

The Importance of Biblical Preaching

“Preach the word,” was Paul’s instruction to Timothy, the young evangelist (2 Tim. 4:2). The apostle Peter also said, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Peter 4:11). Though they lived in the “Golden Age of Greece” when philosophy was so prevalent, both of these inspired apostles directed evangelists to base their preaching solidly on God’s revealed word. In fact, Paul made direct reference to the difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom when he wrote to the church at Corinth, an ancient pagan city. *“Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”* (1 Cor. 1:20). The wisdom of the world did not acknowledge even the existence of God. *“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”* (v. 21).

The Gentile world had previously rejected the knowledge of the true God and had invented idols and philosophy which elevated man against God. When Paul wrote to the Roman church, in the heart of the empire, he reminded them that *“although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened”* (1:21). **Please note that mankind, without divine revelation, descends into the depths of immorality.** Paul said, *“Professing to be wise, they became foolish”* (v. 22). Their foolishness was most vividly portrayed in a wicked lifestyle that included every vile thing. Paul’s list of their sins begins in verse 29: *“...being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife,*

deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them” (vv. 29-32).

It is worth repeating: mankind, without divine revelation, descends into the depths of immorality. It was so in the days of Rome; it is true today. Apart from the wisdom that comes from God, mankind becomes filled with immorality. The Bible, and the Bible alone, contains the wisdom of God that directs our ways and elevates man out of darkness. There can be no more evidence of wisdom than that of depending on divine revelation in our preaching. It is not wise to use human creeds as a basis for doctrine. It is not wise to use philosophy as a basis for human morality. It is not wise to use science as a basis for faith. *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

We Need The Bible For Guidance

Jeremiah, the prophet, said, *“It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”* (10:23). The Psalmist added: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”* (119:105). In an age of advanced technology and science, many may find it difficult to admit that man needs guidance in any area of his life. But unless we are careful, the more knowledge we have, the less advanced we really are. It is possible to worship at the altar of technology and become idolatrous in our intelligence. We can make the same mistake as the ancient Gentiles and give up the knowledge of God in exchange for a lie: that man does not need God! For example: man has the medical science at his fingertips to practice abortion right up to, and including, the final trimester of pregnancy. But what does it say about us when over one million abortions take place each year without regard to the moral issue of taking innocent life? How can anyone be so warped in mind and soul that protestations are made against killing dolphins and whales while encouraging abortions of innocent babes? Why is it

moral to kill a baby in the womb, but immoral to kill an animal for food? We need divine guidance to see the value of the soul. *“For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26). Those who espouse humanism and atheistic evolution have turned away from God and divine revelation and have a strangle hold on education in America. All references to moral values in public schools have been excised to the point that children are without moral direction and guidance. The result is chaos in the class room and the street. Truly, we need the wisdom of God for guidance in these troubled times.

The Result of Biblical Wisdom

David acknowledged the source of his wisdom: *“I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation”* (Psalms 119:99). Thus, those who trust in the Bible have access to wisdom far above that of man. *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isa. 55:9). If we would be wise, we should seek wisdom from the word of God: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5).

The person who trusts in God’s word is led by a wisdom greater than his own. How foolish for people to trust “Dr. Phil” or “Dr. Ruth,” when they spout pop-psychology which is often slanted to enhance television ratings. Is the true standard of morality a TV guru of the moment, or the Bible? Shall we entrust our souls to a television personality or to Jesus Christ? **What is the origin of man? What is his destiny? What happens to man when he dies? Is there life beyond the grave? What shall we do about our sins? Can we really have eternal life?** How do I find the answers to these awesome questions? How can I be sure to find the right way? The Bible, and the Bible alone, has the answers to these vital questions. You can *“know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32).

The Bible Answers the Issues of Life

What is the origin of man? Science can only speculate and postulate about theories, but is unable to give us the absolute beginning of man. On the other hand, the Bible reveals by inspiration that “*In the beginning, God...*” created all things (Genesis 1, 2). In the six days of creation, God exercised power and wisdom in successive creative acts that culminated with the inhabited earth. Man was the highest act of God’s creation, given life instantaneously and miraculously.

