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## Homiletics

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## HOMILETICS

### CALLING MODERN MAN TO HIMSELF BY PREACHING

Preaching in my understanding is not merely the organization and vocal presentation of certain Biblical or doctrinal materials, an exercise which ministers are perfectly capable of performing because of special training, certain abilities, and highly developed skills and qualifications. Preaching does not involve people in a discussion of God but in the very coming of God Himself.

#### I

Fundamentally, God is always the subject and never the predicate.

#### *God Is Subject*

It must be clear that we do not begin with certain assumptions with regard to deity in general and then seek to demonstrate that these ideas are pertinent also to our God, that our God is God indeed because what is assumed in general is true also with regard to Him. The apparent similarities between the living God and deity in general, all false gods, are really points of widest departure from the truth because they are essentially evidences that man, the sinner, has been creating and evaluating deity in terms of self.

What was really the sin of the Israelites when they made the golden calf? It was not an attempt on their part to deny Yahweh, but to assure His presence in their midst on their own terms and not on the terms Yahweh had laid down. They surely knew that this casting which was the product of their own hands had not brought them out of Egypt. It was to be a representation of Yahweh to which they could hold and to which they could give the kind of expression of devotion and worship that was natural

to their senses. The sin was that they made a representation of the Living God who had commanded them that they were not to represent Him by anything because "He is who He is, and He will be present as He Himself chooses to be present." This is the sin of all natural theology. It is equally the sin of many Christian preachers and theologians to this day.

Nor do we begin with certain attributes of God and from these draw our conclusions about God or make our verifications of God. A case in point here would be the clear Scriptural statement that God is love. This must be understood only in terms of God and what He declares His love to be and never in terms of what we regard as love in general. Nor can we ever assert that love is God. God is God, God the living God, and therefore always more than what can be said about Him.

#### *God Is Revealer*

We cannot have anything to do with God unless He reveals Himself to us. Therefore only that can properly be said about God which He first declares of Himself and what He shows us of Himself through what He has done. This means that He Himself sets both the area and the limits of His revelation and is not bound by any conclusions that we might draw with regard to Him or by any neat systems in which we might attempt to contain Him. This points up what is essentially wrong with all isms including pietism, mysticism, and, beyond them, superorthodoxy.

God is always the Actor and never the acted-upon, always the Initiator and never that which is initiated. All that we can ever do is respond to God and, strictly speaking, our only proper response is praise and thanksgiving in terms of faith. While this



fact that God initiates faith is the basic difference between revelation and idolatry, it is also both judgment and grace.

It is judgment because it shows us our total inadequacy for even knowing God. What we learn from revelation (Rom. 11: 31-33) is that we cannot know God Himself by ourselves. Even as we live with His revelation we do not know the mind of God as if we could now be His counselors, as if we had not first received but could now so give to Him as to put Him into our debt. It always remains true—His thoughts are not our thoughts and our ways are never His ways simply because they are ours. Even with revelation our knowledge of God is never a matter of personal possession as if we somehow had mastered it and were in control of it. This is why Jesus was more than a teacher. A teacher is at his best when he makes himself dispensable, when he has brought the pupil to the point at which he no longer needs the teacher and even surpasses the teacher. But we always remain learners, disciples of Jesus, and we are disciples only as we continue in His Word and are constantly being made free by means of it. God must constantly reveal Himself to us anew or we no longer know God Himself but merely harbor some memory of Him as we once knew Him in the past, such as Bible stories which we once learned in Sunday school, or live by certain conclusions which we draw from our existence as professing Christians. This is the reason for hearing again and again what we already "know." What we require is always God in His personal address and personal confrontation (I-Thou relationship). This must be borne in mind by the preacher for his own personal correction, the renewal of his own personal relationship with God, and for the sake of his hearers, who must always be hearers of God and not hearers of the preacher. We need only think how well and how long we have known the parable

of the Prodigal Son, even to the point of being able to recite it, perhaps even in the original Greek; but even we, and especially we, must hear it addressed to us anew in order that it may again and again call us out of whatever pigpen we have ended up in, and reassure us anew that the Father welcomes us as sons who were dead but are now alive again. Otherwise we occupy a different place in the parable—that of the elder brother.

