

The Pastor in Life & Ministry

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STUDY ONE

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE WORD OF GOD

The Nature of a Word

A word is a part of whole of an idea, intended to be an image in the mind of one person, generally with a view to imparting it to another—or others—by uttering it, writing it, or conveying it by signs and gestures. Man is so created that he receives and imparts words from God, fellowman or other personalities. Rational creatures understand words, and on receiving them may accept or reject them, or hold them in suspension.

The Source of Words

God is the Author of all things, and in that sense the Author of thinking. Initially all words were pure, and so the ideas they expressed were authentic. Following the fall of man, ideas (words) may come from (a) God to man, (b) from evil sources to man, (c) from man to man, (d) from man to himself, for man cogitates and introspects. What is ontological is true, and what is not (i.e. that which is unontological, anti-ontological) is untrue so that all words always *only* intended for what is real—are used in order to claim ‘ontological’ being, i.e. basic reality. They are really stolen words, an example of which can be seen in Jeremiah 23:29-32. Because of the fall of man (Rom. 1:19f.) our knowledge of the

essential order of things (i.e. the truth: Ps. 119:160; 31:5; John 17:17) can only come from God (the Scriptures) via the Man of truth (Jesus Christ [John 1:14; 14:6; 18:37]) and the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit [John 16:12-15; I John 5:7]).

The Only True Word/s

God's speaking is from Himself and His wisdom. If man speaks from God his words are true. if not then they are not true. Isaiah 55:6-11 indicates that man's thoughts are not God's. This may mean (a) that God has a greater capacity for thoughts, or (b) the mind of fallen man is of another disposition. Whilst it is true God's capacity is greater than man's it does not mean man cannot understand what God is thinking and saying if God communicates. Without repentance, faith, and an affected will, man cannot hear what has been said by God. That the Scriptures constitute God's word is strongly debated by man. This in-scripturated truth—along with the present working of the Triune God—is our only means of knowing truth (John 17:17; Ps. 31:5; cf. II Tim. 3:16-17).

The Substance and Subject of God's Word

Man created by God correlates to Him as a son (to the Father), a creature (to the Creator) and a servant (to the King). He can only know what God reveals. God is wise, and He has His own counsel. God's counsel is His will, His plan for history and His acts in working out history (see Isa. 46:8-11; 48:3-8; Jer. 23:23ff.; Eph. 1:9-11; 3:8-12). Thus man can only discover counsel, i.e. wisdom—as far as is necessary for him to do so—by listening to God, and reading His acts in history. *If God were not to speak there would be no communication from Him, and none to man.* Man would know

nothing but his research into the phenomenological facts of man and creation. Apart from the inscripturated truth man cannot have an ontology of God, man and creation, i.e. his theology, anthropology and cosmology will always be deficient.

God's Modes of Speaking

God's word comes through many media, i.e. *creation* (Ps. 19:1-4), *theophanies* or manifestations of Himself (Gen. 18:1f.; Exod. 3:2f.), *angelic visitants* (Gen. 28:10-17), *the law* (Ps. 119; cf. Deut. 33:1ff.), *His own acts* throughout history, *the prophets* (Num. 12:6; Deut. 18:15ff.; Jer. 23:23f.), *Jesus Christ* the Logos, *the Spirit* (II Pet. 1:20-21; John 16:12-15) and *the church*—*the* proclaimers of truth. Note that the Scriptures, themselves, inform us concerning these media. It is not good enough to say that God speaks in **words** and deeds. John 14:10-14 (cf. Rom. 15:18-19; cf. Jer. 23:23ff.). His words are His deeds, His deeds His words (see Study 8, para one).

The Word is All

When we look at the various forms and modes of the word of God, and recognize that God and His word are identical, then we see that nothing happens without the word. This is because the word of God is powerful (Heb. 4:12) and effective (Rev. 19:13, 15) and as the word, is never apart from the Holy Spirit. Together they are one in action and power.

In practice this means we have the word of God for pastoral ministry. Primarily this is *kerugmatic* (evangelistic proclamation). This salvific word is also the word of true healing, and at the same time it is didactic *in the context of the church*, where it is ministered

for the benefit of all so that it is pastoral in all aspects. The church itself is proclaiming the word to the world both soteriologically and prophetically, and all of this in the context and operation of salvation history.

STUDY TWO

(by Ian Pennicook)

THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

By ‘The Centrality of the Cross’ far more is meant than just the *importance* of the Cross. Probably no Christian, evangelical or otherwise, would question that. What we must see is not only that the Cross *must* be central, but that it *is* central. Its centrality lies not in our sense of urgency, but is in the very nature of the case.

1. The Ontological Centrality

Rev. 13:8 ‘... *The Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world*’. The question must be asked, does this only refer to the dynamics of redemption, or is there in this statement an indication of something which far exceeds *human* need? Does it, in fact correlate to the whole being of God, in one sense, quite apart from human sin’?

It must be said that the Cross is far more than a contingency in the face of human sin. God is Holy, and this is not only over against human sin; He is *essentially* holy (cf. Isa. 57:15). Evil may not,

therefore, sojourn with Him (Ps. 5:4). Habbakuk 1:13 says that God cannot look on wrong; His purity is not mere reaction but is the expression of His whole being.

We must see that the Cross is, therefore, an ontological necessity. Were Christ not the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, there would be *no fundamental* declaration by God of the truth of His own being and nature. In other words, the entrance of sin into the world was over against that which was true in eternity; it was not over against a void, albeit a good one. We may go further and that had God not acted in eternity to destroy the whole possibility of evil ever having a *genuine* existent, then God would have ceased to be God, and there would be no valid basis for any law in creation.

P. T. Forsyth¹ has put it that the Cross was ‘the great confessional’. It was not primarily the confession of human sin over against the holiness of God, but of the holiness of God over against sin. He says, ‘he [i.e. Christ] confessed God’s holiness in reacting mortally against human sin, in cursing human sin, in judging it to its very death’. Had he not done so, God’s holiness would, of course, have been called into question and effectively denied. But what Christ did on the Cross was the outworking in history, and therefore in the experience of men and women, of all that was true in eternity. It was not that, until the Cross took place in history, sin had some valid existence, but, that sin was denied its genuine existence before ever it appeared.

Forsyth again: ‘What is the Atonement but the satisfaction of the conscience—God’s and man’s—the adjustment, the pacification, of conscience, and especially God’s’.² And further, ‘If his conscience be not met, ours is not sure’.³ The point is that before man’s conscience

¹ *The Work of Christ* (Fontana, London, 1965), p. 130.

² *The Cruciality of the Cross* (Independent Press, London, 1957), p. 57.

³ *The Work of Christ*, p. 141.

can effectively be satisfied, the offence done to the holiness of God, to His conscience, must also be atoned. God has a conscience which must be satisfied.

When Jesus cried, 'Father, glorify thy name' (John 12:28) the reply came 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again'. The Greek word for 'I have glorified it' is *edoxasa*, which is the aorist tense, implying a single action in the past. But what was this past act of glorification? It is unlikely that this refers to the signs which Jesus had done, as C. K. Barrett suggests⁴ since that would hardly fit the regular use of the aorist.⁵ However, if the single action was that definitive glorification which took place in eternity, where Jesus was 'the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world' then this declaration of God makes sense. He has glorified His name, in eternity, and will glorify it again, at the Cross, in history and so in the presence of men and women who as yet do not acknowledge it. In other words, God's conscience has been satisfied! He is not in some torment of conscience until the action of the Cross in history, because His name is *already glorified*. It is only on this basis that the men and women of faith before the incarnation of Christ could be justified.

When we say, then, that there is an ontological necessity for the Cross, we mean that *the Cross had to be*, because God could not allow the possibility that evil should ever have genuine existence. The Cross took place in history *because* it took place first in eternity. What took place in history, then, was God effecting that which had already been established. So as sin attempted to challenge the truth of the character of God, its real nature was exposed and its apparent power drained. The defeat of sin was certain from the moment it appeared (cf. Gen. 3:15).

⁴ *The Gospel According to St. John*, (S.P.C.K, London, 1967), p. 355.

⁵ However, there is the use of the aorist in John 17:4, where Jesus says, 'I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do'. Even here, the aorist implies that it was the accomplishment, the completion (*teleiósas*) of the work, i.e. a single action, which glorified the Father. It must also be noted that, in the Scriptures, glory has a particularly *moral* connotation.

2. The Theological Centrality

Theology is the ordering of our thinking about God and all that He has revealed of Himself and His purposes. It follows then, that, if the Cross is the great action of history because it is the great action of eternity, it must not be absent from our thinking when we engage in theology.

However, theology is not just academic thinking; it must always relate to proclamation. Hence, Paul said that the Cross could not be anything but central to his proclamation (so I Cor. 1:17-18; 2: 1-5). Proclamation which did not have the Cross as its core could not be true Christian preaching. This does not mean that preachers should, as C. H. Spurgeon is reputed to have said,⁶ ‘take a text and make a bee-line for the Cross’. It means that the work of the Cross is the key to understanding all that God is about in history. We could say that it is the hermeneutical principle.

We can see that the proclamation of the Cross (I Cor. 1:17) is not, finally, that which we do. The word of the Cross is the word of Christ, i.e. the word which he himself proclaims through those who bring the gospel (Rom. 10:17). The Cross is his action to defeat the power and powers of evil. The proclamation of the Cross is his action to effect in the lives of men and women that which was accomplished at the Cross. Apart from that proclamation, men and women can never know the truth of what God has done. Only in the Cross can they know the victory which has been won. Thus Paul’s great declaration, ‘Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world’ (Gal. 6:14).

⁶ I have not been able to verify the statement as coming from Spurgeon. It seems somewhat simplistic for someone with his gifts and insights.

STUDY THREE

(by Dean Carter)

THE PASTOR AND HIS PERSPECTIVE

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son. (Hebrews 1: 1, 2)

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4: 13)

Introduction

For our three studies, on the *Pastor's Perspective, Reading, and Preaching*, we will focus on the Letter to the Hebrews. This Epistle will give us ample scope to treat each of these areas, especially in relation to *God's final Word, His Son*. Our first study will concentrate on the situation established by God for His creation, as determined by the redemptive revelation of His Son Jesus.

'God Has Spoken'

In the past God has addressed man, by partial and fragmentary (though consistent) means (Heb. 1:1). But now the situation has

radically changed' God has spoken to us by a Son' (1:2). This Son, with the revelation he brings and redemption he effects, is the final, permanent, and anticipated fulfilment of promise.

Whatever angels mediated as messengers (1:14; 2:2), the Son spoke as Lord (2:3). When Moses' ministry *in* the household of God is considered (3:5), we find that Jesus as Son is *over* God's household, and he mediates the divine call (3: 1). Again, the Aaronic priesthood, so intertwined and dependent on the law, neither of which fulfilled the promise (7:11, 19; 9:9), was superseded by the Son as priest after the order of Melchizedek (apart from the law, 5:7-10: and 2:10-11; 7:7-11, 19).

In fact, a new situation has arisen, for these are the *last days* (1:2), and the *time of reformation* (9: 10). A new order has been established, and it demands the appropriate response from all men. The one act of the Cross has enabled God to raise Jesus to glory (2:9, 10; 13:20), in readiness for the dismantling of all creation (12:26-27). And God speaks clearly to all men, with a uniform demand (4: 13).

'The Word of God Calls All to Account'

The people of God have been given a 'heavenly call' (3:1). This call has come as 'promise' and 'good news' from the living God (4:1-2), and anticipates meeting 'faith in the hearers' (4:2; of. Gal. 3:1-2; Rom. 10:14). God's people are to hear and obey the Word (Ps. 95:7-11). It has come both to Israel and the Christian Church, with the uniform demand. In fact, the *same* word has come, and all are to give account (4:13), as it *summons* them to the great destination (11:39-40), yet stands *over against* them (2: 1-4; 12:25).

The Word is a 'promise', which reveals that the *eschatos* (the last things) and the *telos* (the goal) are co-terminus. All things centre on the Son, and are sustained by His Word (1:3). He is controlling all history (12:8), and establishing the kingdom of God (12:28). It is this

kingdom which grants God's people the place of rest (4:9-10), since it is the true city and fatherland (10:34; 11:10-16; 13:14) for all who have been aliens and strangers (11:13, 38-40). This promise is faithful, because God is faithful (10:23; 11:11; cf. 6:18), but is not known by anyone now other than as promise (12:26).

Living at the End of the Age

The History in which the Word is given is also the History of promise (1:3). When we compare and contrast the discussion of Mount Sinai and Mount Zion in chapter 12, we find that Sinai represents all that is imperfect, inadequate and anticipatory. The perfect is recognized and realized in Zion. What connects both Sinai and Zion is the God of the Covenants, and His word has always demanded trust and worship (12:25, 28).

In the past, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets and other means (1:1). When we look back beyond Sinai, we see the Patriarchs (chs. 6 and I I). When we look forward from Sinai, we observe life in Canaan, with the operation of the Old Testament cultus (chs. 3—5). These witness to us, both negatively (chs. 3 and 4) and positively (ch. 6:13, 11). But now, the new covenant has been inaugurated, and we perceive the content of that promissory word—the Son in glory.

The Son appeared once (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10: 10) to deal with sin (9:26), and now rules by love (1:3; 2:8b-9; 10:12). He made purification of our sins, being the propitiation for them (9:14; 2:17). So the sons of God trust Him, and are united with Him. This trust is the *one right thing* for which the situation calls: man is 'to abandon himself to the sin-bearing love which appeals to Him in Christ, and to do so unreservedly, unconditionally, and for ever.'¹ Again, we are one with Christ simply and solely through faith, and the 'one thing in the universe which evokes such faith . . . is the love of Christ in

¹ James Denney *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1959) p. 290.

which He bears our sins in His body on the tree'.²

It is this love which carries all things through to God's appointed goal—'the last reality in the world is the love which has borne their sins and will not suffer anything to frustrate its gracious purpose'.³ And God has revealed the goal, which is the dismantling of the present creation, for its replacement by an unshakeable kingdom (1:10-12, citing Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 12:26-28).

The Son as Pioneer and Priest

Who is this Son, who has revealed God, and to whom we draw near, and for whom we eagerly await (4:16; 7:25; 9:28)? He is portrayed as *Pioneer* (2:10; 5:9; 12:2) and *Priest* (2:17; 4:14; etc).

Pioneer

Jesus is the Pioneer of salvation and faith. He faced death, repudiating unbelief, confident in the promise of God (12:2), and in his endurance shows what God requires of us all (10:36). Further, he tasted death for all (2:9). He knew limitations and temptations throughout his earthly life, but is now exalted. United with him, we too are bound for glory, for he has made a proleptic entrance into the presence of God. He has achieved *our* status, so we are called to follow.

The way of following, through suffering, shows the appropriate path to glory (2:10-11; 12:9; 5:8; 12:5ff.). What Jesus has done, he has done for his brethren—liberated them from fear of death, to the hope of glory (2:14). Further, as Pioneer Jesus is the 'head of the class', so that all the people of God follow him, facing the future with confidence (10:35). And as 'forerunner', he has taken his place as Priest (6:21).

² op. cit., p. 303,

³ op. cit., p. 330.

Priest

As Priest, Jesus is like his brethren, the people of God (2:14, 17 18: 4:15). He was elected by God to this position (5:5-10). The significant features of his priesthood are his radical obedience (front the heart), with the offering of himself (10:5-10), and his proper approach to God (with the required sacrificial blood of the covenant 9:14, 24-28; 10:12, 19).

Just as he was utterly trustworthy prior to the Cross, so he is to be trusted since then. He gives access now (to faith) to what we shall inherit (and know by sight. 10:19; 4:16; 12:22). But what of the Church, to which tile Letter is addressed?

The Church of the Hebrews

They were struggling with the problem that ‘if God’s final revelation had occurred in the Son, and had effected the purgation of sins, and defeated the Devil, why was the very community of the Lord Jesus under such pressure’?. Because they were theologically backward and biblically illiterate, they could not deal with imminent practical difficulties. What do we know of them?

