

***Preaching
Christ
Crucified***

Winford Claiborne

International Gospel Hour

% West Fayetteville Church of Christ
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Dedication

To:

Marvin and Susie (Dillihay) Claiborne

Who gave me life and love

To:

Dr. Dalton W. Doron and Ora Holloway Doron

Who gave me Molly

Introduction

Preaching has always been one of God's main methods in reaching the lost, in strengthening His own people and in warning the rebellious and disobedient. Before God sent a universal flood on the earth, He commissioned Noah to preach to antediluvian world. The apostle Peter referred to Noah as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). God commanded his seventh century B. C. prophet Jeremiah:

Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:9-10).

Jeremiah's preaching necessarily included both negative and positive elements. That was also true of every other Old Testament prophet and of every New Testament preacher. After God had chastised Jonah for his prejudice toward the people of Nineveh, he instructed him: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2).

The apostle Peter used the word "preacher" (**kerux**) in describing the work God has assigned to Noah (2 Peter 2:5). In addition to Peter's use of the word, the New Testament uses the word two more times only (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). The verb form (**kerusso**) almost always translated "preach" appears sixty-one times in the New Testament. The English Standard Version translates the noun **kerux** by the English word "herald." A herald in ancient times had the responsibility of delivering his master's message exactly as his master gave it. He could not alter the message; he had no authority to negotiate with the receiver of the message. Paul used the word **kerusso** in his charge to Timothy and to all preachers who would be faithful to God.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).

The book you hold in your hands is not intended to be an exhaustive manual on preaching. My purpose in making this volume available to preachers and to others is to show conclusively that when one preaches the truth of God's word—whatever that truth encompasses, whether marriage and family, moral issues, such as abortion, homosexuality, gambling, alcoholic beverages—or issues relating to the plan of salvation and the nature and work of the church—all of it is included in preaching Christ crucified, that is, if Paul meant what he wrote in his first epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:2). All faithful preachers will discuss Christ's vicarious death on the cross, but they must not assume when they have done so, they have preached all Paul meant by preaching Christ crucified.

Most committed students of religion know that preaching has fallen on hard times in recent decades. There probably are many reasons for the decline in the power and in the popularity of preaching. So much modern preaching involves little scriptural content. The sermons are often shallow and lack deep conviction. The hearer can often learn as much from a pop psychologist or from an entertainer as he can from many preachers. Too many modern preachers are not sure if their messages have any ultimate meaning for themselves or for their hearers. There is so much uncertainty both in the pulpit and in the pew. I pray that God will use the lessons in this book to remove some of the uncertainty about preaching that exists in our world.

The men whose pictures are on the front cover of this volume have been very influential in my life. I first met N. B. Hardeman when I was a freshman at Freed-Hardeman College (now Freed-Hardeman University). When I became a sophomore, I sat in two of his classes—"Special Bible"

and "Bible Geography." Since I often attended services at the Henderson Church of Christ at Henderson, Tennessee, I had the great privilege of hearing brother Hardeman preach. He was a master orator. He could hold the attention of an audience as well as any speaker I ever heard. He also had a wonderful sense of humor. I profited greatly by being in his classes and by hearing him preach. The last time Molly and I heard him preach was in late 1950's at Woodbury, Tennessee. He was still a powerful speaker at age 86.

Gus Nichols came to Henderson Church of Christ for a gospel meeting while I was a student at Freed-Hardeman. I had heard about brother Nichols, but had never heard him preach before that meeting. I was greatly impressed by his thorough knowledge of the scriptures and by his loving and compassionate presentation of the gospel. I remember his quoting as many as one hundred-fifty passages of scripture in one sermon. His preaching inspired me to devote my life to study and to preaching God's word. In addition, I have been greatly blessed by knowing brother Nichol's family, especially his sons, Flavil and Hardeman.

When I was Director of the annual lectureship at Freed-Hardeman University, the Lectureship Committee dedicated its book to V. P. Black. I wrote the following in the book about brother Black.

It has been my privilege through the years to hear some of the outstanding preachers in our brotherhood-N. B. Hardeman, Foy Wallace, C. M. Pullias, B. C. Goodpasture and many others-but I do not remember the first time I heard these men. In some cases, I was so young their preaching may not have made much impression on me. But I remember the first time I heard V. P. Black. About 1960 I was visiting with the Shannon Church of Christ in Columbia, South Carolina, during a meeting in which brother Black was preaching. I was thrilled to hear the

gospel presented so simply, so lovingly and so powerfully. Since that time I have sought every opportunity to attend meetings and lectureships where V. P. Black was speaking. I have never been disappointed in a sermon or a lecture which brother Black delivered (Winford Claiborne, Editor, **Christ in You, the Hope of Glory**; Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University, 1993, pp. iii-v).

I have known Tom Holland for more than forty years. During my tenure as lectureship director (1982-1993) at Freed-Hardeman University, we invited brother Holland to speak on a number of occasions. After I retired from teaching and moved to Fayetteville, Tennessee to preach for the West Fayetteville Church of Christ, brother Holland has preached in two gospel meetings with this congregation. I had the honor of introducing him in those meetings. I told the audience that Tom Holland has been one of my favorite preachers for a long time. His sermons are always well prepared and effectively delivered. His radio work and his writing have influenced many people to obey the gospel of our Lord. I express to Dr. Holland my sincere appreciation for his friendship and for his generosity in providing the Preface to this book.

The publication of this volume on preaching would not have been possible without the generous support of the three churches that are mentioned in the Acknowledgements. From the time the International Gospel Hour moved from Texarkana, Texas, to Fayetteville, Tennessee, all three of those churches have given generously to the Gospel Hour. Through their efforts and those of many others, we are able to reach most of the people of our nation and of parts of Mexico and Canada. A program as large as the International Gospel Hour (at this time more than 160 stations) could not survive without the generosity of so many faithful Christians. I am so grateful for such wonderful help and encouragement.

The Central Church of Christ in Martinsburg, West Virginia, has meant much to me over the past several years. I have preached in five gospel meetings at Central and have meetings scheduled every two years until my preaching work has to stop because of age or death. The three elders, Danny Bowers, Don Deitrick and Mark Everson, their preacher, Warren Kenney, and all other members of Central have become like the physical members of my own earthly family. That congregation paid for the publication of Robert Usrey's book, **Church Discipline for Caring Christians** and helped in the publication of my first book, **Restoring God's Pattern for the Home**. I always enjoy going to Martinsburg for gospel meetings. One of their elders, Mark Everson, serves on our Advisory Board.

The Shackle Island Church of Christ in my home county (Sumner County, Tennessee) has been most helpful in the work of the International Gospel Hour. That church has not missed a month in sending to the program. In addition, they have helped when special needs have arisen. Their elders, Garvin Claiborne (my youngest brother) and Tony Lambert, have sought ways to promote the Gospel Hour. They also helped in the publication of my book on the home. I commend them and thank them for their desire to have the gospel preached to our nation and to the world.

While I was teaching in the English Department at Benton High School, Benton, Kentucky, I began to preach at the Williams Chapel Church of Christ (then Lynn Grove, Kentucky, now Murray, Kentucky). I was preaching there most of the time while Molly and I were dating and for two years after we married. Both of us fell in love with Williams Chapel people and that love has continued to this very hour. They have been good to both of us and grieved with me in the loss of my dear Molly. I always feel I am returning home when I go back for a gospel meeting. (I have preached in eleven meetings over the past fifty-five years.) I have known the elders, Billy Murdock and Max

Smotherman, and their wives for many years and love them dearly. If I live to be eighty-two years of age (in 2008), I will plan to be at Williams Chapel for another gospel meeting.

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ has given an enormous amount of money to the International Gospel Hour. Over the past eight years, the church as a congregation has given about \$50,000 to the program. The members individually have given about the same. In addition, the members support me and others associated with the program with their prayers and good wishes. They seem to understand the great opportunities we have been given for reaching the lost and for strengthening the Lord's church. I am blessed to be working under good elders and with good people.

I cannot complete this introduction without paying tribute to my dear Molly. She departed this life on October 12, 2002, but her goodness and love touch my life every hour of every day. Although I have dealt with words all my life—in preaching, in writing and in teaching school—I do not have the words to explain the loss I have experienced with her death. How eagerly I anticipate our reunion!

May our heavenly Father bless all gospel preachers and help them to be faithful to their calling!

Preface

The only constant in life is change. Corinth, Greece, of the first century was drastically different from towns, cities, and rural areas of today. An attempt to compare life then with life today would be a study in contrasts.

However, when one compares the problems of life with which the Corinthians struggled and events today, there is an evident similarity. There were social-spiritual problems that constantly threatened a high quality of life. Sexual immorality, idolatry, stealing, greed, blasphemy, and extortion were some of the sins that prevailed in Corinthian society (I Cor. 9:9-11).

God had a church in Corinth. The gospel of Christ had been proclaimed, believed and obeyed (I Cor. 15:1-4; 1:18-25; Acts 18:8). The church, or the "called," had been called to be saints (I Cor. 1:2-3). But God's church as a small island of goodness was surrounded by a raging sea of paganism, ungodliness, and unrighteousness. The challenge was to keep the island from being inundated by the ocean.

God's people struggled to be God's people. The world was influencing them. Division, a characteristic of the world (I Cor. 3:1-3; 1:10-13), had gotten into the church. Immorality was a threat to the very existence of the church (I Cor. 5). There were other problems: brethren taking brethren to law courts; abuse of Christian liberty; abuse of the Lord's Supper; improper use of special powers given to some in the first century church; and the false doctrine which denied the resurrection of the dead.

The Corinthian letter is relevant because God's church today must constantly struggle with many of the same and similar problems.

His many years of study, the years of teaching Bible on the university level, his preaching, and the years of study

in preparing manuscripts for university and college lecture books, and the hundreds of manuscripts written for radio preaching, including the last several years as speaker on the International Gospel Hour, make Winford Claiborne eminently qualified to analyze and write about the book of I Corinthians.

Winford Claiborne is an avid reader, a diligent student, a competent writer, a capable lecturer and a faithful and effective preacher of the gospel of Christ.

Claiborne's information about I Corinthians will bless the life of anyone who carefully reads the material. The Lord's church will be strengthened by this discussion. Lives will be spiritually challenged and strengthened by this book.

It is a personal joy to know Winford Claiborne, an honor to claim his as a brother in Christ, and a personal privilege to recommend his book on I Corinthians. Read this book carefully and study it diligently. You will be reading a book written by a man who believes that I Corinthians is inspired Scripture, that I Corinthians is written by the apostle Paul, revealed to him by God's Holy Spirit.

Reading Claiborne's book will stimulate us to be better people. His discussion of I Corinthians will challenge us to be faithful to the church which God Almighty purposed and the church made a living reality by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

~ Tom Holland
Brentwood, Tennessee

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Chapter 1

Preaching Christ Crucified (No. 1)

Do you remember these words from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33)? If God is not the author of confusion but of peace, how do you explain the Babel sounds one hears on radio and on television? One man preaches salvation by grace along through faith alone. Another man emphasizes the absolute necessity of believing and obeying the gospel. Some preachers support so-called "modern miracles," while others believe in Bible miracles but deny the reality of modern faith healing and other charismatic beliefs. Some of the faith teachers claim God owes His children health and prosperity while most of the religious leaders in America oppose such use of the Bible. Why all this confusion about what ought to be preached?

Tragically, even among some left-leaning churches of Christ there are preachers and teachers who have no scriptural idea about what ought be preached and how it ought to be preached. For example, one prominent preacher argues that the very essence of preaching is based on these verses from the Ephesian letter.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

Who could possibly deny that these "ones" are fundamentals of the faith? Could anyone deny any of these and still be faithful to God's law? But are these the only biblical truths we are to accept and to preach? Did you notice that these seven ones of Ephesians 4 say absolutely nothing about the

Lord's supper, about prayer, about giving of our means to support the cause of Christ and nothing about the moral behavior God expects of His children? No one can preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and fail to stress these seven ones. But men might preach these for a hundred years and miss many of the biblical truths which are essential to our salvation.

Some preachers among churches of Christ have invented what they call "the core gospel." They are saying, in effect, that there are certain fundamentals of the faith, such as, the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord, and other matters are secondary in importance. Some of these same preachers are accusing gospel preachers of not preaching grace, the cross and the mighty acts of God, such as, God's deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian bondage, the Lord's incarnation and His resurrection. These are totally false accusations. It may be that some preachers do not emphasize these great biblical principles to the extent some other preachers do, but they all preach the grace of God, the cross and the mighty acts of God. At least, the thousands of preachers I have known preach these concepts.

One of the great problems with preachers who have such a narrow view of what biblical preaching is: they simply do not know what preaching Christ crucified means. I am aware of the seriousness of this indictment of much of modern preaching, but I think you will see what I mean as our lesson unfolds. The great apostle Paul wrote as follows to the Corinthians:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That

your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

There is much in this passage I wish we had time to examine, but I want to focus on one verse. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (v. 2). Paul was saying that all his preaching would fit under the heading: "Christ and Him crucified." He had made a decision which obligated him to preach only Christ and Him crucified—nothing less, nothing more. So when any person—preacher or otherwise—wants to know what preaching Christ crucified means all he has to do is to review what Paul wrote in his great epistles and to read his sermons in the book of Acts. Would that also apply to Peter's preaching or John's or Jude's? Were those great gospel preachers going to preach something other than Christ and Him crucified?

Let me illustrate the principle we are examining. For more than a half century I have heard gospel preachers discuss and I have discussed the sinfulness of division among God's people and God's demand that His people be united in His Son. When I condemn division and promote unity, am I preaching Christ crucified? If I am not, I must not continue to do it since I am obligated to preach only Christ and Him crucified. What do we learn from Paul's letter to the church at Corinth and from other New Testament writings?

Paul describes the shameful division which existed at Corinth.

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ (1 Cor. 1:11-12).

Can you imagine a more unreasonable, unscriptural and unbelievable situation than that Paul has described? All of

the members were saying, "I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos, I belong to Peter and I belong to Christ." Even those who claimed to belong to Christ were apparently making the boast in a divisive spirit. What an ungodly and destructive situation! How can men and women ever be brought to Christ when such confusion and fragmentation exist? Is God pleased when those who claim to belong to His Son are so divided? From a biblical viewpoint, division is always sinful, at least, on someone's part.

The divided situation at Corinth motivated Paul to ask three penetrating questions: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13). These three questions go to the very heart of division. These questions are called "rhetorical questions" because they are literary devices which do not demand answers. The answer is implied in the question. In other words, when Paul asked, "Is Christ divided," every reasonable person knows the answer is NO. Of course, Christ is not divided. How utterly ridiculous to think that God the Son is divided! The same answer is implied in the other two questions. Let us examine the three questions a little more carefully.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16). He is our redeemer, our Savior and our life. How could the Son of God be divided? But if division within His body is scriptural, reasonable and profitable—as some sectarians teach—then Jesus is divided. But the very idea of Christ's being divided is absurd. James asks the following questions for a different purpose, but they are appropriate in this context.

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh (James 3:11-12).

How can the Son of God promote unity in His high priestly prayer and permit division in His body? A fig tree cannot

produce figs and olive berries. Jesus cannot demand unity among His followers and encourage division at the same time. Jesus petitions our heavenly Father:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

In view of this beautiful prayer, how could anyone even imagine that Christ endorses or allows division among His professed followers?

Paul asked the Corinthians, "Was Paul crucified for you?" Does that question suggest that we ought to follow in religion only the one who was crucified for us? One of the great tragedies of the current religious scene is that millions and millions of people follow popular teachers or appealing ideas—not Jesus Christ. People sin grievously when they follow anyone other than the One who was crucified for us. Do we not realize that He alone is the way, the truth and the life? No man can come unto the Father but through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). If we want to have unity in the religious world, it will come only when we lay aside sectarian names and attitudes and human innovations and stand alone on the word of God. We must follow Paul's plea for unity.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

But it is not possible—is it—for all religious groups in the United States to speak the same things? If it is not, then our God requires us to do the impossible. How can we all speak the same things when there are dozens or hundreds of different denominational concepts being taught in our

country? Are you willing to listen with an open mind to some challenging ideas? Are you willing to do exactly what the Bible says in the way it says do it? Would you agree to removing all mechanical instruments of music from the worship services of the church you attend in order to have unity? Mechanical instruments are not authorized under the new covenant anyway. Would sacrificing those instruments be a step in the direction of all people's speaking the same things? Is unity among those who claim to follow Christ worth any sacrifice?

Bill McCartney, founder and chief ramrod of the so-called "Promise Keepers," speaks passionately of unity in the religious world. He affirms there is only one criterion (or standard) for unity: To love Jesus and to be born of the Spirit of God. Is that a biblical platform for unity? One is forced logically to ask some questions about such doctrine. What does loving Jesus mean? What are the criteria for loving Jesus? The word of God shines considerable light on these questions.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

One example of the errors of the Promise Keepers will have to suffice for the time being. They believe there are five things one must do to become a Christian. Admit that you are a sinner. Repent and turn to God for the forgiveness of sins. Believe that Jesus Christ died for your salvation. Receive Jesus Christ through praying to God Then tell someone about your commitment to Jesus Christ. There are some very serious problems with McCartney's plan of salvation, the chief of which is that it cannot be found in

scripture. Does it not make more sense to go to the Bible and find exactly what God tells men and women to do to be saved rather than taking the word of some man—regardless of the sincerity of that man? Obviously, everyone must recognize that he is a sinner in need of God's saving grace. He must repent of his alien sins, as Peter commanded the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). His faith in Christ must lead him to confess Jesus before men and to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Did you know that not one scripture—not even one—tells alien sinners to pray to have their sins forgiven and to be added to the New Testament church? If that is true—and there is no room for argument on the topic—are you willing for the sake of unity to give up the so-called “sinner's prayer” and unite on the Bible's teaching on how to become a Christian? You surely know that those who are committed to scripture cannot sacrifice their biblical convictions just for the sake of unity. Is unity so valuable that we are willing to give up whatever unscriptural practice prevents unity?

The apostle Paul also asked the Corinthians, “Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” What possible difference could it make about the name into which they were baptized? If baptism has nothing to do with our salvation, we can be baptized into any name we choose. But the scriptures require that we be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. When the Jews on Pentecost asked what they should do to call on the name of the Lord, Peter answered,

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:37-38).

Paul admonished the Colossians:

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

When Paul asked the Corinthians, "Were you baptized into the name of Paul?", was he implying that we belong to the one into whose name we were baptized. If we were baptized into the name of Paul or of Apollos or of Peter, would we belong to that person? Although I have never heard of anyone's being baptized into the name of some religious leader, there are people who wear human names and act as if they were baptized into those names. That is not the only reasons denominational loyalties exist, but that is certainly one major factor. Why, dear friends, can we not repudiate all human names and practices and unite upon the teaching of scripture? If we claim to be Christians and Christians only, why do we need any other name to identify who we are and whose we are? Is not the name of Jesus Christ sufficient to identify His children? Unbiblical names and titles serve only to divide and confuse.

But are division, envying and strife really sinful or just inadvisable? Do you know what the word "carnal" means? That is the word Paul used to describe the sinfulness of division in the body of Christ.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men (1 Cor. 3:1-3)?

Paul returns to the point he made in chapter 1. "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal" (1 Cor. 3:4)?

Can you understand from the biblical passages I have read to you just how vital it is to have unity? And biblical unity can be based only on the teaching of the word of God. We cannot add the doctrines and commandments of men. We cannot corrupt the worship of the Lord's church by

introducing practices which are not authorized, such as, dancing, showing how physically strong we are by breaking concrete blocks or bending iron rods or playing on mechanical instruments of music. These are all innovations which men have invented to enhance people's enjoyment of the worship services, but they are clear violations of the principle that we must do all in the name of the Lord (Col. 3:17). Even if these human additions to the work and worship of the church were permitted—and they definitely are not—are they so valuable that we shall keep them even if it means dividing the church of the living God? Will you please think and pray about these biblical principles?

Chapter 2

Preaching Christ Crucified (No. 2)

When was the last time your preacher discussed the necessity of withdrawing from ungodly members? Was it two years ago or twenty years ago or never? Have many of us preachers failed to discuss corrective church discipline because the Bible is somewhat vague regarding the practice? Or is it because we might encounter some opposition from the leadership of the church or from some of the prominent members? Are we afraid we might be taken to court for withdrawing from a sexually immoral person, as happened a few years ago in Oklahoma? Whatever excuses which have been offered for not discussing any topic will be judged in that final day. We will have to give an account of our preaching before the throne of Almighty God. I do not want God saying to me on that day, "You knew what my word taught, but you did not have the courage to preach it."

I need to ask you another question. Does preaching Christ crucified include teaching what the Bible says on church discipline—both instructive and corrective? If you have carefully examined the book of 1 Corinthians, you know it does. Paul informed the church at Corinth: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). If Paul meant what he wrote to the Corinthians, then church discipline must be included in preaching Christ and Him crucified. That was one of the topics on which Paul spoke very forcefully. He did not leave it to the church's discretion. He required discipline of those churches which would be faithful to God.

The church at Corinth had an incestuous brother within its fellowship.

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you (1 Cor. 5:1-2).

The word "fornication" (**porneia** in the Greek) means sexual immorality. That is what the word always means. The kind of fornication or sexual immorality the inspired writers had in mind must be determined by the context. For example, the word in this text means incest—"that a man should have his father's wife." Paul used the word "fornication" later in this letter to mean premarital sex.

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband (1 Cor. 7:1-2).

In this chapter, Paul was speaking of unmarried people. If they cannot control their sexual appetites, let them marry rather than commit sexual immorality.

Jesus used the word "fornication" in His famous discourse on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Matt. 19:9).

Since Jesus was speaking of married people when He used the word "fornication," He used the word to mean adultery. Jude, the Lord's brother, employed the word "fornication" to describe the behavior of the Sodomites.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh,

are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 1:7).

Jude used the Greek, **ekporneuo** in this verse. That is an intensified form of the word translated commit fornication and means exceeding fornication or perverted fornication and is unquestionably speaking of homosexuality. The expression, "strange flesh," indicates that men were going after men. From a biblical viewpoint, that is strange flesh.

The sexual immorality at Corinth was of such a nature that the pagan people did not practice it. As most of you know, if you have studied anthropology, incest is taboo in almost every culture in the world. As immoral as the Gentiles were at Corinth and in other parts of the world, they generally did not engage in incestuous relationships. And yet, the church at Corinth had done nothing about the incestuous brother in its fellowship. Can you imagine a church's unwillingness to withdraw from a brother who is living with his father's wife or his brother's wife or anyone else's wife than his own? You should have no difficulty imagining such behavior because it happens in almost every church in the land in our day. Tragically, many churches recognize no standard which would require them to withdraw from anyone—regardless of the heinousness of the sin.

When a church has become contaminated and corrupted by immorality—sexual or otherwise—what can and should the church do? We cannot just sit on the sidelines and complain about a brother's being a drunk or a sister's being an adulteress. That kind of behavior adds to the problem. Paul commanded:

For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such

an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:3-5).

That sounds so harsh, does it not? How can modern tolerant people countenance the delivering of a brother unto Satan? And Christianity is supposed to be a religion of love.

1 Corinthians 5 furnishes at least three reasons why the church must-not may-withdraw from ungodly members of the body of Christ. The church must withdraw from unfaithful Christians because it is the will of God. Paul commanded: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...deliver such an one unto Satan..." (1 Cor. 5:4-5). "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" means by His authority. It is by the name of Christ that we are to preach and to practice baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Paul also commanded the Thessalonians:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thess. 3:6).

The truth is: All we do in the work and in the worship of the church is to be done in the name of Christ.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:16-17).

When the Lord requires any work or act, those who would have His approval must do it. We may be repelled and even repulsed by the Lord's commands, but if we accept Him as the Lord, we will do what He says in the ways He says do it. I am aware that some theologians—even among churches of Christ—characterize such thinking and preaching

as being legalistic. But no one can sustain that thesis from the scriptures. We must have the faith which led Abraham to obey (Heb. 11:8). Withdrawing from drunks, fornicators, extortioners and lazy Christians is not man's arrangement—but God's. How can a church imagine it is being faithful to God when it ignores the responsibility of withdrawing from unrepentant sinners?

The church must also deliver a brother to Satan for "...the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5). Does Paul mean to leave the impression that withdrawing from the unrighteous should be considered an act of love? You know that was what Paul had in mind. Do you remember these words from the same epistle: "Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor. 16:14)? A simple illustration should help us to understand what Paul was teaching. If your child is about to touch a very hot stove and you slap his hand to prevent his being burned, are you acting from love? My parents were very forceful in disciplining me because they loved me and wanted to do right. The Hebrew writer quoted from Proverbs when he said to his fellow Christians:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Heb. 12:5-6).

If you see a brother violating God's law by getting drunk or committing sexual immorality or taking the Lord's name in vain, do you honestly believe his soul is in danger if he continues in that sin? If his soul is not in danger of hell fire, then why bother to correct him or to withdraw from him? If his soul will stand condemned before God in the judgment unless he repents, is it not a loving act on the part of the church to withdraw from him to awaken him to the evil of his way? There is nothing more loving you

can do for anyone than to keep him from going headlong into eternal condemnation. Sometimes that means taking extreme measures, such as, withdrawing fellowship from him. Jude admonished his readers:

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 1:21-23).

In other words, we must do all that is legitimate to turn our brothers away from sin. Withdrawing is just one means God has provided for accomplishing that goal.

But what if withdrawing from a brother or sister does not work? What if he disdains our best efforts and continues to turn his back on the Lord? My friends, we are not responsible for the results of our work in the Lord's vineyard. Paul informed the Corinthians:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

If we do our best in planting and watering the seed of the kingdom, we have to leave the increase to God Almighty. If we follow the biblical guidelines for withdrawing from erring members, we have to leave the results in the hands of the Father.

Paul gives a third reason for the church's duty to withdraw from those who become unfaithful in the Lord's service—whatever the nature of that unfaithfulness. Will you please listen carefully to these words:

Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us

keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

Have you ever heard someone say about some church, "I would not be a member of that congregation because I work with one of their members and he is the biggest liar or the worst drunk I know"? I am aware that sometimes the person who makes that accusation is using it as an excuse for not obeying the Lord. But, tragically, it is too often true. I have no doubt that thousands of people have been turned away from religion because of the behavior of preachers, priests and other church leaders. When a preacher has been indicted for misappropriating church funds, or sleeping with one of the women in the congregation, or failing to file correct tax forms, or driving under the influence of alcohol or of other drugs, you can know it will take years and even generations for people to forget such conduct. Do you want to stand in the way of someone's obeying the gospel? The great apostle Paul denied himself many privileges, such as, not taking a wife, and nor receiving wages from some congregations because he did not want to hinder the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:12). The word "hinder" means to cut into. Paul did not want to cut into his good influence for the kingdom of God. He says later in the same chapter, "...I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

There is no sermon more powerful than the one we live. That was Paul's reason for telling a young preacher:

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

Paul also admonished Titus to exhort young men to be sober minded.

Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good

works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (Titus 2:6-8).

The apostle Peter urged Christian women to so live before their husbands that the husbands could be won to Christ (1 Peter 3:1-6). A husband who knows how much his wife loves the Lord and takes care of her duties as a wife may win him to Christ. She should serve as a good example of Christianity in action. There are no guarantees she will win her husband to the Lord, but there is no better way to do it than to live one's profession.

Paul told the Corinthians: "Your glorying is not good." They were probably glorying in spite of the evil at Corinth—not because of it. Then the apostle asked, "Do you not know that little leaven leavens the whole lump?" I have had precious little experience with leaven, but I have worked with strawberries and other fruits and vegetables all my life. If a rotten strawberry is not removed from the cup, the entire cup will be contaminated. If a church member commits adultery and nothing is done about it, the church will be corrupted in many ways. So Paul commanded:

...Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:5-7).

No one who is familiar with the teaching of the Mosaic law or who has had any experience with fruits and vegetables should have any difficulty understanding Paul's meaning. Let me put it as plainly and succinctly as possible: Get rid of the sin in the church because sin corrupts and contaminates.

Christians are to keep the feast—not the Lord's supper—but the feast of Christian living—not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the

unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:8). Does the congregation you attend need to hear these inspired words from 1 Corinthians 5:1-8? Are you allowing immoral people and troublemakers to remain the fellowship of the church? Did you know that a church which allows ungodliness to continue in the church will cease to be the church of the living God? God told the Ephesians:

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:5).

From what I have discussed with you today about church discipline, do you get the impression that preaching Christ crucified must include this vital topic? Or to put it another way: If I want to know only Christ and Him crucified, must I teach what the Bible says about withdrawing from the wicked persons within the church? If you listened carefully to our examination of the topic, I do not believe you can avoid seeing that preaching Christ crucified must include teaching all men what they need to know in order to become Christians and to be faithful in their duties as Christians. How can preachers imagine they are following Paul's observations about preaching Christ crucified when they neglect so many vital topics or when they soft-soap the truth of the gospel? May God help all of us preachers to preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth! We shall be judged for doing less.

Chapter 3

Preaching Christ Crucified (No. 3)

If your preacher announced his topic, "Preaching Christ Crucified," and then proceeded to speak out against sexual immorality and greed and drunkenness, would you think he was out of order? Have we been too narrow in our concept of what it means to preach Christ crucified? If we think the expression means to preach only the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord, we do not understand what Paul said on the topic. Paul told the Corinthians, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Does that mean that every sermon Paul preached had to include our Lord's death on the cross? Oh, I know there is no true Christianity without that truth, but is that all Paul had in mind when he spoke of preaching Christ crucified? My friend, you know it is not—if you have read 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians and Paul's other letters and his speeches in the book of Acts. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of the preaching he had done at Ephesus.

I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house...Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 26-27).

To put all of this very simply and bluntly: Paul preached whatever the churches and individuals needed. If they needed to learn of the great evil of division, Paul discussed it (1 Cor. 1:10-13). If they needed to know how God had revealed His will to man, Paul explained it to them (1 Cor. 2:6-13). If they needed to know God's will on

church discipline—both instructive and corrective—Paul gave them the Lord’s instructions concerning those matters. When brothers in Christ were carrying each other to court, Paul warned of the sinfulness of such behavior. But in teaching against division, against going to law with a brother, was Paul preaching Christ crucified? If he were not, he was not being honest with his hearers and readers. He had made a decision not to know anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. If the topics I have mentioned and many others did not fit into that category—that is, Christ and Him crucified—Paul should not have preached them.

But does teaching God’s will on human sexual functioning fit into Paul’s commitment to preach Christ and Him crucified and nothing else? You know it does—if Paul was being straightforward with his readers. Let us summarize in our lesson today what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about human sexuality. There were almost certainly some at Corinth who thought of sexual contacts as nothing more than eating a meal or taking a drink of water. It was simply a natural function of the body. They were saying,

Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body (1 Cor. 6:13-18).

Some observations on these verses are in order.

The sexual appetite and its fulfillment encompass far more than the eating of food. God designed the sexual appetite to be fulfilled only in the marriage relationship. Even if the scriptures did not teach this truth, Americans ought to be able to look around them to discern how evil it is for people to spread their sexual favors as widely as they do in modern times. There are millions of children and young people who are growing into maturity with only one parent. These children are more likely to be poor, to become involved in sexual promiscuity, to get involved in criminal activities and to lead destructive lives. Sexual behavior demands self-control. We cannot do whatever we choose without having to pay the consequences.

The human body in God's sight and in the sight of Bible believers is sacred and to be used only to glorify the God who made us and the Christ who died for us. The God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is going to raise our bodies. Does that fact provide some insight into God's rules and regulations regarding our sexual behavior? If we were not going to be raised from the dead, it would not make any difference what we did with our bodies. Our bodies are members of Christ. How can we take the members of Christ and make them one with a prostitute? When we join our bodies to sexually immoral persons we become one with that person. How absolutely disgraceful that Christians should degrade themselves and the Lord in such a fashion!

Paul commands: "Flee fornication." The verb flee is present active imperative and means keep on fleeing from fornication. Tragically, many Christians—especially young Christians—seem to want to get just as close to sexual immorality as they can without actually engaging in sexual intimacy. That is extremely dangerous, as many Christians through the ages have had to learn. They thought they could get very close to the fire without getting burned, but their foolish behavior produced unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and broken hearts. I am aware

that the popular media teach a different lesson, but millions of people have learned the hard way how wrong the media have been. Every parent, preacher, psychiatrist and counselor has had to pick up the pieces of these young people's lives and try to put them back together.

None of this says that the sexual appetite and its legitimate fulfillment are in any way unchristian or vulgar, as many Christians have been accused of teaching or at least of believing. The human body is not sinful. But our appetites—and not just our sexual appetites—must be under our control and not the other way around. Paul asked the Corinthians:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

If the bodies of Christians belong to God, we are accountable unto him for the way we use or misuse them.

If I preach these great truths—and I do to both young people and to older ones—am I preaching Christ crucified? Are not these topics too mundane—too worldly—to be included in the category, "Preaching Christ crucified"? My friends, if you think they are, you have misunderstood what Paul said he was going to do—"know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified"—or you have a warped view of human sexuality. If we are not careful, we adopt, unconsciously perhaps, the view of some religious groups that sex even in marriage is somehow beneath the dignity of good people. Many of the church fathers, like Tertullian, Origen and Augustine, had warped views of human sexuality.

As you can see from what I have read to you from 1 Corinthians 6, preaching Christ crucified necessarily involves discussing moral values. Any preacher who thinks

he has preached the whole counsel of God when he has taught what the scriptures say about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ has deceived himself and has deprived his hearers of fundamental truths. In the same chapter I have been examining, Paul asked,

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Now wait a minute! Am I saying to you that preaching Christ crucified must include speaking out against adultery, idolatry, fornication, homosexuality, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling and extortion? Please remember that Paul said, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." But the same writer who made that decision and recorded it in 1 Corinthians 2:2 condemned the sins I have just listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. What other conclusion can we draw than that these sins must be exposed if we are going to preach Christ and Him crucified? If that conclusion does not logically follow from what Paul wrote, then what is he saying?