What is his destiny? God made man to live in the Garden, to flourish, and to “*replenish the earth*” (Genesis 1:28), but man went astray from God’s purpose by the temptation of Satan (chapter 3). When they ate of the forbidden fruit, our fore-parents died spiritually (separated from God’s fellowship) and began to die physically. The explanation of human suffering is explained by the intrusion of sin into the human race. But death is not our destiny, if we are willing to accept the gracious offer of God as given in the prophecy of the “*seed of woman*” (3:15), a reference to the coming of Christ. What we have lost in Adam, we regain in Christ, through His sacrificial death on the cross. As Jesus was able to raise Lazarus (John 11), he can raise us at the last day (John 5:28-29) and give us eternal life. The poverty of evolution is seen in its inability to give no promise of everlasting life. Friend, which gives you more hope: evolution which promises only a tombstone over your grave, or Jesus Christ who died that you might live?

What happens when he dies? Is there life beyond the grave? All of us have felt the utter futility and helplessness of witnessing a loved one’s death. But from death’s moment, science is totally ignorant as to the disposition of man. Is death the final end? Does life continue after death? Where does the spirit of man, if one exists, go? Is there life beyond the grave? Human “wisdom” (such as the utter nonsense of those like Shirley McLaine) might postulate recycling of the soul through reincarnation. Or some of the eastern New-Age religions suggest a loss of personality into Nirvana. But they cannot know, for sure. Science, with all its technology, and philosophy, with all its

vaunted knowledge, stand mute at death's bedside and can tell us absolutely nothing beyond the final breath. Only the Bible has the answer! Jesus, who "*tasted of death for every man*" (Hebrews 2:9), is the only One who has been there and back, and who can tell us what really takes place. We find the curtains drawn back and the mystery revealed in such places as Luke 16:19-31, where the death of Lazarus and his destiny is revealed, along with that of the rich man. Matthew 25:31-46 brings to our view the final judgment when Christ will judge all men, both good and evil. 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 assures us of the resurrection and Revelation 21-22 describe the glories of heaven for the saved of God.

What shall we do about our sins? Can we really have eternal life? Science and philosophy cannot tell you what a "sin" is or what to do about it. Science cannot put "sin" in a test tube and analyze it for weight and molecular structure. Philosophy is helpless in addressing sin because there is no absolute standard for morality. There is no agreement among men as to what constitutes "sin." As one Supreme Court judge said, "I cannot define pornography, but I can recognize it when I see it." Relativism and situation ethics blur the definition of sin and are absolutely helpless in its presence. Only divine revelation describes and defines sin and tells you what its consequences are and how to escape the dreadful punishment that sin merits.

"*Sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4). Thus, the Bible is the revelation of absolute truth and relativism is cast aside. What is right and wrong? God's word decides that! Galatians 5:17-21 contrasts the "*lusts of the flesh*" with the "*fruit of the Spirit*" (vv. 22-23). The Bible reveals how deadly sin is: "*The wage of sin is death*" and the "*soul that sins shall die*" (Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:4, 20). We are likewise informed that "*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). Those who understand the guilt of sin, like Paul, before his conversion, can state: "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (Romans 7:24). Man's helplessness in the face of his sins is apparent. We are in bondage in our sins and hopeless without God's help to escape.

It is at this exact point that the necessity of gospel preaching is clearly seen. “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” The gracious response is found in the next verse: “*I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (v. 25).

Is it any secret, then, that this message must be preached? “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:18-20). Is it any wonder that this is called the Great Commission?

Can we really have eternal life? Yes! You can be saved from your sins and, “*though it is appointed unto man once to die*” (Hebrews 9:27), we can have eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Is Anyone Preaching The Great Commission Today?

Faithful churches of Christ are actively preaching the Great Commission and are reaching out to the community around them with its saving message. We are attempting to communicate the “good news” (gospel) of Christ today, just as it was delivered in the first century.

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (NKJ).

As a youngster, I heard 2 Timothy 2:15 discussed widely in class and used often in gospel preaching. In most instances, the passage was relied upon to urge Christians to “*study*” (KJV) their Bibles and to “*rightly divide*” (make a distinction) between the Old and New Testaments. While there is no doubt that “*being diligent to present yourself to God*” will include studying the scriptures, and “*rightly dividing the word of truth*” will include distinguishing between the covenants, it is also true that this passage carries a deeper meaning than then allowed. The instruction to Timothy in verse 15 is embedded in a wider context of preaching the gospel that lends weight to the work of evangelism. We must learn this lest we “*need to be ashamed.*”

