

# WORSHIP AND PREACHING

## *Introduction*

If worship can be defined as the activity of ascribing the proper worth to God and, then, of extolling that worth, the preaching of the Word is foundational for it. The Bible, after all, is essentially the story of God, his person, his perfections, his plan, his purposes, his works, and his words. And preaching is the first and foremost means to make this story known in its totality and in its details. So Scripture is indispensable for a full view or a glimpse, for that matter, of the worth of God. And preaching is of the highest significance if one is to enjoy that view or catch that glimpse. In a nutshell, in the Word of God the worth is grasped in its full-orbed totality and in its many facets. This explains not only the perennial devotion of the Church to the Scriptures, but also of its constant preoccupation with preaching as the major means to convey its content.

A further, but brief delineation of the various elements of biblical worship can only serve to accentuate the need for preaching, provide insight in the correct kind of preaching, and put the objectives of proper preaching in perspective.

## I. WORSHIP

According to Revelation 4:8-11, further corroborated by Revelation 5:9-14, biblical worship has two preparatory and two constituent elements. These will now be introduced. Incidentally, the two preparatory elements are prerequisite for the two constituent elements, just as College 101 and 201 are prerequisite for College 301 and 401.

### *1. Preparatory Step I: Vision of the Holiness of God (Perfection of Purity)*

The first preparatory element is a vision of the holiness of God and the exultation of God in his holiness (Rev. 4:8). Holiness may well be the hub of the divine perfections. No other attribute is repeated three times, let alone in two contexts, Is. 6:3 and Rev. 4:8. This includes attributes such as love, grace, and mercy. Furthermore, only holiness can be combined with all the other perfections. There is holy love and holy wrath, a holy heaven and a holy hell. But loving wrath is a contradiction in terms. So is a heavenly hell. In this light the observation of Jonathan Edwards must be endorsed that someone who has not loved God for his holiness has never truly loved God.

When God is only loved for his love—necessary and noble as that is in itself—, the time will come that the “why’s” will rise up in one’s heart. Divine providences that tend to push all men to the breaking point at one time or another (Jam. 1:2) will precipitate cries such as, “Why, oh God? Do you not love me anymore?” Such cries, however tempting, are indicative of a man-centered attitude and preclude worship, which is God-centered. The “why’s” to God will silence the worship of God by definition. To love God centrally for his holiness is to escape that trap. In the light of the awesome purity of God man sees himself in his ruined state (Is 6:5), which admittedly deserves eternal damnation. In the face of any providence of God, even the kind that seemingly

presses the last drop of blood out of an individual, the response of anyone who acknowledges his ruined state as his own fault and damnation as his just desert will never be “Why?” but rather “Why not?” This response, and this response, and this response alone, which can not be produced except through a vision of God in His holiness, will pave the way for the worship that God seeks (John 4:23) and with which he is satisfied.

In fact, the love for God in his holiness always goes hand in hand with a desire for holiness before God. That ultimately will produce thankfulness, not just in spite of or in the circumstances, but because of the circumstances. After all, everything in the lives of those who love God aims at their sanctification (Rom. 8:28, 29). Never do “bad” things happen to good people. To complain that something bad is happening to “me” is to imply that “I” am a bad person. For God’s people there are literally no stumbling blocks to worship. Everything fosters it!

## ***2. Preparatory Step II: Submission to the Dominion of God (Word and Providence)***

The second preparatory element is “to fall down” before God (Rev. 4:10). This is routinely presented as introductory to the worship of God (Mt. 2:11, 4:9; Rev. 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16). It was also customary procedure for anyone who both in ancient and more contemporary times appeared before absolute monarchs or emperors. It spelled total and radical submission. To lift up one’s head in the presence of the ruler would mean a quick and certain death. Not only would “why’s” never be tolerated, but any kind of rebellion, opposition, refusal to obey, or even bad attitude in carrying out orders would be dealt with in a summary fashion.

If the “worship” of earthly rulers already requires such kind of submission, how much more should it be bound up with the worship of the ruler of the Universe. Any reservations, any ifs, ands, or buts, any question marks are intolerable and unthinkable. It is needless to say that only total and radical submission is conducive to biblical worship. Anything else will break up, if not destroy, the worship of God. Whenever man-centeredness prevails, anything God-centered and God-ward will vanish. In terms of both preparatory elements, preaching clearly has its task cut out for it.

## ***3. Constituent Element I: Surrender of Everything to God (Worship in Deed)***

The first constituent element of worship is “to cast one’s crown before the throne” (Rev. 4:10). This is *worship-in-deed*. Believers are crowned with many gifts. They may have received the “crown” of health, of strength, of studies, of a vocation, of a profession, of a spouse, of children, of energy, of time, of reputation, of money, of luxury, of wealth, of possessions, of a home, of an automobile, of friendships, of vacation. The list is potentially endless. It should and does cover all that life offers and has to offer.

In acceptable worship all those “crowns” are handed over, indeed immediately returned to God upon receipt, unequivocally and without holding anything back. Nebuchadnezzar is a prime example. When his kingdom in all its “golden” glory is restored to him, he for all practical purposes hands it right back to God (Dan. 4:34-37). He confesses God’s sovereignty and does not ask, “Why?” He submits to his dominion

and does not chafe under it, nor seek to escape to it. No wonder that he concludes with worship.

