

Chapter 1.

The Scriptural Conception of Preaching

Preaching is that unique procedure by which God, through His chosen messenger, reaches down into the human family and brings persons face to face with Himself. Without such confrontation it is not true preaching. Since preaching originated in the mind of God, and is His own distinctive medium for reaching the hearts of men with a message that is calculated to save the soul, it is obviously His prerogative to set the standards. It follows that the only valid conception of preaching is the conception which God Himself has revealed in the holy Scriptures. It is unfortunate for the Christian cause when secular standards are substituted for the sacred pattern, and preaching becomes a mere instrument of culture or a means of teaching ethics and morals apart from the holy and authoritative demands of the living God.

The Scriptural conception of preaching is clearly reflected, as it relates to the messenger, and to the message.

As to the Messenger

1. *His Call.* In the Old Testament the preacher was a "prophet." This title is derived from the Greek *prophetes*, which in turn is a free rendering of the Hebrew *nabhi*, meaning "one who is called (by God), one who has a vocation (from God)." Thus, "the prophet was a man who felt himself called by God for a special mission, in which his will was subordinated to the will of God, which was communicated to him by direct inspiration."^[1] It was this call which differentiated him from other men.

In the New Testament the preacher was an "apostle," "one sent from God" (Greek: *apostalmenos*), like John the Baptist (John 1:6), literally a "godsend." The apostle Paul, in nine of his Epistles, identifies himself as one "called to be an apostle." While the preacher at best is but an "earthen vessel" (2 Cor. 4:7), through whom God reveals Himself to others, he is nevertheless the living point of contact between God and those whom He seeks to save through "the foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21).

2. *His Character.* In the ministry, as in no other calling, character is decisive. The Holy Spirit simply will not identify Himself with the unclean or unconsecrated. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11). How completely God identifies Himself with the labors of His faithful spokesmen is shown in the ministry of Samuel. "The Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:19-20).

It must be remembered that the fruitfulness or sterility of a man's ministry depends not nearly so much upon his native ability, his training, his skill, and his labor, as upon that which the Lord adds or withholds. "After preachers have preached ever so eloquently and long, when sinners are bowed, as great a wonder is