
Preaching: The Salvific Voice of God

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Why preach? Spreading the knowledge of Christ and his gospel is one of the fundamental tasks of the church, with the purpose of bringing salvation to lost sinners. This communication can occur in many ways – conversation, bible studies, pamphlets – so why choose to preach? For many, it is just another form of communicating the gospel. Different forms can be said to have their own peculiar strength: conversation is the most relational, pamphlet distribution has the widest reach, and preaching has the power of rhetoric and confrontation. Seen this way, the significance of preaching can be reduced to mere preference and practicality. Choosing to sit under preaching becomes a matter of taste.

The Reformed tradition tears apart this low view of preaching.¹ For them, preaching was God himself speaking. John Calvin writes, “When someone goes up into the pulpit... it is so that God should speak to us by the mouth of men and should favour us with his presence.”² Martin Luther wrote, “Tis a right excellent thing, that every honest pastor’s and preacher’s mouth is Christ’s mouth.”³ Most famously, Henry Bullinger, in the Second Helvetic Confession, states, “The preaching of the word of God is the word of God.”⁴

This understanding springs partly from Paul’s conception of preaching. In his epistles, he lifts preaching as the communication of the gospel *par excellence* because its very nature surpasses mere communication. My aim is to show that, for Paul, the preached gospel *is* not only the very word of God but is God speaking to affect salvation. It is in the sphere of human preaching,

¹ The following quotes were sourced from Jonty Rhodes, *Man of Sorrows, King of Glory: What the Humiliation and Exaltation of Jesus Mean for Us*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 121 – 22.

² John Calvin, *Sermons on 1 Timothy*, trans. Robert White (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2018), 337.

³ Quoted in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 1.196.

⁴ “The Second Helvetic Confession”, chap. 1 in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol. 2, 1552 – 1566, ed. James Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 811.

that three persons of the triune God are found applying the salvation He has accomplished to his elect.

Turning to contemporary scholarship, the theology of preaching has occupied some of the most influential theological minds of the twentieth century.⁵ During the mid-twentieth century, there was a significant upturn of interest in Paul's concept of preaching, triggered primarily by Dodd's study of apostolic preaching, in which he tried to crystallise the *kerygma*, the apostolic message.⁶ As a result, *kerygma* became a technical scholarly term for the essential content of apostolic preaching, with its exact form, nature, and validity as a concept being widely debated.⁷ His work widely influences the scholarship on the subject of preaching. However, Dodd never tried to specifically address *the theology* of Pauline preaching. Following him, several less well-known figures have attempted to address this aspect.⁸ In what we have encountered, Beaudean has produced a detailed and comprehensive treatment of the subject in

⁵ Including the likes of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. For instance, see Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York & Harper Brothers, 1957), and *The Preaching of the Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962); Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

⁶ Paul uses *kerygma* six times, seemingly to encapsulate and summarise the entire scope of his preaching. It is usually translated as 'my message' or 'my preaching'. See Rom 16:25, 1 Cor 1:21, 2:4, 15:14, 2 Tim 4:17, and Titus 1:3. Dodd derives a set of fundamental points that characterise this *kerygma* from the Pauline epistles and Acts that he considered universal in the primitive apostolic preaching, and which can be summarised as "a proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in an eschatological setting from which those facts derive their significance." For Dodd, this *kerygma* was essentially evangelistic (and different to teaching delivered to the church), with very little significant variance from occasion to occasion. Hunter described Dodd's contribution as "one of the most important and positive contributions to New Testament science in our generation," with far-reaching implications beyond a New Testament theology of preaching. C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1936): 7 – 35; Archibald M. Hunter, *The Unity of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952):22.

⁷ For a helpful summary the scholarly scene in the late 1950s, see William Baird, "What is the *kerygma*, a study of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and Galatians 1:11-17," *JBL* 76:3 (1957):181 – 191. This paper helpfully notes how the concept was widely embraced by scholars in America and Britain, but not widely accepted in continental Europe, which largely chose to see the Pauline *kerygma* as more of a dynamic interaction in which God confronts men. Baird sets out to demonstrate that both are valid aspects of its nature. For our present discussion, it is helpful to note, therefore, that Paul's preaching could have had a certain essential *content* (1 Cor 15:3 – 8), while at the same time having an essential *nature* - God's confrontation of individuals.

⁸ For instance, Charles A Chamberlain, "The Preaching of the Apostle Paul, Based on a Study of Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters, with Special Reference to the First and Second Corinthians" (Ph.D Dissertation, Temple University, 1959) and Jeremy Murphy – O'Connor, *Paul on Preaching* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963). For an overview of the scholarship on this topic in the twentieth century. See William Beaudean, *Paul's Theology of Preaching* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 21-27.

the late twentieth century. However, the present author considers the study limited due to his refusal to include the ‘pseudo-Pauline’ letters.⁹

While such a comprehensive treatment is beyond the scope of this work, it is our task to exegete a selection of texts and show that Paul considered his preaching to be God himself speaking to affect salvation. These texts are 1 Thessalonians 1:4 – 5 and 2:13, Romans 10:14 – 17, and 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 21.¹⁰ Where appropriate, we will draw in other references to support our arguments.

