

Conclusion

In this book, I have argued that many modern evangelicals, in their evangelistic efforts, have departed from Scripture, and in two main aspects.

First, the church itself – the *ekklēsia* – has been re-engineered. Without scriptural warrant, its assemblies have been radically re-designed to attract unbelievers into long-term church attendance.

Secondly, the preaching of the gospel has been adjusted to further this objective.

Throughout these pages, I have been mainly concerned with the latter. It should not be forgotten, however, that both aspects are intimately connected.

As for the first, that any man should have the audacity to lay his fingers on the *ekklēsia* ought to leave us speechless. It is, at least, audacious; in fact, it is a grievous sin. It is the Lord’s *ekklēsia*. It is not ours to play with. I leave it there.

Now for the second point – the heart of what I have wanted to say.

The preachers who are commended in Scripture would never have adjusted their preaching to pander to unbelievers; the very idea is preposterous. Even though they had to face hearers who hated the message they were preaching, what did these preachers do? Did they accommodate their preaching so as not to put their hearers off? Did they omit or gloss over the ‘unpalatable’ bits? The posing of such questions exposes how ludicrous they are. The faithful preachers we read of in Scripture did the exact opposite.¹

The prophets in Israel bear vocal witness to the fact. As does John the Baptist. Nobody who reads Matthew 3; Mark 1:2-8;

¹ See my *To Confront*.

Conclusion

6:16-29; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:15-36; 3:27-36 can be left in any doubt. He certainly confronted his hearers. He never compromised his preaching when addressing sinners.

As for Jesus, Peter and Paul, throughout this work I have supplied abundant evidence of the way they confronted their hearers. Let Paul sum it up:

Am I now seeking the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts (1 Thess. 2:4).²

So, if – as we ought – if we are going to follow apostolic precept and practice in our preaching, we must have the same spirit.

‘But such preaching will only upset people and drive our hearers away, while we are working flat out to attract and hold them!’

² This is not contradicted by his words to the Corinthians: ‘Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings... I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved’ (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 10:33). Paul was certainly prepared to eat gravel that he might preach the gospel, and he certainly bore in mind the people he was addressing, but to suggest that he would tamper with the gospel, or entertain hearers with carnal activities, in order to make himself popular, is highly offensive to the apostle’s memory.

Conclusion

I could not agree more. Indeed, it is my very point. I grant that a biblical ministry will be divisive, that unbelievers will not be able to keep sitting contentedly under it. *But that is precisely what it should be, and what unbelievers should not be able to stomach – unless they are converted!* A dividing, separating ministry is essential.

But, by no stretch of the imagination, can this be said of most evangelical preaching today. And the longer it goes on, the more severe will be the consequences for the churches, the unconverted, *and the preachers.*³

For a start, the longer this accommodation, this pandering, to what unbelievers like – or, at the very least, does not offend them – goes on, the more unconverted sinners will be made – or, at the very least, encouraged – to feel comfortable in the ambience of the church while remaining unconverted. The greater the risk, therefore, that they will end up moral and religious, churchified – but unregenerate – sinners. And that, in the long run, will prove fatal, eternally fatal.

Not only that: the procedure will inflict a devastating blight on the church itself; believers will suffer immense damage by this departure from the New Testament pattern. Above all, the Lord Christ who works by his sovereign Holy Spirit in the gospel will be robbed of his glory.⁴

Not to develop the point – since that would require a volume to itself – but if the present practice of playing down God’s wrath and judgment, and the avoidance of key biblical words in preaching, persists, the penal aspect of the sufferings of Christ will fade into oblivion. Indeed, I already see signs of it. I suspect that a growing number of today’s young believers have little – if any – concept of propitiation, for instance. How can they? Their Bible version almost certainly

³ No preacher should ever forget Ezek. 3:16-21; 33:1-20; 1 Cor. 4:2; Jas. 3:1.

⁴ For a full explanation of these terms, and for my justification for saying such things, see my aforesaid works.

Conclusion

has dropped, not only the word, but the concept from certain crucial passages. Their favourite song book (the biggest source of doctrinal understanding for most believers) probably does not use it, or even speak of the concept (although, I am glad to say that the doctrine is clearly stated in at least one popular modern song).⁵ Their preachers do not want to talk at any length – if at all – about the wrath of God, so why would they preach the penal sufferings of Christ under that wrath in order to appease his Father?⁶ In my

⁵ I am glad – relieved – to have met the following from Collin Hansen, not only for the stout insistence on biblical truth it contains, but for the evidence of the pressure against the doctrine of propitiation, and the reasoning behind that pressure, which I have been criticising: In 2013, ‘a hymn committee [of] the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) wanted to add the song [‘In Christ Alone’] to their new hymnal... But in doing so, the committee requested permission from the song’s writers, Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, to print an altered version of the hymn’s lyrics, changing “Till on that cross as Jesus died/the wrath of God was satisfied” to “Till on that cross as Jesus died/the love of God was magnified”. The songwriters rejected the proposed change, and as a result the hymn committee voted to bar the hymn. “The song has been removed from our contents list, with deep regret over losing its otherwise poignant and powerful witness”, [the] committee chair [said]... The “view that the cross is primarily about God’s need to assuage God’s anger” *would have a negative effect on the hymnal’s ability to form the faith of coming generations*, [she] explained’ (Collin Hansen: ‘Keith Getty on What Makes “In Christ Alone” Accepted and Contested’, emphasis mine).

