

The Call to Minister an Effective Word

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When a young Reformed man meditates upon the future labors to which the Lord may be calling him, certainly the ministry of the gospel will have primary consideration. A believing young man understands the importance of the ministerial office and its crucial role in the salvation of lost sinners. Not only has he been taught, but also personally experienced the truth that one cannot hear Christ without a preacher ([Rom. 10:14](#)). Through the preaching of the Word, the Christian young man has heard the powerful call of Jesus Christ in his own heart: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden” ([Matt. 11:28](#)). He has responded to that call of the gospel through faith. And through the preaching of the Word he has come to know the Savior whose voice he heard, and loves him.

Despite the central role of the ministry in their own lives, many never consider preaching as a future vocation, or if they do, quickly abandon the idea. Others reject the possibility only after long and prayerful consideration. Among these there are indeed many valid reasons for not pursuing the noble office of the ministry. For example, the Lord may have already made clear through ones education that the necessary psychological or mental gifts are lacking. However, some reject the ministry based upon erroneous ideas concerning the work of the office itself, particularly in regard to the nature of the Word that the minister is called to preach.

This situation can occur in churches where preaching is still held in high esteem (as in the PRC), especially when a young man contemplates his own natural abilities and compares these with the awesome and powerful effect of the gospel. Through the preaching of the gospel, the church is established and maintained; her members are feed spiritually. Through the preaching of the gospel the dead are raised to life, the weak are strengthened, and the diseased are healed. Through the preaching of the gospel Christ is present in the world and his kingdom is established. From a purely natural perspective it seems quite normal that a Reformed young man might become discouraged from pursuing the ministry after meditating upon such things. Yet he wrongly excuses himself from the ministry who simply feels inadequate preaching such a necessary and powerful Word. The truth is that men do not send forth the Word, define its purpose, or give it its power. Therefore, it is neither in the capability of the preacher, nor is it his obligation, to make the Word preached effective. As in all of salvation, the powerful effect of preaching is the work of God alone.

The Word of God is an effective Word in and of itself. By this we mean that the Word is absolutely able to accomplish the purpose of God whereunto he sends it. This is the teaching of [Isaiah 55:10-13](#) which compares the Word preached to God’s providential Word spoken in nature.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

The purpose of the Word is to bring into what previously existed eternally only in the divine mind of God. The Word accomplishes what God has planned without fail. It is an effective power due to the fact that the Word spoken proceeds from the divine being of God and, consequently, bears his character and perfection. Therefore, this effective power that continually brings into being the eternal will of God, is called a living, creative power.

In the Old Testament, God revealed the living, creative nature of his Word both in the genesis of the heavens and earth, and the birth of his covenant people. Using the enduring refrain, "...and God said...and there was...," the Scripture teaches that the creative effect of God's Word was the formation of all things in the universe. When God created the world out of nothing by speaking, he spoke to nothing. Nothing heard his voice. Nothing was there to respond. Yet nothing became something by this almighty speech. As the Psalmist sang: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouths ([Ps. 33:6](#)).

The effective power of the living Word is also indicated in Scripture by Jehovah's creation of his covenant people. In the promise of God unto Abraham, God spoke with a dynamic power, accomplishing his eternal purpose throughout history with respect to the elect seed of Abraham. As in the creation of the heavens and earth, the Lord called his covenant people, Israel, out of nothing. God spoke his creative promise to an aged and barren couple—called dead by the apostle Paul in [Romans 4:19](#)—and from them sprang forth a mighty nation, a miraculous birth recounted by the prophet Isaiah in several places.

But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine ([Isa. 43:1](#)).

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King ([Isa. 43:15](#)).

Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen ([Isa. 44:2](#)).

This same spoken Word that created the heavens, the earth, and the covenant people of Israel, is the same Word that the church now proclaims, the only difference being that the Word spoken in the New Testament is that of the incarnate and exalted Christ. Christ himself, as the embodiment of that Word, came and spoke with the absolute authority of God. Those who heard him confessed that "he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" ([Mark 1:22](#)). His words were the creative works of power of God by which he performed, not his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him ([John 5:30](#)). Christ spoke and the sick were healed, the lame walked, the deaf heard, the blind saw, sins forgiven, food multiplied, water changed into wine, demons cast out, wind and waves obeyed, and the dead were brought back to life. And in his great work on the cross he accomplished the perfect will of God for our salvation so that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" ([1 Cor. 1:18](#)).

In the New Testament era, God sends forth this powerful, creative Word of the risen and exalted Christ through the instrumentality of the preachers' mouth. Preaching, therefore, is a spiritual event by which God, through lawfully called ministers, speaks to his elect church. It is spiritual because God speaks through the Spirit of Christ unto that same Spirit planted in the

hearts of his elect. It is an event because this Word is both preached and takes effect at a specific place and time. Therefore through the preacher, the living and creative voice of God that is effectively heard in a given church by God's people.

Preaching the Word of God, therefore, is an effective event in which the voice of God goes forth in might, accomplishing that which the divine mind has eternally conceived—even as that same Word went forth creating the heavens, earth, and the nation of Israel. This Word powerfully and eternally changes things. It does not depend upon man for its effect. It creates its own hearers by bringing to life the spiritually dead. Its mighty work is performed in those who have no ears, no eyes, and no life, so that they come to life and respond. Christ himself spoke of this mighty work of the gospel when he declared: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live” ([John 5:25](#)).

The Reformed give expression to this mighty effect of the spoken Word in her creeds. The Belgic Confession speaks of the operation of faith, namely the conversion and sanctification of the believer that arises through hearing the Word.

We believe that this true faith being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God, and *the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man*, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin (Belgic Conf., Art. 24).

The Canons of Dort attribute the whole mighty work of grace in man to the preaching of the Word.

And as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so he preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof (Canons 5.14).

If the powerful effect of preaching is derived from the divine nature of the Word and not the preacher, then no human help is necessary to resurrect the dead, turn darkness into light, and convert sinners into glorified saints. No more than the creation of the world needed human cooperation, so also the Word goes forth in its own power and does its work independent of the minister. This does not deny that ministers are the necessary means to bring the Word. Rather, it emphasizes that the ministerial means itself is powerfully created, enlivened, and directed by the Word of God.

It is not the duty of ministers to convert the sinner or raise the dead, but merely to preach the Word as those who are called by the Word themselves. They may plant and water, but God gives the increase ([I Cor. 3:6](#)). Although the ability to make the Word effective does not lie with the preacher, he can, however, obstruct, interrupt, and create offense by his preaching. Unable to empower the Word, ministers are able to prevent others from hearing the Word—a most grievous offense—through their own ungodliness, preaching something other than the Word living in self-promoting pride, lack of sermon preparation, laziness, poor grammar, or garbled speech.

Young men who prayerfully consider the ministry should not worry about whether the Word they preach will be effective; they should be concerned with whether the Lord has called them to preach the Word. There can be no more effective preacher of the Word than one who has personally experienced the powerful effect of that Word in his own heart. Do you know the Word? Personally yourself? Do you love the Word? Young men who prayerfully consider the ministry should be concerned with whether the Word they would preach is indeed the Word of God. For if it is, then it will be effective. How important, therefore, that one would minister in a

church where the Word of God is loved and confessed—such as In the PRC. Young men of the PRC should consider the blessed vocation of preaching the Word and prayerfully ask themselves whether the powerful Word of God is indeed calling them as the means by which the voice of Christ is heard.

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