity of human powers. We repeat that the offence of the Cross is the fact that human powers cannot effect what the Cross alone can effect, i.e. the salvation of man, and the transformation of his fallen nature.

THE KERUGMA THE ONLY WAY

In I Corinthians 1:21 Paul states, ‘For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through *the folly of what we preach* to save those who believe’. It might equally have been said, ‘For since in the wisdom of God the Jews did not know God

through signs, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe’, i.e. there is no way to salvation apart from ‘the folly of what we preach’, namely the Cross and Resurrection.

It is this which so infuriates hearers. Man’s insistence on his own autonomy means he believes he can somehow save himself. He may even be prepared to concede some need of God, but not his utter helplessness. That is why the Cross is an offence. The preacher, then, must be prepared to live with this. He must insist that there is no other way, but in doing so must be ready to receive the hostility which faces him.

THE BATTERING OF THE BODY: THE PRESSURE ON THE PERSON

In II Corinthians 4:7-15 Paul shows that whilst we carry in our being the treasure of the Gospel we are ourselves only earthen vessels. This must be ‘to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us’. We need to look closely to the following text:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way. but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us. but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, ‘I

believed, and so I spoke'. we too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

We are now able to see the principle of suffering that is necessary for the true proclamation of the Gospel. In verses 8 to 12 Paul is saying that pressures will inevitably come against us when we preach the Cross. In fact he says that we are always carrying about in our body 'the killing' of the Lord Jesus. This is not merely 'the death' (Greek: *thanatos*) but 'the killing' (Greek: *nekrosis*). The killing process which took place at the Cross is—in one sense—portrayed by us. Because 'he bore our sins in his own body on the tree' then we are all responsible for his killing. Now we are confronted by that killing when the Gospel is proclaimed. Exactly the same 'mind' (Greek: *nous*) is evoked or incited by this confrontation, and the proclaimer is hated as Christ was hated and subjected to the same opposition, passion and treatment—insofar as it can be executed by the listener, who may also be called 'the beholder'.

This really is what Paul is saying in Romans 8:36, 'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered'. It also comports with I Corinthians 15:30-32, 'Why am I in peril every hour? I protest, brethren... I die every day... I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus'.

The result of this persecution, pressure and battering from those who hate the Cross brings about a principle so

vital and essential to true communication of the Gospel, namely, 'We are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you'. Just as Christ's death was essential for resurrection—and so for life to believers—so the *necrosis* (death) that comes to us when we preach the Gospel brings the *zoe* (life) of Jesus to the true beholder-hearer.

Far from this wearing process destroying faith it establishes it! In fact it is the only situation or ethos out of which the proclaimer can truly communicate. He is so sure—because he is fully in it—that his proclamation comes with immense power. At the same time the proclaimer who is being opposed and battered knows the reality of the resurrection that will come to him if he is actually killed or 'worn down' by this attrition. This then, makes sense of II Corinthians 4: 16-18;

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We see then that to be worn down in the outward body is to be built up and fully firm in the inner person. Such building up makes the person who is to be ultimately unveiled, for this is 'the eternal weight of glory' which is being prepared by the very process of proclaiming which brings the bitter reaction of the hostile world.

From this passage—II Corinthians 4:7-18—we see the proclaimer faces unremitting suffering but actually develops in glory as he does it. *The functional* value is that the Gospel is truly communicated no matter how much the listeners may be angered by what they hear. There will be those who truly hear and who will be redeemed. Those who refuse will have their sins retained (cf. John 20:23, ‘If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’).

THE SUFFERING APOSTLE AND THE NON-SUFFERING SUPER-APOSTLE

In relating to the church he had founded at Corinth, Paul encountered many problems. The first set of problems are discussed in I Corinthians where incest, party factions, taking believers to pagan law-courts, problems regarding divorce, and pride over the matters of gifts were some of the actions which faced the founder of the church. It is suggested that Paul wrote four letters in all, one of which appears to be lost, and another which is embedded in the epistle called ‘I Corinthians’.

It does not matter. What matters is the main problem encountered in the second letter. It appears that Paul had opponents in the Corinthian assembly. These were people whom he calls—with some disgust—‘superlative apostles’ (11:5; 12: 1 1). They seemed to accuse Paul of being dull, a poor preacher, weak when present although able to write powerful letters at a distance! They appeared to be

attractive, dynamic, and brilliant—far outclassing Paul.

Paul’s answer to their criticism of him is virtually to ask, ‘How do these people suffer?’ He is really saying, ‘You show me a person who suffers in the preaching of the Gospel and I will acclaim him as a true preacher. However, show me a man who does not suffer and I will show you a charlatan’. In the light of what we have seen in the section above, his judgement is warranted.

Let us then peruse the two quotations below and see the offence of the Cross. When we have seen that, we will then be able to turn to our own preaching and ask whether it stirs up such opposition, calls for such suffering, and thus has such effects.

II Corinthians 6:3-10:

We put no obstacle in any one’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

II Corinthians 11:2b-29:

•.. for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray

from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel without cost to you? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine shall not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

I repeat, let no one think me foolish; but even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. (What I am saying I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool, in this boastful confidence; since many boast of worldly things, I too will boast.) For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever any one dares to boast of—I am speaking as a

fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

We conclude rightly that genuine proclamation will inevitably bring suffering, but will also surely be powerful and effective preaching. What we are really saying (and seeing) in all this is that we are sharing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; cf. Eph. 4:13), and in doing this we are in the heart of the message—on the inside. So we know what we are saying and it comes through as the truth. This lends weight and understanding to II Corinthians 2:17, 'For we are not, like so many, pedlars of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ'. It also comports with II Corinthians 4:2, 'We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways, we refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God'.

FURTHER CONFIRMATION THAT THE WAY OF PROCLAMATION IS THE WAY OF SUFFERING

Suffering and Proclamation in I Peter

Peter's first letter is written around the principle of suffering. Here he is not quite writing after the manner of Paul. He is primarily emphasising the fact that all believers will suffer. They must not be surprised at this. On the night of his betrayal Jesus had told Peter and the others, 'If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you'. He then proceeded (John 15:18-25) to show that it hated him because he had brought the truth to them and delineated inescapably their sin.

Not by mere coincidence Peter speaks much in this letter of the nature and power of the word of the Gospel. It is 'the living and abiding word of God', for 'the word of the Lord abides forever', and it is 'the good news that was preached to you', and this 'through the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven', thus 'whoever speaks [let him speak] as one who utters oracles of God' (1:23; 1:25; 1:12; 4:11). It is in such a context that the Gospel is known and lived out.

Suffering and Proclamation in the Book of the Revelation

The Revelation has the people who suffer 'for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (1:2; 1:9). This statement and its equivalents—'for the word of God and the witness they had borne', (6:9); 'who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus' (12:17); 'their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God' (20:4)—are

really the operative principle shown to us in II Corinthians 4:7-12, i.e. the proclaimers who proclaim by life and word, always meet opposition even to 'striving unto blood', i.e. death.