In fact, when God removes anything from any believer at any time from the simplest and minutest to the biggest and most precious item, projected event or even person, he simply says, “Thank you” for the “crown” that had been presented to him as a gift in the first place. To be content (Phil. 4:11), yes to be thankful (1 Th. 5:18), indeed to rejoice (Phil. 4:4, 1 Th. 5:16) in God’s “Thank you’s” is the (only!?) evidence that a truly acceptable worship has taken place. Any other response does and will fall short of it.

#### ***4. Constituent Element II: Pouring Forth of Praise to God (Worship in Word)***

The second constituent element is *worship-in-word*. This is the crowning piece. It has astutely been observed that from one perspective worship and love are identical in structure. Love that is not expressed is not love. In fact, the expression of love belongs to the essence of love. Genuine love can not be contained. It finds its way out into the open in words. Whether they are creative words, moving words, simple words, depends upon the gifts, mood, and temperament of the lover. Similarly, the verbal expression of worship belongs to the essence, indeed is the pinnacle of worship. True worshipers “say” (Rev. 4:10-11), “sing” (Rev. 5:9), “say with a loud voice” (Rev. 5:12) and “keep saying ‘Amen’” in ever recurring waves (Rev. 5:14). More often than not they can not even keep their hands next to their bodies. They can not contain themselves, and lift up their hands as a symbol of their total surrender (Ps. 141:2, I Tim. 2:8) as they praise God in language from the heart.

#### ***Conclusion***

Clearly, in acceptable worship the worshipers give it all as well as their all to God. All their crowns are surrendered to God. They have nothing and no one left, not even themselves or their lives. If God entrusts them with anything or anyone, they function as stewards and not as owners. Everything and everyone belongs to God.

Furthermore, they give all as well as all possible worth to God. All their words of praise are offered up to God. Again they have nothing left for anything or for anyone, not for people, including their wives, husbands and children, nor for items, including their prized possessions, and not for events including the highlights of life. If any worth is to flow to any person, item or event, it is only to the extent that God bends the stream of worth to that person, item or event. Every worth and all worth belongs to God.

When God recalls any one, any item, or any event, he exercises the prerogatives of the ownership over that person, item, or event that has been acknowledged to him in heartfelt surrender, and dries up the stream of worth toward that person, item or event that has been ascribed to him in joyful praise. The response of the believer? If the “why not’s” have replaced the “why’s,” if submission has been substituted for rebellion, if genuine surrender has taken place, and if true praise has been offered up, any recall, whether partial or total, painful or even “devastating” will constitute a “Thank you” on

God's part. On the worshiper's part it will be acknowledged as such and evoke contentment, thankfulness, indeed joy in response. The two preparatory and the two constituent elements not only evidence the need for preaching. They also more than hint at the type of preaching that should prevail and the objectives that it must pursue. People are to have a vision of the holiness of God with all that this entails. They are to submit to God's dominion in total and heartfelt submission with all that this implies. They are not to function as owners but as stewards with all that accompanies this. They are to ascribe all the worth to God with all that flows forth from this. Preaching, indeed, has its task cut out for it. Add to these preparatory and constituent elements the fact that God seeks worshipers (John 4:23), and the need for proper biblical preaching is not just an option, it is a given.

## II. PREACHING

If the kind of preaching that will lead to the true and full worship of God is ever to become a reality, various concerns ought to be recognized and taken into account. These concerns are reflected in the following composite definition. Preaching is

(1) The authoritative, purposeful, and timely communication of God's truth as deposited in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments

(2) Based upon a thorough contextual and textual study and in the form of a carefully structured message

(3) Through the personality of human instruments, commissioned by God, as a gift of Christ, anointed by the Spirit, molded by the Word and committed to prayer

(4) As the Gospel of and the keys to the Kingdom with discriminating, applicatory and healing power with a view to regeneration, justification and sanctification

(5) Through the minds, to the hearts and into the lives of any and all audiences, sinners and saints, men and women, old and young, and presented in a well articulated, imaginative and persuasive fashion

(6) With a Trinitarian focus, centered upon the Father, the Christ, and the Spirit as required by the purpose and clues of the text, and

(7) All that in dependence upon, for the sake of and to the praise of the Triune God.

This definition with its seven-fold focus upon Scripture, Preparation, Preacher, Proclamation, Audience, each Person in the Trinity, and last but not least upon God-centered Purpose, will now be unpacked, be it in broad strokes only.

### *1. Focus upon Scripture*

The minister of the Gospel is under a solemn obligation to preach the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments (2 Tim. 4:2), to preach all of the Scripture (Acts 20:27) and to preach the Scripture exclusively (Gal. 1:8). For only Scripture is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). Its every word is needed to produce and sustain life (Deut. 8:3). And no other word is on a par with it or can claim to be without error in whatever it asserts (John 10:35). If the preacher is a channel of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth of Scripture, whether his emphasis is edificational or evangelistic, whether his method is expository, textual or topical, he will be able to speak with authority. For what he transmits in that case is not just an all too human message, but a word from God (1 Thess. 2:13).

