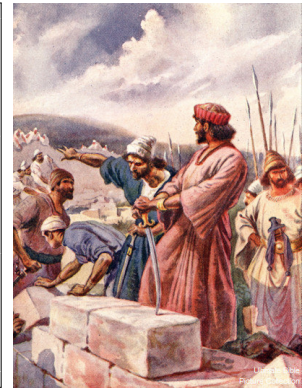


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Preaching Christ

The preaching of the gospel of Christ is the most unique instruction in the world today. It is unlike anything else that came before it. It was so new to the Jewish and Gentile worlds in the first century that many could not, or would not, accept the truths it revealed. To the Jews the preaching of Christ was a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23a). The teaching of a crucified Messiah was something which many Jews could not accept. This was, therefore a stumbling block in their path as they considered Jesus as the Christ. When this basic fact was finally accepted by the Jews as truth, then there was no more occasion for stumbling and the gospel could be obeyed. A good example of this is what happened on the day of Pentecost. Part of the message on that day concerned the Messiah (or Christ) actually being crucified (Acts 2:37). Although there may have been multiplied thousands in Jerusalem for this important feast day, only 3000 overcame the occasion of stumbling to obey the gospel (Acts 2:41). The others who could not obey the gospel would stumble at the teaching of a crucified Messiah.

Not only was the gospel different to the Jews, but it was also different from that which the Gentiles were accustomed (1 Cor. 1:23b). The preaching of the cross would appear to the philosophical Gentiles as utter nonsense. The very idea of a god being crucified and resurrected with the purpose of saving mankind would cause wonderment to Gentile hearers. They would be more used to the type of god which basically had a disdain for man. Paul's preaching on the Areopagus would be an example of this.

The audience was with Paul until he spoke of the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:22-31). However, when they heard this, disorder arose because it transcended their understanding (Acts 17:32). "Some mocked," indicating a jeering or making jest of what Paul said (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). This type of preaching would appear foolish to the philosophical scholarly mind of the Gentile world. Although the truth was taught, the Gentiles had a hard time believing it. We would also note that indeed some in Athens

did believe in spite of how the majority might have viewed the teaching of Paul (Acts 17:34).

This preaching of Christ would, therefore, be unique to those who did and do hear it. When it is preached to those today who know not the gospel, it must appear as unique as it did to those in Corinth and elsewhere in the New Testament. Many times, those who hear the preaching of Christ are heard to say things such as, "I didn't know that," or "I never considered it that way." I have had people ask me personally, "Where has this teaching been?" These statements would indicate that the uniqueness of the preaching of Christ was not lost between Pentecost and today.

It would be most important if we consider exactly what constitutes the preaching of Christ (or Jesus). Many today claim to be preaching Christ. Are they? If so, what sort of criteria do we use to prove the message? Sometimes Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, or others make the claim that they are preaching Christ. Sometimes misled people make this claim for them. What does the New Testament reveal concerning this? Exactly what is the sum and total of the preaching of Christ, according to the New Testament?

New Testament Preaching Of Christ

As we study this subject, let us look at every passage that uses the term "preaching" or "proclaiming Christ" or "Jesus." Hopefully, we will eliminate immediately the idea that someone merely entered some particular place, mounted a platform, and only said, "Christ," and then was silent. Something more is, most certainly, implied to have been said on these occasions. Just exactly what was said is our concern. The following passages may not be exhaustive, but I hope they are thorough enough for our needs.

In Acts 5:42 we notice that Jesus was being preached as the Christ (i. e., the anointed or Messiah, Vine's) everywhere, in the temple and at home.

Acts 8:5 shows that Philip, an evangelist (Acts 21:8), is found proclaiming Christ in Samaria. We find that some of the things Philip taught were about the kingdom of God (church) and the name (authority) of

Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12). In this verse we notice that the people of Samaria, having believed these teachings, were baptized. Hence, this would necessarily imply that the preaching of Christ includes preaching on baptism. After all, if this was something the Samaritans did, it would follow that Philip must have said something about baptism in his preaching. As many people point out in these two verses, it is impossible to preach Christ and not preach baptism.