They had had fine leadership (13:7), known the Spirit of grace and his operations (2: 1, 4; 6:4, 5), and engaged in generous service (6:10). The Church was called to be holy (12:14:2:11; 10:10,

Yet they had been persecuted (10:32-34), and had become ‘sluggish’ (5:11). They faced great testings (temptations), perhaps even unto death (2:15; 12:4). Regular ongoing encouragement was neglected (3:13), as was congregational meeting (10:25).

The ‘Sluggish’ Church (5:11 6:20)

The writer yearns for the Church to be mature, and for teachers minister (5:12). Yet when he begins to give instruction on the superiority of Jesus as the Melchizedek High Priest, he acknowledges

their inability to cope. They have become *dull of hearing* (5:11; 6:12), whereas they ought to be ‘imitators of those who . . . inherit the promises’.

He gives strong encouragement (6:17, 18) to those in danger of falling away (drifting away, 2:1; commit apostasy, 6:6). He sees that the ‘difficult word’ and ‘word of exhortation’ are linked, and opposed to sluggishness (with its hardness of heart and propensity to deliberate sin, 3:12, 13; 10:26). This very word he brings is the Word of God (of. 1:2), and is the means of maturity. They are to recall those who brought the ‘word of God’ (5:12; and ‘of righteousness’, 5:13) to them, and mark their lives (13:7).

For they are immature, unskilled, childish and dull, lacking the right response to the promissory Word of God (5:11-13; cf. 4:12). This poor Christian situation, (of. Israel in chs. 3 and 4) has effected their sluggish attitude to the Old Testament (‘the first principles’?) and rendered them unwilling to penetrate any further than the simple and basic’ truths of the Gospel (6:1). In the face of their inertness before the Scriptures (here Ps. 2; and 110; and later Prov. 3 in 12:5-6), they are now lethargic to hear the fulness of the ‘good news’ (4:2).

The preacher brings the ‘oracles of God’ (5:12; 6:3) again, to show that Jesus is High Priest, and what that means for the community of faith. This is to encourage them, just as God encouraged Abraham by the promise in which he hoped (6:11-15). His great desire is for them to hope in Jesus, who has been given access into the heavenly sanctuary to make our ‘introductions’ (6: 18-20). This indeed is a strong ‘exhortation’ (6:18)!

The Writer’s Pastoral Concern

The writer of the Epistle shows his genuine concern. He knows that the new age has dawned in Christ, and like Paul, has a new perspective (II Cor. 5:16). He knows the purposes of God, and his

personal and congregational responsibilities. Like the leaders, he acknowledges his accountability (4: 13; 10:30; 13: 17). He longs to see the Church built up and strengthened by grace (13:9; 12:15). He knows it's difficult times—both past (10:32-39) and present (5:11—6: 12; 10:25).

He speaks the word of God, knowing that both the Old and New Testament people are *under* the Word. He even understands that Christ enables him to interpret the Old Testament appropriately, as it prepares and witnesses to its climax in Him (i.e. the relationships and disposition of Jesus show him to be the promised Messiah; Ps. 22; and 40). The Old Testament both remains God's word, and becomes God's word for His people.

Further, he affirms, as did P. T. Forsyth, that 'Society . . . is being driven most reluctantly, amid violent and even hysterical resistance, to that ultimate ethical crux, where the theologians are waiting for it (themselves with a changed and softened temper) round the cross of Christ'.⁴

And simply because that is true, like the writer of this Epistle, 'We refuse to bow to the spirit of the age, but we ought at least to speak the language of that age, and address it from the Cross in the tone of its too familiar sorrow'.⁵ To be able to do this, we are ourselves called to hear and read the Word of God, with faith.

⁴ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (Blackwood: NCPI, 1984) p. 122.

⁵ P. T. Forsyth *God the Holy Father* (Blackwood: NCPI, 1987) p. 61.

STUDIES FOUR, FIVE AND FIFTEEN
(by Noel Due)

MINISTRY IN II CORINTHIANS

Introduction

Paul's understanding of ministry as reflected in II Corinthians cannot be understood apart from the situation into which he was writing.

Paul came to Corinth with nothing to preach but Christ crucified (I Cor. 2:2) and he shared the gospel with integrity of heart and method (I Cor. 1:17; 2:1; cf. Acts 20:22ff.; I Thess. 2:1-12; etc.). He thus laid a pure foundation upon which others were to build (I Cor. 3: 10f.; cf. II Cor. 11:1ff.), the 'others' probably including Peter and Apollos (I Cor. 1:10ff.). After remaining at Corinth for at least 18 months (Acts 18:1-11), he was forced by circumstances to leave the city, ultimately to arrive at Ephesus (Acts 18: 18if.).

While at Ephesus Paul kept in touch with the state of the Corinthian church through letters and messengers. It is clear from I Corinthians 5:9 that he had written a letter to the church ('Corinthians A') which is now lost. Members of the church had visited Paul (I Cor. 1: 11; cf. the official party of I Cor. 16:17ff.) probably delivering to him the letter mentioned in I Corinthians 7:1. The reply to this letter is our I Corinthians.

The problems existing in the church are well known. Party spirit, immorality, litigations, abuses of the Lord's supper, abuses of the gifts, disagreements about marriage and food offered to idols as well as

theological anomalies regarding the teaching on the resurrection, all appear in the letter. However, the point that is of primary relevance to us is the questioning of Paul's apostleship (I Cor. 4:3, 15; 9:1f.) and the attitude of spiritual 'arrogance' associated with this (cf. I Cor. 4:6ff.; 4:18f.; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; II Cor. 12:20).

Though the historical reconstructions of the sequence of events following the delivery of I Corinthians to the church are quite varied¹, it would seem that Paul wrote at least one more letter to the Corinthian Christians that has been lost to us ('Corinthians C'). Our II Corinthians is thus probably the fourth letter of Paul's to the church in Corinth. Sometime after I Corinthians had been written (though this is an argument from silence) the Corinthian church was assailed by a group of persons who represented themselves as servants of Christ in the apostolic sense, i.e. they were claiming to be apostles of Christ with an authority rivalling that of Paul. Clearly many of the members of the church were convinced of their genuineness and were swayed by their arguments.

What was the identity of these false teachers? From II Corinthians 11:22, 23 we can gather that they were Judaizing Jews from Jerusalem who were claiming to be servants of Christ. Their message was in some ways very similar to the Gospel that Paul preached (11:4; cf. 11:13, 15). They sought to commend themselves (cf. 11: 18) and they also came with and sought letters of commendation (3:1). Judging from verses such as 5:12 they took pride in appearance, but doubtless this means, not so much one's physical form, but rather the appearance of being wise and spiritually powerful (5:13; 12:1; cf. Col. 2:18). Their boasting was in keeping with the prevailing Graeco-Roman social *mores* but well out of touch with the ethics of the kingdom (cf. Mark 10:35ff.; Phil. 2: 1-11; etc.).

What they were saying about Paul can be fairly deduced from the way he writes. It seems that they were accusing him of being

¹ For an excellent discussion of the issues involved, and for a reasonable reconstruction of C. K. Barrett's Introduction in *his Second Epistle to the Corinthians*

powerless (3:5), foolish (11:1, 16; etc.) and weak (10:1): a coward whose 'letters are weighty, but whose bodily presence is unimpressive and . . . speech contemptible'(10:10). Paul's gospel appeared to them to be veiled, obscure and secretive (4:1ff.) and moreover it was preached by a man who did not love the Corinthians because he did not let them contribute to his personal needs (11:6ff.). Paul was worldly (10:3-6), having nothing of the numinous about him and not exuding charisma. Furthermore he operated in an underhanded way by craftiness and deceit (12:16) so that, all in all, he is not to be trusted and his Gospel is not to be adhered to.

On the contrary they were *hyperlian apostoloi* (11:5; 12:t 1). Paul's coined word appears only here in the *New Testament*, though the use of the word *hyper* is common throughout II Corinthians 10—12 (e.g. 10:14; 12:7).

Against such a background as this the themes of weakness and power, triumphalism and suffering, God's sufficiency and human impotence and the great issues of grace are all sensible. With this background in view we are now in a position to look at some specific passages which take up the topic of Paul's view of ministry.

II Corinthians 2:14-3:6

2:14. 'But' (i.e. in contrast to the travail of 2:13 and the whole of Paul's personal situation) 'thanks be to God who always leads us in [His] triumph'.

The figure used by Paul is that of a Roman triumph,² We are all captives of divine grace, having once been enemies and haters of God (Rom. 1:28; cf. 5:6, 8, 10), but now being laid hold of by Christ

² If a Roman general returned to the city from a campaign, and if he had taken more than 5,000 prisoners captive, he was granted a 'triumph' through the streets of Rome. He would ride at the head of the procession, resplendent in chariot and special tunic. Behind him would come standard bearers and then row upon row of soldiers. Trailing along behind would be the hapless prisoners, straggling along in chains.

(Phil. 3:12) and made to be His bondslaves. And, as Paul's experience testified, this often meant living in real bonds for the sake of the kingdom.

In the triumph we are led 'in Christ', i.e. we can never consider ourselves apart from being in Him (cf. II Cor. 5:17). We have no standing before God, and thus no true ministry, apart from 'in Christ'. In this state there comes through His captives 'a sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place'. This alludes to the practice of burning incense in association with the triumphal procession. God leads in triumph and He manifests the aroma, not Paul.

2:15-16. In the procession Paul says, 'we are a fragrance of Christ to God'. The word here is different from verse 14.³ It seems clear that Paul has two different images in mind. Here the word refers to the fragrance of sacrifice directed Godward (cf. Gen. 8:21; Exod. 29:18; Lev. 1:9; Num. 15:3; Ezek. 6:13; Dan. 4:34; Eph. 5:2), whereas the other word more naturally fits into the context of the incense spread abroad during the triumph. He seems thus to be saying that in his apostolic call his life is poured out as a sacrifice to God (cf. Rom. 12:1; 15:6; Phil. 2:17). The primary thrust of his ministry is thus Godward and as this apostolic call is lived out 'among those who are being saved and those who are perishing', the fragrance of the knowledge of God is spread abroad. To some it is a fragrance of 'death to death', to others it is a fragrance of 'life to life', just as the incense of the triumph would have been.

Here is thus a wonderful piece of 'reverse triumphalism'.⁴ Paul's ministry is not one of overt power, but it is nonetheless effective in the same way that an aroma is effective. As he is 'poured out' in turmoil and suffering, hardship and trial, persecution and affliction, the aroma of his life, which is Godward not manward (i.e. in no

³ 2:14 has *osmé* while 2:15 has *euódia*. *osmé* appears again in 2:16

⁴ A term used by Rev. Paul Barnett in the 1986 Magarey Lectures.

sense cosmetic) spreads throughout the world. This putting out is a matter of life and death for his hearers, hence the question ‘Who is adequate for these things?’. This question is answered directly only in chapter 3, but it is answered indirectly in the next verse as Paul shows up who is inadequate.

2:17. Paul does not carry out his ministry ‘like many’ (Barrett suggests the translation ‘like the majority’) who ‘peddle’ the word of God. The word describing the action of the false teachers was common in the wine trade, where watered down produce was sold from door to door (hence the translation ‘corrupting’). The ‘product’ in this case is the Gospel, i.e. the word of God (cf. I Thess. 2:13; Heb. 13:7; Rev. 1:9). Paul’s assertion is that in his proclamation of it there has been no hint of salesmanship. His work has been in the open, in sincerity, ‘in the sight of God’ (cf. Acts. 20:18ff.; I Thess. 2:5ff.; etc.).

3:1. Having made this assertion, Paul is aware that his opponents at Corinth are likely to seize it as an opportunity to twist his words into a representation of Paul’s self—adulation. Possibly they would have already picked up some earlier statements (e.g. I Cor. 4:16; 11:1) in order to condemn Paul on this score!⁵ His point here is to affirm that his authority is not linked to earthly letters of commendation, but is from God.

3:2-3. Paul’s letter of commendation is the church itself, as carried in his heart (cf. 6:11-13; 7:2f.). This internal letter is ‘known and read by all men’. There is nothing hidden or esoteric about Paul’s ministry. There is no need for confidential letters of commendation, that are read only by a few. Rather there is the open statement of the

⁵ ‘Self defence is almost impossible without self commendation. St. Paul’s opponents at Corinth made the former necessary, and then blamed him for the latter.’ Quoted in Barrett. *II Corinthians* p. 106.

truth in the life of Paul himself.

This internal letter on Paul's heart has been manifest in the existence of the church at Corinth. As such it is Christ's letter of commendation. The congregation has been cared for by Paul (cf. 11:2ff.; I Thess. 2:11; ICor. 4:15), but its existence is Christ's testimony to Paul's apostolic ministry. Since the church is not of human derivation it can be spoken of as having been written not with ink, 'but with the Spirit of the living God' (cf. Titus 3:4ff.; ICor. 12:13; John 3: 1-8; etc.). Moreover this imperishable writing material has been used on 'hems of flesh' not 'tablets of stone' (cf. Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 31:31ff.). Paul's allusion to the New Covenant passages will lead later in the chapter to the consideration of the nature of his ministry under the New Covenant. His mention of it here is preparatory to that discussion, but also to point the Corinthians to the fact that their experience of the Gospel has been inward. It has brought a change of heart and thus does not need external commendation (cf. the way Paul uses the experience of the Galatian converts in Gal. 3:1ff.).

3:4. The authority for Paul's claim (that they are themselves all the commendation that Paul needs and that this commendation is linked to the ushering in of the New Covenant) is 'through Christ before God', i.e. there is no self confidence on his part, as is made plain in the verses which follow.

3:5-6. Paul's adequacy is from God. There is no other basis for ministry (cf. I Cor. 15:10) and thus in the face of the great triumphalism of the false apostles, Paul is at pains to witness to his own weakness (cf. 4:7ff.; 5:18f.; 6:4ff.; 7:5f.; 11:23ff.; 12:9f.: 13:3f.). Nothing in Paul's ministry stands to its own credit, rather it is all to the credit of God who has made Paul⁶ the 'servant of a New

⁶ See Acts 9:3ff.; 26:16-18; 22:14f.; cf. I Tim. 1:12.

Covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit' (in contrast to the false teachers who are by implication still ministering under the old). Only the ministry of the Spirit in New Covenant can bring life, for the old "kills '.

II Corinthians 4:1-18

4: 1-2. The preceding paragraph has been contrasting the ministry of Moses under the Old Covenant and Paul's ministry under the New. The one was a ministry of fading glory, the other a ministry of increasing glory.

'Therefore' (i.e. in the light of the magnificent nature of ministry of the Gospel), 'as we have received mercy we do not lose heart'. Ministry flows out of the knowledge of God's great mercy especially in the case of Paul who never forgot that he was persecutor of the church (I Cor. 7:25; 15:9f.; Gal. 1:13; I Tim. 1:12-17). In receiving mercy the constraint of love and fear of God come upon him (II Cor. 5:11, 14; cf. Ps. 130:4), and the reception of mercy establishes hope in order to continue in ministry. The 'losing heart' means, among other things, that Paul does not lose heart in the proclamation of the Gospel in integrity and purity, as is indicated by the rest of the sentence.

The renunciation of anything 'hidden' or 'crafty' is clearly linked the reception of mercy as the impetus to ministry. Only those who have had the secrets of their hearts exposed, judged and thus forgiven are able to renounce any false practice in ministry because only they have no vested interest in the outcome. They are in debt to the Spirit to witness to the truth, not to the flesh to keep up appearances (cf. Gal. 6:12f.). In this way Paul asserts that he 'does not walk in craftiness or adulterate the word of God'. Craftiness is a mark of the evil one (11:3, 11-15) and it belongs to the realm of the flesh that has been put aside by those who have been translated from the realm of the

flesh to the realm of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:18ff.; Col. 3:5-11; Eph. 5:8; etc.). The word *panourgia* means literally, 'readiness to do anything', i.e. there is no indication of expediency in relationship to the apostolic proclamation.