The minister of the Gospel is under the equally solemn obligation to handle the Scripture accurately (2 Tim. 2:15) and to handle all of the Scripture accurately (2 Pet. 3:16). The careful interpretation of Scripture and the presentation of its proper meaning are necessary for the truth to come to grips with the hearer. (Acts 8:31). Even seemingly insignificant details can harbor a world of difference (Gal. 3:16). The most fundamental prerequisite for handling Scripture or any part of it accurately is to interpret it in the light of its own purpose. At times this is explicitly stated in the passage that is chosen as a

preaching unit. At other times it must be inferred from the available clues found in that passage. But only this insures that the aim of the preacher in his preaching is identical with the purpose of God in the text. This must be so for the message of the preacher to be truly a word of God for the audience.

The minister of the Gospel has a similarly solemn obligation to bring out the significance of Scripture (Heb. 4:12) and to bring out the significance of all of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). For the preaching of the Word of God can hardly be complete, unless and until its truth is shown to have applicatory force, and at times even a cutting edge (2 Tim. 4:2). The aim ought to be that the truth of Scripture, and indeed all of its truth, is genuinely understood intellectually, experientially and practically (Neh. 8:8). In a word, it must be presented as timely, however timeless it may be. For a preacher to succeed in this he must the context of the purpose of the preaching unit glean universal principles and patterns from the text. Then the exposition will become (identical with) application, the old will show itself to be amazingly young, the venerable will prove to be ever fresh, and the timeless will appear to be quite timely.

In short, the minister of the Gospel must honor the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments for what it is, the inerrant and authoritative Word of God, ought to interpret and present its meaning according to the purpose of the preaching unit, and should bring out its significance and apply its truth cogently.

By way of concluding observation, it is not without good reason that Paul cautions Timothy, and in Timothy all ministers of the Gospel, to “preach the Word.” There may be times for a special emphasis upon God the Father, or God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. There may be circumstances that require special attention for regeneration, or justification, or sanctification. There may be conditions that call for a special focus upon discipleship, or evangelism, or missions. There may be situations that invite special preoccupation with the sacraments. Or the end times, or spiritual gifts. There may be a need for special instruction in the areas of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, promise and law, etc., etc. It may even be realistically admitted that at different times different preachers are gripped by different facets of the truth, which they should not hesitate to preach.

But the Church will do well to heed the summons of the apostle Paul carefully. It must “preach the Word.” If it does so, preferably, if not predominantly, in an expository fashion, it will safeguard itself against obscuring, impinging upon, or subtracting from the whole counsel of God by an unbecoming fascination for one or more favorite themes and so against an inevitable spiritual loss.

## ***2. Focus upon Preparation***

To understand the fundamental significance and indispensable character of preaching is to understand the importance of proper preparation. For a message to be biblical in content and purpose it must reflect the content and purpose of the preaching unit. To arrive at such a message a thorough contextual study of the preaching is necessary.

A contextual study inquires into the historical, cultural and geographical setting of a text and seeks to determine whether this is reflected in the particulars this text sets forth. It also researches its literary setting and seeks to establish the genre, author, date,

audience, theme, division and aim of the larger unit of which the text is only a part. Contextual studies often shed a remarkable light upon the text.

After the contextual studies have been completed, the meaning of the text must be established. This may be done with the assistance of dictionaries, grammars, and other helps. At least two rules of thumb, however, ought to be kept in mind. For one, since the text is always directed to a specific audience, no meaning may be ascribed to any text that could not have been recognized by the original audience. For another, since the text is always truth applied to an audience in its specific situation, no meaning may be imposed upon the text beyond this truth as it is applied. In a word, the interpreter faces two inherent limits that he may not transgress. He may not wrest an answer to a question or a solution to a problem from a text when this text is not designed to answer that question or solve that problem in addressing its original audience in its circumstances.

Once the meaning of the text is established, the bedrock for relevant preaching is in place. The genius of such preaching is to glean the legitimate universal principles and patterns of God's dealings with man and of man's response to God from the text. To arrive at these principles and patterns an outline of the text in its literary context is indispensable. The theme and the main divisions will yield the more general and structural universal principles, the subdivisions the more particular and concrete universal principles.

The outline of the preaching unit, formulated in terms of universal principles, should determine the structure of the body of the message. It must represent and unpack the theme and divisions of the text. At no time may the audience hear anything else but, "Thus says the Lord." It is advisable for a preacher to state the theme and divisions of his message explicitly and at the outset, whether in the form of propositions, assertions, questions, etc. If he decides against that, the minimum requirement is that the audience clearly understands what the text wishes him to get across and is able to follow the flow of the message.

When the body of the message is ready to be presented, an introduction and a conclusion should be added. The introduction must be just that, an introduction, short and to the point. However constructed, it must arrest attention, awaken interest in the subject matter and produce an eagerness in the audience to listen to the message. Indeed, it must create a tension in the hearers that will not be released until the climax is reached and the presentation is completed. The conclusion should follow the climax. Again it should be short and to the point. Whether it consists of a summary, a series of questions, a plea a challenge, or a prayer, its aim should be to drive the message home, into the hearts and lives of the hearers.