In the last part of Acts 8, we find this same Philip on the way to Gaza. He encounters a man from Ethiopia, a eunuch of Queen Candace's court. Upon drawing near to this traveler, Philip hears him reading from the book of Isaiah. After a bit of dialogue is exchanged, Philip begins with the portion of Isaiah from which the eunuch was reading and preaches Christ. We will notice that this shows that Christ can be preached from the Old Testament. The place where the eunuch was reading is what we call Isaiah 53:7, 8. These verses would be speaking of the suffering of Christ. Philip could easily point this out to his listener. We notice that when Philip preached Christ to the eunuch in this fashion, something happens. The eunuch expresses a desire to be baptized. Why? Because, as previously stated, preaching Christ includes baptism.

Our next passage to consider is Acts 9:20. It tells that one of the first works Paul engaged in as a Christian was proclaiming Christ as the Son of God.

Jesus is the only Son God has had or ever will have (Jn. 3:16). The events concerning His birth include testimony of an angel who told Mary that her child would be the Son of God (Lk. 1:35). When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, God spoke His pleasure and called Jesus His Son (Matt. 3:17). This identification of Christ by God as His Son is repeated in the account of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:5). What with angels and God speaking affirmatively on such a matter, there should be little doubt that Jesus was and is God's Son. The good confession which Peter made included the acknowledgement of Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16). Indeed the basis of the gospel rests upon a like acknowledgement from mankind. "And who is he that overcometh

the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 Jn. 5:5).

Acts 11:20 shows that several men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached Jesus as Lord. The Lordship of Christ is a part of God's divine plan (Acts 2:36).

The word which is translated "Lord" denotes one having power or authority (Vine's). The disciples' usage of this word shows that they considered only God or Jesus as worthy of being addressed as such. Whoever confesses Jesus as Lord and calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:9, 13; Acts 2:21). No one else has such power or authority to do such things. Truly He is Lord of Lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

In Acts 17, Paul is found in Thessalonica preaching Christ (Acts 17: 1-3). Included in his teaching was the suffering and resurrection of Christ. Paul spent his time, as was his custom, teaching in the synagogues of Thessalonica. He was trying to remove the stumbling block from before the Jews (1 Cor. 1:23; 1 Peter 2:8) by showing that the death of Christ was expedient according to God's purposes (Rom. 5:8).

Our next consideration is Acts 17:18. This passage again speaks of the preaching of Christ incorporating the teaching of the Lord's resurrection (see comments on Acts 9:20 and 11:20).

Acts 19:13 shows that Jewish exorcists were trying to emulate the preaching of Paul by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus to cast out certain evil spirits. Although the end of these exorcists at the hands of one of the spirits is quite humiliating (Acts 19:14), there is, nevertheless, an acknowledgement of the power and authority of Jesus whom Paul preached.

1 Corinthians 1:23 points out that the death of Christ was crucifixion, a most degrading, humiliating death -- the common death of a felon. This very teaching would cause problems with both Jewish and Gentile patterns of thought. This particular verse was commented on earlier and the reader would do well to see those comments.

1 Corinthians 15:12 has Paul commenting once again upon the resurrection. The first ten verses of the chapter deal with the many eyewitnesses of the risen Christ. He points out that many of these brethren were still alive to tell about it, himself included. This was a necessary teaching, for some were denying the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:13-14). If there was no resurrection, then preaching Christ, which includes the resurrection, was a vain, empty doctrine. The eyewitnesses were the greatest proof that Paul could offer. They could disprove the heresy of no resurrection.