Rather than subterfuge and deceit, therefore, Paul's proclamation has been the open and bold statement ('manifestation') of the truth (cf. 3: 12), which has been towards 'every man's conscience'⁷ and 'in the sight of God' (cf. 1:12; 2:17; Heb. 4:13; John 3:20f.).

4:3-4. 'And even if our Gospel is veiled' (which seems to point to the criticisms of Paul's calumniators possibly for his seeming ineffectiveness) 'it is veiled to those who are perishing' (cf. 2:15f.; 3:15; I Cor. 1:18; Mark 4:11f.). These are those whose 'minds' (not 'eyes' as would be expected) have been blinded by 'the god of this age', i.e. the evil one himself (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; I John 5:19; Eph. 2:2). In the proclamation we are not simply dealing with the stubbornness of rebellious humanity, but with a humanity that has allowed itself to be deceived and taken captive by the evil one.

This blinding has been done in order that 'they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ'. The phrase is complicated, but the general meaning is clear. These are those who neither come to salvation or to a true knowledge of the person of Christ who is the 'image of God' (cf. 5:16).

4:5. It is not of himself or for his own aggrandizement that Paul preaches the Gospel. He was not one who sought the glory of men (cf. I Thess. 2:5f.), rather his message was thoroughly Christ centred (cf. I Cor. 2:2; Phil. 2:11; Acts 2:36; etc.). In serving Christ he had become the 'bondservant' of the Corinthians (cf. I Cor. 3:4ff.; 4:1, 9if.; 15:10; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1), in contrast to the false

⁷ This is in itself an interesting point. There is the constant temptation to preach to the emotions or the intellect or the sight, all of which may bring more 'visible' results in the short term (cf. I Tim. 1:5).

apostles who sought greatness through domination (cf. Mark 10:35-45; Ezek. 34:4). This service was clearly ‘for Jesus’ sake’⁸ which would also be under His hand.

4:6. Paul’s service⁵ is for Jesus’ sake because of God’s great action in redemption. Apart from God’s grace in redemption we remain blind and dark (cf. Eph. 5:8). Importantly light is said to shine ‘out of darkness’. Says Hughes:⁹

The Creator God of the Old Testament is one and the same with the ReCreator God of the New Testament. It should be noted, however, that at creation God’s word ‘Let there be light’ was a divine fiat uttered from heaven; whereas in re-creation God’s effective word is not a mere fiat, but the Living Word of His only-begotten Son, made flesh here on earth (Heb. 1:2). ‘Then indeed He said, "Let it be" and it was’, comments Chrysostom; ‘but now He said nothing but He Himself became light for us: for the Apostle does not say, "hath also now commanded", but "hath Himself shined"’.

4:7-10. ‘But’ (here an emphatic contrast) the treasure of the Gospel is contained ‘in earthen vessels’. While the ministry of the Gospel is one of increased glory over the ministry of the Old Covenant, it is not seen to be so. Indeed, the very opposite seems to be the case. However the point is that the earthen nature of the vessels is important so that ‘the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not of ourselves’. It is the Gospel which is ‘the power of God unto salvation’ (Rom. 1:16) and this is independent of the container. The point of the analogy could even suggest that the ‘better’ the vessel the poorer is its use for the purpose of the ministry in which Paul is engaged.

And just as the commonest earthenware pots were used for the most ‘unprotected’ functions, so too is Paul subject to all manner of

⁸ Cf. the story of C. H. Spurgeon who reportedly told his deacons soon after his appointment, ‘I may be your servant but God is my master’.

⁹ II Corinthians p. 133

hardship and rough treatment. He is ‘afflicted in every way. perplexed . . . persecuted . . . struck down’ (cf. I Cor. 4:9-13; II Cor. 6:3-10; 11-12). But in all these things he is not destroyed, for the Gospel inside the containers is imperishable. It is Paul’s utter frailty which exposes the more than adequate sufficiency of God’s grace.

In all of the affliction Paul is certain that the Gospel prevails. How so? Because the affliction is really the ‘carrying about in the body the killings¹⁰ of Jesus’. As the body is destroyed, the vessel broken down, the ‘life of Jesus’ is ‘manifested in our mortal flesh’. The killing of Jesus is the perennial pursuit of fallen humanity and the anger of the Cross is replayed in every situation that the Gospel is preached. The ministry of Paul as the servant of the New Covenant is thus really one of increasing glory, but only as seen by faith, for to the eyes of sight there is only increasing affliction and the open display of weakness.

4:11-12. These verses reiterate the point made in the paragraph above. In all of the afflictions mentioned in 4:8ff., Paul sees that he is ‘constantly being given over to death for Jesus’ sake’ (cf. I Cor. 15:30f.; Rom. 8:36). This process has for its fruit the result that the ‘life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh’. The life of Jesus is only fully manifested in us at the resurrection (Phil. 3:10; cf. Phil. 3:20f.; Rom. 8:17f.; Col. 3:1-4; II Tim. 2:11f.; etc.), but even now it begins to shine through these bodies that are ‘doomed to death’. In short, says Paul, ‘death works in us, but life in you’. The ‘seed’ falls to the ground and dies so that a rich harvest may follow.

4:13-14. ‘But’ (i.e. notwithstanding the fact that all we seem to get out of the ministry is death and that you receive life) Paul says that by faith they are constrained to speak. The quotation is from Psalm

¹⁰ Usually Paul uses the common word *thanatos* when wanting to speak of death (as in 4:11, 12). Here, however, he uses *nekrōsis*, indicating the process of making dead. See Barrett, *op. cit.* p. 139f.

116:10 (LXX), which is a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from death. Paul is saying that he has the same ‘spirit of faith’ as did the Psalmist who believed and therefore spoke while in the middle of his affliction. The point seems to be that that constraint of faith produces proclamation which is carried on in and through affliction, not that there is a removal of affliction that produces belief that then leads to proclamation.

Paul’s hope is not set on the temporal alleviation of affliction in the current era, but on the hope of the resurrection. The believing and speaking is carried on ‘knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will raise us also with Jesus and present us with you’. Our resurrection is ‘with Jesus’ by virtue of His identification with us (cf. I Cor. 15:12ff., Eph. 2:5f.; Rom. 6:3ff.; Col. 2:13; 3:1ff.) in order that we may be ‘presented’ to God the Father. Paul’s concern here is that such an event will not be apart from those to whom he has ministered. Paul’s hope is thus not simply personal, but formed in the love he has for the church. His hope is that they and he together will share in the resurrection of the last day.

4:15. ‘All things’ i.e. all the sufferings and afflictions as well as the hope of the age to come are ‘for your sakes’, says Paul. ‘For Jesus’ sake’ and ‘for your sakes’ are clearly not mutually exclusive terms (cf. Acts 9:4; I Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22-23). There is nothing in Paul’s ministry that is there for its own sake or for the sake of Paul himself. All has been done for the sake of his hearers, ‘so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound for the glory of God’. Thus in serving Christ Paul serves the church, with the result that the grace of God ‘spreads’ to more and more, i.e. increasing numbers believe the Gospel. This causes the giving of thanks to abound for God’s glory as more give thanks and also as those within the fellowship rejoice in the spreading influence of the Gospel. Such giving of thanks is the right and proper vocation of all mankind (cf. Rom. 1:21).

4:16. ‘Therefore’, i.e. in the light of the nature and magnificence of the ministry of the Gospel, ‘we do not lose heart’. The thought takes up that of verse 1 as Paul’s argument returns to its beginning. The ‘we do not lose heart’ of 4:1 has been followed by a discussion of ministry that consists of death in the midst of life, which, to the eyes of the world is no life at all but rather a spectacle of defeat (cf. I Cor. 4:6-13). We do not lose heart because the very spectacle of our seeming defeat redounds to the glory of God.

4: 17-18. ‘For the momentary light affliction is producing [present continuous] for us an eternal weight of glory...’, but this is only intelligible to he who has with the eyes of faith an eschatological view.¹¹ The ‘weight’ (baros) of glory is heavy compared to the lightness of the affliction, but the affliction in some way produces the glory. Suffering is not the cost of glorification, but the way of it.

Hence in all things (ministry included) we ‘look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen’ (cf. Heb. 11:1). The ‘things seen’ are weakness, frailty, persecution, suffering, affliction and a ministry the success of which cannot be outwardly measured (cf. I Cor. 4:1-5; Gal. 6:5). The ‘things that are not seen’ are the glory of the new creation and the abiding fruit of the ministry of the Gospel. The seen things are ‘temporal’ (i.e. temporary), but the other things are eternal. To which do we have our heart set in the ministry to which we have been called?

¹¹ Says Hughes:

‘... Christian suffering, however protracted it may be, is only for this present life, which, when compared with the everlasting ages of the glory to which it is leading, is but a passing moment: affliction for Jesus’ sake, however crushing it may seem, is in fact light, a weightless trifle, when weighed against the mass of that glory which is the inheritance of all who through grace have been made one with the Son of God. And this is a present reality, even though it is only hereafter that it will be experienced in all its fulness.’

[op. cit. p. 157f.](#)

STUDY SIX
(by Dean Carter)

THE PASTOR AND HIS READING

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless some one guides me?’ (Acts 8:30, 31).

When you come, bring the books too, and especially the ones made of parchment (II Timothy 4: 13, GNB).

Introduction

In this study we will concentrate on the necessity to hear (read) the Word of God, consider some cautions, and note some suggestions as to what and how to read. And from the Letter to the Hebrews we will remind ourselves that we are called to account for how we hear, as we keep our souls and watch over others (4:13; 13:17).

‘Reading, Listening for a Voice’

Helmut Thielicke warns us that ‘the man who studies theology... might watch carefully whether he increasingly does not think in the third rather than in the second person... This transition from one to the other level of thought, from a personal relationship with God to a *merely* technical reference, usually is exactly synchronized with the

moment that I no longer can read the word of Holy Scripture as a word to me, but only as the object of exegetical endeavors'.¹

The Scriptures are firstly addressed to *me*, and they come anticipating a response (Heb. 3:13-15; 4:13). They do not come permitting me to impose the question, 'How can I use this in a sermon?'. For remember, the first time that someone spoke of God and His word in the third person, that is, *about* God but not *with* God, was when the question was posed, 'Did God say?' (Gen. 3:1).

And the next step from there for us is that 'we come to the point where we no longer hear what they (the Scriptures) have to say but delude ourselves in the fatal self-deception of listening to the echo our own way of thinking about God and the world and ourselves'.²

We do well to take Forsyth's advice. 'Our aim must be an ever fresh immersion in the Bible, an immersion both scholarly and experimental.'³ And again, 'Now the ideal ministry must be a Bibliocracy. It must know its Bible better than any other book'.⁴ It was said of James Denney, 'He never reads Scripture as if he had written it: he always reads as if listening for a Voice'.⁵

'Give attention to Reading'

The 'greats' of the past—Luther, Calvin, Baxter, Edwards, Spurgeon, and others—were disciplined readers, in the context of pressing pastoral duties, almost daily preaching, and uncertain health. In Baxter's case, the parish of Kidderminster had growth and maturity due largely to the careful guidance given by Baxter and his curates to the families of the parish. Family libraries were established, and those families without a 'reader' were encouraged to link with families who had 'readers'.

Baxter further notes, 'Many ministers study only to compose their sermons and very little more, when there are so many books to be read and so many matters that we should not be unacquainted with.'

. . . Certainly, brethren, experience will teach you that men are not made learned or wise without hard study and unwearied labour and experience'.⁶

'Been there—done that!'

How often have we been astounded to find that our discoveries were discovered by others long ago—we have simply stumbled upon something which had been overlooked for a while (and that generally to our detriment!).

Here are two examples, which are surprising in their 'relevance'. In an article written back in 1919, P. T. Forsyth remarks:

The missionaries find, as the first Christians found, that they have often to postpone the deep deliverance from sin to the near deliverance from ghostly fear. The heathen are more concerned with their demons than with their misdeeds, and Christ at first is more welcome as an exorcist than as a Redeemer. So for us, paganised as we are by progress, fear has become a greater load than sin— fear of what the civilised machine might bring to the unfavoured many in the way of poverty, slavery, anarchy, or suffering. It is that that weighs on us rather than concern for a wounded God whom we cut in the street. Christ is more welcome as a social exorcist than as a moral Redeemer. Deep in the heart of many is the fear of a future of heartless force—especially fear for our life's ideal gains or dearest souls. We have the love that feareth all things for want of the fear of God. And the Saviour we turn to is one who will restore business confidence rather than the righteousness of God's Kingdom.⁷

The second example is even more stunning. Thomas Torrance's study of *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* comes to alarming conclusions. He shows that the Early Church soon lost its knowledge of grace as the absolutely predominant factor in faith, due to their 'failure to grasp the significance of the death of Christ'.⁸ And

then, due to this failure, they taught that grace was something to be acquired, solely through the Church, by means of pneumatic power.

That worked out in practical terms in this way. He continues:

The early Christians lived in a demonic world full of superstition and fear **and the** grovelling worship of the mysterious and occult. To them salvation largely meant, as it often does in the mission-field to-day, deliverance from a world of evil spirits, and so the Spirit of God came to be looked on as the divine energy **that** overcame the power of evil. Salvation was not so much a matter of atonement and the pardon of guilt, as of dynamic deliverance, of light breaking into darkness; and immortality into the fear of death. It was the Holy Spirit bringing knowledge of the true God and working immanently in the hearts of believers that wrought redemption. Thus attention was directed toward the inner dispositions of the heart and the motions of the human spirit, and it was in that context that they thought of grace. Grace was the gift of spiritual energy that ranged itself within the heart of the believer, and delivered him from evil by bringing him understanding of truth, power to resist evil and live a holy life. It was a phenomenon, a pneumatic energy implanted in the soul. Thus the relation of grace and man came to be thought of sub-personally, as cause and effect instead of as word and faith.⁹

Such are the treats that await those who are prepared to delve into the vast store of literature, ready to instruct us. But are we really interested?

‘Hearing Aids’

Where is reading on our scale of priorities? Are we more concerned with ‘crisis management’ and parish trivia? Are we functionally illiterate, only reading what panders to our ‘sluggishness’? Is our reading determined by ambition, such as a diploma, or denominational status? For proper reading takes serious effort, the

discipline of time and selection of materials.

We work in a study, not office; a reading, not a rumpus room. We read while ‘walking down the road’, not ‘basking on the balcony’. And since our concern is ever to be led into the truth we are under the Lordship of the Spirit, not the scholars. Books then, are our tutors, not our task-masters. They function as ‘hearing aids’, and not as substitutes. But note even Paul’s desire for the books and parchments (notebooks), even after knowing Christ, writing much of the New Testament, and being in ministry for some thirty years.

What to read

For the study of the Bible itself, the essential tools include a Bible Dictionary, an Encyclopaedia of the Bible, and Dictionary of the Christian Church. Then, a Theological Word Book, together with Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, and Brown’s Dictionary of New Testament Theology will prove invaluable.

As for Commentaries, there are many multi-volume sets: Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, Lange, Calvin, Luther, Ellicott, and Lenski. Of the single volume offerings: the Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, New Bible Commentary Revised, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, and the Jerome Commentary are all worth owning. Then, of course, there are the many series: the Anchor Bible, the New Century Bible, New International; Word Commentary, Tyndale, International Critical Commentary—the list is seemingly endless. Yet remember the danger of ‘tangential’ reading (taking what any commentator says out of the context of his overall understanding of the commentary).

But when all else fails, at least own a decent Concordance (Young’s or Strong’s) and Bagster’s *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*.¹⁰

The brevity of this study precludes any extensive treatment of what ought to make up a basic Library, but we will at least offer some suggestions concerning the Theology of Proclamation (see below). Other than that, read as much as you can.

