

Text— 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

There are many preachers throughout our country and the world. A number of preachers broadcast weekly programs on television or over the internet. Unfortunately, not a few preachers use the ministry simply as a means to gain personal fame and worldly wealth, while ignoring the fact that the Holy Bible in 1 Peter 4:11 instructs: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Yes, preachers are to preach the Holy Scriptures to the glory of God, with Jesus Christ and His work being the main message.

Therefore, self-serving preachers have a big problem since Isaiah 8:20 plainly states: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Indeed, false prophets do not have the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, dwelling in their hearts, for they speak their own thoughts and opinions as they are found walking in craftiness, handling the Word of God deceitfully, and "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9), rather than preaching "things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1) taken directly from the pure preserved Holy Bible, which is God's Word.

Accordingly, in Matthew 7:15-20 Jesus warns: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know

them." Thus, false preachers will be recognized by their fruits, that is, by what they preach and teach.

Hence, our Scripture selection can be of benefit to us as it informs us regarding a most important subject, that being:

"PROPER PREACHING"

Therefore, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) What the central theme of proper preaching is
- 2) Why proper preaching is necessary

-1-

Verse 5, ----- (2 Corinthians 4:5)

The apostle Paul penned our text by inspiration of God, the words being first addressed to the Christian congregation in Corinth. The city of Corinth was located on a four mile wide strip of land which links northern mainland Greece with its southern island-like section, all of which was known as Achaia in Paul's day. Being located on a common travel-route, Corinth was a wealthy and wicked city, and was the greatest commercial center in Achaia. Hence, Christian converts in the area were surrounded by many temptations, not unlike we Christians today living in modern-day America. For instance, Corinth was home to the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and fertility, who dominated the social and religious life of the city, and whose worship fostered and popularized sexual sins among citizens and travelers. Likewise, modern-day America boasts lotteries and gambling casinos, with the city of Las Vegas being a leader in gambling dens and encouraging sexual sins with its prostitutes.

Accordingly, we, and all other Christians, need to be on guard against temptations by keeping our focus on Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, since Acts 4:12 plainly states: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be

saved." The apostle Paul knew it to be the case, which is why he writes: *we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*

Paul and his fellow faithful preachers did NOT preach about themselves as being great lords to whom people were to bow-down and follow as their leader and master. For instance, consider the following incident Acts 14:8-15 reports: "there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein."

Note well that Paul and his fellow preacher Barnabas would not permit themselves to receive worship and honor, but rather pointed the people to the living God, the true God, the Creator of all things.

Likewise, Peter, which a very large church-body claims was their first pope, never permitted people to worship himself, for we read in Acts 3:1-16, "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of

them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." Thus, Peter gave all glory to God as he pointed people to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of all.

Peter did not say, "I'm your pope, bow to me, kiss my ring, for I am your supreme pontiff and the vicar of Christ." No way would Peter speak such blasphemy! Rather, the apostle Peter was like the apostle Paul, who said: *we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.* So, observe that the central theme of proper preaching is NOT the

person doing the preaching! The central theme of proper preaching IS CHRIST JESUS THE LORD!

There is good reason for Christ Jesus the Lord being the central theme of proper preaching, for Romans 6:23 clearly states: “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Take it to heart that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to God and heaven, for Romans 3:23-26 declares in no uncertain terms: “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Accordingly, Jesus Christ Himself tells us in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

My friends, we learn from John 1:17-18 that “the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Thus, Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God the Father; and, John 3:16-18 informs us: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Hence, faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord is vital if one would personally receive the forgiveness of sins and the salvation earned by Jesus for the entire world.

However, personal faith in Jesus Christ is NOT something a sinful human being can produce in himself or herself, for Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly states: “by grace are ye saved through faith; and

that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Therefore, proper preaching – that is, preaching which has Christ Jesus the Lord as its central theme – is necessary, because Romans 10:17 reports: “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” We will further consider this fact when we proceed with the next verse of our text in a few minutes.

Before leaving the first verse of our text, notice again that the apostle Paul said: *we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake*. Thus, those preachers who know the central theme of proper preaching is Christ Jesus the Lord, also know they are their congregation’s servants for Jesus’ sake. Indeed, pastors are to serve their congregations by proper preaching of God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures, for Jesus’ sake who has called them through their congregations to be HIS MOUTHPIECE and NOT to speak their own thoughts and opinions, for the Lord says in Jeremiah 23:28, “he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.”

Furthermore, the apostle Peter, writing to elders – pastors – in 1 Peter 5:2-4 says: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

And, by inspiration of God the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 instructed the young pastor Timothy: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." Accordingly, sound, Scriptural doctrine is to be preached by pastors in service to the congregation through whom God called them, with Christ Jesus the Lord being the central theme of all proper preaching.

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As we ponder the remaining verse of our text, let us see why proper preaching is necessary, for we noted a few minutes ago that faith in Jesus Christ is vital, and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

Verse 6, ----- (2 Corinthians 4:6)

The reason all faithful truly Christian preachers preach not themselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, and themselves their congregation's servants for Jesus' sake, is that they sincerely confess with the apostle Paul: *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Consider the facts. God at creation commanded the light to shine out of darkness, for we read in Genesis 1:1-5, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." Thus, God by His power gave light where there had been only darkness. Likewise, fellow Christians, whether we be pastors or lay-persons, God *hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Now, the *light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* is exactly what the

apostle Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 4:4 just prior to our text, that being: "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God." Hence, realize that proper preaching is necessary – preaching with Christ Jesus the Lord as its central theme is necessary – because the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ is the means by which God gifts folks with faith in Jesus Christ, the very faith that personally receives the forgiveness of sins and salvation, for in Romans 1:16-17 the apostle Paul declares: "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. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Fellow Christians, we would not be Christians if we were not graciously gifted with faith in Jesus by God as He worked through the Gospel of Christ in our hearts when preached – which includes the Word of God attached to the waters of Holy Baptism – for the closing verse of our text informs us: *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* And, 1 Peter 3:21-22 relates: "baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." Hence, God does the saving, all of it; and, God uses proper preaching to save sinners— proper preaching being Christ-centered genuine Gospel preaching as Jesus Himself commanded His followers to proclaim in Mark 16:15-16, where we read, "he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Therefore, proper preaching is necessary, for we are told in 1 Corinthians 1:21-25, "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. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

Let us therefore be grateful to God for proper preaching. Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins. Let us tenaciously cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord. Let us never settle for any less than proper preaching from any pastor to whom we give audience, for Paul in Galatians 1:8-9 plainly states: “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” Indeed, let us insist on hearing the glorious Gospel of Christ, for the Lord Jesus is our only Savior, our only Deliverer from never-ending doom. Yes, let us insist on proper preaching. Amen.

m.e.l.