

God's Powerful Purposes in Preaching

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As a Professor of Homiletics, my working definition of preaching, regularly reviewed with my classes, is as follows. Preaching is God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, communicating His truth in our world to people in the pew through human instruments in order to change their thinking, bridle their emotions, and alter their wills for the purpose of converting sinners, sanctifying saints, and preparing people for heaven. My objective in this paper is to validate this definition both biblically and confessionally and thus to display God's powerful purposes in preaching.

Before going to the definition of preaching, a word about the ordinary context of preaching is in order. Preaching is one of the elements of worship. Since this is the case, the ordinary context for preaching is an assembly of God's people gathered for worship. This in itself carries huge implications. Consider 2 Corinthians 6:16. Paul reminds the body of believers at Corinth, "We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.'"¹ The New Testament temple or dwelling place of God is the church assembly gathered for worship. Including himself with the Corinthians, Paul emphatically says, "We are the temple of the living God." Paul affirms this great truth in Ephesians 2:19-22.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Just as the whole church is "being fitted together" and "growing into a holy temple," so too, the local congregation at Ephesus, as well as all other local congregations, is being built "into a holy

¹ All Scripture references are from the *New American Standard Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

temple in the Lord.” The apostle Peter reminds his readers, “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Going back to 2 Corinthians 6:16, Paul gives God’s purpose for dwelling among His people gathered before Him in worship. In doing so, he confirms the truth that the local assembly is a special dwelling place of God in the Spirit. He does this with a use of Leviticus 26:11-12. “Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.”² Paul affirms that God’s ancient covenant promise applies to the New Testament church. That is, as God’s people come together for worship, God commits Himself to be graciously present in the worshipping assembly. God says to His people gathered before Him in worship, “I will be your God and you shall be my people.” God declares He will dwell with His people to confirm that they do belong to Him and that He is indeed their God. The great God of heaven stoops low to dwell among His people gathered before Him in worship. He does so to affirm and to confirm His covenant promise and word with His people. He does so to apply His covenant word to the hearts of His people. It is in the context of worship, where God is present to confirm His covenant with His people, that we have the privilege of preaching or hearing the preaching of God’s covenant word.

Keeping in mind the context of worship and God’s purpose in worship, we begin to unfold the definition of preaching. Preaching is God, Father Son, and Holy Spirit, communicating In its essence, preaching is the activity of the Triune God. We ought not to think of the involvement of only the Father in the preaching moment. The work of the Spirit and the work of Christ are of equal importance and relevance. Since preaching is God communicating, we rightly speak of preaching as *the word of God*. Sixteenth century Puritan,

² Paul conflates this text in 2 Corinthians 6:16.

William Perkins, goes so far as to say, “Preaching the Word is prophesying in the name and on behalf of Christ.”³ Few of us on the contemporary scene equate, even earnest preaching, with prophesying. Stephen Marshall drafted the section on preaching in *The Directory for Worship*. He declares, “The preaching of the Word is the *Scepter* of Christ’s Kingdom, the *glory* of a Nation, the *Chariot* upon which life and salvation comes riding”⁴ Marshall then laments, “What little care hath the State in general taken to provide that *Christ* might ride in Triumph upon his *white horse*: that the Word of God might spread into every corner of the Land?”⁵ Marshall has in mind the first of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. James Durham, a contemporary Puritan, comments on Revelation 6:2. “By this type, is understood the flourishing estate of the Gospel, and the spreading estate of the church by it after our Lord’s Ascension, as it were, Christ in the Ministry of His Word, going out to conquer souls and prevailing.”⁶ Thomas Goodwin, a Westminster Divine, is of the same mind regarding Revelation 6:2. “That in the first seal is the ‘going forth’—the preaching of the gospel—‘conquering and to conquer’. . . .”⁷

Preaching is prophesying. It is a form of the word of God. Preaching is Christ riding forth in triumph. But how is preaching a form of the Word of God? That is, in what sense do the Westminster Divines view preaching as God communicating? William Gouge answers. “That which ministers do or ought to preach is styled the word of God in a fourfold respect.”⁸ First, after dealing with extraordinary ministers, Gouge says, “As for ordinary ministers, they have God’s word written and left upon record for their use. . . . They therefore that ground what they

³ William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 7.