But our ongoing need of revelation is constantly met by God, and this is also the renewal of the grace of God. Of Him and through Him and to Him all things truly are, and therefore He can be blessed by us who seek always to bless only ourselves. God Himself, by making Himself known to us as the Unknowable, as Yahweh, God as He is God, God as He will be there on His terms and in His own way, but truly be there, brings us to believe, not something about Him but in Him. This will keep all dullness and perfunctoriness out of our preaching, because in faith we believe in Him as coming now as He came of old, to be our God here and now even as He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### *God Is Chooser*

This is what makes preaching different from all other forms of address—it is the coming of God Himself, man confronted by the living God. In all other audience situations man weighs and evaluates in terms of what the subject offered might or might not do for him, and then on that basis chooses to accept or reject it. Preaching, however, is the coming of God as the Chooser of men and does not essentially offer man a choice with regard to God. Refusal on man's part is always the refusal to be chosen, the refusal to have God as He would be God, and that really is no choice. It is destruction. Thus preaching does not present just another option among the many with



which man is confronted daily. Man does not hold the balances and do the weighing. Man himself is in the balances and is being weighed. Our Lord Himself reminds us (John 15:16) that we have not chosen Him but He has chosen us and then has ordained us that we should go and bring forth fruit and that our fruit should remain. The option is His, and He opted for us; what we are by His choice we are because He established us to be that, and what we produce is His product. This is utterly distasteful to modern man. But it is not up to us to cut God to fit modern man's pattern or so to present His coming that it is palatable to man. As preachers we have no other responsibility than to be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in His triumphal entry into inimical territory where He establishes Himself as the stronger One who conquers what was previously held in peace.

Thus preaching recognizes that man has freedom to choose God only by virtue of the fact that God has already chosen him. Man really had no choice as far as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was concerned. He could exercise choice only with regard to all of the other trees of the garden. From these he could choose which he liked most and which he preferred to all the rest. He could eat of them or not eat of them, whatever his need or disposition at the moment. But with regard to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil man had no choice, because God had already chosen that man should not eat of it. Man's freedom consisted in precisely this that he obey, that he operate within the framework God had set for him as man. The sin lay in thinking that any other choice was possible for him, the choice, the sin of not being man in the way God had chosen for him; the choice, the sin, therefore, of wanting to be like God—self-determined, self-centered, self-possessed. Even Joshua's and Elijah's "Choose you this day" were not basically

calls to make a choice, but the revelation of human folly and disobedience and therefore the call to repent, to return unto the Lord their God, who was willing to have them back because He had chosen them, sinners that they were and disobeyers that they had again manifested themselves to be.

Preaching therefore can never begin with God as some point of reference from which we draw a given number of pertinent or impertinent conclusions that have to do with modern life. Preaching always has to do with God and faith in God. St. Paul in Rom. 8:35 ff. describes what might be called the manner of our existence in this world: for God's sake in danger of death all day long, constantly treated like sheep going to the slaughter. That's the way it is by all human assessment and evaluation. But in all these things (not by their removal but right in the midst of them) we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Nothing is changed and the pressures are always on, but none of it, as it is now or as it shall yet be, imaginable or unimaginable, shall be able to separate us from the love of God—not some sentimental love that fits our ideas of love but the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

### *God Speaks Through Prophets*

We are to be prophets, but only in the original sense of the word, as spokesmen for God, God Himself speaking through us.

### *True Prophets*

We usually refer this exclusively to doctrine and judge ourselves to be prophets of the living God when our presentation is in harmony with or at least not contrary to pure doctrine. But this was not the problem with the false prophets of old. They did not deny the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and thereby make themselves false. They merely did not speak what God had given them to speak. They worshiped the true God of Israel, in name, by word and ac-



according to prescribed ritual, but they did not represent the living God at all. Their speaking was on the basis of the conclusions they drew from their "knowledge" of God and their evaluation of the current situation. It just had to be that way if God were so and so. They never had it so good and therefore God had to be blessing them no matter what anyone said. And so, regardless of any possible threat, they cried out their "peace, peace" when there was no peace. And the reason there was no peace was that God *said* there was none, since He had declared war on them and their evident prosperity was only a ripening for doom. God was truly the God who had brought them out of Egypt, but that by itself was no guarantee that He would bring them out of their present situation. He could and He would, but only as He said so and only on His terms and not as some foregone conclusion.