Preaching Christ and Him crucified must surely include telling men and women what to do to be saved and what to do to avoid losing their inheritance in the kingdom of God. Paul tells us that the unrighteous are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. He then lists some of the activities which make men and women unrighteous. I want to preach all that God requires of men and only what He requires of them. I can do that if I adhere carefully to what God has revealed about becoming a Christian and about remaining a Christian.

My friends, there is good news-wonderfully good

news—in this great chapter from 1 Corinthians. After listing the sins which will exclude one from the kingdom of God—adultery, idolatry, fornication, homosexuality, and such like, Paul said,

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

The church in the city of Corinth had members who had engaged in the grossest kinds of immorality. But they heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins and were baptized into Christ for the remission of those sins. The great book of conversions tells us how all of this came about.

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ...And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:5, 8).

My friends, it does not matter what your sins are. If, like the sinful people at Corinth, you will believe the gospel and obey it, you will be saved. All your old sins will be washed away and you will become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Please remember Paul's statement to the Corinthians: The Corinthians had been grossly immoral, but they were washed, they were sanctified and they were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. There is no reason you cannot do exactly what the Corinthians did and enjoy the same benefits they experienced.

Paul's discussion of sex within the marriage relationship would do wonders for many troubled marriages—if the partners would read and observe Paul's instructions. Paul encourages men and women to get married if they have any problems controlling their sexual appetites.

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband (1 Cor. 7:2).

Paul gives other reasons for getting married, but he knew some people would have great difficulty controlling their sexual conduct if they remained single. He is not elevating celibacy above marriage, but he does allow men and women to remain single if they can avoid sin in doing so.

But if they cannot contain (that is, control their sexual feelings), let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn (1 Cor. 7:9).

We must not forget the Hebrew writer's observation:

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4).

Paul outlines three principles which will go a long way in resolving sexual problems within the marriage relationship. The husband and wife have mutual responsibilities in their intimate relationship.

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband (1 Cor. 7:3).

The Greek word rendered "due benevolence" means conjugal duties. Some modern versions translate the Greek "conjugal rights," but the Greek points to duties on the part of husbands and wives—not to rights. That means very simply that a man has an obligation to fulfill his wife's sexual desires and needs and the woman has the same obligation toward her husband.

Husbands and wives have mutual authority in their sexual expressions of love.

The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife (1 Cor. 7:4).

The word "power" in this verse means authority. The husband has authority over his wife's body and the wife has authority over her husband's body. The term "mutual authority" does not apply in other phases of the marriage relationship, but it does in the sexual phase of marriage. God surely made this arrangement so that neither party could take advantage of the other. They may do it anyway, but they are violating the law of God when they do.

Husbands and wives are not to deny each other the sexual privilege—except for good reasons.

Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency (1 Cor. 7:5).

The word "defraud" means to cheat, to steal, to rob. If a married partner denies the sexual privilege to his or her spouse, Paul calls that cheating, stealing or robbing. Does Paul really mean defrauding or cheating? Is not that language too strong? When you think about what Paul said in verse 4, you know it is not. The wife's body belongs to the husband and the husband's body belongs to the wife. If we withhold that which belongs to another, is that not cheating or stealing?

Couples can refrain from their sexual communion, but only if it is by mutual agreement. The word "consent" in the Greek really means to sound together. If the couple can agree on interrupting their sexual activities for a specified time, then they are not sinning in so doing. But it must be by mutual consent and it must be for a specified time. Then they are to come together again so that Satan does not tempt them for lack of self-control. All of us know how strong the sexual urge is in most human beings. If we deny our partners the right of sexual communion, we might lead them into sin. All married people under the sound of my voice understand Paul's reasoning in this section of 1

Corinthians 7. How very vital it is that we teach all people—both young and old—these biblical principles.

But are these truths really categorized under the heading, "Christ and Him crucified?" My friends, if you believe Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:2, you know they are. He had decided not to know anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And yet he discussed immoral sex (1 Cor. 6:9-20) and sex in marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-5). We may have never thought of this approach before, but there really can be no doubt about its legitimacy. What all of this means is that we are preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) or we are preaching the gospel of Christ. We cannot neglect any biblical teaching and pretend we are doing what Paul did—"preach Christ and Him crucified."

I am sure I have failed many times to abide by Paul's teaching about preaching Christ crucified, but it has been because of ignorance—not intention. Will you pray to God for me that I shall preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Chapter 4

Preaching Christ Crucified (No. 4)

Confusion, chaos, uncertainty and doubt are just some of the words which describe the status of modern preaching—even among some churches of Christ. Many preachers are not sure what they ought to preach or even if they ought to preach. The confusion which reigns in the hearts and minds of many preachers can be traced to some extent to the liberal seminaries which are not certain of any truth. In fact, the professors in some seminaries and in some Bible colleges have no idea about preaching, except that it ought not to be too dogmatic and ought to be tolerant of almost any doctrine which comes down the pike. Theologians such as John Shelby Spong glory in the uncertainty which runs rampant through liberal religion, but they are absolutely certain that those who are certain about biblical truth are absolutely wrong.

Part of the confusion surrounding preaching relates to what it really means to preach Christ crucified. They know these words from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), but they have no idea how that passage is to be applied. But the truth of this verse could hardly be plainer. Paul made a decision not to know anything save Jesus and Him crucified. That means that everything he preached at Corinth, at Rome, at Ephesus, at Philippi and in other places fell under the heading: Christ and Him crucified. Would that include condemning division, sexual immorality, going to law with a fellow Christian, confusion surrounding the Lord's supper and promoting the false concept that the resurrection is already past? Would knowing only Christ and Him crucified obligate preachers to discuss church discipline, the place of preachers in the

scheme of human redemption, human sexuality, the Lord's supper, the miraculous elements which were available in the early church? All of these topics and many more are discussed in Paul's writings to churches and to individuals.

If preachers preach on Old Testament books, such as, Proverbs, Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah, is it possible we could be preaching Christ crucified, even though the specific commands and regulations of the Mosaic law are not binding on Christians? Two passages from Paul's letters show the necessity of knowing and preaching the great truths of the Old Testament. Paul urged the Roman Christians to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please themselves.

Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:1-4).

Paul opposed men's burning incense as an act of worship. He also preached against keeping the sabbath, observing circumcision and keeping the other feasts and festivals of the Mosaic law, but he knew of the good examples of people like Abraham and David and encouraged Christians to emulate their examples. The Old Testament stories were written for our learning.

1 Corinthians 10 lists a number of incidents from the lives of the Israelite people.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed

them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness...

Why did Paul bother to record these Old Testament events? He does not leave us in doubt as to his reasons for telling us about the history of God's people.

...Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Cor. 10:1-11).

When we read these incidents and many others in the Old Testament, we can understand why Paul would write:

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:12-13).

But how do I know God is faithful and will not suffer us to be tempted above our ability to cope? The hundreds of examples in the Old Testament show God's loving care for His people. But did not many of the Israelites fall away from their faith? Obviously they did, but not because of God's unfaithfulness. They simply did not take advantage of what God had provided for them. It was their fault when

they fell away—not God's.

But is preaching these Old Testament stories preaching Christ crucified? Paul and other New Testament writers certainly thought so or they would not have used them so freely. The problem is that many modern preachers have defined too narrowly the concept: "Preaching Christ Crucified." There is no fundamental difference between preaching Christ crucified and preaching the whole counsel of God or preaching the gospel or preaching the word. Our responsibility as preachers is to teach what God has given us to make men and women Christians and to build them up in the most holy faith. We cannot neglect any idea or concept which is essential to our growth as children of the living God.

Modern charismatic preachers and teachers think we are not preaching a complete gospel if we do not support modern divine healing and other so-called "miracles." Many of the television evangelists think they find support for miraculous healing, for tongues-speaking, for being slain in the Spirit and for other supernatural gifts in 1 Corinthians. That many miraculous gifts are discussed in this great book cannot be disputed by any knowledgeable student of the word. But does that mean these charismatic gifts are available and needed in our day? Is there any evidence that genuine miracles are being performed? Is it not evident on the very surface that these are fraudulent performances and not bonafide miracles? For example, when one watches those preachers who pretend to have the power to slay people in the Spirit, it is obviously a staged event. It is nothing but show business.

We must preach the biblical miracles, if we are going to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, but we cannot scripturally participate in these contrived shows—whether on television or in some church building. How can any preacher overlook or deny the great miracles Jesus and His appointed spokesmen performed? Jesus actually turned

water into wine. He raised Lazarus from the dead. He took a boy's lunch and multiplied it into enough food to feed five thousand hungry people. The apostle Peter brought Dorcas back to life after she had died. Paul and other apostles also demonstrated that they were God's messengers by the miracles they performed.

Have you ever wondered about the difference between the miracles of Jesus and of His apostles and those fake miracles one sees on television? Some of the Pentecostals, like Pat Boone, claim that the same power Jesus and the apostles used is available for the church today. He says there is no two-thousand year barrier between Christ's power and the power we can use. How many of the modern day miracle workers have tried to raise a man who had been dead three days or three hours or three minutes? How many gallons of wine have they produced from pure water? If they have the same power the early church possessed, why are they not feeding the hungry of the world by simply multiplying loaves and fish? If they have the power to heal the sick and the diseased, why are they not emptying hospitals across the United States and throughout the world? Is their failure to accomplish any of these worthwhile projects evidence they are pretending to have power but really do not have it?

Demonstrating that they have miraculous gifts would be really easy. If the charismatic preachers can cure cancer and heal other debilitating and deadly diseases, they ought to give proof—not just their word—for it. They stand to make money by making claims of divine healing. But why not subject their fake healings to people who know about diseases? For example, we need the medical records of those who are supposed to have serious illnesses, such as, cancer. Doctors should be asked to submit the kind of medical evidence that they have been critically ill or seriously injured. They could give x-rays and other kinds of evidence we could understand. Then after the alleged healing takes place,

the same doctors could certify that healing has occurred. Is that asking too much of these faith healers? Should they not be more interested than anyone else in proving they have miraculous powers? Since they will not submit to medical examinations—either before or after the alleged healings—we ought to be able to draw the right conclusion: They are not genuine miracle workers, but frauds.

Paul provides a list of the miracles which God gave to the churches in apostolic times. I shall not attempt to give an exhaustive list of those miracles, but I do want to mention some of them.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues (1 Cor. 12:28).

Some of the early Christians also received the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, miraculous faith, discerning of spirits and the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:8-10). These miraculous gifts were absolutely essential for the establishment and the building up of the early church. After all, they did not have the inspired New Testament which we possess. They could not get along without the supernatural gifts.

But we do not need any of these gifts. We have the completed revelation of God. Is that not what Paul meant when he wrote to the Galatians:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

But did not that gospel which Paul preached include miracles? There is no question about it. But the miracles were not to continue throughout the Christian era. How can we arrive at that conclusion? Paul provides the inspired

answer. The church during its childhood phase had to have these miracles to confirm the word, but we no longer need or have the miracles. Please listen to Paul:

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part (1 Cor. 13:8-9).

When, according to Paul, will the miracles cease?

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away (1 Cor. 13:10).

One of the crucial questions relating to this passage is the meaning of the expression, "that which is perfect." Some of our Pentecostal friends imagine that the "perfect" refers to Jesus Christ. They believe the miracles will continue until Jesus returns. There is a serious problem with that interpretation. "That which is perfect" is neuter gender—not masculine—as it would have to be if it were speaking of Jesus. If Paul were not speaking of Jesus, what did he have in mind? He was saying that the miraculous would continue until God had completed His revelation to man. Will you please give special attention to these two verses?

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Cor. 13:11-12).

The childhood of the church required miracles. It could not have grown as it did without them, since they did not have the word to guide them. But as the church matured (the meaning of the word "perfect"), the miracles were no longer needed. During the unfolding of God's perfect will for man, God's children could not see plainly. They did not

know and could not know all God had in store for them. But when the word was finished, they could know as they were known. These great truths led the apostle Peter to affirm that God has granted unto us,

...all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3).

Jude was in complete agreement with Peter

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 1:3).

All of this says, dear friends, that the miracles were designed to confirm the word (Heb. 2:1-4). The word has been confirmed and does not need further confirmation. Those who pretend to perform miracles are admitting—even if they do not mean to—that God has not completely revealed His will to man. We still need further information and confirmation. But the word is complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It furnishes unto every good work. We have every truth in the Bible which tells men and women what they must do to be saved and to remain saved. Why do we need further revelation? We do not and we are not receiving any. When teachers and preachers claim to have additional revelation from God, you can know for sure they are false prophets.

If, like Paul, I am determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, must I preach that miracles have ceased? Paul preached that great truth. He knew by divine inspiration that the day would come when the miracles would no longer be needed nor available. He wanted the Corinthians and us to understand that truth. How can I be faithful in the proclamation of the gospel and not teach that miracles have ended—not because God lacks power—but because it is His will that they have come to an end?

For a great part of my preaching and teaching life, I have defended the great miracles of the Old Testament and of the New. I believe every miracle recorded in the Bible. But we must recognize the purpose of miracles and preach their cessation. We must not deceive people into believing in modern miracles. Many of them are deliberate hoaxes. I know that is harsh language, but I stand prepared to prove it in connection with some of the charismatic preachers. What a tragedy that men will stage miracles and then pretend they are genuine. Please keep your eyes open to prevent deception.

Chapter 5

Positive And Negative Preaching: The Sermon On The Mount (No. 1)

The apostle Peter called Noah "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). Every man who stands in the pulpit week after week, month after month should aspire to be a "preacher of righteousness." But what does a man have to preach to be labeled as God Himself labeled Noah? What did Noah preach? The book of Genesis describes in very vivid terms the moral and spiritual conditions of the human family at the time God called Noah to be a preacher.

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5).

God informed Noah of His intentions regarding punishment for man's grievous sins.

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth (Gen. 6:13).

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Gen. 6:8).

God instructed Noah to build an ark according to the pattern which God gave him and "Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him" (Gen. 7:5).

During the time the ark was being built, Noah continually preached to the inhabitants of the land. Although we are not told precisely what God instructed Noah to preach, can there be any doubt his message must have been somewhat like our Lord's message to the Jews of His day: "Except you repent, you will perish" (Luke 13:3)? If Noah did preach such a message—and he must have preached a

message somewhat like that—how did the people of his day view his message? They either did not believe it or they did not care enough to obey it. Whatever the case, almost the entire human family was wiped off the face of the earth. Was it in order that Noah—“a preacher of righteousness”—should warn his generation of a judgment to come? Or was Noah’s message too negative, too discouraging? Did the people consider him to be a prophet of gloom and doom?

Would the results have not been measurably more positive if Noah had spent more time encouraging the people’s self-esteem, self-worth, self-fulfillment and self-dignity? Robert Schuller’s 1982 book, **Self-Esteem: The New Reformation** (Waco: Word Books), argues that man’s deepest need is not “material things,” as Karl Marx thought, or “pleasure,” as Sigmund Freud insisted, or “will to power,” as Alfred Adler thought, or even “will to meaning,” as Victor Frankl believed. Schuller says the “will to self-love” is the deepest of all human needs (pp. 32-33). So what should a preacher of righteousness do, according to Dr. Schuller? Every problem facing the church will be resolved if we can satisfy man’s deepest need—the hunger for self-esteem, self-worth and personal dignity. Human dignity, according to Robert Schuller, is the ultimate human value (p. 35). Do you see any similarity between Dr. Schuller’s humanistic approach to religion and these words from the apostle Paul:

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings,

being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Phil. 3:7-11)?

Were you able to find self-esteem, self-worth and personal dignity in Paul's words?

But would Jesus Christ—the greatest preacher who ever lived—the meek and lowly Nazarene who always did the will of God—ever be so negative as was Noah? Surely, the Son of God would not preach gloom and doom, would He? Were you listening a few minutes ago when I read these words from the very lips of Jesus: "Except you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3)? Did not our Lord say to the Jews, "Except you believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24)? In Christ's sermon on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, He said, "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell" (Matt. 23:33)? Of course, modernistic theologians can deny that Jesus ever used such language, but they would have a hard time proving it.

There are many ways I could approach our study of the topic, "Negative or Positive Preaching," but I want us to look carefully at Christ's great Sermon on the Mount. How did our Lord balance the negative and the positive on that occasion? I emphasize the words, "on that occasion," because Christ did not preach in exactly the same way on every occasion. A careful reading of Christ's teaching and preaching will establish that point beyond question. There were times when He was as hard as nails. Matthew 23—from which I have just read—is a case in point. There were other times when He was as gentle as a loving mother caring for her newborn baby. Christ's meeting with the Samaritan woman in John 4 and with the woman taken in adultery in John 8 are excellent examples of our Lord's understanding, love and compassion. The Sermon on the Mount allows us to look at Christ's negative preaching and at His positive approach as well. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 5.

The first section of the Sermon on the Mount is called "the beatitudes" (Matt. 5:1-12). **Webster's Third New International Dictionary** defines the word "beatitude" as "the quality or state of being blessed...transcendent happiness" (p. 193). Bible students refer to Matthew 5:1-12 by the term, "beatitudes," because each verse begins with the word "blessed." Some modern versions render the Greek by the word "happy," but the word "happy" does not bring out the full force of the Greek *makarioi*. Fortunate or praiseworthy would be good translations of the Greek.

I shall not take time today to read and discuss each of these beautiful and meaningful beatitudes, but I hope all of us will do that on a regular basis. Let me read to you some of the better known beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth...Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God...Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God (Matt. 5:2, 5, 8-9).

While all of the beatitudes are stated positively, their opposite is implied. If the pure in heart are going to see God, what about those who are impure in heart? Will they also see God? It is not possible to preach positive truths without suggesting the negative. If the ones who believe and obey the gospel are going to be saved, where will the unbeliever and the disobedient be?

In the second section of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ referred to His followers as "salt" and "light." The following verses are well known, although many people do not recognize them as being part of the Sermon on the Mount.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the

light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16).

When Christ called His disciples "light," He was speaking of the saving and preserving influence of godly people. Our Lord knew how unspeakably evil men and women can become. He knew His people could and should work to overcome the evil effect of such ungodliness. We know from biblical history that if ten righteous people could have been found in Sodom, Gommorah and other cities of the plains, those cities could have been spared (Gen. 19:32).

But what if the salt has lost its saving power, how is the world to be saved? Was Christ being negative when He warned His disciples about losing their influence for good? Modern preachers might call such preaching negative, but you and I know it was the right kind of preaching then and it is the right kind of preaching now. Evil men and women in the church will cause the church to become ungodly and will have a detrimental impact on those who are outside the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 5:6; Col. 4:5). If Christian people lose their beneficent influence because of immoral living, they have lost a major power to lead others to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

When salt does lose its saving and preserving power, what do we do with it? "It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under the foot of men" (Matt. 5:13). These concepts are certainly negative, but are they destructive? Jesus was warning men and women of the danger of losing their good influence in the world and of losing their souls as a result. Unless Christians repent of their unrighteous conduct, they will be lost eternally. Their value to the kingdom of God has been destroyed. They are fit only to be cast out and to be trodden under the feet of

men. If modern men object to such preaching—and millions apparently do—they will have to take it up with the Lord since He was the one doing it.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called His people “the light of the world.” The lives of God’s faithful children show the way to those we meet along the way to the heavenly city. As you probably know from reading and from observation, the average man in today’s society is not going to do much Bible reading. The only gospel they know is what they see in God’s sons and daughters. Christians are not to obscure their light by rebellion against God’s law. We are like a city which is set on a hill that cannot be hidden. Our lights are to be shining continually so that men may see the superiority of the Christian way of life and embrace it with their whole hearts.

Lights are useful only when those who need the lights can actually see them. If the lights are hidden under a bushel, they are of no value whatsoever. Christians must not hide their lights by failure to serve God and one another. I understand that these ideas are negative—as the world defines negative—and wholly unacceptable to certain positive thinkers, but they illustrate and amplify the positive truths which Jesus wanted all of us to understand.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

The positive message in these verses says, “Let your light so shine that men may see your good works.” The negative message says, “Do not obscure your light with ungodliness.” Can we not see how badly both truths are needed?

The third topic in Christ’s Sermon on the Mount discusses His relationship to the law of Moses (Matt. 5:17-20). Christ’s immediate disciples and many others almost certainly misunderstood Christ’s relationship to the law. Many of them knew Christ had come to give a new covenant, but some may not have known Christ’s mission in fulfilling

the law. Please notice carefully what our Lord said about His relationship to the law. "Think not," Jesus said, "that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). The word "destroy" comes from the Greek *katalusai* and literally means to loose down, to overthrow completely. The New American Standard Bible renders the word "abolish," but the context of Matthew 5 will not allow for this meaning. The truth is Jesus did come to abolish or to abrogate the law of Moses. At least, that was the way the apostles understood Christ's mission. The Hebrew writer—who may or may not have been an apostle—wrote concerning Jesus and the law of Moses:

He taketh away the first (that is, the first covenant), that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:9-10).

Paul accused the Galatians who were attempting to be justified by the law of Moses of having fallen away from or out of grace (Gal. 5:4). Jesus did not destroy the moral values of the law; He actually enhanced them. But He did take away the old covenant.

Every prediction concerning the coming Messiah and every type of Christ in the Old Testament found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In addition, Jesus was the only person who ever lived perfectly according to the teaching of the Old Testament. According to Christ's testimony, the law would remain in effect until He had fulfilled every phase of it.

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:18).

The little word "till" or "until" in the last phrase of Matthew 5:18 sets the time limit for the abolition of the law of Moses. The old covenant was binding on the Jews "till all be

fulfilled." When our Lord died on the cross in harmony with Old Testament predictions, He sealed the new covenant with His blood. The law had been fulfilled; its mission had been completed; it was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14-17). No human being on earth is bound by one precept of the law of Moses. Paul tells us we are dead to the law by the body of Christ "that we should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4).

Chapter 6

Positive And Negative Preaching: The Sermon On The Mount (No. 2)

If someone were to ask you what the most grievous sin a preacher could commit, how would you answer the question? Perhaps you might say that a preacher's becoming sexually involved with someone other than his wife, maybe even a member of the church where he preaches, is the most serious breach of conduct for a preacher. When preachers behave in such a fashion—as seems to be increasingly true in our day—their behavior is a crushing blow to the family, to the church, to the community and to our young people who may have great respect and affection for the preacher. It is unfortunate that there are hundreds and perhaps thousands of preachers of all religious groups who have broken their vows to their God, to their wives and to the churches where they labor.

But God will forgive a preacher for sexual sin when he repents of that sin and asks God to forgive him. King David is an excellent example of God's willingness to forgive the most heinous deeds. Churches will forgive—at least, they should—and in some cases allow those preachers to continue their work. Jimmy Swaggart's devoted followers apparently forgave him quite readily. Families, communities and even young people—maybe I should say, especially young people—whose trust the preacher has betrayed forgive and try to forget. We cannot expect less from those who claim to be Christians.

Others may think financial irresponsibility is undoubtedly the greatest sin a preacher would commit. Preachers—like all other Christians—should do their best to handle their financial obligations as honestly as humanly possible. Some preachers have left debts in all the communities where they have lived and preached. I know

of several churches who have released their preachers because of the preachers' unwillingness to pay their debts or because of underhanded financial dealings on the part of the preacher. We know God expects all of us to have "regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:21).

Maybe you are thinking of some other sin of gospel preachers: their unwillingness to study, their neglect to visit the sick, their highmindedness, their laziness or their unfriendliness. But I seriously doubt that any of these sins rank at the top of modern preachers' failings, at least, from the standpoint of some church members and of some others. The number one sin of preachers from what I hear across the country and that includes messages from many members of the churches of Christ is **Negative Preaching**. A preacher may be a poor student of the word, lazy as a town dog and indifferent to other people and still retain his position. But if engages in what some modern people call "negative preaching," his days in some pulpits are numbered.

True preachers of the word are not overly concerned about whether some people may call their preaching "negative." Like our Lord and Savior, they want to do always those things which are pleasing in the sight of God (John 8:29). Gospel preachers—like all other Christians—must avoid falling in with the fleeting fashions of this world (Rom. 12:2). Please notice Paul's attitude as he asked the Galatians,

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Paul was not being abrasive with the Galatians, but he knew his first responsibility was to please God. That should be the true goal of every gospel preacher in the world. If it were true of all of us who preach, this would be a different world.

Our Lord's powerful Sermon on the Mount shows us

conclusively the need for negative, as well as, positive preaching. If you will study carefully Christ's Sermon on the Mount, you will understand his great respect for the law of Moses. He said concerning that law:

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19).

Christ's words have been interpreted by some positive thinkers as being negative, but Jesus knew and taught that men do not love God when they fail to keep His commandments. Since Jesus lived entirely under the law of Moses, it should come as no surprise that he kept the law and taught others to keep it also.

Even though Jesus came to give a new law, He never criticized the old law or discouraged men's keeping its precepts—even when some of the precepts would have been considered insignificant. Please notice what Jesus said concerning the Jewish law:

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not (Matt. 23:1-3).

Christ's words amount to this: "You must not break God's commandments of the law of Moses; you must not teach others to do so. If you break God's commandments or teach others to break them, you will be considered least in the kingdom of heaven." Do you take note of these extremely negative words? Do you think modern preachers can improve on that approach which both Jesus and His apostles used?

Jesus warned His disciples—a negative approach,

according to some so-called "positive thinkers":

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

I read to you a few minutes ago where Jesus instructed His followers to listen to the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees, but not to do as they did. "For they say and do not" (Matt. 23:1-3). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples that their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. He was saying very simply and very forcefully to His immediate followers and to us: "It is not enough to teach the truth or to pretend to love God. We must obey His commandments—even when we may not fully comprehend the true meaning of those commandments."

Do you believe our Lord would actually be guilty of warning men about not entering the kingdom of heaven? Is that not about as negative as a preacher can be? But how else does one interpret the meaning of Christ's words in Matthew 5:20: "You shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven?" Of course, if what Jesus said was untrue, then His words would be negative in a destructive sense. But Jesus was simply telling men about their duties to obey God and to keep His commandments. Failure to do so would exclude men and women from God's eternal kingdom. Is it appropriate today for gospel preachers to tell men they will be lost if they do not obey the Lord's will? The beloved apostle John wrote, "He that says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

The kind of preaching John the Baptist, John the apostle, Peter and our Lord did turned the world upside down in the first century, but the compromising, namby-pamby preaching of many modern churches—including some churches of Christ—is turning men and women away from

religion by droves. Why should men and women forsake the world of sin to become members of churches which stand for nothing, preach nothing and practice nothing? What could possibly be more negative than the preaching and practice of many modernistic churches?

The Sermon on the Mount next addresses some of the laws of the old covenant, men's misunderstanding and misapplication of some of those laws and a host of other matters (Matt. 5:21-48). For example, Jesus speaks about the law of God which forbade murder (Matt. 5:21-26). There can be no question about what the Ten Commandments say about murder.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment (Matt. 5:21).

There was certainly no Jew in Christ's day who did not know what the Ten Commandments said about killing. "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13). It needs to be said in passing that murder was in the mind of the inspired writer—not just killing. God had commanded Joshua and the army of Israel to remove the heathen tribes from the land of Palestine so his people could inherit the land he had promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. God also commanded his army under Saul's direction to utterly destroy all of the Amalakites (1 Kings 15). There were many crimes under the law of Moses which demanded the death penalty. So the law of Moses forbade murder, not killing.

Apparently there were many of Christ's contemporaries who thought they fully understood the law concerning murder, but they failed to understand that the law had an application to anger at a brother or hatred of a brother. Jesus corrected that false impression.

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his

brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council:
but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in
danger of hell fire (Matt. 5:22).

Have you ever heard preachers say, "The Old Testament is full of 'thou shalt not's,' but the New Testament contains 'sweeping principles that have to be internalized and acted upon'"? Can that kind of language be justified in view of what I have read to you from Matthew 5?

Our Lord made it plain that you do not have to murder a brother to be guilty of sin. If you are angry with him without cause, you are in danger of the judgment. Christ condemned our calling men "raca" which probably means empty, worthless. The word "fool" comes from the Greek **more** and means dull, stupid and may be the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic word **raca**. Both words show an attitude of disdain and disrespect for one's fellowman. Such attitudes will cause us to be lost. Refraining from murder is certainly desirable, but it does not go far enough. We must not use disparaging words concerning others. Jesus goes even further when He says,

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do
good to them that hate you, and pray for them
which despitefully use you (Matt. 5:43-44).

In Matthew 5 Jesus discussed the old law's regulations concerning sexual immorality. Every Jew who had ever read the Old Testament was familiar with the law's restrictions on extramarital sex because the Ten Commandments said very plainly: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14). For many people in Christ's day, the teaching of the law of Moses was unnecessarily restrictive. It took away the freedom they believed they had a right to enjoy. Obviously, there are millions of people in our day who hold the same opinion. Modern men say: Adultery ordinarily might be bad, but there may be extenuating circumstances. After all, you only go around once, so grab all the gusto.

Joseph Fletcher, the nationally known situation ethicist, argued that adultery is not wrong unless you hurt yourself, your partner or someone else. And who, dear friends, is wise enough to know whether a given act will hurt oneself or his partner or others? Only God possesses that wisdom and He said 3,500 years ago in the Ten Commandments: "You shall not commit adultery"-period (Exod. 20:14). God knows what is best for men—all men—and has designed His word to give us the best. He does not allow us to flaunt His word and get by with it. Even David, the man after God's own heart, did not escape punishment for his adulterous affair with Bathsheba.

Jesus Christ did not soften the Old Testament's teaching on adultery. He went behind the act to the motive.

But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on
a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery
with her already in his heart (Matt. 5:28).

Incidentally, the Lord was not saying that someone living under the law of Moses could safely lust in his heart without sinning. But apparently there were some of the scribes and Pharisees who thought only of the overt act of adultery. They seemed to ignore the intent of the human heart. Jesus struck down such thinking. He said, in effect, it is not only wrong to commit adultery; it is wrong to think adultery. After all, Jesus knew these words from king Solomon: "As he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

Please think about this question for just a moment: How do you honestly think our Lord would react today toward pornography, toward lewd movies, toward salacious literature and toward seduction on television? Do you believe He would condemn these as stimulations to lust in the hearts of men and of women? If they do produce lust in people's hearts—and there is not even the slightest doubt about it—are they condemned by what Jesus said about a man's committing adultery in his heart when he lusts? We cannot ignore these questions because they confront us

everyday of our lives—even in our own living rooms.

For those who are looking to Jesus for strictly positive commands or who desire a law which is less demanding than the law of Moses, they will have to look beyond the gospel of Christ. Jesus not only deals with the overt act—murder, adultery and such like—but with the thought and intent behind the act. How can a loving Savior be so negative, so harsh, so critical? My friends, Jesus goes a step further on the matter of adultery:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Matt. 5:31-32).

We cannot afford to ignore what our Lord Jesus Christ taught in these pertinent and powerful passages.

Chapter 7

Positive And Negative Preaching: The Sermon On The Mount (No. 3)

In 1871 the best known lecture series on preaching in the world was initiated at Yale University. The series was called "The Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching" and has been held each year since that date. The first three series of lectures were conducted by Henry Ward Beecher, one of America's most famous preachers, and the son of Lyman Beecher. This great series of lectures has included some outstanding scholars, famous preachers and excellent teachers. I have made it a high priority to collect and read as many of these lectures as possible. The older books in the series are among the best I have on preaching. Many of the newer ones are not worth the paper on which they are written. Why the differences between the older ones and many of the newer ones? There are probably many reasons why the older books are superior in almost every case to the newer ones, but I believe the main reason is that the older ones generally take a much stronger stand for biblical truth than most of the newer ones. Many of the newer books seem to be more concerned about making a good impression, about not offending anyone, than in teaching the truth of God's word in a scholarly fashion. Many of the more recent lecturers were influenced by liberal theologians, such as, Harry Emerson Fosdick, P. T. Forsyth and Washington Gladden. These men were not committed to the supernaturalness of New Testament Christianity. They were involved in the social gospel. Their major concern seems to have been a social revolution rather than converting men and women to Jesus Christ. They were the forerunners of men like Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller. They almost certainly would have disapproved of a strong emphasis on sin, on atonement, on salvation and on eternal

life. They supported positive preaching and opposed negative preaching.

What kind of preaching did Jesus—the greatest preacher who ever lived—do? Was His preaching all positive or mostly positive and none negative or very little negative? The Sermon on the Mount provides us with some insight into the balance between negative and positive preaching which occurred during this great sermon, but not necessarily happened in all Christ's preaching. Our Lord was not striving to achieve some mythical balance between the negative and the positive. He was teaching His hearers exactly what they needed to know about the topics on which He spoke. If it turned out—as it did sometimes—that His message was primarily negative, then He was merely meeting the needs of the men and women who came to hear Him—His purpose was the same as when He delivered positive truths: To point men and women to the will of Almighty God. What better example could modern preachers find than to study and to emulate the preaching of Jesus Christ?

The Sermon on the Mount has a brief section on vengeance and forgiveness, but I shall pass over that section in order to examine what Jesus said about giving alms and praying (Matt. 6:1-15). There are very few areas of human conduct where modern men and women demand such total freedom as in the area of worship. Many of us seem to believe we should not be restricted in doing whatever we please in public worship. We do not want anyone telling us that certain acts of worship are commanded of God and others prohibited or at least unauthorized. If we want to dance and cavort or laugh uproariously or even strip as an act of worship, we do not want anyone—including God—telling us we should behave differently. Is that the way our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles approached worship? Did Christ ever oppose any act or attitude in worship?

Christ accepted without question that those who love God and each other will be generous in giving of their

means as an act of worship to our heavenly Father. No doubt Christ was familiar with these words:

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again (Prov. 19:17).

If we give liberally and regularly to the cause of Christ, how can it make any difference about our motivation? Is it not the act of giving which is all important? Do you not get that impression sometimes from certain radio and television evangelists?

Jesus very pointedly discussed the proper attitude in giving:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward (Matt. 6:1-2).