How to read

I heartily recommend Mortimer Adler's fine volume, entitled *How to Read a Book*.¹¹ I have summarized his 'reading rules' (see pp. 266-268 of his book).

1. Analysis of Structure

Ask such questions as: 'What kind of book is this? What is the book basically about? What are its main parts and how are they related? What is the main problem or issue being raised?'

2. Interpretation of the Contents

Now ask: 'What are the significant words, the leading propositions, the chief arguments? Which problems have been solved, and which ones remain unresolved?'

3. Criticism of the Book's Communication of Knowledge

Do you really understand what the writer has endeavoured to say? If you disagree with him, do so politely, with respect. For remember, knowledge is not the same as opinion.

Finally (and make sure it is last!), make your criticisms on the basis of whether the writer is un-informed, mis-informed, illogical or incomplete.

Things to Remember

Be jealous of time, and make careful notes. (Many of the 'classic' Puritan works began not as treatises, but as series of sermons.) Reread your books. Read widely, and read the best. Use Reading Groups, Bibliographies (College Handbooks, Publishers, Reading Guides). Buy the best books available. Master what you have. Engage in responsible borrowing. Consult others for Reviews: in Journals, from Booksellers, and friends. And be prepared to use 'dumb-bell' books: they both stretch our understanding, and keep us humble.

The Theology of Proclamation

For Historical studies A. D. R. Polman's *The Word of God according to St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) is a very fine treatment. The standard work on Calvin is Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacraments*. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953). On the great Jonathan Edwards see Harold Simonson's *Jonathan Edwards.' Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) and the symposium edited by Charles Angoff and entitled *Jonathan Edwards.' His Life and Influence*, published by the Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1976.

On the nature and function of Preaching see James Denney on 'Preaching Christ' in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, (ed. James Hastings, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906-1908, Vol. II, pp. 393-403). The 'classic, by P. T. Forsyth, his *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1981) has gone through many reprints. For a Lutheran contribution see Gustaf Wingren on *The Living Word* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960). And the work by Robert Mounce, entitled *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, '1960) ought not be overlooked.

Shorter treatments include Frank Colquhoun's *Christ's Ambassadors*, (London: Hodder and Sloughton, 1965), James Daane *Preaching With Confidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) and in the Warrack Lectures Series *Heralds of God* (London: Hodder and Sloughton, 1952) by James Stewart.

A Final Caution

As we conclude, ready to read more, let us hear two last cautions. Herman Gunkel protested against the barrenness of his day that 'the theology of the great apostle is an expression of his experience, not his reading'.¹²

And the great Preacher-Theologian Thielicke remarks: ‘A drop of compassion for the flocks who are without a shepherd is better than an ocean of theological knowledge and liturgical enthusiasm’.¹³

Notes

1. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) p. 33.
2. Heinrich Vogel, *Consider Your Calling* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962) p. 102.
3. P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1981) p. 25.
4. *op. cit.*, p. 37.
5. Cited in John R. Taylor’s *God Loves Like That!* (London: SCM, 1962) p. 133.
6. *The Reformed Pastor* (London: SCM, 1956) p. 96.
7. P. T. Forsyth, ‘Religion and Reality’, in the *Contemporary Review*, May 1919, Vol. 115, p. 549.
8. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1960) p. 137. Emphasis is his!
9. *op. cit.*, page 140.
10. Bagster’s *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1971).
11. *How to Read a Book* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1967).
12. Cited in James Dunn’s *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975) p. 4.
13. *Christ and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 180.

STUDY SEVEN

(by Ian Pennicook)

THE PLACE OF THE CONSCIENCE

We are not sent into the pulpit to shew our wit and eloquence but to set the conscience of men on fire. (Solomon Stoddard)¹

1. Introduction...The Nature of Conscience

In I Timothy 1:5 Paul says that ‘the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith’. In company with ‘a pure heart and . . . sincere faith’, a ‘good conscience’ is, without doubt, a most powerful dynamic for life. It is equally the deep desire of men and women all over the world. This does not mean that they will necessarily pursue a good conscience in ways that are consistent with God’s provisions for it, but the desire is present and powerful nonetheless. At the same time, for many Christians a good conscience seems more like an elusive ideal than a dynamic reality. Yet this is exactly what the Scriptures declare it to be. Hebrews 9:14 states that, in contrast with the blood of bulls and goats under the old covenant, ‘the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, [will] purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God’. In this context.

¹ Quoted in Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography* (Banner of Truth, 1987)

conscience ceases to be a tyrant and becomes an ally in the move towards true godliness.

The word ‘conscience’ is a transliteration of the Latin word *conscientia*, and, like the Greek word *suneidésis* which is used in the New Testament, means literally a shared knowledge or co-awareness. As we shall see, this means that conscience is actually a co-awareness with God of the moral elements of His being. But for the moment it is appropriate to offer the definition of conscience given by John Kleinig,² who says that conscience is the faculty which registers ‘the inconsistency between my moral beliefs and seriously, contemplated actions or actions already performed’.

Kleinig then goes on to say: ‘Since it is merely the registration of such inconsistency, it can have no authority as such to judge upon the correctness of my moral beliefs, and hence upon the rightness of my actions or contemplated actions’.³ This means that conscience does not control or dictate my actions; it merely is a moral red light which flashes on and off when there is inconsistency. Kleinig insists that the role of conscience is purely negative, i.e. to register/n-consistency. Perhaps technically he may be correct, but in practice this is surely a bit narrow. This becomes clear when we see, for example, that when Paul says, ‘I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience’ (II Tim. 1:3), he is not only saying that he is not aware of any offence in what he is doing; on the contrary, for him a clear conscience is the delight and drive of his service. It is a powerful incentive rather than just a rearguard reflection that all is without fault.

2. Conscience and Creation

In Genesis 1:26-27, the creation of man (i.e. male and female) is

² *Always Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide?* Interchange, Vol.1 No 2, 1967, p. 124.

³ *ibid.*

introduced in terms of God creating a reflection of His own being. This means, as someone has said somewhere, that ‘all that God is, man is like that...’ Man is not God. It was the offer that he would become inherently like God instead of *reflectedly* like God which, when accepted, resulted in ‘the Fall’. However, it did not, because it could not, result in a change in man’s essential being. He does not cease being in the image of God. That is why, when discussing the justice of God’s wrath in Romans 2:14-15, Paul declares that the Gentiles who have never had the Jewish Law laid upon them, nevertheless have the essence of that law written on their hearts. Creationally it could not be otherwise. Conscience is thus a universal function which registers in all men. And it registers against the truth, which is the character of God.

The implication of this is that men and women are created for consistent living. Conscience is the guardian against inconsistency (cf. Job. 27:1-6;⁴ Ps. 25:21; Eccl. 7:29a). Conscience is part, therefore, of the ‘very good’ creation. Far from being simply a weapon against wrong doing, it is a dynamic part of the working of the image of God in man.

3. Conscience and Fallen Man

In the LXX (the Greek Old Testament) the noun *suneidésis* is used once only (Eccl. 10:20) and the verb twice (Lev. 5:1; Job. 27:6). The Hebrew has no word for conscience at all. But although the actual words may not be present, the concept of conscience is a very powerful reality. Thus we see in Genesis 3:7-10 that, as soon as there was guilt (inconsistency), a deep uneasiness came over Adam and Eve. As we shall see, they had to act to relieve their distress, although the possibility of success was never there.

⁴ where the LXX has *sunoída* for ‘heart’.

Other examples of the action of conscience are not hard to find. David's life provides us with numerous instances (e.g. I Sam. 24:5; 25:31 [lit. no 'offence of hem']; Ps. 25:11; 32:3-4; 38:3-8). These instances show also that conscience relates to the totality of man's being. His conscience cannot finally be examined apart from the whole man. We could also suspect that the sleep of Jonah while on the ship was part of the effort to suppress the demands of conscience.

4. Conscience and the Wrath of God

Guilt is not simply an individual's inconsistency with himself. It brings the guilty person into *personal* conflict with God. God is 'angry with the wicked every day' (Ps. 7:11, AV). The offence is against the holiness of God. It is not without purpose that it has been said that 'nothing can satisfy the conscience of man which does not first satisfy the conscience of God'.

Romans 1:18ff. describes the outworking of the conflict. Conscience registers the guilt and man finds the burden intolerable. But instead of coming in simple repentance and acknowledging the fault, man attempts to remove the stress of guilt by suppressing the truth of the guilt. He must, he thinks, in order to survive, exchange his gods. He thus suppresses the truth of God and refuses to acknowledge Him. In His place he substitutes gods of his own devising, whose standards do not threaten him. Instead, his substitute gods actually *allow* him to indulge his (now) debased drives. Furthermore, in verse 28 Paul says that men 'did not like to retain God in their knowledge' (AV). But since God (i.e. His character) is the basis for their understanding of themselves and their actions, it follows that, in order to survive, men and women must, they assume, have some other basis for rationalizing their behaviour. Consequently we find the prophets castigating Israel for the repeated resort to idolatry, which the people see, not as illegitimate and downright foolish, but as legitimizing their

own choices and lifestyles (cf. Ex. 32:4-6).

In Titus 1:15, we see that man under wrath can no longer evaluate his actions against the framework of truth. For him to claim to have a clear conscience in such circumstances is quite meaningless. Hebrews 10:22 describes him as having ‘an evil conscience’. Furthermore, Hebrews 9:14 tells us that the conscience under wrath is enslaved by dead works. The reason is that the image of God, distorted without doubt by sin, is nonetheless present still. Man is in a complex of his own devising. Although the conscience cannot register clearly against the truth, it nevertheless must register against the truth. Man’s actions are, therefore, constantly aimed at giving peace to the conscience but all his works in that direction are dead. No matter what is done in guilt, there can be no final satisfaction of the demand of conscience for consistency. Nothing done in the present can *un-do* the past. There is simply no rest for the wicked.

5. Conscience and the Cross

We have already seen the ontological and theological centrality of the Cross. We are now faced with the experimental centrality of the Cross. Apart from the action of God to satisfy the demands of His own holiness, men and women remain locked into their guilt, and so to their evil conscience. Until grace is known in experience the conscience can never be free, which means that the whole being of man remains in bondage.

Grace is not simply a dynamic concept; it is a dynamic experience. ‘The washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’ (Titus 3:5) has a direct effect on the experience of the believer. There is a transformation which touches every aspect of life. Hebrews 9:14 says that the blood of Christ purifies the conscience! God has acted to deal with the guilt in human experience. This is not some subjective change only; it is the objective work of the Cross in history. Once

guilt hindered the conscience from truly registering anything other than inconsistency. There was the consequent, though futile, appeal to dead works to deal with the guilt. But grace has purified the conscience from those dead works. The judgement of grace is that there is no condemnation. The conscience of God is satisfied.

Because the sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God, the just, is satisfied,
To look on him and pardon me.
(C. L. Bancroft 1841-?)

Thus freed, the conscience now actually *serves the living God*. This means more than just that we are saved for good works, however true that may be. It means that the conscience of the renewed person actually now *serves* God and His purposes.

6. Conscience and the Word

The comment by Stoddard at the beginning of this study is significant. Whilst we do not take it to mean that the function of the preacher is to touch the conscience (which would be to put the preacher in a devilish position), we do mean that the preacher brings the one thing which can truly reach the conscience, namely the word of God (cf. Heb. 4:12). The word of the Cross comes via the preacher (Rom. 10:14; I Cor. 1:17-18; 2:1-5). Likewise the church must continually have the prophetic word if it is to live (Deut. 8:3; cf. I Cor. 14:1).

The reason for this is simple. According to I .Corinthians 4:3-4 a clear conscience, while a strong incentive to service, is not the final judge of behaviour. It is the Lord who has the final say. It is imperative, therefore, that there should be the constant input of the word of God. If I no longer *need* dead works it is because I am no

longer in the lie but in the truth. We may compare I Corinthians 8:4-13 where we see that a good conscience may still be an occasion for sin (v. 12). This is because the renewed man or woman must at all times function within relationships. A good conscience does not, in itself, guarantee a correct action. The conscience still needs the control of the word of God, in this case to love one another (see also Rom. 14; I Cor. 10:23-30).

Conscience, now freed from the distortions of guilt, is now purified to register against *the truth*. The veil of guilt has been removed and conscience *can* now register accurately (see Titus 1: 15a).. Thus seen, conscience is a powerful ally. Its registration of inconsistency is now a cause for rejoicing since the forgiven person finds it inconceivable that having died to sin he should go on living in it any longer.

So the need is simple: to maintain a good conscience (I Tim. 1:18-19).⁵ But how is a good conscience maintained? The following two suggestions are offered.

- (i) If the conscience registers inconsistency then immediate action must be taken. Avoid or cease that action or disposition which is inconsistent with the truth. This means that we do not allow guilt to enter or remain in experience, thus clouding the vision of conscience. If there is fault, then we must return speedily to the Cross for cleansing. Only in this way can we abide in the truth, since nothing *we* do can remove the accusation. The pangs of conscience are *the wounds of a friend*.
- (ii) Romans 12:2 makes clear that conscience cannot function independently of what is put into the mind. The AV of Proverbs 23:7 says, 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he'. It is vital that conscience be constantly renewed by the word of

⁵ For the danger which accompanies a hilum in this area, see also I Timothy 4:1-2. In that statement 'seared' means a conscience once sensitive to sin has now been totally desensitized. Such is a tragedy of the highest order.

God. This is, of course, not some mechanical reading of the Scriptures which is envisaged, though even that may not be without value. Rather, what is needed is a daily, moment by moment experience of living in the word. False information will, with surprising speed, work to confuse the conscience. The conscience must be constantly renewed by grace. Ours is no-cold legalism, but a rich sensitivity to sin and to the mind of God which is the result of total forgiveness.

* * * * *

‘It is imperative, then, for man to live under grace, and for his conscience to be free. This freedom is a work of the Spirit. Unless the conscience of man has witnessed in revelation the complete work of the Cross, the believer will always have a deficient view of grace and a partially morbid view of law. When the conscience is convinced that the Cross covers the sin and the pollution of the person, then the conscience acts under resultant grace. It makes the person genuinely sensitive to sin, willingly acceptive of authority, and motivated to true obedience.’⁶

⁶ G. C. Bingham, *The Conscience—Conquering or Conquered?* (NCPI 1980, 1987) p. 43f.

STUDY EIGHT

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE WORD AND ITS POWER

The Word of God is Powerful

Anyone acquainted with the Scriptures knows that they claim that the of God is innately powerful. God cannot speak and His in-ten(ion not be effected (Isa. 55:11). When we preach or proclaim we are often disappointed because we are not wholly effective, or even partly effective. We think, 'If the word of God is powerful, how come we do not see the results which ought to follow?'. It may be because we are not truly proclaiming the word, and it may be that sowing ,and husbandry. are lacking. It may be that when we are seemingly—not being heard that the word of God is being rejected. Being accepted or rejected is not the point (cf. Isa. 6:9-13: Jer 2:31: Matt. 13:14—15: Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-41; Acts 28:26-27: Re, n,.. 11:8; Acts 13:40-4'I; Rom. 10:16, 11:17ff.; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

In the Old Testament the word of God (*dabar*) is used about 400 times. John Taylor (*New Bible Dictionary*, I.V.P., Eng., 1986, p. 1259) says, 'Yahweh's word is an extension of the divine personality, invested with divine authority, and is to be heeded by angels and men'. It is the word by which God communicates to man, and which cannot be divorced from Him any more than can His law. Thus 'the word of the Lord came', and 'thus says the Lord' are the terms used and they must be heard and obeyed. The power of the word polarizes its hearers. They either obey or disobey.

In the New Testament the words *logos and rhema* equal the *dabar* of the Old Testament and are used synonymously in the LXX. Just as Yahweh's *dabar* is identified with God and so is dynamic, so too *logos and rhema* are dynamic.

