

IN RESPONSE – 1 PETER 1:25 & PREACHING

by Dennis Prutow

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Preaching is a profound pleasure and delight. Preaching is also an awesome task and responsibility. We begin a brief look at this divine institution by turning to 1 Peter 1: 23-25, particularly verse 25.

You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Peter tells his readers, Christians scattered throughout Asia, that they came to Christ and were born again through the instrumentality of the Word of God. Regeneration does not come to pass independent of the Word. Regeneration, the new birth, takes place in conjunction with the Word.

Calvin comments. "Peter's object is to teach us that we cannot be Christians without regeneration, for the Gospel is not preached only in order to be heard by us, but that it may radically reform our hearts as a seed of immortal life."¹ Berkhof adds. "This word of Peter too implies that the word of preaching precedes regeneration and is instrumentally connected with it."²

James 1:18 is a companion text. "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." Regarding this text, Calvin notes, "We are further taught, that it is peculiarly God's task to give spiritual birth. That this should be occasionally ascribed to the ministers of the Gospel means only that God works through them."³

This is huge. Preaching is an instrument of God to save sinners. Hence the awesome nature of the responsibility. The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it this way. Question 89: "How is the word made effectual to salvation?" Answer: "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation."

Peter now quotes from Isaiah 40:6-8. He has several things in view. First, the words of the prophet are an example of the Word proclaimed to the dispersed Christians to whom Peter writes. We see this clearly from verse 25. Second, Peter provides a proof text for his statement that the instrument of rebirth is the imperishable, living, and abiding Word of God. Third, Peter takes a text from Isaiah relating to the work of ministry, ministry exemplified and fulfilled in John the Baptist. Isaiah 40:3 "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.'" See Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3 and Luke 3:4-6.

Zeroing in on point three for a moment, we see the ministry of preaching the Word is a preparatory ministry. It is a ministry in preparing men and women for Christ. It is preparatory in the sense that God is pleased to use His Word, read and proclaimed, as an instrument of grace. It is preparatory in the sense that God is pleased to use duly appointed ministers as instruments. They introduce men and women to Christ. Not only so, they are instruments, through whom God is pleased to grant the new birth. God uses this ministry to prepare men and women by granting the new birth and thus enabling them to embrace Christ through faith. This is humbling and in a sense frightening.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones therefore says, "Preaching should make such a difference to a man who is listening that he is never the same again. Preaching, in other

words, is a transaction between the preacher and the listener. It does something to the soul of man, for the whole of the person, the entire man; it deals with him in a vital and radical manner."⁴

Peter does not stop here in his explanation of the great work of God in regeneration. You were born again. You were born again through the instrumentality of the Word of God brought to you. "This is the word which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:25). You were born again, not through the instrumentality of just any word or message brought to you. It was through the instrumentality of Scripture and the message of Scripture.

Peter makes this abundantly clear. He points back to Isaiah 40:6-8. *This* text speaks of Scripture. This text *is* also Scripture. It is this Word, by which you were regenerated. It is this Word of Scripture preached to you through which God wrought new life within you.

Calvin puts it this way. "What then is the Word of the Lord which gives life? It is the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel. Those who wander beyond these limits of revelation, find nothing but the impostures of Satan and his delusions rather than the Word of the Lord."⁵

The pastor does not preach *about* Scripture or use Scripture as a pretext for his own ideas. Preaching is exposition of *Scripture*, exposing the meaning of *Scripture*, and applying *Scripture*. That Scripture is the "more sure word" (2 Peter 1:19) supports this truth. Scripture is the Word of Christ. As such, Christ Himself gives life in preaching. Preaching is therefore a work of the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 3:19). Finally, preaching is the exposition of the Word of Christ by the power of Christ *with the evident grace of Christ* (1 Peter 5:1-3). We look at these points in the next three lessons.

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¹ John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, trans. William B. Johnston, eds. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 252.

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 455.

³ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, Volume III and The Epistles of James and Jude*, trans. A. W. Morrison,

eds. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 270.

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 53.