A Superficial Overview of Preaching in Paul

Preaching takes a prominent role in Paul’s epistles, with references scattered throughout. Paul uses three verbs all with the same referent (gospel preaching), with each bringing a different flavour. *Euangelizomai* (“preach good news/the gospel”) brings home the goodness of the message. *Kēryssō* (to “preach” or “herald”) emphasises the gravity and authority of the message. *Kantangellō* (to “proclaim”) emphasises the particular force and focus of the message.¹¹ These terms are used more or less interchangeably.

⁹ Beaudean’s PhD contribution is significant since his methodology involves exegeting individual pericopes pertaining to the topic, in dialogue with the wider Pauline corpus. Unfortunately, he limits the scope of his study only to those letters that are undisputedly authored by Paul in contemporary New Testament scholarship. He, therefore, neglects several significant texts, especially those found in the pastoral epistles. Beaudean, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 27-28.

¹⁰ Since our thesis is drawn from the concept level and not from a word level, pinpointing all the occasions that it appears is more difficult. However, in our estimation passages that support the concept that preaching to be the salvific voice of the triune God include Rom 10:13 – 17; 1 Cor 1:18 – 2:5; 1 Cor 15: 1-2, 11; 2 Cor 2:17; 4:1 – 6; 5: 18 – 20; Gal 1:15 – 16; 3:1 – 2; 4:13 – 14; Eph 1:13; 2:17; 5:25; Col 1:23 – 25; 1 Thess 1: 4-5, 8; 2:13 and Titus 1:3.

¹¹ By Paul, *euangelizomai* is used twenty-one times (e.g., see Rom 1:15; 1 Cor 1:17 and Gal 1:8 – 9), *kērrysō* is used nineteen times (e.g., Rom 10:14; 1 Cor 1:23; 2 Cor 4:5 and 1 Thess 2:9) and *kantangellō* seven times (e.g., Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 9:14 and Phil 1:17 – 18). For an excellent overview of the nuance and use of these terms, from which we have drawn our definitions, see John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 53 – 61.

It is often synonymous with Paul's (or another's) missionary activity, demonstrating its central importance in his mind.¹² He describes himself as a preacher¹³, steward¹⁴ and ambassador¹⁵ to whom had been entrusted the gospel for the purpose of proclamation.¹⁶ Christ and his redemptive work were his consistent and sole theme.¹⁷ However, in general, the lengthiest treatments arise when Paul reminds his audience of the nature of his preaching to them, thereby offering a defence of his own ministry and simultaneously addressing the particular issues that have arisen since.¹⁸ This latter group often provides the greatest insight into Paul's understanding of preaching.

For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction...¹⁹
(1 Thessalonians 1:4 -5)

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

1 Thessalonians was one of Paul's earliest letters, probably written shortly after his second missionary journey.²⁰ After giving thanks for the way their faith has grown (1 Thess 1:2 – 10), he proceeds to defend his prior ministry among them (1 Thess 2:1 – 12),²¹ before returning to

¹² Romans 1:14 – 15; 15:18; 1 Cor 4:7; 9:16; 2 Cor 1:19; 2:12; 8:18; 10:16; Gal 1:23; Eph 3:8; 6:19; Phil 1:14 – 18; Col 1:23; 4:3 – 4; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11 and Titus 1:3.

¹³ 1 Tim 2:7 and 2 Tim 1:11.

¹⁴ 1 Cor 4:1.

¹⁵ 2 Cor 5:20

¹⁶ 1 Cor 1:17; 2 Cor 5:18 – 18; Gal 1:15 – 16; Col 1:23, 25 and 1 Thess 2:4.

¹⁷ Rom 10:13; 1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; 15:3 – 5; 2 Cor 1:19; 2:12; 11:4; Phil 1:14 -18; Col 1:28 and 2 Tim 2:8 – 9.

¹⁸ See, for instance, 1 Cor 1:17 – 2:5; 15:1 – 14; 2 Cor 4:1 – 6; 5:18-20; 11: 4 – 7; Gal 1:11 – 16; 3:1 – 2; 4:13; Eph 2:17; 1 Thess 1:4 – 5; 2:9 – 13; 2 Thess 2:15; 2 Tim 1:13 – 14 and 2: 8 – 9.

¹⁹ Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

²⁰ For an overview of different views on dating see F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982): xxiv – xxv. It is generally agreed that Paul was expelled from Thessalonica, and from Athens sent Timothy to gather a report of the Thessalonian church (1 Thess 3:1 – 6). The letter that Timothy brought back to Paul, who was now in Corinth, is the occasion for Paul writing.

