

Pulpit Ministry Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church. Lord's Day AM 5th October 2008

Scripture Reading 1Cor Ch1:17-24

'The

Pre-eminence of Preaching!'

It has always been the position of Reformed Churches to maintain that it is God's prerogative to Sovereignly use the preaching of the Holy Scriptures as the means of bringing sinners to Christ. If we were to take the time this morning and examine the great doctrinal standards of the Church we would discover that one prominent feature upon which reformed teaching is agreed is this! Such teaching not only finds a mandate in the great confessions of the Church, but more importantly it finds a solid foundation in God's word.

Last week we looked at the subject of evangelism. During that message we noted from scripture that the evangelism of the New Testament Church was thoroughly established upon the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, in all things. One of the key areas in which God's sovereignty was especially seen was in the sole use of the scriptures as a means of bringing sinners to faith and repentance. By way of scripture proof we quoted from 1Cor Ch1v21; "*It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe...*" Paul had full confidence both in the means of evangelising (the word of God) and in the method of propagating that gospel (preaching) look at [v18], "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God.*"

Those words spoken by the apostle Paul are to be understood as being the practical enlargement or development of the apostle's own personal conviction that it was God's prerogative to use the preaching of the cross as a means of bringing sinners to Christ!

We noted also last week that where there is a rejection of that truth or a misplacing of confidence in the use of the means (the word, read and preached), there inevitably will be, a resorting to and an espousal of pragmatic means and methods, which have no scriptural warrant. The ultimate result being in the words of Paul v17, "*the cross of Christ (the work of Christ) (becomes) should be of none effect.*" Yes the results are serious!!

There therefore must be among God's people a wholehearted confidence in the preaching and the expounding of the word. In order for the Lord's people to have a steadfast confidence in the Preaching of the Word, their confidence must be founded upon a knowledge of what the scriptures themselves teach. It is always to the Word of God that we must turn in any examination of Church Practice. It should never be a case of Knowing what we believe, but not knowing why we believe it! E.g. We may say of preaching, "*I believe that preaching is important, after all it is the best way of communicating to others truths contained in the scriptures.*" It is an altogether different thing to say from conviction, like Paul "*I believe that preaching is central in church practice because God has ordained it, the scriptures teach it.*" It's only upon that ground (*an objective knowledge*) that we will be able to resist the temptation to substitute biblical methodology for unscriptural methodology.

The historical background of the Corinthian Church shows to us that many of Paul's converts were Greeks. The Greeks were renowned for their love for philosophy, human wisdom and thinking, Greek society was built on philosophy, human opinion etc {the word philosophy comes from two Greek words *phileo-love and Sophia-wisdom = the love of wisdom*}. There was at least an attempt by some professing Christians in Paul's day to introduce human philosophy into the Church of Christ, and Paul opposed it (see v17, v19, v20, v22). This was a real battle in Paul's day, divine truth, absolute truth being replaced by man's opinions etc The Colossian Church had this problem (Ch2v8, "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit...*"

Paul challenges these attempts by giving a defence of preaching, in doing so he shows these Corinthian believers, that God has no place for human wisdom in worship or in the evangelisation program of the church.

What does the term '*preach, preaching*' mean? The word '*preach*' is found in many places in scripture. But I want us to look at 1Corinthians Ch1. The word, '*preaching*' is used twice. (a) V18, "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness...*" (b) V21b, "*...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" In v18 & v21 Paul makes two statements concerning the proclamation of the gospel, in many ways the statements are similar, yet on a closer examination of the use of the word preaching in both verses we discover that two altogether different truths are being emphasised by the Holy Spirit through Paul to these Corinthian believers.

Let us look first at v21. In this verse the original Greek word translated '*preaching*' is '*kerugmatos*' meaning to proclaim or preach (linked to the verb '*kerusso*' to preach). The word '*preaching*' has a direct bearing on methodology, the method for spreading the gospel, is '*preaching*.'

Then look at v18 where again we have the word '*preaching*', in v18 the original word translated '*preaching*' is not the word, '*kerugmatos*', '*kerusso*' etc referring to a proclamation or the act of preaching, it is the noun/word '*logos*' meaning *word*. It is the same word that is used of Christ in John Ch1v1 "*In the beginning was the word...*" or in John 17v17, "*Thy word is truth.*" When you begin to apply this: you will see that Paul's defence is first of all to in regards to '*the word, to Christ*', and secondly to the method used for the propagation of the gospel

1) The Message preached (v18)

In verse 18 the word '*preaching*' as already stated is the noun '*logos*' it's not a verb, so it does not denote an action. V18 can be read that way, "*For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness...*" The noun as already mentioned is used of Christ in John Ch1v1. "*The Christ of the Cross...*" That shows us very clearly what the gospel message is that men count foolishness, it is Christ, He is the word. Not only does the message revolve around Christ, but also on His work, it is "*the word of the cross.*" What is it to preach the cross? And why preach about the cross?