It ought to be obvious to even a casual Bible reader that our Lord was not trying to discourage men's giving to support the cause of Christ. Jesus knew—and we ought to know—that giving is essential for our own spiritual growth. It is also necessary for the relief of human suffering and for the spreading of the gospel. But giving to the Lord may not profit the giver because he is giving to be seen of men, that is, to have praise of one's fellowmen. That kind of giving is wrong, even though it may help to feed the needy and to preach the gospel. Those who give to have the praise of men have their reward—the praise of men. They do not receive glory from God Almighty. Jesus taught that men should give of their means to honor and to glorify God—not to have others say, "Look how generous and godly that man (or woman) is."

If men and women are supposed to sound a trumpet

to call attention to their generous contributions to the cause of Christ, how should they give into the Lord's treasury? "But when you do alms," Jesus said,

...let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:3-4).

A showy display of generosity may impress your friends and neighbors, but it does not please God. Our giving must be for the purpose of glorifying God and promoting the kingdom—not to impress others with our righteousness.

Christ next lays down both positive and negative rules concerning prayer. Christians are not to be like the hypocrites.

...for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward (Matt. 6:5).

We must not interpret Christ's words to be a condemnation of public prayers. Public prayers were common in the synagogues and in other public worship services of the Jews. They also became prominent in the worship of the early church (Acts 2:42). What Jesus was condemning was men's making a public display of their spirituality. "Look," some people seemed to be saying, "how devout and holy we are."

Instead of making public spectacles of our religiosity, we should,

...enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:6).

When we go into our closets to pray, we are not trying to show others our goodness, unless, of course, we boast of our many hours spent praying. I have read from certain

prominent religious leaders who write about praying four or five hours per day. I am not doubting their word, but are they not doing exactly what Jesus forbade? There is no doubt we would all be better if we prayed more, but are we supposed to brag about it?

God has often expressed a desire for His children to pray more. He wants us to bring our heartaches, our adversities and our wishes to Him in prayer. Paul expressed the will of God in these words:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

But God does not want His children to stand on the street corners and wave a red flag so others will notice how righteous and devout we are?

Christ told His disciples that they should not pray like the pagans who "use vain repetitions:" "for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:7). Heathen people apparently believed they could influence their gods if they yelled loudly enough or used the same words or expressions over and over. They may have thought God would grow weary of their pleadings and cries and grant them what they desired. Are there any of us who have the same views of prayer? Do we use vain repetitions and much speaking? We do not have to cry and scream and beg God for His blessings. He wants to bless us more than we can understand the need for the blessings, but He wants us to come before Him with contrite hearts in the beauty of holiness.

If God's children are not to pray like the hypocrites or like the heathen, how should they pray? Please listen carefully to the model prayer which Jesus taught His disciples:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Matt. 6:9-13).

Has there ever been a prayer more precise and concise and yet more comprehensive? More simple and yet more profound? How different our public prayers would be if we read carefully and comprehendingly the model prayer and sought to bring our prayers in harmony with it!

There is at least one major difference between Christ's dealing with public worship and the modern preacher's discussing it. Christ knew when men and women were being hypocrites; we may not always be able to make that determination. We have a right—in fact, we have an obligation—to condemn false worship—but we are not capable of judging men's motivations. We must recognize we can be wrong in our work and worship, but that does not necessarily mean we are hypocrites. Even when men and women are inconsistent in their behavior—and all of us are at times—that does not prove we are hypocrites.

The scriptures require preachers, teachers, elders, and other Christians to examine every practice to determine whether it is scriptural—whether it meets God's approval. The Christians in the ancient city of Berea were called "noble" because "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). If and when modern Christians follow that practice today, they are not usually called "noble." They are often characterized as being judgmental, negative, intolerant or worse.

It may not be easy to get it through our heads that we are not free to worship God in whatever way we choose. We must follow the instructions of God's inspired

spokesman—the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. A powerful illustration of this truth comes from our Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman. She said to Jesus,

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews (John 4:20-22).

My friends, the Jews were authorized to worship in Jerusalem. The Samaritans had no such authorization concerning worshipping in Mount Gerizim. But that seems too insignificant—does it not? Surely the place and the manner of worship could not possibly make any difference to God Almighty—could it? So long as men and women are sincere, mount Gerizim was just as good as Jerusalem. The only problem is that the scriptures never approach the work and worship of the church in that way. How we worship does make a difference. If we want God's approval of our worship—and why else would we worship?—it must be from the right motivation and according to God's inspired word.

There is much more in Christ's great Sermon on the Mount I would like to discuss with you, but I shall mention two more sections before our time expires. Please take note of the emphasis on both the positive and the negative from this well known passage.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

Jesus wanted all men to know the promise of eternal life

which is available to all who believe the gospel and obey it. But He also wanted to warn men of eternal punishment which awaits the disobedient. How desperately the world needs to hear Christ's message of warning and of hope. Gospel preachers are not violating the love of God when we warn men of the judgment to come, but we would be if we did not tell them of the hope men can enjoy in Christ Jesus. Gospel preaching must include both elements—if we are to be faithful to our calling as God's spokesmen.

Finally, Jesus spoke of the wise man who builds his house on a rock. The rains descend, the floods come and the winds beat upon the house, but it stands secure because this it is built on a rock. Jesus had reference in this example to one who hears the sayings of Jesus Christ and does them, that is, the one who obeys the Lord's commandments. On the other hand, the foolish man built his house on the sand. The rains descended, the floods came, the winds blew and beat upon the house and it fell. Great was the fall of that house. The house on the sand represents the man who hears the teachings of Jesus Christ and refuses to obey them. Who would dare be so negative as Jesus was in speaking about the foolish man who builds on the sand? All of us who preach must be that negative—if our preaching is to be God approved.

Chapter 8

Are Gospel Preachers Prophets Of Doom?

Being a preacher in modern times is often fraught with some uncertainty and unpleasantness. The work of preachers is not always appreciated. Occasionally we are accused of being prophets of doom. Tragically, sometimes the accusation is probably justified. Sometimes we are guilty of speaking of nothing except tragedy, immorality and heartaches. When gospel preachers express scriptural concern for evil, are they being prophets of doom or are they fulfilling the divine injunction to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2)?

Faithful preachers of the word are often accused of trying to take the fun out of living when they condemn drinking, gambling, sexual promiscuity and such destructive behavior. Do preachers have a right to examine these activities in the light of God's word and then preach what they honestly believe God wants them to preach? Paul encouraged his son in the gospel:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).

Paul recognized the seriousness of his obligations as a preacher. He wrote to the Corinthians:

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16).

In case you think that only modern preachers have been accused of being prophets of doom, let us take a brief look at some Old Testament examples. King Omri of Israel was succeeded by his son, Ahab. The author of 1 Kings

records that Ahab "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him." Of all the evils committed by Ahab, none was greater than his choice of a wife. Please listen to these comments by the author of 1 Kings.

And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him (1 Kings 16:31-33).

What course should a faithful prophet of God pursue when evil arises among God's people? Should he allow evil to flourish and thereby jeopardize his own soul and the souls of others? That some modern preachers would follow that course and have followed it cannot be denied, but not Elijah. Elijah appeared before king Ahab and declared,

As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word (1 Kings 17:1).

At the end of the draught which Elijah prophesied, God sent the prophet to Ahab. When Ahab saw Elijah he said to him, "Are you the one who troubles Israel?" Can you believe the king of God's people would be so ugly-spirited with the prophet of God? Why would Ahab try to shift the blame for Israel's troubles on the prophet of God? How little hope there is for anyone who is unwilling to take responsibility for his own sins and try to correct them!

Elijah was angered when Ahab asked if he were the troubler of Israel. He responded to Ahab:

I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kings 18:17-18).

The great prophet Elijah was not a prophet of doom; he was not a troublemaker. He was simply carrying out the Lord's mandate to preach the truth to Ahab. A gospel preacher is not a troublemaker when he teaches the truth, but he makes trouble for himself and for others when he fails to preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). When are preachers going to learn that truth?

Baal worship was introduced into Israel by Jezebel. It had become a major threat to Israel's stability. Elijah knew his life would be in danger if he challenged the prophets of Baal, but he really had no choice. He proposed a test to determine whether Jehovah was the true God or whether Baal was God. Baal failed the test and his prophets were executed (1 Kings 18:19-46). When Jezebel heard that the prophets of Baal had been killed, she sent the following message to Elijah:

So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time (1 Kings 19:2).

In other words, if Jezebel could not get rid of this troublemaker in any other way, she would have him killed. "Surely," you say, "there are no people now who would put a preacher to death just because they disagreed with him, are there?" While we are not sure who might and who might not, we know that such people do exist in our world and some of them probably live in the United States.

The wicked Jezebel had Naboth the Jezreelite killed, seized his vineyard and delivered it to Ahab. God sent Elijah to Ahab with this message:

Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy (1 Kings 21:19-20)?

How tragic for Ahab and for Israel that the king of God's

people would consider God's prophet his enemy! It is equally tragic for the church and for the world that we fail to heed the warnings of faithful preachers of the gospel—when we consider these men enemies of the church because they teach and preach the truth.

There is one other prophet mentioned in 1 Kings I would like to discuss briefly. We actually know very little about this prophet, but what we do know endears him to us forever. He is mentioned very few times in the Bible, but what a great and fearless prophet he must have been. His name was Micaiah the son of Imlah. Ahab wanted desperately to take Ramoth-Gilead from the king of Syria. He wanted to know if Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, would join him in capturing Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat suggested that they inquire of the prophets if such a mission would have God's approval. The king of Israel asked about four hundred of his hireling prophets: "Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" Since they knew he wanted to go, they answered, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Jehoshaphat appeared not to be satisfied with their answer, so he asked Ahab, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" Ahab answered,

There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: **but I hate him**; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil (1 Kings 22:8).

How revealing are these words from Ahab, king of Israel! They tell us of Ahab's lack of respect for God's word as revealed through the prophet and they give us information about the character of this great spokesman for God. Do we need men of the caliber of Micaiah in the pulpits of our land today? Absolutely!

Another of the Old Testament prophets who could not be intimidated—even by imprisonment—was the man commonly called "the weeping prophet," Jeremiah. We have

so often referred to Jeremiah as "the weeping prophet" that we may have left the impression that he was weak and vascillating. If that is true, we have left the wrong impression. Jeremiah was concerned and tender-hearted, but he was also very courageous. We can understand why some of the Jews during the days of Christ thought of Christ in terms of the prophet Jeremiah (Matt. 16:14). Jesus Christ was certainly meek and lowly (Matt. 11:29). He was tender-hearted (Matt. 23:37), but he was also called "the lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5).

Jeremiah knew his nation was heading toward disaster. He knew what the trouble was and did not hesitate to speak as God directed. He spoke these challenging and stirring words to the Jewish people:

Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:11-13).

Of course, everyone in Israel had to bear some of the blame for the immoral and shameful conditions of the nation. However, the prophet accused the leaders of Israel of neglect of responsibilities and of gross immorality. When he did so, he touched a sore spot which eventually landed him in prison. As most of us know, it has never been easy to find leaders who are honest enough and magnanimous enough to receive criticism and suggestions. Please listen to the prophet Jeremiah.

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and

have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD...For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD. Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah (Jer. 23:1-2, 10-14).

When Jeremiah recorded these words about 2,600 years ago and delivered them to God's people, do you suppose they thought he was a prophet of doom? You can know for certain they did.

What do we do with a preacher like Jeremiah or Micaiah or Elijah? Do we put them in prison as the Jews did Jeremiah? Do we seek to have them killed, as Jezebel tried to do with Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-2)? We are probably more subtle in our opposition to the truth and to those who preach the truth, but the overall result will be about the same. When we want to remove a preacher, we can think of many, many ways to get the job done. We can attempt to assassinate his character or assert that he is not educated enough for our community or say we need someone who can work more effectively with our young people. We can always think of ways to send the preacher packing. Of course, there are preachers who know their responsibilities,

but are unwilling to do their duty. It could be fear of reprisals, racial or social prejudice, unconcern for the lost or the saved or just plain laziness. Such a preacher needs to be opposed vigorously and exposed to the brotherhood.

There are many other Old Testament prophets whom I would like to discuss with you, but let us turn briefly to one of the great New Testament preachers—the apostle Peter. The apostles Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from his mother's womb. They commanded the lame man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Luke says the man not only stood up, but "walked, and entered into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:1-8). The Jewish leaders were very much disturbed about the healing of the lame man. They demanded to know "by what power of by what name" the apostles had performed the miracle. Peter argued before the Jewish council that it was,

by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole.

Members of the council met privately to determine what course of action they should pursue with respect to the apostles. They finally agreed that a great miracle had been performed, but they did not want it to be known by anyone who did not already know it. So they called the apostles "and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:7-18).

Peter's response to the commands of the Jewish Sanhedrin showed enormous courage.

Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

In very plain modern English, the apostle Peter affirmed,

"We have to preach the truth. We cannot do otherwise and be faithful to our God."

Later the Jewish leaders were informed that the apostles were back on the streets preaching Jesus and performing miracles. They arrested the apostles and placed them in prison. An angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and commanded the apostles: "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." The apostles were again arrested and brought before the Jewish council. The high priest asked them,

Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us (Acts 5:28).

The following words of the apostle Peter have served to bolster the courage of countless messengers of God. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

How many preachers of your acquaintance have the faith and the courage to defy governmental powers and religious authorities, Peter and John did. Are we not often guilty of forsaking "the right way" and following the "way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15)? Do we value our preaching positions more highly than we value the truth? Are we afraid someone will classify us as preachers of gloom and doom?

In closing today, I want to read two brief passages from the apostle Paul.

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16).

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).

Chapter 9

Should A Gospel Preacher Be A Fighter (No. 1)

You are aware, no doubt, of the military language being used by many religious teachers in the United States. Prominent evangelical writers and others speak of "culture wars." Preachers of most conservative religious groups do not hesitate to speak of our being engaged in a battle against evil. Even liberal theologians may occasionally use military language, although as a rule they object to it. They believe that using military language does not exhibit a Christ-like spirit. Is it legitimate for churches to be militant? Should gospel preachers be fighters? Can we be faithful to God without being fighters?

One preacher was asked about his stand on certain moral issues, like abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia. He replied, "I am not a fighter." Is it possible to preach the whole counsel of God and not be a fighter? Do you remember these words from one of the greatest soldiers of the cross who ever lived?

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12).

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Perhaps it would be wise at this point to examine the Greek words rendered "fight." The Greek noun **agon** appears six times in the New Testament and is translated

“conflict” (Phil. 1:30), “contention” (1 Thess. 2:2), “fight” (2 Tim. 4:7) and “race” (Heb. 12:1). Dr. A. T. Robertson’s **Word Pictures of the New Testament** says the word refers to “athletic or gladiatorial contests” (Volume 4, p. 442). Arndt & Gingrich says the word involves “struggle under great strain or in the face of great opposition” (p. 15). The verb form, **agonizomai**, is translated “strive” (1 Cor. 9:25), “laboring fervently” (Col. 4:12), and “fight” (1 Tim. 6:12). In John 18:36 the word is used of physical altercation. But, generally speaking, the word connotes spiritual and moral battles. Paul used the word when he wrote of “striving for the mastery” (1 Cor. 7:25).

The word never-may I repeat?-never means preaching or teaching in an ugly spirit. We must never be guilty of ridiculing, making fun or lampooning others for their beliefs or actions. Paul used the word in reference to his preaching at Thessalonica.

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention...But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us...Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children (1 Thess. 2:1-2, 7-8, 10-11).

As you can discern from this reading, Paul preached the gospel at Thessalonica without any compromise and with great contention, but never with a mean spirit. Paul was gentle with the Thessalonians “as a mother-nurse

cherishes her children." He was lovingly dedicated to their welfare and willing to have imparted—not just the truth of the gospel—but his own soul because they were so dear to him. He treated them as a loving father treats his own children. If a preacher really loves his Lord and the people to whom he preaches, he will never be harsh and unloving. But he will not soft-peddle the truth either. Should not preachers of our day learn from the attitude and behavior of the great apostle Paul?

I have a question I would like for you to consider. If preachers desire to preach the gospel without being fighters, which Bible prophets or preachers serve as their examples? Are these non-combative modern preachers using Elijah, Micaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and other Old Testament prophets as models of the kind of preaching they think ought to be done in modern times? Are they following the example of John the Baptist, of Jesus Christ, or of the apostles Peter and Paul? Or are they designing their preaching after Norman Vincent Peale or Robert Schuller or other so-called "positive thinkers?" The ultimate question every preacher must ask himself is: What kind of preaching does God approve? The only way we can answer that question is to delve into the scriptures and see what they teach. Will you please join me in that endeavor?

As you know, if you have read the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah was one of the Lord's most dynamic spokesmen—not a perfect man by an stretch of the imagination—but a faithful servant of God Almighty. On one occasion, Ahab went out to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw Elijah, he asked this great man of God, "Are you he who troubles Israel?" Ahab was one of the most ruthless and violent kings who ever reigned in the nation of Israel. He had the power to imprison or to kill Elijah. But please take note of the prophet's response to Ahab's stupid question:

I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the

commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kings 18:17-18).

It was at this time that Elijah proposed the contest which showed that the Baalim were idols and had no power whatsoever. Do you get the impression that Elijah would have agreed with modern pluralism in religion? Do this nation and the church need men of the courage and faithfulness of Elijah? Are there people in all churches who oppose such preachers as Ahab and Jezebel opposed Elijah?

King David of Israel committed grievous sins against the Lord and against the nation of Israel. He deliberately and maliciously took Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, to be his wife and had Uriah killed in battle. Even though David is called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), God sent the prophet Nathan to David to correct his inexcuseably evil behavior. I know you remember the story Nathan told David about the rich man and his poor neighbor. The rich man had many flocks and herds. But instead of killing one of his own animals to entertain a traveller who had come his way, he took the poor man's only sheep and slaughtered it for the traveller. When David heard the story, his

...anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity (2 Sam. 12:1-6).

If Nathan had been like many modern preachers, he would have found a way to make David's sin seem less obnoxious. But Nathan said to David,

Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house

of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun (2 Sam. 12:7-11).

You probably have seen in the newspapers or on television that our current president has two preachers as advisors on spiritual matters. The two preachers are: Tony Compolo and Robert Schuller. Do you believe these preachers would remain presidential advisors if they were as honest and blunt as Nathan? If they told the president, "You have sinned grievously by approving of partial-birth abortion or by removing restrictions on fetal experimentation or by attempting to integrate homosexuals into the military," they surely would be ex-presidential advisors. But do preachers have an obligation to tell presidents, governors, mayors and other public officials what sins they have committed and what they ought to do about it? Can we remain silent in the face of evil without incurring the wrath of Almighty God?

Modern preachers may be tempted to say, "But God was speaking directly to and through the prophet Nathan. We do not have that kind of direct communication." That is true: God does not speak directly to man today, regardless of what you hear on some television programs, but we just as surely have the word of God as Nathan did. When men

and women in our generation—whether or not they are political, religious or educational leaders—commit sins, can we not turn to the sacred scriptures and find condemnation of all kinds of evil? Could it be that we lack the courage of Nathan or of Elijah or of John the Baptist? There should be no uncertainty about the Bible's teaching on sin, but there is often an absence of courage and faithfulness on the part of many men who claim to speak for God. We do not want anyone to perceive of us as fighters. My preacher friends, should we not be more concerned about our Lord's perception of us? After all, we must stand before God in the judgment—not before the people of the world or before the members of the churches where we preach.

King Ahab of Israel wanted king Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in a battle to win the city of Ramoth-Gilead in Syria. Ahab had consulted his own court prophets who assured him of victory. Jehoshaphat apparently had some misgivings about the reliability of the court prophets. He asked Ahab if there was another prophet they might consult. Ahab said,

There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil (1 Kings 22:8).

Micaiah was asked whether or not the two armies would be successful in their battle against Ramoth-Gilead. Micaiah said to Ahab: "As the Lord lives, what the Lord says unto me, that will I speak" (1 Kings 22:14). Micaiah knew—as Elijah before him had known—that Ahab was a cruel and heartless man—like Hitler. He had the power to put Micaiah to death. But the prophet had the courage to stand up in the face of Ahab and tell him what God had said. Micaiah warned Ahab he would lose if he persisted in his plan to fight against Ramoth-Gilead. He did lose—both the battle and his life.

In view of this brief history I have given you from the

Old Testament, do you believe Ahab thought of Micaiah as a fighter? Ahab hated Micaiah because the prophet was not afraid of the king's threats. He told Ahab what he needed to hear, even though he could have lost his life in the process. Did it not take as much courage for Elijah and Micaiah to fight against Ahab's evil schemes as it does for a soldier to fight in the service of his country? I do not know of any greater fighters in the Lord's army than Elijah, Nathan and Micaiah. Should they not serve as models for modern preachers whose main goal is to please the One who called us into His service?

The prophet Jeremiah has always been one of my heroes. He confronted a nation steeped in the most heinous deeds. They were guilty of turning from the living God to gods of their own making. Jeremiah pled with the Israelites to return to God Almighty.

Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:9-13).

The leaders among God's people in the days of Jeremiah had become corrupt in their personal lives and derelict in their duties in serving God's people.

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered

my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord (Jer. 23:1-2).

Later in the same chapter, the prophet decried the immorality among the Israelite people—especially among the leaders.

For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord... And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah (Jer. 23:10-11, 13-14).

If a gospel preacher were to mount his pulpit in our day and denounce the leaders in the church and in the nation in the way Jeremiah did in ancient Israel, would you call that preacher a fighter? I am not asking if you would approve of that approach, but would the preacher be a fighter? My friends, you should have no difficulty in answering those questions. Every preacher who is worth his salt is going to teach what the scriptures require, regardless of the consequences. Do you think Elijah, Nathan, Micaiah and Jeremiah ever trembled at the enormous tasks they were assigned? Did they have sleepless nights before they had to confront the evil of their day? But did they have any choice if they were going to be faithful in delivering God's message in God's words to God's people and to others? Do we have to be fighters like those great men of God to have God's approval?

I wish time permitted an examination of the preaching of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Amos, Haggai and Malachi. But let me summarize what I have discussed with you today. Men who speak for God must be careful to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). We have no authority on our own to speak. We must teach and preach what God has revealed in His word. If we do that, we are likely to be accused of being fighters. But can we afford to do other than God requires, regardless of what others may think and say? V. E. Howard preached the gospel on these radio stations for sixty years. He did not hesitate to preach the whole counsel of God. Some may have called him a fighter—and he was in the good sense of that word—but he kept right on preaching the word of the truth of the gospel (Col. 1:5). Can anyone of us afford to do otherwise?

If your preacher does not fight evil, maybe you ought to find out why. He cannot be what God requires preachers to be unless he opposes moral evil and religious error. Will you please pray for all of us who preach that we may be diligent and faithful in fulfilling our calling?

Chapter 10

Should A Gospel Preacher Be A Fighter? (No. 2)

All of my life I have loved preachers and preaching. When I was a teenager I remember hearing J. Farris Baird speak on two Old Testament kings: Jeroboam and Rehoboam. The sermon made a definite impression on my young mind. I also remember hearing J. D. Boyd speak on "Making God in Man's Image" and "Making Man in God's Image." These men and many others like them inspired me to want to study to become a gospel preacher. They were men of devotion, dedication and courage. I am grateful to God I grew up under such faithful men of God. In addition to hearing these men preach on a regular basis and in gospel meetings, I had the opportunity of listening to them talk as they visited in our home. We always invited meeting preachers to come to our home for meals.

As I think back on the men who influenced me most in my preaching career, I know these men were almost without exception faithful fighters—not mean-spirited, not belligerent, not unkind—but courageous in standing for the truth and against error and immorality. Did they always manifest the right attitude in their preaching? I doubt it, but they had strong convictions regarding the church and the Bible and were not hesitant to stand for what they believed—even when it was not popular in the community or in the church. I am not setting these men forth as models of perfection, but they did have a bearing on my desire to preach the gospel and I am grateful for that.

Our examples today should be the great prophets of the Old Testament and the preachers of the New. Moses, Samuel, David, Jeremiah and other Old Testament prophets were dedicated to preaching God's word exactly as He had revealed it to them. That meant, in some cases, their lives

were in constant jeopardy. When a nation is ruled by men like Ahab, Manassah, Jereboam I and II, you know that men who preach what needs to be said are in grave danger. Not all the prophets had the courage to take a stand against ungodly kings and immoral people, but some of them did and had to pay with their lives. Stephen reminded the Jews of his day of their bitter opposition to God's spokesmen.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers (Acts 7:52).

As great as the Old Testament prophets were and as much as I admire them, my chief models for preaching are John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the apostles and other New Testament preachers, such as, Philip the evangelist, James the Lord's brother, Timothy and Silas. These men were similar in their courage and faithfulness to the prophets of the Mosaic covenant. If we would preach like the New Testament preachers, the church would grow, evil would have a difficult time flourishing and Satan would be on the run.

The apostle Matthew tells us that king Herod had taken Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip and had made her his wife. John the Baptist knew how evil such behavior was and said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have her" (Matt. 14:3-4). It is my judgment that many preachers in our day would not do what John did. There are probably at least two reasons. Many modern preachers would see little wrong with what Herod did. They might not themselves engage in such behavior, but they would not condemn it as being wrong—always wrong. But even if some of them thought it was wrong, they would not have the intestinal fortitude to preach against it. There are preachers in our day who believe abortion, adultery, homosexuality and drinking are wrong, but they will not preach against

these evils. They are afraid their income will be eliminated. They are like Balaam who "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15).

Let me ask you to imagine a modern scenario. What if you were standing before Saddam Hussein or Moamar Khadafi and told either of them: "You have taken your brother's wife as your own. It is unlawful for you to have her." Would these outlaw rulers think you were a fighter? Do you think they would take that charge lightly? Would you be willing to lose your life to stand by your convictions?

King Herod may not have been so cruel as were Ahab and Manassah. He almost was certainly not as violent as are Hussein and Khadafi, but he was married to an extremely wicked woman who hated John the Baptist for his faithful preaching of God's word. John the Baptist knew that, but it did not deter him from doing what God demanded of him. John, dear friends, was a fighter **par excellence**. He never backed away from telling men and women what they needed to hear. On one occasion when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to his baptism, he said to them,

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt. 3:7-9).

How would that kind of preaching go over in the congregation you attend?

John the Baptist was unquestionably a great fighter. But surely the meek and lowly Son of God would not approve of John's demeanor and preaching. Not only did our Lord approve, He gave this powerful compliment to John:

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than

John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matt. 11:11).

Does our Lord's endorsement of John's preaching and life indicate that Jesus approved of John's fighting spirit? Absolutely!

I say that—not only because of what Jesus said in Matthew 11:11—but because He used basically the same approach. Jesus Himself said to the Pharisees, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell" (Matt. 23:33)? Some of the strongest words against evil and against evildoers in all of God's book come from the lips of the Son of God. Does that fact prove the hardness of Christ's heart? The question seems to border on blasphemy. Who can doubt for one moment the Lord's deep concern for sinners? He knew—and we ought to know—that a head-on confrontation may be the most effective method of dealing with some people. There may be no other way to approach certain problems in our society.

The most devastating criticism of the Pharisees' hypocrisy is found in Matthew 23. One brief excerpt from this chapter will have to suffice today.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt. 23:27-28).

Do these biting words prove that our Lord did not love His own people or that He was prejudiced toward them, as Bishop John Shelby Spong asserts? On the contrary, He had to speak as He did to awaken the Pharisees to their hypocritical conduct. If He had failed to condemn their ungodly behavior, He would not have been doing the will of God. Besides, He completes His lesson to the Pharisees with these beautiful words:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus Christ was a fighter. He fought for goodness, righteousness, and holiness. He did not fight against people; He fought against evil. How can gospel preachers do otherwise and hope to have God's approval?

Many churches and individuals in Paul's day had departed from God's divinely ordained pattern. For example, the church at Corinth had splintered over many ideas and practices. They had even perverted the purpose of meeting around the Lord's table.

When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not (1 Cor. 11:20-22).

What should be a preacher's attitude and reaction to problems like the one I have mentioned from 1 Corinthians 11? I ask you to think how your preacher would handle this situation? Robert Schuller says Jesus never mentioned sin; he claims to follow Jesus in that respect. Dr. Schuller would certainly not call the Corinthians' behavior sin. What did the inspired apostle Paul say about the confusion and division around the Lord's table at Corinth? "I praise you not" (1 Cor. 11:22). If we cannot praise, can we not just ignore? We cannot ignore immoral conduct and false teaching-not if we want to say with Paul at the end of our preaching days:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

The Galatian churches were being troubled by false teachers who were attempting to bind parts of the law of Moses on the New Testament church. Paul asked very bluntly,

O foolish (or stupid) Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you (Gal. 3:1)?

How could any man who loved his readers use such strong words? The error of the Judaizing teachers would have turned the Galatians away from Christ and led them into soul-condemning error. How could Paul act as if nothing was seriously wrong among those churches? His love for God and for the Galatians demanded that he fight the Judaizing tendencies among the Galatian churches.

Paul pled with the Galatians:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1-4).

Do these verses sound to you as if Paul were a fighter? Was he fighting against the false teachings which were troubling the churches of Galatia? Should we not fight against all false teaching? If we do, are we guilty of negative preaching?

Among liberals in many religious bodies, the book of

Galatians has been preached as if it were the only book in the Bible. Many modernistic theologians imagine that Paul gave almost unrestricted freedom to God's people in this great book. It certainly is a book which frees all men from any obligation to keep the law of Moses. But it binds men and women to avoid the lusts of the flesh and to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-22). Paul encouraged the Galatians to stand fast in the liberty they had obtained through the sacrificial death of Christ, but liberty does not mean license, as some modernistic theologians imagine. Paul urged the Galatians:

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ...But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another (Gal. 6:2-4).

If the liberals pretend to have such high regard for Galatians, why do they often ignore Paul's explicit condemnation of error and moral turpitude? How can they fail to see Paul's militancy in writing to the Galatians? If no other book in Paul's writings demonstrates that he was a fighter, then surely the Galatian letter does. My preacher friend, will you please study Galatians carefully and model your preaching after Paul? Do you think you can do any better than Paul or James or John or Peter?

If time permitted, I would like to examine some passages from James and from Jude, but let us think for just a minute of Peter's second letter. I do not know what false teachers Peter was opposing, but I know some of the damage which was being done by those false teachers. Peter knew that

...many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned (or well-turned) words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not (2 Peter 2:2-3).

Would you call the following passage "fighting words":

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption...These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever (2 Peter 2:12, 17).

How can words like "compassion," "sympathy," "pity," "love" and "mercy" be used of Jesus, of John the Baptist, of Paul and of other gospel preachers if they are fighters? My friends, the question needs to be rephrased: "How could they have been compassionate and loving when they knew men and women were going to be lost if they continued in their rebellion against God and they did nothing about it?" If we see men heading toward eternal punishment and do nothing about it, how can we think we are being our brother's keepers? Jude—the Lord's physical brother wrote:

And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 1:22-23).

If we are going to be faithful to our Lord, we must fight the good fight of faith.

But does fighting the good fight of faith mean only opposing error and immorality? Does it not involve fighting for goodness, righteousness and love? Reading the Sermon on the Mount should give us some insight into the need for preaching positive truths as well as opposing evil. Even though there is a negative component to everyone of the beatitudes, they are basically positive. Let me illustrate what I mean. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). What will happen to the impure in heart? Will they also see God? Do you see a negative element in this beatitude and all the others? The same is

true of every book in the New Testament.

I have given you one example from 1 Corinthians of Paul's explicit condemnation of some of the actions of the Christians at Corinth. They were misbehaving at the Lord's table. Did Paul fight for the right attitudes and practices in reference to the Lord's supper? If you have read 1 Corinthians 11, you know he did.

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

My friends, if we preachers only fight against religious error and immorality and do not fight for the right, we are not going to be very effective in bringing men and women into the kingdom of God and in building them up in the most holy faith. On the other hand, if we teach only the positive and do not fight against the negative influences which are destroying so many, we have not fulfilled our mission as spokesmen for God. All of this can be summarized in one simple truth: We must preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). We must not overlook any truth—whether positive or negative. We must preach the word—all of the word (2 Tim. 4:2).

Chapter 11

Great Preachers

The Odyssey channel has been televising a series of programs on "Great Preachers." I have not watched any of the programs because I am fairly sure the people who produce the programs have no standards by which they could judge great preachers. It is almost certain that preachers such as Elijah or Amos or John the Baptist or even Jesus Christ would not fit into the modern category of "great preachers." Some of the preachers they almost certainly would include in their study do not believe the Bible and may not believe in God. The series reminds me of some articles which the Memphis **Commercial Appeal** published a few years ago. The articles were entitled, "God's Twentieth Century Giants." One of those giants was Dr. Paul Tillich, a prominent German theologian, who did not believe in the personal God of the Bible and had a taste for wine, women and song.

One of the honorees on the television series, "Great Preachers," has become an American icon. He has preached to hundreds of millions of people in the United States and abroad. One of the participants in the series said concerning this popular preacher: "He never criticizes; he just leads men to Jesus Christ." I am positive the host of the program thought he was being complimentary of the nationally known subject of the television program, but does that kind of approach to preaching make a man a great preacher? It may make him a popular preacher, but does it make him a great preacher?

By what standard should we determine if a preacher is great? Does great knowledge of the scriptures make a man a great preacher? We understand-or should understand-that a man cannot preach that which he does

not know. A preacher may have a wonderful personality, love the people to whom he preaches, be a powerful orator and have a string of graduate degrees, but in God's sight and in the thinking of good men be a total disaster. I am not downplaying the importance of Bible knowledge. Paul exhorted his son in the gospel:

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

There are few things in life more troubling to me than to hear a preacher who does not know what he is saying. Sometimes preachers do not study and claim to depend on the Lord to give them their messages when they get into their pulpits or on radio. You do not have to listen long to such a preacher to know he has nothing worthwhile to say. Sometimes these know-nothing preachers punctuate their sentences with "hallelujahs" and "isn't God great?" How can intelligent people learn to appreciate the gospel and to obey it when they hear nothing but pablum? Why is it one never reads that kind of message in the Bible? The apostle Paul did not constantly say "Praise the Lord" or "What a great God we serve." He and all other apostolic preachers spoke "words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).