⁴ Stephen Marshall, *A Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons, at their Public Fast, November 17, 1640* (London: J. Oaks, 1641), 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ James Durham, *A Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation* (Willow Street, PA: Old Paths Publications, 2000), 432.

⁷ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, An Exposition of the Revelation* (Eureka, CA: Tanski Publications, 1996), 3:30.

⁸ William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 1072.

preach upon the Scripture, and deliver nothing but what is agreeable thereunto, preach the word of God.”⁹ In this same vein, William Greenhill, another Westminster Divine, connects preaching and prophesying. “If men preach or prophesy anything which is not from the Spirit, but from themselves, it is not acceptable to God, neither should be entertained by us.”¹⁰ In addition, when men preach what is agreeable to the word of God it necessitates a high regard for “the subject-matter which they preach, which is the will of God,” a high regard for “the end of preaching, which is the glory of God, and making known ‘the manifold wisdom of God,’ Eph. iii. 10,” and a high regard for “the mighty effect and efficacy thereof, for preaching God’s word is ‘the power of God unto salvation, Rom i. 16.’”¹¹ Preaching is therefore styled the word of God when it is agreeable to Scripture and sets forth the will of God, for the glory of God, in the power of God. Greenhill therefore makes this observation. “*God’s word* shall not be in vein, which is given out against hard-hearted sinners.”¹²

In this light, recall God’s presence and purpose to apply His covenant word to His covenant people in the context of worship. Preaching on the words, “The LORD is with you when you are with Him” (2 Chronicles 15:2), Stephen Marshall reminds his listeners, “[T]he *presence* intended in this text is God’s presence in the *Covenant of Grace*, in which he is so joined with a people, that they also are joined unto Him.” One of the means God uses to join His people to Him in His gracious presence is preaching or prophesying. Ezekiel 37:10 reads, “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived.” William Greenhill makes this observation.

Here was prophecy used, but that did not work without God: “Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and ye shall live.” God could have done this without prophecy, but that was the means he would use and work in or by. We must not

⁹ Gouge, 1072.

¹⁰ William Greenhill, *An Exposition of Ezekiel* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 299.

¹¹ Gouge, 1072-1073.

¹² Greenhill, 521. Italics added.

neglect means, and leave all to God, that is tempting the Most high; neither must we trust to means when used, that is to idolize a creature: but we must use means and look to God to be all in them (for without him nothing is done); and if we make him all in the means, we shall make him all after them.¹³

Preaching agreeable to Scripture setting forth the will of God, for the glory of God, in the power of God *is* the word of God. Preaching is God communicating His truth. We do not speak metaphorically.

Romans 10:14 validates this claim and the posture of the Westminster Divines. “How will they believe Him¹⁴ whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” Commenting on this text, John Murray observes, “A striking feature of this clause is that Christ is represented as being heard in the gospel when proclaimed by sent messengers. The implication is that Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation.”¹⁵ “Therefore,” says Jeremiah Burroughs, another Westminster Divine, “however you may look upon the instruments that bring it or open it to you, as your equals or inferiors, yet know there is an authority in the word that is above you; it is ‘the word of the Lord.’”¹⁶ In other words, the exalted Christ continues to execute His prophetic office “in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.”¹⁷ Preaching is *God communicating* His truth.

Continuing, preaching worthy of the name is God communicating *His truth*. As already observed, such preaching is agreeable to Scripture and sets forth the will of God. In other words, a core issue is the proclamation of God’s truth from Scripture. Peter exhorts, “Since you have in obedience to the *truth* purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22, italics added). The truth is the distilled teaching of

¹³ Greenhill, 741.