If we follow this pattern through the Revelation we will see the conflict of history is that the people and forces of the beast seek to defeat the people and forces of Christ. Ultimately the Lamb overcomes all evil, but when we ask how, we are told, 'From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations and he will rule them with a rod [sceptre] of iron' (19:15).

3

Conclusion

THE WORD OF GOD IS THE POWER OF GOD, AND IS THE REALITY OF THE PROCLAMATION

In the letter to the Romans Paul opens up the whole matter of the Gospel or the word of God. He points out that it is the word which will bring about 'the obedience of faith among all the nations' (1:5; 15:18-19; cf. 16:26). That word is not inaccessible; indeed it is near to us, even in our mouths (10:8f.; cf. Deut. 30:12-13).

So then we conclude that the primary matter for us is that of proclamation. We ought to proclaim the word of truth since it is 'by the folly of what we preached', that man is saved.

This, then, prepares us for the final section of our book, 'The Preacher and the Word of God'.*

* The following material is included for the preacher who desires to see the nature of the word of God. He can constantly refer to this, learning to distinguish between his attempts to interpret the word, and the word itself. Unless he be convinced of the innate power of God's word, then he will always attempt to prove it, be supportive of it, and even to garnish it with his own thoughts. The simplicity of true preaching baffles our understanding because we are always trying to be convincing.

SECTION THREE **THE PREACHER** **AND THE WORD OF GOD**

*1**Introduction*

Whilst the preacher has the authority of his commission from God, he has no message apart from the one given to him. In fact this message is contained within the Scriptures, and in one sense is the very Scriptures themselves. There is always the temptation to think we have the right to interpret the Scriptures, instead of letting them speak for themselves, or to so render them to others that the elements of confrontation can be ameliorated, i.e. so softened down that the hearer is not offended. In this process we use our understanding to make the truths as we know them both reasonable and acceptable to human thinking, but in that we make a great mistake. The so-called 'wisdom' man has manufactured for himself since the human race fell into sin is antithetic to the wisdom of God.

We have then only one word to offer, and one truth to tell—that of the Scriptures. Whilst it is true that many readers interpret the Scriptures differently, yet where we so read that the Scriptures become for us—and to us—a

unified whole, then as Scripture interprets Scripture the truth will be evident. John in the second chapter of his First Letter tells us we have an anointing from the Holy One, and so the truth has come to us. This means the Holy Spirit has come to show us the truth. Prior to our understanding of the Hebrews Scriptures, and the events of Christ which are the subject of the New Testament, the Holy Spirit had come and enlightened the apostles as to what we then called ‘the apostolic doctrine’. By nature of the case Jesus could not have done this, but those who wrote the Gospels already had understanding of the significance and purpose of the events of Christ from his incarnation to his ascension.

Thus we have all of the truth we need for preaching, as pure and powerful as that known to the apostles themselves. In a lifetime we will never fully compass or depth the Scriptures, but enough is known to us—both in heart and mind—to be the constraint for, and substance of our preaching. It is true that there is great authority in our calling, but it must go along with the prior authority of Scripture, and the powerful aid of the Holy Spirit to effectively communicate the truth.

How, then, we should treasure the living word of the Living God!

2

The Word of God

THE NATURE OF A WORD

A word is a part or whole of an idea, intended to be an image in the mind of one person, generally with a view to imparting it to another—or others—by uttering it, writing it, or conveying it by signs and gestures. Man is so created that he receives and imparts words from God, fellowman or other personalities. Rational creatures understand words, and on receiving them may accept or reject them, or hold them in suspension.

THE SOURCE OF WORDS

God is the Author of all things, and in that sense the Author of thinking. Initially all words were pure, and so the ideas they expressed were authentic. Following the fall of man, ideas (words) may come from (a) God to man, (b) from evil sources to man, (c) from man to man, (d) from

man to himself, for man cogitates and introspects. What is ontological is true, and what is not (i.e. that which is unontological, anti-ontological) is untrue so that all words—always *only* intended for what is real—are used in order to claim ‘ontological’ being, i.e. basic reality. They are really stolen words, an example of which can be seen in Jeremiah 23:29-32. Because of the fall of man (Rom. 1: 19f.) our knowledge of the essential order of things (i.e. the truth: Ps. 119:160; 31:5; John 17:17) can only come from God (the Scriptures) via the Man of truth (Jesus Christ: John 1: 14; 14:6; 18:37) and the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit: John 16:12-15; I John 5:7).

THE ONLY TRUE WORD/S

God’s speaking is from Himself and His wisdom. If man speaks from God his words are true. If not then they are not true. Isaiah 55:6-11 indicates that man’s thoughts are not God’s. This may mean (a) that God has a greater capacity for thoughts, or (b) the mind of fallen man is of another disposition. Whilst it is true God’s capacity is greater than man’s, it does not mean man cannot understand what God is thinking and saying if God communicates. Without repentance, faith, and an affected will, man cannot hear what has been said by God. That the Scriptures constitute God’s word is strongly debated by man. This inscripturated truth—along with the present working of the Triune God—is our only means of knowing truth (John 17:17; Ps. 31:5; cf. II Tim. 3:16-17).

THE SUBSTANCE AND SUBJECT OF GOD’S WORD

Man created by God, correlates to Him as a son (to the Father), a creature (to the Creator) and a servant (to the King). He can only know what God reveals. God is wise, and He has His own counsel. God’s counsel is His will, His plan for history and His acts in working out history (see Isa. 46:8-11; 48:3-8; Jer. 23:23ff.; Eph. 1:9-11; 3:8-12). Thus man can only discover counsel, i.e. wisdom—as far as is necessary for him to do so—by listening to God, and reading His acts in history. *If God were not to speak there would be no communication from Him, and none to man.* Man would know nothing but his research into the phenomenological facts of man and creation. Apart from the inscripturated truth man cannot have an ontology of God, man and creation, i.e. his theology, anthropology and cosmology will always be deficient.

GOD’S MODES OF SPEAKING

God’s word comes through many media, i.e. creation (Ps. 19:1-4), *theophanies* or manifestations of Himself (Gen. 18:1f.; Exod. 3:2f.), *angelic visitants* (Gen. 28:10-17), *the law* (Ps. 119; cf. Deut. 33: 1ff.), *His own acts* throughout history, *the prophets* (Num. 12:6; Deut. 18:15ff.; Jer. 23:23f.), *Jesus Christ* the Logos, *the Spirit* (II Pet. 1:20-21; John 16:12-15) and *the church*—the proclaimers of truth. Note that the Scriptures, themselves, inform us concerning these media. It is not good enough to say that God speaks

in words and deeds (see John 14:10-14; cf. Rom. 15:18-19; cf. Jer. 23:23ff.). His words are His deeds, His deeds His words (see the next chapter, paragraph one).

THE WORD IS ALL

When we look at the various forms and modes of the word of God, and recognise that God and His word are identical, then we see that nothing happens without the word. This is because the word of God is powerful (Heb. 4:12) and effective (Rev. 19:13, 15) and as the word, is never apart from the Holy Spirit. Together they are one in action and power.