### ***3. Focus upon the Preacher***

In a very fundamental sense God's message is God's man. The messenger must be the embodiment of the message. He must be truth personified. It is not just that the preacher must be God's mouthpiece, his Master's voice, however much that should be the case. This is what the previous section was all about. When he speaks, he must be able to say with confidence that Christ speaks (Rom. 10:14). But there is more. As the Father is truth, Christ is truth and the Spirit is truth, so the preacher as the Father's

representative, Christ's ambassador and the Spirit's instrument must in a real sense be truth himself. How else could Paul have spoken with approval of the Thessalonians as "imitators of him" (1 Thess. 1:6).

For any preacher to be truth personified and to present himself with confidence as a model for the believers, he must have proper credentials in terms of the origin of his ministry and the preparation for his task as well as of his walk with God and execution of his duties.

God must have called and commissioned him (Heb. 5:4), and Christ must have presented him to the church as his personal gift (Eph. 4:11). God's call to ministry can never be separated from his call to Christ. In fact, the latter is the bedrock for the former. The call to Christ is, first of all, experienced in the heart rending and transforming reality of rebirth, accompanied by repentance and faith, evidenced by a thirst for God, and resulting in an appropriation of Christ. Then in the refreshing reality of God's justifying verdict that yields forgiveness of sins, which is sealed by the indwelling of the Spirit. And finally, in the enriching reality of sanctification through the energizing presence of the Spirit. From all this arises an inner desire to serve in the pastoral and preaching office, to extend the Gospel to others, and so to see sinners saved and saints edified.

Already at this stage there is a curious intertwining of the call of God to and the preparation of man for the ministry. The call takes the avenue of the preparation to evidence itself. In fact, the clarity of the call is commensurate to the progress in the preparation. Progressive sanctification and a desire to enter the ministry, however indispensable, are only the first steps in the preparatory process. By themselves they are far from definitive proof of a divine call and in a sense only the launching pad for the main and much more focused stage in the preparation. The focus of this stage is twofold, in line with both a divine and human aspect.

The human aspect is expressed in 2 Timothy 2:2, where a period of intensive training is ordered for future leadership. This is a straightforward directive. Historically it has often been quoted as the basis for seminary instruction. The curriculum of such an institution usually calls for training periods from three to four years. This is intensive, indeed. But it is not sufficient unless hand in hand with the acquisition of the knowledge of the Word there is a maturation in being molded by that Word. In short, the process of sanctification in the broadest sense of the word must be a priority. Anyone who wishes to be molded by the Word, that is to make progress in practical godliness, must not only be filled with the Word that directs, but also with the Spirit who empowers (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18). The former without the latter will leave emptiness in its wake, the latter without the former will have blindness as its net effect. It makes little difference whether one knows the way to reach a destination but lacks the wherewithal to get there, or possesses the wherewithal to get somewhere but does not know which destination one wishes to reach.

The divine side is somewhat more intricate. It is closely linked with the area of spiritual gifts. The presence of the Spirit is not just evidenced by a lifestyle that has the marks of holiness indelibly stamped upon it. According to Peter, the Spirit also furnishes every believer with a special gift, either in the speaking or in the acting area (1 Pet. 4:10-11). These are identified by Paul as prophecy (indicating the recipient as God's mouth piece) and ministry (characterizing the recipient as doing his footwork), and further subdivided as teaching and exhorting in the speaking, and sharing, caring and showing

mercy in the acting area (Rom. 12:3-8). What emerges here is the connecting link, the bridge, between the call to Christ as the foundation and the call to the ministry as the crowning piece. The Christian who aspires to the pastoral/teaching ministry with its focus upon the Word should display a gift in the speaking area before he ever may consider, or may be considered for, that ministry. Incidentally, the call to be a Christian and the identification of one's gift are intimately interwoven. Teaching and exhorting are activities in which all Christians should be involved as Christians (Heb. 5:12; 3:13). The same is true of sharing, caring, and showing mercy, for that matter (Lk. 3:11; Rom. 16:2; Jam. 2:13). In the way of purposeful obedience, then, to God's explicit commands through the indwelling Spirit in all these areas every Christian will eventually be able to determine experientially that the same Spirit has given something special in one area or another.

The intensive training and the identification of the spiritual gift in the speaking area in the course of, or—preferably—prior to, that training, must now be capped off by the third and final phase of the preparatory process. The Church must determine whether the candidate is, indeed, called of God and a gift of Christ. Neither God the Father, nor the ascended Lord grant only salvation to individuals. They also grant officers, not just offices, to the Church (Eph. 4:11). Officers are not man made on earth, but gift wrapped in heaven. They must be recognized as such. The Church does so by applying the standard of 1 Timothy 3 that, hardly surprising, fully honors the intertwinement of call and preparation. Does the candidate have a fervent desire for the pastoral/teaching office? Does he have a track record of practical godliness, acknowledged by believers and unbelievers, and can he function as a model for the Church? Has he given evidence of possessing a teaching gift that will enable him to edify the believers as well as promote and/or defend the Gospel before unbelievers?