Being a good speaker may contribute to making a man a great preacher, but some good speakers have very little worthwhile to say. I have listened on occasion to the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. Dr. Peale was a powerful speaker, but his message harmonized more with modern pop psychology and with the New Age movement and with great Eastern religions than with the word of Almighty

God. Dr. Peale's attempts to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative" finds no support in scripture. It makes no difference how powerful a speaker is if he does not preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and that includes preaching negative sermons.

I am afraid many modern Americans—including millions who call themselves Christians—have little interest in a preacher's knowledge or his oratorical skills. Their major concern is whether he makes them feel good by entertaining them and getting them out on time. If you ask such people what they learned from the preacher's message, they probably would remember only the jokes or stories he told. If that is good preaching or even passable preaching, then, Lord, deliver us from good preaching. Why did not John the Baptist, or Jesus Christ, or the apostle Paul preach like some of the modern entertainers? You may have heard the expression, "Some preachers have something to say and others just have to say something." The great prophets of the Old Testament and the preachers of the New had something to say and had to say it. Is that not what Paul meant when he wrote:

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16)!

One of the participants on the Odyssey channel said of one "great preacher": "He never criticizes; he just leads men to Jesus Christ." One of our listeners recently wrote of one of my sermons: "This speaker should not be heard by the public since he delivers such hate messages. Also I'm shocked that he mentions names." Some questions need to be formulated on these two observations about preaching. Is it possible for a man to preach the whole counsel of God and not criticize the moral behavior of men and women and the doctrinal errors which will condemn men's souls to hell? When a preacher speaks against false teachers and

false doctrine, does that mean he hates the ones who preach false doctrine? Jesus commended the Ephesians for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans which God also hated (Rev. 2:6). Are not preachers and all other Christians supposed to hate every false way? So far as I am able to understand my own motivation, I do not hate anyone—not even Saddam Hussein or Moamar Khadafi or other criminals—but I hate their evil ways.

My correspondent expresses shock that I mentioned the name of Benny Hinn. What she probably does not know is that nationally known scholars continually criticize Benny Hinn **by name** because they believe he promotes himself, has given three different versions of his conversion and exaggerates some of his so-called miracles. Am I being unkind and unchristian by mentioning the names of false teachers? Is that no what Paul did? Will you please listen carefully:

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

Did Paul have a right to expose false teachers like Hymenaeus and Alexander? Do I have an obligation to mention Bishop John Shelby Spong who denies the inspiration of the scriptures and endorses the grossest kinds of immorality?

One of the men who worked with the apostle Paul was a man named Demas. He is mentioned along with other faithful men like Tychichus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras and Luke (Col. 4:7-14). There is hardly any doubt about Demas' devotion to the cause of Christ at the

time Paul wrote Colossians. Will you please listen to what Paul wrote about this same brother: "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10)? The word "forsaken" comes from the Greek *kataleipo* and means to leave, to leave behind, to desert. Was it legitimate for Paul to mention the name of a deserter? How are we going to mark the ones who cause division if we are not able to name them (Rom. 16:17)?

Let me return to a question I raised a few minutes ago. Is it possible for a man to be a great preacher or a good preacher or even a passable preacher without criticizing moral misconduct and departures from the faith? I have one more question we must consider. How do we determine whether it is permissible or even obligatory to criticize error and immorality? Frankly, I do not know how to answer these questions without turning to the inspired record to ascertain how John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the apostles and other first century teachers handled these matters. I am not going to listen to pop psychologists or liberal theologians or television evangelists. I am obligated to listen only to the inspired word of God. Surely, all believers in the Bible will readily admit that our models for preaching must be the preachers of the New Testament.

How would you react to your preacher if he were to speak as forcefully and uncompromisingly as did John when the multitudes came to hear him?

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Luke 3:7-8).

Was John justified in so severely criticizing the people of his day? Was his strong preaching against sin evidence of his hatred of his hearers?

Nobody—and I do mean nobody—was ever more critical of His own people than the Lord Jesus Christ. If time permitted, I could give you a number of examples, but I shall take time to give you just a few.

Then began he to upbraid (or to reproach) the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Matt. 11:20-24).

Can you imagine how almost any modern audience—especially some church audience—would react if Jesus or any other preacher compared them to Sodom? It was particularly distasteful and insulting for a Jewish audience to be compared to Sodom—a city whose very name was shameful, degrading and abominable. When a preacher uses such stinging rebukes of people, is that not strong evidence that he does not love them—in fact, that he hates them? Do you know how Jesus concluded His condemnation of His own people?

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

You decide on the basis of these words from Matthew 11

if Jesus loved or hated the Jews.

Matthew 23 includes some of the most critical remarks Jesus ever made to anyone. He said to the Jewish leaders:

Ye fools and blind...Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel...Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell (Matt. 23:19, 23-24, 33)?

Some modern theologians, such as, John Shelby Spong, have accused the Bible of being anti-semitic because it records these remarks and similar ones. But such charges make absolutely no sense. Jesus Himself was a Jew and loved His own people. Besides, please listen to the way Jesus concluded His rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (Matt. 23:37).

If you can get hate out of these words, then you must have a fertile imagination.

John 8 records a very intense conversation between Jesus Christ and some of the Jewish leaders. Jesus encouraged the Jews to believe in Him and to continue in His word. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The Jews protested that they were already free. They were Abraham's seed and had never been in bondage to any man. Jesus responded to their claim to be Abraham's descendants: "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which

I have heard of God: this Abraham did not do." Jesus accused the Jews of doing the deeds of their father. They protested, "We were not born of fornication: we have one father, even God." Jesus responded to their claim to be God's children: "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your fathers you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there was no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:33-44).

Do you understand these excerpts from Matthew and from John as being critical? Would Jesus be considered a great preacher in modern times if he preached to Americans—including some religious people—as He preached to His generation? How would your preacher fare today if he preached like Jesus did? How long would many modern churches keep a preacher who had the courage to call sin what it is—sin? What if your preacher condemned immoral conduct, such as, fornication, adultery, homosexuality and drunkenness? Did you know that some preachers have been fired because they had the courage to speak out against alcoholic beverages? It does not take much courage for me to speak out against these evils at West Fayetteville because I have the support and prayers of all the members—including our elders. But would I preach against these evils if the leadership and membership did not support such preaching? How can any preacher fail to preach the whole counsel of God when he knows he will have to give an account of his stewardship?

Most of you know that John was called "the apostle of love." How did John—not John the Baptist—but John, the apostle, preach? Was he ever critical or did he just try to lead men to Christ? To give you some insight into John's attitude and preaching, let me remind you of his extensive use of the word "liar." The word is used only ten times in the entire New Testament. 70% of the uses of the word "liar" appear in John and in 1 John. Is it possible for a great

gospel preacher to accuse someone of lying? These verses from 1 John will give a good answer to that question.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:10).

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him...Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son (1 John 2:4, 22).

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar... (1 John 4:20).

My friends, if you want to know what makes a great preacher, just study the Bible. We have dozens of great preachers both in the Old Testament and in the New. And then pray that God will send this generation some great preachers.

Chapter 12

Preaching The Gospel Without Offending Anyone

Have you ever been offended by what some preacher said from the pulpit or on the radio? Did you go to him afterward and ask him why he could not preach the gospel without offending people? I hope you understand that preachers, generally speaking, have no intention of hurting anyone's feelings. If we do so because of our poor selection of words or our attitudes or the tone of our voice, we should apologize for those blunders and strive with God's help not to be guilty anymore. I believe strongly that what Jesus taught in Matthew 10:16 applies especially to gospel preachers. Jesus said to the twelve:

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16).

Is there anyway on earth a man can preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and not offend someone? If I preach the whole counsel of God, those who do not want to hear it will likely be offended. If I do not preach the whole counsel of God, my Lord and those who want to hear it will be offended. There is no way to keep from offending someone if we follow the example of the great prophets of the Old Testament and the great preachers of the New. Will you please give careful attention to our study of the topic, "Preaching The Gospel Without Offending Anyone?"

The prophet Isaiah lived about seven hundred fifty years before Christ entered the world. Dr. George Robinson calls Isaiah "the king of all the prophets." Edmund Burke, the outstanding English statesman, habitually read from the prophecies of Isaiah before going to Parliament. Isaiah

was a great statesman who consulted on a regular basis with the kings of Israel. His writings—stylistically, linguistically and spiritually—are among the greatest ever penned by mortal man. Even in an age of materialism and secularism, the writings of Isaiah still exert a powerful influence in our world. Reading his great book provides an uplifting and challenging experience. We would know so much less about God if we were bereft of Isaiah's prophecy.

Do you believe the following passages from Isaiah were offensive to the Jews?

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward (Isa. 1:3-4).

Later in the same chapter, Isaiah wrote:

How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them (Isa. 1:21-23).

Were these words—from a modern viewpoint—designed to win friends and to influence people?

Isaiah 5 tells of the parable of the wild grapes. The Lord planted a vineyard—the nation of Israel—and looked for it to bring forth grapes, but it brought forth wild or rotten grapes. Isaiah describes the kind of fruit the vineyard of the Lord had produced.

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp,

and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands (Isa. 5:11-12).

Later in the same chapter Isaiah wrote:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him (Isa. 5:20-23).

We know enough about Isaiah to understand how painful it must have been for him to have to speak in such a manner to his own people. If you have read his prophetic writings, you know he was a very sensitive man—a man in love with God and with God's people. If you know human nature, you know some of the Israelites almost certainly said, "If Isaiah really loved us as he claims to, he would not speak in that way. He has embarrassed me and the people of God. Why does he have to be so offensive?" Please remember that the true prophets of God were not speaking from their own hearts; they were speaking the very words of God. God had said to Moses several hundred years before Isaiah began his prophetic ministry:

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him (Deut. 18:18).

If the Jews were offended at Isaiah's preaching, it was not the prophet's fault. He was speaking for God—delivering God's message in God's words to God's people.

How do you think the Israelites—especially the

prophets and priests—reacted to these caustic words from Jeremiah:

Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness. For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right (Jer. 23:9-10)?

Perhaps you have forgotten how they treated this great man of God.

Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire (Jer. 38:6).

Zedekiah had placed the prophet Jeremiah in a prison, but he wanted to consult the prophet to learn what would happen to the nation. He sent men to the prison and had him brought to the king. Zedekiah asked Jeremiah secretly,

Is there any word from the LORD? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land (Jer. 37:17-19)?

The false prophets had been assuring king Zedekiah and the Israelite people that the king of Babylon would not march against the nation and carry the Jews into captivity.

Obviously, that was what the king and the Israelites wanted to hear. They were not offended by the message of the false prophets. But when Jeremiah told the truth, they were offended and put him in a dungeon. Earlier in the book, Jeremiah had spoken of the prophets who were saying,

Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you (Jer. 23:17).

When Jeremiah warned the Israelites of the evil which would befall them, they were very angry. Some of the leaders among the Jews accused Jeremiah of falling away to the Chaldeans (Jer. 37:13). In other words, because he had revealed God's words about the future of the nation, they accused him of treason. Were they offended by Jeremiah's preaching? If the prophet had wanted to be popular, he would not have preached so strongly and uncompromisingly. But Jeremiah was more interested in pleasing God than in being popular with the Jews or anyone else. What a powerful example Jeremiah is for every preacher who wants to help people and to have God's approval!

Time will not permit any further discussion of the other great prophets of the Old Testament, men like Elijah, Micaiah, Amos, Micah, Malachi and Daniel. Suffice it to say that these men would not be remembered and honored as God's faithful servants if they had tried to avoid offending their hearers. We know these men were dedicated to serving God by preaching the messages he had given them. If the messages offended anyone, it was not their fault—but God's. They had no choice—if they wanted God's approval—but to preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I pray that God will raise up some Isaiahs and Jeremiahs and Elijahs for our day. When He does—if He does—they will not be able to represent God without offending some.

Now for a few minutes let us turn to the greatest preacher, prophet, priest and king—the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a preacher, Jesus said to the people who had seen His great miracles and had not believed:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

As a prophet, Jesus predicted the time when the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed because of the ungodliness and rebellion of the Jewish nation (Matt. 24; Luke 21). As our high priest, Jesus was tempted in all points just as we are (Heb. 4:15). He was and is the king of peace.

Isaiah wrote as follows concerning the coming Messiah:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law (Isa. 42:1-4).

The apostle Matthew quoted these words from Isaiah 42 and applied them to Jesus (Matt. 12:17-21).

In view of the fact that Jesus was meek and lowly, wept over His own city, entered into our feelings and experiences, and is the Prince of peace, how could He ever offend anyone? In the very chapter where Jesus claimed to be meek and lowly, Jesus severely criticized the Jews who had heard Him preach the message of God's kingdom and had seen the spectacular miracles He had performed. Will you listen carefully and decide whether His words angered and offended the Jews?

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they

repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Matt. 11:20-24).

Would anyone be so foolish as to accuse the Son of God of not caring about the people to whom He spoke?

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

Virtually every sermon Jesus preached offended someone. Why would He subject Himself to ridicule and abuse if He did not love men enough to come to this earth to suffer and to die for us?

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps...Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed (1 Peter 2:21-24).

John 8 records one of the most intense conversations between Jesus and some Jewish leaders. Jesus told the Jews: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They told him that they were Abraham's seed and had never been in bondage to any man. Jesus did not deny their physical connection to Abraham, but He denied their

spiritual relationship to him. He said to them,

I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father (John 8:37-38).

They assured Jesus that they were not born of fornication. They claimed to have one Father, God Almighty. Now please listen carefully to our Lord's response to the Jews' claim to be God's children:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not (John 8:44-45).

You know without any doubt that Jesus was striving to awaken the Jews to their rebellion against God's law. The Jews were His own people. He was not trying to hurt them or to anger them. But He could not have been faithful to God without telling them of their sinfulness. Were they offended by what Jesus said to them? The divine record says:

Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by (John 8:59).

Could Jesus have been a little less abrasive in His condemnation of the Jews? My friends, Jesus knew what the Jews were thinking. He could not have approached them in any other way. His goal always was to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10), but sometimes that meant a frontal attack against the enemies of God Almighty. We do not know men's motivations, but we can know when false

doctrine is being preached or when men are behaving in immoral ways. If we want to be faithful to God's calling, we will oppose all false teaching and all immoral behavior. Even if it offends the hearers—even if it offends the whole world.

There are many other incidents in the life of Jesus Christ which deserve our time and attention, but let us turn for just a few minutes to the preaching of the apostle Paul. Do you know how much Paul loved his hearers and readers—both Jews and Gentiles? He said to his own people: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). Does that sound to you as if this great man of God was anti-Semitic, as John Shelby Spong argues? Earlier in that same epistle Paul had written about the Jews: "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). But he no doubt offended the Jews when he wrote:

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3).

As you know if you have studied the Bible carefully, 1 Corinthians is one of the most caustic letters in the New Testament. Paul warned them of the danger of their being lost if they did not repent. But in his second letter, he tells them of his deep love for them.

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved (2 Cor. 12:14-15).

Were the Christians offended by Paul's first letter? How could there be any doubt about it? They were made to see

how they had sinned against God. Their godly sorrow led them to repentance (2 Cor. 6:10). If we want men and women to turn to God, we have to preach His word faithfully—not intending to offend—but to bring about salvation.

Chapter 13

Preaching Christ

If a preacher is serious about his work, he has to agonize over what he ought to preach and how he ought to preach it. He knows from reading the scriptures that his work will result in men's having greater trust in the word of God or in their having less respect for the word. That was the reason James warned: "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1). The word "masters" means teachers. Preachers know or ought to know just how vital their work is and how it can strengthen men in their work for the Lord or how it can weaken their resolve to serve their Lord. We preachers have one of the most responsible jobs in the world.

In view of our grave responsibility, we must ask ourselves if we are preaching what God wants us to preach. Are we really preaching Christ? I want to answer that question by taking notice of just one chapter in the book of Acts. As every knowledgeable student of the Bible knows, the church of our Lord was established in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. A careful reading of Acts 2 will provide some insight into what preaching Christ meant, at least, on that occasion. Peter preached that the Jews had crucified Jesus Christ, but God had raised Him from the dead. When the Jews realized the great crime they had committed, they asked Peter and the other apostles what they should do to be saved. Peter answered,

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:38-39).

Three thousand people believed on the Lord, repented of their sins and were baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

Was Peter's sermon on Pentecost a model or a pattern for preachers in all ages? Must we preach the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? If we preach these great truths of the gospel, have we discharged our responsibility to preach Christ? Let us today look carefully at Acts 8 to ascertain what preaching Christ meant on some occasions.

After the Lord's church was established on the day of Pentecost, almost immediately the church encountered opposition from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. The Old Testament had specifically predicted the coming of Christ and His kingdom (Jer. 31:31-34). The bitter persecution from the Jews led to the martyrdom of the gentle, faithful and good man, Stephen (Acts 7). Present at the death of Stephen was a Jewish patriot whose name was Saul of Tarsus who later became the apostle Paul. The Bible says that Saul was consenting unto the death of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1).

Saul was so angry with Christ and His church that he,

...made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison (Acts 8:3).

Can you imagine what motivates a man to be so strongly opposed to the Lord's plan for saving man? The truth is: What Saul meant to do by persecuting the church turned out to be a great blessing. Luke comments on the events I have just outlined:

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

No wonder the English poet wrote: "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform."

Luke affirmed that these early Christians "went everywhere preaching the word." Is preaching the word different from preaching Christ or preaching the gospel or

preaching Christ crucified? Each of these expressions may have a particular significance in its context, but all of them refer to the same activity. That fact will become evident as we continue to examine Acts 8.

Luke says that "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). What did Philip preach when he preached Christ to the Samaritans? We know some of what he preached, but the inspired record does not tell us how he preached. However, I know the broad outline of Philip's sermon. We have the Holy Spirit's report of Philip's sermon.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

Am I telling you that preaching Christ must always include these topics: the kingdom of God, the name of Christ and baptism? That is not what I am saying. But I am persuaded that no one can preach all the truth about Christ without discussing what the Bible teaches on these subjects. A careful reading of the scriptures will confirm that truth.

When Philip preached the kingdom of God, what did he say about it? Did he survey what the Old Testament predicted about the coming of the kingdom? Is it possible he reviewed what Daniel said about the coming of God's kingdom? You will recall that Daniel predicted the coming of four world kingdoms: the Babylonian under Nebuchadnezzar, the Medo-Persian under Cyrus, the Macedonian under Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire under the Caesars. Daniel then wrote:

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44).

As can be gleaned from this reading, the kingdom of heaven was to be established during the days of the Roman kings.

Several features of the Lord's kingdom deserve to be mentioned in passing. It was to be established "by the God of heaven." The New Testament uses the same term in referring to the kingdom. It also uses the expression, "kingdom of heaven." The kingdom to be established in the days of the Roman kings was to be eternal. That means the kingdom the prophets had in mind could not be the kingdom of premillennialists. The premillennial kingdom is to last a thousand years. Daniel affirmed by divine inspiration that the kingdom of God "shall never be destroyed." In the same verse, he wrote: "it shall stand forever." The author of Hebrews had the same kingdom in mind when he said:

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:28).

The author of Hebrews was not looking for a kingdom thousands of years in the future. They were receiving that kingdom in the very first century, as the tense of the verb "receiving" makes plain.

What was that kingdom the prophets had in mind and Philip preached at Samaria? Did you know that those who wrote about the kingdom prior to the day of Pentecost always spoke of the kingdom in the future but those who wrote after Pentecost spoke of it as being in existence? For example Mark records these words from the very mouth of Jesus Christ.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14-15).

The apostles asked Jesus just before His ascension to the

Father, "...wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6)? The apostles knew the kingdom was still in the future, but they did not know when it would come into the world.

What the apostles did not know at that time, we know-not because we are smarter than they-but because the scriptures tells us. Paul wrote to the church at Colosse as follows:

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered (literally, rescued) us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:12-13).

One question must be asked: "How could the Colossian Christians be translated (or changed) into a non-existent kingdom? According to premillennialists, the kingdom will be established at the Lord's second coming. If that were true, how could the Colossians and John the apostle already be in the kingdom? My friends, there really is a very simple solution to that problem. The kingdom was not postponed; it was established on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. That kingdom will never be destroyed, but will be delivered to the Father at the end of the age (1 Cor. 15:24).

Are these the truths about the kingdom of God which Philip preached to the Samaritans? I do not know, but all preachers who want to be faithful to God must teach what the Bible says about the church or the kingdom of Jesus Christ. How else can any man claim to preach the whole counsel of God?

Acts 8:12 affirms that Philip preached "the name of Jesus Christ." We have no way of knowing what he said about the name of Christ, but we know what other scriptures teach about the name. Peter told some Jews in Jerusalem:

This is the stone (meaning Jesus Christ) which was set at nought of you builders, which is

become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:11-12).

Is that what Philip preached? We do not know, but we surely can understand the necessity of preaching this great truth. Paul urged the Colossians:

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

If you have ever had any doubt about the name of Christ, this passage from Peter should remove that doubt forever.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:14-16).

How can a preacher claim to be speaking for God and not emphasize the absolute necessity of the name of Christ? I am aware of the foolish expression one often hears: "There is nothing in a name." No one could ever arrive at that position by the reading of the scriptures. Peter commanded Christians to glorify God in the name of Christ, that is, by being Christians and Christians only.

There is one other point in Philip's sermon I must discuss briefly with you. Luke says that when the Samaritans

...believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

Is Luke saying that preaching Christ must include baptism?

Acts 8:5 says that "Philip went down to a city of Samaria and preached Christ." The Samaritans heard the word Philip preached, they believed the truth of the gospel and they were baptized, both men and women. Can you logically come to any other conclusion than the preaching Christ means preaching baptism? Is it possible for a man to preach the whole truth about Christ and not preach baptism?

Mark's account of the Lord's Great Commission reads:

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

Are these the words Philip used in teaching the Samaritans? It would be presumptuous on anyone's part to affirm that. We do not know what words Philip used, but we know what other passages teach about baptism. We also know that the Samaritans did exactly what Jesus taught in the Great Commission according to Mark. They heard the preaching of the word, they believed and were baptized. Were they saved? You know they were because Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." The Samaritans believed and were baptized. How can truth be made plainer than that?

Have you ever meditated on the fact that Jesus began His personal ministry by requesting baptism at the hands of John the Baptist? When Jesus asked John to baptize Him, John protested by saying,

I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased

(Matt. 3:13-17).

It is impressive or ought to be that Jesus concluded His work on earth by commanding His apostles:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:19-20).

If Jesus began His personal ministry by being baptized and completed it by commanding the apostles to preach baptism, how could any man think he is preaching all the truth about Christ when he fails to preach baptism? To neglect to preach and to practice New Testament baptism reflects on the authority of Christ.

Since I am reviewing with you some of the events recorded in Acts 8, please take note of another conversion in that chapter. The evangelist Philip was commanded by the angel of the Lord to,

...Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert (Acts 8:26).

Philip obeyed the angel's command and found an Ethiopian eunuch riding in a chariot. The eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship. The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 as he rode along in his chariot. He did not understand what he was reading. He told Philip that he did not understand whom the prophet Isaiah had in mind (Acts 8:27-31). Philip joined the eunuch in the chariot and explained that Isaiah was speaking of Jesus Christ. These are the inspired writer's exact words: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35).

When Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch, what did he say? What great doctrines of the Bible did he emphasize? We do not know because the Bible does not tell us. But please take note of what occurred.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest... (Acts 8:36-37).

Who said anything about baptism? Was baptism necessarily included in preaching Jesus? My friends, you know it was. The eunuch certainly did not learn about baptism from Isaiah 53. He learned it from Philip's sermon about Jesus.

What was the eunuch's reaction to Philip's preaching?

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:38-39).

What reason did the eunuch have for rejoicing? He knew according to God's promise that his sins were forgiven. He was a member of the body of Christ. The apostle Paul explains the significance of baptism.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

Does all of this mean that preaching Christ must include baptism? You know it does—if the inspired writers meant what they said. How else can anyone interpret the events I have read to you from Acts 8?

Chapter 14

Balance In Preaching And Teaching (No. 1)

Through the ages since the church of our Lord was established on the day of Pentecost, one of the most troublesome aspects of religion is its tendency to go overboard in some direction. Theologians, preachers and other religious leaders often select one major area of interest or concern and concentrate on that area to the exclusion of others. For example, during the late 1800's and early 1900's, scholars like Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong, believed and preached what some have called "The Social Gospel." These men and many other prominent Americans seemed to have little time for the great doctrines of the Bible, such as, the inspiration of the scriptures, the deity of Christ, our Lord's second coming and His death for the remission of sins. Their major concern was social reform which included redistribution of our great wealth, helping the needy, supporting the labor movement, and stamping out racism. As you can readily see, some of these goals harmonize with the teaching of the prophets, of Jesus Christ and His apostles. But it was and is clearly wrong to emphasize these great biblical principles to the neglect of telling men and women what to do to be saved, how to worship God acceptably and what God expects His children to do in service to their fellowmen. The key to preventing the extremes which have divided Christendom through the centuries is preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). Balance in preaching and teaching must characterize all service to God Almighty.

Liberal theologians are often critical of those who urge men and women to do what God says in the way He says do it. They leave the impression that the specific acts of worship are relatively unimportant so long as men's and

women's hearts are right. They often appeal to the writings of the Old Testament prophets to sustain their unreasonable and unscriptural position. It is not unusual to read from some liberal theologian who denies God's demands that the Jews keep the rules and regulations of the Mosaic law. Some of them are fond of quoting these words from the great statesman prophet, Isaiah:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts (Isa. 1:11-12)?

Was God telling His people through the prophet that He cared nothing for their burnt offerings and sacrifices? He was warning the Jews not to bring their offerings, not to keep the sabbath, not to come into His house—unless and until they were observing other precepts God had given, such as, loving their neighbors as themselves, leading pure moral lives, taking care of their family responsibilities and being just in their dealings with their fellowmen. After all, dear friends, the ceremonies and rituals of the law of Moses were God's arrangement. He was the one who ordained the keeping of the sabbath, the burning of incense, the circumcision of males, but these meant nothing to the Lord if the hearts of the people were not in tune with His will. Sincerity of heart is not adequate in our worship to God, although we are to be sincere and to have pure hearts. The truth is: the worship of the Jewish people became an abomination in God's sight if the Jews did not live according to God's commands. What else could Isaiah have in mind when he wrote:

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away

with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them (Isa. 1:13-14).

There simply cannot be any doubt about the Lord's commands regarding animal sacrifices, the burning of incense and such ceremonies. But many of the Jews apparently thought they could be saved simply by obeying these laws regardless of how they lived. Micah, Isaiah's younger contemporary, asked the Jews:

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul (Micah 6:6-7)?

In other words, will strict adherence to the rituals and ceremonies of the law of Moses be sufficient in service to God Almighty? Every prophet of the Old Testament and every preacher of the New would answer that question in the negative. No Bible writer would have condemned those activities since God Himself arranged them, but they knew there was more to loving God and serving Him than observing these commandments. Micah puts all of this in the right light when he says,

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (Micah 6:8)?

May one really walk humbly with his God and not keep all the Lord's commandments? Were the Jews ever released under the old covenant from strictly observing the rituals and ceremonies of that law? The Jews often offered sacrifices and observed other ordinances of the law and

disregarded and disobeyed other laws of God. In the words of Jesus, "these ought you to have done" (that is, offered sacrifices, burned incense, honored the law of circumcision and so on) and not to have left the other undone (that is, justice, mercy and walking humbly with God). Many of the problems the Israelites faced stemmed from their partial obedience to God's law. Israel's first king had to learn that lesson the hard way (1 Sam. 15).

Ancient and modern theologians have caused many heartaches and much confusion in religion by stressing faith to the exclusion of obedience or in teaching faith without works or love without the need to keep God's commandments. This was one of the great flaws of the Reformation movement. Martin Luther and John Calvin believed in the vital importance of faith, but they often overlooked the fact that faith without works is barren or fruitless (James 2:20) and "dead" (James 2:26). Why not preach about faith and obedience what the books of James and Hebrews teach? Do you know the kind of faith which saved Abraham?

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Heb. 11:8).

The main clause of this verse is simple and powerful. "By faith Abraham...obeyed." There is no other kind of saving faith.

If one really wants to understand the relationship between faith and obedience or faith and works, he must carefully examine every passage which deals with faith and works. Obviously, I cannot do that in the time I have allotted, but let us take a few representative verses from the Bible. Will you listen carefully to these words from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount?

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he

that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Is Jesus actually teaching that we must **do** the will of God? Whatever became of faith only? The truth is: There are millions of Americans who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but they have never obeyed the gospel and are not living in harmony with the will of God. Are they saved in spite of their disobedience?

In the chapter from which I have just read, Jesus pictures some at the final judgment asking,

Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:22-23).

Who can fail to see that Jesus is stressing both faith and works? If we truly believe in Christ, we are going to take Him at His word and do exactly what He says in the way He says do it. Failure to do His will means we really do not believe in Him.

In a very familiar passage, Jesus illustrates what faith must do to be saving faith.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock (Matt. 7:24-25).

It is not enough to hear and even to believe; we must do what God commands. If Jesus did not mean to teach that truth, what did He have in mind? There is no way under heaven any theologian or preacher can get faith alone from these verses. We certainly know that faith is essential (Heb. 11:6), but we must go beyond faith to obedience.

What if one does not obey the words of Jesus?

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:26-27).

Is Jesus teaching the same truth that James taught—that faith without works is dead, being alone (James 2:17)? Jesus was not for one moment disparaging faith, but He was denying its adequacy. We must hear God's word, believe it with all our hearts and render obedience to the simple commands of the gospel. That was Paul's reason for telling the Galatians:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

Balance in preaching must include both biblical doctrine and modern application of the word of God. It is not unusual in modern times—even among left-leaning gospel preachers—to hear: "We need to downplay doctrine and stress practice." That is a position that no teacher or preacher can sustain. One gospel preacher said to a fellow gospel preacher: "The brethren are tired of these old doctrinal sermons." On another occasion, a gospel preacher was discussing many of the changes which are taking place in the religious world. He said to a co-worker, "What we must do is get back to basics." His co-worker replied, "If you mean preaching faith, repentance, confession and baptism, I do not intend to do that."

I am aware—as I think most of you are—that preachers can become hobby-riders—even in preaching the truth. If a preacher does nothing except preach baptism, he is not preaching the whole counsel of God. On the other hand, if he does not preach baptism for the remission of sins, he is being unfaithful in his preaching. What I have said about New Testament baptism can be said about dozens and dozens of other topics. Let me mention one other example.

Some of the preachers on television—especially on the Trinity Broadcasting Network—generally speaking, have two topics: How to get rich by giving to the Lord and the imminent coming of Christ. For the time being, I shall not discuss the so-called “health and wealth” gospel, but I do want to stress in passing the false predictions concerning the Lord’s second coming. Even if the preachers were right about the time of Christ’s return, they should have other topics to discuss. Their emphasis on the Lord’s immediate appearing explicitly violates the simple statements of the Lord Himself.

Am I saying we should not preach on the Lord’s second coming? Absolutely not! I had a brother to ask me recently, “When do we preach on eschatology (meaning events surrounding the Lord’s coming and the end of the age)?” I told him that I do preach on that topic on a regular basis and have done so all of my preaching life. I may not preach on the second coming so much as he or others think I should, but I have not neglected this very important subject. How could any preacher overlook an idea which appears so prominently in the New Testament?

The Bible certainly emphasizes the need to discuss both doctrine and application. One example from the book of Hebrews should be helpful. Hebrews one says that God has spoken to the Christian era through Jesus Christ. And why did God speak to us through Christ and not through any other, such as the angels? The answer to that question is very simple: God did not have any greater through whom He could speak. God gave the law of Moses through angels (Gal. 3:19). But Jesus is greater in every way than the angels.

For unto which of the angels said he at any time,
Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?
And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall
be to me a Son (Heb. 1:5)?

He never said to any angel, but He did say it to His Son. Now the argument is: “We have a better spokesman, a better mediator, a better way.” That is the doctrinal

foundation upon which the Hebrew writer says,

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (or more literally, lest we should slip away from them) (Heb. 2:1).

In most cases—although not in all—inspired writers laid down basic principles and then made application of those principles to life. The first eleven chapters of Romans are devoted to showing that the gospel—not the law of Moses—is God’s power for saving man (Rom. 1:16-17). The next five chapters make application of the truths Paul gave in the first eleven chapters. If these observations are true—and it can hardly be doubted—how can any preacher preach what is commonly called “doctrine” and not preach Christian living, New Testament worship and other acts of obedience which God commands? On the other hand, why do some modernistic preachers neglect to teach men what to do to be saved, how to worship God in spirit and in truth, the absolute importance of evangelizing the world and the essentiality of being a member of the body of Christ? If we overlook or ignore any teaching of the Bible, we will be condemned and those who follow us will fall into the ditch. That ought to be a sobering thought for all who preach—whether on television or in the pulpits of America.

Many non-church attenders often criticize preachers for stressing church attendance. Those critics say, “I can be a good Christian and never go to church. My home and my family are my church.” Could people ever make such a blunder if they have ever read the scriptures carefully? Dear friends, in Bible times there were no Christians who were not members of the church of the living God. If they did not attend church services regularly, they were sharply rebuked for their negligence. The author of Hebrews urged his fellow Christians:

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the

assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

We must not forget how very vital church attendance is, but there is more to Christian living than attending the worship services. God demands that we live our beliefs everyday—at home, in our communities, on the job and elsewhere. That means abstaining from any corrupt practice showing by our deeds that we love all men (even the unlovable), speaking words of kindness and encouragement to all who are discouraged and downtrodden. It means what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

What I am pleading for in this lesson today is a balanced approach to preaching and to Christian living. We must preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but we must also live the truth.

Chapter 15

Balance In Preaching And Teaching (No. 2)

A former student of mine had been listening to our radio programs and asked, "Why do you always preach on abortion, homosexuality, gambling, alcoholic beverages and such topics?" That is a perfectly good question and deserves an answer. I did not then and I do not now always preach on these moral and social issues. I do preach on them often and conduct lectures on them at colleges, universities and schools of preaching. I do so quite often because I am asked to do it. Lectureship committees within our brotherhood know I have spent many years in studying these topics, in debating them and in writing about them. I make no apology for discussing these very vital issues. But in my regular preaching at West Fayetteville Church of Christ, in gospel meetings and on the International Gospel Hour, I preach on a variety of topics. I am striving to be like Jesus, the apostles Peter and Paul and other New Testament preachers. They did not neglect to speak on any issue which was essential to the church's growth and faithfulness.

