

# The Preaching of the Word

by

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The subject "The preaching of the Word" is of a very wide scope. For this reason I decided not to repeat the things we all know. I would rather concentrate on some special aspects of the preaching, which in my opinion need particular emphasis and consideration.

I wish therefore to confine myself to the preaching of the Word to the congregation. I agree that missionary and evangelistic preaching is in essence of the same nature as the regular preaching to an established congregation. Nevertheless, there is a marked distinction, and time will not permit to deal with this distinction now.

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Turning to my subject proper, the first question I shall try to answer is: What is the WORD we have to preach, and what does it mean to PREACH this Word? Karl Barth distinguishes between three different forms of God's Word. There is, in the first place, Jesus Christ. He is THE Word of God. It is in and through Him that God reveals Himself to a sinful world. Secondly, there is the Bible. It is not as such, the Word of God but the human, fallible, though Spirit-inspired witness to Christ, who is THE Word of God. Nevertheless, this fallible human witness to God's Word can and will itself become God's Word if, and when and where it pleases God to speak effectively through it by His Spirit. Finally, there is the preaching of the Church. Again a fallible witness. Even more so than that of the Bible-authors. For the latter wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and had first hand knowledge of Christ, THE Word of God. Lacking all this we preachers can only, with fear and trembling and realizing that we are thoroughly fallible in doing so, try to explain and lay before the consciences of our hearers the biblical witness to the Word of God, Jesus Christ. Yet, however human and fallible this preaching may be, it too can become God's Word, God's infallible Word, His revelation in Christ. This will happen as often as it pleases God to reveal His Son, by the Holy Spirit through the preaching, to a human heart, causing it to believe in Christ.

We cannot possibly agree with Barth when he calls the Bible a FALLIBLE witness to God's Word, i.e. to Christ. Scripture itself and the Testimony Spiritus Sancti teach us differently. Nor can we agree when Barth says that in the Bible and in preaching God speaks His Word only when He causes a man to hear His voice through it in faith. This is one of the most dangerous theologoumena of Karl Barth. For it implies that unbelief is an impossibility. If God does not speak His Word where there is no faith, then it is impossible to reject God's Word in unbelief. How can I ever disregard a word that was never spoken to me? No wonder that Barth himself

speaks of unbelief as an impossible possibility. A nice paradox, indeed, but it clearly shows to what confusion Barth's conception leads. Let us rather accept the Biblical teaching that God speaks His Word to all who read Scripture, or who hear it read or preached, but that He does not speak His Word to everyone UNTO SALVATION. That happens only where God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, opens the heart and causes a man to hear and believe God, speaking to Him in Scripture.

On the other hand, Barth's distinction between the three forms of the Word of God can help us to realize what is the essence of our preaching. It is explaining and laying before the conscience of the congregation the Biblical, infallible Word of God concerning His eternal Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a preaching (and in this Barth is certainly right) essentially different from that of the writers of the Bible. They were inspired and therefore infallible witnesses; we are not. Certainly we have to proclaim God's Word and not human religious ideas. Like the Bible authors we must be convinced that we say what the Lord wants us to say. With authority we must tell God's people: "Thus says the Lord." Yet, there is a great difference, which we as preachers should not for one second forget: the authority with which WE speak rests upon our preaching only and exclusively in so far as we really preach the Word as God has revealed it in Scripture. Because we are not inspired we can (and probably more often than we realize we DO) misinterpret the Word of God. We can draw unwarranted conclusions from our text, imposing them upon the congregation as God's Word, whereas it is not God's Word. Even while we do not contradict any main truth of Scripture, we may lead the congregation on some wrong track, where the sheep of Christ suffer spiritual damage. The history of preaching is very revealing in this respect, and we should not imagine that this history found its consummation just before WE started to preach.