The Power of the Word in Its Many Aspects

What we will now treat is the word of God in its various aspects. God's word is simply His speaking, but it relates to many things—as we would expect. We look then at the following aspects:

- (i) **The Word of God.** *The* Scriptures tell us God's word is truth (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17; II Sam. 7:28; II Cor. 6:7; James 1: 18), that it is eternal as the living (Heb. 4: 12) and abiding word (I Pet. 1: 23, 25) and is never ineffectual (Isa. 55:11). In fact God's word is as God Himself, inseparable from Him, is the word of His counsel which means His wisdom and will be fulfilled in the ultimate. We can say that God's relates to the ontological, and man's word cannot be seeing he is fallen. In a later study *we will see that the forces of evil* (including fallen man) steal God's word because it is innately dynamic.
- (ii) **The Creative Word.** See Genesis 1:1f.; Psalm 33:6-9; 148:5-6; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3, 11:3; and Colossians 1:15-17. God's word dynamically creates so that its enormous power is incalculable (Eccles. 3:11). Creation alone should be sufficient to make man worship and be grateful (Rom. 1:19f.), and if man were not fallen he would be immensely awed by seeing and hearing the word of creation.
- (iii) **The Continuing Creative Word.** See (a) *the word which sustains*, i.e. upholds, and by which there is continuity in creation, (Col. 1:17). Thus creation can be called 'a fixed

order' (Ps. 89:36-37; 148:5-6; Jer. 31:36-37), and such a 'fixed order' brings security to man. It is really affirmed in the Noahic covenant as promised in Genesis 8:20 9:7. (b) *the new acts of creation* on the principle of Romans 4:15 (see Isa. 44:26; 45:23; 46:10; 55:10-11; 59:21). God can and will do works which seem to be against the normative principle of the initial and sustaining word of creation.

- (iv) **The Prophetic Word.** This word is continuous *in both Old and New Testaments*, referring to every aspect of God's will and counsel, namely creation, covenant, law, salvation, holy living, judgements, the day of the Lord, and all things eschatological. Two classic passages are (a) Deuteronomy 18:9-22 and (b) Jeremiah 23:23-32. 'Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces.?' In prophecy God speaks through man (cf. Exod. 7: 1-2; Num. 12:6-7; Amos 3:7-8; Acts 2:17ff.; cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:18-19). This word comes by God speaking face to face (Num. 12:6-7), and through dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Jer. 23:31; 23:15f.; Acts 2:17f.). Later we will see that the prophetic word is often related to the Spirit.
- (v) **The Enacted Word.** By this we mean God is *the living God*, i.e. 'the God who acts'. His acts reveal Him, portraying His nature. The kind of things He does show who He is (see Ps. 105-107, especially 105:8ff., 107:1ff.). In the New Testament *the enacted word is the word of the Kingdom* (Matt. 12:28; cf. Acts 8:5-8, 14). The *enacted word* is also seen in the judgements of the book of Revelation. In fact all history is the enacted word, e.g. 'he commanded and they were created'.
- (vi) **The Word of the Law.** See Deuteronomy 33:1-5, Exodus 24: 1-8, Acts 7:38 and Galatians 3: 19. We must warn ourselves against detaching the law of God from God. No one can create true law: no one dare initiate *torah* which in fact means

‘instruction’ and as such shows ‘the way’ of God. There is only one way (see Exod. 34:28f.; with Deut. 4:13; 30:11, 14). Psalm 119 has the terms, way, word, truth, precepts, ordinances, testimonies, works, statutes as virtually synonymous. The law must not be subverted on pain of death (cf. Gal. 3:10), but obedience to it is ‘sweeter than honey’ for it is a delight to meditate on His law (Ps. 19:7-11; 1:2).

- (vii) **The Word of Redemption—Old Testament.** This begins with Genesis 3:15 (cf. Gen. 49:10) and comes in covenant to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; ch. 15; 17:1-14). In the midst of the revelation of fallen man’s sinfulness and guilt, the redemptive word blazes with the revelation of God’s grace.
- (viii) **The Word of Redemption—New Testament.** This is the word of grace (John 1:14; Matt. 1:21; Titus 2:11). See also Acts 4:33; 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; 20:32. This word of grace is also the word of faith (cf. Deut. 30:14f.; Rom. 10:8f.; Rom. 1:16-17; I Cor. 1:18). This salvific word contains in itself the regenerating word as seen in John 6:63, I Peter 1:3, 22-23 and James 1: 18.
- (ix) **The Sanctifying Word.** See John 15:3; 17:17; cf. Hebrews 1:3; 9:14; etc. The redemptive word is also the word of judgement. Guilt and pollution are the two things which keep man in bondage when they beset him in the light of the holiness and wrath of God. His judgements set His people free, although they destroy the obdurate impenitent. Often in Isaiah God said ‘I am the Holy One of Israel—thy Redeemer’. His holiness is always dynamic—opposing and destroying the evil that would destroy His people.

The Spirit, The Word and the Power

Pastorally we do our best to make the word of God powerful. Paul warned against this on a number of occasions (see I Cor. 1:17; 2:2-5; II Cor. 2:17; 4:2). Man redeemed still has to do battle with evil, including Satanic deception, human pride in achievement, the desire to be praised and other such personal fleshly elements. Most of all he has to fight the desire to be thought wise, and to be able to reveal the truth from himself. He must be born of the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and continually walk in the Spirit by being continually filled with the Spirit.

If he is not in the state of Spirit-control then he cannot preach the word of truth—God’s word. He must be in that state of grace where his faith is strong. This is because there can never be a division between the word and the Spirit. I Thessalonians 1:5 demonstrates this principle, ‘Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction’. A vast study could be undertaken on ‘the Spirit and the Word’, but it is enough for us to know that in the Old Testament the prophets spoke the word of God by the Holy Spirit. In Numbers 24:2ff. the Spirit came upon Balaam and he prophesied. In II Samuel 23:1-7 David, seized by the Spirit, spoke the oracle of God. In Hosea 9:7 the prophet is equated with ‘the man of the Spirit’. Both I Peter 1:10-12 and II Peter 1:20-21 speak of the prophets of old being moved by the Holy Spirit—also known as ‘the Spirit of Christ’. *It is safe to conclude that the word of God cannot be spoken in all its awesome and holy truth apart from the Spirit of God.*

At the time of the Reformation there were discussions as to whether the word of God was powerful in itself, or powerful through the Spirit. Both are mutually inclusive and as one entity the word and the Spirit work, and work with power. God is identical with His word, even if we call that word ‘an extension of the divine personality’. If we can visualize the word apart from the Spirit, or the

Spirit working (soteriologically) apart from the word, then we have strange and impossible situation.

What we ought to include under our present topic heading is 'the word of grace', but this too, requires opening up, and we will leave to a later study.'

STUDY NINE

(by Dean Garter)

THE PASTOR AND HIS PREACHING

After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to flu? In saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, .say *it*'. (Acts 13:15.).

Bear with my word of exhortation... exhort one another every day. (Hebrews 13:22; 3:13).

C. H. Dodd's influential book, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, had the unfortunate effect of sharply distinguishing between what are termed *kerygma* and *didache* (proclamation and teaching). Subsequent discussions have shown that these categories are not so 'water-tight' and inflexible. There are distinctions, but they often relate to the formality of the situation, and the teacher's posture, rather than the content of the message. In fact, it is proper to regard them as complementary, and overlapping.

The terms *preaching and teaching* are both used to describe the ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:21). In fact, the Gospel writer's appear to use them as synonyms (compare Mark 3:14f. 'to preach' with 6:30, where the disciples had 'taught'). And for Paul's use, see Romans 2:21, where he argues that teaching against stealing is in fact *preaching*.

In this study, we will focus on one form of this speaking to man. *paraclesis*, or exhortation. It is one of a number of terms which the New Testament employs, and they include:

Prophēteia—denoting the reception and articulation of revelation, proclaiming the divine message as in the Old Testament tradition, and often associated with pneumatic experiences (Amos 3:7; I Thess. 5:20).

Paraclesis—is exhortatory preaching, which includes both kerygmatic and didactic elements. It is related to the work of the Spirit as the Paraclete (Luke 3:18; Acts 2:40; I Thess. 2:11; II Cor. 5:20; I Tim. 4:13; Titus 1:9; I Peter 5:1, 3; John 14:16; cf. I John 2:1).

Paraenesis—is ethical counsel, advice and recommendations. (Acts 27:9, 22) It appears to be related to *nouthesia* (instruction and admonition, Col. 3: 12) and *paideta* (discipline and nurture Eph. 6:4).

Catechesis—is the content of faith's instruction (Acts 18:25; Gal. 6:6; Rom. 2:18).

Paradosis—means tradition, from 'what is handed down' (Matt. 15:2, 3; Gal. 1:14; II Thess. 3:6).

My Word of Exhortation

We will consider the use of *paraclesis*, with particular reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is called by its author 'my word of exhortation' (Heb. 13:22). The letter is written out of genuine pastoral concern, prompted by the Spirit, and is an expression of normal congregational life (13:9; 3:7, 13; 10:25).

The preacher appeals, warns, encourages and instructs his hearers

to remain faithful, to renewed hope, to regained confidence, to sustained endurance—in short, ‘to look to Jesus’. All of God’s word is brought to bear on the present situation. Even the prior words (1: 1) are now able to speak fully to God’s people, for the Son has come.

The Structure of Hebrews as ‘Exhortation’

1:1—4:13 ‘The Superiority of the Son as God’s Word’

The Son’s final revelation is superior to prior revelations, as well as its bearer is superior to lesser mediators (1:1-4). This theme is developed by showing that the Son is higher than the angels (1:5-14), so proper attention ought to be afforded to him (2:1-18; developing Ps. 8:4ff.). Then, the Son’s gospel is greater than the law mediated through Moses (3:1-6), so that to reject the Son incurs far greater judgement than simply repudiating Moses (3:7-4:10; which develops Ps. 95:7-11).

The hearers are given a clear warning. Since Israel did not hear with faith (3:12, 16, 19, 4:1-2, 6), they failed to enter into the *promised rest*, even under Joshua. The section concludes with the reaffirmation that God has addressed His creation, and now continues to do so: His word is living and active, and demands a proper response (4:11-13).

4:14—10:25 ‘The Son is High Priest’

Firstly note the tenses of the theme statement (4: 14-16): the life of Jesus is in the *past*, he gives inspiration in the *present*, and the exhortation is for the *present and the future*, though often based on the *past*. As Priest Jesus endured the common human temptations, and inspires believers (4:15, 16). The central sermon ‘text’ is Psalm **110:4**, linked with Psalm 2:7.

The writer wants to teach *much* (5:11), but this is difficult to interpret. In a series of antitheses and exhortations, he shows that Jesus

is a superior High Priest (selected by God, not man; 5:1-10). This is followed by the parenthetic section (5:11—6:20) where the preacher affirms the inability of his readers to cope with the Word of God. (For a more detailed treatment of this section, see Study 3: *The Pastor and His Perspective*.) When he closes this section he returns to the place where he left off (5:10 and 6:20b).

Next, the Melchizedek priesthood is superior to the Aaronic (7:1-28). Then, Christ ministers in the heavenly sanctuary, showing that the old covenant and its earthly sanctuary are superseded by his unrepeatable and perfect sacrifice (8: 1—10: 18). Finally, there is the great exhortation, with its eschatological thrust (10:19-31).

10:32—12:29 'Faith and Endurance'

The theme (11:1-3) is developed with examples (vv. 4-31) and a summary (vv.32-40). The sermon commences back in chapter 10, with the text from Habakkuk (2:3f.) introducing the exhortation. The 'vision' is slow in 'coming', yet the righteous man lives by faith. A component of such faith is patient and quiet endurance. They wait for what is not yet realized, but what is never-the-less promised (not some 'ideal').

In chapter 12 this 'not yet' is further developed in relation to *endurance* (12:1ff.) and *discipline* (12:5ff.). Throughout the focus is on Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of this faith (12:2). The exhortation concludes with directives on practical living, since they have come not to Mount Sinai, but to Zion (12:12- 29).

13:1—end ' Sundry Ethical Exhortations' (*Paraenesis*)

The Old Testament becomes God's Word to the Hearers

The Scriptures teach us 'today'

The writer wants the readers (hearers) to receive the Old Testament as

exhortation, since every citing of the Scriptures is used to this end (the *indicative* is the basis for the *imperative*). The chain of references to the angels in chapter 1 leads to ‘therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard’ (2:1). Linked with the citing of Psalm 8:4-6 comes the phrase, ‘we see Jesus’ (2:9). Again, when Psalm 95 is used in chapters 3 and 4, the exhortation is given: ‘Let us be zealous’ (4:11). The citations of the high priesthood and new covenant (Ps. 2:7; 110:4; Jet. 31:31ff.; Ps. 40:6-8) throughout chapters 5 to 10 culminate in the exhortation: ‘Since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near’ (10:19ff.).

In the long sermon of 10:32—12:29 the citations (Isa. 29:20; Hab. 2:3-4) and the catalogue of ‘the men of old’ bring us encouragement: ‘let us run with endurance’ (12:1). The same holds true for chapter 12, where the Old Testament texts (Prov. 3:1 If.; Isa. 35:3; Prov. 4:26; Deut. 19:18; Hag. 2:6; etc.) all build up to move us to worship: ‘let us be grateful... and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship’ (12:28). Finally, the allusions and citings of chapter 13 either encourage as words of the writer (13:5) or by themselves (13:15).

The Preacher’s ‘Homiletical Licence’

We have seen that the preacher makes use of the Old Testament. This he does in a manner which corresponds to other New Testament usage. For example, Jesus’ preaching precipitated a crisis for the hearers, as God’s salvific fulfilment confronted them, with authority. He constantly took his hearers back to Creation (‘from the beginning’, Matt. 19:8) and the Scriptures (‘how do you read?’, Matt. 19:4; Luke 10:26). The same was true for Stephen and Paul in their sermons in Acts.

However, when we look more closely at the preacher’s use of the Old Testament, we discern a certain *Homiletical Licence*.¹ He makes

use of:

- (i) Deviations from the Old Testament text (Deut. 32:43 in Heb. 1:6; Hab. 2:3-4 in Heb. 10:37-38; cf. Rom. 1:17).
- (ii) The Old Testament Text, out of context (Ps. 104:4 in Heb. 1:7).
- (iii) The linking of unrelated Old Testament texts, with a common word (Ps. 95 with Gen. 2:2 in Heb. 4 by means of *rest*).
- (iv) The reinterpretation and extension of Old Testament texts (Ps. 8 in Heb. 2).

His guiding principle appears to be able to give a word of encouragement, to the present difficult situation. To do so, he has heard what the Scriptures affirm about themselves, as the Word of God. He readily acknowledges that God has spoken (Heb. 1:1; Christ—Heb. 2:12-13 for 3 citations; Heb. 10:5-7; and the Spirit—Heb. 3:7-11; 10:16-17).

Remember Who You Are

Coupled with his treatment of the Scriptures, the preacher reminds his hearers of their identity. They are following the way of faith in the promises, just as Israel and Jesus have done. Their solidarity with God's people is underlined, by means of stressing common features:

1. The Call of Israel, paralleled in the call of Jesus, and now the Christians (3:
2. Sonship to God, of Israel, Jesus, and the Christians (12:5ff.; 5:1, 5; 2:10-11).
3. Tempted as we are, linking Israel, Jesus and the Christians (3:8: 4:15; 2:18).

4. Recipients of the Word of God (1:1; 4: 1-7; 5:5-6; 13:7).
5. Required to obey (3:18; 4:6; 10:7, 9; 5:7; 4:11).
6. Anticipated to have a pure and docile heart/conscience (3:12; 9:14; 10:16).
7. Experience suffering, and vindication (11:2, 39; cf. 6:15; 2:9; 13:12; 12:2; 10:12; 10:32; 2:10).

The sons may therefore follow the Son, the sheep after the Shepherd (13:20), the worshippers with the Minister (8:2), those of the faith after the Pioneer of that very faith (12:2).

