

- In his book “Common Sense Preaching”, Dee Bowman defines preaching as “a special kind of communication called persuasive rhetoric. It differs from teaching in some ways, although there are some techniques common to both. All preaching is teaching, but not all teaching is preaching. Both involve the presentation of information, but preaching is a specialized form of the process that includes a motivated reaction to the information offered.” He goes on to say that the goal of Gospel preaching is for a person to be persuaded to adopt a “higher manner of life” before God. My standing before you is not simply a communication or distribution of facts or knowledge, but I am giving every effort to persuade someone to action. The Bible is full of examples of people who preached and caused others to act upon the words that were said. The same thing is true today! From time to time people are convicted within their hearts, just as the Jews were in **Acts 2:37**. Those convicted are given the opportunity to respond through, what we call, the invitation. I and many other men throughout this country, and probably other countries, invite those who would like to respond to come to the front and let their request be made known.
- I want to talk this morning about this coming to the front. Recently, I saw a writing from an older man concerning the effectiveness, or really lack thereof, of the invitation for a person to come to the front at the conclusion of a sermon. He expressed his disappointment in the fact that it just doesn’t seem as if people respond quite like they used to. He said that it used to be, years ago, where at any given worship service you’d have at least 1 or 2 if not many more people come to the front in response to the invitation given. He went on to ask the question of why things have changed so much and why don’t people respond like they used to? I think these are valid questions and it got my mind thinking on this topic of the invitation and coming to the front. So I’d like to spend our time this morning briefly talking about the history of this practice of extending invitations at the end of sermons and why we do it. Then I want us to consider 3 facts about coming to the front as we make some applications from the lesson.
- ➡ We do not have an instance, within the Bible, of a man standing up before a crowd as we are today and offering a lesson and then extending an invitation as we and most other churches do throughout this country and in other places. Some vary on this practice by asking the respondent to raise their hand or for all to sit down except those who would like to respond, but the goal is still. It is an opportunity to have those who feel the need to respond to respond to the Gospel’s Call. However, we use this as an expedient way for those to respond, today. There was a response by the people who heard the Gospel preached in Acts 2:38. They asked what they needed to do and then Peter invited them to obey by repenting and being baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, and so we see them responding in that way. I certainly do not believe we are violating Scripture by extending the invitation as we do because we are simply giving those who mind need to obey the opportunity to obey.
- ➡ But it is interesting to know how this practice began. It began by a Presbyterian Minister named Charles Finney in the early 1820s. He referred to this action as coming to the “anxious seat” and others went on to call this the “mourners bench.” It was actually a great controversy among many denominations because this action flew in the face of the highly held teachings of Calvinism. Calvinism teaches that man is totally depraved and does not have the ability to seek and find God, so this action, in their minds, was a false teaching that encouraged people to seek out God when he wasn’t even able to do so without God first intervening on the person’s behalf. This invitation to respond stood in direct contradiction to the movement of people “seeking salvation in the woods” by pleading on your knees for God to open your heart and allow you to seek after Him.
- ➡ Men, later on, during the “Restoration” or “Reformation” periods took on this practice as a way for people to express their desire to put their faith in God and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. This practice has been kept up for many years and even unto today as many Gospel preachers extend an invitation for those to respond at the end of their sermons. We already talked about this in lesser detail but I want to take a brief moment to consider why we extend an invitation at every service.
 - It is the goal of our preaching. We want people to respond and better their soul’s condition if they have a need.
 - Obedience is a public action, not something done in secret in the woods. We must be willing to confess and acknowledge God before men or He will not be willing to acknowledge us. (**Matt. 10:27-33**) We cannot be ashamed of our faith and obedience to God. We must submit ourselves to immersion in water through faith for our sins to be washed away.
 - Although, obedience doesn’t have to take place during the assembly of a church at the end of a sermon, but we are all gathered together and it is an expedient time to allow someone to be served.
 - Public sin deserves a public confession and acknowledgement of repentance.

3 Facts About Coming To The Front

I. Is An Opportunity To Help Your Faith

- A. Our whole purpose is to help people stand before God holy, pure, and justified.
 - 1. A person might need to obey the Gospel and have their sins forgiven.
 - 2. They might need to repent of some sin they have been committing as a Christian.
 - 3. Request prayers for encouragement, a struggle they're going through, for another person to have an open heart to the Gospel.
 - 4. Publicly express desire to be identified with a local church.
 - 5. Announce a victory in their life over some sin and over Satan.
- B. Coming to the front is the best place to better your soul.
 - 1. Regardless of the situation, everyone is present and together as a family.
 - 2. We are a support system for one another.
 - 3. The local church is a big family of like minded people who are all just trying to get to heaven in the next life. We come together to encourage one another. **(Heb. 10:24,25)**
 - 4. We are to love one another and be devoted to each other. **(Rom. 12:9-15)**
 - 5. When we are struggling or when we are rejoicing, we can all do it together as a family when we are all together!

Why doesn't this happen more often then? Do we all have our lives perfectly together? Do we not have any struggles or trials that we go through? Why don't people come forward more often? I personally, believe it's because we are scared of judgement from others.

II. Should Not Open You Up To Judgement From Others

- A. There is a huge misconception about what the church is.
 - 1. Some see the church as being a resort for all these perfect people.
 - 2. Someone might say, "If I make it known that I struggle with this then these perfect people will judge me and think less of me."
 - 3. In reality, the church is a hospital and rehab center for struggling and recovering sinners.
 - 4. That shouldn't be the case because we all have our struggles and difficulties in this life.
- B. This misconception has some sad consequences.
 - 1. We fail to practice the command of **James 5:16**, **"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."** We don't confess our sins to one another because we think that everyone has their perfect life perfectly together and we'll be looked down upon for our struggles.
 - 2. If we are not willing to discuss our struggles then we cannot have someone pray for us and help us and the same is true the other way around. We have to know what to pray for our brothers and sisters.
 - 3. We are commanded to bear one another's burdens. **(Gal. 6:2)**
 - 4. Through acknowledging our burdens and confessing our sins and struggles, we give ourselves a better chance of avoiding what has to take place in **Gal. 6:1**.

III. Takes Courage

- A. It takes courage to admit that we fall short of glorifying God whether that means admitting I'm a sinner and need the blood of Jesus to wash away my sins or its acknowledging that I've left the light and have found myself in darkness again.
- B. Satan is standing in our way and that might be in the form of pride and telling ourselves that we can do this on our own. If we allow our pride to win then we will indeed fall. **(Prov. 16:18)**
- C. We need to show our appreciation for those who are willing to be courageous enough to come forward and open up their hearts to us. That should encourage us to do the same when it is needed.
- D. That courage needs to be rewarded by assisting that person in whatever way necessary. "Bear one another's burdens" **(Gal. 6:1)**

Coming to the front and admitting faults isn't easy, but it is absolutely worth it. It is an opportunity to better our soul's condition. We shouldn't worry about judgement from others because we all have our own problems, but regardless it takes some immense courage to stand up and admit that we have made a mistake and need help. We are a family and we are all in this together. We are to bear the burdens of our brethren and assist them in any way possible. May God help us to have the courage to admit when we struggle and seek the necessary help to defeat Satan and stand whole before God.