¹⁴ The NASB reads “in Him.” However, “There is no need to insert the preposition ‘in’ before ‘him’.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:58, n. 16.

¹⁵ Murray, 58.

¹⁶ Jeremiah Burroughs, *An Exposition of the Prophecy of Hosea* (Beaver Fall, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 3.

¹⁷ Westminster Shorter Catechism 24.

Scripture. It is the sense or meaning of Scripture or a text of Scripture. It is the *single* point or teaching emerging from a passage of Scripture. When you grasp the *truth* of a Scripture passage and set it down in a single statement or point, you have the truth of God. William Whitaker, who preceded the Westminster Divines, says, “We affirm that there is but one true, proper and genuine sense of scripture, arising from the words rightly understood, which we call literal. . . .”¹⁸ Whitaker defines what he means by literal. “The literal sense, then, is . . . that which arises from the words themselves, whether they be taken strictly or figuratively.”¹⁹ After arguing there are not differing senses or meanings of Scripture but “only various applications,”²⁰ Whitaker adds, “The sense of scripture, therefore, is but one,—the literal; for it is folly to feign many senses, merely because many things follow from the words of scripture rightly understood.”²¹

To hold there is but one meaning to any passage of Scripture is profoundly important. This is so for two important reasons. First, “it is only from the literal sense that strong, valid, and efficacious arguments can be delivered. . . .”²² Second, “it is certain that that which is derived from the words themselves is ever the sense of the Holy Spirit. . . .”²³ Preaching agreeable with Scripture setting forth the will of God must begin with the truth of God, “the literal or grammatical”²⁴ meaning of the Scripture text.

Stephen Marshall’s section on preaching in Westminster’s Directory for Worship reflects Whitaker’s hermeneutic. “The doctrine,” that is, the main point of the sermon, “is to be expressed in plain terms.”²⁵ The Directory reminds the preacher that, “In raising doctrines from the text, his care ought to be, *First*, That the matter be the truth of God. *Secondly*, That it be a

¹⁸ William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1849), 404.

¹⁹ Whitaker, 405.

²⁰ Whitaker, 406.

²¹ Whitaker, 408.

²² Whitaker, 409.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Whitaker, 406.

²⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1997), 379. Hereafter WCF.

truth contained in or grounded on that text. . . . *Thirdly*, That he chiefly insist upon those doctrines which are principally intended. . . .”²⁶ The preacher must make it his business to set forth the truth of God contained in or grounded on the text. Preaching is God communicating *His truth*.

Continuing with our definition, Preaching is God communicating His truth *in our world to people in the pew*. Again, the Directory for Worship instructs the preacher, “He is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application, to his hearers. . . .”²⁷ God’s target in preaching is the person in the pew. We see this in 1 Peter 1:22-23, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, [you] fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.” Notice Peter’s use of the second person. Individual men and women are born again through the instrumentality of the word of God. For this reason, the Directory for Worship reminds the preacher “he is to endeavor to perform it [his preaching] in such a manner that his auditors may *feel* the word of God. . . .”²⁸

There is a direct connection between the pulpit and the pew in the preaching moment. This is the divine dynamic. God chooses, by an act of His will, to cause His word to be effectual in the hearts of those who listen. “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth” (James 1:18). Our Lord states the result of this divine dynamic. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). Acts 16:14 gives us the picture. “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” As we

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ WCF, 380.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Italics added.

will note, God has proximate ends and ultimate goals for the people in the pew He chooses to attain, in large measure, through preaching.