If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, and properly so, the way to his ordination is open. This ordination, then, will constitute a commission of God through the Church or of the Church on behalf of God, once again blending the divine and human together while acknowledging the primacy of the divine. When an ordination comes about in this way, it can be expected that a resulting preaching ministry will be pursued in prayerful dependence upon divine grace and be executed with the anointing of the Spirit. Such dependence naturally flows forth from the recognition of the primacy of the divine. The pastor/teacher owes his origin to God's call and Christ's gift. Such anointing naturally flows forth from the recognition of the indispensable operation of the Spirit. The Spirit who sanctifies and the Spirit who endows with a special gift, in the first steps and the main stage of the preparatory process respectively, is also the Spirit who grants unction to the preacher in the proclamation of the Gospel. This is a curious reality that just like so many other spiritual realities, transcends conceptualization. It must be experienced to be understood. Its presence produces a liberty and a power that transforms the proclamation into "rivers of living water" (John 7:37-39) that "make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4) and prevail over "the gates of hell" (Mt. 16:18).

#### *4. Focus upon Proclamation*

The preaching of the Gospel is the first and foremost means of grace. Of the several parables that disclose features of the Kingdom which were unknown in the OT era (Mt. 13:1-52), the one that heads the list brings this out with great force. In order to implement the Kingdom there is no other alternative than to sow the seed of the Word. This is further on display on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17ff. and 42) and set forth by Paul as a universal principle. People will not believe unless they hear the preached Word (Rom. 10:14).

The power of the spoken Word is clearly enormous. It guarantees that the Church of Christ has a great future. After all, this Word is specifically designated by Christ himself as the keys to the Kingdom. This ensures that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. With the weapon of the proclamation of the Word it is invincibly on the march. The picture is bright, indeed. But does it seem realistic? The facts look rather grim. They hardly seem to bear out a triumphant impact of the Church. Worldwide it does not keep up with the birthrate. Nationwide it barely appears to hold its own. And locally the Church is often in retreat! How does one square the promise of the Savior with the facts, the ideal with the real?

The reason for this should not be sought in the promise, as if that is too grand and too idealistic. The Church is always ill advised to tinker with God's promises, to question them or scale them down. It would seal its doom, for they are its lifeline and its power. If the problem, then, is not to be sought in the promise of our Lord, it must be in the preaching of his Word. This, indeed, is the case. Preachers readily acknowledged that the keys to the Kingdom are to be identified as the multifaceted Word of God. But they rarely recognize that this multifaceted Word should be proclaimed as the Keys to the Kingdom. Too often they solely address the mind and are satisfied with agreement, a mental nod, on the part of the audience. Of course, the mind matters. The next section will enlarge upon this. But proper preaching goes deeper. It reaches out to the heart and insists on repentance and/or submission. Here the contours of the kind of preaching comes into view that opens and closes the Kingdom (Mt. 16:19), that forgives and retains sin (John 20:23), the kind that is both prescribed and modeled in the Bible itself and conquers the very gates of hell. This kind of preaching is discriminatory and applicatory, and so proves to have healing power. By virtue of this power it is the only kind that truly satisfies

Discriminating preaching is evangelistic in nature. In addressing unbelievers or in expositing an evangelistic preaching unit, the preacher may not leave the hearers in the dark as to their standing before God. In confronting Nicodemus with his need for a new heart in John 3:5, the Samaritan woman with her need for a new record in John 4:18 and professing Jews with their need for a new life in John 8:31, Jesus makes it crystal clear that as they are they can not lay claim to the Kingdom of God. When Peter on the day of Pentecost exposit the truth of Joel 2:28-32, his audience has no doubt as to where they stand either. The messages of both Jesus and Peter have a cutting edge that is unmistakable. The hearers are not the jury that must give a mental and oral verdict. They are the accused that need to bow before God and cast themselves upon mercy alone. In a word, in discriminating preaching the preacher goes after the rebel heart of man and

under discriminatory preaching lost sinners know that they are lost before the preacher has completed his message, whatever their response might be.

Applicatory preaching is edificational in nature. In expositing edificational preaching units or in addressing believers, the preacher will not leave his audience in the dark as to their status before God. When Jesus had finished his exposition of the law in the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples knew what kind of lifestyle would disqualify a man from membership (Mt. 7:24-27). When James addressed his hearers in the area of practical godliness, he did not simply define it in terms of its origin, nature, implementation, and range. He also left no doubt that it was neither optional nor negotiable. Professing believers who saw their disobedient lifestyle or ungodly conduct exposed had little choice. They would either have to clean up their act or conclude that they were not genuine believers. Again, the cutting edge is noticeable. The hearers are not a jury that makes the final determination but the accused whenever and wherever they are found wanting. In a word, in applicatory preaching the preacher sensitizes the hearts of the audience as to their lifestyles and under applicatory preaching deficient saints recognize when and where they are deficient and must deal with it if they truly love God and if they wish their profession to remain credible to others and to themselves.

This kind of preaching has healing power. It sets the stage for the application of the three benefits of the gospel: regeneration, justification, and sanctification, both in the life of the believer and the unbeliever.