⁵ Calvin, *First Peter*, 254.

IN RESPONSE – 2 PETER 1:19 & PREACHING THE WORD

by Dennis Prutow

Christian preaching involves expounding and applying Scripture. This is important to for three reasons. First, Scripture is a more sure word (2 Peter 1:19). Second, Christ speaks through Scripture and the preaching of Scripture (1 Peter 3:19). Third, when pastors preach the Word of Christ by the power of the Spirit of Christ, they do so with the evident grace of Christ (1 Peter 5:1-3). We look at these three points in turn.

The apostle Peter declares, “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). What is the prophetic word? To what is Peter comparing the prophetic word?

The context helps us. Verses 16-18, For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased” and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. Peter, James, and John were with Christ on the mountain when “He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light” (Matthew 17:2).

God the Father spoke from a cloud descending upon the mountain. “A bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’” (Matthew 17:5). Peter says of this experience, “We ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (1 Peter 1:18). In other words, Peter, James, and John heard the audible voice of God on the occasion of Christ’s transfiguration.

Peter then says, “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your

hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). The marginal note in the New American Standard Bible reads, “We have the even more sure prophetic word.” The Authorized version says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” What is this more sure word of prophecy? What is this more sure word of prophecy more sure than?

First, Peter is comparing the audible voice of God heard on the mountain with Scripture. We know this is the case since Peter goes on to quite pointedly discuss Scripture. “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21). The word of prophecy to which Peter refers is the prophecy of Scripture.

Second, Peter declares Scripture to be a more sure word of prophecy. It is more sure than the audible voice of God. How could this be? Scripture is a written word. We need not rely upon memory to know this word. We may go back to it again and again. From this perspective it is eminently more sure.

Commenting on this text, the late professor John Murray exclaims,

The astounding fact for our purposes is that he does not place that voice which came from heaven on a higher plane, as regards divinity, authority and stability, than the written Scripture. No indeed; he says the very opposite. “We also have a more steadfast word of prophecy....” The written Word, whether he refers to the whole of Scripture or to that part specifically prophetic, gives ground for stronger and more stable assurance than the very word spoken on that occasion.¹

Applying this text of Scripture, we may say without reservation that Scripture is a more sure and reliable Word than any audible voice we may hear. We hear a cacophony in our society. These chaotic sounds may also be in our heads. There is the voice of peers. There is the

voice of parents. There are the voices of teachers, professors, commentators, and newscasters. There is the voice of conscience. Finally we have our own voices rattling around in our brains arguing with the voice of conscience (Romans 2:15). Where do we turn for a sure word in which to trust and find ultimate guidance. We turn to Scripture. Scripture is more sure than any voice that may come along.

As Peter exhorts, Scripture is therefore a word, “to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). Scripture is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). The dark place into which the Word shines is the human heart pervaded by sin (Genesis 6:5). When this Word shines in our sin filled hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, the day may dawn. “The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8). The Morning Star, Jesus Christ, may arise in our hearts (Numbers 24:17, Revelation 22:16). We are born again only by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of Scripture and the preaching of Scripture.

It is therefore essential to preach Scripture. We are not to preach psychology. Rather, we ought to present the biblical view of the human condition along with biblical solutions. We are not to preach simplistic patriotism. Rather, we must preach the Kingdom of God. We must preach Christ as Lord. We are not to preach political correctness. Rather, we must present the biblical ethic and the decency of the strictly Christian life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We must remember: “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer 89). God is please to so use His *more sure Word* in this way.

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¹ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Studies in Theology* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 46.

IN RESPONSE – 1 PETER 3:19 & PREACHING THE WORD

by Dennis Prutow

Pastors must expound, lay bare, and apply Scripture. This is true because Scripture is a more sure Word. It is more sure than any other word to which we may look for guidance in this life or the life to come. Pastors also preach Scripture because Christ speaks in Scripture.

Peter speaks of the preaching of Christ in 1 Peter 3:19. "He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison." How and when did Christ preach? Peter injects this note regarding Christ into a discussion of the work of Christ in conjunction with Noah.

