

IN RESPONSE – TWO MINISTRIES, PART ONE

by Dennis Prutow

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There is little doubt the Westminster Divines placed emphasis upon preaching as the ordinary means God uses to bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Questions 88, “What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?” Answer, “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”

Question 89 asks, “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.”

Paul declares, “God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). This is the ordinary means God uses. If this is the case, why place extraordinary emphasis upon means that are out of the ordinary. In our day of individualism, we honestly think the most profound encounter a person may have with God is in personal work or in personal counseling.

We do not deny that so-called personal evangelism is a means used of God to bring men and women to Himself. However, to make personal evangelism the norm and the ordinary means while Scripture and our Standards make preaching the ordinary means is to turn the tables on Scripture. Would it not be wise on our part to emphasize the ordinary means as done in Scripture and in our Standards as they following Scripture? Martyn Lloyd-Jones is emphatic in “that the primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God.”¹

With regard to personal work and counseling, Lloyd-Jones goes on to say,

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 19.

“My contention, then, is that personal counseling and all these other activities are meant to supplement the preaching, not supplant it; that they are the ‘carrying on,’ ‘follow-up’ work if you like, but must never be thought of as the primary work.”²

Why this seemingly heavy emphasis upon the teaching and preaching ministry of the church? Scripture points us in this direction. Not only so, Scripture teaches that we are privileged to hear the voice of Jesus in and through the preaching and teaching of the Word. Men and women must actually encounter Christ if they are to follow Him.

With this in mind, we shall first examine a text set forth as central in properly understanding the propriety and priority of preaching. It is Romans 10:14. Second, we shall examine Romans 10:14 in the context of the classic Christian confession given by Paul in Romans 10:9. We shall answer the question, How does Jesus Christ ordinarily speak to people, draw them to Himself, and elicit from them the confession that He is Lord? Third, we shall turn to what I call two different ministries. They are two different applications of the principles set forth in Romans. Fourth, we shall examine what Calvin has to say with regard to the application of our doctrine. We shall see Calvin holds to the need of examination and testing by the people in the application of the doctrine.

We turn, first of all, to Romans 10:14. “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?”³ The question that concerns us is the second. “How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” “There is no need to insert the preposition ‘in’ before ‘him.’”⁴ We may render

² Ibid., 40.

³ GKNT, Pw̄j oū epikalesw̄ntai eij̄ oh̄ ouk episteusan̄ pw̄j de. pisteuswsin ou- ouk hkousan̄ pw̄j de. akouswsin cw̄rij̄ khrūssontoj̄

⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 2: 58, n. 16.

the text, “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 the sent messengers.”⁵ Paul uses the specific grammatical construction he does to “suggest that Christ is heard in the message of the gospel....”⁶

Jesus Christ speaks to His people in and through the preaching of Scripture.

The Word, accordingly, is required for a true knowledge of God. But it is the preached Word alone which Paul has here described, for this is the normal mode which the Lord has appointed for imparting His Word.... If it is contended from this that God can instill knowledge of Himself only by means of preaching, we shall deny this was the meaning of the apostle. Paul was referring only to the ordinary dispensation of God....⁷

Preaching may not be the only means whereby Christ presents Himself to His people but it is the ordinary means. This is the perspective of the Westminster.

For our purposes, we may actually hear Jesus Christ speak to us in the and through the preaching and teaching of Scripture by faithful pastors. Our Lord Himself declares, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). How is this so? In preaching and teaching. In fact, “Christ must be heard either in his own person, or in the person of his preachers, through whom his own word (v. 17) is spoken, otherwise faith in him is impossible.”⁸

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 663, n. 11.

⁷ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 12 vols., Torrance and Torrance, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 8:231.

⁸ C. K. Barrett, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1957), 204.

IN RESPONSE – TWO MINISTRIES, PART TWO

by Dennis Prutow

We now turn to the first question in Romans 10:14, “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” The second and third questions indicate we *hear* Christ in the preaching and teaching of Scripture. “How will they believe Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” It is important to hear Christ because we must “call in Him” for salvation as the first question indicates.

