



THE ROLE OF PREACHERS IN THE LORD'S CHURCH

By A. Kay Gardner

The church of Christ seeks to restore the New Testament church. It is committed to following the biblical pattern in all things: doctrine, worship, work, organization, zeal and life. Its faithful preachers fill the God-ordained role of public proclaimers of the gospel. They heed the principles stated here.

PREACH THE GOSPEL

"Preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). The gospel must be preached! It is God's power to save sinners and the world's hope. It is spiritual light that scatters darkness; divine power that breaks down bulwarks of sin. Since Christ built his church there has been perpetual need for men, faithful and able, to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). This urgent need exists now; it always will.

Early Christians, evangelists and inspired apostles set the example. They were absorbed with an overwhelming passion to carry the message of a glorified Lord to their perishing fellow-men. With a crucified and risen Savior as the heart of the message, they preached it with amazing conviction and strong affection for the cross.

(1 Corinthians 2:2).

The church goes the way the pulpit goes. Soft, compromising preaching produces weak, wavering congregations. Every generation needs to hear the "Old Jerusalem" gospel. When blood-atonement is eliminated the pulpit is powerless; the pew is impoverished. The pulpit will be despised in an age when gospel truth is no longer honored.

PASTORS ARE SHEPHERDS--EVANGELISTS ARE PREACHERS

According to the Bible, pastors (elders) are to pastor (shepherd) the flock (Acts 20:28). Preachers (evangelists) are to preach (2 Tim. 4:1-4). Preachers who preach and pastors who pastor is the right way; it is God's divine plan. Here denominations have stumbled. When the evangelist is doing the pastoring, God's way is being ignored or rejected. Elders are to discharge their duty as caretakers of souls and should not appoint the preacher as their deputy to care for sick straying sheep. Shepherds do not nurse ill lambs by proxy.

Preachers are to labor in the word, preaching, teaching, exhorting (Colossians 1:24-29; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). Many preachers have played "pastor" so long it will take a while for them to become evangelists again.

Elevating the "Reverend Pastor" to a level above the "average" member in the Lord's body is a result of superficial thinking. Men who preach may be placed on a lofty pedestal by those whose minds are clouded, and conclusions are conditioned by a denominational thought-pattern. In God's sight the greatest person is the most faithful servant; not one who has

assumed an elevated position. Seemingly it is a basic paradox of Christianity that the way up is down (Matthew 20:25-28). One does not earn a high place before God by appropriating an impressive religious title.

RELIGIOUS TITLES NOT SCRIPTURAL

Distinctive dress and high-sounding titles feed clerical vanity that mocks the spirit of Christianity. Scribes and Pharisees delighted in pompous designations. These reflect an arrogant attitude displeasing to the Master. A full-grown "clergy-laity complex," entrenched in denominational thought and practice, is foreign to New Testament teaching.

The words of Jesus are authoritative and final. "Be not ye called Rabbi. . . call no man your father on the earth. . . neither be ye called masters" (Matt. 23:8-10). Here the Lord laid down the principle that condemns the wearing of ALL religious titles whether they be Reverend, Rabbi, Master, Father, Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Pastor, etc.

PREACH THE WORD

Assuming religious titles corrupt the religion that is pure and undefiled even as false teachers are a disgrace to Christ and a hindrance to his church (Acts 20:29-30). Their "mouths must be stopped" (Titus 1:11). Paul warns against teaching traditions of men and vain philosophy (Colossians 2:8). When the whole counsel of God is preached, believed and obeyed, all spiritual needs are satisfied (James 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). All that men need to believe, be, know, do or teach to please God is written in the Bible. God provides the effective tool; his eternal word. It is mighty, living, powerful and will accomplish its purpose (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; Isaiah 55:11). when hearers obey God's word a glorious three-fold result follows: (1) aliens are converted to Christ, (2) the wayward are restored, (3) the saved stay saved if they continue firm and steadfast unto the end (1 Cor. 15:58). In this way the church is strengthened and its influence for good is extended.

Preachers carry a heavy burden in a sin-sick world. They lead the fight against sin by calling Christians to take up the whole armor of God; fight the devil; withstand his wiles and quench his fiery darts (Eph. 6:10-18). In the Lord's church, conscientious preachers refuse to join the search for something new and different, nor do they make a blundering reach for "relevancy." They are not ashamed of centuries old fundamentalism. Knowing that the doctrine of redemption in Christ will always be relevant, they preach the Old Jerusalem gospel and exhort sinners to obey it; to become servants of God; saved, with sins forgiven and souls set free (Rom. 6:17-18). They do not neglect duty while sinners perish in darkness. Their preaching promotes unity, truth and righteousness while opposing division, error and sin (Proverbs 14:34; John 8:32; 1 Cor. 1:10-13). They warn of the fatal danger in being ashamed of Christ and his words for by them we will be judged (Mark 8:38; John 12:48). They teach that we are saved by grace through faith; not by grace alone nor faith alone but by God's grace and man's obedient faith (Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 1:5; Gal. 5:6).

They do not try to galvanize sin into respectability, nor do they "soft-pedal" sin by shading terminology. They call transgression of God's law sin, not "deviant behavior" (1 John 3:4; James 4:17). They are careful to distinguish between matters of faith and matters of opinion, then deal with each for what it is.

PREACH THE GOSPEL--HOW?

Faithful evangelists preach the gospel in this manner:

Fully - "From Jerusalem and round about. . . I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (Rom.

15:19). A man who will not preach the gospel fully should not preach at all.

Forcefully - Paul "powerfully confuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:28). "I am set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:16). Paul's preaching was powerful; it demanded a decision. Most of his sermons caused a revival or a riot. Need for strong preaching is constant.

Simply - "I fear lest . . . your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). The average word in the Bible contains fewer than five letters. Inspired preachers had no mania for big words.

Urgently - "Necessity is laid upon me: for woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel"

(1 Corinthians 9:16).

Boldly - When the council in Jerusalem beheld the boldness of Peter and John they marvelled (Acts 4:13, 29, 31). Paul urged brethren at Ephesus to pray that he might "make known with boldness the . . . gospel, . . . and that I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:19, 20). God's preachers do not fear lest they offend brother Social Drinker or sister Dancer. That would be weak and cowardly.

In love - Christ placed evangelists, teachers and others in the church to minister unto the building up of the body of Christ by "speaking the truth in Love. . ." (Eph. 4:11-15). "Let all that ye do be done in love " (1 Cor. 16:13).

In the church of Christ evangelists "hold the pattern of sound words. . ." (2 Tim. 1:13). They strive to please God, not men; they preach Christ, not themselves. They are not in the entertainment business; rather, they are fishers of men in the soul-winning business. Faithfully and courageously, worthy preachers expose and oppose error; they rebuke sinners and condemn sin (John 8:44; Acts 8:20-23; 13:9-11). By doing their work well they glorify God.

QUESTIONS

Explain why the pulpit is left "powerless" when blood-atonement is not preached (Romans 5:8-11).

Why is it wrong in the sight of God for men to wear religious titles?

(Matthew 23:8-10).

Point out as clearly as you can the particular work in the church that God has assigned: (a) to gospel preachers (b) to elders.

Whose mouths must be stopped? (Titus 1:11) Why?

In this chapter, six characteristics of sound gospel preaching are listed, with scripture references that support them. Does the preacher where you worship so preach the gospel?

Are sinners made saints by faith alone, or by grace alone, or by grace and obedient faith? Prove your answer by scripture.

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