

Old Union Minister's School
2008 Session

Elder Douglas Skinner
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Preaching for Effect

Reading lesson: **I Corinthians 1:17-28**

Lesson text: **I Corinthians 1:18, 21**

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God..."

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

I. "Firing for Effect"

"Firing for Effect" is a military term used historically with the use of artillery. With dramatic technological improvements of the 20th Century, artillery no longer had to be carried to and from the battlefields. Rather, the gun emplacements could be situated miles from the actual battlefield and still remain of great value to those engaged in the fight. Because of the increased distance, the battlefield combatants and artillery personnel often could not see one another, necessitating the use of radio contact and communication. The ground personnel would be asked to call in a 10 digit coordinate to the artillery battery. After an initial white phosphorous round to "mark" the splash, ground forces would call in adjusted coordinates to the battery until the rounds were finding the intended mark. Once the area was sighted in, the ground forces would call for a certain type of round and fuse to be utilized and sign off with a radio transmission stating, "Fire for Effect". This was a signal for the artillery battery to load every gun and fire the maximum rounds on the last coordinates. With a "battery 6 by 6" (six artillery pieces firing six rounds each), it was possible for all rounds to be in-flight before the first impact. The result was a sudden and horrific arrival of tremendous devastation to a very small area within seconds. The military utilization of a controlled and purposeful delivery of such tremendous power has proven to be very effective.

II. The Foolishness of Preaching

Foolish: as defined by Dictionary.com

1. resulting from or showing a lack of sense; ill-considered; unwise: *a foolish action, a foolish speech.*

2. lacking forethought or caution.
3. trifling, insignificant, or paltry.

The Greek word for "**foolishness**" used in our text verses is identical. It is a feminine noun and found under Strong's #3472. That word is derived from Strong's #3474 which is an adjective meaning, "*foolish or impious or godless*". The primary root word of both of the above is **Strong's #3466**, a neuter noun defined as: **a hidden thing, secret, mystery**. Strong's concordance further defines this word as a mystery as pertaining to the secret will of God: "**...the secret counsels which govern God in dealing with the righteous, which are hidden from ungodly and wicked men but plain to the godly**".

We, as men called of God to preach His Word, have an obligation to rightly represent our Savior and the plan of salvation to all men. Our Creator is not foolish. The subject and purpose of our preaching is not based upon nonsense or whimsical philosophy. The delivery and purpose of the gospel message is a serious work. We are not to be fools nor behave or preach in a foolish manner. Rather, the Scriptures teach us here that the mystery of the preaching of God's Word is foolishness to them who do not believe. In contrast, it is the power of God unto salvation to those of us whom have believed on the name of Jesus.

The MESSAGE may seem as foolishness to the world, but may the MESSENGER never be accurately accused of the same. Our message delivery ought to be purposeful and calculated to the end that God receives the most honor and glory from our efforts. It is our singular purpose in preaching to lift up His name only!

John 3:14-15

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 12:32

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the **power** of **God** unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

The Fallacy of the Mad Sower

It is likely that we all are familiar with Jesus' Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13. We also have likely heard, at one time or another, these verses used in describing preaching:

Ecclesiastes 11:1

Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

Isaiah 55:11

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Matthew 10:19

But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak

Each of these verses of Scripture, and several others, are used to promote the false idea that God has called ministers to scatter seed far and wide like a blind man sowing to the wind. While we ARE commissioned to preach the gospel to every living creature (Mark 16:15); we are NOT called to preach without purpose, preparation, or power of the Holy Spirit. The seed is precious and our Creator has never shown Himself to be anything other than purposeful and practical in His creation of and dealings with mankind. Thus, as His called we ministers are to serve as ambassadors of His kingdom and to present the gospel when, where, and how He directs.

The Reality of Purposeful Sowing

Proofs that God has a purpose, place, and plan for each of His ministers:

a. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch Acts 8:26-29

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

b. Paul and Silas preaching in Asia Minor Acts 16:4-9

And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

c. Peter and His sermon at Pentecost Acts 2:14-16

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel

d. The Apostles at Jerusalem Acts 5:17-21a

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.

e. Paul and Barnabas sent to the Gentiles Acts 13:2-3

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

III. The Importance of Being Effective

Dictionary.com defines "effect" as:

1. As a noun: a result or consequence; power to produce results; the state of being effective or operative; the making of a desired impression.
2. As a verb: to produce as an effect; bring about, accomplish

The Lord has never called a man to be an ineffective preacher. It is God's purpose that souls be saved and saved souls mature in the Lord. He has called each of us as instruments in accomplishing His purpose. Furthermore, He has given each of us ALL the tools necessary for effectiveness in preaching. Lack of effectiveness in ministry makes us unprofitable servants and imperils the souls of lost men, women, and children. Realizing that the Scriptures teach that we each will give an account of our ministries and the effectiveness thereof, it behooves us to apply ourselves vigorously towards becoming "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed."

A. Effectiveness may occasionally be recognized by outward, visible results

1. Positive

Acts 4:4

Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

Acts 14:1

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

2. Negative

Acts 7:57-58

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

Acts 21:36

For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

Acts 22:22-23

And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air

B. Effectiveness may be present in the absence of visible results

Acts 24:25

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Acts 26:28

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

Acts 17:32

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter

C. True effectiveness is judged by the execution of our duty in preaching the gospel

II Timothy 2:15

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth

God holds us responsible to be effective communicators of the gospel. Certain Greeks at Jerusalem said to Philip, "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21) Effective preaching shows Jesus to lost souls. We cannot convict souls of sin, provide the necessary contrition and faith for salvation, provoke repentance, or convert souls unto eternal life. Those are all miraculous works performed by our Creator alone. Our lot is to convey the message as purely and as powerfully as possible. Paul stated that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation. Our aim ought to be to provide an unrestricted conduit through which God's Word and the Holy Spirit may freely deliver the message to men's souls. How, then, may we become more effective? How can we, as Paul charged Timothy, "war a good warfare?"

