

What is the purpose of the ministry of the church?

Rom 10:13-15 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Paul asked, "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" And that remains a most important and necessary question before the church today. One must ask why . . . when in a land of so many churches and so many Bibles yet most today, even those in the church, are biblically illiterate. When, according to recent Barna Polls, 46% of people professing to be born again Christians deny Satan's existence, when 41% of adults living in America believe that Jesus sinned when he lived on earth and when 53% of Americans in the church believe that one can gain heaven by "being good" and especially when some who so answered were classified as Evangelical believers, something is terribly wrong in the visible church today. One can only conclude, the Bible is simply not being taught in the churches. Thus the blame for much of the Biblical illiteracy has to be laid at the foot of Church visible.

As I mentioned last Lord's Day while attending our Synod Meeting in California I began to ask this question, "What is the purpose of the ministry of the Church?" And of course of I am thinking of the church here in this New Testament age. And we know that our Lord told us that we are the "light of the world", that is, in a very real sense, the world should see Christ in us. At the same time we know we often fail to be that light as we should be. Like Peter who on one occasion denied even knowing the Lord, or on another occasion permitted his witness to be affected by those who were teaching that the new Gentile believers in the church had to be circumcised in order to be saved and Paul had to oppose him to his face. Or as we see the weaknesses in the church as recorded in the messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, or some serious weaknesses in the church visible as revealed in Paul's letters to the churches we understand that the message of the church to the world is not us, and our witness because we still struggle with sin ourselves, so what then is the means whereby we can be that "light" to the world. The only answer can be this; it is our duty to "preach the Word of God" as Paul instructed the younger minister Timothy.

I am not saying that we ought not to strive daily to so live that others will see Christ in us since our chief desire and goal in life ought to be to glorify God before the world. But since we are but flesh and often will fail and fail in our obedience how then can we with full assurance know that we are presenting to the world that truth alone that can bring others to repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ? As I thought on these things, I concluded that the only witness that cannot fail is a faithful proclamation of the Word of God as given to us in Holy Scripture. And this brings us to the second part of this series, "The Necessity of the Word".

B. The necessity of the Word

1. People need to hear about the God of Holy Scripture.
 - a. Not our opinions as to who we think He is or should be.
 - b. Rather we must proclaim God before the world as He revealed Himself to mankind in His written Word.
2. Why do men need to hear about the God of Holy Scripture?
 - a. Simply stated, there is no other God

Isa 46:9 For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,

- b. Outside of the name of Jesus Christ there is no salvation

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

3. And God has purposed that men are to be brought to a saving knowing by the foolishness of preaching.

1 Cor 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

- a. Many in the Church want to turn to pretended miracles.
- b. Others are convince that they can convert the ungodly through philosophical debate
- c. Others want to turn to psychology, until much of the faith expressed in the church today has become faith in nothing more than a Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

1 Cor 1:22-25 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who 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.

4. All men will by nature suppress the truth - How can you reach them?

- a. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God

Acts 13:48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

5. The message of the cross may be foolishness to those who are perishing

- a. Men who boast in their wisdom do not fear to subject God's sacred truth to senseless criticism (Calvin)
- b. Human reason cannot comprehend that God became man in order that He might suffer in the sinners place
- c. Human reason cannot comprehend a God with whom nothing is impossible

6. Men not only lack inclination to believe, they lack the ability to believe

- a. Men will not accept the written Word even if one rose from the dead
- b. Jesus said, you cannot come to Me unless the Father draws you

7. How was it possible that the pagans in Ephesus came to faith in God

- a. They were quicken, made spiritually alive by God working in their hearts
- b. Dead men in and of themselves cannot and will not come to God
- c. Christian it is not your purpose or within your means to convert the sinner

8. Here is what we can do - - - from God's written Word

- a. Tell men about the Creator
- b. Tell them how men fell and how death passed upon all men
- c. Tell them how this brought all men under condemnation
- d. Tell men that they are sinners in need of salvation
- e. Tell them about Jesus, who He is, and how and why He became man
- f. Tell them what Jesus did on the cross
- g. Tell them their need of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ
- h. Tell them there is no other way of salvation
- i. Warn them of the consequence of rejection
- j. Tell them of the hope one has if they place their trust in Christ Jesus alone

Conclusion: What then is the purpose of the Church?

Proclaiming the Word of God

Jesus said, "go into all the world and preach the gospel"

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God

Faith is that instrument whereby men are saved

Men cannot produce true faith.

By grace men saved are through faith and that not of themselves it is a **gift** of God

As the church through the foolishness of preaching

As the church present the truth as it is given in Holy Scripture

God works faith in the hearts of sinners chosen by Him from all eternity

The purpose of the church is to present Christ alone as Savior to sin cursed mankind

The purpose of the church is to preach the Word of God that His people might be strengthened in their faith in Christ their Savior and Redeemer

The only source of true faith is the Holy Spirit quickening the dead through the revealed truth in Holy Scripture. As Paul points out later in this passage, "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*"

How else could one come to the knowledge of the TRUE GOD?