**Preaching as a Means of Grace**

The first and chief means of grace is the preaching of the Word.

And here it should be emphasized at once that the Word of God must be reac e . Then, and then only, as the Word that is preached it is a means of grace. Many there are who either deny or completely ignore this truth, and belittle the importance of preaching. They simply speak of the Word —Bavinc or even of in thehis Bible as the means of grace. So even Dr.

"Roeping en Wedergeboorte", pp. I l l, 112, writes (we trans-

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"But out of this affinity of the covenant of grace and the gospel, it follows in the second place that grace is not dependent, as presented by the Romish Church, on the institute of the church or priest and sacrament. The relation between Scripture and the Church is defined by the Protestants in an entirely different way than by the Roman Catholics. According to the latter, the Church precedes the Scriptures. The Church is not built on Holy Scripture, but Scripture proceeded out of the Church. The Church, therefore, for her being in existence does not need the Scripture; but the Scriptures for theiY origin' collection, preservation, and explanation are in need of the Church. The Reformation, however, reversed this relati0n• She placed the Church on the foundation of the Scriptures and put the latter far above the Church. Not the Church, but the Scriptures, the word of God, became the means of grace par excellence. Even the sacraments were subordinated on the

Word, and had no meaning or power without that Word. But

404

PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE

405 that Word was able, therefore, to operate and did operate also without the institute of the Church. It is true that God entrusted the Word to His Church in order that it might be explained by her, preached, and defended. But that Word is not given to the Church in such a way that without her it would have neither existence nor power. On the contrary, that Word is directed to all men; it is of value in all circumstances and for all spheres of life. And it derives its power and operation by no means only from the fact that it is being preached by an offcial person in the gathering of believers. It operates also then when it is being read and studied in the home, when it is being narrated by parents or teachers, when it is brought to the knowledge of men no matter in what form. Everyone, who, and what, and wherever he be, who accepts that Word in faith, is a partaker of God's promise, of grace in Christ, and of the entire blessing of salvation. He does not need to wait for a Church, ministe , or for the sacrament. Whoever believes has eternal life." 

Now, it is perfectly true that the Word as a means of grace is not dependent on the Church, if by Church is meant the Romish Church. Nor is salvation dependent on a Romish priest. The Church is free to institute its own offces. But that does not alter the fact that the means of grace are given to the Church. NO Reformed man so belittles the institute of the Church as to think or teach that he can partake of the sacraments, whether baptism or the Lord's Supper, without the institute of the Church in his own home or in any gathering of believers. Nor is the preaching of the Word a means of grace apart from the institute of the Church.

It is true, of course, that the Church is founded on the Word Of God, that the Word of God was first, and not the Church. But it is evidently not true that the Bible as we now have it was before the Church. Long before there ever was a Bible, there Was preaching of the Word of God. In fact, preaching was from the very beginning of the world, as has been explained in connection with Lord's Day VI, question and answer 19: "TVhence

# LORD'S DAY X X V

406

knowest thou this? From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs ancl prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other cere. monies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by his only-begotten Son."

How comparatively recent it is, however, that the Bible as we now have it existed not only, but was accessible to all. For many centuries the Church existed without a written IVord whatsoever. For many more centuries only the Old Testament canon was gradually written and finally completed. And again, for centuries afterward the Church waited for the completion and closing of the New Testament canon. And even then, many more centuries elapsed before the Bible was accessible to every believer. This had to wait for the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, for the general distribution of the Bible, and for the general education of the masses to be able to read and write.

But always the Church had the commission to preach the gospel.

And always the preaching of the Word was a means of grace.

What is true preaching in the Biblical sense of the word? And what is a preacher?

## We find the great importance of preaching as well as of the

preacher expressed then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except

they be sent?"