All of this goes back to Romans 10:9 and the basic Christian confession. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Christ is the one whom we must believe. Christ is the one upon whom we must call. It is insufficient to have information *about* Him and to simply hear *about* Him. To believe Him and call upon Him we must encounter Him. We must meet Him and hear Him.

Again Jesus tells us, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). Hearing Christ, knowing Christ and being known of Him, and following Christ are tied together. Why do Jesus’ sheep follow Him? “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4). Does this hold for all who may hear the voice of Jesus? Indeed it does. “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Paul directly ties belief in the resurrection of Christ and confession of Christ as Lord to the idea of calling on the LORD, for “Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be saved” (Romans 10:13). Paul quotes Joel 2:32. We call upon Christ as God.

Joel 2:32 has the same significance as belongs to it elsewhere. When Paul applies the same to Christ this is another example of the practice of taking Old Testament passages that refer to God without qualification and applying them to Christ. It is the distinguishing mark of New Testament believers that they call upon the Lord Jesus (cf. Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; I Cor.

1:2; II Tim. 2:22) and therefore accord to him the worship that belonged to God alone.”¹

Salvation comes as we hear Christ. *He* issues an invitation. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Christ makes the outward effectual. “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). There is an outward call and an effectual call.² In the former, we voice the call. In the latter, Christ speaks. “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). We are united to Christ in our effectual calling.

Effectual calling, the voice of Christ heard by His sheep, comes in the envelope of the outward call voiced by the pastor or evangelist. “God has more especially made the word preached efficacious to the enlightening [of] the soul. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word preached....”³ “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.... And this is the word which was preached to you.” (1 Peter 1:23 and 25).

We have a good example of this in Lydia listening to the preaching of Paul in Acts 16:14. “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” Lydia heard the voice of Jesus and followed Him.

We have another example in the conversion of Paul. Paul spent three days in darkness. Ananias went to him. “He said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed

you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to *hear an utterance from His mouth*. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, *calling on His name*” (Acts 22:14-16, italics added). Paul heard the voice of Jesus. He called upon Christ. “The personal commitment which faith implies is coordinate with the encounter with Jesus’ own words in the gospel message.”⁴

We return to John Murray’s explanation of the second question in Romans 10:14. “A striking feature of this clause is that Christ is represented as being heard in the gospel when proclaimed by the sent messengers.”⁵ There is no doubt this is the case. Yet Murray shows remarkable reserve in this comment.

Compare a couple of other comments on the same text. “It is simplest to render [the text], How are they to believe on Him Whom they have not heard? Identifying the preachers with the voice of Christ.”⁶ The text “must be so interpreted by assuming that the preaching of Christ’s messengers is identical with the preaching of Christ Himself.”⁷

These comments take the text to the next seemingly logical level. There is some warrant for this. But there is also an attending danger. Paul says to the Galatians, “You received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself” (Galatians 4:14). Do we equate the voice of the modern preacher with the voice of Christ? Do we identify the preaching of Christ’s messengers with the preaching of Christ Himself? Murray does not appear to take this last step. Why?

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¹ Murray, 56.

² Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 31, What is effectual calling? Answer, Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

³ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and discourses 1720-1723*, Wilson H. Kimnach, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 542.

⁴ Murray, 58.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ James Denny, “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 2:673.

⁷ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1964), 296.

IN RESPONSE – TWO MINISTRIES, PART THREE

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During a Community Thanksgiving Service a young lady introduced her song with words similar to the following. “As David was inspired to write the Psalms, so I was inspired to write this song I’m going to sing for you.” Had this young lady realized what she said, I do not think she would have introduced her song in this way.

Because the Psalms are inspired words from God, they are infallible and inerrant. Knowing this lady as one who holds to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, she was *not* testifying she is an organ of special revelation, that her songs are inspired like Scripture, and that they are inerrant. Yet, her comparison was at best unfortunate.

When the Galatian Christians received Paul as Jesus Christ, there is little doubt the people waited upon his words like those of Jesus. Paul was an organ of special revelation. Such revelation has ceased. The canon of Scripture is closed. Pastors and evangelists today do not speak the word of God *in this sense*.