#### *False Prophets*

We are false prophets in our preaching when we represent God from our own direct experience or as similar to what we gather from our human relationships. God is our Father, and we know what that means because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and only through Him our Father. We don't know Him as Father because we know what it means to be or have human fathers, from which fact we can draw all sorts of conclusions with regard to God. Again, we need only think of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Someone has said that if the prodigal were to have come home to a different kind of father, the old man might well have killed the son instead of the fatted calf. God in His revelation of Himself to us as Father shows us love beyond anything that we know, and therefore is a judgment upon us when we are fathers who do not reflect the fatherhood of God in Christ. (Note Eph. 3:14 ff.)

God is the Creator. We begin and end

with what God tells us of Himself as Creator. We are false prophets when we come with all sorts of general notions about existence and fit God as Creator into some general scheme of being. Luther points the way for us in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. There God the Creator is confessed in His personal relationship with me, and so I learn what this means for me and what the net result should be as far as I am concerned.

We are always involved in faith in God or in rejection of God. We either see God as the User of means, or the means become our idol. God is the Preserver, not because we know some prior providence of God from which we can make certain deductions, but because, regardless of how it appears, God opens His hand to satisfy the desires of every living thing. If we are to know this, we do not judge by our eyes, but, as Luther reminds us, we see here only if we stick our eyes in our ears. The only proper knowledge of God is always in faith, and faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Abraham was given the land by God, but it was his only in promise. The only portion that he ever held title to was the cave of Machpelah, which he bought for a burial place.

We can never begin or end with a given other than God as He gives Himself, as if we could determine in advance and by ourselves what God must or must not do. That is always the attempt on our part to be His counselors, and we always end up crying "peace, peace" when there is no peace. We are tempted to do this very thing with regard to our democracy, specifically in these very troubled times, but it is always pride speaking, the pride of the nations which forget God and make self-claims on the basis of God's use of them in the past. We always stand under the judgment of God, also as a nation, and our only hope is that we repent and live by the grace of God.



We are especially tempted to do this with regard to the institutional church as we know it and with which we are in fellowship, as if God's promises to the church were unequivocally applicable to us because of what we are as characterized by the specific expression we give of being the church. This is the old Roman error which identifies the church with a given organization. The church, however, lives always by grace. Organizations live by self-effort and under self-assessment.

We are tempted to do this when we lead people to believe that their prayers are bound to have a certain outcome that is deemed favorable, or when we imply that favorable situations are certain evidence of their faith and the goodness of God. Being Christian does make for a happier home, but only as "happy" is defined as being "God-used" and "God-glorifying" and "God-blessed." Prayer does change things, specifically us and our attitudes. It is never an attempt to change God's will with regard to us and our situation. Here we need only think of Gethsemane and ask if our Lord's prayer was answered.

### *God of the Prophets*

The whole history of Israel is an object lesson of how God acts according to His own plan and not as Israel (or we) might expect Him to act on the basis of certain preconceived personal ideas. This same God is our God and deals also thus with us. He did not choose the Children of Israel because they were a great and wonderful people. In fact, He Himself says that it was for exactly the opposite reason, lest they should ever attribute their being chosen to what they were in themselves. It is this same gracious God who chooses us in order that He might make *His* name great among the people and not our name. And then when God did choose them, He dealt more harshly with them than He did with any

other nation, demanded more of them, punished them for things that all the nations of the earth have always gotten away with, and finally rejected them when they put their trust, not in the God who chose them but in their descent from Abraham, in their God-given rite of circumcision (the symbol of being chosen), and in the form of worship which had been given them by God. This is the God who must continue to reveal Himself to us, coming again and again as the living God who only does wonders. He is God, and what He does is right because He does it and is the just God. He is God and needs neither vindication nor defense. The standard is the fact that He does it, while He is judged by no one and nothing, "that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest and be clear when Thou judgest." He is God and therefore the situation, circumstance, condition is always interpreted in the light of Him and His revelation of Himself, and He is never interpreted in the light of it.