This is a very humiliating thought, which should make us all aware of our first great responsibility, namely that we, preachers, ought to be very humble men, gladly prepared to listen to any criticism which appeals to the Word of God. We must particularly be aware of the New Testament reality after God has completed His revelation in Christ in the Holy Scriptures. The Church of God is no longer, as under the Old dispensation, a child, but a grown-up son. The Holy Spirit has made it a people of prophets, priests and kings, who according to 1 John 2 : 20 and 27 have the anointing of the Holy One. They all have knowledge and do not need that any one teaches them. However weakly this may be realized in actual fact, in essence it is the New Testament reality. Therefore, the members of the Church have the right to criticise our fallible preaching, on the basis of the infallible Word of God. There is ample proof in the New Testament that in the Early Church preaching and discussion were inseparably connected. The gatherings for worship were molded after the pattern of the Synagogue. Services like ours, where only one man may speak, are lacking in conformity with the New Testament. Think of the worship services in Corinth and elsewhere. Think of Paul in Troas, where he prolonged his sermon until midnight. Here we find the word DIALEGOMAI, to discuss, discourse. Prof. Bruce comments: SERMON is to be taken here in the original sense of the word, viz. CONVERSATION.

It is certainly a wellnigh impossible task to say how, after a tradition of centuries and in view of large congregations, our Church services could be changed and brought into conformity with the New Testament pattern. But we as preachers should be very conscious of the dangers that surround our position as the sole speakers and teachers in the Worship services of the Church. There is the danger that we degrade the Church to a class of children who just have to believe without questioning what we preach and teach. There is also the danger, particularly in Churches that require thorough theological training, that we as preachers think we have the monopoly of knowledge over against "the crowd that does not know the law".

Let us pray day and night that the Lord may deliver us from all pride and grant us, through His Spirit, the humility of Christ, our Master. For it is the cursed sin of pride which degrades the congregation to a class of school children, allows for no criticism and therefore for no improvement, and tends to destroy the Church of Christ as a holy priesthood, a people in whom the Spirit of knowledge and wisdom is dwelling.

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The next point I wish to stress is that we must preach the **WHOLE** Word of God. In Acts 20 : 26, 27 we hear Paul say to the elders of Ephesus that he had preached the whole counsel of God and therefore was pure from the blood of all that had heard him.

That whole counsel of God can be summed up in one Name, that of Christ, as Paul declares: "But we preach Christ." Whether we take our text from the New or from the Old Testament, it is Christ we have to preach. No preaching on an Old Testament passage is biblical, unless we point out that what happened or was spoken is connected with Christ, finds its fulfilment in Him and has become spirit and truth in the New Testament. No exemplaristic, allegorizing method should be followed here, but we must preach God's mighty works in the history of redemption, His paving the way for Christ's coming and for the world's salvation through Him.

Yes, it is Christ we have to preach. But then, and this is the point I wish to emphasize — Christ in all His fullness, Christ in ALL that the Word tells us about Him. We should never make one aspect of His Person or work prominent to the neglect of the other. We should never fit all our preaching into a framework, which would make that preaching one-sided. How often has this been done! When I was a boy the preaching was individualistic. Practically all preaching circled around the *Ordo Salutis*. In the days of Prof. Schilder the truth of the Covenant became the great Watchword for the preaching of many. Today there is the danger of making the Kingdom of God the sole key to God's revelation. I even read a discussion on the question whether we should preach the grace of God or the Kingdom of God. As if the two were a matter of either-or, instead of and-and.

Yes, we should preach Christ in all the fullness of His Person and work. Christ as the Lamb of God, dying for our sins, but also Christ as the One who, in the words of the Catechism — "after He has redeemed us by His blood renews us by His Holy Spirit, after His own image." Christ as our Redeemer and Intercessor, but also Christ as the Example we have to follow; as He himself said after having washed the feet of His disciples: So you must wash each other's feet. Or as I John 4:17 puts it: As Christ was in this world,

so must we be; and all those passages which challenge us to live a Christ-like life, full of self-denial, love, humility, dedication to the will of God, etc., like Christ lived on earth according to the Gospels. We must preach the Christ who not only lived and lives for us, but who wants to live IN us, as our Lord and Master sitting on the throne where our own dear SELF wants to sit. So that we can say with Paul "I live, but no longer I; CHRIST lives in me," and "Be ye my imitators, as I am of Christ." We must preach the Christ who is prepared to do for the Church what Paul prays for it in Ephesians 3: 14ff: the Christ who is desirous of filling us unto all the fulness of God, and who commands all God's children to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that they become the holy counterparts of the drunkard with his unholy enthusiasm and happy songs. God's children should be so filled with the Spirit that, being profoundly happy in the Lord, they cannot but sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, praising and thanking the Lord out of a heart that is overwhelmed by Christ's love and mercy (Eph. 5 : 18-20) and in which the promise of Christ is fulfilled that "rivers of living water shall flow from his belly, his inmost being" (John 7 : 38).