What my young friend may have been asking was, "Why not speak on the plan of salvation, church membership, New Testament baptism, the Lord's second coming, and similar 'doctrinal truths?'" I want to clear up a matter which is often misunderstood by preachers and by others. When I preach against abortion, homosexuality, gambling and such like, I am preaching on "doctrinal issues." Do you know what the word "doctrine" means? The Greek New Testament uses two words which are translated "doctrine": **didaskalia** and **didake**. The King James Version almost always translates these words by the English word "doctrine," but most modern versions do not.

I have no problem with the King James translation, but we need to know the meaning of the word. The word simply means teaching.

If someone were to ask you, "List some of the great doctrines of the Bible," would you ever think of listing how older men and older women were to behave? Would teaching young women how to be good mothers and good wives belong in the category of "sound doctrine?" If you have any doubts about these matters, please listen carefully to Paul's admonitions to Titus.

But speak thou the things which become (or befit) sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (Titus 2:1-8).

As some people use the word "doctrine," what Paul wrote to Timothy seems out of order. But it is because we have confused the word "doctrine." It just means teaching.

My question to you is this: How do we preachers balance our teaching on such matters as church membership, the deity of Christ, the second coming and moral issues, family responsibilities and related topics? We have to begin by recognizing that all of these subjects are of vital importance. We cannot preach the whole counsel of God

and overlook any of these great biblical truths. The only way we can be sure we are preaching a balanced gospel is to preach each chapter of every book of God's word. We must do a great amount of expository preaching, that is, taking large sections of a book or a chapter and opening that part of the Bible to our listeners. Topical sermons surely have their place in preaching, but they are not adequate. By using topical sermons only it is too easy to miss some fundamental message from the Bible. Of course, the goal of preaching whatever the method is to preach all that God says on every topic.

Jesus Christ spent countless hours outlining His mission, discussing His relationship to the Father, criticizing false doctrines and warning against false teachers. I shall elaborate on each of these concepts in the order in which I listed them. Please take note of these passages which tell us why Jesus came to this sinful world.

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

On one occasion, as His custom was, Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth, His hometown. The minister of the synagogue gave the scroll of Isaiah to Jesus who opened the book and began to read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

After He had read these words from Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2, He sat down and explained to His Jewish audience: "This

day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).

Our Lord wanted His generation and all subsequent generations to know of His special relationship to God the Father. A few brief excerpts from John 17—the Lord's prayer—should help us understand that Jesus and God are one. Christ expressed deep concern for the spiritual growth of His disciples by praying:

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:17-21).

Christ went so far as to say that belief in God the Father was not adequate. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). On one occasion, Jesus said to the Jews, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). The Jews were very angry because our Lord was claiming to be equal with God; therefore they sought to kill Him because they believed He was guilty of blasphemy and He was—unless He really was equal with God. Jesus vigorously defended His equality with God (John 5:19-47). The apostles certainly believed and taught that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh—not God the Father and not God the Holy Spirit—but God the Son (1 Tim. 3:16).

Condemning false doctrine is not generally acceptable to modern theologians and to millions of men who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. In a letter to the editor of *The Tennessean* (Monday, December 14, 1998), one writer expresses confusion, befuddlement, mystification and amazement that this "professedly Christian nation" has shown so little compassion for a fellow human being. He

asks this question, "How can we call ourselves Christians and not be able to demonstrate the very essence of what Jesus was and still is all about: love and forgiveness" (p. 16-A)? In case you have not already guessed, this letter to the editor was referring to the conduct of President Clinton. I am not going to discuss the president's behavior—even though both Democrats and Republicans have vigorously condemned his moral turpitude. What I am concerned about is the lack of understanding of the man who wrote the letter. Is he saying that our Lord's love and forgiveness forbid our condemning and opposing immoral behavior? Jesus judged the Pharisees very harshly because of their unlawful and sinful behavior. Was He unwilling to forgive them? He came to this earth to die that they might be forgiven. But He did not forgive those who persisted in their rebellion against God. If we want to be forgiven, we must acknowledge our sins, repent of them and ask God to forgive our sins. No one—NO ONE—is exempt from these requirements. The truth is, dear friends, the love of Christ should constrain all who claim allegiance to Him to repent of their sins and turn to Christ for forgiveness.

But what about judging men for teaching false doctrine? Was Jesus so judgmental—to use a very popular modern word—that He opposed all teaching which did not harmonize with what He came to reveal? In His Sermon on the Mount—which is supposed to be filled with love, compassion and forgiveness—Jesus warned His disciples and all generations:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down,

and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:15-20).

Was Christ saying that the truth and only the truth could make men free (John 8:32)? Maybe the writer to the editor of **The Tennessean** ought to examine the scriptures more carefully.

Did Jesus balance His emphasis on doctrine with opposition to moral evils? In other words, was He concerned about both sound doctrine and sound practice? How anyone could read the scriptures and come to any other conclusion staggers the imagination. Please think seriously of the great moral values Jesus emphasized in His Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). What about the impure in heart? How are they going to stand in the day of judgment?

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matt. 5:27-28).

Could Jesus have preached a balanced gospel by stressing the love and forgiveness of God and neglecting to show that adultery and lying will condemn souls to hell? Incidentally, Christ did not mention the possibility of contracting social diseases when one commits adultery. I am sure He was aware of that possibility. He did not say a man could be killed if he were sexually unfaithful to his wife. He also knew that. He discussed adultery as a sin against God Almighty. Paul later wrote: "...they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21).

There are many other moral teachings in the Sermon on the Mount which deserve our attention, but I choose to turn to Matthew 15 and read our Lord's words about various kinds of immorality. Many of the Jews in Christ's day were more concerned about their own childish traditions than about the moral values they should have honored. Jesus

asked His disciples if they understood the lessons He was teaching the Pharisees.

Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man (Matt. 15:17-18).

Now please listen carefully.

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man (Matt. 15:19-20).

Was Jesus teaching that these sin were unforgivable? Absolutely not! But He was teaching that these sins can be forgiven only when those who commit them repent and seek forgiveness in the heart of God. If those sins were forgiven—and they were in the case of David and many others—does that mean that those who committed those sins were still qualified to be preachers, teachers, religious leaders and examples to others? If their hearts are genuinely changed and they bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, they might continue as leaders but their influence would be seriously curtailed.

Balance in preaching and teaching must include helping those who are in need—the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, the disenfranchised. No teacher in history so powerfully brought this truth to our attention as did Jesus Christ. Matthew 25 expresses the need to help others in words we should have trouble forgetting. These are our Lord's words:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave

me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me (Matt. 25:34-36).

The compassionate people Jesus mentioned asked the Lord when they had done so many good deeds. He answered:

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:40).

Can anyone pretend he is preaching the whole counsel of God when he neglects to speak about helping those who are in need? The story of the prodigal son further emphasizes the need to preach a balanced gospel.

A few questions are in order for the preachers in my audience. Do you plan your sermons in such a way so that you preach all the great truths of the scriptures—not just your special interests? Do you read widely on many topics, such as, moral issues, Christian evidences, cultic movements, political and business corruption, marriage and family, the life of Christ, modern educational practices, the New Age movement, racism, evolution, and other topics? Do you believe you can meet the moral and spiritual needs of your listeners if you do not know what they are thinking—what their deep concerns are? The word of God was designed to elevate men and women and bring them into a saving relationship with Christ. Are you and I as preachers helping our fellow human beings get ready to enjoy eternal life with God? If we are not, do we not need to examine our motivations and practices?

We preachers must realize that what one preacher discusses on any given occasion may not be what another preacher should preach. For example, if the church where you preach has many members who are involved in gambling, speaking out against abortion or refuting the arguments of atheists may not fit the bill. If you have a

congregation with a number of gossips in the membership, teaching on the New Age movement may be interesting, but does it really reach people where they are? Examining carefully Paul's and Peter's sermons in the book of Acts will help us understand that we must know the people to whom we preach and adapt our sermons to the audience. That does not mean that we attack people in our sermons—although, at times, we might have to speak very plainly—but we are going to be held accountable for what we preach and for what we fail to preach.

If, preacher friend, you decide to preach a balanced gospel or if you are already doing it, some opposition will likely arise, if it has not already done so. Some church members do not want what they call "doctrinal preaching." Others do not want any preaching on moral issues or on doing works of benevolence. I believe in listening to all points of view. But you will have to decide what God expects of you. You will have to stand before God in the judgment to give an account of your stewardship. So I would urge all preachers to remember these words from Paul's first letter to a young preacher:

Till I come, give attendance to reading (that is, public reading), to exhortation, to doctrine... Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:13, 15-16).

May God help us all to do His will!

Chapter 16

Balance In Preaching And Teaching (No. 3)

Bible expositors are often guilty of making mistakes—sometimes very serious mistakes—in their interpretation of the scriptures. They often take passages out of their contexts and make the text mean whatever the preacher or theologian wants it to mean. Perhaps no group has been more guilty in this area than dispensationalists. They interpret the first part of Matthew 24 as applying to the end of the age and the second coming when Jesus plainly applied it to the destruction of Jerusalem. We must not misuse the scriptures or any other document in such a fashion. It simply is not being honest with the text and with our listeners or readers.

Theologians and preachers often overlook the meaning of the original text. I could give you dozens of examples, but I want to provide just one. Hal Lindsey's latest book—at least, the latest I have seen—has the title, **Planet Earth: The Final Chapter** (Beverly Hills, CA: Western Front LTD., 1998), asks, "Could it be any other generation?" He is asking if the rapture could occur in any other generation than the present one. He then writes,

Understanding the times in which we live is not the exclusive domain of the theologian. Peter reminds us, 'But know this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation' (p. 99).

The scripture Lindsey quoted has nothing to do with the topic he is discussing. It has nothing to do with "one's own interpretation." The Greek word rendered "interpretation" is not **hermeneia** (the usual word for "interpretation") but **epiluseos** which means releasing or loosing or solving. Dr.

A.T. Robertson says the expression should be translated: "No scripture comes out of private disclosure," not "of private interpretation" (volume 6, p. 158).

Another mistake preachers often make is taking one verse on a given topic and making that verse the total of all the Bible has to say on that topic when, in fact, the Bible has much more to say. An example should help us understand the principle involved. The Bible says very plainly, "...by grace ye are saved..." (Eph. 2:5). If you accept the Bible as God's inerrant Book, how can you question the truthfulness of that statement? The entire revelation of God from Genesis to the book of Revelation shows how God's grace has brought about salvation through Jesus Christ. But are we being fair with the sacred text when we make salvation by grace alone the meaning of God's dealings with fallen men?

One grievous blunder some preachers of various religious groups have made relates to our Lord's statement in John 13:34-35. Will you please listen as I read these beautiful sentiments from our Lord?

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

It is in order for me to raise a number of questions about this passage. Do these verses forbid the church's judging others for preaching false doctrines and engaging in unauthorized practices? If love is the only prerequisite for discipleship, are we forbidden as Christians to oppose instrumental music in the worship of the Lord's church? May one be a true disciple of Christ just by loving his brother even if he has not been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins? Does loving one another as Christ loved us prohibit our condemnation of worldly activities, such as dancing, gambling, divorce and such like? Are we somehow

violating the principle of love when we insist that every member of the body of Christ must take the Lord's supper every Sunday?

It ought to be obvious to even a casual reader of the scriptures that love is the fundamental of the faith. Is that not what Paul meant when he said at the end of his immortal chapter on love: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13)? John's epistles show how absolutely essential love is in the life of every child of God.

He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him (1 John 2:10).

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death (1 John 3:10-11, 14).

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (1 John 4:7-11).

As you can readily understand, to deny the necessity of Christian's loving one another is to deny Christianity. All of the passages I have read to you and dozens of others

emphasize the need for Christians to love one another and to love those who are not Christians. But is love the only essential for becoming and remaining a faithful Christian? Does not love make some demands on Christians? If I confess to Molly that I love her—and I do on a regular basis—have I fulfilled my obligation as a husband to her? I must tell her that I love her and then I must show by my deeds that I truly do love her. John writes:

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18).

By the same token, how do we know we love God?

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3).

Love for our spouses, love for our fellowmen and love for God must be shown in our actions. Did not Jesus tell His disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15)? It is a mockery to God to say, "Lord, I love you, but I cannot make sense of some of your commandments. Do I have to be baptized to show my love? Is it not adequate just to tell you that I love you?" No one would be so foolish as to say that, but that is what many of us say by our actions.

While loving one another is surely the duty of every Christian, there are thousands and thousands of people who love others but who make no pretense of being Christians. Millions of Jews through the ages have demonstrated great love for others. Many of them have laid down their lives for their families and for other people in their own nation. It is true that many Jews have primarily loved other Jews, but no one can fault the great love Jews have for each other. Does that fact make them disciples of Christ? In truth, most Jews in our day are not Christians, do not want to be Christians and would be offended if we accused them of being Christians. While love for others is

an essential ingredient of New Testament Christians, it is not enough.

Adulterers, homosexuals, and other sexually immoral people often have genuine love for each other. To deny such is to show one's lack of understanding of human behavior. Some of the most immoral people who ever walked God's footstool genuinely love other people, at least, love some people. If we are known as Christ's disciples just because we love others, then every kind of sinner and rebellious person can be called "Christians." Christians must love others, as I have shown from the scriptures, but just because you love others—even those who are not very loveable—does not mean you are a Christian.

Everyone of the so-called "great religions" have many adherents who love others enough to give their lives for them. That is true of Muslims, of Buddhists, of Hindus and of the other Eastern religions. Those religions do not teach the same kind of love which Christians are to exemplify, that is, love for all people regardless of race or nationality or moral conduct or religious affiliation. Great numbers of the members of those religions are devoted to their families, to their nations and to religious communities. Anyone who has studied the Eastern religions knows that. But those people are not followers of Jesus Christ. They do not claim to be and have no intention of being. Is love for one another all God demands for men and women to be saved and to stay saved?

The United States has hundreds and hundreds of cultic groups, some with a few dozen members and others with millions of members. If you read their literature and observe their behavior, you will immediately conclude that the members of those cults, at least, in multiplied thousands of cases, are devoted to each other and would willingly give their lives for one another. In some instances, the cultic members put to shame many members of mainline denominations and even evangelical bodies. They show

much greater concern and love for each other than many within conservative religions. Again I ask you, does that make them New Testament Christians? I am not asking if those cultic members are sincere, devout and compassionate. I have no doubt many of them are. But are they Christians just because they love each other? Is that what our Lord was teaching in John 13:34-35? If it is, there are a great number of problems with the Bible and with Christ's teaching.

Let us return to the questions I raised a few moments ago. The first question was: "Does the passage I have just mentioned (John 13:34-35) forbid the church's judging others for preaching false doctrines and engaging in unauthorized practices?" The implication from what some preachers are saying is that we are Christ's disciples if we show love to one another. But are we really showing love to one another if we fail to expose and to oppose false doctrine and unscriptural practices? Our Lord warned His immediate disciples and us of false teachers who would trouble the church.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15).

He even gave one of the criteria by which we can judge false prophets.

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:16-20).

If we apply the principle, "by their fruits you shall know them," what do we find on the current religious

scene? Any religion which encourages greed by promising its adherents great wealth shows by its fruits that it is not the church of the New Testament. Jim Bakker's new book, **Prosperity and the Coming Apocalypse** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), shows conclusively how certain elements of the charismatic movement are supporting the concept that all of God's children should be rich. While Jim was associated with PTL, he instructed his listeners not to pray, "Thy will be done," but to claim whatever they wanted. If they wanted a new car, just name it and claim it (p. 22). Jim now recognizes that he was preaching a "misguided, mistaken, materialistic theology" (p. 12).

An organization originally called itself the "Children of God," (now called the Family of Love), a cult founded in Huntington Beach, California, by Moses David Berg, promotes sexual promiscuity as a means of recruiting members for the cult. David Berg's own daughter, Deborah (Linda Berg) Davis, wrote about the cult in her book, **The Children of God: The Inside Story** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 1984). Deborah Davis describes a practice which David Berg had initiated. He called it "flirty fishing." Berg sent young women out into the streets to entice men into sexual relationships. The men who fell for their seduction were then pressured into becoming members of the cult (p. 118). Berg's annual statistical letter to his followers stated: "Our dear FF'ers (Flirty Fishers) are still going strong. God bless'm, having now witnessed to over a quarter of a million souls, loved over 25,000 of them and won nearly 19,000 to the Lord, along with about 35,000 new friends" (p. 123). Peter had such people in mind when he wrote:

For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the

servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage (2 Peter 2:18-19).

Is showing love to one another adequate in view of the soul-condemning error that such cults teach? Are we violating the principle of neighbor-love when we judge cultic movements to be false religions? "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Paul, Peter, John and other New Testament writers demanded that Christians judge all doctrines to see if they were in harmony with the word of God. Please listen to John:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

The word "try" comes from the Greek **dokimazo** and means to prove or to examine with a view of approving or disapproving. My friends, we are not being unkind when we speak against false doctrines. We would be unfaithful to God if we failed to do so. So how can anyone think logically about loving one another and not see the need to expose false teachings and to oppose false teachers?

Are some preachers who condemn false doctrines arrogant in their attitude and approach? Tragically, there is no doubt about it. Does that mean that all who preach against error are arrogant? If it means that, then Jesus and His apostles were all arrogant. There is never a place for arrogance whether one is preaching positive truths or refuting error. These are Peter's instructions to Christians—not just to preachers.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

Did you notice the expression, "with meekness and fear?"

The New American Standard Bible renders that phrase: "with gentleness and reverence."

I raised another question which I shall address briefly before our time expires. If love is the only prerequisite for discipleship, are we forbidden as Christians to oppose instrumental music in the worship of the Lord's church? What do these words from the Colossian letter mean?

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:16-17).

Do you see instrumental music in the verse which talks about singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord? And how can one use a mechanical instrument of music in worship when all we do is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus? Unless Jesus authorizes an act, we cannot do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, regardless of sincerity. We are being presumptuous when we practice in worship what the Bible does not authorize. We are placing our wishes above the teaching of scripture.

Does the Lord's command to love one another in some way exclude such teaching or make it unnecessary? Do people of the world know we are Christ's disciples just because we love one another? Does sound doctrine have anything to do with our being the Lord's faithful children? Do you see how easy it is for even good people to exclude what the Lord included and to include what the Lord excludes?

Chapter 17

Balance In Preaching And Teaching (No. 4)

Luke 10 tells of an expert in the law who asked Jesus, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" As the Lord's custom was, He asked him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The man gave a good answer:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself (Luke 10:27).

Jesus complimented the man for his good answer. "...Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (v. 28). The lawyer apparently was not quite so interested in learning how to have eternal life as he seemed. "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour" (v. 29). It was at this point in the conversation that Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). I shall not take the time today to examine this powerful story, but we need to know the lesson Jesus taught the lawyer.

Does loving neighbor fulfill all the requirements of the gospel plan of salvation? The apostle John quotes Jesus as saying:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

This feature of Christianity impressed the pagans who observed the behavior of God's faithful children. The pagans had a hard time believing that Christian could love each other and even non-Christians with such unselfish and

sacrificial love. There is hardly any doubt that many turned from disbelief and rebellion to faith in Jesus Christ because they witnessed such powerful love among Christians. Can we see that same love today among the professed followers of Jesus Christ? If we cannot, is it not time that Christians spend more time learning to love all people?

If we do show love to one another, is that all God requires of His people? Are there no other commandments we must obey to become and to remain children of God? If we truly love each other as Christ commanded, does that mean we should not continually emphasize the necessity of New Testament baptism? After all, dear friends, it was the same Lord who said that love for others was a true mark of Christ who also said,

Go ye therefore, and teach (or make disciples) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19).

How do we make disciples as we go into all the world preaching the gospel? We make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the sacred Godhead. The Greek demands that interpretation.

If one really wants to know how disciples are made in the first century, he must turn to the great book of Acts to learn how the apostles and other gospel preachers understood Christ's Great Commission. Acts 8 provides a record of three conversions: the Samaritans, Simon the sorcerer and the Ethiopian eunuch. These conversions are so simple no one should have any difficulty understanding what occurred and why it occurred. I shall review only the conversion of the Samaritans. Philip the evangelist "...went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). When one preaches Christ faithfully, what must he say? We certainly do not know all Philip preached, but we know some.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the

name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

How can anyone miss what happened in Samaria? The Samaritans heard about Jesus Christ, they believed what they heard and they were baptized. Were they saved by their obedience? Jesus said in the Great Commission according to Mark:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16).

Since the Samaritans believed and were baptized, surely no one will argue they were not saved.

When I preach these great truths from Acts of the Apostles, am I in some way infringing upon or substituting for the Lord's command for Christians to love one another? Can a man become a Christian by some means other than the one revealed in the book of Acts? If I do not preach the gospel plan of salvation, am I honoring the Lord's command to teach the truth which sets men free? Loving one another must include what Jesus and the apostles taught about God's plan for saving man. Surely all understand that loving one another is one way men can recognize us as Christ's disciples. But is that all there is to it—just loving one another as Christ loved us?

What I have read to you about New Testament baptism also applies to repentance and confession. Can we truly love our fellowman if we fail to inform them of the Lord's absolute requirement that men and women must repent or perish (Luke 13:3) and that they must confess Christ before men so He will confess them before the Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33)? I cannot imagine anyone's criticizing faithful gospel preachers for urging men to obey the Lord in baptism. Can preaching baptism be over emphasized? Of course, but so can any other topic. If a preacher preaches only baptism, he is not preaching the whole counsel of

God. But if one does not teach about baptism what Jesus and His apostles taught, is he preaching the whole counsel of God? Some may have problems answering that question, but gospel preachers should have none.

Preachers among churches of Christ, at least, most of the ones I have known, generally point out the dangers involved in dancing, gambling, drinking alcoholic beverages and other social evils. They know the temptation for dancers to become sexually involved with their partners or to lust after them. Incidentally, many non-christians readily admit their sexual pleasures in dancing with someone other than their wives. Some who claim to be Christians are no quite that honest. Everyone who has any insight into human nature will have to concede the dangers of excessive physical contact with members of the opposite sex. I am not suggesting that all dancers are unfaithful to their wives or that they become involved with women or men other than their spouses. But to discount the dangers is a sign of spiritual blindness.

Gambling is the fastest growing industry in America. Thousands of people are depriving their families of necessary food and clothing because they spend the family income on gambling. Millions of Americans are gambling addicts. They live for the pleasure of taking a chance with their hard earned money. Can you imagine any activity more foolish and more destructive? Preachers of the gospel through the years have strongly condemned gambling—all gambling.

Alcoholic beverages destroy thousands and thousands of lives every year in our nation. Probably as many as 150,000 people die every year in America alone because someone foolishly drank. Young people are killing themselves on our highways; parents are consuming alcohol and neglecting their responsibilities because of their drinking; judges and other public officials pervert justice because they drink alcoholic beverages. Anyone who doubts

this information simply is not keeping up with current events in America.

Christ's command to love one another so that people of the world will see Christ living in us does not preclude our discussing these moral issues, does it? If it does, please tell me why all of these are condemned in scripture. If I truly love my Lord and my fellowmen, am I not as a Christian going to do all within my power to prevent my fellow human beings from destroying their lives, neglecting their families, corrupting our political system and setting bad examples for our young people?

Churches of Christ through the years have insisted that we worship God according to the biblical pattern which includes taking the Lord's supper every Lord's day. In modern times even among some gospel preachers there are those who think our emphasis on the Lord's supper may give evidence we do not love others. Frankly, I fail to see any connection between the two. Is not the Lord's supper included in the assembly which the author of Hebrews urged all Christians to attend?

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

Provoking one another to love and good works must include encouraging our brothers and sisters to be present at the Lord's table every Lord's day—every Lord's day.

There surely is no serious Bible student who denies Christ's commands for Christians to love one another. That truth is plain in every book of the New Testament. I have given you some insight into what loving one another means, but let us go a step further. Matthew 25 outlines many of the activities which show our love for all men, even for the least of them. We have an obligation to feed the hungry,

to provide water for the thirsty, to care for strangers, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick and those in prison (Matt. 25:35-36). The epistles use somewhat different language from Matthew 25, but no one should misunderstand what they teach. Paul admonished the Romans:

Let love be without dissimulation (or hypocrisy). Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another...Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality...Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:9-10, 13, 20-21).

If one fulfills these sacred obligations, does that lessen his duties to believe and to practice sound doctrine? In other words, is there a conflict between orthopraxis (right doing) and orthodoxy (right belief)?

Paul provides in the Galatian letter a number of insights into what it means to love one another.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ...As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:1-2, 10).

Some of the same inspired advice was given to the Philippians:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others (Phil. 2:3-4).

The Colossian letter urges its readers:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness (Col. 3:12-14).

The book of Hebrews gives a long list of heroes of faith (Heb. 11). The final chapter in Hebrews begins:

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body (Heb. 13:1-3).

There is much more along these same lines throughout the New Testament, but these passages will have to suffice for today.

All of the Christian duties I have read from Matthew and from Paul's epistles are essential in our loving one another, but by themselves they are inadequate. We must go beyond these to helping men and women come to an understanding of the gospel and obeying it. If we feed and clothe the needy, support those who are downtrodden and discouraged, but fail to teach them the soul-saving gospel of Christ, how much good have we done them in the long run? I am not saying that we should help the needy only so we can teach them the truth, but we must be concerned about men's souls—not just their bodies. Liberal theologians, including the social gospel advocates, seem to have been far more concerned about helping people physically than helping them spiritually. We must do both if we wish to comply with the Lord's commands.

Jesus is our example in meeting men's physical needs

and their spiritual needs. On one occasion, multitudes came into a desert place to hear Jesus teach. The disciples urged Jesus to send the multitude away so they could go into the villages and buy food.

But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes (Matt. 14:16).

Jesus then performed a miracle of multiplying loaves and fish. On this occasion, Jesus fed about five thousand men, besides the women and children (Matt. 14:15-21). If Jesus had believed in the social gospel, He would not have been too concerned about teaching the multitudes. He would have been satisfied simply to feed them.

My concern in our study of "Balance in Preaching and Teaching" is to show that we cannot go off the deep end in any direction. We must not neglect to teach men the soul-saving gospel of Christ. The only way men can come to a saving relationship with the Lord is by being taught and obeying what they are taught. Jesus Himself said,

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (John 6:44-45).

If men are going to be saved from their alien sins, they must hear the truth of God's word. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Paul calls the gospel "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). But the gospel does not save just because God made it available to human beings. We must know the truth since only the truth can set us free (John 8:32). I am pleading for churches of Christ to be more mission-minded—to make the gospel known to the whole world, as Jesus commanded in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). I

am also pleading for men and women to have open and receptive hearts so they will obey from the heart the teaching delivered unto them (Rom. 6:17-18). This means, dear friends, hearing the word, believing that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God, confessing faith in Jesus and being baptized for the remission of sins.

The steps I have outlined from the scriptures are essential to our being pleasing in the sight of God, but they are only the beginning. They are the first principles of the oracles of God. We must go beyond these first principles or we shall remain babies all our lives. The author of Hebrews urged his readers:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection (or maturity)... (Heb. 6:1).

The apostle Peter commanded the early Christians:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Peter 1:5-10).

The apostle adds: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Chapter 18

**What God Demands
From Preachers**

Every preacher who is worth the salt which goes in his bread has thought and prayed about what he ought to preach and how he ought to preach it. Preaching in such a way as to bring honor and glory to God entails a number of fundamental elements. He must make maximum efforts to know the moral and spiritual conditions his hearers confront on a regular basis. If he does not know what their genuine needs are, how can he adapt his sermons to those needs? The preacher must study diligently—not only his Bible but books and articles relating to the moral and spiritual crisis we face in America. That includes reading books on theology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, ethics, the law, medicine and many other topics. The preacher must have the courage to discuss any subject which touches the lives of the people to whom he ministers. How valuable is a man's knowledge of the Bible and of other literature if he does not relate that knowledge to men's lives?

All of this raises two questions every preacher must consider. What does God want me to preach? How can I find out what He wants me to preach? Will you give your respectful attention today to the topic, "What God Demands From Preachers." What if every preacher in the world devoted himself to preaching exactly what God demands? It is my considered judgment that many of the divisions within religion, many of the tragic moral situations which prevail in our world and much of the spiritual deterioration among churches and within our communities would disappear. At the very least, they would be considerably lessened.

The questions I raised a moment ago have to be

answered at the same time. What God wants every man to preach can be learned only by a careful study of God's book—the Bible. O I know there are some excellent books on preaching, but unless these books are based on the Bible and help us to preach the Bible more effectively, they are not worth reading. Before we examine a few passages dealing with what ought to be preached and how it ought to be preached, I shall mention a few books which deal with the topic.

Bishop John Shelby Spong's books would destroy preaching as we know it. I know that is a strong indictment, but I can sustain it by referring to some of his books. In 1988 Bishop Spong wrote a book with the title, **Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality** (San Francisco; Harper & Row). Bishop Spong thinks preachers and others are out of order to quote the Bible to prove a point. He says the Bible presents a contradictory account of the creation and makes many other errors (pp. 111-112). He criticizes the Bible as being prejudiced against women (p. 117). Bishop Spong endorses sex outside the marriage relationship and thinks churches ought to have ceremonies celebrating non-marital unions and homosexual liaisons (p. 54ff). The only people who appear to be wrong, in Bishop Spong's view, are those who oppose the evils of our day. If I believed what John Shelby Spong does, I would cease preaching immediately. Is what Bishop Spong advocating what God wants preachers to do? How do his moral values differ from those of Jerry Springer? Would Jerry Springer fit into the world of liberal religion?

R. Kirby Godsey's recent book, **When We Talk About God...Let's Be Honest** (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1996), affirms that New Testament Christianity "is not a set of doctrines" (p. ix of the Preface). There is a serious problem with that kind of thinking; it is only partially correct. For the statement to harmonize with scripture, it should read, "Christianity is not just a set of doctrines; it

is also a life." Dr. Godsey thinks that "new truth will break through the boundaries of the frail words we used before" (pp. ix-x of the Preface). Did not Jesus promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth—all truth (John 16:13)? Dr. Godsey insists, "There are no right answers" (p. 4). If his assertion is not a right answer, then nobody should pay any attention to it—which is exactly what I strongly recommend. Dr. Godsey insists that "doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense" (p. 17). Do you suppose Dr. Godsey has ever had a course in logic? His statements are doctrinal positions—ridiculous positions from a biblical viewpoint—but doctrinal nevertheless.

If these theologians were correct—and they are not—what would be left to preach? For example, Dr. Godsey says "there are no right theologies" (p. 16). The word "theology" simply means a word about God. Is there nothing in the Bible about God we are justified in believing? God through Moses instructed the children of Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:
and you shall love the Lord your God with all
your heart, and with all your soul, and with all
your might (Deut. 6:4-5).

Does Dr. Godsey believe these words were revealed to Moses? Does he believe any of them are true? If they are, then there are some right theologies, namely, God is one and we should love Him with our whole being. If I cannot preach those truths, why am I in the pulpit and on this radio program?

Perhaps the best known passage in all of God's word is John 3:16.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his
only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in
him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The ideas promoted in this verse have encouraged and

sustained millions of people for almost 2,000 years. Are we to believe on the basis of Dr. Godsey's unfounded and unreasonable observations that none of the concepts are true? Did and does God love the world? Did He send His only begotten Son into the world? Is there any necessity of believing in Christ in order to have everlasting life? My friends, if these doctrinal statements are not true, then preaching, believing, worshipping, obeying and loving God are worse than wasted efforts.

But I have preached these truths for more than fifty-five years and by God's grace, I intend to keep on preaching them. If we do not preach the love of God, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His resurrection from the dead and His glorious second coming, what is the meaning of life? We are not to preach these doctrines because they furnish hope in this life and joy in the world to come. We preach them because they are true-unquestionably true. If we preach them just to make people feel better-just to keep this world from taking its toll on our lives-we are engaging in pragmatism. "Pragmatism" says if an idea works, then it is true. But that is false philosophy. We preach the death, burial and resurrection of Christ because they are true, absolutely true.

I know there are many ways for preachers to approach their work. I am not suggesting to you that what I am about to say is the only way, but I believe all the word must be preached if our listeners know what God expects of them. In my judgment, we ought not to neglect the great books of the Old Testament. For example, the book of Genesis forms the foundation on which later revelation is based. Genesis gives us reliable information about the creation of the world, including man, man's fall into sin, God's announced plan to redeem fallen man, the great flood which changed the very face of the earth, God's call to Abraham, and many other fundamental ideas. If we neglect the book of Genesis, we make it more difficult for people to

understand what follows in the remainder of the Bible. What I have said about Genesis can be said, but perhaps to a lesser extent, about the other books of the Old Testament. What tremendous food for thought can be found in the book of Psalms, in Proverbs and in the prophetic writings. To neglect these books is to neglect opportunities for growth in serving our great God.

Preachers should devote many sermons—although I am not trying to tell them how many—to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. For that purpose, God has provided four essential documents—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I am urging preachers and all others to study these books very carefully. The mere reading of these books will inspire, challenge and comfort. We receive great blessings by reading of John's work in getting men and women ready to receive the Messiah. The Lord's powerful miracles, His associating with publicans and sinners, His beautiful parables, His Sermon on the Mount and His opposition to the false teachers of His day should be examples for all of us who want men to know about our Lord and Master.

One prominent philosopher was asked, "What was the greatest day in the history of the world?" He wisely replied: "Any day in the life of Jesus Christ." We are blessed by having a record of many days in the life of Jesus. We are able with the aid of divine revelation to be present when Jesus turned the water into wine, when He multiplied the loaves and fish, when He stilled the storm on the sea of Galilee, when He called out to dead Lazarus, "Come forth" and he came forth. Scripture allows us to look into the heart of Jesus as He takes a little child into His arms and blesses it, as He demonstrates great compassion on individuals as well as on the multitudes, as He talks with a woman of ill repute in Samaria and as He rebukes the cities where He had done many of His mighty miracles. How can anyone examine the words and works of Jesus as revealed in the gospel accounts and not say with Thomas,

“My Lord and my God?”