In practice this means we have the word of God for pastoral ministry. Primarily this is *kerugmatic* (evangelistic proclamation). This salvific word is also the word of true healing, and at the same time it is didactic *in the context of the church*, where it is ministered for the benefit of all so that it is pastoral in all aspects. The church itself is proclaiming the word to the world both soteriologically and prophetically, and all of this in the context and operation of salvation history.

3

The Word and its Power

THE WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL

Anyone acquainted with the Scriptures knows that they claim that the word of God is innately powerful. God cannot speak and His intention not be effected (Isa. 55:11)! When we preach or proclaim we are often disappointed because we are not wholly effective, or even partly effective. We think, 'If the word of God is powerful, how come we do not see the results which ought to follow?'. It may be because we are not truly proclaiming the word, and it may be that sowing and husbandry are lacking. It may be that when we are—seemingly—not being heard that the word of God is being rejected. Being accepted or rejected is not the point (cf. Isa. 6:9-13; Jer. 2:31; Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-41; Acts 28:26-27; Rom. 11:8; Acts 13:40-41; Rom. 10:16; 11:7ff.; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

In the Old Testament the word of God (*dabar*) is used about 400 times. John Taylor (*New Bible Dictionary*,

IVP, Eng., 1986, p.1259) says, 'Yahweh's word is an extension of the divine personality, invested with divine authority, and is to be heeded by angels and men'. It is the word by which God communicates to man, and which cannot be divorced from Him any more than can His law. Thus 'the word of the Lord came', and 'thus says the Lord' are the terms used and they must be heard and obeyed. The power of the word polarises its hearers. They either obey or disobey.

In the New Testament the words *logos* and *rhema* equal the *dabar* of the Old Testament and are used synonymously in the LXX. Just as Yahweh's *dabar* is identified with God and so is dynamic, so too *logos* and *rhema* are dynamic.

THE POWER OF THE WORD IN ITS MANY ASPECTS

What we will now treat is the word of God in its various aspects. God's word is simply His speaking, but it relates to many things—as we would expect. We look then at the following aspects:

(i) **The Word of God.** The Scriptures tell us God's word is truth (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17; It Sam. 7:28; II Cor. 6:7; James 1:18), that it is eternal as the living (Heb. 4:12) and abiding word (I Pet. 1: 23, 25) and is never ineffectual (Isa. 55:11). In fact God's word is as God Himself, inseparable from Him. It is the word of His counsel which means His wisdom and plan will be fulfilled in the ultimate. We can say that God's word relates to the ontological, and man's word cannot be such, seeing he is

fallen. In a later study we will see that the forces of evil (including fallen man) steal God's word because it is innately dynamic.

- (ii) **The Creative Word.** See Genesis 1:1f.; Psalm 33:6-9; 148:5-6; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3, 11:3, and Colossians 1:15-17. God's word dynamically creates so that its enormous power is incalculable (Eccl. 3:11). Creation alone should be sufficient to make man worship and be grateful (Rom. 1:19f.), and if man were not fallen he would be immensely awed by seeing and hearing the word of creation.
- (iii) **The Continuing Creative Word.** See (a) *the word which sustains*, i.e. upholds, and by which there is continuity in creation, (Col. 1:17). Thus creation can be called 'a fixed order' (Ps. 89:36-37; 148:5-6; Jer. 31:36-37), and such a 'fixed order' brings security to man. It is really affirmed in the Noahic covenant as promised in Genesis 8:20-9:7. (b) *the new acts of creation* on the principle of Romans 4:15 (see Isa. 44:26; 45:23; 46: 10; 55:10-11; 59:21). God can and will do works which seem to be against the normative principle of the initial and sustaining word of creation.
- (iv) **The Prophetic Word.** This word is continuous *in both Old and New Testaments*, referring to every aspect of God's will and counsel, namely creation, covenant, law; salvation, holy living, judgements, the day of the Lord, and all things eschatological. Two classic passages are (a) Deuteronomy 18:9-22 and (b) Jeremiah 23:23-32. 'Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?' In prophecy God speaks

through man (cf. Exod. 7: 1-2; Num. 12:6-7; Amos 3:7-8; Acts 2:17ff.; of. Rev. 1:3; 22:18-19). This word comes by God speaking face to face (Num. 12:6-7), and through dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Jer. 23:31; 23:15f.; Acts 2: 17f.). Later we will see that the prophetic word is often related to the Spirit.

- (v) **The Enacted Word.** By this we mean God is *the living God*, i.e. 'the God who acts'. His acts reveal Him, portraying His nature. The kind of things He does show who He is (see Ps. 105-107, especially 105:8ff., 107:1ff.). In the New Testament *the enacted word is the word of the Kingdom* (Matt. 12:28; cf. Acts 8:5-8, 14). The *enacted word* is also seen in the judgements of the book of Revelation. In fact all history is the enacted word, eg. 'he commanded and they were created'.
- (vi) **The Word of the Law.** See Deuteronomy 33:1-5, Exodus 24:1-8, Acts 7:38 and Galatians 3:19. We must warn ourselves against detaching the law of God from God. No one can create true law: no one dare initiate *torah* which in fact means 'instruction' and as such shows 'the way' of God. There is only one way (see Exod. 34:28f., with Deut. 4:13; 30:11, 14). Psalm 119 has the terms, way, word, truth, precepts, ordinances, testimonies, works, statutes as virtually synonymous. The law must not be subverted on pain of death (cf. Gal. 3: 10), but obedience to it is 'sweeter also than honey' for it is a delight to meditate on His law (Ps. 19:7-11; 1:2).
- (vii) **The Word of Redemption—Old Testament.** This begins with Genesis 3:15 (cf. Gen. 49:10) and comes in covenant to Abraham (Gen. 12: 1-3; ch. 15; 17: 1-14). In the

midst of the revelation of fallen man's sinfulness and guilt, the redemptive word blazes with the revelation of God's grace.

(viii) **The Word of Redemption—New Testament.**

This is the word of grace (John 1:14; Matt. 1:21; Titus 2:11). See also Acts 4:33; 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; 20:32. This word of grace is also the word of faith (cf. Deut. 30:14f.; Rom. 10:8f.; Rom. 1:16-17; I Cor. 1:18). This salvific word contains in itself the regenerating word as seen in John 6:63, I Peter 1:3, 22-23 and James 1:18.

- (ix) **The Sanctifying Word.** See John 15:3; 17:17; cf. Hebrews 1:3; 9:14; etc. The redemptive word is also the word of judgement. Guilt and pollution are the two things which keep man in bondage when they beset him in the light of the holiness and wrath of God. His judgements set His people free, although they destroy the obdurate impenitent. Often in Isaiah God said 'I am the Holy One of Israel—thy Redeemer'. His holiness is always dynamic—opposing and destroying the evil that would destroy His people.

THE SPIRIT, THE WORD AND THE POWER

Pastorally we do our best to make the word of God powerful. Paul warned against this on a number of occasions (see I Cor. 1:17; 2:2-5; II Cor. 2:17; 4:2). Man redeemed still has to do battle with evil, including Satanic deception, human pride in achievement, the desire to be praised and other such personal fleshly elements. Most of

all he has to fight the desire to be thought wise, and to be able to reveal the truth from himself. He must be born of the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and continually walk in the Spirit by being continually filled with the Spirit.

