

PREACHING CHRIST
PREPARATION: PREPARING TO PREACH

INTRODUCTION

This course is entitled “Preaching Christ.” It is divided into two main parts. Firstly, there are a number of introductory lectures which will examine the fundamentals of preaching the Gospel. The second and most substantial part of the course will focus on “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament.”

This first lecture will examine the necessary convictions which any man must have before he begins to preach. We are looking then at “Preparation.”

The preacher is a man of conviction. It is therefore vital that His convictions be right convictions. Let us consider three areas where the preacher’s convictions must be right; the preacher and his God, the preacher and his Bible, and the preacher and his people.

I. THE PREACHER AND HIS GOD

If you are a preacher you must have certain clear convictions about your relation to God

1. A sinner saved by the grace of God

The pendulum of your heart must be continually swinging between two states. You must know that you are a hell-deserving sinner with a deceitful and desperately wicked heart; and you must know that you are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ through faith in His blood. The further and faster the pendulum swings between these two convictions the happier and healthier will be your preaching. No one has a right to preach who is not totally and utterly convinced of his own sinful misery and of Christ’s saving mercy.

2. A sinner sent by the grace of God

Paul not only speaks of being saved by the grace of God, but also of being “sent” by the grace of God. “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph.3:8). Paul’s divine “sending” also implies a divine “calling.”

This is not the place to enter in a detailed way into the “call to the ministry.” However, suffice to say that the preacher should have two calls – the one internal and the other external – the exact nature of these calls varying from person to person. In general we can say that the internal call is a burden or longing to preach based on right motives – the desire to obey God, to edify God’s people, and to save souls. The external call is the church’s confirmation of the internal call and involves the church’s examination of the preacher’s motives, gifts and Christian experience.

The main point here is to maintain a constant sense of the divine call – when preparing to preach, when preaching, and when reflecting on the results of your preaching. This will set another pendulum swinging in your heart. It will swing from humility – resulting from the knowledge that it is divine mercy not human merit that has made you a preacher, to authority – resulting from the knowledge that God has commissioned you.

3. A sinner supplied with the gifts of God

Not only is the preacher saved by God's grace, and sent by God's grace, but he is also gifted by God's grace. A man can be gifted without being called and sent, but a man cannot be called and sent without being gifted. God supplies both the calling and the gifts to fulfil that calling.

What kind of gifts will be present in the preacher?

a. A strong self-discipline

The preacher has no "boss," no supervisor or manager. This means that he is able to do as little or as much as he desires in whatever areas he chooses. This is why so many lazy and undisciplined men have been attracted to the ministry. And, this is why, when a man is truly called of God to the ministry, he is divinely equipped with an ability to organise and discipline himself to do his duty, even when there is no one to check up on him

b. A love of studying

Paul admonished the young preacher, Timothy: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine... Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (1 Tim.4:13; 2 Tim.2:15). As the core of the preacher's task is the study of God's Word, God will usually bless the preacher with a love of studying.

c. An ability to communicate

Al Martin said the preacher, "must not only have a grasp upon the truth, but the ability to convey the truth, with conviction and with convincing authority."¹ God will therefore usually bless the preacher with a clear mind and a clear voice, resulting in a clear message from God to men. God does not send messengers who confuse and bamboozle His people with displays of their learning – or their lack of it.

d. A love of people

There are many preachers who love their studies but wish they never had to come out of them. They love preparing sermons, lectures, and addresses but seem to wish they did not need a congregation to deliver them to. The God-sent messenger loves the people God has given to him. He enjoys visiting the flock and feeding the flock.

The gifts summarised above, and others, must be cultivated, stirred up, and developed (1 Tim.4:14; 2 Tim.1:6). J W Alexander said: "I fear none of us apprehend as we ought to do the value of the preacher's office. Our young men do not gird themselves for it with the spirit of those who are on the eve of a great conflict; nor do they prepare as those who are to lay their hands upon the springs of the mightiest passions, and stir up to their depths the ocean of human feelings."²

4. A sinner summoned to the bar of God

"Preach the word" (2 Tim.4:2) was Paul's last charge to Timothy and it was given in the context of the final judgment (v1). Paul's whole ministry was conducted in the awesome shadow of the last day. Knowing he would one day be called to give an account of his life

¹ A Martin, *Prepared to Preach* (Strathpine North, Covenanter Press, 1986), 89.

² J W Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 9.

and ministry he said: “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward men*” (Acts 24:15-16).

Al Martin said: “Next to the presence of Christ, there is no greater companion to the minister than that of a good conscience. To have the Lord at your side and a peaceful conscience in your breast – these are the preacher’s two greatest companions.”³

A constant awareness of the final judgment will help you to shun ignorance, levity, indiscretion, dishonesty, laziness, vanity, and self-seeking. It will make you zealous, energetic, disciplined, prayerful, sober, and faithful.