²¹ Some have argued that the defence in 1 Thessalonians 2:1 -12, is a 'facile' defence. Paul is not really responding to any opponents, or character assassination, but is rather using a rhetorical method to set himself

thanksgiving (1 Thess 2:13 – 16). The central defence section centres on his preaching, and supporting conduct, matched by the thanksgiving section focusing on the initial (and ongoing) effect of the preached gospel (1 Thess 1:4 – 5 and 2:13). It is clear then that Paul’s method of appeal to the Thessalonians is to bring before them their experience of *the preaching* of his gospel.²² In so doing, he reveals that although the preached gospel appears merely human, it is in fact God speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit to save his elect.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:4, Paul introduces his preaching in the third participial clause of the pericope, as a reason for his thanksgiving.²³ After ‘mentioning’ and ‘remembering’ (the faith-love-hope tried, 1 Thess 1:3), he adds that the thanksgiving springs from *knowing* that God has elected them (1 Thess 1:4). The certainty of the latter is expressed with his warm description of them as “brothers, having been loved by God”.²⁴

The following verse begins *hoti*, which could either act epexegetically, introducing the occasion of their election, or be causal, giving the reason for Paul’s confidence that they are elect.²⁵ While we favour the former view as a more natural reading in context, the choice is not

as an example to follow. While there may be an element of imitation here (given the context of 1 Thess 1:6 and 2:14), Cara opposes this view, seeing a real defence as a usual part of Pauline writing, and natural in light of the opposition to Paul implicit in Acts 17:1 – 9. 1 Thessalonians 2:14 also shows that the church has been suffering opposition from Gentiles. See Robert Cara, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, EP Study Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: EP Books, 2009), 47 – 49.

²² I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 238 – 239.

²³ Malherbe sees this third clause as the primary ground for Paul’s thanksgiving. Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB, (New York, Ny: Doubleday, 2000), 109.

²⁴ A perfect passive participle is an unusual construction, probably indicating that the love of God that began in the past is continuing on in the present. Cara, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 37.

²⁵ For the view that *hoti* describes the occasion of their election, see Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 110. Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, BNTC (New York, NY: Harper Row, 1972), 73. More scholars take the the view that it refers to the basis of Paul’s confidence. See Richard C. Blight, *An exegetical summary of 1&2 Thessalonians*, second ed., (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 20. For a representative example see, Charles A. Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, NICTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 78.

significant, since the latter must be rooted in the former. Either way, their election is inseparably related to his preaching: *hoti to euaggelion hēmōn egēnēthē eis hymas*.²⁶

Paul does not say that this gospel was received or heard by them, but rather that the gospel *egēnēthē eis hymas*: that is ‘happened among them’.²⁷ This implies that the coming of the gospel was in more than content, but rather, in Paul’s mind, an event took place – the gospel happened.²⁸ The following positive antithesis confirms this: it came not in word only (i.e. content), but *kai en dynamei kai en pneumati hagiō kai en plērophoria pollē*.²⁹ While this could be referring to miraculous signs, the antithesis stresses the supernatural nature of his *human* preaching,³⁰ evidenced in its effect on the Thessalonians (cf 1 Thess 1:6ff).³¹ Their election is certain because of the way Paul’s preaching affected them. The three terms (power, Holy Spirit and conviction) designate the means by which the preached gospel works on people to save them

The first two terms, should be viewed together (cf. Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4), and demonstrate a divine energy in Paul’s preaching.³² In contrast, the third term, *plērophari pollēi* refers to the

²⁶ All Greek transliterations in this paper are from Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

²⁷ The Greek verb *ginomai* has a vast semantic range with numerous nuances, but at its core it relates to the concept of “being and manner of being.” It has a more dynamic/active nature than the “static term *eimi*,” and in many instances has the sense of ‘coming into being’. In the context, it seems most likely that the term is being used to mean “to occur as a process”, hence the gospel ‘happened’. BDAG, “*γίνομαι*”, in *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196 – 197.

²⁸ Beaudean, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 36. Boring, *I & II Thessalonians*, 64.

²⁹ Some argue that since the Holy Spirit is anarthrous the person of the Holy Spirit is not in view. See Beaudean, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 38. However, the majority of times Paul uses this term, it is anarthrous, with clear instances that the person of the Holy Spirit in mind. See Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 14.

³⁰ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 112; Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 20).

³¹ Looking back, the faith-love-hope tried can be seen as an outworking and result of this power-Spirit-conviction motif. Beaudean, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 34. In Paul’s thanksgiving section in Colossians 1:3 – 8, we find the same faith-love-hope triad, and there it is *rooted* in coming from the preached gospel (see Col 1:5).

³² Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 112.

certain belief that the message is true.³³ The subject of the conviction could be Paul (the manner in which he preached) or the Thessalonians (the belief aroused by the preaching).³⁴ Paul is most likely referring to himself.³⁵ However, that *his* conviction became *their* conviction is evident in 1:6, as they become imitators of Paul.³⁶ Overall, we see that Paul's preaching came in the Spirit's power to those he had elected to salvation (cf 1 Cor 2:4, Eph 1:13), so as to establish a conviction that lead to conversion (see 1 Thess 1:9 – 10).

