

"We Persuade Men"

Introduction. From the beginning, people have struggled to accept and obey God's word (Genesis 3:1-6). More than once Moses had to challenge the people to heed God's word (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 12:32). Joshua had to do the same (Joshua 1:7). It continued in the time of the prophets (Amos 8:11; cp. Proverbs 29:18).

We live in a time when people want to change the church by changing the gospel. To the embattled church at Corinth, Paul wrote "we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11). "Persuade" means "to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to bring about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations." For those who try to persuade mankind today, we have to do it with pure motives, just like Paul in 2 Corinthians. These motives will be the subject of investigation in our lesson this morning.

I. To Preach The Word

- A. We have to preach the Bible in all of its purity and simplicity. Paul understood that Christ caused his preaching to be effective (2 Corinthians 2:14-17).
- B. He realized Christ changed people (2 Corinthians 3:1-5). He knew Christ's glorious covenant made his message transformative (2 Corinthians 3:6-18). In his preaching, Christ ever remained the theme of his message (2 Corinthians 4:1-7). Even in the midst of trials, preaching Christ proved rewarding for the apostle (2 Corinthians 4:8-15).
- C. Although the "temporary" world changed, Paul refused to compromise the "eternal" gospel (2 Corinthians 4:16-18; cp. 1 Peter 1:24-25). Unlike so many who feel like they need to change the gospel, Paul knew that people could change only if they heard God's true words (cp. Acts 2:36-38). When people dilute the gospel they drain it of its power to save. For this reason, Paul wanted Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2).

II. To Please God

- A. In Paul's words "we persuade men," he reminded the Corinthians of this pivotal motive (2 Corinthians 4:5). Pleasing God, not men, drove Paul's preaching (Galatians 1:10). Pleasing God and men at the same time can only work if men want to please God.
- B. In speaking of the gospel the apostle cautioned the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:7). The Lord warned that if we do our good deeds (such as teaching the Bible) just to be seen or heard of men, the only reward we will receive will come from men (Matthew 6:1-2).

III. To Plan For Heaven

- A. Paul knew that Heaven was near for all of us (2 Corinthians 5:1). This is what Paul longed to experience (2 Corinthians 5:2-8). This was one of his reasons for preaching (cp. Philippians 1:21-24).
- B. He would not allow anything or anyone to jeopardize this hope, including what he preached. Nothing is more important than going to Heaven (Matthew 5:29; Luke 9:25).
- C. Because we want everyone to go to Heaven and not one person, including ourselves, to be lost, we refuse to change God's word (2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2). It gives light and understanding (Psalm 18:28; 119:130).

IV. To Prepare For Judgment

- A. The Bible says death and judgment remain two appointments all of us will keep (Hebrews 9:27). Our preaching can help people save themselves (Amos 4:12). However, it is not normally considered that those who preach use the word to save themselves as well (1 Timothy 4:16).
- B. Right before Paul said "we persuade men," he mentioned the judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10). He also began 2 Corinthians 5:11 with a mention of the "terror of the Lord." "Terror" means "a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger, evil, etc., or possibly by the illusion of such circumstances." If Paul looked at the day of judgment soberly and feared the Lord (literally, stood in awe of), how much more should we keep our eyes on that day and preach in awe of Him?
- C. Every Christian will be held accountable to God for what we preach or fail to preach, as well as how we preach to people who are lost (cp. Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 4:6).

V. To Possess The Love Of Christ

- A. The love of Christ has to motivate our preaching (2 Corinthians 5:14). It was Paul's love for the Lord as well as the lost that kept him from being discouraged.
- B. In 1 Corinthians 9:22, Paul revealed that he never compromised the truth, but he altered his methods in order to save as many people as possible.
- C. According to the apostle, preaching was a matter of the heart (2 Corinthians 5:12). We might love to preach and teach, but we must first love the Lord and others to be successful. This is the attitude of the Lord (Mark 10:21; John 11:5, 34-36; 13:1, 23, 34). The change that the love of Jesus can bring about in the life of someone should

excite us about preaching (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10).

VI. To Proclaim The Good News

- A. God called Paul to be His ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). An ambassador is one through whom another speaks. They are sent to do what the sovereign would do if he or she were personally present. In a lesser fashion, Christians share this function with the apostles (Romans 10:15).
- B. As ambassadors, Christians have been given "the ministry of reconciliation" now. His word will reconcile the lost (Colossians 1:20-21). As "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Revelation 19:16), it is His message we herald; we do not proclaim our own.

Conclusion. When Paul said that he persuaded men because of the fear of the Lord, he enumerated his motives for preaching in these chapters in 2 Corinthians. It is little wonder that other than the Lord Himself, no other person has had more influence on the world or church than Paul. Agrippa was "almost persuaded" to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). How about you? Please do not receive the grace of God in vain — let today be your "day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).