Apology — Robert Barclay — 324-328

preaching

extract of Proposition XI § xviii, xix, xx

§ xviii. Both Papists and Protestants use the word "preaching" to mean that one man takes some part or a verse of Scripture and speaks about it for an hour or two. What he says is what he has studied and premeditated in his study and has gathered together from his own inventions or from the writings and observations of others. Once he has memorized that he brings it out and repeats it before the people, like a schoolboy reciting his lesson. The more strong and fertile the man's invention is, and the more industrious he is in collecting these observations from others, then the more he is considered an able and excellent preacher, if he can declaim these things with excellent style of speech and with human eloquence.

In opposition to this we believe that when the saints are meeting together and everyone is gathered to the Gift and Grace of God within, the one who ministers, who is moved to do so by the rising of Grace within, ought to speak what the Spirit of God supplies to him without considering eloquence or verbal wisdom, but only making the Spirit and power known, either by interpreting some part of Scripture if the Spirit, which assists the memory well, leads him to do that, or otherwise with words of exhortation, advice, reproof and instruction, or with an account of some spiritual experience. All that will be in harmony with Scripture, though perhaps not based on any particular chapter or verse as a text.

Let us consider which of these two sorts of preaching is most in harmony with the precepts and practice of Christ and his apostles and the primitive church as recorded in Scripture. Regarding their preaching on a text, we would

not criticize it if it were done by the immediate motion of the Spirit rather than being merely customary and premeditated. As far as I can see there is neither precept nor practice in the New Testament, as part of the worship established there, to do it their way.

Objection: But they say that Christ took the book of Isaiah and read from it, and spoke about it, and that Peter preached from a sentence of the prophet Joel.

Answer: I answer that Christ and Peter only did that when they were directly moved and inspired to do so by the Spirit of God without premeditation, and in that case we approve of it. I suppose our adversaries will not deny this. But that has nothing to do with their usual pre-planned speeches,* without waiting for or expecting the movings or leadings of the Spirit. Neither Christ nor Peter did this as a settled custom or established form which should be constantly practiced by all the ministers of the Church; this is apparent because most of the sermons of Christ and his apostles recorded in Scripture were not done in this way, as can be seen in Christ's sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:1 etc.; Mark 4:1 etc.) and in Paul's preaching to the Athenians and to the Jews, etc. . . .

§ xix. Secondly, considering that they also affirm that it is often practiced by people who are wicked or empty of true grace, this manner of preaching used by the preachers nowadays* cannot edify the church, and cannot beget or nourish true faith; but rather it is destructive to the church, because it is directly contrary to the nature of the Christian and apostolic ministry mentioned in the Scriptures. The apostle preached the gospel "not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be emptied of its power" (I Corinthians 1:17). But this style of preaching is not done by the impulses and motions of God's Spirit but rather by human invention and eloquence, in man's own will and

through his natural and acquired strength* and learning. This is the wisdom of words, which takes away the power of the cross of Christ. The apostle did not speak and preach "with persuasive words of human wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power," so that the faith of those who heard him "would not be based on human wisdom, but on the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:3-5).

But really* this manner of preaching has none of the Spirit and power in it; both the preachers and the hearers confess that they don't expect* such a thing nor do they often feel it. It must necessarily depend on the enticing words of human wisdom, since it is sought by mere human wisdom and is spoken by the mere strength of human eloquence and persuasion. Therefore it is no wonder if the faith of those who hear and depend on such preachers and such preaching is based on human wisdom, and not on the power of God. The apostles declared that they "did not speak in the words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit" (I Corinthians 2:13). But these preachers confess that they are strangers to the Holy Spirit and to his motions and workings and that they do not wait to feel them, and therefore they speak in the words which their own natural wisdom and learning teach them, adding and mixing in words which they steal out of Scripture and other books, and therefore they don't speak what the Holy Spirit teaches. . . .

§ xx. *Objection*: Perhaps some may object in this way: Haven't many been benefited, indeed haven't they been both converted and edified by the ministry of those who have premeditated their preaching? Even more, hasn't the Spirit often joined in with pre-planned preaching by its divine influence, so that it has been powerfully borne in on the souls of the hearers in a beneficial way?

Answer: I answer that I shall not deny this, but even so that does not imply that the thing was good in itself, any more than it implies that Paul was right to make that journey* to Damascus because when Paul was riding there to persecute the saints he was met by Christ and his soul was converted. In the same way, specific actions, or even whole congregations (as we have said before) should not be measured by the acts of God's condescension in times of ignorance.

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XI § xviii, xix (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 324-328; and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 248-251.