Application

Clear convictions about who has saved you, sent you, and supplied you with gifts will breed a deep-seated and essential humility before God.

The conviction that you are a divinely commissioned messenger will make you study with diligence and speak with clarity, authority, and sobriety, knowing that one day you will be called to give an account to the One who sent you.

“My dear young friend, if there is anything you would rather be than a preacher of the gospel; if you regard it as a ladder to something else; if you do not consider all your powers as too little for the work; be assured you have no right to hope for any usefulness or even eminence.”⁴

II. THE PREACHER AND HIS BIBLE

God, in his mercy, has spoken and continues to speak to humanity through his works of creation and providence. While this “general” revelation makes known God’s goodness, wisdom, and power, it is not enough to show a sinner the way of salvation. Consequently, in a further display of his mercy, God made a “special” revelation of this necessary extra knowledge, to carefully chosen spokesmen, through theophanies, audible voices, dreams, visions, etc. As a preacher you must have certain clear convictions about this special revelation.

1. The Inspiration of Scripture

Firstly you must believe that God, by a mighty work of the Holy Spirit, has infallibly secured an accurate and permanent written record of these special revelations in the Old and New Testaments. This work of the Holy Spirit, often called inspiration, secures an infallibility which extends to every word of Scripture, including those parts which make historical or scientific claims.

2. The Authority of Scripture

In a day when Scripture is being questioned and undermined as never before and when everyone regards his own opinion as authoritative, it is essential that the preacher be absolutely convinced of the ultimate authority of Scripture. The preacher must understand and communicate that the words he preaches are not his own, but God’s, and that as such they are not optional but binding on all. “The Bible is the absolute standard of truth

³ A Martin, *Prepared to Preach* (Strathpine North, Covenanter Press, 1986), 27

⁴ J W Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 105.

(matters of faith) and the absolute rule for living (matters of practice).”⁵ Like the Master, you must teach “as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mat.7:29).

3. The Sufficiency of Scripture

The preacher must be convinced that the Word of God Bible is God’s all- and only-sufficient method of saving sinners and sanctifying saints (Heb.4:12-13; Rom.10:14ff). As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (WCF 1.8).

4. The Interpretation of Scripture

Although there are difficult passages of Scripture, the preacher must be convinced that, “Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” (WCF 1.7).

Michael Barrett said “God has made enough of His Word so crystal clear that only blind and blatant disbelief will not understand. He has made enough of His Word so deep that even the most faithful must depend on His enlightenment, rather than intellect.”⁶

Application

Clear and constant convictions regarding Scripture will motivate reading, study and enjoyment of it. As a preacher, you must have a systematic plan of regularly reading through the whole Bible, with a portion from both the Old and New testaments being read each day. Dedication and application are needed if you are to find the truths essential to our faith and practice, as well as to your calling.

R C Sproul said: “We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.”

“The liveliest preachers are those who are most familiar with the Bible...The Bible is, after all, the one book of the preacher. He who is most familiar with it, will become most like it; and this in respect to every one of its wonderful qualities; and will bring forth from its treasury things new and old.”⁷

⁵ M P Barrett, *Beginning at Moses* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2001), 5.

⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

⁷ J W Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 12.

III. THE PREACHER AND HIS PEOPLE

The preacher must have convictions about His relationship to the people he is to preach to.

1. You are similar

The preacher must never imagine that he is better than his hearers. He may well be “less than the least of all saints.” So, he is what he is by the grace of God – saved, sent and supplied by grace. The awareness that “I am not better than them” will produce humility, sympathy, watchfulness, and a willingness to accept constructive criticism.

2. You are different

Though not by nature better than his hearers, the preacher must be different from his hearers. This is not an argument for aloofness and detachment. However, to whomsoever much is given, much shall be required; and much has been given to the preacher. He must be an example to his hearers and set higher standards than the norm.

Aristotle said that the secular orator must establish with his hearers a character for discretion, or knowledge or judgment; second, for probity; and third, for benevolence, or good-will toward them. If this is true in the secular how much more in the sacred realm. “Without a sacred weight of character, the most splendid rhetoric will win only a short-lived applause; with it, the plainest scriptural instructions are eloquent to win souls. Eloquence may dazzle and please; holiness of life convinces... The pastor’s character speaks more loudly than his tongue.”⁸

Application

By holding the seeming paradox of similar yet different, you will set forth “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim.4:12), while maintaining a humble, approachable and sympathetic spirit.

⁸ R L Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 261.