Moving forwards, we note that Paul began by terming the content of his preaching as 'our gospel'. By terming it as 'our' gospel, he does not mean it as the gospel of his invention, but rather the particular gospel, entrusted to him by God (1 Thess 2:4), which he preached, as opposed to other 'good news' messages that might have been circulating (cf Gal 1:9; 2 Cor 11:4).

Moving through the letter, the term used changes. The preaching that sounds forth from the Thessalonians (in imitation of *his* preaching, 1 Thess 1:6) was 'the word of the Lord' (1 Thess 1:8, cf 2 Thess 3:1). This is a reminiscent expression of the OT (e.g. Jer 1:4; Ezek 3:16) where the prophet's preaching was God speaking, and implies the same here.³⁷ Later, what he

³³ Beaudean, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 38. Some manuscripts lack the proposition *en* before the term, which, if true to the original, further strengthens its distinction from the first two. See Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 21.

³⁴ For the view that Paul was considering the manner of his preaching, see Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 112; C.G. Findlay, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 23 – 24 and G. K. Beale, *1 – 2 Thessalonians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 54. For the opposing view see F.F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 14.

³⁵ That Paul has himself in mind seems most likely since 'full conviction' 1) parallels the previous two terms as descriptive of his preaching, 2) explains his reference to the kinds of men 'they proved to be',³⁵ (presumably ones of genuine conviction!) and 3) dovetails with 1 Thess 2:2, which refers to Paul's 'boldness' in preaching. See Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 112 and Ray C Ortlund, "Power in Preaching: Desire (1 Corinthians 2:1 – 5). Part 1 of 3." *Them* 34:2 (2009), 207.

³⁶ In passing, we therefore note that the *man preaching* is part of the means God uses to work his salvation through preaching. His gospel is not dropped out of the sky but comes through the means of a man convicted of its truth. This conviction is no doubt a result of the Spirit's powerful working in him, that then emanates out from him to others.

³⁷ The construction is most likely a subjective genitive (a word *from* the Lord), when we also consider the repetition of the phrase in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where the phrase is more unambiguous. This latter verse also demonstrates Paul's Christological twist; by Lord he means Christ. Christ himself is speaking! Cara, *1 & 2*

proclaimed becomes ‘the gospel of God’ (1 Thess 2:2, 9) – the gospel authored by God.³⁸ It is evident that, for Paul, the *preached* gospel and the word of God are synonymous with one another (cf. 2 Cor 4:1 – 2; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5).

This is conclusively demonstrated in 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Paul once more gives thanks for their response to his preaching: *logon akoēs par' hēmōn tou theou*, woodenly translated ‘a word-of-hearing-from-us-of-God’. This double genitive construction implies a double source for the heard word.³⁹ The audible source was Paul, but the powerful and true source was God. As Calvin puts it, it means “the word of God preached by man.”⁴⁰

This positive contrast is continued and proved by the next clause. The Thessalonians accepted what they heard not as *logon anthrōpōn*, but rather what it really was, *logon theou* (note the similarity in construction to 1:5). The parallelism with *logon anthrōpōn*, which is unambiguously a subjective genitive, demonstrates that God was the author and not the content of the word in *logon theou*.⁴¹ Preaching, therefore, while conveyed through men and bearing the marks of man’s voice, is not *merely* from man, but, in reality, from God. As Bornkham notes, this is a truly extraordinary claim, since Paul would have preached to them in a wretched condition, having been driven out of Philippi, and in competition with other outwardly impressive orators.⁴² However, those who welcome (‘accept/receive’) the message have moved past a ‘weak’ surface appearance, having recognised the very voice of God ringing in their ears. They have perceived its “objective, ontological reality.”⁴³ This acceptance has been

Thessalonians, 41 – 42. See also Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 17. For an objective genitive (a word *about* the Lord) see Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 117.

³⁸ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 14. According to Malherbe, this is a genitive of origin. Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 136.

³⁹ Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 166.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, Calvin’s Commentaries, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 347.

⁴¹ Cara, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 65. Cara notes here that ‘all commentators agree’ that these two terms are both subjective genitives. We rest our case.

⁴² Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1969), 6 – 8.

⁴³ Boring, *I & II Thessalonians*, 96.

brought about by the word of God itself. In the final clause, this preached word of God is said to be ‘at work in’ the Thessalonians. God acts through it.⁴⁴ It has its own inherent dynamic power, which works to bring about its original acceptance and continues onwards bearing fruit.⁴⁵

The first two chapters of 1 Corinthians expose a similar theme; even though Paul came in ‘weakness and in fear and trembling’ (1 Cor 2:3) and his preaching seemed like foolishness and weakness (1 Cor 1:23), it came ‘in demonstrations of the Spirit and of power’ (1 Cor 2:4, cf 1 Thess 1:5), so that the Corinthians who heard recognised in preaching, God’s wisdom and believed. Hence, and crucially it ‘pleased God through the folly of what we *preach to save* those who believe’ (1 Cor 1:21).