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water (1 Peter 3:18-20).

Peter seems to indicate that Christ engaged in preaching during the period between death and resurrection. Some think 1 Peter 3:19 therefore refers to a literal descent into hell. This does not appear to be the case for several reasons.

After His death on the cross, Christ rose again by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:4). This appears to be the import of the phrase, "made alive in the Spirit" referring to the Holy Spirit. While Christ's body was in the grave (Matthew 27:59-60), His human spirit went immediately into the presence of His Father not into the prison house of hell (Luke 23:46).

As Peter writes his letter in the first century, the spirits of those who disobeyed during the time of Noah are already in prison. The New American Standard Bible editorializes correctly by speaking of the spirits *now* in prison. How did Christ preach to these people who were disobedient in the time of Noah? Calvin says "Christ preached by the power of His Spirit."¹ Specifically,

how did Christ preach? Peter describes Noah in 2 Peter 2:5, as "a preacher of righteousness." Noah preached the righteousness of God obtained by faith in the coming promised savior. He did so under the unction and by the power of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ. So we say without reservation that Christ preached through Noah. Those who disobeyed are *now* in prison. First Peter 3:19 is therefore a specific example of Christ preaching in and through a human vessel.

Peter adds to this in 1 Peter 1:10-11. He speaks of the salvation that comes through Christ. He explains, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." The Spirit of Christ was speaking in and through the prophets of old. One such prophet was Noah. The words of many of the other prophets were set down in writing. God commanded this (Exodus 17:14; Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 30:20, 36:2). On the basis of the teaching of Peter, we therefore affirm Scripture itself is the Word of Christ.

When the pastor preaches Scripture, expounding, explaining, and applying its meaning, and the pastor does so under the unction and power of the Holy Spirit, Christ speaks to His people. We emphasize two points. There must be a faithful exposition and application of the Word of Christ. There must be a faithful exposition of the Word of Christ by the power of the Spirit of Christ. Romans 10:14 asks, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" With regard to question two, John Murray indicates, "There is no need to insert the preposition 'in' before 'him.'"² The question then reads, "How

will they believe Him whom they have not heard?" "A striking feature of this clause is that Christ is represented as being heard in the gospel when proclaimed by sent messengers. The implication is that Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation."³

The preacher and pastor ought to be deeply challenged and profoundly humbled by this truth of Scripture. Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, is pleased to speak to men and women in the pastor's hearing when the pastor faithfully expounds and applies the Word of Christ in the power of the Spirit of Christ.

The pastor is therefore an ambassador. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). The ambassador must accurately, faithfully, humbly present the message of the Monarch.

Yes, as an ambassador, the pastor must humbly represent his Master. The pastor does not arrogate the Master's prerogatives. The Master must increase, the pastor must decrease (John 3:30). The pastor must not pompously think, "If the people reject my message, they reject Christ." The pastor must lead the people to Christ. Christ is their teacher. This seems to be the import of 1 John 2:27. "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." Christ uses His Word to reach and teach his people. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones says to the pastor, "It is not your effort; you are just the instrument, the channel, the vehicle...."⁴

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of St. Peter, trans. William B. Johnston, eds.

David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 292.

² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:58, note 16.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 324.

¹ John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles*

IN RESPONSE – 1 PETER 5:1-3 & PREACHING THE WORD

by Dennis Prutow

Christian preaching means setting forth Scripture. Scripture is a more sure word. Christ speaks through Scripture and the preaching of Scripture. Finally, in this lesson, we look at 1 Peter 5:1-3. When pastors preach the Word of Christ by the power of the Spirit of Christ, they do so with the evident grace of Christ.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

One, the pastor is an elder among elders. Peter says, "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder." The pastor may be the elder ordained to preach. But he is not alone in his preaching. He has fellow-elders. He is subject to his fellow-elders. They too oversee the teaching given to the flock. Fellow-elders are also the pastor's safety net in his preaching and labor with the flock. The pastor must shepherd his fellow-elders. He must expect his fellow-elders to shepherd him.