A Pentecostal pastor was fond of saying, “If you reject my words you reject Jesus Christ.” He considered his words inspired by God. I saw this same man throw His Bible on the floor and declare He no longer needed that book because He had the Word of God. He believed he was an organ of special revelation.

Note how Hendriksen puts the matter in commenting on Romans 10:14.

For the audience, then, and for every person in the audience, the apostle has so arranged the series that the reference to God—or, if one prefers, to Jesus Christ—who commissioned the preacher, would be mentioned last of all, in order that all the emphasis might fall upon Him! Every person in the audience must be made aware of the fact that when he rejects the preacher who, as a faithful minister of the word, with insight and enthusiasm presents the glad and glorious tidings of salvation in Christ, then he is rejecting Jesus Christ himself! In addressing the seventy (or seventy-two) missionaries Jesus said, He who listens to you, listens to me, but he who rejects you rejects me; and he who

rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).¹

Is it true that when I preach, expounding the Scriptures, if people do not agree with me, question me, and perhaps reject what I have to say, they are rejecting Jesus Christ? I answer, “Perhaps” and “Not necessarily.”

Is not the dignity of the office of minister wrapped up in what we are saying? If individuals reject the words coming from the lips of the minister, are they undermining the authority and dignity of the office of the minister? I answer again, “Not necessarily.” Murray does not take the exact position of Hendriksen in his exposition of Romans 10:14. Murray does say, “The dignity of the messengers, reflected on later, is derived from the fact that they are the Lord’s spokesmen.”² There is no loss of dignity if we do not follow Hendriksen.

We submit that we are talking about two different ministries. These are two divergent applications of the same principle. Christ speaks to His people in and through His Word preached and taught. We see the two approaches in Murray and Hendriksen. The former is reserved, perhaps reticent. Some think it is too hesitant. The latter is bold to speak the truth and give the pastor, minister, or evangelist proper dignity. We favor the approach of Murray over the boldness and perhaps brazenness of Hendriksen.

An elder gave the charge to a new pastor. “Remember,” he said, “You are a shepherd and not a cowboy.” The elder aptly described two ministries. The shepherd stands before the flock and leads the flock. The cowboy gets behind the cattle and drives them. This *is* a fitting comparison of two types of ministry.

Jesus Christ obviously sets before us the pattern of the shepherd. Jesus says of the shepherd, “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4). Jesus says of Himself, “I am the good shepherd, and I know My

own and My own know Me” (John 10:14). Jesus says of His people, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

We’ve discussed how Jesus speaks in and through the preaching and teaching of Scripture. We drew a proper distinction between the outward call of the gospel and effectual calling, the outward speaking of the truths of Scripture and the effectual application of these truths by the Holy Spirit. We can add this. The pastor is not inspired like the prophets of old. He is not an organ of special revelation. His words are neither infallible nor inerrant. Yet, Jesus Christ chooses to speak in and through preaching and teaching so that men and women may actually hear the voice of Jesus as they sit in the assembly of God’s people under the preaching and teaching of Scripture.

We therefore maintain the minister is under obligation to realize a responsibility to present the truth of God so that the Holy Spirit will illumine the hearts of listeners, they will hear the voice of Jesus, and follow Him. In this respect, the minister is in the position of living out the truth spoken by John the baptizer with regard to Jesus. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). This is the position of the pastor acting as a shepherd of God’s flock. He decreases in importance as Jesus Christ takes preeminence. This is one type of ministry.

On the other hand, the pastor may take a more hard-nosed, pragmatic, position of one who says, “If you reject what I have to say, you are rejecting Jesus Christ.” There is little room for debate or questions. The danger here is evident. It is a small step toward taking the position that the actual words of the pastor are the words of Jesus. It is no longer Jesus speaking in and through the words of the pastor. There is a demand for immediate deference and obedience or at least the appearance of a demand for deference and obedience. The pastor easily steps into the roll of cowboy, driving the people rather than leading them. This is a second type of ministry.

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¹ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 2:350.

² Murray, 58.