1 Thessalonians 1:8 (see above) suggests that this is true for all preaching, not just Paul’s – the message and not the messenger is given divine undertones. Paul’s letter to Titus underlines this. Titus 1:3 states that God ‘manifested his word *in* preaching’⁴⁶ (explicitly Paul’s). Commonly, Paul’s greetings contain content pertinent to the purpose of the letter. In Titus, one of his concerns is to press home the need to continue preaching what he preached (Titus 1:9; 2:1).⁴⁷ The implication is clear: just as God’s word has been manifested in Paul’s preaching, it continues to be manifested in those who imitate Paul, in preaching what he preached. Paul’s preaching is *foundational* but can be reproduced; preaching that imitates him bears the same nature.

⁴⁴ The term *energeitai* is often used by Paul to speak about the activity of God in the world (cf Matt 14:2; Mark 6:14; 1 Cor 12:6, 11; Gal 2:8; 3:5; Eph 1:11, 20; 3:20; Phil 2:13; Col 1:29). See Green, *Thessalonians*, 140.

⁴⁵ See Beaudean, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 55. Note that *energeitai* appears in the present tense. The word original received is having a present effect in their lives.

⁴⁶ *En kērygmati* has the meaning of in/through/by preaching. J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Titus & Philemon*, 2nd ed. 2008 (Dallas Tx, SIL International, 1989), 18. Note the lack of a preposition before *logon autou*. God isn’t manifesting something in his word, but rather manifesting his word in preaching.

⁴⁷ See William B. Barclay, “*Titus*,” in *A Biblical – Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realised*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 397.

In sum, 1 Thessalonians 1 – 2 is heavy with Paul’s understanding that his gospel preaching is an occasion through which God himself speaks. This occurs in the power of the Spirit, establishing conviction and acceptance, and thereby gathering his elect to salvation.

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in [ZL] him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?... So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:14 – 15a, 17)

Romans 10:14 – 17 is rich in the theological conception of preaching.⁴⁸ Two points are pertinent for our study; that faith comes through hearing and that Christ himself is being heard in the preached gospel. Paul has just contrasted the righteousness based on obeying the law with the righteousness that comes through faith (Rom 10:5 – 13), with his conclusion that salvation is a matter of faith for *everyone* (Rom 10:4, 13).⁴⁹ This explains why the Gentiles have attained righteousness through faith, but Israel hasn’t since they pursued righteousness as based on works (see Rom 9:32). The next verses address *how* that faith is brought into existence with this answer: preaching.⁵⁰

Fides ex auditu (faith comes from hearing) is a well-known Reformation concept.⁵¹ Romans 10:14 – 15 sets out the necessary conditions for someone to call upon God. It cannot spring out of nothing. Calling on God requires faith, faith requires hearing, hearing requires a preacher, and the existence of a preacher requires him being sent (implicitly by God – Rom 10:15). The

⁴⁸Indeed, the whole book is pregnant with a high view of preaching. Romans lays out Paul’s most systematic outline of the gospel and its power, which its famous programmatic verses (Rom 1:16 – 17) encapsulate. However, these verses (and following) are really the foundational explanation for Paul’s desire to *preach* the gospel to the Romans (v15). This is something he is not ashamed to do, because in his gospel preaching, ‘the power of God for salvation’ springs forth. This would certainly be a passage we would have considered in more depth, if we had infinite time and paper length. See Beaudean, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 174 – 175.

⁴⁹See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 644 – 645.

⁵⁰By extension, Paul’s argument in Romans 10:14 – 21 is to demonstrate why Israel has no excuse for their unbelief, since they had all the necessary ingredients for faith, but lacked faith itself (v16). This point doesn’t concern us here. The subject of the verses is the Jews, but the concept can be applied universally.

⁵¹Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Biblical Period*, vol 1. Of *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 182 – 83.

effective *cause* of a person's faith is God, the *medium* is preaching. "Preaching is the instrument God uses to produce faith in the human heart."⁵² This finds its summary in v17, 'faith comes from(/out of) hearing'. *Akoē* here has been interpreted by some to mean 'a report' since it parallels the quotation in Isaiah, where it has that meaning, but it is more likely to be active in meaning here.⁵³ Salvation is worked by God, as an individual *hears* the gospel preached.

Cooper has said, "the organ by which faith first comes into being, is not the intellect, nor the will, nor even the heart, but the ear."⁵⁴ But by 'hearing', more than audibly receiving the message is meant – Paul explicitly says that some can hear and *not* believe (Rom 10:16). Hearing is also an action of a heart; your ear can hear, but your heart is deaf to God. And yet the latter cannot exist without the former.⁵⁵ 'True' hearing, therefore, is actually a double hearing that corresponds to a dualistic composition of an individual – an external, physical hearing followed by an internal, spiritual hearing.⁵⁶ Preaching is indispensable since "whatever happens in the heart of the believer is somehow preceded by what happens in the ear."⁵⁷ And yet, since man by nature has no propensity to hear God (Rom 3:10 – 11), preaching that brings faith must be accompanied by the Spirit and power (see our discussion on 1 Thess 1:5 above). God himself must be at work in him, arousing faith through what is heard.