This brings us to God's use of human instruments to affect His purposes. God communicates *through human instruments*. Here the Directory reminds the preacher he must perform his ministry: "As taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teacheth is the truth of Christ. . . ." ²⁹ We note two things. First, the preacher must be submissive to and fully embrace the truth he intends to proclaim. Taught of God himself, he is then qualified to teach and preach. His preaching is not theoretical but personally experimental. The preacher is himself persuaded and convicted of the truth. Second, the preacher knows what he delivers to the congregation is the truth of God; it is the truth of Christ. Such knowledge has a tempering effect. It causes him to refrain from "mixing his own passion or bitterness" with God's truth. ³⁰

Such knowledge also causes the preacher to humbly understand himself as God's instrument and preaching as God's means. Recall William Greenhill's observation regarding means. "We must not neglect means, and leave all to God, that is tempting the Most high; neither must we trust to means when used, that is to idolize a creature: but we must use means and look to God to be all in them (for without him nothing is done); and if we make him all in the means, we shall make him all after them." ³¹ Note Greenhill's balance. God does use means. But this is not to the exaltation of the instrument. We must "look to God to be all in them" if we truly desire to "make him all after them." "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth" (James 1:18).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism is quite explicit in its outline of God's use of means.

²⁹ WCF, 381.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Greenhill, 741.

Question 88: What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?

Answer: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Question 89: How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

Answer: The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Notice it is God's design to communicate the benefits of redemption through the means of preaching. Preaching is God communicating. The catechism also insists that God makes these means effectual. Here is the divine dynamic set in the context of worship where God in His gracious presence commits Himself to apply His covenant word to His people.

We now come to the ends God seeks in preaching. We first look at the proximate purposes or ends for preaching. Preaching is God communicating His truth in our world to people in the pew through human instruments *in order to change their thinking, bridle their emotions and alter their wills*. Here again we are talking about the benefits of redemption. Christ communicates His benefits by His Word and Spirit. As we have just seen, "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the *benefits of redemption* are, his ordinances, especially the Word. . ." (Emphasis added). Larger Catechism Question 58 asks, "How do we come to be made partakers of the benefits which Christ procured?" Answer: "We are made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured, by the application of them unto us, which is the work especially of God the Holy Ghost." Shorter Catechism Question 29 simply asks, "How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?" Answer: "We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit." The Spirit, using preaching as His instrument and means, effectually applies to the individual the benefits of redemption procured by Christ.

The Shorter Catechism outlines these benefits.

Question 29: How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?
Answer: The Spirit applied to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Question 30: What is effectual calling?

Answer: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

In other words, here are benefits God effectually applies to men and women through the instrumentality of preaching. These benefits include the enlightening of the mind, conviction, and the renewing of the will. These are God's powerful proximate purposes in preaching.

Broadly speaking, we are rational beings. We each have a mind, a thinking apparatus. We also have emotions. Conviction relates to emotions and conscience. When we do something wrong, we feel bad. Finally, we always act freely, in accordance with the desires of the will. The problem is the bent of the will. In speaking of the mind, emotions, and will, we have reference to the heart. Scripture sees the heart "as the center and source of the whole inner life w[ith] its thinking, feeling, and volition in the case of the natural man as well as the redeemed man."³² Preaching accomplishing God's purposes is directed to the heart. Therefore, Preaching is God communicating His truth in our world to people in the pew through human instruments *in order to change their thinking, bridle their emotions and alter their wills.*

With regard to the enlightening of the mind, 2 Corinthians 4:6 indicates, "God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." We can rightly translate this text, "God . . . has shone in our hearts for illumination of or to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."³³ First of all, Paul speaks of God, the creator and author of light,

³² William f. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 404.

³³ The prepositional phrase *πρὸς φωτισμὸν* indicates purpose: "for illumination" or "to bring light."

shining *in our hearts*. Second, we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, in Scripture. It is therefore important that we, along with the people in the pew, come to grips with Scripture. We must fill our minds with the Word of God. When this is the case, God may, by the power of His Spirit, come along and illumine His word in our hearts. If you shine a flashlight into a large dark cave or cavern, you see nothing except the beam of light fading into the darkness. There needs to be something for the light to shine on for us to see something. It is the same with the Spirit. The Spirit shines upon God's truth resident in the mind and then we "see." God therefore effectually calls "by His Word and Spirit."³⁴

Preaching should aim to provide Scriptural material leading to the enlightening of the mind. The Confession and both the Larger and Shorter Catechisms use Acts 26:18 as the proof for the concept of the enlightening of the mind. Christ commissions Paul to go to the Gentiles "*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*"³⁵ The Westminster *Annotations* comment, "This is attributed unto ministers, as instruments and ordinary means, the effect whereof is only in the Spirit of God, working thereon." Enlightening comes by Spirit *and* Word.