Context

Paul’s first epistle to Timothy encouraged him to remain at Ephesus that he might charge some to “*teach no other doctrine nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith*” (1:3-4). Those teachers Paul had in mind doubtless included the elders he had previously met at Miletus when he warned them that “*savage wolves*” would arise after his departure that would “*not spare the flock.*” It was this eldership Paul warned that “*from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (Acts

20:28-30). To prevent this departure, Paul impressed upon Timothy the “*pattern of sound words*” (2 Tim.1:13) which he was to “*commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2:2). He warned that men of a different sort were already “*overthrowing the faith*” of some: Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17) along with those like Jannes and Jambres who withstood Moses (3:8) came to his mind. Against these “*evil men and imposters,*” Timothy was to “*continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2:14-15).

The “*Holy Scriptures*” of which Paul spoke, he assured Timothy, were “*given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (3:16-17). From these, Timothy was to “*preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching*” (4:2). All of this provides the broader context which lends itself to a proper understanding of what it means to “*rightly divide the word of truth.*”

Possible Applications

The phrase “*rightly divide*” is an interesting expression. There are a number of possible explanations as to its etymology. Literally, the word used means “*cutting straight.*” “*The figure has been very variously derived: from a priest dividing the victim, the steward distributing the bread or stores, a stonemason, a carpenter, a ploughman, a road-cutter*” (*The Biblical Illustrator*. Joseph S. Excell, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., p. 184). Albert Barnes added this thought: “*It means, properly, to cut straight, to divide right; and the allusion here may be to a steward who makes a proper distribution to each one under his care of such things as his office and their necessities require; comp. Notes on Mat. xiii.52. Some have supposed that there is allusion here to the Jewish priest, cutting or dividing the sacrifice into proper parts; others, that the allusion is to the scribes di-*

viding the law into sections; others, to a carver distributing food to the guests at a feast” (*Barnes Notes*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich, 1961, p. 225).

Within the context of Paul’s letter to Timothy, there is room for all these allusions, without forcing the text. Consider the application in each instance.

The Priest Dividing The Victim: No priest who revered God would hack and hew an offering without design, as it seemed best to himself, without regard to instruction in the Law. Priests knew that the blood of a sacrifice was to be treated in particular ways (Exodus 29:12, 20, *et al.*), the flesh of a sacrifice treated differently (vv. 17-18), and the fat, liver and kidneys yet another way (vv. 13-14). In “rightly dividing” a sacrifice, a priest would separate and distinguish each sacrifice and its parts, “cutting straight” so as to prepare it for its intended use. Similarly, evangelists must weigh, determine, handle rightly the truth so that it “cuts straight” as God intended. Truth does not belong to the preacher; he cannot redesign it or twist it to his own purposes. The hermeneutic of scripture does not depend upon man’s analysis but upon God’s revelation. Man does not decide to include or exclude or to determine what is relevant. Man’s wisdom is not greater than that of God’s and cannot determine that some verses are too harsh, too severe, too remote. If the Bible teaches a truth, it is not undignified to teach it. If the Bible doesn’t teach something, we must not include it. Whatever the Bible teaches is exactly what God wanted taught and the language of scripture is the thought of God’s mind (1 Corinthians 2:7-16). If God revealed “baptism,” it is not cutting straight to substitute sprinkling or pouring. If God revealed “sing,” it is not “rightly dividing” to insert mechanical instruments of music. If God revealed the work of the church in specific terms as “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), it is wrong to redirect the church into social and civic affairs. If God forbids his people to fellowship those in sin (Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11), we must divide where God divides, cutting where God cuts. If God calls one an adulterer (Matthew 15:1-9; Romans 7:1-3), that person must not be called

something else simply because the word is offensive. The way God cuts by his word is the way men must apply it.

The Steward. The steward of Biblical times was a responsible person who was put in total charge of his master's goods: Abraham and Eliezer (Genesis 15) come to mind. In the process of his duties, a faithful steward would rightly distribute, divide, apportion to each person under his oversight that which was his due. In the spiritual sense, Timothy is being told to take the truth and distribute, divide, apportion to each hearer that which he needed to receive, rightly divide it. We are told in other places that some should be given "milk" while others are ready for "meat" (Hebrews 5:11-14; 2 Pt. 2:1-2). Thus, one would apply truth to every person, but in a different measure to babes in Christ as distinct from those who could digest weightier matters of the gospel.