Do we as Reformed ministers really always preach such a Christ, emphasizing ALL the aspects I mentioned with the same strength? I am afraid we do not.

I think of many sermons I have heard or read over the years in Australia, which point out the sins of the congregation and call for a truly Christian life. It is faithfully stated that if we do not serve the Lord the wrath of God rests upon us. But then suddenly there appears the Cross of Christ, where He paid for all our sins. And the congregation is told that we must confess our sins and ask for forgiveness in Jesus' blood and then everything will be all right. Did not the publican pray "O God, have mercy upon me the sinner" and after that go home justified?

All this sounds good Reformed and Scriptural. But I wonder whether it is, and really I am afraid it is not. The lack of sanctification cannot be compensated for by a prayer for forgiveness. Certainly there is the publican with his prayer. But we should not forget that the Bible speaks of TWO publicans. There is the one of Luke 18, who prayed for mercy and was justified. Thank God for that. But in the next chapter Luke speaks of another publican, Zachaeus. Of him we read that when Jesus had bestowed His grace upon him, he was moved to make restitution to those of whom he had stolen money, and to give half of his goods to the poor. And AFTER THAT, after he had shown that grace does not only mean forgiveness of sins but also becoming a new creature, Jesus said that Zachaeus had been saved as a true son of Abraham.

Scripture declares in deadly earnest that without sanctification no man shall see the Lord, Hebr. 12 : 14. The publican's prayer for forgiveness does not annul that statement. It is perfectly true that one who in true repentance prays for mercy will certainly bring forth fruits. But the words "in true repentance" should not be overlooked in this connection. There is the terrible danger in our day that members of the Church live completely worldly lives and still think all is well with them because they believe that Jesus died on the Cross for our sins and that the only thing to do is ask God for forgiveness at the end of each day. They are the ones that say "Lord, Lord," but they do not do the will of their heavenly Father. That is why

we should tell the congregation, time and again, that they will be eternally lost with the publican's prayer on their lips, if such prayer is not accompanied by true repentance, revealing itself in true sanctification and dedication to the Lord, as it was the case with the second publican, Zachaeus. Read our Form on the Lord's Supper. In speaking of self-examination it does not stop at the second point, that of forgiveness of the sins through Jesus' blood. There is a third point and it is worded in a most penetrating way: every one must examine his conscience whether he is minded from now on to show true thankfulness to God in his whole life and to walk sincerely before his face . . . , heartily laying aside all hypocrisy, etc. This is the language of Paul who after summing up the fruit of the Spirit goes on to say that against such (people) there is no law (Gal. 5). In a word, we should never comfort the congregation with the blessing that follows praying the publican's prayer, without pointing out in deadly earnest that this blessing will only be received if the prayer is followed by a true sanctification of the whole life, which shows unmistakably that it was a prayer of TRUE REPENTANCE.

I am afraid that this element is too much lacking, or at least too little emphasized. And the result of such preaching must necessarily be that many Church people continue their carnal lives without ever being "pricked in the heart", asking in fear and trembling: "What shall we do to be saved?"

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Yes, we must preach the whole counsel of God, also in connection with the fact that many members of the congregation, whose lives give evidence that they are true believers, nevertheless lead poor Christian lives. I have heard many complaints that Spiritual life even of the true believers is at a rather low ebb. There are some fruits of the Spirit, but there is no ABUNDANCE of fruit. They are still, what Paul says of the Corinthians: carnal, babes in Christ, to be fed with milk, not able to receive solid meat. They have little love, humility, assurance of sins forgiven, joy in the Lord, power to witness for Christ, dedication to God in daily life.

