**The Pulpit**

**WSC Q. 89 How is the Word made effectual to salvation?**

*A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, fo the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.*

**WSC Q. 90 How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to** salvation?

*A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.*

With the Reformation came a renewed burden and responsibility to preach the Word of God as the central focus of the true worship of God and not the sacrament of the Lord’s Table. it was not merely that the Reformers saw education as the key to power and social improvement, it was that God speaks not just to scholars and church officers but to every man, woman, boy and girl, and God commands them all to learn of him and live before him. This was why the format of the worship room changed with the Reformation. The people now were to gather around the minister so they could hear together what God was telling them. And the minister’s platform was raised not just for the ease of hearing (which is very important in its own right) but also that the authority of God’s proclaimed Word might be evident and unchallenged to all.

This centrality and authority are what make preaching different from teaching. In teaching, the aim and burden is the communication of facts, evidences, principles and information. If ethics are mentioned in the classroom, they are communicated in a way as to be examined from both sides of the issue for the student’s ability to compare and contrast. (Christian education, of course, is not satisfied with such mere objectivity and claims of neutrality nor aims for them.) Preaching involves teaching but goes beyond it in terms of pressing the listeners that the information declared is not merely from man alone but from God and that ethics are not only declared but required of the listener under the impending judgment of God which is escaped only through the gospel of forgiveness found in Jesus Christ. So, far more than facts and figures, dates and dead people, the minister proclaims hope and calls his hearers to embrace this hope with all their heart and soul and lives their lives by it alone.

These elements of centrality and authority remain key in both the design of the pulpit itself as well as where it is placed in the worship room. As a piece of furniture, it is to represent and symbolize these elements and bear witness to them even when no service is presently going on. Likewise, even during other parts of the worship service, the elements it represents should not be allowed to compete but rather submit for their place of importance in the eyes and ears of the congregation. This is why a moveable lectern or a music stand, or even the absence of such furniture altogether is not satisfactory. The centrality and authority of the proclaimed Word of God is not silently witnessed to and communicated by such choices but rather the opposite.

So what should the pulpit look like and where should it be placed? if we look at these elements individually, we will get good guidance.

* Centrality When you walk into a worship room for the first time, the most important thing to that congregation should be what you see first. While some congregations may want to emphasize the holiness or majesty of God or even the sacrifice of Christ itself, other congregations want to communicate a warm and friendly atmosphere, even a deliberate lack of intimidating authority but instead, acceptance to all. Which should we aim for? Well, let’s forget the first visitor and ask ourselves this question: why are we here? What is central to our fellowship? it is simply a mutual admiration? Are we all just too cool? And what do we want to hear? Did we come for the music because our musicians and singers are world-renowned? Is it not the power of God Almighty and how he saves us from who we really are in ourselves? This is what we want the first-timer to learn and know too. And we don’t disguise that from him so he will grow to like us first and only find out later what we are all about. We want him to see and hear what we see and hear – Jesus Christ and him crucified, the Word of God is life! We do not invite our visitors to join us because we are a great group of folks. We invite our visitors to join us as we gather around God’s Word. The pulpit must be central.
* Authority – If you go online or thumb trhough a church supply catalog you will discover that pulpits come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they are chosen for very specific reasons: the wood and carving match the décor, a particular model is particularly attractive, even innovative, another is specifically designed to be portable, another has other features which make it interesting. I have become persuaded that the furniture offered at such places only caters to those other, lesser motivations and interests. Instead, the pulpit should be designed to communicate the one element so easily forgotten and set aside: authority. Certain characteristics that I see as necessary include:
  + the pulpit should be raised. More than being just on a raised platform which, itself, suggests multi-use and availability for other things, the pulpit itself should raised uniquely and deliberately or built on its own platform.
  + The pulpit should be substantial. While some pulpits are much too light and inconsequential in appearance, the pulpit should visibly support and tech the true and unique weight of the gospel message. Its appearance should be undeniable and should be allowed to correctly dominate the room.
  + The pulpit should look studious. Preparing and preaching God’s Word properly is time-consuming and requires training and adequate resource material. The pulpit should reflect the seriousness which congregation asks and expects their minister to give to his preaching. The pulpit should be broad, with room for the man’s Bible, his notes and his body so that nothing distracts from his efforts to feed his people.
  + The Bible should be visible. It remains important that while the minister preaches, it is clear to all that he relies not merely on his notes or his personality but on the Word of God himself. The top of his Bible, at least, should be visible to the congregation, so they can see it is open and before him and them and that he is speaking to them from it. (This is the reason I do not prefer a mic stand on the pulpit. It is distracting and gets in the way.)