It is evident that in these words the importance of the preacher and his mission are emphasized. And it is well that we, too emphasize these, especially in our day. Our age is characterized by gross ignorance in regard to fundamental questions; and the nature and importance of preaching is very little underst00d• Today everybody preaches, except those, perhaps, whose specific calling it is. Many that call themselves ministers of the divine Word have become unfaithful to their calling, and devote them

PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE

407

-selves to lecturing on sundry subjects rather than to the preaching of the Word of God. On the other hand, there are in our day not a few that pretend to preach while they have no mission and that utterly disregard the truth expressed with emphasis in the words of our text, in the question: "How shall they preach except they be sent?" Not only men, but women and children preach. Societies, institutes, and other groups that. exist and operate apart from the church prepare and send out preachers; and one of the chief purposes many of these preachers seem to have in view is to draw a crowd, and to this end they are frequently employed by some churches, when the fountains of sensationalism in the local preacher run dry, to create that temporary stir of religious emotions which is called a revival. These preachers advertise themselves in the local papers; they announce the strangest topics as the theme of their sermons; they sometimes offer a more entertaining show than the theaters; they accompany their philippics by the wildest gesticulations; they even perform acrobatic stunts that are worthy of a circus: they one and all hawk the Christ, as if He were the cheapest article on the market. And the fruit of their labors is a wave of sensationalism that passes over as quickly as it is aroused. And when many people speak of a "nice sermon", they mean not at all a sermon that served as a vehicle to bring the Word of God to them and that is a means of grace to them, but one that for approximately forty minutes could entertain them and play on their emotions.

 Hence, it is not at all superfluous to ask the question: what is a preacher, and what is a preacher in the Biblical sense of the word? 

And then I would first of all give the following definition. Preaching is the authoritative proclamation of the gospel by the Church in the service of the Word of God through Christ. In this definition we call attention to the following four elements: first, that preaching is authoritative proclamation; the Preacher must be sent. Secondly, that it is proclamation of the gospel, that is, the whole Word of God as it is revealed in Christ.

# LORD'S DAY X X V

408

Thirdly, that it is by the Church, for only the Church is able to send the preacher. And fourthly, that it is in the service of the Word of God through Christ, for only Christ through the Spirit can make preaching of the Word powerful and efficacious as a means of grace.

Let us begin by considering the last element of the definition, for that is indeed most important and fundamental in the preaching of the Word. Through the preaching it pleases God through

Christ, the exalted Lord, the Chief Prophet of God, Who alone gathers His Church, to speak to His people unto salvation. This is rather plainly expressed in the text already quoted from Romans 10:14, 15; only I must call your attention to an apparently small and insignificant mistake in the translation as we find it in the King James Version that was corrected in the Revised Version In the former you read: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" while the latter renders: "How shall y believe in him whom they have not heard?" The former evidently misunderstood the genitive of the relative pronoun that appears in the Greek, overlooking that the genitive in Greek is the direct object of the verb "have heard." The proper translation, therefore, is not "of whom", but "whom" they have not heard. And you will understand that the difference is important: when you hear o someone, he is not present; you do not hear his own voice but the voice of someone else who tells you something about him. But when you hear someone, you hear his own voice; he is present with you; he is addressing you. Thus the difference in the translation is evidently quite significant, though it concerns only one little word• In the one case the text really asserts in question form that it is impossible to believe in Him unless we have heard about Him; and this is, of course, quite true, but it does not convey the full meaning of the text. In the other case, however, the text teaches us that you cannot believe in Christ unless you have heard Him speak to you, unless you have heard His Word addressed to you. This is exactly the meaning of the text: "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?"

## PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE

1. AAnd this is quite in harmony with other parts of Scripture. The Lord says in John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." And in the twenty-fifth verse of the same chapter we read: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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." Of His sheep, whom the Father hath given Him, the Lord says in John10:31 "To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." And in f the same chapter: "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." And again in verse 27: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