Christ's life, death, resurrection and teaching were all designed to produce faith in Him as the Son of God. No Bible writer expressed that truth more clearly and emphatically than the apostle John.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

The gospels alone are adequate to bring men to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. When we have faith in Christ, what then? How do we translate that faith into salvation? Faith alone is not sufficient or we would not need Acts, the epistles and Revelation.

The book of Acts gives us many examples of what occurs when men and women believe the gospel records. One example will have to suffice in our study today. The city of Corinth included some of the most ungodly people who ever lived. The sins of that city bring a blush to the cheeks of people who even think about those sins. Paul went into the Jewish synagogue where he reasoned with the Jews, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. His message to the people of Corinth was: Jesus was the Christ. We do not know exactly what Paul said in presenting that thesis, but we know the results of his preaching.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

The apostles and evangelists followed the same pattern everywhere they preached. They gave abundant evidence to show that Jesus was the Christ, that men and women had to believe in Him and obey His gospel. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul emphasized the absolute

necessity of obeying the gospel.

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

There is surely no way one can miss the message of this passage. Those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel are going to be lost. Obeying the gospel includes believing in Jesus Christ, repenting of our alien sins, confessing His name before men and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. That is God's plan for becoming Christians. He has no other plan.

Once people become Christians, what does God expect of them? Is their ticket punched on the glory-bound train just because they have believed and obeyed the gospel? I am aware that many of us act like that, but that is not God's way for His children. So what must I do now that I am a Christian? I use the word "must" advisedly because working in the Lord's vineyard and being righteous are not mere options. They are absolute requirements in serving God and our fellowman. Please listen to a few verses from the epistles of the New Testament.

In a very precise and concise statement, Paul told the Corinthians: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). What is included in bringing glory to our Father in heaven and to Jesus Christ? Paul provides some insight when he says,

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have

therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10).

Paul expanded on this concept when he wrote:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others (Phil. 2:3-4).

The apostle Peter urged his readers:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-11).

Does our growth as Christians include some negative elements? In other words, are there dangers—both moral and spiritual—we have to avoid? Paul demanded of the Ephesians:

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprovèd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light...See then

that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:11-13, 15-16).

When we have obeyed the gospel and walked with our Lord during our earthly pilgrimage, what awaits us at the end of the way? The gospel records, the book of Acts and the epistles assure us of victory through Jesus Christ and an eternal home at the end of the age. But no book of the Bible has so much to say about the beauty and joys of the heavenly land as does the book of Revelation. John writes:

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done (Rev. 22:1-6).

Chapter 19

Was Micaiah A Great Preacher?

There are many prophets in the Old Testament about which I would like to know more, but one in particular intrigues me. He lived during the days of Ahab and Jezebel and prophesied faithfully to this abominable couple, but beyond that we know very little about him. Like so many of the Old Testament prophets, such as, Elijah, Samuel, Elisha, Amos and Jeremiah, Micaiah is one of my heroes. He is the kind of preacher our world so desperately needs. Our governmental leaders and people in general might not listen to him, but at least they would know right from wrong and would have no excuse for not doing right. May God raise up men like Micaiah to call our nation to justice, honor and godly behavior!

1 Kings 22 gives us considerable information about king Ahab's conflict with Syria. Syria's king, Ben-hadad, had taken part of Israel's territory during the battle of Aphek and had refused to return it to Ahab. For three years there had been peace between Israel and Syria. In the third year of that peace, king Jehoshaphat of Judah paid a visit to Ahab. Ahab asked one of his servants, "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria" (1 Kings 22:3)? Ahab then asked Jehoshaphat if he would join Israel in the battle to reclaim Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat to Ahab, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses" (1 Kings 22:4).

We do not know how well king Jehoshaphat knew king Ahab. He probably knew him pretty well—well enough not to trust his judgment in going into battle against the Syrians. King Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day" (1 Kings 22:5).

The true kings of Israel knew of the great influence of the prophets of the nation. By the time Ahab and Jehoshaphat came along, there had been a long line of prophets who had advised, warned and criticized the kings of Israel. The prophets were given the responsibility of delivering God's message in God's words—not just to the kings but to all the children of Israel.

There have been few preachers in the history of the world who were more courageous, more dynamic, more uncompromising and more committed to the will of God than the great prophets of the Old Testament. Isaiah, sometimes called "the statesman prophet," lived and prophesied during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, all of whom were kings of Judah. He was one of the counselors to these kings of Judah. When they listened to him, they kept out of trouble. When they failed to take heed to the advice he gave them, they plunged headlong into deep trouble. Other outstanding prophets—both those who wrote books and those who did not—were God's gifts to the Israelite people. How much different the history of both Judah and Israel would have been had the kings and the people heeded God's word as delivered through the prophets.

When Jehoshaphat requested that Ahab consult the Lord concerning their battle against the Syrians, Ahab gathered the prophets together, about four hundred of them, and asked them, "...Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear..." (1 Kings 22:6)? The question was a perfectly good one had it been directed at the right prophets. However, the four hundred prophets whom Ahab consulted were probably paid advisors. Their livelihood may have depended on how they answered Ahab. Whatever the case, they did not know the will of God or they chose to ignore it. They urged king Ahab to go up: "...for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:6).

How many cabinet members of the president or of the

governor or of the prime minister have the courage to speak their convictions on such matters? There are men and women who will tell the president or the governor that he is making a mistake in some of his decisions. It may be possible that the person who gives such advice will not give any more advice. He is fired or demoted. But there are rulers on all levels who genuinely want the best thinking of their staff or cabinet. Such rulers may be rare, but there are some. At least, there ought to be somewhere.

After listening to the four hundred court prophets and apparently not being too impressed by their answer, Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him" (1 Kings 22:7)? Why would king Jehoshaphat have doubts about the four hundred prophets whom Ahab had consulted? Was there something about their demeanor which made him feel uneasy concerning the battle to take Ramoth-Gilead? Did he suspect they were paid for agreeing with Ahab? Did he have an independent word from the Lord about the impending battle? Or did he just know the kind of man Ahab was? He knew Ahab was married to Jezebel. That probably was enough to set off warning bells in his head.

Ahab told Jehoshaphat that there was one other prophet, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord:

...but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so (1 Kings 22:8).

Let us not forget the situation we are examining. Ahab was the king of Israel and should have wanted the best for his nation. Micaiah was a prophet of God and intended to preach and to follow God's instructions. Why should the king of God's people hate God's prophet? After all, God Himself chose the prophets (Deut. 18:15-18) and put His words in their mouths. They were to preach always and only what God Himself demanded. If they delivered a

message other than the one God gave them or failed to speak as God has commanded, they were acting presumptuously and were in grave danger.

We do not know what other utterances Micaiah had delivered to Ahab which had so angered him. Maybe, like Elijah, he had some encounters with Jezebel. No true prophet could ever have the approval of Jezebel. Maybe Micaiah had interfered with other wicked plans and activities of Ahab. He must have done something which led Ahab to say, "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." From knowing the character of Ahab, we can understand why Micaiah could only prophesy evil of Ahab. He was a thoroughly evil man. Besides, as the inspired writer said, he also married Jezebel.

Was this the last time in history when a prophet of God or a preacher of the gospel ever preached in such a way as to make men—including kings, presidents or prime ministers—to hate him? Jeremiah knew his nation was on the brink of being punished for the rebellion against God's law. The Israelites were hoping that the army of Egypt would help in their fight against the Chaldeans, but Jeremiah assured them it would not happen. Jeremiah repeated this dire warning from the God of Israel:

Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Thus saith the Lord; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire (Jer. 37:6-10).

Was Jeremiah a great preacher when he delivered that

message to the Israelites? Could he not have given them a little more positive message? He could not have done so if he wished to be pleasing to the God who called him into His service. How did the Israelite people react to Jeremiah's preaching?

And when he (Jeremiah) was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans (Jer. 37:13).

In very simple words, Irijah accused Jeremiah, the great prophet of God, of being a traitor. Jeremiah responded, "...It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans..." (Jer. 37:14). The faithful preaching of Jeremiah landed him in a dungeon (Jer. 37:14-15).

We have made tremendous strides in such matters since the days of Jeremiah and of Micaiah. We are more educated, more sophisticated and more tolerant when preachers or other leaders condemn our behavior. Or are we? Do you know any cases where preachers have been attacked because they preached the truth on some controversial issue? Have church leaders ever released their preachers for speaking out against adultery or premarital sex or homosexuality? Some church leaders—even among churches of Christ—have fired their preachers for condemning alcoholic beverages. We moderns pretend to be so tolerant of other religious and political views, but we are tolerant only so long as others agree with us.

We may be more adept at covering up our anger toward those who speak out against evil, but many of us have not changed fundamentally since Herod's wife demanded the head of John the Baptist because John had told Herod he had no right to have his brother Philip's wife. If you think I might be wrong about modern man's intolerance of other philosophies or worldviews, read the

criticisms of the so-called "religious right" or listen to what the news media say about them. I do not belong to the religious right, but I am appalled at the venom which is spewed out by some religious teachers, by a number of television commentators and by some academics. Modern men may not say, as Ahab did of Micaiah, "I hate him," but that many in the liberal churches, in academia and in the media apparently despise the religious conservatives who speak against all evils—moral and spiritual.

According to 1 Kings 22, king Ahab asked of his officers to hasten to bring Micaiah to him. While Ahab and Jehoshaphat were waiting for Micaiah's arrival, all of the court prophets prophesied before them. One of the prophets, Zedekiah, made him horns of iron. He said to the two kings,

Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand (1 Kings 22:11-12).

The messenger who was sent to find Micaiah said to him when he had found him, "...the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good" (1 Kings 22:13). The great prophet of God replied: "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak" (1 Kings 22:14). What else could a true prophet of God or a faithful gospel preacher say? We do not have any modern prophets, at least, none who were chosen of God and who have His divine approval, but we do have gospel preachers. Every preacher who would be true to his calling must speak only what the word of God teaches. The apostle Peter expressed that truth in these words:

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the

ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:11).

Why would a preacher want to speak differently from what the word of God teaches? What would be his motive for adding his own opinions or the opinions of others? Do we preachers not know the enormous responsibility for preaching only the truth? Paul was constantly concerned about delivering the message God had given him.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-2).

Preaching like Jesus, Paul and Peter did can get you into deep trouble with the world, and even sometimes with your own brothers and sisters in Christ. Many of the early Christians vigorously opposed the faithful proclamation of the word. Peter and Paul were often in danger from their own brethren.

When Micaiah came into the presence of the two kings, Ahab asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?" The prophet of God said to Ahab, "Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:15). Ahab knew something was wrong with Micaiah's answer. He, no doubt, suspected the motives of the four hundred court prophets, but he had some problems with Micaiah's answer. The king asked Micaiah,

How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord (1 Kings 22:16)?

In other words, Ahab told Micaiah he wanted the truth. The great prophet answered:

I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace (1 Kings 22:17).

Ahab knew Micaiah was a true prophet, but he did not want to hear the message he had delivered. He said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings 22:18)? Micaiah gives an unusual but very impressive revelation concerning Ahab. He said,

Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee (1 Kings 22:19-23).

Ahab was angry with Micaiah and commanded his servants to put Micaiah in prison and feed him bread of affliction and with the water of affliction, until I come in peace (1 Kings 22:26-27). Micaiah assured Ahab he was not going to return from the battle to take Ramoth-Gilead. "If thou return at all in peace," the prophet said, "the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you" (1 Kings 22:28). Ahab stubbornly refused to hear the word of the Lord revealed through Micaiah. He went into battle but never returned. The Bible tells us what happened.

And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot (1 Kings 22:34-35).

As we close our lesson today, I have one question I must ask you: Was Micaiah a good preacher? If we are going to judge a man to be a great preacher, we must have some standards by which we make that judgment. By the standards of modernistic theology, of the positive confession religion and of possibility thinkers, Micaiah was an abject failure. He was also a failure in the eyes of those who are fed up with negative thinking and negative preaching. But in the eyes of God Almighty, he was a great preacher. The reason he was great is very simple: he spoke the message God gave him. Can you imagine the pressure he must have felt when he stood before Ahab and told him he would not succeed in his battle against Ramoth-Gilead, especially when 400 other prophets had said he would succeed? Ahab hated Micaiah; the 400 prophets almost certainly hated him too. But none of this deterred him from speaking the message God had given him.

Churches and society in general would make some radical changes if we had enough Micaiahs in our day. May God raise up a generation of preachers who will speak the truth, regardless of the threats against them.

Chapter 20

Watchman, Sound The Trumpet (No. 1)

Reading our local newspaper and watching the evening news on television should make all of us aware of the moral and spiritual problems we face in this country. Divorce, drunkenness, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, murder and other serious situations should concern every American who loves his family and his country. While I would not seek to minimize the enormity of our moral condition, we need to realize that many ancient cities and countries were far worse. Who can forget about Sodom, Gomorrah, Babylon, Rome and other corrupt nations and civilizations? When Ezekiel came on the scene about 600 years before Christ, criminal elements wandered from city to city, killing, looting and burning. It would be difficult to imagine a more dreadful situation.

The cities in Ezekiel's day were vulnerable to attack from marauding bands. If the cities were large enough and affluent enough, they had protective walls around them. At night the people would go inside the city, close the doors and place a watchman on the walls to warn them when danger was imminent. In addition, during the day when farmers were working outside the city walls, they needed warning about these roving bands of criminals. A watchman was stationed at strategic positions along the walls so he could sound the trumpet to warn the citizens of an approaching army. That would give the soldiers inside the walls time to prepare to defend their homes. If the watchman failed to warn, the people who perished were his responsibility; their blood was on his hands. If the people failed to heed the warning, their blood was on their own heads.

There are many similarities between these ancient

watchmen on the walls of the cities of Palestine and the watchmen that God has appointed in every generation to watch for the souls of His people. Whatever these men happened to be called—prophets, priests, preachers, elders, parents—God has always provided watchmen for His people. Because of the fearful responsibility of the watchmen—especially the watchmen under the Christian era—please think with me today on the topic, “Watchman, Sound The Trumpet.”

Although the biblical record does not call Noah a watchman, he served in that capacity for the people of his day. The Genesis account says of conditions in the days of Noah:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth (Gen. 6:5, 11-12).

Because of the grievous sin which prevailed on God's good earth, He determined to destroy sinful men.

And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them...And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth (Gen. 6:6-7, 13).

But God would not destroy the earth—even though it deserved it—without giving sinful men adequate warning. When God has determined in His own mind to bring

punishment on men, He has always raised up the appropriate people to warn those who are affected by His decision. In the years immediately preceding the flood, God found a man to preach to those sinful people. His name was Noah and he "found grace in the eyes of the Lord...Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:8-9). God appointed Noah to preach to his generation so they would not be destroyed. Peter calls Noah a "preacher of righteousness" because he preached what God sent him to preach. The author of Hebrews says concerning Noah:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:7).

It is unfortunate that Noah's long years of preaching did not lead the people of his day to turn from their wickedness so they might be spared the horrible death they had brought upon themselves. But the Bible did not place the blame on Noah for the destruction wrought by the flood. He was faithful in his proclamation of God's message, but the people were so intent upon following their own inclinations that his preaching had very little effect. Noah did not become discouraged; he did not quit, though he may have been tempted to do so. He kept right on preaching and warning until God sent the flood to cleanse the earth of its violence and rebellion. Noah warned, but the people paid no attention. Their blood was upon their own heads.

The Old Testament reveals that Moses was a watchman—a spokesman, or a "mouth"—for God. He was somewhat reluctant to accept the responsibility of a watchman, but he was a great prophet and military leader nevertheless. When God selected Moses to become a prophet, Moses protested that he was not adequate for the work.

I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue (Exod. 4:10).

The Lord did not accept any excuses from Moses.

And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say (Exod. 4:11-12).

Moses responded: "O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send" (Exod. 4:13).

Why could Moses not understand that God chose him to be a prophet because God through Moses was the best man for the job? Why did Moses keep objecting to the Lord's will in this matter? God became angry with Moses, and asked,

Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs (Exod. 4:14-17).

Every prophet—including Moses—was under divine direction to speak the very words which God revealed to him. God said to Moses in establishing the office of the prophet:

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all

that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:18-22).

The prophet oftentimes rooted his message in the law of Moses. He sometimes predicted the future, but his main responsibility was to address the problems and challenges of his own generation. The word "prophet" means one who speaks for God—whether he is talking of the past, the present or the future. He had to warn his generation of the grave dangers they faced. We all know Moses was such a prophet. The book of Hebrews tells us that,

Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after (Heb. 3:5).

Although Moses was not always successful, his warning often saved the Israelites from much backsliding and rebellion.

When we study the lives of the great prophets and preachers of the past, we may wonder why their preaching was not more successful. After all, Noah, Moses and other great spokesmen in the Old Testament times received their messages directly from God Almighty. In addition, they had His supernatural guidance and support. From a worldly viewpoint, many of these men were abject failures. Noah's work succeeded in saving eight people—just eight people.

Moses seems to have done somewhat better, but still hundreds of thousands of people perished in the wilderness. Why were not more people saved from death and destruction? My friends, we must remember that human beings are free moral agents. They choose whether they will follow the men whom God has sent to lead them. God does not force men and women to do His will. The people of Noah's day and many of the Israelites at the time Moses prophesied were intent on having their own way. They may not have been totally opposed to the preaching of Noah and of Moses, but they were not sufficiently impressed to turn from their wickedness to obey the God of heaven. Does this explanation apply to millions of people in our day?

The great prophet Jeremiah was a spokesman for God—a watchman on the wall of Zion. God ordained him to be “a prophet to all the nations” (Jer. 1:5). Like Moses, Jeremiah was reluctant to accept the Lord's call into the prophetic office. He said to the Lord, “Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child” (Jer. 1:6). The Lord rebuked Jeremiah for saying he was a child. He instructed the prophet to go,

...to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord (Jer. 1:7-8).

The Lord touched the mouth of Jeremiah and told him, “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9).

The Lord God of heaven was deeply concerned for the safety and welfare of His people. He said to them through the prophet Jeremiah:

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein (Jer. 6:16).

When God's people are so deliberately defiant, what does

God do for them? God had set watchmen over them and urged them to,

Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it (Jer. 6:17-19).

Many of the Israelites seemed to believe that their burnt offerings and other ceremonial observances would substitute for righteousness. The Lord asked the Israelites:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting (Isa. 1:11-13).

Similar language can be found in the writings of almost all of the prophets. Jeremiah asked, "To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country..." (Jer. 6:20)? The prophet answers his own question.

...your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will lay stumblingblocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish (Jer. 6:20-21).

But all of this seems to harsh and intolerant to the

modern reader. Surely this kind of preaching cannot be done in modern churches which hope to appeal to the multitudes. Many modern people want the church to be user friendly. How can it be user friendly when such harsh words are used? No one who loves the souls of his fellowmen want to hurt other's feelings. We want to do all within our power to influence those who hear us to believe in the word of God and render obedience to it. Since the "soft touch" of modern preachers has not worked, is it not time to make some changes in our preaching? Must we not return to the preaching of the great prophets of the Old Testament, of John the Baptist, of Jesus Christ and of His apostles? We cannot continue to be soft in sin and hope to change people's lives for good.

I have a friend in West Tennessee who asked a well known preacher among churches of Christ: "If you had your life to live over as a preacher, what changes would you make?" I was somewhat amazed but pleased with the preacher's answer. He said, "I wish I had been harder on sin." My friends, I am an old man and an old preacher. I do not want to say at the end of my preaching life: "I wish I had been harder on sin." I want to be like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea and other great preachers. I want to demonstrate a hatred for sin—all sin. But I want to be like our Lord in loving the sinner and working for his salvation. I know the right balance between hating sin and loving the sinner is not easy to achieve, but with the Lord's help, I want to do that.

How can I sleep peacefully at night knowing I have not been adamantly opposed to evil? But there is a far more important consideration. How can I stand before my God in the judgment if I have not hated sin as He hates it? If I have not been a watchman on the wall of Zion, figuratively speaking, how will I be able to explain that to the One who called me into His service? I desire to be like the apostle Paul who told the young preacher:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

My friends, I do not wish to leave the impression that the world's moral and spiritual problems could all be solved if all of us who preach would follow the examples of the great preachers of Bible times. I do not believe that, although such preaching would go a long way in changing the church and society. In addition to strong, sound preaching, the world needs to see Christians' being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Preaching is absolutely essential, but every Christian must live the word. Who could have been more faithful in the proclamation of the word than Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and other prophets? But the Israelites paid little attention to their preaching. So the nation deteriorated morally and spiritually until God had to discipline them through the Assyrian captivity and the Babylonian exile. Strong preaching supported by Christian living could turn the world upside down.

But what effect will the so-called "positive preaching" or "possibility thinking" have on the evils of our day? The preaching of such men as Norman Vincent Peale or Robert Schuller may make an impression, but it will not radically alter the behavior of adulterers, thieves, drunks and other gross sinners. There is one way and only one way to preach.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).

Chapter 21

Watchman, Sound The Trumpet (No. 2)

Several southern cities in recent years have suffered devastation from tornadoes because there was no warning systems or the warning systems were not working properly. Tornadoes can wreak havoc, as cities like Moore, Oklahoma and Nashville, Tennessee have had to learn in the last several months. When there are no warnings or poor warnings, the loss in property and in human life can be unbelievable. So towns and cities across our nation must have some way of warning people that a tornado is imminent. The warnings must be given far enough ahead that people can prepare to save themselves and their families.

Physical dangers, such as, tornadoes, hurricanes and other storms are very serious. I would not minimize these dangers at all. But are they more dangerous than the various kinds of immorality which are sweeping our country? Young people are killing each other in our schools and on our streets. Teenagers are producing children who have very little chance in this life to succeed at anything. Both old and young are contracting social diseases at a rate that previous generations could not imagine. AIDS has killed hundreds of thousands of our people and threatens to kill millions worldwide. Alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling addiction and similar behaviors are ruining lives, destroying homes and breaking down the moral fiber of our people. These facts may not be pleasant, but they are beyond dispute.

Whose responsibility is it to warn of these grievous evils? We occasionally hear television personalities speak of some of these problems, but so many of those who warn young people are themselves involved in sleazy practices. What good does it do for a notorious drug user—even if he did not inhale—to urge young people to avoid drugs?

Government officials, television personalities and many modern educators are wasting their breath when they warn children and young people about drugs, alcohol, sexual promiscuity, divorce and gambling. In most cases, they are not very good role models.

The prophet Ezekiel preached immediately before and during the Babylonian exile. He was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah. Ezekiel's writings are probably not so well known as are those of Jeremiah, Isaiah and Daniel, but they are challenging and stimulating. The primary burden of Ezekiel's prophecy was to the nation of Israel. God instructed Ezekiel:

Son of man, go, 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 an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened 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 impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong 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 be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears (Ezek. 3:4-10).

The Lord informed the prophet concerning the seriousness and difficulty of his assignment. But the Lord commanded him to,

...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 God; whether they

will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me (Ezek. 3:11-14).

This faithful prophet of God,

...came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made 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, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand (Ezek. 3:15-18).

The God of heaven had given the Jews His law to guide them in their relationships with Him and with their fellowmen. When they transgressed His law, they were in danger of being punished—even destroyed from off the face of the earth. It was the duty of the prophet to tell the people of their wickedness and to warn them that God would punish them. The great prophets of the Old Testament—Elijah, Micaiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others—did not hesitate to proclaim God's dissatisfaction with Israel's rebellion against the law of God. Those outstanding prophets were diligent in following God's directions, but the people

in many cases did not repent. The people had a choice to obey or to disobey. In many cases, they disobeyed and had to pay the consequences.

God said to Ezekiel,

...therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die... (Ezek. 3:16-18).

Can you understand the enormous responsibility of God's watchmen—whoever they were and are—preachers, parents, teachers? The souls of men are in our hands, figuratively speaking. When the wicked are turning their backs on God Almighty, their fate to some extent is in the hands of preachers, teachers and elders. Will the watchmen of our generation be as faithful as were the great watchmen of the Old Testament? My preacher friend, do you and I want God to hold us accountable for failure to warn the people of our day?

The little sermonettes which are being preached in many modern pulpits are not going to serve the cause of righteousness. We cannot preach what some have called "positive Christianity" and prevent men's being lost eternally. We cannot dwell on mental health and a positive attitude and be the kind of watchmen God wants for this day and age and for every day and age. I am not denying that preachers ought to discuss mental health and a positive attitude, but there is more to preaching the gospel and being a watchman on the walls of Zion than that. We must warn of the dangers of false doctrine and immoral behavior. Please take note of the apostle Peter's warnings about false teachers.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil

spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not (2 Peter 2:1-3).

How long has it been since you heard that kind of preaching from your pulpit? Do we need that kind of preaching in our day? My friends, you know we do. How else are we going to counteract the cults, the New Age movement, the secular humanists, the atheists and other false teachers? We know that doctrinal error and moral transgressions are rampant in our generation. How can we stand in our pulpits and talk about "positive thinking" when millions are being seduced by the various cults and by the secular humanists? Do we think God will forget about our indifference to these great evils? The wicked are dying without God while many are playing at religion. We are building big church buildings, big gymnasiums, spending millions of peripheral matters and letting the wicked die without any hope. How can one think this is what God demands of His church?

But every preacher knows he can warn and beg and urge and some people will continue in their downward path to eternal destruction. We may be tempted to reason: "It will do no good to preach like Paul or Peter or the great prophets of the Old Testament. Some people are determined to be lost and nothing can be done about it." It is very unfortunate that in many cases nothing can be done about it. But, dear friends, God has not told us that we are responsible for the results. We are duty-bound to do God's bidding. The results are not within our control. God said to Ezekiel,

Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezek. 3:19).

You do remember that Paul told the Corinthians: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6).

Every preacher has had the experience of preaching to people, working with them, praying with them and for them and then seeing them continue in their rebellion against God. We may be tempted to become discouraged and cease working with the lost and with the saved. But that kind of hearer has been in existence since the beginning of time. Please keep in mind that Noah preached his heart out for many, many years and made practically no impact on his generation. Isaiah and Jeremiah were probably not listed in the top ten percent of the most successful prophets in Israel. Jesus Christ was totally faithful in his proclamation of the kingdom of God, but did not convert the masses. We cannot quit preaching so long as the breath of life is in us. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Jeremiah was disheartened because he seemed to be having little effect among his people. He said,

I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay (Jer. 20:9).

We cannot quit warning just because most people seem not to listen. We cannot quit if nobody listens.

But there are pleasant and rewarding aspects of preaching or being a watchman. If we warn the wicked man and he turns from his wickedness, we have saved a soul from death and hidden a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20). Ezekiel said,

Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezek. 3:21).

God does not want anyone to be lost.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

The Lord instructed Ezekiel to say to the children of Israel:

As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel (Ezek. 33:11)?

What does all of this mean for preachers and other watchmen in our generation? It means, as the lawyers say, that we must preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It means that we must oppose all error—whether it is doctrinal or moral error. We cannot tickle the ears of our listeners. It means that preachers must watch, endure afflictions, and do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:1-8). If we are to be free from the blood of all men, we must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27).

But are preachers the only church leaders who are charged with the responsibility of being watchmen? What about the duties of elders of the Lord's church? Actually, they are the chief watchmen on the walls of Zion. If they have hired preachers who will not preach the full gospel, the elders ought to give their preachers the instruction they need or they ought to fire him and hire a preacher who will teach the whole truth. I have heard elders complain: "Our preacher just does not preach like he should." Since the

elders are responsible for hiring and firing, they must take their duties very seriously. Elders must tell their preachers to be faithful in preaching the whole counsel or go elsewhere to preach.

Is that just my opinion about elders of the church? Please listen carefully. Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders ought to shed considerable light on this topic.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:26-32).

My elder friend, God will hold you accountable for what your preacher says or fails to say. Make sure he preaches all the word and only the word.

The author of Hebrews urged members of the body of Christ—including preachers—to obey them who have the rule over you and submit yourselves. He then said concerning the elders and to a lesser extent all watchmen:

...for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

What an awesome task elders of the Lord's church have! But all members of the church must work at making these watchmen more effective for the Lord's service.

Are parents also watchmen? God has given them the duty of teaching their young people and being examples to them. The Bible could hardly be plainer in its teaching about parental responsibilities. Paul said,

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

We need to remember that the word "nurture" in the Greek means discipline. That word entails all the teaching, encouraging, warning and loving which God demands of parents. Who is in a better position than parents to be watchmen for their children? Are we warning them about the dangers of alcoholic beverages and other drugs? Are we teaching them about their bodies? Are we helping them to understand about corrupt companionship? Are we going to allow our children to grow into maturity without being taught what God wants them to know?

And what about teachers in our public schools? Do they have any responsibility for helping our children learn about the evils of our world? I know that many public school teachers are lacking in good moral values. Are we going to permit these men and women to undermine the foundation we have laid with our children? Parents, preachers, elders and other concerned citizens must be alert to what our children are learning in the public schools. We are watchmen for those children. God will hold us accountable for what our children learn—even in the public schools.

Chapter 22

Who Speaks For God?

The late Dr. Paul Ramsay, one of America's most influential ethicists, wrote a very perceptive and challenging book with the title, **Who Speaks For God?** Dr. Ramsay was a strong believer in the ethical teachings of the scriptures and emphasized these teachings in the classroom and in his outstanding books. As I understand his book, he was not denying that some may speak for God, but he was emphasizing the enormous responsibility for doing so. I am asking you to think with me today on the topic of Dr. Ramsay's book, **Who Speaks For God?**

The prophets of the Old Testament and the preachers of the New claimed to speak for God. The prophets invariably used a formula somewhat as follows: "The LORD spake also unto me again, saying" (Isa. 8:5), or,

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah... (Jer. 1:1-2).

Or, "Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you...Thus saith the LORD..." (Jer. 10:1-2). Such expressions can be multiplied hundreds of times from the writings of the prophets.

The New Testament writers make the same claims for the Old Testament prophets. Matthew records the following conversation between Jesus and some Pharisees. Jesus asked the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he..." (Matt. 22:42). The Pharisees answered, "the son of David." Jesus then asked them,

How then doth David in spirit (or by the Spirit) call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my

Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son (Matt. 22:43-45).

Mark uses slightly different language.

For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool (Mark 12:36).

Jesus was strongly affirming that David spoke by the direct operation of God's Holy Spirit. Everyone of the New Testament writers who spoke on this subject affirmed God's authorship of the Old Testament.

The New Testament writers did not use the same formula the prophets did, but they believed and taught that their messages came from God. Paul asked his Corinthian brothers and sisters,

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:11-13).

Does a man speak for God just because he says he does? You do not have to be a Bible student to answer that question. When two modern preachers or teachers deliver contradictory messages, you know one of them is not speaking for God. Both of them may be wrong, but both of them cannot be right. It would violate the law of non-contradiction. But you do not have to know the law of non-contradiction to know that one of the preachers has invented his message. Just plain common sense informs you that two contradictory ideas cannot both be truth. You know that in

reference to your children. You also know that in thinking about theological or philosophical concepts.

The truth is, dear friends, any man who claims to receive direct messages from God and give them to their hearers in our day is simply not being straight with you. Preachers on television and on radio are constantly saying, "The Lord spoke to me last night" or "the Lord appeared to me in a vision." Perhaps the most blatant example of this folly comes from the book, **Angels on Assignment**, by Charles and Frances Hunter as told by Ronald Buck (Hunter Book, 1979). Ronald Buck, so-called "pastor" of Central Assembly of God Christian Life Center in Boise, Idaho, pretends to have had "sixteen separate visitations by angels." The angels stayed from two to four hours at each visit. The odd thing about angels who supposedly come from God never one time quoted a single scripture (p. 15). Buck says the angels did not reveal any new truth, but they opened his eyes so he could understand the teaching of scripture. If we need an angel to illuminate the Bible, why did we need a Bible in the first place? Could not angels teach us about God without our having to bother about reading the scriptures? When men and women claim to receive direct revelation from God, they are deceiving us. How can we know that? Paul argues that the inspired word was given to make the man of God mature and thoroughly furnishes him unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Peter teaches the same truth in these words:

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:2-3).

If God has given us all things which pertain to life and godliness, we do not need any more. More is not available. I repeat, not available.

So, does all of this mean that God does not speak through anyone in our generation? It does not mean that at all. God speaks through every preacher or teacher who takes his message from the Bible and delivers it faithfully to his hearers. If I tell people that God, "...now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30), that is God's speaking through me, unless I take the passage out of its context and make it mean what God never intended. I have absolutely no problem saying to my audience,

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;
but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark
16:16).

The reason I have no difficulty affirming that I am speaking for God when I quote that verse is because it comes from the word of God. There is no other way anyone can speak for God in our day, regardless of what some charismatics and Pentecostals teach.

The topic I am discussing with you today came to my mind when I read a recent letter to the editor of **The Tennessean** (Monday, August 30, 1999). The writer of the letter quotes some comedian as saying that if God spoke to men in biblical times, those men were called prophets. If He speaks to men today, the ones who make such claims are just crazy. He expresses wonder why such men would think they speak for God (p. 12-A). If the speakers are not quoting the Bible and applying it properly, they may not be crazy but they have no authority for pretending to speak for God. Tragically, those who claim extra-biblical revelation have done and are doing enormous damage to the cause of Christ, regardless of their intentions.

The man who wrote the letter says that people are writing the editor of **The Tennessean** and saying that homosexuals are going to hell. He says he does not understand the homosexual lifestyle, but cannot condemn the homosexuals just because they disagree with him (p. 12-A). Is that all sin is—just disagreement with certain

persons? Are there no objective standards by which we can judge actions? For example, if a man molests a child, can we judge his actions as being evil? Or are his actions wrong only if he and I do not agree that what he did is reprehensible? The standard for judging all action is the infallible word of Almighty God.