Two, the pastor must stand in Peter's shoes as he describes himself "a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed." The pastor must be a convicted sinner and saved saint not simply the former. He cannot preach the glories of the saving work of Christ without being a partaker of the life to come. He is united to the same Christ as his fellow-elders and the flock. He belongs to his Master by grace. The pastor may then expound the Word of Christ in the power of the Spirit of Christ *with the evident grace of Christ.*

Three, the pastor is a shepherd. Peter exhorts his fellow-elders, "shepherd the flock of God among you." The term pastor means shepherd. The duty of the pastor is to lead the flock. The pastor is not a cowboy. A cowboy *drives* cattle. Too many pastors liken their tasks to that of

cattlemen who sharply prod their livestock. Their ministries are full of exhortations. They regularly blast the trumpets of warning and pour out the bowls of judgment. There is much law but little evidence of the grace of Christ.

The work of the shepherd differs dramatically. A shepherd stands before the flock and leads the flock. The shepherd is not a blind guide. He knows the power of sin and the judgment of God against sin. He knows the love, mercy, and grace of God. The shepherd understands the process of sanctification and always allows room for the grace of God and the maturing of the flock. He is not impatient with God's providence. The pastor leads the flock to green pastures, the Word of God and the waters of life, with evident grace in his own life.

The shepherd emphasizes the smile of God's love and the sunshine of God's grace. He does so, not at the expense of law, but in contrast to the dead works of legalism. The shepherd is therefore familiar with both Scripture and the wondrous works of God's grace through the Holy Spirit. This familiarity is not academic. It is experimental. The pastor himself knows the grace of Christ through the Word of Christ by the power of Christ. He can therefore minister with the evident grace of Christ.

Four, the pastor is an under-shepherd. Peter reminds us he is responsible to the "Chief Shepherd." Jesus Christ gives the pastor his flock. Jesus Christ issues the pastor his call and outlines the pastor's duties. In leading the flock, the pastor must therefore follow Christ as outlined in Scripture. The pastor must lead the flock where Christ wants the flock to go not where the pastor thinks the flock should go. The pastor must also offer the flock food from Christ. The pastor must feed the flock the Word of Christ and not his own ideas and agendas.

Five, as just mentioned, Peter reminds his fellow-elders that the flock is "allotted to your charge." The flock is given into the pastor's care by Christ. It does not belong to the pastor. The pastor is a steward of the Chief Shepherd. As an under-shepherd, the pastor is therefore quite dispensable. He serves at the call of

Christ. The pastor must realize this and seek to please his Master and benefit the Master's flock. At the same time, the pastor is a steward of the mysteries of Christ. He has treasure born in a clay pot. As Christ wept and prayed, so also the pastor. He must know the promise of Psalm 126:6, "He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

Six, Peter says the pastor exercises "oversight" with his fellow-elders but he should never be "lording it over" those in his charge. The pastor is not lord; Christ is Lord. When the pastor truly presents the Word of Christ by the power of the Spirit of Christ he does so with the evident grace of Christ. Christ commands the attention of the people. The pastor need not interpose his own commands.

Seven, the pastor must carry out his charge "according to the will of God." This includes all we noted in the previous three lessons. The pastor must expound, explain, and apply the Word of Christ under the power of the Spirit of Christ with the grace of Christ. Failure to expound the Word of Christ properly and adequately and failure to preach in the power of the Spirit of Christ with the grace of Christ means Christ does not speak to His people.

Eight, the pastor, with his fellow-elders, must "be examples to the flock." As the pastor walks before the flock in speech and conduct, he must exemplify the teachings of Scripture he proclaims to the people. He must practice what he preaches. He must be a witness to the active grace of God in his personal and social life, within the church and without.

Nine, the pastor may anticipate the rewards of grace for his labors in the kingdom of grace. If the pastor faithfully proclaims the Word of Christ by the power of the Spirit of Christ with the grace of Christ, he does so only by the work of grace in his own life. Christ promises he will receive the rewards of grace in the kingdom of glory. In all of this the grace of Christ triumphs.

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