

SESSION 4



TRUTH AND AUTHENTICITY

Introduction

It is our responsibility to preach the Gospel. What an amazing thing to be a part of. Usually however, when it comes to preaching the Word it is as the final step in a long process of preparation. There are many different elements that are important with regards to the messenger long before the message is proclaimed. In this section we look at Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* and the three forms of persuasion that can be applied to the way we witness to others about Christ. The main focus of this study is to look further into these three forms, exploring their importance in our witness to a non-Christian. Each of us may find that we have natural giftings or struggles more in one form than another but all of them are elements that we should recognise are part of drawing a non-Christian to the Saviour.

Focus

In Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* the three forms of persuasion are ethos, pathos and logos. These terms have deep meanings but they certainly aren't complicated to understand. The hardest part is developing these forms of persuasion and making ourselves more effective in our witness.

Let's first consider 'ethos'. Quite simply, ethos is our character. It is the way that we live out our faith. As Christians it is of the utmost importance that our lifestyle and our actions back up our words, otherwise we are perceived as nothing more than hypocrites. (This is, of course, extremely important for those in positions of leadership). There is nothing worse for our witness to a non-Christian than preaching about God and a godly way of life and not actually living it out personally. Paul states this very matter in his letter to the church at Philippi:

. . . so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe. . .

Philippians 2:15

Our lifestyle and our character must back up our words. This will add authenticity to our message when the non-believer can see that being a Christian isn't some far-fetched idea but something that is actively vibrant and visible in us. We must live out our faith! While there is nothing better than being able to back up our words with a visible Godly lifestyle, there is also nothing worse than a bad witness, than someone who doesn't practice what they preach. Of course as human beings our faults, failings and weaknesses are all too often manifest and it is sometimes hard to stick to the narrow path, which is why it is vital that we must constantly be in prayer and in the Word of God, asking Him to develop Christ-likeness in each of us.

Secondly, we must consider pathos. Pathos is very simply the compassion and love with which we communicate our message. The way in which we share the message of Salvation can influence the way in which it is received. For instance, it is possible to share the Gospel with someone in the manner of an uncaring sales person anxious to get the numbers. It's easy for some overzealous evangelists to fall into this trap – seeking results and converts rather than being motivated by genuine love for an individual. When we witness concerning Christ it is vital that we do so for nothing other than the glory of God. As Peter emphasises, this must be done with love and compassion.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect . . .

1 Peter 3:15

This verse is key. Give an answer, but always be aware of the importance of the manner in which you give it.

The final of Aristotle's forms of persuasion we should consider is logos. This is the 'words' that we say. It represents the content of the message that we are presenting to non-Christians. It is amazing how powerful words alone can be. They have the power to build someone up and tear someone down. They have the power to make a person happy or to ruin a person. In the same way the words of the Gospel are 'the power of God to Salvation . . .' (Romans 1:16). However it is important that the words we share are the true and full Gospel. God promises that whenever we speak His words that they will 'never return to me (God) void' (Isaiah 55:11). What a great promise! When we speak the words that God would have us speak they will *always* have an effect.

These three forms of persuasion are all vitally important. To conclude; we must share the Message of Salvation (logos) with a real and vibrant passion and love for the recipient (pathos) and further authenticate our message with the manner in which we live out our life (ethos).

Discussion

1. Look at Galatians 5:22–23. How evident are these 'fruits of the Spirit' in your life?
2. Do you think that any of the three forms of persuasion in *The Art of Rhetoric* are more important than another? If so, why?
3. What is the danger of 'logos' without 'ethos'?
4. How can we live out our faith so that non-Christians take more notice?

Bible Parallel

Read Matthew 9:35–38

Verse 35 of Matthew chapter 9 summarizes the cycle of Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching and healing, recalling a similar summary statement in Matthew 4:23–25. The compassion of Jesus is a repeated theme in the Gospels. Not only does He show compassion but He also admonishes His followers to extend the same mercies, especially to those in need. Jesus' ministry sprang up from a deep sense of compassion and sorrow in His heart when He saw the helpless state of those around Him and their inability to help themselves (v36).

Jesus then exposes the critical urgency of the call to mission by alluding to two images: sheep without a shepherd and a ripe harvest with few ready hands. Compassion must precipitate action. When Jesus saw a need, He always met it, because it moved His heart to do so. Notice also that Jesus' focus is not simply on the privation before Him, but on the amazing potential for harvest. The possibility of conversion and miraculous work of salvation is something that must be anticipated with expectancy – it all lies with God and is reaped through earnest prayer.

It has been said that outside the Lord's Prayer, Jesus doesn't often tell His followers what to pray for specifically. Yet in this instance He is very clear. Not only does He command His followers to pray for labourers to be sent out, but He makes them very aware of their responsibility to do so.

Further discussion and personal contemplation

Jesus exhorts His followers to carry on His work. You may discover that *you* are an answer to your own prayer. Explore the weight given to Jesus' instruction to 'pray earnestly for the harvest and for labourers of the harvest' in your personal life and church life. Is there a regular call of compassion and urgency?