There is no doubt but that certain hermeneutical and exegetical problems will arise here. However, it would be difficult to understand how preaching could be preaching without this premise of the self-vindication of God and without an insistence on this premise as absolutely essential. This must be the necessary backdrop of the whole, without which certain texts could be dealt with only fragmentarily and in many instances result in sermons consisting of only pious or even impious exhortation.

The true God is the living God, the personal God, God as Person from whom "person" derives its highest and only true meaning. As we all readily admit, there is a tremendous difference between person-to-person relations and person-to-thing relations. The former describes the living God in gracious condescension to us. The latter is idolatry.



## II

This leads to our next unit in which we see God as He chooses to be God to us, the living God as He reveals Himself to us, not as some idea or concept but as Immanuel, God-with-us, the Word made flesh and dwelling among us that we might behold His glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Preaching is not Word of God, that is, God in relation to man, except when it is the coming of Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh to the hearer. The Word, once and for all made flesh, incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and made Man, is now clothed anew in humble words that tell of Him as He came, that tell of the work which He accomplished in His coming and which He still accomplishes in His coming to this day as the Word-made-flesh in the sermon. We are saved from all pretension as preachers when we remember that at our very best we are Marys who can make no higher or more meaningful contribution to the coming of the Christ than the response: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy Word!" As it is to us according to God's Word, so the Christ comes to us, and through us to others. Not in an original but in a derived sense are we the bearers of the Word, much like "the colt, the foal of an ass." Unto us who are the least of all the saints is this grace given that we should declare the wonderful works of God by which He works His works anew, by which He proclaims His Gospel, which accomplishes that which it says because it is the power of God unto salvation, by which the God who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, now beseeches others through us: "Be ye therefore reconciled to God!" We are like the pointing finger of John the Baptist as we point to the Word-made-flesh dwelling among us. It behooves us therefore equally to know ourselves as did the Baptist, whose

single function was to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness and who recognized that he could be faithful to his call only as he decreased in order that Christ might increase.

*Jesus Is God*

The Prologue to St. John's Gospel makes it abundantly clear that God, the speaking God, the revealing God, the acting God, the God who draws nigh unto men, is Jesus Christ. This is the basic meaning of prophecy and fulfillment—God as He is in Himself, God as He was ever of old, is God as He is in Jesus Christ. The Lord who is the Shepherd of Psalm 23 is the I AM of John 10, who is *the* Good Shepherd because He lays down His life for the sheep. The great concern in attempting to be utterly clear on the person of Jesus Christ is that we know Him not merely as an agent of God carrying out the will of God but God Himself, God as He acts on His own behalf for us. This is why Jesus spoke as one having authority, who could take the words of the Old Testament and go beyond them with "Nevertheless, I say unto you." This is the meaning behind all the great I AM's of Jesus. This is why the people of His day understood Him far better than most in our own day. They at least recognized His claim to be equal with God, to be God. They did not believe it and so accused Him of blasphemy; but they at least took Him seriously enough to insist that if His claim was not true, He be put to death because He must obviously be of the devil. It is strange that in our day we rarely hear Jesus charged as He was in His own day. It is not at all unusual today to meet men who find in Him no more than an extension or heightening of our common humanity. The question is: Who understands Him best in terms of His claims: those who crucified Him, or those who make Him respectable to our modern knowledge by making Him unworthy of crucifixion?



*Jesus in the Testaments*

The whole revelation of God is bound up in Jesus Christ because in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. God, even God in the Old Testament, cannot properly be known apart from Jesus Christ. The Scriptures have but one witness. They are to be searched for one purpose. They testify of Jesus as the Christ and in Him give eternal life, because only in Him is life, and He alone is the Light of men. All in the Old Testament is either type of Him or promise of Him, God as He would personally come to His people to be their Savior and their God, Immanuel. Even Moses, or the law of Moses, can be known properly only in Him because if the people "had believed Moses, they would have believed Christ." The Law is only a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It is not an end in itself and cannot be properly understood as an end in itself. Israel did not see this, and many to-day do not see this because they operate only with the understanding that the people had in that day (N. B.: much modern exegesis) or with their own understanding. In either instance, the veil is still covering their eyes.