But to be faithful to his master, the steward must apportion truth to every place where it is needed. Sometimes *reproof* must be allotted, at times *rebuke*, at other times *exhortation* (2 Timothy 4:2). Those who would refuse to reprove and rebuke when it is necessary are not faithful stewards. Those who fail to deliver strong doses of truth in the face of error are not rightly dividing what is needed. Those who fail to exhort to greater service are not feeding members properly. While it is true that scripture can be, and should be, allotted to produce faith, love, peace, joy and fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), there are situations which call for "*snatching them out of the fire*" (Jude 23). Clearly, this allusion teaches us that Norman Vincent Peale's approach to teaching is flawed. The "positive only" mentality will never "*rightly divide the word of truth*" because it omits parts that should be allotted. To be sure, there are portions of scripture that meet every need. Evangelists must take heed to distribute every portion to every need so that the "*whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27) is applied.

The stonemason, a carpenter, a ploughman, a road-cutter. Each of the analogies here has something in common: each must be able to cut a straight line, hold a straight course, go forward without veering

either to the right or the left. A stonemason or carpenter must “hew” the line, “plumb” correctly, align evenly. A road-cutter must be able to go straight through obstacles and keep the course. Again, the Biblical Illustrator is helpful. “A ploughman stands here with his plough, and he ploughs right along from this end of the field to the other, making a straight furrow. And so Paul would have Timothy make a straight furrow right through the word of truth. I believe there is no preaching that God will ever accept but that which goes decidedly through the whole line of truth from end to end, and is always thorough, earnest, and downright. As truth is a straight line, so must our handling of the truth be straightforward and honest, without shifts or tricks” (p. 186). Roman roads did not veer all over the countryside, zig-zagging with every boundary and accommodating each farmer’s fields. Rome had one thought in mind when it built its roads: carry troops to and from distant territories directly back to Rome. With these mental pictures before us, it is clear that Paul was telling Timothy to deal the truth straightly, not being turned aside by opinions and theories. Denominations want their own creeds to be honored, but each is a departure, a veering, from truth. The “*fables*” of those with “*itching ears*” (2 Timothy 4) would detour the truth. Evangelists are to hew the line, hold a straight course, plumb correctly, align evenly as they preach. As a road-line meets obstacles of forests, rivers and chasms, a preacher will meet error, opposition and opinions. These must not deter nor detour the faithful preaching in the direction God would have us go. Is it any wonder that James warned: “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment*” (3:1).

Conclusion

The work of evangelism can be a lonely task. Just as prophets of old had to stand alone and aloof from every obstacle to his work, so evangelists must be ready to “*be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*” (2 Timothy 4:5). Yes, one must “*study (give diligence) to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*”

Attitudes Toward the Preaching of the Gospel

“For ‘whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ How 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?” (Rom. 10:13-14).

The world has been blessed by faithful preachers ever since it was recorded that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). Faithful to God’s will, Noah preached one hundred and twenty years to a world that had departed into moral degradation so deep that “it repented God that he had made man” (Gen. 6:3, 6). Unsuccessful in converting those whose heart was “only evil continually”, Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives (8 souls) were saved from the world that was destroyed in the Flood (1 Pet. 3:20). By today’s standards, Noah might have been called a failure since his long years of preaching reached no one outside his family. Likewise, his message was one of doom and destruction, demanding repentance or damnation, unpopular in our generation. Yet God, who is the final Judge in such matters, blessed Noah by calling him an “heir of righteousness” (Heb. 11:7). From Noah’s life, we learn that faithful preaching is true to God’s word, unconcerned about worldly rejection, and “unsparing” of those in sin (2 Pet. 2:5). We must be concerned in our day about attitudes that prevail toward gospel preaching. Not all of us have Noah’s attitude of faithfulness.

As this new **Watchman** (web magazine) is launched, we hope to use the electronic revolution of our day as a tool to reach out to those

both in and out of the church of the Lord to emphasize the necessity of faithful preaching. Plainly, Noah's attitude is not popular, but the world desperately needs it.

The thematic of this effort is taken from Ezekiel 33:7-9: *“So thou, son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die, and thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and he turn not from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.”*

Since this message is specifically addressed to Ezekiel, some may question the appropriateness of application to modern preachers. Surely, an objective look at God's message to Ezekiel will demand the same principle in preaching today. While no man today is inspired (as was Ezekiel), the responsibilities remain the same. We have no hesitation in applying Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus to us today. We are to *“preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry”* (2 Tim. 4:2-5). Both Ezekiel and Paul give us direction and authority in our preaching.