The proof for the phrase, 'convincing us of our sin and misery,' in the Shorter Catechism is Acts 2:37.³⁶ "Now when they heard this, *they were pricked in their heart*, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, *what shall we do?*"

The *Annotations* observe,

This is to the effect of Peter's sermon: first their consciences tell them that Jesus was the Messiah, of whose death they were guilty; and so liable to God's heavy judgment, who had cried out, his *blood be on us, and on our children*. Next they break out in confession of their crime, in that they ask Counsel of *Peter*, and the rest what they should now do, who could by no means undo what they had done.

³⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, 10:1.

³⁵ Scripture Proofs are in the *Authorized Version* with italics as given in WCF.

³⁶ Neither the Confession nor the Larger Catechism speaks of conviction under the head of Effectual Calling.

Peter's sermon was directed to the heart. The men and women of Jerusalem *felt* the force of his preaching under the influence of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. As a result, they were constrained to cry out. This conviction concerning the truth of Christ and of sin brought for confession. Westminster Divine Edward Reynolds therefore maintains we are to preach "so as to affect the conscience, and make powerful and awakening discoveries and impressions upon the practical judgment, which may not, by sophisms or subterfuges, be evaded or gainsaid."³⁷ God's purpose is to reign in evil and promote godly emotions. Preaching aims Scriptural truth at the heart to bridle and direct the emotions.

Larger Catechism 67 indicates God also works on men and women "by his word and Spirit" for the purpose of "renewing and powerfully determining their wills." In the determining of the will, the Catechism indicates we are "made willing and able to freely answer his call." That is, by the power of His Word and Spirit, God alters the inclination of the will. W.G.T. Shedd helps our thinking. "A man is commanded to have a holy inclination, and forbidden to have a sinful one. He is so commanded, when he is commanded to love God with all his heart."³⁸ Then he makes this very arresting statement, "Love is inclination."³⁹ In order to love God with all the heart, God must alter the disposition or inclination of the will.

The proofs to the Larger Catechism on this point are: Ezekiel 11:19, "And I will give them one heart, and I will *put a new spirit within you*; and I will *take the stony heart* out of their flesh, and will give them *an heart of flesh*." Ezekiel 36:26-27, "*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart* out of your flesh, and I will give you *an heart of flesh*. And I will *put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my*

³⁷ *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds, D.D.* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), 5:347.

³⁸ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 2:208.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” And John 6:45, “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be *all taught of God*. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath *learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*”

The Shorter Catechism references Ezekiel 36:26-27. In addition to the two Ezekiel passages, The Confession of Faith adds Philippians 2:13, “For it is *God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*” And Deuteronomy 30:6, “And the LORD thy God *will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*” With the use of these proofs, our confessional documents indicate that the focal point for change and the heart of effectual calling is the altering of the disposition or will.

Confirming this, in discussing effectual calling, both the Confession and the Larger Catechism indicate that the unregenerate, those who are not elect, are subject to certain *common operations* of the Spirit. Confession of Faith 10:4 states, “Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, *and may have some common operations of the Spirit*, yet they never truly come unto Christ . . .” Larger Catechism 68 uses similar language. “All the elect, and they only, are effectually called: although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, *and have some common operations of the Spirit*; who, for their willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ” (Italics added). The proofs illustrate these common operations of the Spirit. Matthew 7:22, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have *we not prophesied in thy name?* and in thy name have *cast out devils?* and in thy name *done many wonderful works?*” Those who are not elect may manifest prophetic gifts and perform miracles. Balaam, Saul, and Judas are examples. Matthew 13:20-21, “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, *and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not*

root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.” Those who are not elect may receive the word with joy, with some emotional fervor. Hebrews 6:4-5, “For it is impossible for those *who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.*” Those who are not elect may receive real light from God the Spirit and actually taste of the good things of the Spirit and of heaven. All of this makes their sin of turning their backs on Christ more heinous. Both Scripture and our Standards indicate unbelievers may receive enlightenment from the Spirit and experience conviction of sin and conviction regarding the truth. At the same time, God may refrain from altering their wills. This impinges directly on preaching.