If you examine the preaching of the apostles the dominant theme was Christ and His work, look at v23, "*But we preach Christ crucified...*" The plural pronoun shows us that this was not only the conviction of Paul but of all the apostles. To preach about atonement by blood, to speak of Christ's resurrection, to preach that it is by faith in Christ men are saved, that's how they preached. But why make Christ's cross & work the substance of preaching? Because that message alone (exclusively) is the power of God...unto salvation! (RomCh1:16). The doctrine, the word of the cross, alone is effectual to salvation. If you read this chapter carefully you will see how Paul rejects any other message, a message of opinion, a humanistic message filled with worldly wisdom.

Yet that kind of preaching was and still is seen to be foolishness by the world/natural man. The word "*Foolishness*" is [mo-ree-ah] '*moria*'. The English word '*moronic*' meaning '*absurd, unintelligent.*' And isn't that true! Those who preach the gospel of Christ are looked upon by an unbelieving world as morons! Is that a reason to change the substance of what is preached? Absolutely not!! That is the natural and spontaneous result of faithful preaching! That response by the world is to be expected, it is not for the church to rectify that, what should be the focus of the Lord's people is that it pleases God through what the world calls foolishness to save them that believe.

2) The Method ordained (v21).

The message is Christ, v18. The method is preaching. In v21 the word '*kerugmatos*' is a word closely associated especially with the preaching of the gospel. It is a word that encapsulates (brings together) both the message and the method, the act of preaching and the substance of what is preached. The Holy Spirit's employment of this word is not without reason. For you see many who oppose the act of preaching, (*remember it's not only modernists who oppose preaching, much of the opposition comes from within evangelicalism*) will say there are other means available to reach the lost, other than preaching! That's what was happening in Paul's day.

By the usage of the word '*kerugmatos*' in v21 we are shown that both the act of preaching and the message preached are intimately connected, you cannot separate or dissever the act of preaching from the message that is to be preached! It is important for us to grasp this, that God has given the message to be used in the evangelisation of the lost, but equally as important He has ordained the act of preaching as the method of propagating that message!

It is the gospel preached, not the gospel dramatised or the gospel danced which God has promised to bless! John Calvin was so convinced of the centrality of the act of preaching, let alone what was preached, that he insisted the pulpit be central and elevated so that all who could hear could see. The pulpit by many is seen to be a hideous domineering feature in any church building, replaced with a stage. And in many places we have the pulpit being removed and replaced by the stage. The pulpit is there for a number of reasons, it is there first of all for Christ to occupy, for the word to sound forth, it is not a place for human philosophy to be set forth! But it is there for another reason!! Turn to Neh 8v1-4, "*And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose...*"

The pulpit serves for the protection of the people of God. The word '*migdal*' can be translated '*tower*' or '*castle*'; it has the idea of guarding. It is found in Proverbs Ch18v10, "*The name of the LORD [is] a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.*" Psalms 61v3 "*For thou hast been a shelter for me, [and] a strong tower from the enemy.*" Certainly the pulpit ought to be guarded against error, but the pulpit serves for the protection of the Lord's people, as they hear the word faithfully preached. That is why we ought to pray consistently for our ministers, because their ministry affects the people of God. Under a faithful ministry God's people are protected and nourished. The study of a minister is important, for the people under it will never rise any higher than the man in the pulpit!

Faithful preaching is the answer to a thousand sicknesses in the Church of Christ!! Do you know the answer to disunity and dissension among the Lord's people? Christ centred preaching! Spurgeon was once asked why it was that he could consistently preach to 1000's every Lord's day at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London (he hadn't many wandering sheep Spurgeon replied I tie my sheep by the teeth!! What did he mean, he simply fed them the word, he fed them Christ!

Rev Ch7v17 "*For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them.*" Notice Christ is in the midst. When Spurgeon died it was said that the 'age of exposition was coming to an end!!' clear and expository was being replaced by something new, pulpits were losing power, error was flourishing etc!