In discriminating preaching the unbeliever is ultimately confronted with his rebel heart (Nicodemus), his guilty record (the Samaritan woman), and his unholy life (the professing Jews). This sets the stage for the preacher to call the sinner to repentance unto the forgiveness of sins and an obedient life (Acts 2:38), and for the sinner to call on the Lord for a new heart, a new record, and a new life based upon God's promise to that effect (Ezek. 36:37, 25-27; Acts 2:39). The upshot will be the liberating reality of a heart that is freely devoted to God, the refreshing reality of a record that is fully cleansed before God, and the enriching reality of a life that blossoms up before God.

In applicatory preaching the believer is faced with shortcomings in his conduct. This paves the way for the preacher to call the saint to repentance unto the forgiveness of sins and practical godliness and for the saints to call in repentance to the Father for forgiveness and practical sanctification. This will produce a renewed liberation, refreshment, and enrichment.

Discriminating preaching under God effects the once and for all realities of regeneration (John 3:5), justification (Rom.5:1), and sanctification (Heb. 10:10, 14), while applicatory preaching effects the continuing realities of daily repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-10), daily forgiveness (1 John 1:8, 9), and daily renewal (2 Cor. 7:11). Everyone who possesses the once and for all realities will show that in the continuing realities, thus resting in God without presumption, and everyone who experiences the continuing realities may know through the possession of the once and for all realities, thus working out his salvation without doubt. Clearly, the healing waters that flow forth from discriminating preaching continue to flow forth through applicatory preaching.

That such preaching, which proclaims the Word of God as the gospel and the keys to the Kingdom, is deeply satisfying hardly needs to be stressed. It furnishes entrance into the presence of God, peace in the love of God, and fellowship under the smile of God.

## *5. Focus upon the Audience*

Preachers invariably face a great diversity of listeners among their audience. They can expect to encounter saints and sinners, men and women, old and young who come from a variety of backgrounds, live in a variety of circumstances, find themselves in a variety of situations, cope with a variety of problems, look forward to a variety of futures, etc., etc. It is the genius of preaching that the preacher can touch any and all audiences, however diverse, simultaneously with the Word of God. In order to succeed he must reach out to their hearts as the primary aim through their minds as the necessary means with a view to their holiness of life as the ultimate objective. This is fully in line with the Scripture's distinction of a three-fold understanding: of the mind (Ps. 73:16-17; Dan. 9:2), the heart (I Ki. 3:9; Is. 6:10), and the life (Job 28:8; Prov. 15:21).

Although the heart is the preacher's primary aim, the mind matters. The truth of the Word of God will not reach the heart except through the mind. That is why Scripture is replete with references to the significance, indeed necessity, of the teaching activity. All Christians should be teachers (Heb. 5:12). Many Christians have received a special teaching gift (Rom. 12:7). An elder in the Church is called a pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11).

Teaching is the channel through which the truth of God enters into and impacts upon the lives of people. It can be defined as the conveying of the truth that is, and of the truth that ought to be. The truth that is, the focus also of systematic theology, covers the doctrines of Scripture, of the Trinity, of predestination, creation, providence, of the Spirit, of Christ, man, regeneration, justification, sanctification, of the Church, the consummation, etc., etc. The truth that ought to be, the focus also of ethics, deals with the substance of the ten commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the many directives for a godly and righteous life that are found in Scripture. The truth that is and the truth that ought to be are closely related. In fact, the former is the foundation for the latter. By way of illustration, only the fact that a fetus is a human being (Ps. 139:15) (the truth that is) justifies the struggle to outlaw abortion (the truth that ought to be). But because of this fact such struggle is also mandated.

This illustration does more than indicate the relationship between "systematic theology" and "ethics." It also drives home that the stakes in teaching are high. Improper teaching turns the Church into a rudderless ship, exposed to every wind of doctrine that is bound to shipwreck it (Eph. 4:14). Proper teaching, on the other hand, organizes the presentation of God's truth in a way that it is conveyed in its totality (Acts 20:27) according to the intake capacity, the comprehension level and the need of the audience (Acts 20:31). Such teaching will renew the mind (Rom. 12:2). This, in turn, will result in the unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, and the full transformation into His image (Eph. 4:13). Clearly, the mind does matter.

The recognition of the immense significance of the intellect, however, should never deceive anyone into taking a stand for the primacy of the intellect. This would be a deadly mistake. It unalterably leads to the intellectualizing of the gospel, either in whole or in part. Man simply is not all mind. In fact, with the renewal of man's mind one has in a real sense only scratched the surface. That is why a teaching ministry may not only address the mind, may not solely take aim at the mind, nor make the mind its final destination. Through the mind it must take aim at the heart. Discriminating and

applicatory preaching that will proclaim the Word as the key to the Kingdom will do just that (Acts 2:37; 7:53; 2 Cor. 12:7; Ps. 51:10). For here one touches man's deepest being. The heart in Scripture stands for man's inner core, in contrast to his outer appearance (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4). It represents man's personhood, man's deepest self.

The counsel written over the entrance to the oracle of Delphi, "Know Yourself," is one of the most profound ever given to man. But the problem is that man can not know his deepest self by self-reflection. This noble task proves to be an impossibility (Jer. 17:9). True self-knowledge only comes to a man as he looks in the mirror of divine revelation. And since out of the heart are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23), he needs the divine revelation desperately. This is supplied in the preaching of the truth. It does and must go right to the heart precisely to insure that the life that flows forth from it is truly life. The pattern on display in chapters such as John 3 and 4, Acts 2 and 7, to mention only these, leave no doubt about the biblical model in this regard.