The Final Word is the Full Word

Since the Word has come in its fullness, we are able to interpret the prior revelations, and obey them. We are still obliged to hear them, even though the 'last word' has been addressed to us. As creatures of the living God, we are to hear His full word of power. It must come, and be received, in its totality.

The failure of Israel, and the early Church to hear the complete Word does not excuse us. We are to give account for both how we hear, and speak. The warning of chapter 4:1-13 should encourage us to be thorough.

For, as Polman said of Augustine: 'God's Word must be preached in its fullness, even in His anger and admonitions. No tittle must be omitted to please man's vanity'.² Again, Vogel instructs us that 'in preaching, the comfort of the Word of God, according to its command and promise, is to become a reality time and time again to tempted and tested man, body and soul, to whom it is given to live as the hearer of this Word'.³

Finally, 'anyone who speaks in the name of God must, in a measure, proclaim the judgement of God—His judgement of both

good and evil'.⁴ This judgement is more restorative than retributive, and operates *in* history, not after it. And it is in the hands of the Crucified Christ, 'today'. Since this is so, 'we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises' (6:11-12).

Notes

1. See Robert G. Bratcher, ed., *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1961); Richard Longenecker's *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) and B. F. Westcott *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 469-495.
2. Polman, *The Word of God according to St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 134.
3. Heinrich Vogel, *Consider Your Calling* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), p. 126.
4. A. F. Simpson, 'P. T. Forsyth: The Prophet of Judgement' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1951), p. 148.

STUDY TEN

(by Rod James)

CHRISTIAN THINKING IN TODAY'S WORLD

In the context of present day thought and belief, I would like to set, side by side, two systems of thought. Call them, if you like, 'the word of God' and 'the word of man'. I use the term 'word' because **it** suggests a basic understanding of reality. In that sense both systems are religious statements.

As basic understandings or religious statements, the two are irreconcilable. It is not that there are no elements of insight in what I have called 'the word of man', but that these insights have become for many people central truths, and have pushed aside the fundamental truths of the Word of God.

The tendency of many Christian thinkers today is to begin on the left-hand side (see below) as a result of their secular training, and then to attempt a transfer, at some point, to the right-hand side. In fact this does not come off, and they remain basically 'left-hand side' or 'word of man' thinkers.

Each of the following understandings proceeds logically through the following areas of human thought:

- (i) the origin of all things;
- (ii) the basis of knowledge;
- (iii) the interpretation of history;
- (iv) the salvation or wholeness of mankind;
- (v) the means to salvation (or method of bringing it);
- (vi) the end result.

THE WORD OF MAN

Evolution

The apparent origin of all things suggests:

— no maker;

—no nature (form); —no purpose.

Matter (for there is nothing else) is self-existent, and reality is entirely existential.

Humanism

Man is the basis and centre of knowledge. He is the determining factor of reality, e.g.—

Sociology:

values are discerned by opinions, trends and consensus. Opinion polls and questionnaires are the instruments of knowing values.

Psychology:

wholeness of personality is through —self-awareness;

—self-understanding; —self-acceptance.

THE WORD OF GOD

Creation

The origin of all things is *creatio ex nihilo* by the Word of God:

—creation has form;

—it is for God's predestined purpose.

The world is more than matter, and the seen and the unseen are both dependent on God. Reality is both ontological and existential.

Revelation

Truth comes down from God as revelation. Wisdom is His gift, breaking in on our blindness, ignorance and unbelief.

God's revelation is centrally in Jesus Christ, and is a self-revelation.

It speaks to us of holiness, sin and grace.

'To love is to speak', and God has spoken to us in love, shining His glory into our hearts in the face of Jesus (II Cor. 4:6).

Eternal life (i.e. true human existence) is to know Him who alone is truly God, and Jesus

All aspects of reality unacceptable to man (e.g. sin and judgement) are excluded.

Marxism

History and society are understood in terms of economic and class struggle.

The social system and its distribution of products is the primary area of historical development. This is called dialectic materialism.

The key to history is 'the party', i.e. those who understand and work towards the final synthesis of socio-economic forces. Salvation is man-made by the elite, who direct history, bringing the necessary changes.

Liberation

Salvation comes to the painful human situation through the throwing off of oppression, e.g.—

Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3).

Salvation History

'History' is 'His story'.

It is the story of man's personal rebellion and fall, and of God's gracious and saving intervention.

It is in the fulness of God's time that He sends His Son into the world to save sinners. God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.

His plan is to unite all things through Christ and the redemption He accomplished through him (Eph. 1:9-11).

The 'elite' are pawns in His hand.

Redemption

Sin is common *to all*. All are guilty, rebellious and oppressive (women can oppress men and children can oppress their parents, as well as vice versa).

Oppression of:

—the poor by the rich; — workers by bosses; —blacks by whites; —women by men; — children by parents.

Certain personal freedoms of the above oppressors need to be confiscated by the elite, for the sake of the ultimate good, e.g. freedom of education.

Through this liberation humanity is set free from its bondage and the new society is formed.

Revolution

Liberation comes through the messianic group or 'people's army', which is the agent of change. The method is a power struggle or evolution.

Strategy, persistence, manipulation of ideas and values, social engineering by legislation and violence are the effective tools of trade.

The problem is primarily inward and not cured by changing society.

Salvation comes through the cure of souls, which is through the atoning grace of God in Christ's Cross. The Cross is judgement and mercy upon all sin. The word of the Cross is the power of God for salvation (I Cor. 1: 17—2:5).

Its power is:

—the moral regeneration of the hidden man of the heart; —the just defeat of all the

unseen powers of evil; —the salvation of believers from eternal judgement.

Proclamation

The active agent of redemption is proclamation—the Word of what God has done, not what we must do.

It is at this point that many Christians have lost their nerve in the battle to be relevant.

The power of redemption (see above) is released in true proclamation:

Discontent, real or generated, is the fuel for the cause.

Commitment to the cause is the essential power of it.

Terrible Bondage

The end result of the 'word of man' is bitter disillusionment. Changing society does not change people, and after the revolution rebels rule.

The greatest power man knows is physical force, and the future holds only more power struggles as successive revolutions become necessary.

The hoped for social synthesis is never realized. Instead, only corruption and further oppression. The domineering or totalitarian role of man grinds on.

—hearers are inwardly converted (changed); — individuals and communities in the bondage of evil powers are delivered; —damned rebels become eternal children of God; Paul calls all this 'a demonstration of the Spirit's power' (I Cor. 2:4).

The Reign of God

Faith, hope and love are kindled in the knowledge that nothing escapes God's sovereign reign of judgement and mercy. By the proclamation of the Gospel the individual can be inwardly freed, whatever his outward circumstance.

He is freed from his guilt, from the power of evil over him and from the fear of the future.

He is free to trust God and do the good works that the Sovereign Lord prepared for him to do.

His life is a sign of the coming Kingdom of God.

Social Justice or Christian Fabians

Some Christians adhere to points 1 to 4 on the left-hand side, and at 5 posit a Christian non-violent revolution. Their thinking and methods, however, are essentially from the left-hand side.

Despite much labouring, little is achieved by them, for the real power of God is not known or called upon. In frustration, efforts become more coercive, manipulative and even violent.

It is understandable that Christians working from these two different understandings experience conflict and confusion when trying to work together.

Conclusion

Whenever the power of God unto salvation is not known or trusted, the resulting power vacuum will cause other powers for salvation to spring up.

Because the power of God is the only real power, the Church will wane and society fall into bondage without it.

Contradiction

Many Christians who know the power of God go quiet in the presence of other powers, particularly in the church. 'Contradiction' means 'to say the opposite'.

It is in the boldness of proclaiming the truth that the power of God is demonstrated (Eph. 6: 19-20).

STUDY ELEVEN

(by Ian Pennicook)

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

1. The Reign of God

‘The Kingdom of God’ is possibly a phrase which is sometimes used loosely, but precisely it means the reign or rule of God. While other ideas may tend to be associated with the word ‘kingdom’, e.g. in Mark 6:23 and Revelation 16:10 with the idea of the area over which one rules, the principal meaning remains the basic one. However, what must be stressed is that in the Scriptures any technical definition is seen to be inadequate simply because of the dynamic nature of the kingdom of God (see Dan. 4:24-25, 34-35, 37).

It would be fair to say that in Scripture one does not discuss the kingdom of God; one either submits to it and rejoices in it (Ps. 47:1-2, 7; 84:1-3; 98:6) or one is confronted by the truth of the kingdom and is destroyed (or, at least, broken) by it (as with Nebuchadnezzar; see also Ps. 2).

The truth is that ‘The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all’ (Ps. 103:19). This means that ‘Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps’ (Ps. 135:6). To recognize the fact of the kingdom is therefore to see the whole of creation, including the present lives of men and women, as under the direct sovereign control of God.

2. The Kingdom in Action

The fact of the kingdom is not seen in the world today. This has prompted some writers to argue that the kingdom is essentially a 'future' kingdom which is only anticipated in the present.¹ In other words, any experience of the kingdom now is possible only because of the *promise* on which it is based. There is doubtless a considerable element of truth in this.

What we must recognize, however, is that the failure to *see* the kingdom does not mean that the kingdom is not now present in its fullness.² It only means that it is not seen. That is why, when Jesus appeared, he did so announcing the fact of the kingdom, e.g. Mark 1:15, 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'. This did not mean that God was *about to become* king. Rather it meant that the truth of the kingdom was about to confront what was, in reality, wilful refusal to see it and to live under it. Consequently, when he cast out demons he said, 'the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matt. 12:28).³ The ministry of Jesus was the breaking in of the kingdom of God into the world which had hitherto refused to acknowledge it.

More than that, in the ministry of Jesus the great action of God destroy those powers which hold men and women in bondage inaugurated. This was surely the reason for the fierce attacks on Jesus by Satan immediately following his baptism, where Jesus was designated the Son who was at the same time the king who would rule the nations with a rod of iron. At the close of his earthly ministry,

¹ Cf. J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, (London, 1977) p, 190ff It would not do to oversimplify the theological arguments of such writers; they do say more.

² Cf. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones *Studies on the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol. 1, (London, 1959) p. 16, who says 'whenever Christ is enthroned as King the kingdom of God is come, so that while we cannot say that He is ruling over all in the world at the present time, He is certainly ruling . . . in the hearts and lives of all His people'

³ See 1. Pennicook, *Living in the Kingdom*, (NCPI, 1985) pp. 2-5, for the place of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus, in particular in the opening chapters of the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus declared, 'Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out' (John 12:31).

3. The Establishment of the Kingdom

The event which would definitively establish the kingdom was, of course, the Cross. At that point all the rebellion and wilful blindness of men and women was effectively disarmed. It was taken into Christ and drained of its apparent force. Not only that, but 'he disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in [the Cross]' (Col. 2:15). From that point on, the truth of the kingdom was operative in the lives of men and women in a way which it had not been up to that point.

The work of the Cross was not done in some son of isolation. If God had indeed established the kingdom at the Cross, then from that point on we would expect to see the reality of the kingdom being evidenced in the lives of men and women. Consequently, the Cross meant that men and women were now actually released from all that had previously held them in bondage (Acts 13:39) and truly reconciled to God, the King (II Cor. 5:19).

4. The Kingdom and the Church

'The kingdom is not the church... However, there is an inseparable relationship... we may say that the kingdom of God creates the church'.⁴

⁴ G. E. Ladd, "Kingdom of God"; *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, E. F. Harrison (Ed.), (Grand Rapids, 1960), p. 313. If we equate the kingdom with the church, it will mean that the larger the church, **the** more effective is the kingdom, with the result that we will then attempt to 'christianize' society in order that the kingdom may be present in fullness. It may surprise us to know that John Calvin equated the kingdom with the church (*see Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.15.5; etc.), which may go towards explaining the events in and structure of Geneva during his time. There were, of course, other elements conditioning the organization of Geneva.

This is, of course what we see in the book of Acts. The kingdom, the rule of God, was sovereignly applied to men and women, so that their rebellion was dissolved in love and their blindness illuminated in the brilliance of revelation (II Cor. 4:5-6). The cry of men and women who receive Christ is now 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom. 10:9; I Cor. 12:3; etc). The church is the community who acknowledge the truth of the kingdom and so live at liberty (cf. II Cor. 3:17) 'where the Spirit of the *Lord* is, there is liberty'. Christ is Lord, '*for the church*' (Eph. 1:22).

The implication of this must be that the church must continue to live under the Lordship of Christ. Romans 5:17 and Revelation 5:10 speak of the people of God 'reigning in life on the earth'. They are the people who know the freedom and the authority of the kingdom, but their knowledge will only be experimental as they live under authority (cf. Luke 7:8). The question is, who is lord of the church? Theoretical answers will no doubt satisfy some, but for the practical reality of the kingdom to be known, the church must be functioning under the lordship of Christ.

The kingdom of God operates through the church. Clearly the kingdom was established at the Cross, but the effect of that is only seen when the Cross is proclaimed (I Cor. 1: 17-18; 2:1-5; people of God, in living under the lordship of Christ, will then speak of the kingdom with a powerful authority⁵ (Acts 4:33; of. 8: 12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:31).

We note that in Acts the proclamation was more than by words (I Thess. 1:5; Rom. 15:18-19). It is because the kingdom is operative *through* them that when 'God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit...' (Heb. 2:4), 'the Lord. . bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done *by their [Paul's and Barnabas's] hands*" (Acts 14:3).

⁵ Cf. the study, *The Centrality of the Cross*.

5. The Eschatological Kingdom

The disciples were taught to pray, 'Thy kingdom come'. Inasmuch as this was taught prior to the events of the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, we are doubtless justified in seeing a significant if partial answer to the prayer in the whole complex of those events. But it is only partial. If there are powers, they are 'the powers of the age to come' (Heb. 6:5). The gift of the Spirit is the 'earnest of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it' (Eph. 1:14). This does not mean that we may not experience powers and gifts now nor that signs and wonders may not be operative now. It does mean that these things are not in themselves the final goal of the church. Even with them, the church cannot be satisfied until faith is exchanged for sight and all men and women, whether believers or not, can see the truth 'that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:11).

Although believers know by faith the dynamic of the kingdom of God, their knowledge is still constantly contested. They 'wrestle... against principalities and powers' (Eph. 6:12); they are still only justified by faith, whereas 'through the Spirit, by faith [they] wait for the hope of righteousness' (Gal. 5:5). Failure to see this eschatological element often leads to attempts to bring about now what can only be known in fullness then. It will be to want the glory of 'the ultimate' when we are living in 'the *pen-ultimate*'. This, of course, leads to attempts to manipulate God into giving now that which belongs only to the new heavens and the new earth. But the foretaste of those things must be seen as just that, a foretaste.

Until that day, we wait, secure in our hope and unashamed, because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us as the guarantee of our inheritance.

STUDY TWELVE

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

STEALING GOD'S WORD

Introduction: The Prophets and the False Prophets

The following passages should be read as a foundation for this subject: Isaiah 9:15; Jeremiah 14:13-16; 23:9-40; 27:14ff.; Ezekiel 13:2 17; 22:28. Deuteronomy 18 is the *locus classicus* of the meaning, nature and practice of prophecy. Moses was the classic prophet, having a sense of the destiny of Israel, and the significance of covenant in the light of the wisdom and counsel of God concerning the nations. Revelation 19:10 (cf. Luke 24: 25-27, 44-47; Acts 26:22-23; I Pet. 1:10—12; II Pet. 1:19-21) shows that the law and the prophets have to do with Christ and God's plan for and in him.

True prophecy relates to the truth. God's truth is the ontological reality. Prophecy—the proclamation of God's word both predictive and hortatory—is authentic because it concerns the ontological. it is ontological. Hence it is dynamic. Therefore prophecy is necessarily dynamic. whether it be unontological or anti-ontological. Deuteronomy 18 indicates that false forms of prophecy, e.g. divination and soothsaying, are also dynamic. True prophecy effects that which it is about (Deut. 18:22), and whilst false prophecy does not, it works in the same way upon those who wish to know the future. Knowing the future is part of being human, and so is dynamic. The first set of Scriptures cited above distinguishes between true and false prophets and prophesying.