First, much pulpit ministry today simply seeks to reach the mind. It majors in teaching. Preaching, so-called, simply aimed at enlightening the mind *may* have certain benefits. But too much pulpit ministry stops at this point. Second, many in the Reformed community shun affective preaching fearing manipulation of the emotions. However, Spirit born conviction regarding both sin and the truth has emotional content. On the other hand, preaching only designed to enlighten the mind and strike the emotions, although seemingly effective, may yet fall short of bringing about real lasting change. Third, God’s powerful purposes in preaching involve the enlightening of the mind, heartfelt conviction, *and* the altering of the will. The preacher must aim gospel arrows at the heart and trust God the Spirit to alter the wills of those listening. Psalm 45:3-5 speaks of Christ in these terms.

Gird Your sword on *Your* thigh, O Mighty One, *In* Your splendor and Your majesty! And in Your majesty ride on victoriously, For the cause of truth and meekness *and* righteousness; Let Your right hand teach You awesome things. Your arrows are sharp; The peoples fall under You; *Your arrows are* in the heart of the King's enemies.

And how does Jesus Christ ride forth shooting gospel arrows into the hearts of men and women? He does so in preaching. Remember Stephen Marshal who lamented, “What little care hath the State in general taken to provide that *Christ* might ride in Triumph upon his *white horse*: that the Word of God might spread into every corner of the Land?”⁴⁰ Preaching “is no small work . . . whereby the natural propensions [propensities] of men must be changed, and they effectually persuaded to hate what they loved, to love what they hated. . . .”⁴¹

We have been looking at God’s more proximate purposes for preaching. He also has ultimate goals. Shorter Catechism 31 gives the goal of effectual calling. “Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, *he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel*” (Italics added). The Spirit applies the redemption purchased by Christ in effectual calling.⁴² The specific goal of effectual calling is conversion. A primary outward means God uses to communicate the benefits of redemption is preaching.⁴³ Conversion is therefore a specific goal of preaching.

Further, Shorter Catechism 32 speaks of the benefits of effectual calling. They are, “justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life either accompany or flow from them.” Justification and adoption occur at conversion. Each is “an act of God’s free grace.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”⁴⁵ One of the proofs is 2 Thessalonians 2:13. “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation *through sanctification of the Spirit* and

⁴⁰ Marshall, 33.

⁴¹ Reynolds, 5:346.

⁴² Westminster Shorter Catechism 30.

⁴³ Westminster Shorter Catechism 88.

⁴⁴ Shorter Catechism 33 and 34.

⁴⁵ Shorter Catechism 35.

belief of the truth.” Notice the connection here between Spirit and Word. The *Annotations* suggest the text speaks of “sanctification wrought in you by the Spirit of God.” And further that “belief of the truth” refers to “Faith which layeth hold, not upon lies, but upon the truth of God, which is the Gospel.” Thomas Goodwin therefore maintains, “That the preaching of the gospel is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, instituted for the conversion of sinners, and for the edification of saints.”⁴⁶

But the Shorter Catechism goes on to rehearse further benefits that accrue to those who are called effectually by God’s Word and Spirit.

Question 37: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

Answer: The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united in Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.

