

Preaching the Gospel

A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.

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The Work of an Evangelist (2)

Keith Sharp, Watertown, NY, USA

God ordained the work of an evangelist (Ephesians 4:11). All aspects of the Lord's will for the church are to accomplish His purpose (Ephesians 3:8-12). Thus, there is aim or purpose in the work of a preacher. An evangelist has six goals he should seek to accomplish in his work.

(1) Toward God: Please

As of any other servant of God, the first obligation of a minister of the gospel is toward God.

For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be the servant of Christ (Galatians 1:10).

A servant seeks to please his master. As Christ is our Master, we must seek to please Him. Of course, we would wish that our work is pleasing to those who hear us, and we should not be unnecessarily offensive, but we must always remember that ultimately we serve God rather than men.

(2) Toward Sinners: Reconcile

It is God's purpose in Christ to reconcile the sinful world to Himself by the preaching of the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Though the apostles are the ambassadors of this passage, preachers are to proclaim this same apostolic doctrine (Galatians 1:8-9). The purpose of preaching to the world is to lead them to the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26) that they might be forgiven (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 3:19) and thus be reconciled to God.

(3) Toward Brethren: Edify

The word of God is able to build Christians up, that they might receive the inheritance of eternal life (Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, preachers should teach brethren with the aim of developing in them "the divine nature," so they might attain unto the heavenly kingdom (2 Peter 1:2-11).

(4) Toward Faith: Guard

In every generation false teachers arise bringing heresies that test who will be faithful to the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:19; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 2:18-19). They will overthrow the faith of

some (2 Timothy 2:16-18). The soldier of Christ must guard the faith against all error, whether from within or without (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 4:3-5).

(5) Toward the Faithful: Teach to Teach

I believe the greatest measure of a preacher's work is the ability of a congregation to prosper spiritually while he is away and after he is gone. A church which cannot effectively function without the evangelist there has not sufficiently matured. They should develop men and women to teach Bible classes, including home Bible studies, men to lead the worship assemblies, and men to preach. Thus, the wise preacher will diligently heed the apostle's admonition:

And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).

The word "men" of this passage is from the Greek term "*anthropos*," which means "without distinction of sex, a human being, whether male or female" (Thayer. 46). Thus, the evangelist should carefully cultivate the knowledge of God's word and the ability to teach that word in faithful men and women, that they might in turn teach others.

(6) Toward the Congregation: Set in Order

But even though an evangelist might equip faithful Christians to teach, lead in worship, and preach, he still has not completed his obligation to the local church. The church is not complete until it has elders to shepherd the flock and oversee the work of the church and deacons to serve the congregation (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:17,28-31; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 6:1-6). Therefore, the faithful minister of the gospel will make it a long term goal to obey Paul's admonition to Titus:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you (Titus 1:5).

No local church is fully set in order until it has qualified elders and deacons appointed and serving in their divinely appointed roles.

Conclusion

As to his personal distinction, a preacher is no more important and to receive no more honor than any other Christian (1 Corinthians 3:5-7; Matthew 20:25-28; 23:5-12). But there is no more vital work than the proclamation of the gospel. It is God's means to save the lost and to build up His church (1 Corinthians 1:21; Acts 20:32). Those who love God's word love the men who proclaim it (Romans 10:15), and those who hate truth hate those who preach it (John 17:14-18). Even as the prophets of old were men of God (1 Kings 13:1), i.e., men whose life's work was the service of God, so evangelists are men of God (1 Timothy 6:11). God has only one Son, and He was a preacher (Luke 4:18).

The Lord's church needs good men who will devote their lives to proclaiming the gospel (Matthew 9:36-38) and good brethren who will hold up their hands in the thickest fight (Philippians 4:10-17). Thus, we will save both the lost and ourselves and glorify God.

Filing Study Material On Your Computer

The preacher has to have a way of filing study material so he can find it when he needs it. He will need a filing cabinet with folders (cardboard boxes will do just as well). He should draw up a list of subjects (Church, Church Worship, Church Organization, etc.) which he will, of course, add to as time goes on. Each folder is given a subject name and the folders are kept in alphabetical order. It might be well to make a list of the subjects on your folders and keep the list in your computer. Articles and clippings go in this file.

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This file is formatted for printing on both sides of the paper, with room to punch holes on the left for inserting in a notebook.

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But most of your filing can be done in your computer. Make subject folders with the same names as your cardboard folders. Then you can file material by scanning articles, or by showing where the material can be found in your library.

In addition I have a folder for each book of the Bible. When there is an article on a verse or verses, I put the chapter and verse as the first part of the file name. For instance, in the folder for 1 Corinthians I have a file named "13v8-13 Willis.com". (I have to use "v" to mean "verse or verses" because Microsoft will not let you use the colon in the file name). When I scanned the pages of Mike Willis' commentary to send to someone else, I simply filed those pages in my computer. Putting the chapter and verse first causes Microsoft to arrange the material in your folder in the order of the chapters and verses.

Gestures and Body Language

When Paul began to speak, he often motioned with his hand (Acts 13:16; 21:40; 26:1). This gesture was understood by his audience to be a symbol that he had something important to say. When we get up to speak we signal to our audience, and we should send a signal that we have something important to speak.

Every preacher has his own way of doing this. One preacher starts for the platform as soon as the last song is ending and when his foot hits the platform he is preaching. He immediately gains the attention of the audience in a way which shows he has something urgent to say. Others stand at the speaker's stand for a moment without speaking or moving. This also gains attention.

How we stand and how we use our hands and bodies while preaching is important. And each preacher has his own characteristics. I was privileged to attend a meeting sermon of a renowned gospel preacher who stood almost perfectly still and used almost no gestures during the entire sermon. His way of using words and his earnestness kept the audience's attention throughout. Another preacher whom I admire has a different personality. He is full of energy, and he marches first to one side of the platform and then the other while he preaches, using his voice in a powerful way. And his manner is very effective. Each preacher should use gestures and movement in the way that is best for him.

However, there are some general rules to which most of us should pay attention. When I first started full-time preaching, one of the elders who was a retired preacher made me stop putting my hands in my pockets while preaching. He felt, and probably rightly so, that standing with hands in pockets was too casual without adding meaning to the sermon. I don't like to see a preacher slouch, or stand with his feet crossed. I think we should stand in a way which shows an intense interest in our subject and in getting our message across to the audience. Slouching, crossing feet, hands in pockets detract from the feeling of urgency which our messages should have.

Nervous mannerisms also detract. Some preachers do the two-step dance—that is, two steps to the right, then two steps to the left, and back again. It is usually distracting. Aimless waving of arms falls into this category, too.

Well-planned gestures can be very effective. When I was preaching in Plainfield, Indiana, Bro. Harry Pickup Sr. was invited to speak one night. Before people arrived for the service he took the microphone which was on a long cable and walked with it into the auditorium as far as the cable would reach. He was planning where he would walk when extending the invitation. As a result he extended the invitation with power.

So preacher it would be well to take stock of how you walk to the speaker's stand, how you get the attention of the audience, how you stand while preaching, and what mannerisms you have picked up along the way. Work so that your posture and gestures focus attention on your lesson and do not detract.

One last word. Don't get too uptight if something unusual happens. One night I was listening to Bro. Billy Murrell when his too-tight collar came undone and his clip-on tie fell down, being held by the tie pin. The audience laughed. Billy couldn't easily get the tie off, so he left it hanging and continued his sermon. At the end, two young women confessed sins. Don't worry unduly about accidents. Just continue preaching and the word will still do its work.

Preachers need this as well as other members:

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7.

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