Several causes for this situation might be mentioned. But one of them I am afraid, is that we do not always preach Christ in ALL His grace. I have already pointed out that Scripture does not proclaim a Christ who gives His believers only a small portion of what He merited for them on the Cross. The Christ of the Scriptures is the One who according to His own words in John 10: 10 gives His sheep life AND ABUNDANCE and who makes His believers so full of His grace that rivers of Spiritual water flow out of them so that they become a blessing to others. What the Christ of the Scriptures is prepared to give to His Church He has clearly shown on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled all the 120 believers with power to witness for their Lord and where the Church became so full of love and holiness that many unbelievers were converted and others were filled with reverence and fear. It is true that soon decay set in. But we cannot blame Christ or the Holy Spirit for it, can we? It is clear from Paul's epistles that decay set in because the Holy Spirit instead of being given full sway, was grieved, resisted or quenched. That is why the Holy Spirit withdrew with His mighty blessings that characterised His first coming down.

Does the apostle Paul accept this situation with a sigh? No, but He presents to the backsliding Churches Christ as the One who by His Spirit is able and prepared to make them grow from spiritual babes in Christ to spiritual grown-

ups, men and fathers in Christ. He exhorts them to seek all the Spiritual gifts and fruits (they are not the same) emphasizing in 1 Cor. 13 a love that is so absolutely the contrast of the lovelessness of our sinful nature that to love as 1 Cor. 13 demands it means to love as Christ Himself loved and to bear His image. He tells the Churches that He prays that Christ by His Spirit may fill them with the fulness of God, Eph. 3. He admonishes them to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to such an extent that their whole lives become one song of joy, gratitude and love, in an edifying fellowship with each other, Eph. 5:18ff.

The same things we find in the Epistle to the Hebrews, with its strong and repeated exhortation to press on unto perfection, instead of being satisfied with being babes, Heb. 5:11—6:1ff.

Yes, that is the Christ the apostles preach. The Christ of the abundant life, the Spirit-filled life, the "perfect" i.e. the full-grown life. A life, that needs not to be produced by the believers themselves. Christ GIVES it, according to God's promises, to all that pray Him as Paul prayed for it, and trust Him for it, and who, confessing their backsliding, stop grieving the Holy Spirit and let him work in their hearts.

That same Christ, in all His fulness, in all the riches of His grace, of His Spirit's gifts and fruits, should be preached by us too. HAVE we faithfully preached Him so? The Rev. J. Overduin, writing in "Gereformeerd Weekblad" is right when he says that in the Reformed tradition there has been too much one-sided emphasis on the poor sinner, who will remain a poor beggar till the hour of death, with just enough grace to live the life of a baby in Christ, carnal like the Corinthians instead of spiritual. Reformed preaching and pastoral care have often "dangerously failed" (the expression is Overduin's) to emphasize such Biblical truths and conceptions as fulness, perfection, holiness, maturity, being blameless, and the like, which abound throughout the New Testament. When we let these words really speak to us, we become astonished (thus Overduin) that we could ever overlook them when reading the Bible. We feel like one who was blind and suddenly sees. We realize how a preaching which did not sufficiently emphasize these truths, has resulted in Reformed Christians remaining babies in Christ and carnal, despite all their pride as regards pure doctrine.

THE goal of preaching and pastoral care, according to Ephesians 4: 12—16 consists in PERFECTING the saints, building up the body of Christ in such a way that we be no longer little children in Christ, but attain to a FULL-GROWN man, who grows up in Christ, IN ALL THINGS, in the unity of love with all other members of the body. This sanctification is a GRACE, not the work of man, not even partly the work of man, but that of the Holy Spirit alone.

Only the Holy Spirit sets a Christian free from the law of sin and death, as Paul describes it in Romans 8. In his excellent book "The Spirit of God" Campbell Morgan rightly remarks that in Ephesians 4:31 Paul does not say: "Put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing," but: LET these things BE put away." This follows after the apostle has warned his readers not to grieve the Holy Spirit, which makes it clear that the work of putting out of one's life this unholy brood of evil things, bitterness etc., IS NOT MAN'S WORK BUT THAT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ALONE. Man must LET THE HOLY SPIRIT DO IT." In stating this Campbell Morgan is quite in line with our Catechism, which says in Lord's

Day 38 that all our days we should **LET THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK IN US**. This holds true for the negative side, the deliverance from the tyranny of sin, as well as for the positive side, the renewal of our lives to a full dedication to God. It is all a matter of absolute dependence on God's grace in Jesus Christ, and of a full surrender in true repentance and utter helplessness to Him, Who alone is able **AND WILLING** to make us full-grown men in Christ, through His Holy Spirit.