If he is not in the state of Spirit-control then he cannot preach the word of truth—God’s word. He must be in that state of grace where his faith is strong. This is because there can never be a division between the word and the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 1:5 demonstrates this principle, ‘our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction’. A vast study could be undertaken on ‘the Spirit and the Word’, but it is enough for us to know that in the Old Testament the prophets spoke the word of God by the Holy Spirit. In Numbers 24:2ff. the Spirit came upon Balaam and he prophesied. In 1 Samuel 23:1-7 David, seized by the Spirit, spoke the oracle of God. In Hosea 9:7 the prophet is equated with ‘the man of the spirit’. Both 1 Peter 1:10-12 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 speak of the prophets of old being moved by the Holy Spirit—also known as ‘the Spirit of Christ’. *It is safe to conclude that the word of God cannot be spoken in all its awesome and holy truth apart from the Spirit of God.*

At the time of the Reformation there were discussions as to whether the word of God was powerful in itself, or powerful through the Spirit. Both are mutually inclusive, and as one entity the word and the Spirit work, and work with power. God is identical with His word, even if we call that word ‘an extension of the divine personality’. If we can visualise the Word apart from the Spirit, or the Spirit

working (soteriologically) apart from the word, then we have a strange and impossible situation.

What we ought to include under our present topic heading is ‘the word of grace’, but this too, requires opening up, and we will leave it to a later study.

4

*Stealing God's Word***INTRODUCTION:****THE PROPHETS AND THE FALSE PROPHETS**

The following passages should be read as a foundation for this subject: Isaiah 9:15; Jeremiah 14:13-16; 23:9-40; 27:14ff.; Ezekiel 13: 2-17; 22:28. Deuteronomy 18 is the *locus classicus* of the meaning, nature and practice of prophecy. Moses was the classic prophet, having a sense of the destiny of Israel, and the significance of covenant in the light of the wisdom and counsel of God concerning the nations. Revelation 19:10 (cf. Luke 24: 25-27, 44-47; Acts 26:22-23; I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet. 1:19-21) shows that the law and the prophets have to do with Christ and God's plan for and in him.

True prophecy relates to the truth. God's truth is the ontological reality. Prophecy—the proclamation of God's word both predictive and hortatory—is authentic because it concerns the ontological. It is ontological. Hence it is dynamic. Therefore prophecy is necessarily dynamic,

whether it be unontological or anti-ontological. Deuteronomy 18 indicates that false forms of prophecy, eg. divination and soothsaying, are also dynamic. True prophecy effects that which it is about (Deut. 18:22), and whilst false prophecy does not, it works in the same way upon those who wish to know the future. Knowing the future is part of being human, and so is dynamic. The first set of Scriptures cited above distinguishes between true and false prophets and prophesyings.

SPEAKERS OF GOD'S WORD**True and False Prophets**

Hebrews 1: 1-2a says, 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...' The prophet, then, spoke the word of God. We have seen that prophecy has the two elements of prediction and exhortation. Either one or both of these elements would be present at any time. Hence prophecy was not always predictive, nor always hortatory. Whatever elements were present the utterance was the word of God. Hence the statements, 'the word of the Lord came unto... ', 'thus says the Lord ', and so on. Prophecy constituted God's main mode of communicating His word.

When God speaks, His word is necessarily dynamic. The false prophets recognised this dynamic. In one sense *any* utterance has a certain power to it. The prophets of the baals and the idols purported to be speaking for powerful

deities, but they were seen to be mediums for their gods. From Israel's point of view they were false prophets inasmuch as the only true word was Yahweh's word. The one who spoke His word was a true prophet. In a contest between Yahweh and the false gods, the latter would always be defeated. Hence the people of Yahweh asked the following question in Exodus 15:11:

Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

Israel meant that Yahweh was more powerful than the gods of Egypt. Their word or their prophets were as nothing against Him.

The second set of false prophets were those who purported to speak in the name of Yahweh. These are the prophets mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter.

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE PROPHETS—TRUE AND FALSE

How did the prophets gain the word they were to give? There were two ways: either God spoke to the prophet face to face (Num. 12:8; Acts 3:22-23), or He communicated His message by the means of dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; cf. Jer. 23:23f.; Acts 2:17-18). In Numbers 12:6-8 (cf. Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10; Hosea 12:13; Exod. 24:10-11) these two methods are stated. If a man did not receive God's word by one or other method, then any word he spoke would be false, and not truly prophetic.

In Jeremiah 14:14 God said:

The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.

In Jeremiah 23:16-18 God warned:

Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'

At this point the prophet introduced the idea of 'the council of the Lord'. In Jeremiah 23:18, he said:

For who among them has stood *in the council of the Lord* to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened?

Again in Jeremiah 23:21-22 God said:

I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in *my council*, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

In relation to prophecy, what then is God's council? Israel believed God had a council of supernatural beings. For this see Psalm 89:7, 'a God feared in the council of the holy ones', Psalm 82: 1, 'God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement', (cf. I Kings 22:19-22; Job 1:1-2:2; 15:8; Isa. 6:1-13). Whatever the council was and is, it appears that the prophet was admitted to it, but the false prophet was

barred. The true prophet was given the mind of God for his proclamation of the truth. This being so the prophetic word must be pure as against the false prophetic word which is evil. It is an awesome thing to proclaim the word of God.

The Hebrew word for council (Jer. 23:18, 22; RSV) and counsel (Jer. 23: 18, 22; AV) is *sod*. In Amos 3:7 the word 'secret' (RSV) or 'plans' (JB) is also *sod*. The word *sod* can mean 'a sitting, session, or assembly', and so we take it that the assembly is there for the counsel of wisdom of God, and this counsel is communicated by the prophets when He desires it, even if the prophet does not actually stand in the midst of the holy ones who constitute the *sod*.

THE CHURCH—THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

The gifts of ministry outlined by Paul in Ephesians 4:7-11 show us that the new community—the church—is a teaching community. Apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers are all in the work of teaching. The original apostles must be regarded as unique since they brought the true corpus of teaching to the word, i.e. the apostolic proclamation (*kerugma*) which, by nature of the case, is immutable. The prophets must abide by this apostolic teaching, as also must the evangelists, pastors and teachers. No new or innovative teaching may be made, and the apostolic teaching is unique. It is the interpretation of the Old Testament truth in the light of the events of Christ already predicted and in Christ's incarnation, fulfilled. It is

also the events of Christ interpreted in the light of Old Testament truth.

Where, then, does prophecy figure in the New Testament? The primary answer is that the church is the prophetic community, just as it is the priestly and royal community, i.e. Christ who is prophet, priest and king, works out his offices and ministry through his body the church. Acts 2:17-18 makes it clear that at Pentecost this *prophetic* community came into being.

