

The Artificiality Of Much Christian Preaching

When I was a young boy what struck me forcibly was the artificiality of the preachers. I was forced at first then as I grew older encouraged to listen to them by my church-going parents.

The world that these preachers inhabited was, it seemed to me, always once removed from reality.

They were men, obviously, but they lacked completely the candour and downrightness I knew so well in other men.

The bold, man-to-man approach was missing.

They seemed to be afraid of something, though what, for certain, I did not know.

Those who listened to them were tame, patient, almost indifferent people, harmless enough.

But it seemed to me that no-one was really paying much attention to what they were saying.

For you got the impression that they would rather remain silent than offend anyone, by what they preached.

I am all for preachers, having been one myself for many years, and knowing me, I do **not** expect other preachers to be perfect.

Yet I think that anyone who speaks cautiously can ever speak effectively.

It is true that the Church has suffered from some pugnacious men who would rather fight than pray, but she has suffered more from timid preachers who would rather be nice than right.

The latter have done more harm, if for no other reason than that they are many more.

We do **not** have to choose between the two.

It is altogether possible to have love and courage at the same time, to be both true and faithful.

Colossians 4:5-6 [NIV] *“Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

It is always important to be gracious in what we say, preachers and laypeople. Just as we like to be respected we must respect others if we want them to listen to what we say.

What changed my mind about speakers, and eventually allowed me to accept an invitation to become one, was when I heard one man who was a speaker in a “free” church – that is, a church that was **not** part of some denomination.

He preached graciously but with continual reference to the scriptures in the Christian Bible.

He allowed the scriptures to give power to his message as he presented them with great conviction of their validity for day-to-day living.

One term that he constantly used was “*don’t just believe what I say, believe what you read yourself in the Word of God, the Christian Bible.*”

For me this is how we can “*add salt*” and make our words more acceptable.

Every person who proclaims the Word of God should speak with something of the authority of the Word of God itself.

1 Peter 3:15-16 [NIV] *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”*

Always before we speak of spiritual things we must be sure that what we say is well-founded on the Word of God, the Christian Bible, but also that our lives are personally directed by Jesus Christ.

The Christian Bible is the book of supreme love, but it is at the same time altogether frank and downright.

Its Holy Spirit inspired writers [**2 Timothy 3:16**] are never rude or unkind, but are always honest and entirely sincere.

There is also a great sense of urgency in everything they write.

They are deeply concerned with moral decisions.

Protocol is of less interest to them than the glory of God and the welfare of humanity.

Religious artificiality is **not** just a technical thing but a deeply human and spiritual one.

It is a disease of the human spirit and mind and can only be healed by the Great Physician of humanity, Jesus Christ.

Luke 5:31-32 [NIV] *“Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’”*

Jesus Christ physically healed 100s during His earthly ministry, He also healed many people who humbly accepted that they were sinners.

It was only the self-righteous people, like the scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus did **not** heal physically or spiritually.

To escape the snare of artificiality it is necessary that a person enjoys a satisfying personal experience of the Creator God.

They must be totally committed to serving Jesus Christ in complete humility, this gives them the right approach to the Holy Creator God.

They must also be deeply anointed with the Holy Spirit, experiencing the Holy Spirit fulfilling His work in them.

John 16:7-8 [NIV] *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:”*

Convicting us of our sinful nature.

Isaiah 64:6 [NIV] *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”*

Reminding us that our righteousness is unacceptable to the Creator God.

Romans 4:13, 16, 18-24 [NIV] *“It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.” ... “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.” ... “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’ The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”*

That the only righteousness God accepts is the imputed righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10-12 [NIV] *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.”*

And to have always in our mind that we will have to face Jesus Christ as He evaluates how we have conducted our lives.

They must also walk daily with the Holy Spirit. [**Galatians 5:25**]

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

This must also be a continual personal experience.

John 14:26 [NIV] *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

This happens as we spend time meditating on God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

Luke 12:11-12 [NIV] *“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”*

This is an experience that every preacher of God’s Word must have at some time.

John 7:38-39 [NIV] *“‘Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”*

This is an all essential attitude of mind as well as a personal experience.

The love that is generated by the intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit [**Galatians 5:22**] will flow from the preacher in acts of kindness and concern for all human beings.

The preacher must be delivered from the fear of what other human beings may do to them as a result of them preaching God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

Their focus must be on God, **not** on other humans, knowing that God will be responsible for the consequences when His Word is faithfully preached. [**Isaiah 55:10-11**]

Finally the preacher must speak as one who will not have long to speak before they are called to judgement. [**Matthew 12:36**]

James 3:1-2 [NIV] *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”*

This must be in the back of the mind of every preacher to ensure that everything that they say is in complete harmony with the Word of God, the Christian Bible.

Then those who hear such a person speak will know that they are hearing the voice of God’s servant, not just an echo of a human mind.