2 Corinthians 1: 19 offers something previously discussed and something new to consider. This verse further illustrates that the preaching of Christ includes showing

Him to be the Son of God. A different point is that the Christ whom Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy preached was not a vacillating type of doctrine. It was not "yea and nay." Rather, it was firm preaching, the kind that would have a point to it instead of teaching contradiction. This is a far cry from many of the false teachers today who claim to be preaching Christ while they "beat around the bush" and usually met themselves coming from the other direction! A person who is diligently endeavoring to preach Christ will not prevaricate, but will speak the truth in all matters, as is shown in this verse.

We would also consider 2 Corinthians 4:5 which shows that those in the first century knew from where their authority came. It did not come from themselves, so it must originate in Almighty God. Those who preach Christ were only the servants who were duty bound to fulfill the Great Commission.

Our last passage is Philippians 1:14-18. These verses are quite different from the others in that they show it is possible to preach Christ (a good thing) in a wrong way. It was the intent of those whom Paul spoke of to cause him harm. There were those who did preach Christ out of good will (v. 15b), but, there were those who preached Christ out of envy and strife (v. 15a), hoping to add to Paul's affliction (v. 17). Even with all this to consider, Paul counts it as gain (v. 18). This would show that the message was true yet the motivation was lacking. The fact that this an attempt directed at Paul personally accounts for his reaction. Paul was glad that Christ was being preached and he did not pay much attention to his own state (Phil. 4:11). I believe that an excellent lesson can be learned here. This is not intended to encourage or promote false doctrine, false teachers, or those who have questionable motives. Rather, it shows the great unselfish attitude of a man who rejoiced even when he personally was being persecuted.

In many of the cases cited from the book of Acts, there were those who believed when they heard the gospel. Therefore, the preaching of Christ produced faith, as it should today. The gospel is power to save (Rom. 1:16), and it is God's marching orders to the church (Mk. 16:15). This gospel must produce faith in order for mankind to be saved (Heb. 11:6). A pre-requisite to baptism is faith (Mk. 16:16). Where, then, or how, does one acquire faith? It is acquired through the preaching of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

Now let us look at what we have discovered from these verses we have studied. A list of things which constitute the preaching of Christ would look something like this:

1. Everywhere
2. Kingdom of God (church)
3. Name (authority) (twice)

4. Baptism (twice)
5. Old Testament Scripture
6. Son of God (twice)
7. Lord (twice)
8. Suffering
9. Crucifixion
10. Resurrection (three times)
11. Affirmation
12. Divine Origin
13. Unselfishly
14. Produces faith

This compilation of facts should prove that the preaching of Christ is a manifold endeavor. This is the reason Paul called it the unsearchable riches (Eph. 3:8), and also why he encouraged those who would study in order to teach others to handle aright the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). With such a great sum of teaching included in the preaching of Christ, should we pass off this task lightly? Of course, the answer would be that we should teach the whole counsel of God and preach Christ in fullness, not in part.

Conclusion

There are many different avenues our conclusions might take us. We might ask if Billy Graham or Oral Roberts do indeed preach Christ. Our answer would have to be, "No." The preaching of Christ requires preaching about baptism and the kingdom of God. Since Billy Graham and Oral Roberts will not do this, they are not preaching Christ as did those in the New Testament. We might be even bolder and ask if those holding to the doctrines of liberal churches of Christ or the Christian Church are preaching Christ. Our answer would be the same "No," due to the fact that they see the kingdom differently than what the New Testament teaches. Liberal churches of Christ are "up to their chins" in sponsoring church arrangements. Christian Churches are engulfed with missionary societies. All of these are tied to, or a part of, the church in such a way as the New Testament never taught. Hence, they are not preaching Christ. These conclusions are inevitable.

Let us give much thought to the preaching of Christ and speak with great boldness. May we always realize that Christ needs to be preached today as much as 1900 years ago. May we also realize that when we set our minds to preach Christ, we must do it completely; holding back nothing that would be profitable (Acts 20:20).

[Editor's note: I ran across this in my old files—and I mean old! This was written in 1987 and was one of the first articles I had printed in a brotherhood magazine. I was surprised I still had a copy and decided it was good enough to re-print in this month's issue. I hope you gain from it]