Speakers of God's Word

True and False Prophets

Hebrews 1: 1-2a says, 'In many and varied ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...' The prophet, then, spoke the word of God- We have seen that prophecy has the two elements of prediction and exhortation. Either one or both of these elements would be present at any time. Hence prophecy was not always predictive, nor always horatory. Whatever elements were present the utterance was the word of God. Hence the statements, 'the word of the Lord came unto...' 'thus says the Lord', and so on. Prophecy constituted God's main mode of communicating His word.

When God speaks, His word is necessarily dynamic. The false prophets recognized this dynamic. In one sense *any* utterance has a certain power to it. The prophets of the baals and the idols purported to be speaking for powerful deities, but they were seen to be mediums for their gods. From Israel's point of view they were false prophets inasmuch as the only true word was Yahweh's word. The one who spoke His word was a true prophet. In a contest between Yahweh and the false gods, the latter would always be defeated. Hence the people of Yaweh asked the following question,

Who is like thee, O Lord among the gods?
Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders'?

Israel meant that Yahweh was more powerful than the gods of Egypt. Their word or their prophets were as nothing against Him.

The second set of false prophets were those who purported to speak in the name of Yahweh. These are the prophets mentioned in the first paragraph of this study.

The Word of God and the Prophets—True and False

How did the prophets gain the word they were to give? There were two ways: either God spoke to the prophet face to face (Num. 12:8; Acts 3:22-23), or He communicated His message by the means of dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; cf. Jer. 23:23f.; Acts 2:17-18). In Numbers 12:6-8 (cf. Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10; Hosea 12:13; Exod. 24:10-11) these two methods are stated. If a man did not receive God's word by one or other method, then any word he spoke would be false, and not truly prophetic.

In Jeremiah 14:14 God said. 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name: I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.' In Jeremiah 23:16-18 God warned, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, "It shall be well with you"; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, "No evil shall come upon you".'

At this point the prophet introduced the idea of 'the council of the Lord'. He said, 'For who among them has stood *in the council of the Lord* to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened?'. Again in Jeremiah 23:21-22 God said, 'I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in *my council*, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings'.

In relation to prophecy, what then is God's council? Israel believed God had a council of supernatural beings. For this see Psalm 89:7, '... God feared in the council of the holy ones', Psalm 82:1, 'God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement'. (cf. I Kings 22:19-22; Job 1:1-2:2; 15:8; Isa. 6: 1-13).

Whatever the council was and is, it appears that the prophet was admitted to it, but the false prophet was barred. The true prophet was given the mind of God for his proclamation of the truth. This being so the prophetic word must be pure as against the false prophetic word which is evil. It is an awesome thing to proclaim the word of God.

The Hebrew word for council (Jer. 23:18, 22; RSV) and counsel (Jer. 23:18, 22; AV) is *sod*. In Amos 3:7 the word ‘secret’ (RSV) or ‘plans’ (JB) is also *sod*. The word *sod* can mean ‘a sitting, session, or assembly’, and so we take it that the assembly is there for the counsel of wisdom of God, and this counsel is communicated by the prophets when He desires it, even if the prophet does not actually stand in the midst of the holy ones who constitute the *sod*.

The Church the Prophetic Community

The gifts of ministry outlined by Paul in Ephesians 4:7-11 show us that the new community—the church—is a teaching community. Apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers are all in the work of teaching. The original apostles must be regarded as unique since they brought the true corpus of teaching to the word, i.e. the apostolic proclamation (*kerugma*) which, by nature of the case, is immutable. The prophets must abide by this apostolic teaching, as also must the evangelists, pastors and teachers. No new or innovative teaching may be made, and the apostolic teaching is unique. It is the interpretation of the Old Testament truth in the light of the events of Christ already predicted and in Christ’s incarnation, fulfilled. It is also the events of Christ interpreted in the light of Old Testament truth.

Where, then, does prophecy figure in the New Testament? The primary answer is that the church is the prophetic community, just as it is the priestly and royal community, i.e. Christ who is prophet, priest and king, works out his offices and ministry through his body

the church. Acts 2:17-18 makes it clear that at Pentecost this *prophetic* community came into being.

‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy’, and this is the message of the apostolic church. If we notice the continual reference to ‘witness’ and ‘testimony’ in the books of the Acts and the Revelation, then we will see that issuing from Acts 1:8 the ministry of the church is primarily witness, i.e. the witness *of* Jesus as also the witness *to* Jesus, for these virtually, are the one. (For a detailed development of this see my book, *Is Prophecy For Today?*, NCPI, 1982.) There can be no doubt then that the church is the prophetic community. Whilst certain men and women may have the office of prophet (Acts 11:27-29; 21:10-12; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9; Eph. 4:11), many have or exercise the charisma of prophecy (I Cor. 12:10; 14:1, 24). It is in this context that Peter enjoins, ‘... whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God’. On this hinges much we now need to discuss.

Stealing God’s Word

The passage of Jeremiah 23:9-40 (cf. Isa. 9:15; Jer. 14:13-16; 27:14ff.; Ezek. 13:2-17; 22:28; Deut. 18:15-22) is most important.

In essence it is as follows:

- (i) The prophets of the Northern Kingdom were evil and ungodly for ‘they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray’. The condition of Judah was even worse for, ‘in the prophets of Jerusalem, I [God] have seen a horrible thing; they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of ‘evil doers’, so that no one turns from his wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah’ (see 9-15).

- (ii) The prophets of the Southern Kingdom speak ‘visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord’. They speak comfortably to those ‘who despise the word of the Lord’ (sec 16-17).
- (iii) These false prophets have not been sent by God for they had not ‘stood in the council of God’ therefore they could not know the true word of God, the word which would have turned God’s people ‘from their evil way, and from the evil of their doing’ (see 18-22).
- (iv) The prophets—so called—use the dreams and visions of the true prophets. They know they need the authentication of these and so they pretend to know the true prophets’ visions, or manufacture some of their own. They know the word of God—the prophetic word—is authentic (ontological) so they use it, shaping it up to their own ends. God says He will differentiate between the wheat and the chaff. His word is fire and He will devour the chaff. His word is a hammer and will break the hard rocklike hearts of the false prophets in pieces.

Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, ‘Says the Lord.’ Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord. (See verses 23—32).

- (v) God castigates the false prophets when they claim to know ‘the burden of the Lord’ telling the prophets their words are not His ‘burden’ i.e. oracle or prophecy. Their burden (prophecy) is their own. God tells His people to tell these false prophets, ‘You pervert the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God’ (see 33-40).

Our conclusion in this section is then that it is possible—either from delusion or by deliberate choice—to steal the words of God, and

to seek to authenticate ourselves by means of them.

The Ministry of Stolen Words

As pastors we have to decide whether we are uttering our own words, or speaking the word of God, and whether it is possible we are stealing the words on which God alone has copyright. Peter's injunction, 'whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God' essential for proclaiming the truth. Within the scope, of this study it is, not possible for us to do a full survey of the use of the word of God in the New Testament—let alone in the Old Testament. It is however that in the Acts, the apostolic church was proclaiming the word of God. In the Epistles certain references are made to 'the word of the cross', and to the power of the proclaimed Gospel, and many warnings are given against wrong uses of God's word. In the book of the Revelation are numerous references to 'having' or 'holding' word of God.

The Authentic Word

The Holy Spirit brought the truth of the Gospel to the church on the Day of Pentecost (John 16:12—15; I Cor. 2:12-13; Acts 2:42), and so the apostolic truth was known and formulated. Only apostles could claim authority for this formulation of the truth: others taught what they had formulated. In Acts and the Epistles they insist that they teach the word of God. Paul spends almost two chapters of Galatians in setting out his apostolic authority so that his readers will believe his word against that of the Judaisers who were perverting apostolic truth. This authentic truth was always via the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; I Cor. 2:1-5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12).

The False Word

In II Corinthians 2:17 Paul claims, 'For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ'. In II Corinthians 4:2 he says, 'We have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God'. In I Corinthians 1:17 he had said, 'For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.' To this he added (I Cor. 2:3-5), 'And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God'.

These statements are of immense importance. He is saying that we can peddle God's word, that we can practice disgraceful and underhand ways in the proclamation of the Gospel, and that we can use cunning, and we can tamper with God's word. We can also use eloquence and plausible words of a wisdom which is not God's wisdom and we can even make men to stand in such false wisdom. rather than in the power of God. All of this should cause us much heart- searching.

The Old Testament prophets had stolen the dreams, visions words of the true prophets. As we have suggested, they recognized some measure the ontological way, the way of truth and hence authentic power, and they wanted to use the true things in order to gain credibility and power. Everything false is only an imitation of the true, but by nature of the case it cannot genuinely succeed. As Jeremiah states it will be burned in the fire of the true word, and smashed by the hammer of the same word. Moreover God is against those who steal His word. He will by no means allow them to get

away with it. Judgement is inevitable.

In II Timothy 4:3 Paul says that ‘the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth, and wander into myths’. He tells Titus (1:9) that an elder ‘must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. Without doubt the early church was beset about with many who did not know the apostolic truth. Galatians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles refer to such happenings. John’s Epistles warn against current heresies, and Jude (3-4) says, ‘I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ’.

An Evaluation of Our Own Words

We have a number of things to take into consideration when we seek to evaluate the word we proclaim and the manner of our proclamation. Is it the word of God or is it merely quoting the Bible, the giving of biblical information? Do we preach without power and without fruitfulness? Are we afraid of our hearers, and so seek to satisfy them? Do we seek the praise of men more than the praise of God? Does money and comfort occupy our minds more than the word itself? Do we have presuppositions (critical and otherwise) which mean we do not really believe the Scriptures? Do we have a form of godliness but deny its power (II Tim. 3:5), and is the Kingdom of God words and not power (I Cor. 4:20)?

Some of us use other men’s sermons and other men’s thoughts.

There may be nothing harmful in this, or there may be the admission that God does not speak directly to us through His word. In Study 8 we talked about the word and its power. Do we really know that power in truth, or is it simply an academic fact for us? Are we men and women of the word of God and His Spirit, or are we using human wisdom, tacking our sails according to the wind, using mores and wisdom that smack more of man than of God?

These are not the only questions we need to ask of ourselves, all of them ought to be asked with the principle of stealing God's word—and words—in mind.

STUDY THIRTEEN

(by Ian Pennicook)

THE PARISH IN TODAY'S WORLD

The word 'parish' is 'derived from the Greek *paroikia*, or "district"' and 'seems till about the fourth century to have corresponded to a whole diocese and only later to small subdivisions of the same. By the later Middle Ages the parish had emerged as a definite geographical district, its inhabitants restricted to a particular church to which they paid tithes, and which had a single incumbent appointed either by the bishop, patron, or less usually, by the parishioners themselves. At the time of the Reformation both Lutherans and Calvinists retained the parish system, the latter for administrative convenience only'.¹

Having noted that meaning, we must also note that in the New Testament, *paroikia* is only used twice, at Acts 13:17 and I Peter 1:17, on both occasions in reference to a period of time spent in a particular place, a 'stay', a 'time of exile'. Since this meaning does not correspond to the meaning of 'parish' and since the concept of a 'parish' seems more akin to the idea of the identification of the kingdom of God with the church,² it seems best that we confine ourselves to examining the role of *the local church* in today's world.

¹ Ian Sellers, 'Parish', *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J. D. Douglas, Ed., (Grand Rapids, 1974, 1978) p, 747.

² See the study *The Kingdom and the Church*

1. The Identity of the Local Church

It is true that, for many, the word 'church' conveys many things. In spite of our theological definitions, we are constantly using the word to mean the organization, the building (less frequently), the occupation and so on. We also speak of 'The Baptist Church', 'The Anglican Church', etc, as if we can consider the church from a denominational angle. Certainly it seems that these various usages reflect as much the demands made on a pastor's time and energy as they do a looseness of language.

In Matthew 16:18³, Jesus said 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church'. If there is a church, then it is the result of Christ's action to form it and sustain it. To speak of someone doing 'church planting' can never be totally correct. Christ is the one who plants the church, however much men and women may have been used in the process. This is borne out by such statements as '... yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; to all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints' (Rom. 1:6-7). The church was formed by the 'effectual call' of Christ (cf. John 6:37, 44; Rom. 9:11, 24; I Thess. 1:4-5; etc).⁴

This is more than a matter of theological precision: this is the great reality of the church. The people who are members of the church are so because *Christ is in action and has called them to himself!* To be pastor of a *local* church is therefore to be the shepherd of the people whom Christ has called to himself *in a particular place*. Christ has spoken through the word of the Cross and men and women have been gripped by that revelation and been drawn to him.

³ There are only two occasions in the Gospels when the word 'church' is used, here and in Matthew, 18:17.

⁴ This is, of course, the meaning of the greek word *ekklesia*; the church is the body of people 'called out'. What gives the word its Christian significance is the identity of the one who called it. That is not to say that the English word 'church' has this meaning. It is rather derived (transliterated) from the Greek adjective *kuriakos*, 'of the lord or master'.

We might observe that there are many in the churches who do not seem ‘gripped’ to the same degree as we see in the New Testament. It is indisputable that there will always be weeds among the wheat; it is also true that people will always be in varying stages of maturity. However, since Christ builds his church via the preaching of the word, we must also admit that, in so many cases, there has been a deficient preaching, with the result that many who have come to Christ have little or no understanding of what that means and so they can hardly function in the conscious power of it.

2. The Growth of the Local Church

What, then, can we say of the various ‘church growth’ methodologies? The answer is that they must be measured against the Scriptures. Without wishing to take some superior stance, and knowing few of the methodologies in detail, I can only say that if Christ is building his church, then it is the supreme presumption to assume that I can build his church for him by my methods. Indeed, one cannot but sense that the leaders of the church in the early chapters of Acts had their work cut out keeping up with all that God was doing. What they did know was that they could not budge from the preaching of the word (see Acts 4:29; 6:2, 4; I Cor. 1:17; etc). They were aware that anything other than ‘the open statement of the truth’ involved them in ‘tamper[ing] with God’s word’ (II Cor. 4:2). If there is to be a growth of numbers in the church, it would only be by the action of revelation (II Cor. 4:5-6).

We ought to ask the question concerning the present state of church growth. In an age when so many groups are lamenting a drop in numbers and others are recording a phenomenal increase, how are we to evaluate all that is happening? Again, our answer must be the same as that above. If what we see is, on the one hand a failure to preach the word and on the other the determination to have numerical growth

(for its own sake?), then to what extent have people consequently adopted a pragmatic approach to ministry in an attempt to justify Christ in the light of his apparent failure to repeat his New Testament successes? Or is the growth the result of the preaching of the word? We might also have to ask whether the drop in numbers does not also, at times, spring from the preaching of the word. But either way, the responsibility for the membership of the church is Christ's and not our's. Our responsibility is to preach the word. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:26-28) summarizes the issues: 'I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from *declaring* to you the whole counsel of God. Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*, to care for the church of God which *he obtained* with the blood of his own Son'.

3. The Function of the Local Church

What function does the local church have? Generally there are two sociological approaches to church life which determine our answer to the question. The first approach sees the church as having a 'communal' role. This is seen especially in the Anglican parish system.⁵ There 'the Church' is regarded as a significant part of the life of the whole community, churched or unchurched. It has a function in family life, via baptisms, marriages and burials, and in society by providing a point of continuity in a rapidly changing world. The old building has social value quite apart from anything that takes place inside it. Many pastors who are pressured to function within such a system, be it Anglican or other, find that they are then forced to 'use' these social activities, such as baptism, for evangelistic purposes. Whatever the biblical purpose of baptism, it is not what is meant by it

⁵ Particularly as it is in Britain, though these assumptions were carried over into Australia. It does not, of course, mean that all Anglican clergy hold to the position. Nonetheless the framework is there.

in the eyes of the community.