The word of man is not suffcient to serve as a basis for that certain knowledge whereby I know that all my sins are forgiven me, and for that perfect confidence whereby I rely in life and death on my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. How shall they b'elieve in Him Whom they have not heard? We must hear "the word of God, (which) is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner Of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Heb.4:12,13. But how shall they hear this Word unless they hear it from Him, unless they hear the voice of Christ? And how shall they hear this Word without the preacher This is the point of the text in Rom. 0±14, 15. Anyone can tell you about Jesus and about His Word and work, about the cross and the atonement, about the resurrection and justification. And to do this, to be witness of Christ, is certainly our calling; the Christian must be a witness for Christ in the world, must confess His Name, must extol His Name and tell all about Him. But this does not make anyone a preacher, for a preacher is not a person

1. LORD'S DAY X X V

who merely speaks concerning Christ, but one through whom it pleases Christ Himself to speak, to cause His own voice to be heard by His people. The thing that matters in any sermon is whether we hear the voice of Jesus say: "Come unto me and rest"; whether we hear Him say: "Repent and believe"; whether His voice resounds .in our deepest soul: "Your sins are forgiven, and I give unto you eternal life." 

Christ is the office-bearer in God's house. He must build the house, not we. The task to gather His people is committed to Him; it is, and remains, His; never can it become ours. Even though it pleases Him to gather His flock and to build His Church through the instrumentality of men so that they become co-workers with Him, the work still remains His. All that is merely our work, not the work of Christ, shall be burnt: "And I, when I shall be lifted up, shall draw all unto me." And when it pleases the Lord Jesus Christ to gather His flock, to cause His voice to be heard, so that His sheep hear it and follow Him, — when it pleases Him to do this through a man, then you have a preacher and in no other instance. It is in the consciousness of being such a preacher that the apostle could write in 11tCor:æc5Q "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." That is preaching.

It follows, with respect to the contents of the message which a preacher brings to the Church or which he brings to any audience in the heathen world, that it may never be anything else than the Word of Christ. For the Lord will not speak through anything but His own Word. He gave His own \Vord directly  to the apostles, as Paul declares in i hath committed unto us (posited in us, accor mg to the original) the word of reconciliation." It was in this way that Christ made preachers out of the apostles: He put His own Word in them, Just as when an ambassador from one government to another delivers a message he takes the word of his government along' so Christ gave His Word to the apostles; and this same Word Of Christ is committed unto the Church in the Holy Scriptures•

## PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE

411 And preaching as to its contents is strictly limited to the Word of Christ in the Bible. The preacher has nothing of his own to deliver, strictly nothing. Whenever he delivers a message of his own, apart from the VVo,rd of Christ, he ceases to be a preacher. If an ambassador to a foreign government has a definite commission and a definite message from his own government to deliver, and after having delivered it begins to express his own views and opinions on the matter in question, he cannot do the latter in his capacity as ambassador. The same is true of the preacher. In the measure that he goes outside of the Word of God, he ceases to be a preacher. This may be applied to modern social and political preaching: many preachers today use the pulpit to express their views on various social, economic, and political questions. When you listen to one of these men, you are perhaps hearing a well worked out lecture on the subject under discussion; perhaps, — and this is more often the case, — the attempt is very amateurish; you may agree or disagree with the speaker; but the man was not a preacher. And if he offered his social or political views under the pretext of his being a V. D. M., a minister of the Word of God, he is a deceiver, too: for a preacher has nothing else than the Word of Christ to bring; and although this Word of Christ may throw light upon the calling of a Christian with respect to social and political life, a mere lecture on social and political topics is no preaching.

Moreover, it must be remembered that a preacher must bring the Word of Christ concerning Himself: Jesus Christ as the revelation of the God of our salvation, — that is the central theme of all preaching. Hence, the apostle speaks in the latter part Of verse f the preacher that brings the gospel of peace, the glad tidings of good things. It is the gospel Of God concerning His Son; the Word of faith; the Word that God through Christ has blotted out the handwriting of sin that was against us, has reconciled us unto Himself, has justified us in Christ; the glad tidings of such good things as the forgiveness of sins, the adoption unto children and heirs, the

## 412 LORD'S DAY X X V

deliverance by almighty grace from the bonds 01 sin and the dominion of death, regeneration, sanctification, the hope of eternal life and glory, — it is that Word of Christ which the preacher must bring. He may preach that Word of Christ from different angles, in many different ways, with application to different phases and spheres of life: he may cause the light of that Word of Christ concerning Himself as the God of our salvation to shine upon the Christian's calling and attitude in and over against peace and war, prosperity and adversity, sickness and health, fruitful and barren years, life and death, the home and society, Church and state; in fact, he must preach the whole counsel of God. But always it must be the Word of God in Christ concerning Himself, the glad tidings of good things, which he preaches.