IN RESPONSE – TWO MINISTRIES, PART FOUR

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Calvin treats our doctrine a Deuteronomy sermon. “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:18-20).

Calvin has a high view of the preaching and teaching office.

So then, God’s intent was to make men desirous to be taught by the Prophets and preachers whom he would send unto them. And that is the thing which Moses touches in this present place.

Now then, we must understand first of all, that our Lord will not come down from heaven visible and speak unto us: for that were not for our benefit. Indeed many men are of that mind that they would fain have God to send them His Angels: and they think it a matter of no great authority that a man which is but a frail creature and but an earthen pot, should go up into the pulpit but yet does God know it to be for our behalf. And therefore we must understand, that forasmuch as the Jews found by experience that it was a dreadful thing to them to hear God speak: it behooved God to alter that manner of declaring himself and to send Moses unto them. Therewith all let us mark also that God’s authorizing of the Law was not for the Jews only; but to the end that we also at this day should receive the same with all humbleness, and understand that, whatsoever despise it, advance himself against the majesty of the living God, and make war against him. That is the thing which we have to remember where mention is made of the terribleness of Gods voice, and of the fire that so filled the air. And thereupon let us mark (as hath been treated of already,) that God promised a Prophet, not only to the Jews, but

also to us; and that it is a continual order in his Church. So then, will we be reckoned for the children of God? Let us suffer ourselves to be governed by his word. Yea, and let us not hold scorn to hear men that speak to us in his name. But although they be from among us and of our own company, so as we might allege that we owe them no such duty as in respect of their persons: yet not withstanding seeing they be set in Gods stead, and by his will; let that suffice us. And if we intend to honor God, and to have him to reign over us: it behoove us to show it in this case, by yielding such obedience to his word, as those whom he sends to us be heard of us.¹

God teaches us His Word in the church by the mouths of mortal men. We ought not to despise God in this. The pastor stands in the place of God in the sense that he communicates God’s message. He has the privilege of setting forth the truths of Scriptures. God is pleased to speak in and through the presentation of these truths. The people may really and actually hear the voice of Jesus in them.

“To be short, it is the will of Jesus Christ, to execute his office by the mouths of those whom he ordains to be ministers among his faithful.”² We dare not deny this truth. “Then let us conclude, so that even to the world’s end, if we will be members of our Lord Jesus Christ, and (to be short) if we will be taken for Christians: we must hearken to the word which God puts into men’s mouths, whensoever it is preached unto us....³

Should we bow to the words of a sermon as we bow to God?

God meant not to exempt the preachers of his word from all examination, but will have the faithful to consider what is set forth unto them, according to the general rule that is given us thereof. It is said that they that have the gift of Prophecy must speak in

order, and that the residue must judge (1 Cor. 14:29). It is not said, whatsoever they say, let it be received: but, let men judge and discern of it. Lo how the Holy Ghost shows us how to measure our faith, and after what manner we may keep a mean between the contempt and rebellion which we see in the heathenish sort, and the beastly blockishness of such as say, as for me I am so well minded that I receive whatsoever is told me. Yea; and thou art a good goose for thy labor. But God will have such children as be of discretion and knowledge. And although our faith be not a worldly science: Yet does it require skill to be taught us at God’s hand as the Prophet says. One point then is this, that when we preach Gods word, it is not for us to say that men should not judge of our doctrine or that we should not yield any account thereof. . . . We see here in few words then, that God hath given his Church leave to inquire of men’s doctrines, and that he would have his prophets accountable, so as they should be bound to yield a reason of their doctrine and to show that it is of God. And this condition was never refused, neither of the Prophets nor of the Apostles, who at all times when they were accused of false doctrine were ready to show openly that they were sent of God, and that they had behaved themselves faithfully. And even so must we do at this day. And thereby will all tyranny be shut out.⁴

We must respect the ministry of the Word. In it we have the privilege of hearing the voice of Jesus. We also have the privilege of inquiry. This is in keeping with Scripture. “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Pastors may be shepherds or cowboys. We prefer the former.

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¹ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy, Facsimile of 1583 Edition* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 674. Modern English update mine.

² *Ibid.*, 675.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 677-678