The word of God commands: be ye perfect; be ye holy, as God is. Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit; let yourself be filled with the Spirit, so that your whole life becomes one song of praise and joy, and rivers of living water flow from your inward being. Paul took all this seriously. He said: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made (**MADE!**) perfect, but one thing I do . . . I press toward the goal . . ." That is the point: Not yet perfect but in deadly earnest **PRAYING AND SEEKING TO BE MADE PERFECT**. And the results of such praying and seeking were clearly manifest for Paul himself and for all who learned to know him. Recognizing that it was all due to God's grace is not afraid of pointing to himself as an example of holiness. In 1 Thess. 2 : 3 Paul reminds his readers of the way he lived among them, and in vs. 10 he dares to say: "You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers . . .", and to other congregations he writes similarly. He exhorts all to be his imitators as he is of Christ. It is all the very opposite of our imperfectionism that with an appeal to Romans 7 reduces the victorious Christian life of Romans 8 to a life of endless defeats, failures, never-to-be-conquered-besetting sins; a life which we dare not place before others and say with Paul: imitate me as I imitate Christ, Christ who lives in me.

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Preaching the Word requires **CAREFUL PREPARATION**: finding a text, trying to understand its meaning, writing the sermon or an elaborate sermon-outline.

**FINDING A TEXT**. This is difficult and dangerous business. There is the danger that we look for an interesting subject, which makes us confident that old and young will love to listen to, as the public listens to an entertainer. But we are not to entertain a public. We are to preach and teach the Body of Christ how to become a body of mature, full-fledged Christians. There is also the danger that we look for a text that suits our dogmatic insight and enables us to mold the thinking of the congregation after our cherished pattern. But our dogmatic insight may be wrong. We have not to preach our cherished convictions, but the Word of God and that Word alone.

Let me assume we are looking for a text without any such prejudice, and are following the traditional methods for finding our text. Here we should never forget that only the Holy Spirit can guide us to the right text. By the right text I mean that word, the congregation needs to hear very badly here and now, in connection with her present condition and situation. It may be a word that just one member of the congregation is in great need of hearing it preached.

It is not we who know these needs sufficiently. Only the Holy Spirit knows the hearts of the believers and all that characterizes their lives. Only

He knows what is most needed, just this particular Sunday. Therefore, we have to ask Him for guidance. To pray very earnestly that He may make one passage of the Word so much alive for us, binding it upon our own consciences, making us feel a holy desire to preach just THIS truth to the congregation, that there is no doubt left: on this text I MUST preach.

Years ago, in Holland, I myself felt urged one week to preach on Joseph as he was tempted in Potiphar's house. On Monday-morning a much respected member of the Board of management wanted to see me. With tears he confessed the sin of adultery he had been committing for years, no one knowing about it, not even his wife. He said: "God has given it into your heart to preach especially for ME. Here I am to confess my sin."

Are we sufficiently aware of the need of the Spirit's guidance when looking for a text?

#### TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE TEXT.

Of course, we study and meditate. We use all the theological tools at our disposal. Someone has said: a minister who does not study hard is not converted.

Of the greatest importance, however, is the question HOW we study and meditate. There is the danger of doing it guided only by our theologically trained intellect. But this intellect is by no means an infallible guide for understanding the Word. Particularly Psalm 119 teaches us quite differently. It is true, we may depend on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But we should realize that this illumination is not a sort of safe deposit in our souls and minds, yielding automatically interest. We have to pray for it, day by day. We have to pray for it particularly all the time we are studying our text and meditating upon it. We have to pray that the Holy Spirit may cause us to understand the meaning of the text, not only with our intellect, but with our heart, as the word which the living God Himself is speaking to us. So that it is not we who get at the truth, but the truth that gets at us, overwhelming us, taking possession of our inmost being. So that, in answer to our prayers, we see how we ourselves (that first!) and our congregation have to live by that truth, with all its implications. It may be a truth our flesh does not like at all and which we are sure many of our hearers won't like to hear. A truth, perhaps flatly against our cherished, personal ideas. Yes, but we have been taken captive by it and we MUST preach on it, so help us God!