This is a clear and clarion call to gospel preachers everywhere. We are to be watchmen; we are to be urgent in our preaching; we must be ready to convince, rebuke and exhort. As Paul said of himself, he *“was innocent of the blood of all men, For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God”* (Acts 20:26-27). If you are not ready to be a watchman, you are not ready to be a preacher.

Those with a “John Mark” mentality cannot be watchmen; they don’t have the courage to watch and are a burden to those who do (Acts 15:37-38). Such will avoid controversy, seek peace at all costs, and be uncomfortable in the presence of those who are willing to watch and cry out as God demands.

Those with a “Demas” attitude cannot be watchmen; their heart is in the world and they will wind up there after discouraging others (2 Tim. 4:10).

Those with a “Simon” character cannot be watchmen; they are in it for the money and will sell out to the highest bidder (Acts 8:19). Such know instinctively which side of an issue to take for self-gratification, how to flatter others for personal gain, how to turn preaching into a “profession,” how to make preaching a superb job of self-seeking so as to make himself “somewhat,” a “great preacher.”

Those with the “Paul-hater mentality” cannot be watchmen; they hate truth, the ones who preach the truth, and will back-stab those who support the truth, stirring up envy and strife against those who preach the gospel (Phil. 1:15).

Those with the “Royal” perspective cannot be watchmen; they are the elite, the “some-whats,” the “pillars,” who are above the lowly preacher who cares more for God’s word than style, personage and prestige (Amos 7:13; Gal. 2:6-9). Such are too dignified to call names, identify error, align themselves with distasteful issues; they are appalled at those who do. However, they are not too far above name-calling to call names in secret, telling others to watch those who call names, carping privately against those who speak out as the Bible directs. These speak swelling words in inner sanctums but are “dumb dogs” in open discussion (Isa. 56:10).

Those with an “Older Prophet” attitude cannot be watchmen; they imagine themselves to exist in an exalted state of elder statesmanship which gives them the right to cut the feet out from under the younger generation of “know-nothings” (1 Ki. 13:11-18). Such

live in a delusion that they are the only ones who have ever fought battles, the only ones to have sacrificed, to have been the standard bearers. Speaking “ex cathedra,” such illustrious ones take the liberty of labeling others as “buzzards, looking for carrion” even while accepting the praise of men for their long-ago battles when they themselves hunted prey. Casting mantles of prophet-hood about their shoulders, some of these elder prophets seek immunity from current sins because of past heroic deeds. Not recognizing the fairness of God, they believe age gives them venerability to such an extent that they they are above reproach (Ezek. 18). How the mighty are fallen!

Those with the “Ivory Tower” mentality cannot be watchmen; they live behind walls of academia and editorial policy, dealing in theoretical wisdom while ignorant of the ravages of Satan in the real world (1 Cor. 1:20–2:5). Such refuse to dirty their hands with the effects of sin, indulging rather in lofty statements which cannot be examined publicly. Ignorant of God’s truth, they do not hesitate to defend those who lead the blind into hell all the while critical of those who warn sinners of their real condition.

Brethren, we are seeing an entire generation of preachers who are not committed to fulfill this charge of God to “Preach the whole counsel.” As in the Old Testament, there were those today who cry, “...Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things...” (Isa 30:10). Toward those who obey God’s mandate and preach the message faithfully, criticisms abound and are hurled by those who love “smooth things” or are too timid to preach “the whole counsel.”

We Are Hearing:

- “We must accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.”
- “Negative preaching turns me off.”
- “Who appointed you a brotherhood watchdog?”
- “Preachers should not name names and identify false teachers.”

- “One cannot be called a false teacher unless it can be proved that he is dishonest.”
- “Those who disagree with me are not trustworthy, so I refuse to discuss issues with them.”
- “I am too busy in a local work to bother with issues beyond local interest.”
- “Papers violate local autonomy and those who write for them are hungry for attention, are trying to make a name for themselves, and they meddle into the affairs of local churches.”
- “Those guys are just trying to make a name for themselves.”
- “Those guys are ‘guardians of truth,’ self-appointed judges, full of the party spirit.”
- “But God demands that we allow fellowship with some who believe sinful doctrines and who practice sinful activities.”
- “Local autonomy demands that we allow some churches to accept into their fellowship people who are in sin, even though another church might not be willing to do so.”