It is no coincidence that the term "heart" is a figure of speech. As the deepest core of man it represents a layer of him that can only be experienced and therefore transcends conceptualization. It, indeed, goes deeper than the intellect. It is the "I" that has thinking, and willing and feeling for that matter, as three of its functions. This, therefore, should be the primary target in all pastoral ministry, including preaching. Any type of ministry that addresses merely the mind or the will or the emotions will only remain on the surface. The core of man's being must be targeted, touched and secured for any ministry to be permanent.

To repeat, the mind is of incalculable significance. It should be saturated with all the truth of Scripture. In fact, intellectually, there should be no doubt about the meaning or significance of any passage, text, or topic of Scripture after it has been preached. This requires that the message is delivered in a well articulated and clear fashion, in words that are carefully chosen and befit both the subject matter and the audience. It must further be presented in an imaginative way, with vivid illustrations that make the subject matter come to life before the audience. But it must also come across with persuasiveness, with a personal and practical touch that makes the audience come to grips with the subject matter.

If the preacher applies himself to accomplish this, he will not be satisfied with just an intellectual deposit as the end product. That would be tantamount to turning the mind into a place that serves the sole purpose of storing agreeable data like ice cubes in the freezer compartment of a refrigerator. No, the mind should be a channel through which the truth penetrates into the heart. It will be like a stream of water that floods it. It will prick, jolt, cut, instruct, direct, empower, and set in motion. The primary aim is not agreement of the mind, but repentance, faith and submission of the heart. The result? Holiness unto the Lord up to and including the last nook and cranny in the Church, the armament upon army tanks and the pans in mother's kitchen (Zech. 14:20-21). Here the grand objective of biblical preaching comes into view.

Holiness, it is the essence of God's being (Is. 6:3), it is the scope of election (Eph. 1:4) of the covenant (Gen. 17:1; Ezek. 36:27), of the work of Christ (Mt. 1:21), of the operation of the Spirit, (Rom. 15:16), of repentance (Acts 26:20), of faith (Acts 26:18), of the Church (Eph. 4:11, 12) of the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13-14), etc. It is also the major subject matter (OT and NT) and objective (Ps. 119:11; 2 Tim. 3:15-17) of Scripture. Why, then, should it not be the grand objective of preaching? It puts on display just one

more aspect of that God-centeredness which is so characteristic of all of biblical faith and practice. However, God-centeredness must adorn the preacher in more than the objective of his preaching ministry only.

### *6. Focus upon the Persons in the Trinity*

It is quite common for handbooks on Homiletics to insist that according to Luke 24:27 and John 5:39, 46 Christ is the focus of the OT in general, and of each passage in particular. This supposedly warrants the conclusion that all preaching should be exclusively Christo-centric. Regrettably proponents of this type of preaching all too often end up by ignoring or downgrading the biblical emphasis upon either God the Father or God the Holy Spirit or both. In doing so they virtually follow in the footsteps of Martin Luther whose type of Christo-centricity was such that he gladly would have removed James from the Scriptures. That should raise a red flag or two!

No, there is a more biblical way to preach. Neither Luke 24 nor John 5 by any stretch of interpretive imagination imply that all of Scripture in each passage only testifies of Christ. To insist on this is irresponsible exegesis. To be sure, John informs us in no uncertain terms that Scripture contains an overwhelmingly clear and opulent witness to the Person and Work of Christ. Luke adds that the Savior systematically recited the passages and sections that provided this witness. While the OT therefore testifies to Christ in a rich and unmistakable manner, by and large it portrays the fullness of the Father. Only at cardinal junctures it refers to either the Second or the Third Person of the Godhead. Responsible exegesis therefore does and must bring out this fullness by carefully laying out the multitudinous features of the OT text as a display of the Self-disclosure of God the Father. Furthermore, in the Gospels the fullness of the Father is embodied in the fullness of God the Son. This means that proper exegesis meticulously does and must exhibit all the features of the Gospel text to be able to exhibit the fullness of Christ as the personification of the fullness of the Father. Finally, in the Epistles the fullness of the Father, as embodied in the fullness of Christ, is on display in the fullness of the Spirit. Appropriate exegesis will, once again, present the fullness of the Spirit as the personalization of the fullness of Christ as embodying the fullness of the Father by paying meticulous attention to the fullness of the Epistolary text in all its aspects.

To be more specific, the fullness of the Father, on display in the OT in the sum total of his perfections, is concentrated in the new covenant promises, which has holiness as the crowning piece of his saving activity. All of the OT enters in the Person and Work of Christ. However, the Lord Jesus does not resemble a “black hole,” in which the rich variety of the OT reductionistically disappears. No, he is much more like a “white hole,” from which all of the OT, minus the sections that are clearly abrogated, emerge in a glory that is indescribable and overwhelming. The very OT fullness of the Father personified in its NT glory in Christ subsequently does and must become characteristic of the Christian through the indwelling fullness of the Holy Spirit who personalizes the fullness of Christ.