Read Spurgeon's Lectures to his students, the chapter on "The Holy Spirit in connection with our Ministry," and you will be amazed how many and terrible are the dangers and pitfalls if we do not constantly pray for the opening of our eyes by the Holy Spirit, while studying our text. Very instructive in this respect is also Dr. J. J. Stam's book "Rondom de Preek" (About the Sermon). The author is a Barthian. But if Barth has taught us one thing in accordance with Scripture it is that which Dr. Stam emphasizes: Only the Holy Spirit can make the Word of Scripture a living, saving Word for us and for our congregations. Unless we pray for the Spirit's guidance and grace, and do so constantly while we are studying our text, we may see the one truth after the other, but it will remain dead, intellectual, carnal knowledge, and the congregation will suffer by it.

WRITING DOWN THE SERMON OR SERMON-NOTES. No doubt, we have to write them down. It is a fixed rule: our thoughts do not

become perfectly clear to ourselves until we express them in words. Again, a very difficult thing to do. It is always very difficult to say precisely what we think and mean. So easily we express ourselves unclearly or incorrectly, what we mean and want to say. Oh, that difficult art of communication! That arduous task of making perfectly clear to the congregation what the Holy Spirit has laid as a burden upon our souls when we studied our text. If in self-conceit, aware of the gift of easily expressing ourselves, we think we can manage this part of our preparation without the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, we deceive ourselves. If we are ever in need of that guidance, it is while we are writing down our sermon or sermon-outline. For in doing so we are already speaking to our congregation. Even Paul, that inspired Apostle, asked the Church time and again to pray for him that God might enable him to preach the Gospel in the right way. How much more should we, uninspired men, beseech Christ to guide us by His Spirit all the time we are writing our sermon, i.e. addressing our congregation?

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A few words about preaching the Word as it is to be done IN THE PULPIT.

From the pulpit we should preach our sermons as freely as possible.

Reading a sermon is different from preaching one. Preaching is a most direct way of speaking, from person to person, heart to heart. Reading is more indirect. It implies using bookish language, which is the language for learned lectures. It is the language that is likely to reach the intellect, rather than the heart, the conscience.

Paul was deadly afraid of speaking like a lecturer in a polished style. In 1 Cor. 2 : 4 he says that his speech "was not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Why was he so afraid of a polished style? He says: "that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man but in the power of God." Let us not think this has nothing to do with style and nice language. Grosheide in his commentary shows that it has everything to do with it. He says, the Greeks liked beautiful words and expressions, certain fine style-forms as used by all public speakers of the day. The truth was number two. Paul says: to me the truth is number one, and this so much that I purposely avoid speaking and preaching in the beautiful style of my contemporaries. You might be attracted to my style instead of to the wisdom of God I wish to preach you. The wisdom, that is foolishness in the eyes of man. Therefore my simple direct style.

Yes, that is the way Paul preached, Paul whose letters show how fine a style he could employ if he wanted. It was certainly for this reason that they said in Corinth: his letters are good, but his preaching is miserable. But it was just through that miserable preaching that the Holy Spirit was pleased to convert Europe.

Today, too, the Church needs men who speak in simple words to the hearts and consciences of God's children there in front of them. Read Spurgeon, Stam, Stott ("The preacher's portrait") and learn that orators and lecturers in the pulpit are a danger to the Church, and run a terrible danger themselves. They are a danger for the Church because God's people will not perhaps hear their God speaking to them, but the preacher. After the

service they will ask each other: "How did you like the preacher." They may learn much, but their intellect learns more than their heart.

The preacher himself is in deadly danger, too. When I was a young man a Dutch author, an unbeliever, wrote that all ministers are self-conceited. While they are preaching they are continuously thinking of themselves. In their imagination they see mirrors hanging all around the walls of the Church, and whatever way they look they see themselves. Like all unbelievers the man was exaggerating, of course. But is there not a grain of truth in what he says and does he not point to a serious danger? Do YOU find it easy to forget about yourself while you are preaching, seeing only your Lord and Master and His spiritually needy flock? Do you find it easy to forget about yourself when you have finished, having no desire of hearing other people, your wife included, praise you? Oh that cursed orator's pride, that I found so often in my own heart!

How can one get rid of it? Certainly, in the first place, by avoiding even the attempt to be an orator. By speaking plain language, right from the heart and right to the heart. But this is not enough. Even in speaking plain language we can be proud preachers, dead orators.