⁵² Old, *The Biblical Period*, 182.

⁵³ Most commentaries agree that *akoēs* in v16, means 'report', and infer that the meaning in v17 is similar and can be translated 'that which is heard'. However, an active meaning is defended by its close association to *akouō* in v14 and 18, and it's contrast to *hrēma*, which certainly refers to a concrete message. See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 665, n. 27. See also, C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 537 and James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9 – 16*, WBC vol.38 (Dallas, TX: Word Inc., 1988), 623. For the interpretation that *akoēs* means 'the message' of preaching, see Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. An die Römer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 294 – 95.

⁵⁴ Adam G Cooper, "Faith comes by hearing: A Pauline motif in theological tradition," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 44:2 (2010): 105.

⁵⁵ Cooper, "Faith comes by hearing," 106.

⁵⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 665 – 66, n.27.

⁵⁷ Cooper, "Faith comes by hearing," 107.

In the pericope, we also find support for the conception that in the preached word, Christ himself comes to a person.⁵⁸ The first rhetorical question asks how they can call *eis hov ouk episteusan*, literally, ‘in him they have not believed’. Since the verb *epikeleō* does not usually need a preposition (see Rom 10:12, 13), *eis* grammatically goes with *episteusan* and brings forth the concept of ‘faith in Christ/him’ found elsewhere in the NT.⁵⁹ This construction contrasts with the second question, which asks how they can believe *hou ouk ēkousan*. Many translations insert the preposition ‘of’ (e.g. ESV, NIV, KJV), but the Greek text lacks one. Rather, Paul uses the genitive of the relative pronoun (*hou*), which the verb *akoueō* normally takes to denote *a person* who is being heard.⁶⁰ Thus, it should be translated: *how are they to believe him of whom they have not heard?* This could either be the preacher⁶¹ or Christ himself.⁶² However, it is not the preacher being made known and believed in, but rather Christ through his gospel, so the latter is preferable. Murray is right in saying, “the implication is that Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation.”⁶³

Finally, Paul says the hearing that arouses faith, comes through the *hrēmatos Christou* (Rom 10:17). This is a somewhat unique construction rendered by most translations as ‘the word of

⁵⁸ If the idea of Christ’s presence in preaching was *only* supported here in Romans, then we would be unable to place much weight upon it. However, the concept is strongly supported in Ephesians 2:17: ‘He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near’. Paul has just expounded how Christ *himself* has reconciled Jews and Gentiles together to God (Eph 2: 14 – 16), by breaking down ethnicity barriers. And so explicitly, the one preaching to the Ephesians drawing them into one church, was Christ. It is impossible to avoid the obvious fact that Christ never went to Ephesus, let alone preached there. Therefore, in the preaching they heard *from Paul*, Christ preached (cf Gal 4:13). Notably, he preached ‘peace’; a peace that flows from union with him (Eph 2:15) and brings reconciliation. In Ephesians, we find a counterpart to Romans 10:14: from a human perspective, we hear Christ and believe, and from Christ’s perspective, he preaches, and his word saves (/brings peace). For a similar defence see Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 653 – 54. See also 2 Cor 2:17; 5:20 (see below) and Gal 4:13.

⁵⁹ See Dunn, *Romans 9 – 16*, 620 and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol 2., NICNT, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 58 n.16.

⁶⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 662, ft 11. Translating the construction as ‘about whom they have never heard’, is not grammatically feasible, since using *akoueō* with the simple genitive to mean hearing *about* someone (rather than from them) is extremely unusual. See Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2., 534. However, Dunn argues that Paul was not making a theological point, but rather the unusual grammar was due to the syntactical constructions of the parallel questions. Dunn, *Romans 9 – 16*, 620.

⁶¹ Käsemann, *Romans*, 294.

⁶² Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2., 534.

⁶³ Murray, *Romans*, 58.

Christ'. The construction is most likely reflecting language in v7 – 8 (where 'hrēma' is also used). Some, therefore, make this an objective genitive reflecting 'word of faith': the word that proclaims Christ (i.e., a synonym for the gospel).⁶⁴ However, considering our exegesis of Romans 10:14, it most likely means a word spoken by Christ (a subjective genitive), supporting the concept of Christ's presence in preaching.⁶⁵ Supporting this 1) it appears that Paul has deliberately changed 'faith' (v8) to 'Christ',⁶⁶ 2) in Ephesians 5:26 Christ actively works through the *hrēma* (cf Hebrews 1:3), and 3) when *hrēma theou* is used (Eph 6:17; Heb 6:5; 11:3) it is synonymous for God's self-revelation in the Scriptures.