⁶ See the sermon on the KGCC website by Ray Evans on 1 John 1:1 – 2:2, 5th January 2020. Compare the address (more, alas, of a popular lecture than a sermon) by D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Rom. 3:25. Here is an extract from the précis (slightly edited to remove typos) taken from the Trust which publishes Lloyd-Jones’ sermons: ‘Jesus saves sinners! But how are we redeemed in Christ and why did it have to happen in that way? In Rom. 3:25, Paul says that Christ was a “propitiation” for our sins in order to declare God’s righteousness to us. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains that this word means to appease and avert anger or wrath. The cross of Jesus Christ was needed to appease God’s wrath. Propitiation implies four things: an offence to be taken away, an offended person who

Conclusion

experience, if the text or passage deals with God’s wrath and Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice, the preacher can hardly avoid mentioning these major doctrines, but he does so in a soft, non-offensive way, and moves on as quickly as possible. If there is any truth in what I am saying, the cost will be immense – to sinners, to saints, and to the glory of Christ.⁷

* * *

The day we give up carnal methods of evangelism, give up preaching a sugary ‘gospel’, and proclaim the biblical gospel and begin to wait upon God until he pours out his Spirit to awaken and convert sinners as he did through Peter’s preaching in the house of Cornelius (and through others throughout Acts), cannot dawn soon enough.

needs to be pacified, a guilty person, and a sacrifice of making atonement for the offence. Also in this [address], Dr Lloyd-Jones warns about various translations of the Bible. Many who have translated this specific passage have misplaced the word “propitiation” with “expiation”, giving the verse a completely different context’. In his address, Lloyd-Jones rightly spoke of the word ‘propitiation’ as absolutely crucial; the concept, even more so.

⁷ As an example of propitiation from the Old Testament, take God’s response to Israel’s sin at Peor. Yes, it is old-covenant history, but the underlying principle that God’s wrath against sin and the sinner must be appeased, pacified, propitiated, is clear: ‘Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said to Moses: “Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel”. And Moses said to the judges of Israel: “Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor”’ (Num. 25:3-5). Right from the fall, blood sacrifice had to cover the sinner (Gen. 3:21). As for the old covenant, take the book of Leviticus. The concept is constantly referred to (see Ps. 85:2-3; 103:8-12; Mic. 7:18-19; Heb. 9:5, etc.). In the new covenant, the shadow has given way to the reality: the Father sent his Son to bear, as a substitute, his wrath against his elect, and by the sacrifice of the Son’s blood to pacify, appease, propitiate that wrath (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 9:5; 1 John 2:23; 4:10).

Conclusion

Hosea had spelled out the equivalent word of the LORD for Israel and Judah in the days of the old covenant:

I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.

It is to be hoped that Israel kept to their resolve:

Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up... Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth (Hos. 5:15 – 6:3).

Whether or not it is God's purpose to revive us, I cannot say. But nothing less will do. Zechariah put it succinctly:

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts (Zech 4:6).

If I may accommodate these words:

Not by schemes of man's devising, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

As we have seen, Paul proved it at Corinth:

My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

And at Thessalonica:

Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report

Conclusion

concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:5-10).

And, please note, this was Paul's preaching right from the start of his very short visit to Thessalonica; according to Acts 17:1-10, it would seem that Paul spent only a few days there – 'three sabbaths' (Acts 17:2). He did not fritter his time away warming up the people with a bright, jokey session or two. Not at all! Nor did he waste time and energy delivering a boring lecture or giving out bland notes. Far from it! From the extract just quoted, the apostle's message was clear enough – *but so was his method.*

This was the evangelism of the New Testament, and this is the evangelism for which I appeal.

I appeal to all my readers – and I include myself – to weigh the following solemn words from Paul. They are almost his final word to us. Let them ring in our ears. Let them echo in our hearts. Above all, let them be evident in our churches and in our preaching:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

And, let us never forget, the consequences of preaching anything other than the apostolic gospel are dreadful. I use the word advisedly. The words quoted above are almost the last Paul wrote to us. Here are some of the first:

Conclusion

Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received [from the apostles], let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).⁸

That is how serious it is.

⁸ See also Rom. 16:17.