The New Testament is the record of the Word-made-flesh and dwelling among us so that we might behold His glory. If we regard it in any other way, it is a set of inferior writings, hardly worthy of being appended to the Old Testament. Faith in Jesus is the beholding of God's glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The angels sing of glory to God in the highest, but to behold this glory we are always sent to the manger where we see the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Jesus Christ is the only knowledge we have of God, that is, God in relation to us from eternity (Eph. 1), and whatever we know of the eternity of God we know in Jesus Christ. We are always involved in simple speculation when we attempt to

discern how God is in Himself, the majesty of God from all eternity. Here is the Light unapproachable. But the Light of God has shined in the face of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we know how God is disposed toward us from all eternity.

*Jesus Is Creator*

As Jesus Christ is the Word by whom all things were made, so all creation has its meaning in Him. Just as Jesus Himself did all things to show forth the glory of God, to "be the express image of God," that is, to express God, to be the means through which God can express Himself, His glory, His intention, and His purpose, so also all creation and existence have their purpose in Him, in Him and through Him to reveal the goodness of God. At the creation God saw all that He had made by His Word, and it was very good, good in that it expressed what God intended. In Him the restoration of all creation is also accomplished because one day creation will be set free from its slavery to decay and share the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-22). All creation and existence have their goal in Jesus Christ. He is the Firstborn among all creation. His is "the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." The final consummation is in Christ, for God will put all things under His feet. (N. B. Heb. 2: 8 ff.)

Preaching is Word of God as it offers God in Jesus Christ, that is, God Himself in all the words and acts and deeds and being of Jesus. This is the Word by which God Himself addresses us and as such is God's Word of power, God's creating Word. God who caused the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts through the



knowledge of Jesus Christ. This prescribes the manner of our preaching on the Old Testament. We are not dealing merely with history but with the history of God with His people, God's working out His covenant with His people—and this covenant is Christ. All this occurs for the sake of the Seed in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. All is properly known only in terms of the Seed, which is Christ. We do not have morality stories in the Old Testament—God help us, what morality we see expressed there! What we have is always God as He is faithful to His covenant, even when the people are unfaithful.

This is the essential meaning of the creation story. It does not pretend to give us a viable theory of how all things came into being or a theoretical explanation of human origins. It is essentially grace in that it reveals God moving out of His self-sufficiency to be in relation with His creature, man. This too is Christ, because by Him were all things made; He is the Word by which this relation was established, because He is the Word that brought all things into being.

#### *Jesus in History*

This is also the meaning of the Fall. The Fall is man's refusal to live by grace, by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, hence, by Christ. But God refuses to let the end of the matter be man's destruction. God promised a new coming of Himself as the Seed of the woman and therefore as God the gracious God. God refuses to be conditioned by His creature or His creature's response to Him, remaining what He is in Himself, gracious and loving and therefore working out His own gracious purposes with regard to His creature, man, now become sinner and rebel. Man changes, but God does not, even to the giving of His own Son. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Even when God commands us to have no other gods before Him and

thereby condemns us for having other gods, He still is telling us that He alone would be our God as He comes to us in His grace, to us as we deserved to be left with our other gods, to us as Savior from all other gods in Jesus Christ.

We could point out the same thing with regard to all the other events in the Old Testament: Noah and the ark, the like figure whereunto "Baptism doth even now save us"; Abraham and his call to live by the promise of God, and Abraham as our father as we believe in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11 could be considered especially in this connection and the examples continued.

This is the only possible understanding of God's purpose in the suffering of His elect people. All of Israel's suffering was a means by which God Himself foreshadowed His truly Elect, His Suffering Servant, Himself suffering in Jesus Christ. The suffering of God's beloved nation is the suffering of God's love, God Himself involved in the suffering, Himself involved with the sufferer until we see the final culmination of it all in Christ, God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. This is Jesus as He is born at Bethlehem. We do not merely have extreme poverty and pitiful conditions here which cause us to cluck in sympathy. This is God-for-us, the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father which we can behold and in which we find grace and truth. We often think of separating this from God as He is. But then we are still thinking in terms of naked majesty and "Godness" as we conceive of it, which finally is idolatry. We miss the point if we do not here see God taking our place, if we do not believe that just this is the glory of God in the highest, His peace on earth, His good will toward men.