'... the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy' (Rev. 19: 10), and this is the message of the apostolic church. If we notice the continual reference to 'witness' and 'testimony' in the books of the Acts and the Revelation, then we will see that issuing from Acts 1:8 the ministry of the church is primarily witness, i.e. the witness of Jesus as also the witness *to* Jesus, for these virtually, are the one. (For a detailed development of this see my book, *Is Prophecy For Today?*, NCPI, 1982.) There can be no doubt then that the church is the prophetic community. Whilst certain men and women may have the office of prophet (Acts 11:27-29; 21:10-12; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9; Eph. 4:11), many have or exercise the charisma of prophecy (I Cor. 12:10; 14: 1,24). It is in this context that Peter in I Peter 4:11, enjoins, '... whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God '. On this hinges much we now need to discuss.

STEALING GOD'S WORD

The passage of Jeremiah 23:9-40 (cf. Isa. 9:15; Jer. 14:13-16; 27:14ff.; Ezek. 13:2-17; 22:28; Deut. 18:15-22) is

most important. In essence it is as follows:

- (i) The prophets of the Northern Kingdom were evil and ungodly for ‘they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray’. The condition of Judah was even worse for, ‘in the prophets of Jerusalem, 1 [God] have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evil-doers, so that no one turns from his wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah’ (see 23:9-15).
- (ii) The prophets of the Southern Kingdom speak ‘visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord’. They speak comfortably to those ‘who despise the word of the Lord’ (see 16-17).
- (iii) These false prophets have not been sent by God for they had not ‘stood in the council of the Lord’ therefore they could not know the true word of God, the word which would have turned God’s people ‘from their evil way, and from the evil of their doing’ (see 18-22).
- (iv) The prophets—so called—use the dreams and visions of the true prophets. They know they need the authentication of these and so they pretend to know the true prophets’ visions, or manufacture some of their own. They know the word of God—the prophetic word—is authentic (ontological) so they use it, shaping it up to their own ends. God says He will differentiate between the wheat and the chaff. His word is fire and He will devour the chaff. His word is a hammer and will break the hard rocklike hearts of the false prophets in pieces:

Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, ‘Says the Lord’. Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord. (See verses 23-32).

- (v) God castigates the false prophets when they claim to know ‘the burden of the Lord’ telling the prophets their words are not His ‘burden’ i.e. oracle or prophecy. Their burden (prophecy) is their own. God tells His people to tell these false prophets, ‘... you pervert the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God’ (see 33-40).

Our conclusion in this section is then that *it is possible—either from delusion or by deliberate choice—to steal the words of God, and to seek to authenticate ourselves by means of them.*

THE MINISTRY OF STOLEN WORDS

As pastors we have to decide whether we are uttering our own words, or speaking the word of God, and whether it is possible we are stealing the words on which God alone has copyright. Peter’s injunction, ‘... whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God’ (1 Pet. 4:11), is essential for proclaiming the truth. Within the scope of this study it is not possible for us to do a full survey of the use of the word of God in the New Testament let alone in the Old Testament. It is clear however that in the Acts, the apostolic church was proclaiming the word of God. In the Epistles certain references are made to ‘the word of the

Cross', and to the 'power of the proclaimed Gospel', and many warnings are given against wrong uses of God's word. In the book of the Revelation are numerous references to 'having' or 'holding' the word of God.

THE AUTHENTIC WORD

The Holy Spirit brought the truth of the Gospel to the church on the Day of Pentecost (John 16:12-15; I Cor. 2:12-13; cf. Acts 2:42), and so the apostolic truth was known and formulated. Only apostles could claim authority for this formulation of the truth: others taught what they had formulated. In Acts and the Epistles they insist that they teach the word of God. Paul spends almost two chapters of Galatians in setting out his apostolic authority so that his readers will believe his word against that of the Judaisers who were perverting apostolic truth. This authentic truth was always via the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; I Cor. 2:1-5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12).

THE FALSE WORD

In I Corinthians 2:17 Paul claims:

For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's Word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

In II Corinthians 4:2 he says:

We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the

open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

In I Corinthians 1:17 he had said,

For Christ did not send me to baptise but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

To this he added (I Cor. 2:3-5),

And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

These statements are of immense importance. He is saying that we can peddle God's word, that we can practice disgraceful and underhand ways in the proclamation of the Gospel, and that we can use cunning, and we can tamper with God's word. We can also use eloquence and plausible words of a wisdom which is not God's wisdom and we can even make men to stand in such false wisdom, rather than in the power of God. All of this should cause us much heart-searching.

The Old Testament prophets had stolen the dreams, visions and words of the true prophets. As we have suggested, they recognised in some measure the ontological way, the way of truth and hence of authentic power, and they wanted to use the true things in order to gain credibility and power. Everything false is only an imitation of the true, but by nature of the case it cannot genuinely succeed. As Jeremiah states it will be burned in the fire of the true word, and smashed by the hammer of the same

word. Moreover God is against those who steal His word. He will by no means allow them to get away with it. Judgement is inevitable.

In II Timothy 4:3 Paul says that:

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.

He tells Titus (1:9) that an elder:

must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.

Without doubt the early church was beset about with many who did not know the apostolic truth. Galatians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles refer to such happenings. Johns Epistles warn against current heresies, and Jude (3-4) says:

I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

AN EVALUATION OF OUR OWN WORDS

We have a number of things to take into consideration when we seek to evaluate the word we proclaim and the manner of our proclamation. Is it the word of God or is it

merely quoting the Bible, the giving of biblical information? Do we preach without power and without fruitfulness? Are we afraid of our hearers, and so seek to satisfy them? Do we seek the praise of men more than the praise of God? Does money and comfort occupy our minds more than the word itself? Do we have presuppositions (critical and otherwise) which mean we do not really believe the Scriptures? Do we have a form of godliness but deny its power (II Tim. 3:5), and is the Kingdom of God words and not power (I Cor. 4:20)?

Some of us use other men's sermons and other men's thoughts. There may be nothing harmful in this, or there may be the admission that God does not speak directly to us through His word. In the last chapter we talked about the word and its power. Do we really know that power in truth, or is it simply an academic fact for us? Are we men and women of the word of God and His Spirit, or are we using human wisdom, tacking our sails according to the wind, using mores and wisdom that smack more of man than of God?

These are not the only questions we need to ask of ourselves. All of them ought to be asked with the principle of stealing God's word—and words—in mind.

5

*The Word in the Parish***THE PASTOR AND THE WORD**

We have already seen the nature of the word of God, its power, and those who seek to use it illicitly. We would all agree that the pastor must know—and increasingly know—the word of God. It is surely a principle that all ministry springs from the proclaimed and taught word of God—the Scriptures. We will look at the initial proclamation of the word more fully in the next chapter, but here we are thinking of the use of the word that follows the saving proclamation—not that there is a distinct difference between the kerugmatic word and the prophetic, didactic and pastoral word.

**THE CONTEXT OF THE PASTORAL—
PAROCHIAL WORD**

If we are parochially minded we will minimise the true operation of the word. Each church (parish or circuit) is in

the wider context of the church of Christ. This in context is the kerugmatic, prophetic, priestly (worshipping) church in action as the agent of the Kingdom of God, under its head, Christ. Any ambition for the local church is destructive and repressive to the witness of the church in the world. In addition no local church has all the gifts which can be contained within itself. If it has certain ministry gifts such as those of an apostle, prophet and evangelist—which themselves are often itinerant—the local church must give to and receive from such ministries.