In sum, preaching brings an individual into a personal encounter with Christ, generating faith – a faith that saves (Rom 10:9). Indeed, for a Christian's faith to flourish, he needs to be regularly hearing God's word preached (as opposed to discussing or merely reading it, as important as that is). This is why many theological traditions have insisted that 'a primacy [is] accorded to the public and aural encounter with God's word, over the private and visual encounter.'⁶⁷

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18 – 20)

The first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians contain an extended defence of not only the authority of Paul's ministry but its surpassing greatness. One of the high points is 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 21. In this passage, is the concept of *reconciliation* (*katallassō*), which, according to Ridderbos,

⁶⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 666. For the view that this is Christ's self-revelation, see Käsemann, *Romans*, 295

⁶⁵ For this interpretation see Käsemann, *Romans*, 295; Murray, *Romans*, 61 and Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2., 537.

⁶⁶ We concede that the change *could* have been made because faith was mentioned in the first verse, thereby confusing the reader if it was mentioned again.

⁶⁷ Cooper, "Faith comes by hearing," 110 - 111. Cooper cites both Martin Luther and Meister Eckhart in support. He also points out that in the early church, it was a common practice to whisper/read outloud Scripture to oneself, so that even in private mediations, Scripture comes through the ear.

“originates from the social-societal sphere (cf. 1 Cor 7:11) and speaks in general of the restoration of the right relationship between two parties”.⁶⁸ Stott states that “while justification belongs to the lawcourts, reconciliation belongs to the drawing room”.⁶⁹ Reconciliation is personal and rational in nature. It is also monergistic. God is the “Author and Initiator” of this reconciliation.⁷⁰ God is the sole and efficient cause (*ek tou theou*) – and Christ is the means (*dia Christou*, 2 Cor 5:18).⁷¹ God has removed the barrier between himself and us,⁷² through the redemptive work of Christ – they are the reconciling party, not us.⁷³ Indeed, in Paul’s use of *katallassō*, God is always the actor.⁷⁴ Moreover, this reconciliation is eschatological in nature, “constituting the foundation of the new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).⁷⁵ In sum, it is a holistic expression of the salvific action of the triune God to restore right relationship with his creatures.

Although reconciliation is the action of the triune God through Christ’s death, existentially it occurs through human agency. To Paul and his fellow ministers were given ‘the ministry of reconciliation’.⁷⁶ The claim is astounding. God has ordained to work out his eschatological reconciliation *through* ministers – and specifically their preaching. Paralleling this verse, God

⁶⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 182.

⁶⁹ John Stott, “Reconciliation: (An exposition of 2 Corinthians v.18 -21),” *Churchman* 68:2 (1954), 79.

⁷⁰ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 182.

⁷¹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 301, ft 6.

⁷² Marshall notes that “Whereas in popular usage ‘to reconcile Y to oneself’ means ‘to remove Y’s grounds for being offended,’ Paul uses the phrase to mean ‘to remove Y’s offence’.” Hence, the use here, where God has removed the offense of our sin. I. H. Marshall, “The Meaning of Reconciliation,” in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, ed. R.A Guelich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 130.

⁷³ Charles Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Geneva, repr. 1978, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1859), 518.

⁷⁴ Khobnya Svetlana, “Reconciliation Must Prevail: A Fresh Look at 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 6:2,” *EurJTh* 25:2 (2016): 275.

⁷⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 183.

⁷⁶ Throughout this section of 2 Corinthians, the use of the first person plural pronoun frequently shifts between referring to Christians in general (Paul, his fellow ministers *and* the Corinthians), to referring to just him and his fellow workers. In our opinion, a shift from the former to the latter occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:18, as it makes the best conceptual sense. 2 Corinthians 5:20 clearly shows the latter in effect – since there Paul and his fellow ministers are addressing the Corinthian church. Alfred Plummer, *Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC, repr. 1985 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915), 182. Another widely held position is that both pronouns in 5:18 refer to Christians in general. See V.P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 317.

has entrusted to them *tov logon tēs katallagēs* (2 Cor 5:19).⁷⁷ The ministry of reconciliation is executed through means of the Word.⁷⁸ As Calvin concludes, “The duty of ministers is to apply to us the fruit of Christ’s death” and that “application consists entirely of the preaching of the Gospel”.⁷⁹ Having accomplished reconciliation in Christ, God communicates and applies it to individuals, through the apostles’ preaching. As Schnelle says, “the reconciling act of the cross makes possible the proclamation of the message of reconciliation, and reconciliation with God takes place together with this proclamation....*the saving event is present in the word.*”⁸⁰

‘Therefore’, Paul describes him and his fellow ministers as *hyper Christou... presbeuomen* (2 Cor 5:20, cf Eph 6:20). The pronoun *hyper*, donates acting ‘on behalf of’ (for both appearances in the verse), and carries the sense of representation (given the later context of ambassadors), rather than acting in an independent third-party manner, like an advocator.⁸¹ An ambassador (*presbeuomen*) represents one party to another, typically a King to his subjects.⁸² He acts with the authority of another – to reject the sent one is to reject the sender.⁸³ “There is a real sense in which the voice of the ambassador may be said to be the voice of the sovereign he represents.”⁸⁴ Through the preacher, therefore, Christ is confronting individuals.