But did not Jesus say, "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1)? That is exactly what He said. What did He mean? Did He mean that Christians are not to judge at all? If He meant that, then the man who wrote the letter to **The Tennessean** is out of order. Besides, Paul commanded the church at Corinth to withdraw from the brother who had committed fornication. If we cannot judge concerning fornication, adultery, covetousness, extortion and such like, how could the church withdraw from anyone? If we cannot judge men's behavior, how could we ever count a man as a heathen and a publican (Matt. 18:17)? Of course, we have to judge. We could not carry out the Lord's commands if we could not judge.

The letter writer argued that Jesus did not condemn any single person, although He did condemn actions (p. 12-A). He mentions sins which Jesus condemns: hatred, greed, envy, lust and anger. He says church leaders are guilty of condemning those with whom they disagree. He claims the system just does not work that way. Our letter writer has seriously mistated the teaching of scripture. Matthew 25 tells of Christ's condemnation of those who would not show compassion to the needy. He condemns them to eternal destruction. God will say to the disobedient in the judgment:

Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matt. 25:41, 46).

Was Jesus condemning actions or individuals? Revelation 21:8 quotes Jesus as saying to John

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers,

and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Was Jesus condemning actions or individuals who engaged in those actions?

The apostle Paul knew the background of the people who became members of the body of Christ at Corinth. He asked them,

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Obviously, Paul opposed the sin, but he said that certain persons were not going to inherit the kingdom of God. Who can study the Bible with an open mind and not understand what Paul was saying? Certain people are not going to heaven—sexually immoral persons, idol worshippers, thieves, sexual perverts and drunkards. This is not my opinion—which would not be worth very much. This is God's inspired word. The Bible and the Bible alone has the right to say who will be saved and who will be lost. My only obligation along this line is to preach the word without fear or favor.

The letter writer obviously thinks that preaching against certain sins means that we hate the sinners. How absolutely foolish and illogical. I hate drunkenness with a passion. I have seen what damage it has done in the lives of men and women. But I do not hate drunkards. In fact, for many years I have had friends who are drunkards and have worked with them in their efforts to quit drinking. My sons probably have not worked so intimately with drunkards as I have, but they do not hate drunkards, even though drunks killed their grandmother, their aunt and

their great-grandfather.

Every preacher of the gospel has worked with men and women who were guilty of adultery. I know the harm adultery does to every person involved, especially the hurt it causes children. Adultery is an abominable practice. But I do not hate adulterers. I hate adultery, but not the persons involved in adultery. If I hated the people, I would certainly not take time to pray with them and to help them in their attempts to get their lives straight before God. What I have said about drunkards and adulterers can also be said about other sinners. We must hate the sin; but we cannot hate the sinner. Jude demanded that his readers love sinners, by "...pulling them out of the fire...". He then commented: "...hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 1:23). We must hate hypocrisy, as Jesus did, but we cannot hate the hypocrite. Jesus commended the Ephesians for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. God Himself hated their deeds (Rev. 2:6). But neither God nor the Ephesians hated the Nicolaitans.

Is it easy to separate the sinner from his sin? You know it is not, especially if the sinner has brought shame and reproach on the name of Christ and has brought hurt into your life. We have to forgive those who have hurt us and seek to bring them into a right relationship with God and with their fellowman. That was a part of what Paul had in mind when he wrote:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

We must not teach our children to hate people, but we must teach them to hate sin.

Hatred of any group is unchristian. But opposing a group for their ungodly attitude does not mean that we hate them. I have given you several examples of that. But let us think for just a moment about homosexuals. As all

of you know, some young men have been beaten to death or killed in some other cruel way by those who disapprove of homosexual behavior. There is absolutely no excuse for beating someone to death because he is a fornicator, or a drunkard or a homosexual. Christians cannot condone such conduct. In fact, I have spoken out many times about killing homosexuals or abortionists or other violent and ungodly persons. We have no choice about opposing their behavior, but we must leave their fate to the God who will judge all men according to His divine standard.

For many years I have spoken out against abortion, infanticide, euthanasia and similar evils. I have also spoken out against these men who shoot abortionists. Am I showing hatred toward abortionists and those who support abortion which I condemn abortion? How could I or anyone else live with himself if he fails to condemn all evil? But I repeat: I do not hate abortionists, or abortion supporters or Dr. Kavorkian. The scriptures make it very plain what will happen to them in the final judgment, unless they repent. They are not going to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In the meantime, it is my responsibility to oppose those inexcusable evils and try to win those people to our Savior.

Our letter writer insists that "hatred and fear are tools of the devil." He urges the readers of **The Tennessean** to understand the teachings of Jesus and to overcome our hatred and learn not to fear (p. 12-A). My friends, if people are going to appear before Jesus, they need to know what He taught—not what they imagine He taught. He taught His disciples to hate sin and to fear the devil. In fact, no one can be a disciple of Jesus and not hate what He hated and not love what He loved. No one can read Matthew 23 and not understand that Jesus despised hypocrisy. Are we justified in despising hypocrisy? Jesus loved the world enough to give His life for it (John 3:16-17). Are we not to love all people, regardless of their condition or situation?

We may not like people's actions, but we must love all people enough to help them learn God's will.

The letter writer implies that those who hate evil belong in the same category as Hitler. The truth is very simple: If we do not hate evil and seek to convert the evildoer to Christ, we hate him. How can we claim to love people when we see them going in the direction which will eventually lead them to hell and do nothing to help them? If we fail to teach a man the error of his way, will not his blood be on our hands in the day of judgment? I do not want anyone saying to me in that great day: "You knew I was sinning against God, but you failed to show me how to change." By the grace of God, I intend to preach against sin—whatever the nature of that sin—not because I hate the sinner but because I love him enough to help him find the will of God and do it from the heart. How can any faithful child of God do otherwise?

Chapter 23

Calling Names

Recently I heard a preacher castigate those speakers who call names. He said he did not call names of individuals or of churches because such behavior is not Christian. Tragically, his observation involves both ignorance and arrogance. He shows his ignorance of the scriptures by not knowing that both Jesus and His apostles called names. He demonstrates his arrogance because he thinks he knows more about preaching than Christ and His apostles knew. If we are going to call ourselves gospel preachers, should we not preach as nearly like the Lord and His inspired followers as possible? How can an act be unchristian if it is patterned after the great preachers of the New Testament?

Some of the bitterest denunciations of false teachers ever uttered fell from the lips of Jesus Christ—the preacher's great example. We must remember that the denominational groups which Jesus vigorously opposed belonged to the nation of Israel. Will you please listen carefully to what Jesus said about the Pharisees—the most numerous sectarian group among the Jews?

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

The Pharisees would not have accused Jesus of being unchristian, but they did not appreciate His calling their name and condemning their behavior. Was Jesus being unchristian when He called the name of the Pharisees?

Matthew 16 records our Lord's condemnation of both Pharisees and Sadducees. He said to His disciples,

Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees...How is it that

ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees (Matt. 16:6, 11).

How absolutely unthinkable—from a worldly viewpoint—that the Son of God should single out these two sectarian groups among the Jews and speak so harshly about them! Was Jesus wrong when He named the Pharisees and the Saducees? Is any modern preacher so arrogant that he would condemn Jesus for His calling the names of God's enemies?

It would be almost impossible to find harsher language than what Jesus used of the Pharisees. Time will not allow me to read all the verses of Matthew 23, but I do want to read representative passages. Our Lord spoke to the multitude and to His disciples as follows:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men... (Matt. 23:1-5).

Can you find a better definition of hypocrisy than these words from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ? And at whom did He direct them? Surely not at some denomination among His people! If you have any doubts about the Lord's meaning, listen to other passages from the same chapter.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor...Woe unto you,

scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone...Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell (Matt. 23:15-16, 23, 33)?

I would be ashamed for criticizing our Lord for calling names.

The apostle Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived and a great preacher, although not necessarily a great orator. His preaching had the explicit endorsement of God's Holy Spirit. He was conscious of always being led by the Spirit. So that what he preached and how he preached it ought to be a model to the weak-kneed, spineless preachers of our day. It is true that Paul never called denominational names. The reason is too simple for anyone to overlook: there were not any denominations. But knowing Paul as you do from reading his great epistles, do you honestly think Paul would have sat idly by and not opposed denominationalism if they had existed in his day? Dr. Eldon Ladd's book, **A Theology of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), makes this very perceptive comment on denominationalism:

The idea of denominations would be abhorrent to Paul. The nearest thing to denominations was the (sectarian groups) at Corinth that Paul heartily condemned (p. 532).

But surely the apostle Paul would never have called individual names, would he? That would not be honorable, would it, to mention men and women by name? You be the judge, as I read to you the names of unfaithful Christians whom Paul specifically mentions. "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2). I do not know who these women were or

what their differences were, but I know they were women and I know Paul was displeased with their behavior. Can you imagine how embarrassing it must have been for these two women for Paul to call their names in a letter addressed to the whole church? Why did Paul call their names? He wanted them to get their lives straight. He mentions their names because he loved them enough to confront their sin.

Hymanaeus and Alexander were members of the body of Christ. Paul calls their names and says he had delivered them to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20). Was Paul's actions that of a concerned Christian? You know it was. The same apostle wrote:

This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15).

Paul opposed those who were promoting profane and vain babblings:

...for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:16-18).

Also in 2 Timothy Paul mentions Demas who had forsaken (or deserted) him, "having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

Were these people whom Paul mentioned happy with Paul's calling their names? If you know human nature, you know they were not happy. They may have even threatened Paul, but the Holy Spirit guided him to his writing, even into his calling the names of those disobedient and rebellious Christians. If preachers do not know of Paul's inspired actions, they ought to read the word more carefully. If they think Paul's behavior was unchristian, they are arrogant and should give more attention to what Jesus and the apostles did.

The Bible depicts John as the apostle of love. His books lay great stress on love, as you know if you have read the book of John and John's epistles. Do you remember John's calling a man's name and directing strong criticism at him?

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 1:9-10).

Could not John have found a better way to correct the situation involving Diotrephes? My friends, 3 John was the Holy Spirit's idea-not the apostle John's. There was no better way of stopping the devilish work of Diotrephes. If there had been, the Holy Spirit would have provided it. How can anyone call practices unchristian when the Holy Spirit directed them?

Either the Holy Spirit guided Paul and John into calling the names of certain false teachers and unfaithful brethren or He did not. If he did, then no one who calls himself a Christian can object without questioning the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit did not guide Paul and John, then we have some real problems with the scriptures. Paul informed the Corinthians:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

When Paul called the names of Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes, Alexander the coppersmith, Hymenaeus and Philetus, Demas, Euodias and Syntyche,

he was not defying the Holy Spirit. He was yielding to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

The preacher who criticized others for calling names probably would not object to our Lord's and the apostles' calling names, but he thinks preachers in our day who do it are unchristian, even if Jesus and the apostles did it. Is he suggesting that modern preachers keep their mouths shut when they are aware of the vicious attacks against the Bible, against Jesus Christ and against the Lord's church? Are we preachers not obligated to expose all error and to oppose it with all our being? That is what the great prophets of the Old Testament did; that is what John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the Lord's apostles did. If we do not identify and oppose false teachers, many church members may not recognize them and may be led astray by them. After all, some false teachers are smooth as oil, or to use the Lord's words, they are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15-20).

One of England's most influential preachers wrote a book in which he sets forth some strange ideas. I shall not identify either the author or the book until I have read some of his unscriptural and antiscritptural ideas to you. He denies the trinity, the virgin birth and the complete divinity of Christ. He does not accept the bodily resurrection of Christ (p. 20). He does not think Paul was any more inspired than many later thinkers (p. 21). He has been involved in psychiacial research and believes men are passing through a phase of evolution. He apparently endorses telepathic communication. He thinks the world will no longer endure the lies, and superstitions and distortions with which the gospel has been overlaid (p. 27). He thinks there has been communication with the dead. He himself has attended seances (p. 259). He claims to be "a convinced member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Legalization Society" (p. 267). He excludes from his thinking the idea of a set day of judgment (p. 275). He lampoons the idea of hell (p. 281).

There is much more in the book I would like to mention, but time does not allow. From what I have read to you, do you think the author of the book is a dangerous teacher? Should his name and the names of similar teachers be mentioned so that all who might encounter the teacher of this book be aware of the danger involved? Am I being unchristian when I tell you that the author is Leslie Weatherhead, a prominent liberal Methodist preacher? His book has the title, **The Christian Agnostic** (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1965). Weatherhead's book is one of the most unreasonable, unchristian and damaging I have ever read. Am I going to be silent about the author and his book? You know I am not going to be silent.

In 1996, Dr. R. Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer University at Macon, Georgia, wrote a book with the title, **When We Talk About God...Let's Be Honest** (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc.). Dr. Godsey denies the all-sufficiency of scripture (p. ix of the Preface), that there are any right answers (p. 4), that there are any "accurate and settled beliefs" (p. 14) and that there are any right theologies (p. 16). He dogmatically and illogically asserts: "Doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense" (p. 17). Dr. Godsey supports the unscriptural idea of universal salvation and even affirms that the scriptures teach it (p. 202). Am I being unchristian when I mention Dr. Godsey's book? Could I be true to my calling as a gospel preacher if I did not call Dr. Godsey's name and point out the soul-condemning error which he teaches?

I wonder if the preacher who criticizes others for calling names knows that some of the most influential evangelical scholars in the world call the names of those theologians with whom they disagree? I could give hundreds of examples, but I choose to mention just one of America's best known evangelical author, Dr. Norman Geisler. Dr. Geisler's latest book, **Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election** (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers,

1999), attacks what he calls "extreme Calvinism." But he does not stop at exposing the errors of extreme Calvinism; he mentions some of the extreme Calvinists by name and refutes their positions. He singles out several Calvinists: Edwin Palmer, author of **The Five Points of Calvinism**, R. C. Sproul's **Willing to Believe**, Jonathan Edwards, W. T. Shedd and Martin Luther. Does Dr. Geisler overstep Christian compassion when he mentions these men and shows that their teachings are contrary to scripture? How could he do otherwise if he honestly believes they were teaching error?

But could preachers not handle religious error without naming the people involved? There are unquestionably cases where that could be done and probably ought to be done. But there are some theologians who are so blatant in their attacks on Christ, on the Bible and on the church that they ought to be named and their sins exposed and opposed. When John Shelby Spong denies virtually every fundamental of the faith, even the existence of a personal God, should we not call him by name and refute the errors he is promoting? Some of the members of the Episcopal church are speaking out against one of their bishops, John Shelby Spong. Dr. Thomas C. Reeve's book, **The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity** (New York: The Free Press, 1996), accuses Bishop Spong of attempting to prove that Paul was a repressed and frustrated homosexual (p. 20). He says that Bishop Jane Dixon of the Episcopal church wore a large button at one meeting which read, "Sexuality, not Spirituality" (p. 21). Dr. Reeves is an Episcopalian. He names his own bishops and his own church. Is that inappropriate?

Obviously, calling names, whether individuals or of churches, must be done in the spirit of love. We should never be harsh or mean in our mentioning those with whom we disagree. In addition, we must never misrepresent men and women who write on any topic, religious or otherwise.

Our desire must always be to help—never to embarrass or to ridicule. There are times when we must be very firm, but we must never be ugly-spirited. We must not judge men's motives. We must leave that to the God of heaven. But we have a right—in fact, an obligation—to judge doctrines and practices. Many false teachers are honest and sincere; they are simply misinformed. We must always keep that in mind.

If preachers want to mention my name and the church of which I am a member, I have absolutely no objection to that, so long as neither the church nor this preacher is misrepresented. In fact, I would be honored if others would mention my name, if they did not misquote or misapply what I teach. My concern is that the gospel in all its purity and power be proclaimed. If that were the desire of all teachers and preachers, we would not have the confusion and division which plague the religious world. May God help us all to work for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. May He help us to seek the truth on every topic and to preach it faithfully and in love!

Chapter 24

Compromising The Gospel Message

Most Americans know that compromise on political issues is a way of life in our local communities, in our state capitals and in Washington. We might prefer it to be otherwise, but there is no way for governments to operate without compromise. On budgetary matters, for example, members of the House of Representatives must work out some compromise among themselves or money bills would never be passed. Then there must be some compromise between the House and the Senate. Finally, there must be compromises among the House, the Senate and the president. If the men and women in Congress are not willing to compromise, there will not be any legislation. Come to think of it, that could be a blessing.

Great damage is done to our nation when local governments, State General Assemblies and the National Congress compromise on moral principles, such as, legalizing abortion, alcoholic beverages, gambling, same sex marriage and physician-assisted suicide. Some elected representatives personally oppose abortion, but they compromise with their colleagues so their own pet projects will be approved. Who can forget the statements made by Geraldine Ferraro, Mario Cuomo and similar spineless politicians: "I am personally opposed to abortion, but I would not let that interfere with my duties in office?" In hundreds and hundreds of cases, the approach of many politicians is: "You scratch my back and I will scratch yours." Does this fact help to explain why our nation has made so many financial, social and moral blunders?

When John F. Kennedy was the junior senator from Massachusetts, he wrote an excellent book, **Profiles in Courage** (New York: Pocket Books, 1956). Senator Kennedy's

book tells the stories of some of America's greatest statesmen, including John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, Edmund Ross and Robert Taft. According to Senator Kennedy, these men had the courage to do what was right, regardless of the pressures that were brought to bear on their political lives. One quotation from John Kennedy's book will illustrate the kind of courage our leaders so desperately need. The quotation is from George W. Norris, Republican from Nebraska.

I would rather go down to my political grave with a clear conscience than ride in the chariot of victory than to be congressional stool pigeon, the slave, the servant, or the vassal of any man, whether he be the owner and manager of a legislative menagerie or ruler of a great nation....I would rather lie in the silent grave, remembered by both friends and enemies as one who remained true to his faith and who never faltered in what he believed to be his duty, than to live, old and aged, lacking the confidence of both factions (pp. 161-162).

That kind of courage was rare in the early decades of the last century; it is equally rare at the beginning of a new century.

I urge you to think seriously of this question: What happens when men and women compromise their moral and spiritual views? I almost asked, "What happens when men and women compromise their moral and spiritual convictions?", but if they truly had convictions, they would not compromise them. An illustration should help to clarify what occurs when compromises on moral and spiritual issues occur. Two groups within the church hold different views of the inspiration of the scriptures, as is almost certainly true of every group which calls itself "Christian." One group believes the Bible to be inerrantly inspired. The other group denies the inerrancy of scripture. The leaders of these two groups agree to work out a compromise. They

accept what is called in scholarly circles "limited inerrancy." In other words, the Bible is inerrant in some areas, such as faith and practice, but it is mistaken in historical, scientific and psychological teachings. How serious would such a compromise be? At the beginning of negotiations, one group is wrong in holding that the Bible is full of errors in some of its references. The other group is right in maintaining that the Bible is inerrantly, infallibly inspired of God. Since the compromise has become effective, both groups are wrong. Limited inerrancy makes about as much sense as speaking of a square circle or taking a position on a moral or spiritual teaching that is absolutely relative or relatively absolute. In other words, it borders on the ridiculous.

I am not arguing that members of the body of Christ may never compromise on any matter. Churches, like any organization, could not operate without making some compromises. For example, suppose half the church members want one type of architecture and the other half want something entirely different? This can be a real problem and not just a hypothetical one. How do they resolve their differences? They compromise or they are likely to face division. A church building is not a scriptural matter in the first place. There are surely other areas where churches must compromise if the church is going to be effective in the work of the Lord. But the lesson today is not designed to examine matters of opinion or matters of indifference. I am speaking with you today about doctrinal and spiritual teachings. No human being—elder, preacher or otherwise—has any authority to compromise on these.

Think of how Christ could have avoided the cross if He had been willing to compromise just a little. He could have said, "I am one of the ways to God; in fact, I am the best way to God. I have some truth no other teacher has." He could not make such a statement because it would not have been true. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Since Jesus came into the world to be the Messiah, the Savior and Redeemer of mankind, he could have struck a deal with Satan at Christ's temptations. What could possibly have been wrong with His casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple? After all, such a demonstration of power might have convinced many people that He really did come down from heaven.

Also think of the persecution and death countless thousands of early Christians could have avoided if they had been willing to make concessions concerning their faith in Jesus Christ. Why could not the faithful Polycarp confess Caesar as Lord? The early Christians did not have to deny that Jesus was Lord; they could simply have also confessed Caesar as lord. Why were they unwilling to do that? They would have damned their souls for eternity. Men and women all over the world have been,

...tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:35-40).

I know a way they could have avoided all of this-Compromise!

The apostle Paul could have compromised with the Judaizers among the Galatian Christians. Had he done so, he would not have experienced such bitter opposition in telling the Galatians that if they sought to be "...justified by

the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Some within the church applied pressure to Paul to have Titus circumcised. Since Paul agreed to have Timothy circumcised, what could possibly be wrong in compromising with the Judaizers and having Titus circumcised? Please listen carefully to Paul's response to the men who wanted him to compromise the truth of the gospel.

To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:5).

But it seems such an insignificant matter. The differences between having Timothy circumcised and refusing to have Titus circumcised seem unimportant to some, but a vital principle is involved. Timothy was part Jew and would exert a greater influence for good among the Jews if he were circumcised. On the other hand, Titus was a Greek, and nobody had a right to require men and women to become Jews in order to be Christians. Paul could not compromise on such a vital matter. Had he done so the church would have experienced great difficulty in separating from Judaism. Compromise on moral and spiritual truth must never be done by God's people—NEVER!

On December 24, 1989, **The Jackson Sun** of Jackson, Tennessee, printed an article entitled, "Professor asks pastors to compromise to prevent AIDS." The article reported that Dr. Gerald S. Golden, Director of the Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities at the University of Tennessee, told a group of preachers who were members of the Memphis Ministers' Association that they needed to "compromise on the moral message some impart to prevent AIDS deaths among adolescents." He told the preachers that "half of their adolescents are sexually active by their 18th birthday." He asserted that those who doubted his word were simply wrong. He recommended prophylactics as one way to "reduce exposure to the virus that causes AIDS." He expressed his disapproval of those religious leaders who

oppose so-called "safe sex" campaigns. Dr. Golden compared the AIDS outbreak to war. During a time of war, moral guidelines are overlooked to further a cause. Just as the commandment,

"Thou shalt not kill" is held in abeyance during war, some moral concessions need to be made in the battle against AIDS (p. 2-B).

Since Dr. Golden's suggestions and recommendations are not all that unusual, it is appropriate to examine some of them in detail. Dr. Golden urged the preachers to "compromise on the moral message some of them impart to prevent AIDS deaths among adolescents." Churches and theologians have already compromised on the moral message they impart and that has brought us AIDS, syphilis, Gonorrhea, genital herpes, and other sexually transmitted diseases. All one has to do to confirm that observation is to read Bishop Spong's book, **Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality** (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988) or Wesley Baker's book, **An Open End to Christian Morals** or Joseph Fletcher's book, **Situation Ethics**. These and hundreds of similar books have compromised on what God has revealed about moral living. But not only have churches compromised on biblical moral values; so have many parents, school teachers, politicians and others. Will you please listen to Paul's uncompromising stand on sexual immorality?

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God

forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:15-20).

If you can see any room in these verses for compromise on moral issues, you can see further than I. But I wonder if it is not really a matter of seeing what we want to see.

The apostles and other spokesmen for God were not free to preach what they preferred to preach. They were under divine compunction to deliver God's message in God's words—just exactly as God directed them. Preachers of the gospel in New Testament times were "heralds." The Greek word for "herald" (**kerux**) means one who delivers a message for another. Colin Brown's **Dictionary of New Testament Theology** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1971) lists the following characteristics of a herald: He,

...was always under the authority of someone else, whose spokesman he was. He himself was immune. He conveyed the message and intention of his master. He had...no liberty on his own to negotiate (volume 3, pp. 49-50).

In other words, the herald did not originate his message; he had no right to change it; he could not negotiate; he was duty bound to deliver it exactly as he had received it. That, dear friends, leaves no room for compromise on the message we are to deliver or the worship we are to offer to our Lord.

Preachers of the gospel are God's representatives. They must speak only as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). They

are forbidden to alter the message by adding to or taking from it or substituting for it. The Old Testament made exactly that demand on God's spokesmen for that era.

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you (Deut. 4:2).

The New Testament is no less explicit.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

Do you see any room for compromise in these biblical injunctions?

In spite of all these biblical passages which will not permit a preacher to compromise the gospel message, Dr. Golden urged the Memphis preachers to make moral concessions in our fight against AIDS. I hope the members of the Memphis Ministerial Association understood their responsibility to oppose all watering down of the gospel message, although the very existence of a ministerial association suggests compromise and weakness in doctrinal and moral positions. I am aware of no exceptions to that observation.

My friends, churches must shoulder their share of the immorality that exists and they must resolve with God's help to rectify this dreadful situation. We cannot compromise or negotiate. We must be strong in the faith that is in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 16:13). We must put on the whole armor of God and then STAND (Eph. 6:11-13). Souls, including our own, are at stake.

Chapter 25

Appointing Women To Preach

Pressures from the Women's Liberation Movement have caused churches to change their beliefs and practices. I find that fact particularly disturbing since most radical feminists could care less about religion—any religion. The truth is that many of the feminists like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem are secular humanists. Actually, Betty Friedan, the mother of modern feminism, has died and is no longer a humanist. She knows now that God exists. But, generally speaking, radical feminists are bitter and angry opponents of all patriarchal religion, that is, any religion which honors God as Father and allows only males to be preachers, elders and deacons. That the Bible teaches these truths has no bearing on most feminists. They could care less about the teaching of scripture since they attribute women's oppression to the influence of the Bible. If you have any doubt of the feminists' hatred for the Bible, please listen to these brief excerpts from Dr. Kate Millett's book, **Sexual Politics** (New York: Avon Books, 1970):

The two leading myths of Western culture are the classical tale of Pandora's box and the Biblical story of the fall (p. 51).

As you can plainly see, Dr. Millett puts the biblical story of the fall in the same category as the fictional tale of Pandora's box. Dr. Millett cannot understand the influence of what she calls the "myth of the fall." She expresses puzzlement at its power

over us even in a rationalist era which has long ago given up literal belief in it while maintaining its emotional assent intact (p. 52).

Not all feminists are as bitterly opposed to the Bible as is

Dr. Millett, but the majority of the radical feminists seem to be. So why should churches yield to the pressures of the Women's Liberation Movement? Other churches may cave in to feminism, but churches Christ cannot afford to and by the grace of God will not. Too much is at stake to compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many conservative churches, though as far as I can tell none of the liberal churches, are having conflicts over appointing women to be preachers, elders and deacons. According to an article in **The Tennessean** (Friday, May 19, 2000), Southern Baptists are planning to revise their statement of faith "that tells women God does not want them to be pastors." One woman preacher expressed sadness at the Southern Baptists' decision. She is not a Southern Baptist because the Southern Baptists could not have her as a preacher. She said she did not want to be a Southern Baptist anyway. Mark Caldwell, a Baptist preacher, disagrees with the changes proposed by the Southern Baptist Convention. His statement is quite revealing.

Jesus was open to women, women served as deacons in the early church, women early on were very credible witnesses to the resurrection and the gospel. And they are still credible witnesses, and we've experienced that here at Glendale (p. 1-A).

There are some serious problems with Mark Caldwell's observations. Jesus was certainly open to women, but it was one of the apostles who forbade women to teach over the man (1 Tim. 2:12). Did Paul understand less about the mind of Christ than Mark Caldwell knows? How does a preacher harmonize such unreasonable teaching with the Bible's emphasis on infallibility? Paul either spoke by the guidance of the Holy Spirit or he did not. If he did, then his teaching is binding on the church in every age. If he did not speak as the Holy Spirit gave him utterance, how do we decide when he was being guided by the Holy Spirit?

Mark Caldwell asserts that women served as deacons in the early church. It would have been helpful if he had given the passage which teaches that. I am aware of the verse he probably had in mind, but it does not call Phebe a deacon. Paul commended Phebe to the church in Rome. He called her his sister and a "servant of the church in Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1). The Revised Standard Version transliterates the Greek **diakonos** by the word "deacon." The New Revised Version renders the Greek "deaconess." But both translations were guided by what the translators thought the text ought to say—not what it actually says. Romans 16:1 does not call Phebe a deacon or a deaconess. It refers to her as a servant. The word **diakonos** appears thirty times in the New Testament. Do we render all of those appearances by the word "deaconess" or "deacon?" Paul calls civil rulers ministers of God (Rom. 13:4). Does that mean the civil rulers were deacons or deaconesses? There is no justification for transliterating **diakonos** as deaconess in Romans 16:1. It appears to be an attempt to impose one's theology on the word of God.

Mark Caldwell says that early on women were very credible witnesses to our Lord's resurrection and to the gospel. There is not even the slightest doubt about that, but what does that have to do with having women preachers? There were five hundred credible witnesses to the Lord's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6). Did all of them become preachers of the gospel? Some of them may have become preachers, but we have no evidence they did. Women can still be credible witnesses, but that does not qualify them to become preachers or elders or deacons. We have to use the scriptures as our guide—not the emotional appeals of individuals.

Two recent letters to the editor of **The Tennessean** have discussed the controversy surrounding selecting women as preachers. The first of these letters was written by Dr. Bill Sherman who calls himself a "retired pastor of the Woodmont Baptist Church" in Nashville. I normally do

not call the names of people who write letters to **The Tennessean** or to any other newspaper because the letter writers are not usually professionals. But Dr. Sherman has been an influential leader in the religious community for many years. So I do not hesitate to refer to this distinguished Nashville leader.

Dr. Sherman's letter to the editor of **The Tennessean** has the title, "Let churches, God chooses the pastors." Dr. Sherman opposes the Southern Baptist panel that recommended that churches not select women preachers, although he uses the word "pastors." He says the panel's recommendations violate four cherished Baptist beliefs: Competency, autonomy of the local congregation, the priesthood of the believer, and the sole authority in divine calling—God (p. 10-A). Will you think with me on these four violations of cherished Baptist beliefs? What I am about to say is not an argument—just an observation. There are thousands of capable Baptist preachers and millions of other Baptists who vigorously disagree with Dr. Sherman. But who is right on the topic of women preachers?

Dr. Sherman explains what he means by competency.

No human authority can dictate truth, only the Holy Spirit leading in the mind and soul of the believer. If God calls a woman, are we to place ourselves above the Almighty (p. 10-A)?

This sounds very pious and reasonable, but it cannot be harmonized with scripture. The Holy Spirit provides guidance on all things pertaining to life and godliness only through His word.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (or teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect (or full grown), throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

If the scriptures furnish us unto all good works, do they not

tell us who is to preach? Paul by divine inspiration forbids a woman to teach or usurp authority over the man (1 Tim. 2:12). The Holy Spirit will not violate His will in choosing a woman to preach when He clearly forbids it in the Bible. If He did choose a woman to preach, He would be the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

Dr. Sherman says that each congregation led by the Holy Spirit decides who should serve as pastor, not a human panel (p. 10-A). But the Holy Spirit does not violate His own rules and regulations as given in the word of God. And how would a church know what God wants except through divine revelation? Is Dr. Sherman saying that God speaks extra-biblically in helping a church select a preacher? Besides, the preacher is not a pastor, unless he is also an elder of the church. What if a church wanted to select a preacher who denies the inspiration of the scriptures, the deity of Christ and the virgin birth of Christ, if that church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, should it be allowed to make such a selection without any objection from the Convention?

Dr. Sherman appeals to the priesthood of all believers to criticize the panel for recommending that women not be able to serve as pastors. Only the believer who feels called to preach should have the right to make the decision regarding becoming a preacher. The problem with Dr. Sherman's rationale is that the Holy Spirit has already made the determination regarding who can preach. Women are clearly prohibited from preaching when men are present. No person and no church has the right to make decisions contrary to the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:8-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-34. If they can violate these passages, what prevents them from doing whatever they choose whenever they choose to do it?

Dr. Sherman says God alone is the authority in who is called. God will call whom He chooses. He says that Pentecostals have had women preachers for years and God

has used them in a wonderful way (p. 10-A). God is the final authority regarding who is called to preach. But He has already decided in His word that women may not teach over men (1 Tim. 2:12). There should be no wondering about these matters. God has spoken plainly and emphatically on the subject of women preachers.

Dr. Sherman says he is not advocating that women should serve as pastors. Now please listen to this troubling observation.

For me, the real tragedy in this report is that it denies one of the things which Jesus came to do—give women equal worth, dignity, and value as men. Will it not be an irony if, in the name of God, the truth of God is violated (p. 10-A)?

If giving women equal worth, dignity and value as men means women should be preachers, then how could he live with himself if he did not advocate that women should be preachers? It is certainly unreasonable from a scriptural viewpoint to deny women's equal worth with men just because the Bible forbids them to preach or to serve as elders and deacons.

The second letter to the editor of **The Tennessean** was written by a woman who identifies herself as "Reverend Susan I. Spieth." Her letter has the title, "Baptists should study women in the Bible." Does it bother you that any person—male or female—should be so arrogant as to refer to himself or herself as "reverend?" It is interesting and disturbing that John Shelby Spong's latest book, **Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love and Equality** (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000), includes a section he calls "A Statement of Koinonia." He signed the statement "the Right Reverend John Shelby Spong" (p. 447). Should not the men who claim to lead God's people be more humble than that?

The woman who calls herself "Reverend Susan I. Spieth" says it is very disturbing that Baptists continue to

find "it necessary to define the limits of a certain group" (p. 18-A). While there are definite differences between churches of Christ and the Southern Baptist Convention, both we and they believe every church has a right-yea, an obligation-to define the limits of certain groups. Could any group that calls itself Christian afford to include Muslim, Buddhists, Mormons or Hindus? Would Susan Spieth fellowship the Ku Klux Klan or any other white supremacist group? I am not comparing women to radical groups, but I am saying that all churches and other religious groups have some guidelines they have to follow. And the scriptures specifically forbid a woman to preach or to teach over the man.