These statements (and many others), so critical of faithful preaching while tolerant of error, are symptomatic of an attitude reflecting distaste for plain Bible preaching. This distaste is real, pervasive and active. Meetings are being canceled, preachers are being isolated, reputations are being smeared and efforts to discuss these matters are rebuffed, without recourse. The “good ol’ boy” system is alive and working. Quietly, efforts are made by some preachers as they talk to their friends in high places, to cancel meetings and keep preachers from moving into certain churches. What amounts to a “quarantine” reminiscent of the practice of our liberal brethren in the ’50’s is conducted by some brethren who will go to any lengths to work their will among the churches. Such actions are insidious, underhanded, and ungodly, but they are nevertheless being practiced on a wide scale. Directing scorn toward faithful preachers, those who are so critical are guilty of the very partyism they decry, guilty of language bereft of love, guilty of the carnal spirit they claim to see in others. *“Therefore, you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever*

er you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you who judge practice the same thing” (Rom. 3:1).

Let it be understood that we are not talking about controversy over styles of preaching. I know of no one who insists that stylish dress, erudite language, or pertinent wit is unacceptable in the pulpit. None of this is incompatible with gospel preaching. This is not our problem.

Let it be understood that we are not talking about methods of preaching. There is room in the kingdom of God for the country preacher (as Amos) as well as the sophisticated statesman (as Isaiah). Moses was a Law-giver, Ezekiel was hard-headed and Hosea talked tenderly of love, but all were faithful to God. Both Elijah (1 Ki. 17:1ff) and Obadiah (1 Ki. 18:3) served God faithfully, though in different ways. This is not our problem.

Let it be understood that we are not defending brotherhood politics. Sectarian divisions are always sinful and destructive. No one should limit his opportunities to a certain paper, college or section of the country. It is abhorrent to all faithful people when lines are drawn because of friendships rather than truth, because of which paper(s) are read rather than the substance of its message. It is wrong to dismiss a preacher’s message simply through the prejudicial statement that “he is a Guardian boy.” This was the method of the liberals in the institutional controversy. By the use of “anti,” “legalist,” “orphan hater,” and/or other inflammatory words, minds were poisoned against those standing for truth. Yet some are using identical pejorative terms today when they scornfully discuss the “New Pharisees,” “the New Catholicism,” and “brotherhood watchdogs.” Decrying “personal attack and abuse,” some have heaped personal attacks and abuse on faithful preaching as “journalistic and pulpit jingoism,” “extremists who have their own cause to promote,” “a pack of snarling curs, suspicious and paranoid, biting, snarling and snapping in all directions.” All of this from those who claim the moral and spiritual high ground of non-sectarianism and brotherly love.

What sectarian sin has been committed by faithful preachers? Is it the firm stand for truth against those who are advocating that sinful, adulterous marriages are supported by scripture? What party line has been established by faithful preachers? Is it the warnings that have been raised that those who fellowship the advocates of adulterous marriages are violating 2 John 9-11 and Romans 16:17? What “personal attack and abuse” has taken place by faithful preachers? Is it that those who are false teachers have been identified and their false doctrine has been exposed? If this is sin, we stand in the company of Jesus (Matt. 23), John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-10), of the prophets and apostles who stood up and stood out against evil doers.

Let it be understood that the controversy is not about one preacher or a group of preachers telling other preachers or churches when the line of fellowship against a particular error must be drawn. This is not our problem. It is certainly true that events and circumstances move at different speeds and levels across the country and within congregations. During the institutional apostasy, opposition to liberalism varied from church to church, from preacher to preacher and from section to section. Patience and long suffering wrestled with error and apostasy as the *Herald of Truth* was introduced, institutional homes demanded funding, and centralized control began through the sponsoring church arrangement. Some preachers took an early stand against these errors, some much later. Some were early supporters who changed to opposers later, some were influenced by the debates that raged across the country. Most congregations were divided and split across the nation and around the world, but not at the same instant of time. All of it depended on time, Bible knowledge, circumstances, events and personalities. Apostasy slowly, but surely, expanded, affecting individuals and congregations until a brotherhood division was a reality.