This is the Jesus of Palestine, God in Christ saying what Jesus said and doing what Jesus did. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." This is God doing for us



what needed to be done that He might be to us what He is and that He might declare to us what He would have us be. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Not to see Jesus is not to see or know God as Father. "This is life eternal that we might know God through Jesus Christ whom He did send." "All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him."

This is the Jesus of the Passion, God in Christ loving us with an everlasting love, calling us by name, making us His own, refusing to forget us even when women forget their sucking children, graving us on the palms of His hands so that our inmost parts are ever before Him, removing our sins from Him as far as the east is from the west, and wiping them clean from His omniscience so that He remembers them against us no more. Again we see the need for maintaining the person of Jesus Christ as the God-man. It is not only God doing something to Jesus, as to Israel, but God Himself involved; else we do not have God-in-Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; else we do not have Immanuel, God-with-us.

This is the Jesus of the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Session, God for us in every capacity in which He gives Himself to be known as the God-man. In everything He is *pro nobis*. He is our Life because He is the living Savior. Only so is our faith not vain. Only so are we no longer in our sins. He did not rise only for Himself. His union with us is indissoluble; He is the God-man forever; He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, the Word-made-flesh, dwelling among us, that we might behold His glory, full of grace and truth.

#### *Jesus for Us*

He is our Surety and our Pledge, the First-born among many brethren. He has gone

to prepare a place for us, He will come again and receive us unto Himself, so that where He is, there we may be also.

He is the Lord who is Lord of all for us, Lord of our sins, completely responsible for us, between us and all that would destroy us. He pleads our cause for us as our Intercessor. As Luther reminds us, He does not idly sit in heaven enjoying Himself — He rules and governs all things for us. One of the finest comforts that we can take for ourselves is that the ascended Christ intercedes for us. He still bears the scars. He is the Lamb as though it had been newly slain, and on this basis He approaches the Father in our behalf.

#### *Jesus in Sermons*

Jesus Christ is God-for-us in and through His Word. In the power of His Holy Spirit this is the manner of His presence in our midst even now. This is the Word which we are called to preach. As such He is still God in His humiliation for us, the God who calls for and creates faith in Jesus as the proper glorifying of God. This is why we preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Not only is this our perfected salvation, but even now He is the Crucified for us. He Himself sends us to tell the Good News, and to tell it without using the language of men's wisdom, for that would rob Christ's death on the cross of its power (1 Cor. 1:17). When Paul speaks of his knowing nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, it obviously is the way in which he overcame his temptation to respond in kind, to show that he was no fool, to be something less than weak among the Corinthians. We do not always avoid this temptation, but instead seek to be convincers of the love of God by other means than "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." As He once came, so He still comes, which means that there is only one of two possibilities open to us: to declare what others say about Him, which is to be offended in Him, or to confess that He is the Christ, the Son of the



living God and thus believe what flesh and blood cannot reveal to us. To declare that it must be other than Christ Crucified is to become a tool of Satan and not savor the things of God.

Like it or not, we have only one commission: to tell the good news of God in Christ, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. To attempt to prove the Christian faith is to deny it. "The last blasphemy is to defend God." Men can still mock this Christ in His Word, spitefully entreat Him, and spit upon Him, because there is nothing per se that indicates on humanly satisfactory grounds that He is the Son of God. We by ourselves still cannot come up with anything better than, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." Even the miracles and especially the miracle of the resurrection call for faith, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Even in the presence of a miracle people could claim that Jesus did what He did by the power of the devil. Even the empty tomb is no more than a sign which can be spoken against because the story can be spread that the disciples stole the body while the guard slept.

### *Jesus in Us*

As God is God-for-us in Christ, so we are what God would have us be when we are what we are by faith in Christ. He is the Son in whom the Father is well pleased. The full good pleasure of God rests upon Him. Therefore what is not in Him is something in which the Father is not well pleased. This is always the radical nature of the revelation of God by which all other possibilities are fully excluded. What is not Gospel-produced is self-glorifying because it is not God-glorifying, because it is not in Christ, in whom alone God is well pleased. If we take this at all seriously, we cannot help but label much that is called preaching nothing but sheer tragedy for the preacher and the hearers.