The local church is a witnessing church. It has the witness of the word of God and of the life of its *koinonia* (fellowship) and *diakonia* (ministry, servanthood) and *didache* (teaching), as well as those gifts which cannot be contained within itself. Signs and wonders are not solely for the local church, even if often they come via it.

When we say the local church is the witnessing church we must also recognise and keep in mind the fact that the church of Christ is the new temple (Isa. 2:2-3; 56:6ff.; I Cor. 3: 16-17; I Pet. 2:4-10). Worship is rich witness, and fulfils the deepest emotional needs of man. There should never be the worship without the word, nor the word without the worship. Both constitute the one entity.

Another factor to be considered is its denominational polity, i.e. whether it is congregational, presbyterial, or hierarchical. Its sacramental pattern must also be understood. These elements determine the ecclesiastical authority of the preacher.

At the same time we must see that in the local church there are unconverted people, those who have little biblical

knowledge or sense, and many who are in states of confusion, who lack the knowledge and sense of justification, who are awry in doctrine, and who have problems with marriage and children, with understanding Christian morality, especially as they struggle amidst the changing mores of contemporary society. We must also recognise the growth in maturity of those in the congregation who are competent to teach and to preach the word of God.

THE PASTOR AND THE WORD

We use this term, not simply to designate the pastor ministering only from the pulpit, but in whatever situation he speaks the word of God, such as in church services, in study groups, in his study to persons, to the church leadership, and to counselling both in his study and in members' homes. This speaking of the word has to minister to, and in, all these situations.

As I see it, most—if not all—ministry should spring from the proclamation of the word, whether that of the pastor or the word which congregational members have heard or read from others. If questions are asked following genuine proclamation of the word, then proper contact and interaction are established. As we have seen, members of the congregation are in various states of mind, and of understanding. They are also in various states of need. If then their response (or reaction) comes from the word, then it will be the word which will be necessary to answer their queries.

This, then, means that the pastor must be well-versed in the word. Prior even to entering this pastoral ministry he should work out for himself the matter of the authority of the word of God, and his own authority in proclaiming it, as also the consequences which may come from its proclamation. If—for example—he thinks the word may cause unwanted repercussions, then he must be honest with himself. If he considers the authority of current thinking determines the value of the word of God then he must act accordingly, for such things will determine the way in which he preaches, as also the content of his preaching. Every pastor must work out this matter and evaluate the thrust of his ministry and hold fast to that until experimentation in the same determines a change or otherwise in his manner of ministry, as also its content.

One thing the pastor must study is whether his ministry is primarily evangelistic, prophetic, didactic, hortatory or pastoral, i.e. with a view to caring for the flock in all their needs and God's demands of them. If evangelistic then he must invite the help of others in relation to the other elements of teaching and preaching. Even so a worthy pastor may find it possible in his preaching to be prophetic, didactic, hortatory and comforting according to the particular occasion.

THE PASTOR MUST DETERMINE HIS PERSONAL ROLE IN RELATION TO THE WORD OF GOD

Every pastor—as a shepherd—must 'feed the flock of God'. The word of life is also the bread of life. Some

pastors say, 'I am no preacher. Preaching is not my thing. My thing is visitation'. Some see organising or praying as their role. The proclamation of the word must be primary. This does not mean eloquent, knowledgeable or brilliant preaching. The word may even be stammered. Some great preachers have read their sermons word by word, with rich results. One is excusing oneself from study of the word by claiming their roles are different. How can one give pastoral wisdom and advice from one's lack of the studied word? A visiting pastor may be merely social or pleasant or even a 'tea-and-sugar bushranger'! An organising pastor may be taking the easy way out. Organisation must be done in the light of God's word. Many a pastor has built large buildings, increased the size of the congregation, and achieved popularity as a person without much recourse to the word of God.

The pastor is not called to be popular or even loved. He is called to guard the flock of God, to feed it, to train it, and teach the word of God to others that they may yet teach it to others also. His gifts for visiting, organising—and the rest—may also be used, but only in the light of God's word.

THE WORD IS TO, AND FOR, ALL

In a presbyterial polity the pastor is the first among other elders, i.e. *primus inter pares*. He may be expected to be the primary preacher of the word. Even so each elder is expected to be 'an apt teacher', as also to 'hold firm to the

sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it'. In non-presbyterial politics leadership should be designed to assist the minister of the word and the sacraments. In this chapter we cannot cover all the pastoral situations as mentioned above, but when the pastor seeks to cover them it must be from the word, especially the wisdom the pastor has learned in the practical application of the word. This does not mean formal teaching, or the theological setting out of Christian dogma—although that has its place also—but it is showing how in any situation the guidance of the word can be received and applied (of. II Tim. 3:15-17). Thus a pastor may be seeking to assist where one spouse is an alcoholic and even cruel and aggressive in his drunken states. Other situations may relate to immorality, sexual deviations, poverty, emotional states that paralyse the person—and so on. In all these the word of God—with of course the guidance and enablement of the Holy Spirit—can assist the pastor who has studied it. By this we do mean that the pastor will not always open a Bible or simply quote Scriptures but will give to those who need it the wisdom God gives through His word. The pastor himself will be given the wisdom he needs for his own vocation, prayer, devotion, godly living and true pastoral operations.

6

The Proclamation of the Word

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROCLAMATION

A look at a Greek concordance will show that some six verbs are used regularly in the New Testament which have very much the same meaning, and are linked with the proclamation of the Gospel. They are *annagelo* (report), *apagello* (bring tidings), *diaggello* (proclaim), *euaggelizo* (bring good news), *kataggello* (proclaim, announce), and *kerysso* (proclaim). *Ginomia* (come to be, happen, be) and *gnorizo* (to make known) are used only once. What is common about all of them is that they constitute something, i.e. a message, which has authority and demands attention, evaluation and decision on the part of the hearer.

For the preacher who is announcer and proclaimer this has significance. His proclamation is not from himself. It is from God, and through the preacher God demands a response. The proclamation, truly given is always effective, i.e. either for acceptance and obedience or for rejection and (so) disobedience.

THE AUTHORITY FOR PROCLAMATION

This is seen clearly in Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth *has been given to me*. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that [have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'.

In Luke 24:44f., Mark 16: 15f., John 20:20-23 and Acts 1:8 much the same claim and information is given. In Acts 1:2 is a commentary on these passages, i.e. Jesus gave commandments through the Holy Spirit, and ended by saying (Acts 1:8) that when the Spirit came upon them they would receive power and witness to him throughout the world. The authority was Christ's but then that authority was under the Father. Thus the Christian proclaimer—whoever he or she may be—goes in the authority of the Father and the Son. Romans 10:15 asks, 'And how can men preach unless they are sent?'. This Scripture shows that *none can go authentically until sent*: then *that one has full authority*, and must be listened to as he proclaims. One

would normally conclude that a person ordained to the pastoral ministry has authentically, been sent.