During those years (generally the '50's), charges and counter-charges were made against faithful preachers which are similar to those being made today. Preachers who wrote for the *Gospel Guardian*, *Truth Magazine*, *Preceptor* and other papers published by brethren who opposed liberalism in all its forms were castigated by

those who published and wrote for the *Gospel Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, etc. Charges of “brotherhood controllers,” “church splitters,” “orphan haters,” “Guardian-ites,” and much worse were hurled by those who claimed that Roy Cogdill, Yater Tant, Robert Farish, Hoyt Houchen, *et al.*, were trying to decide issues for the brotherhood and trying to “line up the churches.” However, no man, group of men, paper or college had the power, then or now, to decide for the brotherhood. What the preachers and papers did was to furnish individuals and congregations with Bible study and discussions in an open forum that allowed truth to be heard. The result was a cataclysm that ultimately enveloped the brotherhood, effectively dividing it. History has proven that the division was determined along individual and congregational lines, never monolithic and instantaneous.

Unless free and open discussion is allowed today by which truth will be reinforced and error rejected, division will be inevitable. The compromise toward “unity-in-diversity,” so prevalent in our time, is not monolithic and instantaneous, nor will opposition be. Some will take an early stand against compromise, having lived through similar battles before. Some will take a stand later, only as the issue becomes more clearly defined. Some will have to wait and listen to the discussion, unsure of what is going on. But no one can decide for the brotherhood of individual saints and no one can decide for autonomous churches when they will take a stand for or against unity in diversity. The charge of “lining up the churches,” and “brotherhood watchdog,” is a smoke screen, attempting to stifle open discussion. For sure, the charge must be two-edged. Those in favor of fellowshiping error are taking their efforts to papers and churches around the world that are in sympathy with them. As one preacher has stated that he goes “hither, thither, and yon,” preaching his belief in favor of unity in diversity, others might charge him (and his compatriots) with “lining up the brotherhood.” Is sauce for the goose not also sauce for the gander? Why are the efforts of some pure and altruistic while the efforts of others so suspect of evil? Each preacher (pro or con) will try to reach as many people as opportunities permit. Each will claim the most noble of motives. Each will address “the brotherhood.” It is more than a little hypocritical for some to charge others with “lining

up the brotherhood” even while traveling from state to state to label opponents as “brotherhood watchdogs.” The final determination of rightness will depend upon a relationship to truth, not upon the ability to hang derogatory name tags on brethren.

Faithful preachers have a mandate from God as to what they should preach. Those too timid to follow the mandate, too weak to face opposition, have no business carping at those willing to do the work. Isaiah spoke clearly of those who, like “dumb dogs,” refused to bark (Isa. 56:10). But, not content to just remain silent, they yap at the heels of those who are speaking out, seeking to hinder them in their work, becoming a stumblingblock in the path of the men of God. The Lord will reward them according to their own works.

The Mandate From God

There should not be any doubt as to the burden God has given the faithful preacher. Whether inspired or not, the messenger must be true to the message. The responsibility of the preacher is crystal clear. ***Hear the word of God:***

“And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people. Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed” (Isa. 6:8-10; cf. Matt. 13:13-15).

“Now the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, I know not how to speak; for I am a child. But Jehovah said unto me, Say

not, I am a child; **for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak.** Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith Jehovah. Then Jehovah put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and Jehovah said unto me, **Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth;** see, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:6-10).

“A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; **the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so...**” (Jer. 5:30).

“And he said to me, **Son of man, go, and get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.** For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; not to many peoples of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, if I sent thee to them, they would hearken unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me; for all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and a stiff heart. Behold, I have made thy face hard against their faces, and thy forehead hard against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead; fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house. **Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thy heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord Jeho-**

vah; whether they will hear or whether they will forbear” (Ezek. 3:4-11).

*“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. **But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry”** (2 Tim. 4:1-5).*

What Is The Real Issue About Preaching Today?

It is not possible to misunderstand the heavenly mandate. The simplest schoolboy can understand God’s charge to preach His word.

The problem is simply that some preachers are not willing to do what is so clear. There is a desire to do what God condemns: “preach smooth things.” Many in the church are like those who “love to have it so.” This is a sad and deplorable attitude toward gospel preaching.

This is a sample of the material contained in
*Essential Articles: Dealing with Various Issues and
Changing Attitudes toward Gospel Preaching*
by Tom M. Roberts

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