There is a necessary relationship between the humble Jesus and those who are in Him. This is the cross. The disciple is not above the Master. The humbling of Himself was the obedience with which God was well pleased. If we are not sharers in this humbling in Christ, we are not obedient to God and God is not well pleased with us. We can never do more than take what Christ is and go and do likewise. Ours can never be anything but a *theologia crucis*. To insist on a *theologia gloriae* is to deny Christ in His Word, to live by sight and not by faith, to seek another expression of power than the power of the Gospel to look for a different salvation than the salvation which is ours in Jesus, who is the Author and Finisher of faith. What God is in Christ and what God has done and still does for us in Christ is God Himself producing for us and therefore God Himself producing in us what He Himself demands. Indeed, God uses what He has produced for us as the means by which He produces in us.

Now it is no longer a matter of doing on our part, but of being what we truly are in Christ. In Christ we know ourselves beloved of God and therefore we love. This is Christ's constraining love that He died for all so that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Christ which died for them and rose again. In Christ we truly worship the only true God because in Christ we have no other gods before Him. And we are in Christ as we continue in His Word, the Word that is of Him, the Gospel. If we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel, we can look for everything but blessing, to paraphrase St. Paul's anathema.

### III

With regard to our third unit it should be noted that much more could be said than will be said here especially with regard to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps more should be said because much that would make preaching



irrelevant today is fundamentally a denial of the Holy Spirit, the manner of Christ's presence "between the times." It might also be pointed out that Thielicke's judgment upon much modern preaching is not confined merely to his own country. There are many today in our country who are convinced in advance that preaching is no longer relevant to our day and then by their lack of preparation and by their subjecting their hearers to their own learning go about proving it. But we will forego all that now in order to say something about preaching in direct relation to modern man.

Preaching is truly preaching in the Scriptural sense of the word when it is personal, that is, when it comes to man as man is, not in his own estimate of himself and his situation, not in the estimate of the state or any other group, not in the estimate of anything or anybody but solely and only as he is under the revelation of God. The need of modern man is that which God Himself reveals to be man's need. Man is in need of sight because he is spiritually blind. Only God-created faith is sight, and this is always contra flesh-sight and in spite of flesh-sight. Man is in need of life because he is spiritually dead, that is, dead toward God and the things of God. The condition in which modern man finds himself today, despite all his activity, by the definition and under the judgment of God is death. If we no longer believe this and fail to keep it clearly in mind, we will miss God's mark because we will be operating with appearances only and not with the revelation of God. We will fail to see the seriousness of man's situation and therefore will fail to apply to it what it really needs. Man is in need, not only or even primarily of knowledge of God but of a new heart from God, because man is essentially an enemy of God. This is the depth of our lostness which God exposes, way beyond anything that we can possibly discover for ourselves. Whatever the politeness,

whatever the high verbal appraising of God, which seeks ultimately to own Him apart from Christ, man is in open rebellion against God and his life is an expression of die-hard enmity that is out-and-out hatred of God, a wishing that God were not God.

The fears of man are themselves a judgment of God because man does not fear God above all things (seen theologically and not psychologically or historically). God in judgment upon man's fearing others more than God gives man a cowardly heart that is frightened by the rustling of a leaf. Man's heart fails him for fear because his is a godless looking after those things which are coming to pass upon the face of the earth. There is no human way out; man is damned if he does and he is equally damned if he doesn't. Modern man's heart is failing him for fear because it is without Christ, that is, without the certainty of God's love over and above and through all the circumstances of life which he sees and evaluates by himself alone. Actually what causes his heart to fail for fear is cause for the Christian to look up and lift up his head because it is the signal that his redemption is drawing nigh. Modern man is fearful because he is man, that is, he keeps looking at what he sees and does not look up at the urging and interpreting of God. (Cf. also Phil. 1:28-31 — what is the sure sign of God's victory in Christ and in those who are in Christ?)