Question: 38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

Answer: At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

The benefits believers receive as a result of effectual calling by the Word and Spirit include induction into glory in both soul and body. Since this is God’s purpose, it is the goal of preaching to prepare the church, the bride of Christ, for the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The powerful purposes of preaching are to change people’s thinking, bridle their emotions, and alter their wills for the purpose of converting sinners, sanctifying saints, and preparing people for heaven. If men and women are to be saved and receive righteousness from Christ, preaching is “the outward instrumental means to this righteousness and salvation.”⁴⁷

It is God’s word that doth convert, quicken, comfort, and build up, or, on the other side wound and beat down. What was the reason that there was so great and alteration made by the ministry of Christ and his disciples, by the apostles and others after them; yea, by Luther and other ministers of reformed churches? They preached not traditions of elders, as the scribes, nor men’s inventions, as papists,

⁴⁶ Goodwin, 11:359.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

but the pure word of God. The more purely God's word is preached, the more deeply it pierceth, the more kindly it worketh.⁴⁸

The Directory for Worship reminds us, "After reading of the word (and singing of the psalm,) the minister who is to preach, is to endeavour to get his own and his hearers hearts to be rightly affected with their sins" and "with remission of sins through the blood of Christ to pray for sanctification by his Spirit."⁴⁹ And then,

The sermon being ended, the minister is "To give thanks for the great love of God, in sending his Son Jesus Christ unto us; for the communication of his Holy Spirit; for the light and liberty of the glorious gospel, and the rich and heavenly blessings revealed therein; as, namely, election, vocation, adoption, justification, sanctification, and hope of glory. . . ."⁵⁰

God commits Himself to His church gathered for worship. Jeremiah Burroughs therefore urges, "Frequent the ordinances of God where the Spirit usually breathes. Set your souls before the work of God's Spirit. The Spirit breathes where it will, therefore it must be attended upon in those ways which it chooses."⁵¹ It is not only incumbent upon individuals in the congregation to place themselves "before the work of God's Spirit," it must be the posture of the preacher to place himself "before the work of God's Spirit." Why? Preaching is one of the ordinances "which it [the Spirit] chooses." "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation."⁵²

Because of this combined emphasis on Spirit and Word, Reynolds exhorts men in pulpit ministry.

⁴⁸ Gouge, 1073

⁴⁹ WCF, 377.

⁵⁰ WCF, 380.

⁵¹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Excellency of a Gracious Spirit* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 144.

⁵² Westminster Shorter Catechism 89.

Preach in good earnest, as those who seriously intend their own and their hearer's salvation. Preach not as at a rhetorician at a desk, only to tickle ears, and to play a prize; but as an advocate at a bar, to preserve a client, to save a soul. So convince of sin, the guilt, the stain, the dominion, the pollution of it, the curse and malediction whereunto the soul is exposed by it, that your hearers may be awakened, and humbled, and effectually forewarned to flee from the wrath to come. So convince of the all-sufficient righteousness, and unsearchable riches of Christ; the excellency of his knowledge; the unmeasurableness of his love; the preciousness of his promises; the fellowship of his sufferings; the power of his resurrection; the beauties of his holiness; the easiness of his yoke; the sweetness of his peace; the joy of his salvation; the hope of his glory; that the hearts of your hearers may burn within them, and they may fly, like doves unto their windows, for shelter and sanctuary into the arms of such a redeemer, who is able and willing to save to the uttermost those who come to God by him; that they may with all ready obedience, and by the constraining power of the love of Christ, yield up themselves to the government of this Prince of Peace, by whom the Prince of this world is judged and cast out, his works destroyed; and we for this end bought with a price, that we should not be our own, but his that bought us; nor live any longer to ourselves, but to him that loved us and died for us and rose again.⁵³

What are God's powerful purposes in preaching? Following Scripture and the Westminster Standards, my working definition of preaching gives God's powerful purposes. Preaching is God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, communicating His truth in our world to people in the pew through human instruments in order to change their thinking, bridle their emotions, and alter their wills for the purpose of converting sinners, sanctifying saints, and preparing people for heaven.

⁵³ Reynolds, 5:360-361.