The second approach sees the church as having an 'associational' base. By this is meant that membership of the church is by the direct conscious choice of the individual joining it. Local churches of this type have a membership which is far more conscious of its identity, suggest that the associational church was the pattern of the church in the New Testament, but that gradually the church drifted Towards having a communal role.

Now, whatever the value of sociological definitions, we must that the church which Christ calls to himself stands in stark contrast to the world. It is as different from the world as chalk is from cheese'.

The world hates the people of God (John 15:18-25). The reason it does so is that it hates Christ. And the people of God bear the word of Christ (Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 12:17)⁶. The silencing of their witness cause of jubilation (Rev. 11:7-10). Paul said that we are 'always'. carrying in the body the death of Jesus', because of the treasure which we have in our earthen vessels (II Cor. 4:7, 10).

What, then, is the function of the local church in such an environment? An illustration of tile function is seen in Acts 4:13-33. Peter and John had been commanded 'not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus'. This, naturally, they refused to accept. When they returned to their friends, the whole fellowship 'lifted their voices together to God' recognizing that the situation was the same as that described in Psalm 2 and that the rest of the Psalm (unquoted by them but implicit in what was quoted) pointed out that in the face of the hostility of the world the Lord laughs, for lie has set His king on Zion, His holy hill. They, therefore, prayed that God would 'look upon their threats and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness'. The prayer was answered.

Knowing the word they had to proclaim the word, and the proclamation

⁶ The R.S.V. with the N.E.B. reads 'bear testimony to Jesus' but the Greek has 'and having the testimony of Jesus' (cf. NIV and NASB).

flowed from the fellowship that the word had called into being. Peter had quoted Joel 2 on the day of Pentecost to the effect that the believers were a prophetic community⁷ and it is this which we see here. In Ephesians 4:11ff. we read that gifts were given so that the body of Christ might be built up. The presence of evangelists in the list of Christ's gifts indicates that it is more than internal growth which is in mind. The presence of prophets strengthens the believers as they hear the word, but even that spills over to unbelievers as they are confronted by the prophetic word within the gathering of believers (I Cor. 14:24-25).

We may say that the function of the local church is to be the place where the gifts of Christ are received and used with a view to the ministry of the word of Christ to the world. It is the place where believers are nourished and strengthened in order that they may effectively be the prophetic community.⁸

⁷ The cassette, *The Prophetic Community in Action*, by Geoffrey Bingham is highly recommended on this subject.

⁸ This will not mean that the local church is careless about the material and emotional needs of the society about them. It does mean, though, that social action which is not constantly constrained by and filled with the word is no more than healing 'the wound of my people lightly, saying "Peace, peace" when there is no peace' (Jer. 6:14).

STUDY FOURTEEN

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE WORD IN THE PARISH

The Pastor and the Word

We have already seen the nature of the word of God, its power, and those who seek to use it illicitly. We would all agree that the pastor must know—and increasingly know—the word of God. It is surely a principle that all ministry springs from the proclaimed and taught word of God—the Scriptures. We will look at the initial proclamation of the word more fully in Study 16, but here we are thinking of the use of the word that follows the saving proclamation—not that there is a distinct difference between the kerugmatic word and the prophetic, didactic and pastoral word.

The Context of the Pastoral-Parochial Word

If we are parochially minded we will minimize the true operation of the word. Each church (parish or circuit) is in the wider context of the church of Christ. This in context is the kerugmatic, prophetic, priestly (worshipping) church in action as the agent of the Kingdom of God, under its head, Christ. Any ambition for the local church is destructive and repressive to the witness of the church in the world. In addition no local church has all the gifts which can be contained within itself. If it has certain ministry gifts such as those of an

apostle, prophet and evangelist—which themselves are often itinerant—the local church must give to and receive from such ministries.

The local church is a witnessing *church*. It has the witness of the word of God and of the life of its *koinonia* (fellowship) and *diakonia* (ministry, servanthood) and *didache* (teaching), as well as those gifts which cannot be contained within itself. Signs and wonders are *not* solely for the local church, even if often they come via it.

When we say the local church is the witnessing church we must also recognize and keep in mind the fact that the church of Christ is the new temple (Isa. 2:2-3; 56:6ff.; I Cor. 3:16-17; I Pet. 2:4-10). Worship is rich witness, and fulfils the deepest emotional needs of man. There should never be the worship without the word, nor the word without the worship. Both constitute the one entity.

Another factor to be considered is its denominational polity, i.e. whether it is congregational, presbyterian, or hierarchical. Its sacramental pattern must also be understood. These elements determine the ecclesiastical authority of the preacher.

At the same time we must see that in the local church there are unconverted people, those who have little biblical knowledge or sense, and many who are in states of confusion, who lack the knowledge and sense of justification, who are awry in doctrine, and who have problems with marriage and children, with understanding Christian morality, especially as they struggle amidst the changing mores of contemporary society. We must also recognize the growth in maturity of those in the congregation who are competent to teach and to preach the word of God.

The Pastor and the Word

We use this term, not simply to designate the pastor ministering only from the pulpit, but in whatever situation he speaks the word of God, such as in church services, in study groups, in his study to persons,

to the church leadership, and to counselling both in his study and in members' homes. This speaking of the word has to minister to, and in, all these situations.

As I see it, most—if not all—ministry should spring from the proclamation of the word, whether that of the pastor or the word which congregational members have heard or read from others. If questions are asked following genuine proclamation of the word, then proper contact and interaction are established. As we have seen, members of the congregation are in various states of mind, and of understanding. They are also in various states of need. If then their response (or reaction) comes from the word, then it will be the word which will be necessary to answer their queries.

This, then, means that the pastor must be well-versed in the word. Prior even to entering this pastoral ministry he should work out for himself the matter of the authority of the word of God, and his own authority in proclaiming it, as also the consequences which may come from its proclamation. If—for example—he thinks the word may cause unwonted repercussions, then he must be honest with himself. If he considers the authority of current thinking determines the value of the word of God then he must act accordingly, for such things will determine the way in which he preaches, as also the content of his preaching. Every pastor must work out this matter and evaluate the thrust of his ministry and hold fast to that until experimentation in the same determines a change or otherwise in his manner of ministry, as also its content.

One thing the pastor must study is whether his ministry is primarily evangelistic, prophetic, didactic, hortatory or pastoral, i.e. with a view to caring for the flock in all their needs and God's demands of them. If evangelistic then he must invite the help of others in relation to the other elements of teaching and preaching. Even so a worthy pastor may find it possible in his preaching to be prophetic, didactic, hortatory and comforting according to the particular occasion.

The Pastor Must Determine his Personal Role in Relation to the Word of God

Every pastor—as a shepherd—must ‘feed the flock of God’. The word of life is also the bread of life. Some pastors say, ‘I am no preacher. Preaching is not my thing. My thing is visitation’. Some see organizing or praying as their role. The proclamation of the word must be primary. This does not mean eloquent, knowledgeable or brilliant preaching. The word may even be stammered. Some great preachers have read their sermons word by word, with rich results. One is excusing oneself from study of the word by claiming their roles are different. How can one give pastoral wisdom and advice from one’s lack of the studied word? A visiting pastor may be merely social or pleasant or even a ‘tea-and-sugar bushranger’! An organizing pastor may be taking the easy way out. Organization must be done in the light of God’s word. Many a pastor has built large buildings, increased the size of the congregation, and achieved popularity as a person without much recourse to the word of God.

The pastor is not called to be popular or even loved. He is called to guard the flock of God, to feed it, to train it, and teach the word of God to others that they may yet teach it to others also. His gifts for visiting, organizing—and the rest—may also be used, but only in the light of God’s word.

The Word is To, and For, All

In a presbyterial polity the pastor is the first among other elders, i.e. *primus inter pares*. He may be expected to be the primary preacher of the word. Even so each elder is expected to be ‘an apt teacher’, as also to ‘hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instructions in sound doctrine and to confute those who try to contradict it’. In non-presbyterial polities leadership should be

designed to assist the minister of the word and the sacraments. In this paper we cannot cover all the pastoral situations as mentioned above, but when the pastor seeks to cover them it must be from the word, especially the wisdom the pastor has learned in the practical application of the word. This does not mean formal teaching, or the theological setting out of Christian dogma—although that has its place also—but it is showing how in any situation the guidance of the word can be received and applied (cf. II Tim. 3: 15-17). Thus a pastor may be seeking to assist where one spouse is an alcoholic and even cruel and aggressive in his drunken states. Other situations may relate to immorality, sexual deviations, poverty, emotional states that paralyse the person—and so on. In all these the word of God—with of course the guidance and enablement of the Holy Spirit—can assist the pastor who has studied it. By this we do mean that the pastor will not always open a bible or simply quote Scriptures but will give to those who need it the wisdom God gives through His word. The pastor himself will be given the wisdom he needs for his own vocation, prayer, devotion, godly living and true pastoral operations.

STUDY SIXTEEN

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

The Meaning and Significance of Proclamation

A look at a Greek concordance will show that some six verbs are used regularly in the New Testament which have very much the same meaning, and are linked with the proclamation of the Gospel. They are *annagelo* (report), *apagello* (bring tidings), *diaggello* (proclaim), *euaggelizo* (bring good news), *kataggello* (proclaim, announce), and *kerysso* (proclaim). *Ginornia* (come to be, happen, be) and *gnorizo* (to make known) are used only once. What is common about all of them is that they constitute something, i.e. a message, which has authority and demands attention, evaluation and decision on the part of the hearer.

For the preacher who is announcer and proclaimer this has significance. His proclamation is not from himself. It is from God, and through the preacher God demands a response. The proclamation, truly given is always affective, i.e. either for acceptance and obedience or for rejection and (so) disobedience.

The Authority for Proclamation

This is seen clearly in Matthew 28:18-20, 'And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth *has been given to me*."

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" '. In Luke 24:44f., Mark 16:15f., John 20:20-23 and Acts 1:8 much the same claim and information is given. In Acts 1:2 is a commentary on these passages, i.e. Jesus gave commandments through the Holy Spirit, and ended by saying (Acts 1:8) that when the Spirit came upon them they would receive power and witness to him throughout the world. The authority was Christ's but then that authority was under the Father. Thus the Christian proclaimer—whoever he or she may be—goes in the authority of the Father and the Son. Romans 10:15 asks, 'How can men preach unless they are sent?'. This scripture shows that *none can go authentically until sent: then that one has full authority*, and must be listened to as he proclaims. One would normally conclude that a *person ordained to the pastoral ministry has authentically been sent*.

Responsibility with Authority

All authority carries responsibility. When one is responsible for proclaiming the word of God then that is the greatest responsibility of all. Such a one must have the mind of God, and of Christ, and walk with the utmost humility, never deflecting from the word, and never inserting the word of man, no matter how attractive and wise it may sound. The following quotes show us how solemn and responsible a thing it is to proclaim the nine word of God, the living truth as it is in Him.

'Divine revelation is more than the disclosure of supernatural knowledge concerning the nature and purposes of God.' (R. H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of True Preaching*, p. 151 .)

'Revelation is the self-bestowal of the living God... God in the act of imparting Himself.' (P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 10.)

... we are now more aware that it is God Himself Who speaks in the proclamation. Preaching is not talking about God. It is allowing God to talk. The words of the preacher are simply the medium through which the Divine Word comes. It is God who speaks.' (Mounce, *op. cit.* p. 154.)

'Preaching is the immediate, powerful, personal self-communication of the eternal Word to men.' (C. K. Barrett, *Biblical Preaching and Biblical Scholarship*, p. 4.)

'Preaching has a single purpose, that Christ might come to those who are assembled to listen.' (Gustaf Wingren, *Prediken; en principiell studie*, p. 296, quoted by Moance).

'As the preacher proclaims the divine act of redemption, the barriers of time are somewhat transcended and that supreme event of the *past* is again taking place. God's historic self-disclosure has become a present reality.' (Mounce, *op. cit.* p. 153.)

'Preaching does more than recount and explain the ancient event. The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event now transpiring, and the preaching is a medium of the Spirit's action in doing so. In the preaching, when it is truly itself, the event is continuing or recurring. God's revealing action in Christ is, still or again, actually taking place.' (John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching*, p. 92.)

'Preaching is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself.' (P. T. Forsyth, *op. cit.* p. 3.)

'Only authentically biblical preaching can be really relevant; only vitally relevant preaching can be really biblical.' (John Knox, *op. cit.* p. 27.)

'There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.' (Jeremiah 20:9.)

... you accepted it not as the word of men but as *what* it really is, *the* word of GOD which is at work in you believers.' (Paul, I Thess. 2: 13.)

The Mode of Proclamation

If we keep in mind that the Proclamation is not only the *word* given by the proclaimer, but is in the context of the whole church in its witnessing role as the kerugmatic prophetic, priestly, and royal community, living in love and fellowship, endowed with the gifts of ministry and the other gifts (*charismata*) then we can see, again, that

there is a context in which proclamation is made. Not only are those addressed by the word expected to respond, but they are invited into the holy community—Christ’s body, the church.

We have a good picture of the apostolic mode in Romans 15:14-21. In particular let us look at verses 18-19, ‘For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit...’ From this we can see the order, (a) word and deed, (b) the power of signs and wonders, (c) the power of the Holy Spirit. We do not have time here to go into this subject but see my study on *By the Power of Signs and Wonders* (NCPI, 1986). Briefly we can say that when Paul preached, deeds accompanied that proclamation, i.e. (a) Paul and his companions lived in godliness and love, suffered without complaint and ‘adorned the teaching’; (b) others heard, responded, were saved and formed a new church, showing the same spirit as the proclaimers who had come to them; (c) on many occasions—if not all—God attested to the word proclaimed by doing signs and wonders (e.g. Acts 14:3) which thus showed (a) the power of God, and (b) the authentic ministry of the proclaiming team, and (c) all of this was through and by the power of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the word, the deeds, and the signs and wonders.

Down through the history of the church there have been times when Paul’s mode has been reproduced, especially in revivals, and more often in revivals or the initial preaching of the Gospel in the third world. Even so we should have faith and expectancy that God will attest to our proclamation, and that it will be prove fruitful.

The Power of Proclamation

Whilst we have partly dealt with this subject in Study Two of this series under my name, we have to see that terms such as ‘gospel’,

‘word of the cross’ and ‘the word of grace’ all insist on the innate power of the word. Whilst I Thessalonians 1:5 says, ‘Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction’, he is not inferring that ‘word only’ means the word lacks power, but that the word was not preached apart from the Spirit. The word cannot really be authentically preached apart from the Spirit for this constitutes the one act of proclamation.

It is also interesting to notice ‘the word of grace’, for grace was (a) the saving word (Acts 15:11; 18:27; 20:24), (b) the; word which kept them living in the new life (Acts 13:43; 2:32). The terms ‘grace’ and ‘the word of his grace’ were identical:’ thus when anyone was ‘commended to the grace of God’ (Acts 14:26; 15:40) this was the same as being ‘commended to the word of his grace’ (20:32; cf. 14:3). This means that there is no difference between ‘grace’ and ‘the word of God’, for God is both Speaker and Doer—grace never being absent from Him. Thus ‘the word of grace’ and ‘the word of God’ are one as can be seen from Romans 1:16-17; I Corinthians 1:18; I Thessalonians 1:5; I Peter 1:12; and Hebrews 4:12.

Conclusion to our Studies on the Word of God

We can see that if we are not convinced of the word of God, and do not stand in awe and trembling before it (Isa. 66:2, 5; Ps. 119:120; Jer. 5:22; Ezra 9:4; 10:3; 10:9) then we will not be under the word and so will not speak with authority or true effect. If we seek to induce the same results that would accompany the preaching of the word by means other than the word, then those results will not stand. We will have to continue to use human methods, human words, and human exhortation. Whilst we can get fairly calculable results from human planning they cannot be said to come from the word of God.

For these reasons we need to return to the word of God, live in it, and proclaim it in truth.