Preaching to modern man must offer what man does not have by himself and what God alone can give. This is the radicalness of all preaching because as offer of God it is at the same time the judgment of God. It reveals man as man is in God's sight, what he is lacking because God must give it. When God says, "Blessed is he who," His words at the same time pronounce a curse upon him who is not. When God invites, "Come, for all things are now ready," He is at the same time saying that man has not yet come, that he always needs to come and that coming is



always basic to his ongoing need, and that he can come only because of a preparation which he has not made and cannot make. When God tells us that the Word was made flesh and we beheld His glory, He is also telling us that we cannot behold this glory apart from Jesus and apart from seeing Him as the Word made flesh; there is no other way of seeing Him full of grace and truth. When Jesus invites us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him, He is also telling us that without self-denial and cross-bearing there is no following of Him. When Jesus tells us that we cannot come to Him except the Father draw us, He is also telling us that we are in such condition that we would never come to Him on our own. As we believe in Him, it is not that we chose to do so by ourself or by being wiser in this regard than others, but it is by the pure grace of God in Christ, by God Himself doing what we have no will and no heart to do, and by God continuing to do the drawing that keeps us with Christ. When Jesus tells us that He is the Vine and we are the branches, He adds very bluntly that without Him all of our doing is a doing of nothing. As the Good Shepherd, all that is not His shepherding is the work of the hireling to whom the sheep do not belong; as the Door, everything apart from Him is theft and robbery, false coming that is not coming to God. The same can be pointed out when He tells us that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We may come to many a goal, but we do not come to the Father except by Him.

Preaching takes God seriously and therefore sees man's great enemies always at work and always to be resisted in the faith. The devil is always the roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour. This, as we readily see in our day, is not perfectly obvious to human insight. But it is just this that is behind everything that would destroy faith or prevent faith. It is behind American as well as Russian secularism. It is behind

the misuse of Scripture as well as behind the misuse of sex. It is always evidenced in that false confidence which rests in "having" instead of hearing Moses and the prophets. (Luke 16:29-31)

Our own flesh is always something that needs to be drowned daily with all of its sins and evil lusts so that faith may daily let God do His work in us and through us. Flesh is man minus faith, so that it refers to any part or activity which is not an expression of faith. The world as world is always the world without God and passes away together with its lusts, which is love not directed by or to God. Perhaps here one of the sharpest thrusts comes from the friendliness of the world to the church. The world claims to stand for many of the same things that the church stands for, and therefore its friendliness is always a guise by which it would deceive us or else its friendliness is indeed a reality which then speaks only condemnation on us. "Beware when all men speak well of you."

Preaching is properly addressed to man, even modern man, when it serves the purposes of God. Thus preaching always calls man to himself so that he might be called back to God. He is in the pigpen, like it or not, and does not realize it until he comes to himself. Preaching would always free man from his freedom to do as he pleases in order that he might be truly free to serve the living God, whose service alone is perfect freedom. Israel was freed from Egypt, but Israel in the wilderness was still in bondage to Egypt in its lust and hunger for the food of Egypt and in its despising of the flat bread of God. Preaching seeks to free man from dependence upon self and restore him to his proper place, grateful dependence upon God, which alone is life.

Modern man, perhaps to a larger extent than man in the past, is plagued by the "identity question," "Who am I?" He turns to every possible source for an answer, as do we more often than we like to admit.



Our consciences would tell us who we are. Our society would tell us who we are. Our feelings would tell us who we are. Psychology has its answer as well as philosophy and sociology and every "ology" going. But none can give the ultimate answer by which a man can live and die. Only God can, and the answer He gives is in Christ. In Christ God declares us to be His sons, even joint heirs with Christ. In Christ God declares us just and righteous and holy. In Christ all the sins which plague and destroy us and ride us with guilt are forgiven, and we are what God would have us be. In Christ our restlessness is satisfied because we have found our true rest in Him.

Forgiveness in Christ is what modern man is really hungering for because we can be free only in forgiveness and out of forgiveness. We don't have to drag a whole tragic, guilty past into this day with us. It is buried with Christ in His death. We don't have to be anxious about the morrow because God's mercies in Christ are new for us every morning. We can live today, here and now, and there never is anything but NOW, the Now before God, the day of salvation in Christ.

Here is the glory of preaching, the courage for preaching, the triumph of preaching. (Rom. 8:31-39)

I know of no better way to close this faltering effort than by quoting here the prayer of the great apostle Paul, which we surely may take as prayed also for us, modern men that we are and modern men that we are called to serve:

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

"Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Eph. 3:14-21) WILLIAM A. BUEGE