This already implies that the word of the preacher must be authoritative. Preaching is authoritative—proclamation of the gospel. The word for preaching in the New Testament really means "to speak as a herald." The preacher must bring his message, nothing more; and he must deliver it in the name of Christ and with authority. He must clearly leave the impression that the audience is under obligation to hear and to do the Word that is preached, that they and he together must bow before that Word just because it is the authoritative Word of Christ. He must not say: "Now, listen; this is my opinion, and I will show you why," nor must he beg his audience: "Will you not please agree with me and accept what I say?" He must say: "Thus saith the Lord!"- For a preacher is an ambassador, and as much he must speak. No false show of humility nor fear ofmen may keep him from addressing his audience with authority, provided he brings the Word of Christ and nothing else• Pride and conceit it would be indeed, were he to bring his own word, the philosophy of men, with a note of authority. Man's word has no power, neither has it any authority. Conceit, too' it is if the preacher does not include himself in his message: for he also is a sinful man. But if he stands in the consciousness of his calling, and if he brings the Word of Christ, it is only a

### PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE 413

matter of humble and fearless obedience if he brings his message with authority. The fruit of preaching, — and it is well that the minister of the Word remembers this, depends solely on Christ, Who speaks through the sermon. No preacher must ever leave the impression in his preaching that it really depends on his efforts, on his ability to convince b' wisdom of words, on his play upon the emotions and his power to move the audience to tears or to make them tremble with fear of damnation, whether souls shall be won for Christ or not. I consider what is known as the "altar call" in our country as a great evil. It is delivered when the sermon is finished, when the preacher can break loose from his text; it is a strong and prolonged play upon the emotions, often accompanied by a soft strain of music and a few appropriate hymns; always it consists of presenting Jesus as a poor beggar, Who would fain save a few souls if they would only come to Him before it is too late. Always it consists of hawking Jesus in its worst form. This travesty on true preaching always impressed me as a burlesque caricature of the preaching of the apostles. Will He Who declared: "No man can come unto me, except the Father draw him"; and: "All that the Father giveth unto me shall come unto me" speak and cause his voice to be heard through such a travesty on preaching, through such burlesque presentations Qf Himself? God forbid! I do not hesitate to say that this is no preaching. There are several examples of preaching in the Holy Scriptures. The prophets Of the old dispensation preached. Christ Himself delivered His discourses when He sojourned among us. The apostles went into all the world and preached the gospel to every creature. But in vain does one look for any indication in all their preaching that they hawked the Savior and played upon the emotions of men is done in the modern altar call. And therefore, a preacher may apply all his God-given powers and talents to the preparation and delivery of his message. In fact, he should, for the Word that he preaches is worthy of his very best. But preaching is the work not of himself, but of Christ. And it must be-

414 LORD'S DAY X X V

come. clearly evident in the very form of his preaching that he expects none of self, but all from Him.

Finally, we must still call attention to the fact that the preacher must be sent, and that, therefore, strictly speaking it is only the Church that is authorized to preach.

