

The Purpose Of Preaching

Introduction. A brief survey of the Bible reveals the primacy God has always attached to preaching (2 Corinthians 4:13). Noah not only prepared an ark, but he also was a preacher of righteousness (Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5). All of the Old Testament prophets were preachers who were charged with faithfully speaking forth the word of the Lord (Isaiah 58:1; Ezekiel 33:7).

When John the Baptist, the harbinger of Christ, appeared on the scene, he "came preaching in the wilderness of Judea" (Matthew 3:1-2). Following His baptism and temptation, Jesus began to preach (Matthew 4:17). All of the apostles were preachers of the gospel, and the pages of the New Testament are filled with a record of their work (Acts 3:12-26; 17:22-31), as well as that of many other preachers and teachers (Acts 11:19-21; cf. Romans 10:13-17).

Why did God choose preaching to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21-25)? What is the purpose of preaching? This is an extremely vital question and is deserving of a serious consideration of how it is answered in scripture.

I. **Why Do We Preach?**

A. To convict people of sin.

1. Christ said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). How does He convict people of sin? Prior to His ascension, Jesus told the apostles to go out and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47).
 - a) As a result of the preaching Christ, the people on Pentecost were "cut to the heart" and wanted to know what to do to be saved (Acts 2:37).
 - b) This New Testament example of conviction of sin was brought about by the preaching of the gospel.
2. The world today is still in need of being convicted of sin, for "there is none righteous, no, not one ... for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10-11, 23)!

B. To convert people to Christ.

1. Mankind not only needs to be convicted of sin, but they also need to be pointed to the Savior. Preaching should lift up Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Preaching must stress the importance of conversion to Christ -- of being changed from a life of serving Satan to a life of serving Christ (Matthew 18:3; Acts 3:19; Colossians 1:13).
2. Preaching should be for the purpose of informing sinners what to do to be saved. This is the message we find being preached in the

book of Acts. When men asked what to do, the response was simple (Acts 2:38; 8:5-12, 35-38).

3. The same divine message needs to be proclaimed today! The good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ needs to be heralded (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The conditions for responding to the gospel need to be clearly enunciated.
 - a) Faith in Christ (John 8:24; Acts 26:18).
 - b) Repentance of sin (Acts 3:19; 17:30).
 - c) Confession of faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10).
 - d) Immersion in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).
 4. Without compliance with these conditions, no accountable person can be saved. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the faithful preacher of the gospel to make these conditions crystal-clear.
- C. To confirm disciples in the faith.
1. It is not enough just to obey the primary commands of the gospel and become a Christian; one must be taught "to observe all things" (Matthew 28:20). After converting numerous people to the Lord and establishing congregations, Paul and Barnabas saw the need for confirming the disciples (Acts 14:22). To "confirm" means "to strengthen, ground, or stabilize" (cf. Acts 2:42).
 2. Disciples were warned of going beyond what is written and not abiding in the doctrine of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 John 9). They were exhorted to beware lest they be taken captive through philosophy and empty deceit (Colossians 2:8). They were to "hold fast" and "continue" (1 Corinthians 15:2; Colossians 1:23).
 3. In order for this to be accomplished, preaching must include both doctrinal and practical matters. Christians need to be taught how to bear fruit and live appropriately (Galatians 5:22-26; Titus 2:11-12). Christians also need to be grounded in the fundamentals of the faith -- the existence and nature of God, the deity of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the all-sufficiency of the gospel, the undenominational nature of the New Testament church, how one is saved and added to the church, and who, why, and how they are to worship.
- D. To conform souls to the image of Christ.
1. It has always been God's purpose for His people to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 12:2). Paul himself demonstrated this principle (Galatians 2:20). His intense desire for those he converted to Christ is shown in Galatians 4:19.
 2. This is the ultimate purpose of preaching -- to bring people into conformity with the likeness of Christ. This requires time and patience, and is an on-going process (2 Corinthians 3:18).

II. ***Some Alarming Observations***

- A. Sadly, some have turned away from the desire to convict people of their specific sins. I have met preachers who refuse to preach specific lessons on subjects such as dancing, gambling, or denominationalism. Instead, because they believe it is offensive, they prefer to simply give the subject a small, glancing blow as part of a broader subject or a discussion of a Bible text.
- B. Some are abandoning distinctiveness regarding the plan of salvation. Instead of impressing upon people the need to deny themselves and take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23-24), preachers can hardly get the word "repent" out of their mouths. This is demonstrated when, in sermon after sermon, the preacher extends a generic invitation ("if you have a need come forward") without specifying the spiritual need of the audience.
- C. It is alarming that in many places today basic truths are seldom taught from the pulpit or in Bible classes.
 - 1. Young people grow up and never hear lessons on why the church is not a denomination, why baptism is essential to salvation, why sprinkling and pouring do not constitute scriptural baptism, why we do not use instrumental music in worship, why we partake of the Lord's supper every Lord's day, etc. David Tarbet, a preacher for an institutional, church wrote, "Apostasy only comes after a long absence of decisive doctrinal preaching on subjects the church needs to hear. When the brethren are not reminded of the truth, they forget the reasons for opposing error and lose their convictions. Then change agents can begin the steps which inevitably lead to the adoption of instrumental music, women's leadership roles in worship, ecumenical fellowship, and open membership. It's been years in many congregations since there has been strong biblical teaching and preaching on these matters. Surely preachers and elders will be held accountable for what is not being taught that ought to be taught." We must preach what we practice!
 - 2. Everything many gospel preachers proclaim today may be true -- that is, they are not guilty of teaching any false doctrine -- but it is possible for one to preach what is true and still leave off much that needs to be taught!
- D. An Independent Christian Church preacher once remarked, "We talk a lot about preaching but actually mean the management of a congregation. Most of our preachers expect to increase attendance by providing services, not by a strengthened presence in the pulpit." Unfortunately, the same kinds of changes are starting to be seen in churches of Christ. There was a time when teaching and persuasion

were the hallmarks of our preaching, with a strong emphasis on "book, chapter, and verse." Once upon a time a man would stand before a congregation with 50 passages of scripture in his sermon. Now, too often, brethren may only hear 2-3 passages of scripture.

- E. But this kind of preaching is viewed as "old school" now and out of vogue. The current fad in preaching seems to be to go forth armed with a lot of interest-grabbing stories but with not too much in the way of Bible content.
1. Christians who are infatuated with a preacher's personality and style of presentation are ripe for digression (cf. Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1).
 2. Not surprisingly, with this new preaching style, people began to discover "new ways to interpret the Bible." In addition, many preachers from churches of Christ began to say that we are "a denomination among denominations," that immersion may not be the only acceptable "form" of baptism, that baptism may not really be "in order to" the remission of sins, and that instrumental music in worship is "just our tradition."

Conclusion. Tampering with the truth always corrupts it. Virtually every heresy to disrupt the church begins with the belief that, if we could just "change," the world would beat a path to our door. Furthermore, some truly believe that we cannot keep our young people unless we accommodate the times.

If preachers are to honor the divine purpose of preaching, they must not shrink from preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27; cf. Jeremiah 20:9). Both Jesus and Paul were committed to that purpose (John 6:66; Galatians 1:10). Preachers must hearken to sound words and rebuke when necessary (2 Timothy 1:13; 4:2; Titus 1:13; cf. Proverbs 29:18). We need to understand the divine purpose of preaching and make sure that the men who stand before you are committed to that purpose.