RESPONSIBILITY WITH AUTHORITY

All authority carries responsibility. When one is responsible for proclaiming the word of God then that is the greatest responsibility of all. Such a one must have the mind of God, and of Christ, and walk with the utmost humility, never deflecting from the word, and never inserting the word of man, no matter how attractive and wise it may sound. The following quotes show us how solemn and responsible a thing it is to proclaim the true word of God, the living truth as it is in Him:

Divine revelation is more than the disclosure of supernatural knowledge concerning the nature and purposes of God. (R. H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of True Preaching*, p. 151.)

Revelation is the self-bestowal of the living God... God in the act of imparting Himself. (P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 10.)

... we are now more aware that it is God Himself Who speaks in the proclamation. Preaching is not talking about God. It is allowing God to talk. The words of the preacher are simply the medium through which the Divine Word comes. It is God who speaks. (Mounce, *op. cit.* p. 154.)

Preaching is the immediate, powerful, personal self-communication of the eternal Word to men. (C. K. Barrett, *Biblical Preaching and Biblical Scholarship*, p. 4.)

Preaching has a single purpose, that Christ might come to those who are assembled to listen. (Gustaf Wingren, *Prediken; en principiell studie*, p. 296, quoted by Mounce).

As the preacher proclaims the divine act of redemption, the barriers of time are somewhat transcended and that supreme event of the past is again taking place. God's historic self-disclosure has become a present reality. (Mounce, *op. cit.* p. 153.)

Preaching does more than recount and explain the ancient event. The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event now transpiring, and the preaching is a medium of the Spirit's action in doing so. In the preaching, when it is truly itself, the event is continuing or recurring. God's revealing action in Christ is, still or again, actually taking place. (John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching*, p. 92.)

Preaching is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself. (P. T. Forsyth, *op. cit.* p. 3.)

Only authentically biblical preaching can be really relevant; only vitally relevant preaching can be really biblical. (John Knox, *op. cit.* p. 27.)

... there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (Jeremiah 20:9.)

... you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (Paul, I Thess. 2:13.)

THE MODE OF PROCLAMATION

If we keep in mind that the proclamation is not only the word given by the proclaimer, but is in the context of the whole church in its witnessing role as the kerugmatic, prophetic, priestly, and royal community, living in love and fellowship, endowed with the gifts of ministry and the other gifts (charismata) then we can see, again, that there is

a context in which proclamation is made. Not only are those addressed by the word expected to respond, but they are invited into the holy community—Christ’s body, the church.

We have a good picture of the apostolic mode in Romans 15: 14-21. In particular let us look at verses 18-19:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit...

From this we can see the order, (a) word and deed, (b) the power of signs and wonders, (c) the power of the Holy Spirit. We do not have time here to go into this subject but see my book on *God and His People in Signs and Wonders* (NCPI, 1988). Briefly we can say that when Paul preached, deeds accompanied that proclamation, i.e. (i) Paul and his companions lived in godliness and love, suffered without complaint and ‘adorned the teaching’, (ii) others heard, responded, were saved and formed a new church, showing the same spirit as the proclaimers who had come to them, (iii) on many occasions—if not all— God attested to the word proclaimed by doing signs and wonders (eg. Acts 14:3) which thus showed (a) the power of God, and (b) the authentic ministry of the proclaiming team, and (c) all of this was through and by the power of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the word, the deeds, and the signs and wonders.

Down through the history of the church there have been times when Paul’s mode has been reproduced, especially in revivals, and more often in revivals or the initial

preaching of the Gospel in the third world. Even so we should have faith and expectancy that God will attest to our proclamation, and that it will be proven fruitful.

THE POWER OF PROCLAMATION

While we have partly dealt with this subject in chapter three of this section, we have to see that terms such as ‘Gospel’, ‘word of the Cross’ and ‘the word of grace’, all insist on the innate power of the word. Whilst I Thessalonians 1:5 says, ‘...our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction’, he is not inferring that ‘word only’ means the word lacks power, but that the word was not preached apart from the Spirit. The word cannot really be authentically preached apart from the Spirit, for this constitutes the one act of proclamation.

It is also interesting to notice ‘the word of grace’, for grace was (i) the saving word (Acts 15:11; 18:27; 20:24), (ii) the word which kept them living in the new life (Acts 13:43; 20:32). The terms ‘grace’ and ‘the word of his grace’ were identical: thus when anyone was ‘commended to the grace of God’ (Acts 14:26; 15:40), this was the same as being ‘commended to the word of His grace’ (20:32; cf. 14:3). This means that there is no difference between ‘grace’ and ‘the word of God’, for God is ‘both Speaker and Doer’ grace never being absent from Him. Thus ‘the word of grace’ and ‘the word of God’ are one as can be seen from Romans 1: 16-17; I Corinthians 1: 18; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; I Peter 1:12; and Hebrews 4:12.

7

Conclusion to our Studies on the Word of God

We can see that if we are not convinced of the word of God, and do not stand in awe and trembling before it (Isa. 66:2, 5; Ps. 119: 120; Jer. 5:22; Ezra 9:4; 10:3, 9), then we will not be under the word and so will not speak with authority or true effect. If we seek to induce the same results that would accompany the preaching of the word by means other than the word, then those results will not stand. We will have to continue to use human methods, human words, and human exhortation. Whilst we can get fairly calculable results from human planning, they cannot be said to come from the word of God.

For these reasons we need to return to the word of God, live in it, and proclaim it in truth.

APPENDIX

The Practical Elements of Preaching

In our study we have been concerned primarily with the principles of preaching. This may be disappointing to those who looked for helpful advice on the very art of preaching. The following observations may, then, prove helpful.

PREPARATION

The old advice, 'Pray, prepare, ponder and present', stands good. It has been said that the pulpit should not drive us to the text, but the text to the pulpit. Certainly the preacher has to live in his message so that his message may live in him, and then come from him to others. The first period of preparation should be pondering. Out of pondering comes form and structure, and this is the basis for further

meditation, until the 'bones are fleshed', and the message is indeed living. The personal preparation may be greatly helped by consulting others. All aids should be used, but these are best used towards the final period of preparation rather than in the initial period.

AIDS FOR THE PREACHER

The best possible text of the Bible should be used. The use of numerous translations can be ultimately confusing. A concordance is essential. Bagster's *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* is very helpful for references. Most Bibles are limited in their reference column. Good Bible dictionaries are helpful. Commentaries on the text need to be chosen carefully. Aids to the Greek and Hebrew text are available, but should not be quoted dogmatically. The grammar, syntax, and thrust of the Scriptures cannot always be ascertained by literal translation or lexicon meanings. Those who have to pronounce on these things are generally scholars, who in any case know the languages of Hebrew and Greek.

STYLE

As we have commented, this is native to each preacher. He may for a time fashion himself upon another preacher but ultimately his own style will assert itself. He should accept this, develop and refine it.

MODES OF PREACHING

Style to some degree is dictated by the disposition and temperament. Some persons are inhibited from using emotion, bodily movements and expressions, humour, wit, irony, etc. Others are not. Some are extroverted persons, some introverted. However, the word preached should dictate the use of the elements mentioned. *Voice* is the most important of all, with its great range of emotional expression. Nothing surpasses the audio-visual powers of a human person. Extroverts may need to learn to curb some of their natural expression, and introverts may need to overcome their inhibitions. The preaching is what matters; not the natural predilections of the preacher. Style and mode become the one when preaching is developed. It is encouraging to know that Paul was 'in weakness and fear and much trembling' yet at the same time 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power'. Doubtless Paul did not so much tremble because of the audience but for it, and his responsibility in preaching to it!