There is only one way: the way of personal, complete surrender to Christ. A personal, complete, daily repeated surrender to Christ, which is the main requisite for all our work as preachers of the Gospel. All our hearers stand in need of such surrender. We, their preachers and leaders must practise it first and most. By nailing self to the Cross, confessing in true repentance all our sins and particularly those sins that endanger a pastor's dedication to God, and to God alone.

We have to search our hearts whether we are guilty of any of the following sins. Realizing that we must be examples of godliness to our congregation, we must, positively, open up as empty vessels to the Holy Spirit, praying Christ day by day that He may fill us with His Spirit and so dwell and reign in our hearts and lives with His renewing grace that we may become more and more Christ-like men: men, full of compassion, seeking sinners while condemning sin; aiming only at the salvation of the lost and the building up to full-grown men those that believe; willing to forsake self and sacrifice everything that is not conducive to a fruitful ministry; prepared to keep our body under as Paul did and to become fools for God's sake and for the sake of His people; who LOVE to pray because they have learned to understand with their souls what Asaph sung: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is nothing on earth that I desire beside Thee".

Such a full surrender, day by day, to Christ is a hard thing for the human flesh in general, but it may well be harder for us as ministers than for any one else in our congregation. When I was a student a booklet appeared in Germany entitled: "Kann auch ein Pastor selig werden?", "Is it possible for even a minister to be saved?". The author saw the danger that was very much in the mind also of Paul, namely to preach to others and to finally be condemned ourselves, because we have tried to escape to become like Christ in His death, the death to self, to sin.

Yet this hard way is the only way to become a good preacher. For in that way the Holy Spirit will enable us to do all our work so that the Church will be richly blessed by it. He will enable us also to preach from our notes in such a way that our whole heart is in our words. To proclaim in simple lang-

uage the proof about Christ, the full truth about Him, not as a doctrine only but as a truth that has taken hold of our own, whole being. To preach with a heart that penetratingly appeals to the heart, the conscience of Christ's sheep in a pew. To preach in humility, forgetting about self. And if we feel pride entering our soul while we are preaching, we will lift up our heart in a prayer, noticed by no one but God: "Lord, forgive; Lord cleanse me!" and we can go on again, in the power of the Spirit. And after the service we won't need any flattering words from men; we will rather seek God's face, praying that He may bless the message we just proclaimed in His Name.

All this may imply that our sermon is not beautiful from a literary point of view. We may sometimes stumble over our words and there may be anacolutha. What does it matter? "Pectus est quod disertum facit", it is the heart that makes a man eloquent. If we speak with a heart set aglow by the Holy Spirit, we shall be eloquent, with a higher eloquence than that of the orator. Be of good cheer, you that are lacking in oratorical gifts. Filled with the Spirit you will be a greater preacher than the orator who is not.

Only by becoming good pastors and preachers in the way just described, can we be sure of a really fruitful, successful ministry. We have the promise of Christ for it in the allegory of the Vine, which has become a reality for me more than ever before. If we abide in Him, in faith and true obedience, and He abides in us, then we shall bear much fruit, John 15:5. We shall become a blessing for many even if we have to wait and pray a long time before we see all the fruit. We may ask for it in absolute confidence, for just in this connection we read: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you ask whatsoever you will, and it shall be done unto you." We may claim that promise. We SHOULD claim that promise, expecting MUCH from our Redeemer and Master.

But all this will be the case ONLY when we live in a day by day renewed surrender to Christ. Think of Peter, that wonderful disciple. He made the great confession which caused Jesus to say: "Blessed art thou, Simon, bar Jonah." Yes, but this wonderful child of God was not delivered from self. And for that reason he could not yet be a successful preacher, strengthening the brethren. Jesus had to tell him: "When once thou hast been converted, then thou art to strengthen the brethren." (Luke 22:32). Peter's successful ministry started when he had been converted from self and was filled with the Holy Spirit, who placed Christ with all His fulness on the throne, where self had been sitting.

Let us ask ourselves the question whether maybe we ourselves need such a Peter's conversion, before we really can strengthen the brethren, and help the babes in Christ to grow up into mature, Spirit-filled Christians. The spiritual condition of our congregations MIGHT be the result, as least partly, of our own spiritual condition.