IV. Preaching for Effect

A. Preparation

1. We cannot see our target

Jesus commissioned His church to go into the entire world and teach all nations. More directly, we as ministers are given opportunities to preach to various groups of people. Our targets are the individual souls under the influence of our presentation of the gospel message. These souls are hidden to all but God. As a result, it is impossible for us to preach effectively to souls without God's assistance and direction. The account of Peter and Cornelius demonstrates that humble prayer can result in the correct message being sent to the proper target.

Acts 10:44

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

2. We must know how to use our weaponry before the engagement

Soldiers are trained and equipped before being sent into battle. A young minister should take advantage of the time the Lord gives for training and preparation. The battle begins in earnest soon enough and adequate training is essential in this spiritual warfare.

As a young preacher, I "chomped at the bit" at times, eager to get into the "real" fight. My call into the engagement came and I wanted to run back to the rear as I felt grossly unprepared. I have sometimes longed for those days of lesser duty and responsibilities and believe I would utilize them more wisely should I have them before me once again. The Word of God, which Paul called the sword of the spirit in Ephesians 6:17, is our great weapon. Sustained, disciplined study of God's word builds up our arsenal and trains us in its proper use.

3. We must be willing to fight

Luke 14 teaches us that we are to count the cost of the impending work. We must not just be trained for the engagement; we must be ready to fight as our adversary walks to and fro as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Military history has shown the biggest talkers too often to be first to flee combat and the quiet and unassuming to become the greatest warriors. There is no substitute for willingness to engage the enemy.

2 Tim. 2:4

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

4. We must be motivated by something greater than self

When a soldier enlists in the U.S. Army, he takes an oath to defend the Constitution against all enemies, bear true faith and allegiance to it, and obey the orders of the President. Self becomes the soldier's last priority. We should be driven to preach by our love for the Lord, the weight of the calling to the ministry, a concern for lost souls, a responsibility towards the church Christ left in the world, but NEVER by ambition or personal motivation. Jesus taught His apostles that if a man desired to be great, he should become the servant of all.

2 Tim. 2:10

Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

B. The Work

1. We must be ready at all times

We have been purchased and paid for by the blood of our Savior. Our reasonable service is to present ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. At all times, in all ways, we are to be prepared for duty...in season and out of season.

2. We operate under the direction of superior authority

We each hold membership in one of the Lord's churches which received the Great Commission and authority to complete this work. Under this authority, we also must have the leadership of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of this great engagement. There are no mercenaries in the Lord's army!

3. We work and fight where we are sent

Jesus sent the 70 out, His apostles went out and eventually the church at Jerusalem expanded by persecution into Judea and Samaria (as Jesus said that they would). Although the work was bigger than each of them, their personal responsibility rested within their field of labor. We are not allowed to choose our field of labor (after visiting Maui, I thought it would be an excellent location for a mission point). Rather, we take our training and skills to where the Lord knows we are needed most. Our service to the Lord should never be affected by our preference of location.

C. The Weaponry

1. We fire when ordered to do so

Artillerymen do not engage the enemy when and where they think it might be a good idea. They must have orders or direction before they may act. Jesus told His disciples to not cast their pearls before swine. Unless we preach by the direction of the Holy Spirit, we may do just that. This principle goes back to our discussion re: the fallacy of the mad sower.

2. We fire to the best of our ability

A new gunner may get some hits on a target, but an experienced artilleryman's efficient and purposeful efforts will likely be more effective. My experience as a younger minister seemed to be a contest to see how much I could relay that I knew (or thought I knew). Now, I see that 45 minute slot on Sunday mornings in which people will be actively listening and I attempt to convey the Lord's thought as concisely and directly as possible. Brother Vanderpool's advice still is sound: Stand up, speak up, shut up.

3. We must gain some discretion as to the different types of "rounds" the Lord uses

We must gain abilities which will increase our usefulness to the Lord. We may need to evangelize, pastor, counsel, comfort, teach, exhort, admonish, expound, write, etc. The Lord may use us in more circumstances if we have made the effort necessary to be taught certain skills. It's important to understand that ministering is no more a perfectible skill than practicing artillery or medicine.

D. Firing for Effect

Why isn't the preaching of God's Word having the visible results that we hear it once did? Why do lost souls seemingly sit under the sound of the gospel unmoved? Why does sound teaching have little effect upon God's people? God knows the answer. The question for each of us this afternoon is this: Is the Lord's message, as preached through me, hindered? If so, why?

Our lesson text reveals that preaching is the God-ordained means of accomplishing His purpose for mankind. The Holy Spirit is essential to make preaching effective.

I Corinthians 2:4

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power

It is likely that each of us has been allowed to "preach for effect" where we are completely liberated in preaching a message from the Lord. Nevertheless, that type of freedom, for me, is the exception and not the norm. My purpose in using the artillery illustration was to show the procedures prerequisite to the manifestation of the full potential of a powerful tool. The same is true of our preaching efforts. Much effort in study and prayer must be put forth before the Lord sets us free to preach for effect. The crux of this lesson is to understand and appreciate the value of all the preparatory work in enabling the end result. So that, "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Are we willing to put in the necessary work to see the world affected once again by the powerful, spiritual preaching of God's Word?!?