CONTEXTUALIZATION

We have seen that there is contextualization of the preacher and his subject. He must be congruous with the cultural context, the age context, the level-of-intellect context, and so on. There are always limits to what he can do in this respect. However, the best contextualization is his actual text. The old saying, 'Any text out of context is

only a pretext' is true enough. To put a text into context may be a demanding matter. It has its local context, i.e. where it is placed, but then it has a wider context, i.e. of the chapter, the argument, the description, and then of the whole book in which it is placed. It may require an historical, geographical, and even a cultural context. This contexting requires a study of hermeneutics, i.e. the principles of interpretation. No preacher need be dismayed by this wide demand for contextualization. Much of it will prove simple and natural. One must avoid reading something *into* his text, so that he can preach *out of that!* Exegesis is the art of seeking context, knowing the grammar, the meaning of words, their relationship—all in the widest context as well as in the narrowest. *Exposition* is, roughly speaking, the application of exegesis from its narrowest to its broadest meaning. Exposition may call in the aid of other related Scriptures, topics, themes, etc.

DELIVERY OF SERMONS

Should a sermon be written and then read word for word? Should there be merely notes, and these referred to? Should preaching be prepared or purely extempore? Should it be off the cuff? We need, here, to define terms. Some sermons are given off the cuff but it has taken decades, often, to prepare them! The answer to all the questions: 'Whatever is necessary!' Lack of preparation is inadmissible. 'Yakking' is disgraceful. Great concern for the audience, and sense of responsibility and awe towards

the word will demand preparation. Sometimes this is not possible. It is assumed the Spirit of God will help in this case (Matt. 10:20) but never will he support laziness. Written sermons which are read have proved dynamic (eg. Jonathan Edwards, E. A. Litton, etc.). Others have proved to be horribly boring. Likewise sermons delivered with or without notes. Actual delivery should be in accordance with the true style of the preacher but aggressiveness, rancour, bitterness, domination, timidity and fear should not be used. One of the abominations of preaching is the heavy moralistic style which generally proceeds from legalism. 'Preachiness' is inexcusable. The early church delivered homilies, but there was generally an interchange of preacher and audience (cf. Acts 17:3, 'explaining and proving', 19:8, 'arguing and pleading'). All delivery should be given in love, without which all is empty (I Cor. 13: 1). Love of course may chastise and rebuke as well as exhort and encourage.

THE AIM OF A SERMON

How does one choose a subject or theme? Many factors may condition this. Some subjects just simply come. Often the time, the audience and the situation obtaining determine the theme. The preacher must know his people and their needs and preach accordingly. He has the great themes of theology which are never dull, never outmoded or oldfashioned, eg. God! He will know whether to speak of salvation, assurance, Christian holiness, justification,

church-relationships, world responsibility, the end-things, or the now-things. Some preachers expound Scripture, others take themes. Some have series, some seek to be topical. Some preach systematic theology, others biblical theology. Some are general, others reductionist, i.e. see the local thing rather than the general. The aim therefore will be determined by many of these factors. Certain factors may change this aim either before preaching or during it. There will be both objective and subjective evaluations of situations, audiences, etc. Many preachers involve themselves in the sense of 'witness'.

The second thing which will determine the aim will be the category of the preaching, whether *kerugma* (i.e. to those who need to come to redemption) or *kerugma-didache* (those having come, needing to be kept in the good news, but taught in life), *didache* (direct teaching), or *didache-marturia* (i.e. taught, and taught to witness, indeed to be involved in proclaiming *kerugma*). Preaching does not fit neatly into any one of these areas, but then they are all in the true preacher's mind. He cannot opt out of proclamation of the Gospel, anymore than he can limit his ministry to *kerugma*. It is the whole counsel of God which has to be proclaimed by the whole church. The preacher must find his place, time, and opportunity within this context of preaching. There is also the use of *apologia*, i.e. 'the defence and confirmation of the Gospel'. This will be primarily towards those outside, creating a climate for true communication. Sometimes, also, it has to be directed towards those inside the church. Summing up we may say that subject-matter determines the aim, and likewise the aim the subject-matter.

SOME SPECIAL AIDS FOR PREACHERS

The advent of radio, films, audio-records and video-recorders has brought a new world to the preacher. If he can front up to these he will learn much about his preaching. Radio causes a man to listen to himself and find out how long is a pause, how nasal a voice, how hurried is some speech, and how rambling is some speaking. The tape—or cassette-recorder is an enormous boon. The preacher can play himself over and over again, listening to the sound of his voice, and picking out his own faults and excellencies. He can learn much about pitch, volume and the like. Even more helpful is the video-recorder. The preacher can see himself, noticing his eyes, his hand and facial gestures, the use of his body, and his personal idiosyncrasies. He can learn even more from these aids than from the critiques of his friends.

In preaching, most today have the help of the microphone and amplifier. This does away with the need to shout, strain the voice, and seek to gain contact with a far-distant audience. Good lighting and a microphone can do wonders for any preacher. The preacher should be alert to the best situation in which to speak, particularly when he may be placed without the aid of a lectern or pulpit. Some prefer it this way. Others like to rest notes, bible and visual objects on a pulpit or lectern. Some preachers always bring with them a portable lectern which they can erect without trouble. Some like the use of an overhead projector and screen. None of these things is wholly essential, but often they are greatly helpful. If the preacher is not 'at ease' neither is the audience.

SOME SIMPLE 'DO'S' AND 'DONT'S'

Don't scream, roar, bellow, bully, bluster, berate, rumble, mumble, whisper, waffle, wander.

Don't pontificate, patronise, pamper, become impersonal, show servility, obsequiousness, use difficult words, become demagogic, loftily aloof, speak too rapidly, too slowly, use high-flown language, theological jargon, be insincere, dishonest, mystical, obscure. Don't pose as 'the Oracle'.

Do be—as the true mood takes you—serene, joyful, enthusiastic, bold, logical, quiet, patient, assured, humble, simple, clear in argument, sympathetic and empathetic.

Don't overplay idiosyncrasies, roll your eyes, pick your nose, fiddle with your ears, rub your eyes, wring your hands, drop your voice, open and button your clothes, scratch your head, suck your teeth, grimace (except when acting a scene), or any such thing.

Do be careful that you use your body properly. Get everything out of your voice by varying the levels of volume, pitch, timbre. Use your smile, your frown, your awe, wonder, astonishment, humour and pathos.

Don't deliberately work people up, make them insensible of logic, turn them against the intellect, draw them into emotionalism, play on their feelings, make fools of them, cause them to make decisions they will regret, or which are premature in their case.

Do remember you are the servant of God, entrusted with the most powerful message and ministry of all time. Do remember to rest upon God, be dependent on the Holy Spirit, be faithful to the truth, truthful in the faith, unambitious, never playing with politics.

Do remember to tremble, and to live in continual astonishment of the whole of the grace of God.

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