The implications for preaching should be evident. First, careful exegesis of all of Scripture is, indeed, mandatory to disclose the rich and variegated features of the fullness of the Father, as they reside in the Son and are applied by the Spirit. Second, the grand

objective is to seek to display this fullness in the believer to the glory of God the Father through discriminating and applicatory preaching that is Word-filled, Father-filled, Christ-filled and Spirit-filled.

In this way a reductionistic Christo-centricity is replaced by a full-orbed Christo-centricity. In the pursuit of such Christo-centricity both the covenant promises in their Trinitarian backdrop and the new covenant substance in its triadic scope come into their full Scriptural own.

### ***7. Focus upon God-centeredness***

When a preacher is truly God-centered, he displays this in at least three ways. He will execute his pastoral and teaching ministry in full dependence upon God, for the sake of God and to the glory of God.

While it is unmistakable in Scripture that the person of the preacher is the indispensable agent and the activity of preaching the indispensable channel through which the grace of God reaches into the life of the hearers, it is equally unmistakable that the hearer owes his salvation fully to the sovereign grace of God (Acts 13:48b), the efficacious work of Christ (Is. 53:10) and the operation of the Spirit (John 3:5). If the dependent clause spells 100% man and the main clause 100% God, the combination of both clauses spells 100% (God) + 100% (Man) = 100% (salvation). That is to say, in the implementation of salvation the human 100% rests squarely upon the divine 100% for its effectiveness.

On the one hand, God works through man (*per hominem*: Rom. 10:14) and the Spirit works through the Word (*per verbum*: Jam. 1:18). This is so by divine appointment. It is the way in which the salvation that is promised by the Father and personified in the Son is personalized by the Spirit. There is no other avenue of salvation. Human instrumentality in person and word is, indeed, indispensable.

On the other hand, however, God works with man (*cum homine*: 2 Tim. 2:25) and the Spirit with the Word (*cum verbo*: Acts 16:14). While God works exclusively through human instrumentality to effect salvation, there is no guarantee that salvation ensues just because man exerts himself in the preaching ministry. Apparently, one can be man taught without being God taught, and Word taught without being Spirit taught. Unless God constructs an edifice, the human laborers build in vain (Ps. 127:1).

Concretely, the 100% man requires that man "gives it a hundred percent" in his person and in his preaching. By the same token, the primacy of the 100% God demands from him a deep humility and a total dependence. In the face of his impotence pride vanishes quickly. Man can only regard it a privilege and be grateful if God decides to use him. At the same time, when a passion for fruitfulness is kindled within him, he will turn to fervent and unceasing prayer. After all, God must make the difference if there is going to be any difference at all! In a word, pride must be replaced by prayer.

But there is more. The deepest motivation for the preaching ministry must also be God-centered. The preacher in the execution of his ministry should not be driven by a desire for a sense of fulfillment, a sense of accomplishment, or any such motivation that centers upon himself. Neither should his deepest motivation simply be to see sinners to escape the gruesome reality of hell. No, the driving force should be the desire for God's

electing purposes to come to reality (Rom. 9:11, 23), for the Lord Jesus to enjoy the fruit of his labor (Is. 53:10, 11), and for the Holy Spirit to see his love crowned in finished products (Rom. 15:30). This, of course, in no way denies that an effective ministry will leave a sense of accomplishment in its wake and will result in joy over the salvation of sinners.

Finally, there is a goal. If that is to be God-centered as well, the preacher may not seek to build his ministry around himself or his church, so as to cherish the acclaim he gets and the reputation his church enjoys. Neither may he make evangelism or the dominion mandate or any other worthy and necessary goal ultimate, consciously or unconsciously. No, God must fill the horizon of his life, his endeavors, and his accomplishments. The total range of his ministry, the spiritual growth of the church, the evangelistic outreach, the progress of the Kingdom, all must be purposefully pursued and manifestly serve the glory of the Triune God.

That is and must be the grand and ultimate objective. It is the objective of Christ (1 Cor. 15:28). It may be no less the objective of his Christians, let alone of the God-appointed, Christ given leaders among them. "For of God and through God and unto God are all things" (Rom. 11:33).

### **Conclusion**

When preaching is God-centered in the full-orbed sense of the word, the truth of the Word is communicated through a godly man as the Gospel of the Kingdom with a view to practical godliness in dependence upon, for the sake and to the praise of God, then--and only then--a full-orbed worship can be expected to explode. Such preaching programmatically and systematically aims at it. As it reaches out to any and all audiences, it opens up vistas upon the full worth of the Triune God, inviting worship. When an audience does not have the Word snatched away from it by the Enemy, neither has it scorched under persecution, nor has it choked by everyday concerns, it blossoms out into a full-orbed holy life (Mt. 13:18-23). This "invitation" will not fall on deaf ears. The heart will respond. In the joy of the Spirit and with undivided devotion to its Lord, it will praise God (Acts 2:46, 47).

Through the vision of the holiness of God and in submission to his dominion, all the "crowns" will end up at the foot of the throne, and the exultation of the Triune God will ever expand.

By way of sobering reminder, the Father seeks worship from worshippers (John 4:23, 24). And what the Father seeks, he will find. If humans would ever fall silent, the stones would take up their place and cry out in praise (Lk. 19:40)!