It is very evident that it is essential that a preacher be sent. This is true of all preachers, whether they proclaim the Word of God in the established Church or preach the gospel of peace in the heathen world. In this strict sense of the word all preachers are missionaries: they must be sent. And this is emphasized in the words of for the apostle writes: "And how shall they preach except they be sent?" The sending is in. dispensable to the preaching. Without the former the latter is impossible. One may witness for Christ; one may have an answer to anyone that asks him a reason for the hope that is in him; one may confess his faith; one can tell others all about Christ. But one cannot preach unless he be sent. Such is the plain implication of the question which the apostle asks. And this indispensable requisite of the sending is easily understood, if we only bear in mind that preaching is the authoritative deliverance of the Word of Christ, the gospel of peace, the glad tidings of good things: the vehicle upon which it pleases Christ to carry His own Word to His people. You can have two men that virtually say the same thing, while yet there is a wide difference between the word of the one and of the other as far as its power and authority and significance is concerned. Suppose, if I may use that illustration once more, that there are two men in Washington that now that our government determined upon a declaration of war upon another country. Suppose for the sake of the illustration, that both these men have their information from the president, so that they are? equally well informed. Suppose, further, that one of these men is officially appointed to bring in person or write or telegraph this declaration of war to the government of the country upon which war is declared. And suppose that also this other person, that was equally well informed about the declaration

#### PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE

415

of war, makes a trip to the government of that foreign country and arrives there and spreads the news, even informs the government about the declaration of war, before the ambassador arrives to deliver the official declaration. Then, of course, the message of the unofficial informant has no power beyond mere information. Only the official word, by the officially appointed ambassador, weighs. The former spoke the truth, but his word had no authority, did not actually change the state of things, for the simple reason that he was not sent. Thus it is the preacher: he is one that brings the authoritative Word of Christ; he must be very definitely sent. How shall they preach except they be sent?

Our fathers always made a distinction between speaking an edifying word from the Scriptures and official preaching. The former may be done by any Christian; but for the latter one must be sent. And to be sent implies, that one has received the official commission from Christ to preach, to speak His Word, the gospel of peace; to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation. It implies, in the place, the \*promise that Christ will be with that preacher, empower him by His Spirit to preach, and that He will surely speak His own irresistible Word through the ministry of the one that is sent. And it means, in the that it is Christ also Who sends, not only whomsoever He will, but also wheresoever it pleases Him, as the Canons of Dordt have it in Il, 5: "Moreover the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously without distinction, to whom God out of His good Pleasure sends the gospel."

For this reason, we emphasize that preaching is properly the work of the Church alone.

But how is a preacher sent?

And how can one be sure that Christ has commissioned him to preach the gospel of peace?

## 416 LORD'S DAY XXV

With respect to the apostles this question can easily be answered. Their very name expresses that they were sent. And they received their calling and commission through Christ directedly and in person. The chief distinguishing mark or an apostle was even that he was directly and immediately called by the Lord. This is strongly emphasized especially by the apostle Paul, as, for instance, in Gal. 1:1: "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." Surely, the apostles were sent. They received their commission to preach from Christ's own lips. They had the promise of the Spirit; Christ put His own Word in them; and He sent them whithersoever He would, the Spirit leading them and sometimes preventing them from going to one place and directing them to another. And therefore, with respect to the sending of the apostles there is no difficulty. They had their commission directly from the Lord.

 But how about him that serves in the ministry of the divine Word today, whether he labor in the heathen world or in a local church? And the answer is that also the preacher today is sent by Christ. Of course, this sending of the preacher is no longer direct and immediate as with the apostles. It is well for anyone who desires to serve the Lord in the ministry to understand this. A mere abiding desire to become a preacher, even though this desire gradually develop into a conviction that one is called by the Lord, is not sufficient, It happens occasionally that a man with such an Inward desire and conviction attemptsin different ways to enter into the ministry and become a preacher, and, if he fails to find a place and receive a call in the regular way, still insists that he is called, merely on the ground of that inward desire and conviction. This is a mistake. And if a man act upon that mistake and try to arrange a place for himself asa preacher, as is frequently done in such cases, he sins, and he surely will never be a preacher. For a preacher must be sent' and Christ sends no man directly, either by an immediate and special revelation or by creating in one's heart the conviction that he is called.

PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE

417

Nevertheless, the sending of a preacher is just as real and preemptory as it was with the apostles, though the a of sending is now different. We must remember, in the first place, that Christ gave to His Church in the world the commission to preach. He did so when He was about to be taken up into heaven in the well-known words: "Go ye into all the world And preach the gospel to every creature." To be sure, directly He was addressing the apostles when He spoke these words. But, as has often been pointed out, and rightly so, this commission to preach the gospel cannot possibly be limited to the persons of the apostles, but was given to them as representatives of the New Testament Church in the world and must needs be extended to the end of the world. This is evident from the fact that the apostles personally could not fulfill the task of preaching the gospel in all the world, Nor can the promise which the Lord adds to this injunction be limited to the lifetime of the apostles: "And 10, I am with you even unto the end of the world." Therefore, not the apostles only are commissioned here to preach the gospel; neither can it be said that this commission is given to believers individually, for the apostles surely are the representatives of the Church; but go the Church of the New Testament in the world the Lord ad, dresses the command: '{Preach gospel." The Church is "the pillar and ground of the truth." To the Church the Lord entrusted His Word. That Church must keep the Word, receive it, interpret it, confess it. And that Church in the world must preach the gospel. She has the commission authoritatively to speak the Word of Christ. And the promise of the Spirit that will lead her into all the truth was fulfilled in her. It is well that also this be emphasized in our own day, Not the individual believer, apart from the Church of Christ in the world; not all kinds of groups of believers, societies, boards, sects, movements, are the pillars and ground of the truth and have the commission to preach the Word. And whatever in influence for good such groups extraneous from the Church may appear to have, we should never forget that their existence and labor and

418 LORD'S DAY XXV

separation from the Church is disobedience, and the ultimate effect of their work can only be detrimental to the cause of the truth.

The Church only has the commission to preach.

Nor is it difficult to see that this commission to preach the Word of Christ must be fulfilled by the Church as institute, and therefore, through its ministry. Christ gave to His Church some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. And He gave these "for the perfecting of the saints, or t e work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." It is therefore carrying out the commission she has received to preach the gospel. Not the person of the minister has the commission to preach, but the Church has. And she fulfills her task through the ministry. Hence, only they whom the Church separates unto this ministry can properly feel that they are sent by Christ. And therefore, it is this calling by the Church that is the all-important factor in the determination of one's being sent by Christ to preach the gospel. Only when a man is so called by the Church to stand in the position of the instituted ministry, and when in that position he strictly adheres in all he delivers to the Word of God as revealed in the Scriptures, can he rightfully claim that he is a preacher. For how shall they preach except they be sent? 

This preaching, then, in that very specific sense of the word, is meant when we say that the Word is a means of grace.

That this is true is very plain from the question we have already quoted from Rom. 10:14 "And how shall they believe in him whom they

The preaching of the Word is indispensable to faith in Christ.

This does not mean that I wish to minimize the value of all the means of instruction in the truth which we possess today. Least of all would I underrate t e great significance of Bible reading and Bible study in the home, by individual believers or by societies. We certainly believe the perspicuity of Holy Scripture. And we believe that all believers have the unction of the

PREACHING AS A MEANS OF GRACE 15 / l}

419

Holy One. Yet all these means cannot and may never be separated from the work of Christ through the Church as an institute, especially through the ministry of the Word. Suppose there had been no ministry, no official preaching o t e Word through all the ages of the new dispensation: where would be our Bibles, translated in every language? Where would be our confessions, in which the truth is preserved from generation to generation? Where would be your commentaries and other books that interpret Holy Writ? Where would be your fathers and mothers to instruct you in the truth from childhood? They would not be at all. You can see for yourself what becomes of the man and woman, of the family that separates themselves from the Church, proudly ignoring the Word of God that it is impossible to hear without a preacher and claiming that they can just as well hear Christ by reading their Bibles at home. It does not take long before they have strayed away from the truth and are lost in the world.

Therefore, the official preaching by the Church is of central importance.



It is just as true today and for the Church of Christ as it was for the time of the apostles that the preaching of the Word is the main means of grace.