However, for Paul, the reference to ambassadors is not merely illustrative but reflects reality, for he proceeds to say *hōs tou theou parakalountos di' hēmōn* (2 Cor 5:20). The use of *hōs* with

⁷⁷ “The similarity of the form of the words and the use of the aorist or completed action verb suggest a close relationship between the two”. Barnett, *The Second Epistle*, 308. It can hardly be doubted that this refers to their preaching (cf 2 Cor 2:12; 1 Cor 1:18).

⁷⁸ Khobyna, “Reconciliation Must Prevail,” 278.

⁷⁹ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Calvin’s Commentaries, trans. T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 79.

⁸⁰ Italics his. Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 257.

⁸¹ Paul acts in Christ’s stead, not in Christ’s interest. Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 522. See also, Philip Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 210. For the contrary view, that Paul is acting in Christ’s interest, see Plummer, *Second Epistle*, 185.

⁸² John Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 42 – 43. See also Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 522.

⁸³ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 308.

⁸⁴ Hughes, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 210.

a genitive absolute participle construction gives a subjective view that may be either supposition ('as though', i.e. not reality) or fact.⁸⁵ Given the context here, it should be taken as fact. Paul's conviction is that God is making his appeal through his preaching. He is not merely speaking *for* God, but God himself is speaking through him. This is fitting, considering the relational nature of reconciliation.

In the last clause of the verse, Paul gives expression to this! He urges them⁸⁶ to be reconciled to God. The combination of the imperative and passive in *katallassō* is striking: reconciliation is an action only performable by God, and yet Paul commands the Corinthians to have it done to them!⁸⁷ Notably, when we are the subject of the verb *katallassō*, the passive voice is used, but when God is the subject, the active voice is.⁸⁸ We have done nothing, God has done everything. He comes and, through Paul, entreats us to receive.⁸⁹ The gospel proclaims that God has made himself favourable and willing to receive sinners who come to him. Hence, we see reconciliation is a two-sided action: God has reconciled us to himself, and then sinners are urged to respond.⁹⁰ A proclamation of what God has done leads to an appeal to respond.⁹¹ In addressing this to the Corinthians, who have already professed faith, we are reminded that the preaching of reconciliation is not just to bring conversion, but to sustain the continual ongoing exercise of daily repentance and restored relationship with God. In preaching, we find God calling us back to himself.

⁸⁵ Khobyna, "Reconciliation Must Prevail," 277. See also Plummer, *II Corinthians*, 185. See also Barnett, *The Second Epistle*, 310, ft 45 and Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle*, 210.

⁸⁶ The verb *deistheai* introduces earnest and tender exhortation. Barnett, *The Second Epistle*, 311, n.48.

⁸⁷ Khobyna, "Reconciliation Must Prevail," 278.

⁸⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 194, 199.

⁸⁹ This is one of the clearest places where we find support for preaching being 'good news' (what God has done!) and not 'Good advice' (do this). "It is not the main part of his vocation to tell men to make their peace with God, but to tell them that God has made peace with the world". James Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The Expositor's Bible (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1894), 212.

⁹⁰ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 294 – 95.

⁹¹ Proclamation and appeal always belong together in gospel preaching. See John Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, 55 – 58.

Conclusion

Murphy O'Conner, writes concerning an individual's contact with the saving Christ, that "the initial contact is effected by preaching, which is the bridge between the objective and subjective orders of redemption".⁹² In the redemptive work of Christ, he contends that preaching is as essential as Christ's death itself.⁹³

Our study has demonstrated this to be true. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul's human preaching is, in reality, God speaking in the power of his Spirit to convert its hearers. In Romans, Christ comes in preaching and speaks to a man so that as he hears, his heart responds by faith. In Corinthians, we saw that God's work of reconciliation, accomplished in Christ at the cross, occurs through preaching in the present moment. Indeed all three persons of the Godhead are at work: the Father (2 Cor 5:18), the Son (Romans 10:14) and the Spirit (1 Thess 1:5). Understanding this, the preacher in the pulpit discovers himself in one of the most exalted places on earth. His need for faithfulness, the necessity of prayer and an awareness of his weakness press in on him. For through him, in the small corner of the world, in a slice of history, God is bringing to pass his salvation planned from eternity past. Equally, what eagerness, sombreness and joy must arise in those sitting under the preached gospel, when they recognise this to be true.

Soli Deo Gloria

⁹² Jerome Murphy-O'Conner, *Paul on Preaching*, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1964, 3.

⁹³ Murphy-O'Conner, *Paul on Preaching*, 21.