She accuses the Baptists of using a few selective scriptures to defend their position or to attack their opposition. She said Adrian Rogers calls the Baptists, "a people of the book, who recognize no authority for faith and practice but God's word" (p. 18-A). Is Spieth arguing that it is illegitimate to use a "few selective scriptures to defend one's position or to attack one's opposition?" How many passages in the Bible require Christians to be in subjection to civil government? Since there are only a few verses requiring submission to civil government, does that mean we can ignore those passages? Do we have to count the number of passages dealing with any particular topic before we can take a stand on that topic? When the Lord speaks-even if he says something only one time-we are to listen and to obey.

Spieth wonders how the Baptist panel would interpret passages like Romans 16:1. She says that passage calls Phebe a deacon of the church. She also says that Paul probably sent the Roman letter by Phebe. I would be very reluctant to build a doctrine on such scanty information. I have already explained that there is no evidence Phebe was a deacon. She was a servant, but not all servants are deacons. And how did she learn that Phebe delivered the Roman

letter to the church in Rome? That is pure speculation but speculation with a purpose. She is attempting to justify having women preachers. I would be ashamed to build a spiritual house with such flimsy material. Why not build on what is know rather than engaging in endless speculations?

She attempts to make Junia an apostle. Paul wrote:

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me (Rom. 16:7).

Does that verse teach that Junia was an apostle? I wonder if Spieth has bothered to learn that the name can either be Junia (feminine) or Junias (masculine)? And does being prominent among the apostles mean Junia was an apostle? If it could be established that she was an apostle, like Barnabas, she would not have been permitted to preach. It would have been a violation of 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 and 1 Timothy 2:8-12.

Spieth affirms that Priscilla because her name is mentioned first was probably a leader in the church. Priscilla and her husband Aquila are mentioned five times in the New Testament. Priscilla is listed first two of those times. Can you imagine a weaker foundation on which to construct one's beliefs about women preachers? In the words of Jesus, she is straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matt. 23:24). But feminists and liberals are accomplished camel-swallowers.

Spieth mentioned Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28 as justifying having women preachers. Just in case you may have forgotten what Paul wrote to the Galatians, I shall read several verses from Galatians 3.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor

free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).

Is Paul teaching in verse 28 that all distinctions between males and females are removed when they become Christians? Is he not teaching that all human beings—Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female—are of equal value? Can we infer from that truth that all people have the same functions and responsibilities? If that is what Paul means, we have some very serious problems with the inspiration of the scriptures. Paul commands wives to be in subjection to their husbands and forbids women to preach. We are all equal in value in God's sight, but we do not all have the same functions.

Spieth affirms that what ticked Jesus off more than anything was the "dogmatic interpretation of the scriptures by Pharisees" (p. 18-A). As a matter of fact, that is not what ticked Jesus off more than anything else. If it were, why would Jesus tell His own disciples,

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not (Matt. 23:1-3).

Christ's major objection to the Pharisees was their hypocrisy—not their dogmatic interpretation. He also strongly objected to the Pharisees' adding their tradition to the word of God (Matt. 15:3-9). But any argument is just as good as any other when one has decided what the scriptures ought to teach and then sets out to find verses which confirm his or her views. Let us, dear friends, speak only as the word of God speaks. After all, that word will judge us in the last day.

Chapter 26

Dangers Confronting The Church: Ineffective Preaching (No. 1)

The apostle Paul had complete confidence in Timothy, his son in the gospel. He made that very plain when he wrote to the Philippians about Timothy:

For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel (Phil. 2:20-22).

But in spite of his trust in Timothy, Paul warned his young brother in Christ:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Are we living in a time when men will no longer endure sound doctrine—a time when there are preachers who will tickle the ears of those who do not want the truth of the gospel preached?

Tragically and inexplicably, there is great confusion over who ought to preach, what ought to be preached, how preaching ought to be done and even if it ought to be done at all. Wallace E. Fisher's book, **Who Dares To Preach: The Challenge of Bible Preaching** (Menneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), makes us aware of many confusing aspects of modern preaching. The truth is: Many modern churches have almost abandoned any attempt to have Bible preaching. Many church members could care less about the preacher's sermons and attend services primarily for the

entertainment that precedes and follows the sermon. This is a sad commentary on modern religion but no one knowledgeable student of modern worship practices would dare dispute.

Television and radio preaching has not been beneficial, generally speaking. How can people not be confused when they hear preachers misquote and misapply the word of God? Jack Van Impe, Hal Lindsey and similar dispensationalists keep hinting at a date for the Lord's return. Men do not have any idea when the Lord will return. One does not have to be a Bible scholar to know we cannot set a date for Christ's second coming. Jesus, Paul and Peter taught that Christ's coming would be like a thief in the night. In his famous Olivet Discourse, Jesus said very emphatically:

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no,
not the angels of heaven, but my Father only
(Matt. 24:36).

The expression, "my Father only" excludes all the false prophets who presume to know the time of the second coming. If we want to be faithful in the proclamation of the gospel, we must preach the Lord's glorious return, but we have no right to set a date. In fact, preachers and theologians sin grievously when they set dates.

Robert Schuller claims to preach to 20,000,000 people each week on his television program, "The Hour of Power." Oddly enough, he says he is an evangelical, but does not believe many of the great truths of the Bible. He ridiculed the Southern Baptist Convention for its stand on a wife's submission to her husband. In fact, he had the audacity to say: "If Paul had been a married man, he would not have had made such a blunder." Does Schuller believe Paul was writing by supernatural guidance? If he does not, how can he pretend to be an evangelical? If he does believe Paul wrote by divine inspiration, how can he reject Paul's command for a wife to be in subjection to her husband, as

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5 and in other passages? Does he believe he is free to pick and choose what he likes and to discard the rest? He may not admit to believing that, but that is precisely what he does believe. Sadly, Dr. Schuller is not alone in this approach to scripture.

Perhaps Dr. Schuller's greatest weakness is refusing to mention sin in his sermons. He believes that preaching on sin is too negative and what could be more dreadful and discouraging than being negative? According to Robert Schuller, Jesus did not preach on sin. Have you ever wondered if some preachers are talking about the same Jesus we know from the reading of the Bible? Do you remember what Jesus said to the woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery? "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11)? Did Jesus believe the woman had sinned by committing adultery? If He did not, why did He say, "Go and sin no more?" The tense of the verb reads, "Henceforth no longer go on sinning."

The Pharisees criticized Christ's disciples because they had violated the traditions of the Jewish elders by not washing their hands. Jesus asked them if they understood that what enters the mouth goes into the belly and is eliminated. He then said,

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man (Matt. 15:17-20).

Can any honest student of the word read this passage and not understand that evil thoughts, murder, adulteries and such like are sinful? Are one's personal popularity and position so valuable that he will compromise the truth of the gospel to maintain them? If they are that important to him, he is in the wrong profession.

Ineffective preaching includes failure to discuss the critical issues that both the church and the nation face. I am not denying the absolute essentiality of teaching the first principles of the gospel. In our audiences, there are almost always some people who do not know what to do to be saved. Either they have grown up in an environment where the gospel in its fulness has not been taught or they have simply ignored the teaching of scripture. Personally I would be ashamed not to say in every sermon what men and women must do to become New Testament Christians. With some preachers, reviewing the plan of salvation may become routine, but it must not be dismissed or overlooked if men and women are to obey our Lord in baptism. Are we being faithful to our calling as preachers if we fail to preach on first principles?

If we are to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27), we must prepare ourselves to discuss whatever the church and the world need. That observation leads me to ask: "When was the last time you heard a sermon on withdrawing fellowship from ungodly church members?" I am fully aware of the unpopularity of the topic, but do we determine what we shall preach by taking a vote on what people like and what they dislike? No preacher can fulfill his sacred obligation to his Lord and to his church and fail to speak on disfellowshipping erring brothers and sisters. The church at Corinth (1 Cor. 5) and the church at Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3) were given direct commands about withdrawing from unfaithful members.

The moral issues that confront our nation are of vital importance to its very survival. Preachers of the gospel must spend enough time examining these issues so that they can discuss them intelligently. I have in mind such topics as abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, alcoholic beverages, gambling, genetic engineering, homosexuality, capital punishment and divorce. Some preachers may have to give up some of their days of playing

golf or fishing to become well versed in these very serious issues. It will take hundreds and hundreds of hours of reading and thinking to be able to address these moral and spiritual problems. But do we have any choice if we are to be faithful to God?

Doug Murren's book, **The Baby Boomerang** (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), offers some recommendations for preachers. He urges preachers to visit the how-to sections of their local bookstores. And what would a preacher learn about preaching from these how-to sections of bookstores? Preachers ought to visit bookstores on a regular basis, but the how-to sections are generally nothing more than pabulum. A preacher would spend his time more wisely by buying and reading serious literature.

Murren recommends that preachers acquire inventories of needs from secular people in the community. Can you imagine Christ's conducting a survey in the secular community so he would know how to preach? How would Paul have fared if he had conducted such a survey in the ancient city of Corinth? I am not denying our need to know our communities, but I have serious doubts about doing a survey among secular people. If our eyes are open, we can readily understand what our communities need. For example, if the public schools are promoting secular humanism, including the theory of organic evolution, we ought to know that and have the courage to preach against such evil. If alcohol and other drugs are causing great damage to individuals and to homes in our communities, we cannot overlook these problems. A survey of secular people would likely contribute to these ungodly practices—not help to alleviate them.

Finally, Murren offers this advice:

And don't forget to keep your messages light and informal, liberally sprinkling them with humor and personal anecdotes (pp. 217-218).

My last three sermons at West Fayetteville have had the

titles, "Enemies of the Cross," "Hearing and Doing" and "Corrective Church Discipline." What should I have done to keep these messages light and informal and liberally sprinkled with humor and personal anecdotes? I am not denying that humor and personal anecdotes have their place in some sermons, but both must be used sparingly. Matters of life and death are not very humorous. How can I preach light and humorous sermons on our Lord's incarnation, His mighty miracles, His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead and His glorious second coming? These are not exactly funny topics. And personal anecdotes or stories usually contribute very little to a message. There are exceptions, but I fear they are very few.

Dr. John MacArthur's book, **Ashamed of the Gospel: When The Church Becomes Like The World** (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), includes a Jim's assertions. Has he conducted a survey among gospel preachers to determine what they have preached? After reading Jim's book, I did a survey of my own preaching for about ten years preceding the publication of his book. I found that I had preached approximately 50% of my sermons during that time on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Is that the right balance between what Jim calls "effect material" and "cause material?" Unless Jim has supernatural knowledge, he cannot make such a judgment. I have tried-and I believe most gospel preachers try-to be balanced in the preaching of the word. It is not an easy task, but I honestly believe most of us have done our best to be balanced in our preaching.

Using expressions like "effect material" and "cause material" does nothing but confuse. Every book in the Bible has come from the mind of Almighty God. It was designed to furnish us completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). What biblical passage a preacher discusses in his sermons depends on the situation. Some churches are well acquainted with the gospel records, but know less about

the book of Acts, the epistles and Revelation. Others may have relatively good comprehension of Acts, the epistles and Revelation. The discerning preacher will learn the needs of the congregation and address those needs from God's book. From my more than fifty-six years of preaching, I would say that Acts is probably the most neglected book of the New Testament—not among churches of Christ—but in the religious world in general. One of the reasons this is obvious: Many denominational preachers do not want to follow the gospel plan of salvation. For example, Dr. John MacArthur, Jr.'s book, **Nothing but the Truth: Upholding the Gospel in a Doubting Age** (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), almost totally ignores the teaching of the book of Acts, especially as it pertains to how to become a Christian. Does Dr. MacArthur know what the book of Acts teaches about salvation? Absolutely! But he does not believe we have to do what Peter and Paul teach about being baptized. In his book, **The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness** (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), Dr. MacArthur writes,

Peter urged them (that is, the Jews on Pentecost) to repent and trust Christ, and the result was dramatic: 'Those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added unto them about three thousand souls' (Acts 2:41) (p. 50).

My friends, that is not what Peter said. He commanded the Jews:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

Was Dr. MacArthur's twisting of Acts 2:38 a deliberate perversion of the word or was he ignorant of what the verse teaches? I will leave that judgment to the Lord. But can you understand why gospel preachers have an obligation to stress the teaching of Acts of the Apostles? We cannot neglect any of the word, but sometimes one section demands more immediate attention. It seems to me that

any man who has preached the word for a number of years ought to understand that concept.

One more brief excerpt from Jim Woodroof's book tells us why churches of Christ must emphasize the book of Acts. He affirms that,

Acts is more nearly a record of a church entrenched in tradition, rooted in racial prejudice, doing all in its power to prevent the transition from taking place (p. 63).

If Jim's judgment of Acts is correct, I am in favor of taking a penknife and removing Acts from the divine canon and burning it along with the rest of the trash. The book of Acts is just as inspired as any other book of the Bible. It does discuss the discrimination that occurred in Jerusalem, but it teaches the same truth about discrimination that every book of the New Testament teaches.

Were there people in the early church who were "entrenched in tradition?" Every knowledgeable Bible student would have to answer in the affirmative. But the great preachers whose sermons were recorded in Acts strongly resisted any teaching or practice that in any way impeded the progress of the gospel. They opposed all enemies of the cross of Christ and engaged in a movement that changed the face of the earth. Acts tells of difficulties the early church faced, but it also records some of the greatest victories the church has ever known. For these reasons and many others, we must be diligent students of Acts of the Apostles.

Every man who preaches the word must be devoted to doing what God requires of him. We should have no difficulty deciding what that is. Acts 8 tells us what occurred in three different conversions—the Samaritans, Simon the sorcerer and the Ethiopian eunuch. I shall dwell briefly on the conversion of the Samaritans. After Stephen had been stoned to death for his faith in Jesus Christ, the church members

...were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word (Acts 8:1, 4).

Those early preachers of the gospel knew exactly what they were to preach. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). We do not know what Philip said when he preached Christ, but we are given some insight into his sermon.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

From this simple reading of the biblical text, we can conclude that preaching of the word must be done in every case of conversion. Men and women have to know before they can believe and obey. When honest people hear the gospel, they believe it and are baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins. A careful reading of the book of Acts will show conclusively that we must believe, repent of our alien sins, confess the name of Christ before men, and be baptized for the remission of our sins. So, my friends, I appeal to you today to study our Bibles carefully and to obey the commands of the Lord.

I also appeal to you to urge your preacher to teach only what the Bible says about salvation and about Christian living. If he leans to the left, urge him to return to the right way. If he will not do so, find a faithful congregation where the preacher will preach the word without fear or favor. God will hold both you and him accountable for what is preached and the way it is preached.

Chapter 27

Dangers Confronting The Church: Ineffective Preaching (No. 2)

Churches in modern times ought to be deeply concerned about the quality of preaching being done—in pulpits, on radio and on television. Dan Chambers' excellent book, **Showtime: Worship in the Ages of Show Business** (Nashville, TN: 21st Century Christian, 1997), insists that our Lord's miracles were not done "simply to dazzle people and win their allegiance." He makes this wise observation about our Lord's methods and message.

When it came to making disciples, Jesus never tried to "sell" Himself to the world by portraying discipleship as an exciting experience or as something that would enhance people's earthly existence. Instead, He violated every rule of "marketing" theory by portraying discipleship as a life of self-denial (Matt. 10:39), potential hardship, and possibly persecution (Matt. 10:17-23). In other words, He never buried the news that discipleship came with a high price (p. 75).

Many churches in our generation may not consider such preaching effective, but it was then and is now the kind of preaching God demands of all who would be faithful to the Lord.

My topic today is "Ineffective Preaching." I am not using that term of those men who do not know the King's English, who do not always use good diction, who have some kind of physical impediment, such as, stuttering or stammering. J. D. Boyd was one of the most effective preachers it has been my privilege to know. His life and sermons made such an impression on me that I recall topics he discussed in a meeting at my home congregation fifty-five years ago. But J. D. Boyd had difficulty walking,

standing and speaking because he had been afflicted by polio. His face would often be contorted by his efforts to speak, but his preaching was sound, scriptural, bold and loving. I am sure his life and preaching had a profound effect on my desire to preach the gospel. I suspect he influenced many others in the same direction.

Knowledge of the word and of our world is essential in our day to effective preaching, but not many young preachers begin their preaching careers with great knowledge. Does that mean they cannot be effective preachers until they have the depth of knowledge of our older preachers? I have known many young preachers who did great work for the Lord even though they were lacking in knowledge and experience. After all, young preachers have to get started somewhere. Incidentally, I am grateful to those churches that gave me opportunities to preach when I was very young. They will never know what a great encouragement they were to me in my early years in the pulpit. I hope they overlook the blunders I made along the way. Maybe no one was scarred for life because of those blunders.

Ineffective preaching often involves a deliberate perversion of the scriptures. One nationally known preacher intentionally left out part of a verse because he simply does not believe it. He said, "Repent...for the remission of sins." If a preacher has reached the conclusion that baptism is not necessary for salvation, he has an obligation to show how he arrived at the conclusion. But he is being dishonest when he quotes Acts 2:38 or any other biblical passage and deliberately leaves out a portion of the text. Could such use of the Bible be one of the reasons thousands of Americans have little or no respect for God's word? Nobody has a right to use the scriptures in such a fashion.

The same preacher quoted (or rather, misquoted) Mark's record of the Great Commission. He quoted Jesus as saying, "He who believes...shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

There is no doubt the preacher believes that, but does he have a right to remove baptism from the Lord's Great Commission? Twisting the scriptures will bring destruction on those who do it (2 Peter 3:16). How can anyone respect a preacher who attempts to make the scriptures mean what he wants them to mean?

Jim Woodroof's book, **The Church in Transition** (Searcy, AR: The Bible Book House, Inc., 1990), criticizes the use of logic in dealing with biblical issues. He affirms:

These very children who come from our homes are not interested in points of doctrine arrived at by syllogism instead of a "thus saith the Lord" (p. 16).

How utterly ridiculous to use logic to condemn the use of logic, but that is precisely what Jim does, although his logic is seriously flawed. It is absolutely essential that we use logic in our study of the scriptures and in our preaching. For example, each person must reason to the position that the scriptures apply to him these 2,000 years this side of Pentecost. I have searched the scriptures and preached them for more than fifty-six years and have never found my name in them. Do I not have to use logic to arrive at the conclusion that the word of God applies to me and to Jim and to all other modern people?

Jim says our young people are not interested in points of doctrine arrive at by syllogism. Did Jim conduct a survey to discover the interests of our young people? If that is what many of our young people believe, it is a sign that their understanding is seriously deficient. One simple illustration will have to suffice. Paul determined not to know anything but Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Whatever you read in his epistles and in his sermons in Acts of the Apostles must be categorized unto the topic, "Christ and Him Crucified," since that was all Paul was going to know. How can a man preach what he does not know? Is my reasoning valid in this simple illustration? Is it illegitimate to use our reasoning as I have just done?

The Lord gave us minds to use in reasoning about His word. Paul's plea to the Roman Christians must not be disregarded.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Two expressions in these verses demand further attention. The English word "reasonable" comes from the Greek **logikos**. You do not have to be a Greek scholar to know that our word "logical" comes from this Greek word. Dr. A. T. Robertson's book, **Word Studies in the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), says the expression, "your reasonable service," means "you rational (spiritual) service (worship)....The phrase means here 'worship rendered by the reason (or soul)'" (volume 4, p. 402). Does that sound to you as if human reason is out of order? The second expression is "the renewing of the mind." If God does not expect us to use our minds to reason about the Bible, what difference does it make whether we renew our minds? The truth which every serious Bible student ought to know is stated very simply in Philippians 2. "Let this mind (or thinking) be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). My friends, reasoning about the scriptures is not an option for Christians; it is absolutely essential and unavoidable. We must make sure we are reasoning correctly.

The apostle Peter wanted the early Christians and us to know and to obey the Lord's word. In fact, 2 Peter continually uses the word "know." Peter instructed his readers:

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil

speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby (1 Peter 2:1-2).

The word "sincere" is the Greek word **logikos**—the same word translated "reasonable" in Romans 12:1. W. E. Vine's book, **An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), says the Greek word means,

...pertaining to the reasoning faculty, reasonable, rational....The sacrifice is to be intelligent, in contrast to those offered by ritual or compulsion; the presentation is to be in accordance with the spiritual intelligence of those who are new creatures in Christ and are mindful of "the mercies of God" (p. 925).

One of Jim Woodroof's most disturbing accusations against churches of Christ is that many of them are "doctrine-exalting,"

directed at the intellect of the religious rather than a Christ-exalting movement directed at the heart of the unchurched (pp. 31-32).

Must this be an either/or proposition? Can we not exalt doctrine and Jesus at the same time? Is it possible to exalt Jesus and not exalt the doctrine He and His apostles taught? Is it significant that the two Greek words translated "doctrine"—**didaskalia** and **didache**—are used fifty-one times in the New Testament? Fourteen of those times are in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If exalting doctrine were so bad, why did Jesus say,

My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself (John 7:16-17)?

Paul uses some form of the word "doctrine" twenty-five times. Sometimes he uses the word of the doctrines of

men and even of demon, but that in no way detracts from true or sound doctrine. Paul admonished Timothy:

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:13, 16).

Would Jim Woodroof accuse Paul of exalting doctrine and not exalting Christ? The preaching of Bible doctrine must be directed both to alien sinners and to Christians. We cannot neglect either and still preach the whole counsel of God. How tragic that modern preachers and theologians downplay what Christ and His disciples exalted!

Jim Woodroof says that gospel preachers have majored in "effect material" and not in "cause material." If that language is new to you—as it was to me when I first read Jim's book—I shall explain what he had in mind. "Effect material" refers to Acts, the epistles and Revelation. He says gospel preachers have dwelled on these sections of the New Testament to the neglect of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There are some very serious problems with a number of clippings from newspapers and magazines describing preaching in various user-friendly churches. One church advertised: "There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages." Another church said, "You won't hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners. The goal is to make people welcome, not drive them away." Another church boasted: "As with all preachers, "this preacher's answer is God—but he slips him in at the end, even then he doesn't get too heavy. No ranting, no raving. No fire, no brimstone. He doesn't even use the H-word" (p. 47).

An entire book could be written to counteract such unbiblical thinking, but I shall dwell on just one idea from these excerpts. How can men who claim to be preachers deliberately shun preaching on hell? I am aware that

nationally known and even internationally known religious leaders have doubts about the existence of hell, but Jesus knew of its existence and warned men about going there. Will you please listen to what the Son of God—not some liberal theologian—had to say about hell? In His powerful Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire...And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell (Matt. 5:21-22, 29-30).

The Greek word **gehenna** (translated “hell”) appears twelve times in the New Testament. Eleven of those uses are found in the very words of Jesus Christ. Do you not believe that Jesus knows more about hell than any modern theologian, regardless of his prominence within his denomination? The preacher who does not use the H-word is a hireling—not a faithful gospel preacher. He is tickling the ears of his hearers—not pricking their hearts.

Dr. MacArthur furnishes this information from **The Wall Street Journal**. One church described its attempts to perk up attendance at Sunday evening services. The church,

...staged a wrestling match, featuring church employees. To train for the event, 10 game employees got lessons from Tugboat Taylor, a

former professional wrestler, in pulling hair, kicking shins and tossing bodies around without doing real harm....The wrestling matches took place in the Sunday evening service of one of America's five largest churches (p. 69).

All I ask you to do is to imagine our Lord's instigating such stunts. He probably could have drawn a large crowd by having the apostles to stage a wrestling match. But neither Jesus nor His apostles would stoop to such cheap tricks. And do you honestly think they would have employed the so-called "power team" to attract people to church services? Incidentally, none of this matters if we are attempting to please men—not God. Dr. MacArthur comments:

All ministry in the early church revolved around the gospel. No one would have suggested a debate about secular politics, a weight-loss program, a comedy act, a stage show, or a class on time management for businessmen as a means to boost church attendance (p. 122).

It is a great tragedy that many preachers among churches of Christ are as confused about preaching as some denominational preachers. Jim Woodroof's book, **The Church in Transition** (Searcy, AR: The Bible House, Inc., 1990), is a case in point. Jim asserts that young people among churches of Christ are "not interested in keeping alive the issues that have divided us" (p. 16). And what, dear friends, does that have to do with the worship of the Lord and the preaching of His word? Is the church of the New Testament governed and regulated by what young people—or older ones, for that matter—find interesting? What if young people are not interested in the truth of the gospel, are we to change the saving message to meet with their wishes and desires? Rehoboam learned how foolish that approach was (2 Chron. 10:6-15). Neither young people nor older people have the authority to change the work and worship of the church. The church belongs to the Lord and must follow

the Lord's commands, regardless of the attitudes of modern people—whether young or old.

Through the years, some churches of Christ have been plagued by members who wanted to introduce mechanical instruments of music into the worship of the church. Are our young people no longer interested in doing Bible things in Bible ways and calling Bible things by Bible names? If they have no interest in following the Lord's way, are we to change the work and worship of the church to please such people? In the late 1930's and early 1940's, some churches of Christ were troubled by men who preached premillennialism. In fact, some of those preachers divided churches over that topic. Are young people no longer concerned about this very divisive and utterly unscriptural concept? I believe Jim is wrong in his observation about young people, but if he is right, that is truly a sad commentary on our young people. Does Jim's comment give us some insight into why some churches of Christ are leaning in a leftward direction?

When Paul delivered his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, did he give any indication that his preaching had in some way been influenced by what the young people at Ephesus found interesting or non-interesting? He said to those elders:

I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house...Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 26-27).

"But we live in such a different age. Should we not alter the message to fit our age?" Where in the Bible does anyone find authority for changing what God has revealed about the worship and work of the church? We are to preach and practice only that which is authorized by the scriptures. We

cannot add to nor take from nor substitute for what God had revealed. Korah, Dathan and Abiram ought to teach us that lesson. So ought Nadab and Abihu. When will men ever learn to do God's work in God's way?

Chapter 28

Preaching The Gospel And Leaving Others Alone

My very first radio sermon was on WTKM at Mayfield, Kentucky, on October 6, 1947. Over the next few years I preached eighty-three more sermons on that station. During the time I was speaking on WTKM, I received a letter from a woman who asked, "Why do you not preach the gospel and leave other people alone?" I did not keep the letter and do not remember what I had said that provoked the letter. It was the first critical letter I had ever received from a radio listener. I do not know how I responded to it. But I hope my response showed that I had taken the criticism seriously. Through the years I have thought about the question many times. I have preached a number of sermons on that question. Can we preach the gospel and leave others alone? If we can, we could do what the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and the apostles could not do, or at least, did not do.

There were many prophets during the days when Jeremiah and Ezekiel were speaking for God to the Jewish people. Some of those prophets were great men of God, but some were false prophets. Could Jeremiah and Ezekiel act as if the false prophets were not doing great harm to the nation of Israel? Could they just preach the positive truth and leave others alone? Jeremiah obeyed the voice of God in standing against the false prophets. I have time to give you just one example. Following are the Lord's words:

And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from

his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land (Jer. 23:13-15).

Ezekiel also condemned the false prophets in Israel.

Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts...And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God...the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 13:3-4, 9, 16).

The preaching of Jeremiah and of Ezekiel was also done by a host of other Old Testament prophets, such as, Isaiah, Amos, Malachi and Elijah. All of the prophets were under divine directive to speak the truth that God gave them. They could not turn to the right hand or to the left. They could not just preach the truth and leave others alone.

John the Baptist was one of most remarkable men who ever lived. He exhibited great courage in preaching to the Jews and in getting the soil prepared for the coming of the Messiah. John knew of king Herod's unscriptural marriage to his brother Philip's wife. There were hundreds of topics John could have discussed with Herod. But he chose to condemn Herod's immoral behavior. John said very plainly to Herod: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:18). But was it any of John's business

that Herod had taken his brother's wife? Could he not have just told Herod about the coming of the Messiah? Should he not have preached the truth and left Herod alone? John's preaching cost him his life, but he had no choice.

The words of Jesus in the four gospel accounts show us why faithful preachers cannot preach the gospel and leave others alone. John 8 records an intense confrontation between Jesus and some Jewish leaders. The Pharisees claimed to be the sons of Abraham. They were from a physical viewpoint, but they were not Abraham's spiritual children. Jesus affirmed,

If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father... (John 8:39-41).

The Jews protested that they were not born of fornication. They had only one father, God Almighty. Now please listen carefully if you think we should preach the truth and leave others alone.

If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:42-44).

Did Jesus use the right approach in dealing with the Pharisees? Surely, no person claiming to be a Christian would accuse Him of not knowing what He was doing. If modern preachers imitate the Lord Jesus Christ, should they be criticized for doing it? Maybe the critics ought to revise their attitude toward gospel preaching.

On their first missionary tour, Paul and Barnabas traveled to the city of Paphos. While at Paphos, they encountered a sorcerer, a certain Jew, whose name was Barjesus: who was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so was his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul (who is called Paul) filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on him, and said,

O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord (Acts 13:10)?

Then the Lord struck the sorcerer blind (Acts 13:11).

Please take notice of the fact that the false prophet was a Jew. Was it appropriate for one Jew to attack the actions of another Jew? Could not Paul have been a little less abrasive in dealing with a fellow Jew? You can answer these questions in the affirmative only if you believe we are not our brother's keeper. If we are responsible to some extent for the welfare of others, then Paul could not allow the false prophet to turn a sincere seeker away from salvation. If Paul had embraced the position that we are to preach the gospel and leave others alone, he could have been guilty of allowing a man to turn from the Savior to Satan. Paul could not do that. He later wrote to the Corinthians:

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16)!

Preaching the gospel always included correcting the error that prevented men's believing and obeying the Lord.

During the first century of the church's existence, one

of the major sources of irritation and division among the churches was the temptation to combine certain elements of the law of Moses with the gospel of Jesus Christ, a practice that still prevails in some religious groups. The people guilty of this serious error are usually called "judaizers." They were Jews who had obeyed the gospel but were not willing to give up all the law. Their reluctance to turn completely away from the Mosaic law and commit wholly to Jesus Christ may have had a cultural component. They just did not want to turn their backs on the Jewish law, even though the Old Testament prophets had predicted the coming of the gospel age (Jer. 31:31-34). So they held the law of Moses in one hand and the gospel of Christ in the other hand. That way, in their view, they could enjoy the best of both laws. Since the people promoting such error were probably sincere—and since both the law of Moses and the gospel came from God—why could not Paul just preach the gospel and leave the judaizers alone? Would that have been such a serious blunder for Paul and for other early gospel preachers? If you want to know God's answers to these questions, please listen to a few verses from the Galatian letter.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither

received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-12).

It ought to be obvious, even to a casual reader, that false doctrine threatened the faithfulness of the churches of Galatia. We know they were children of God because of Paul's statement of that fact.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

But they were in danger of rejecting the gospel of Christ and being lost eternally. They had already turned from the gospel of Christ to another gospel, which was not really another gospel. They had forsaken the saving gospel for a gospel that would not save. Could Paul be faithful to his calling as a gospel preacher and fail to warn of the dangers the Galatian Christians were facing? They would have been condemned if they did not repent of their error. Paul would have been condemned had he not told them of their error. Does that sound like preaching the gospel and leaving others alone?

The judaizers among the Galatian churches applied pressure to Paul to get him to circumcise Titus, a young Greek preacher. That seems such a small concession to the judaizers. Surely Paul would not object to that since he says in the Galatian letter that neither "...neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). Please listen to Paul's answer. He refused to allow Titus to be circumcised. He then says,

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:3-5).

If a preacher knows that certain doctrines are enslaving, can he afford not to refute them, even if he is accused of not leaving others alone? Can you not see how empty and meaningless is the question, "Why do you not preach the gospel and leave others alone?" Is that what Paul did in his letter to the churches of Galatia? Do preachers err when they follow the example of the inspired apostle Paul?

But since the Mosaic law came from God Almighty, it cannot be serious error to hang on to part of that law, can it? If you have any doubt whatsoever, the following words should remove that doubt forever.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1-4).

Two words in this passage need further elaboration. The word "bondage" comes from the Greek *douleias* and means slavery. If the Galatian Christians embraced any part of the law of Moses as a religious duty, they were returning to the slavery of the law. If they required the keeping of any of the law of Moses—even circumcision—they had fallen from grace. The King James Version reads, "Christ has become of no effect unto you." The American Revised Version says: "You are severed from Christ." The last clause in verse four affirms: "You are fallen from grace." The expression means, "You have fallen out of grace." Dr. A. T. Robertson says concerning that verse:

'You left the sphere of grace in Christ and took your stand in the sphere of law,' as your hope of salvation. Paul does not mince words and carries the logic to the end of the course. He is

not, of course, speaking of occasional sins, but he had in mind a far more serious matter, that of substituting law for Christ as the agent of salvation (**Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, volume 4, p. 309).

If a person has ever read these and similar words from Galatians, he would never be guilty of asking, "Why do you not preach the gospel and leave others alone?" Preaching the gospel demands that we expose soul-condemning error.

Just suppose a church denies the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Are gospel preachers to act as if that theological position is of no consequence? That is not the way denominational scholars have reacted to false doctrine. In 1930, Dr. J. Gresham Machen wrote a blistering attack against modernistic theologians like Harry Emerson Fosdick who opposed the Bible's teaching on the virgin birth of Christ. Other scholars, such as James Orr, Robert Glenn Gromacki and Howard Hanke have joined Dr. Machen in refuting the grievous errors of liberals and modernists. Those scholars did not hesitate to call the names of the liberal theologians and vigorously refute their false teachings. Is that the way preachers should behave? Are we being unchristian when we call names and refute false doctrine? If we are, we must get a new Bible since the one we have requires us to oppose false teachers and false doctrine.

Almost daily I either hear or read about the so-called "sinner's prayer." Preachers of many religious groups encourage their members to ignore what the book of Acts teaches about salvation. They tell alien sinners to pray somewhat as follows: "Lord, I know I am a sinner. I know you sent Jesus to die for my sins. I accept him as my Savior. Thank you for saving me." Why do faithful gospel preachers oppose that kind of teaching? The answer is obvious: It does not come from the word of God. No unbeliever was

ever told to pray for forgiveness. All who would come to God for the forgiveness of sins must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, repent of their alien sins, confess the name of Jesus before men and be baptized for the remission of sins. A careful reading of the conversions on Pentecost, in Samaria, at Corinth and in all other places will confirm what I have outlined for you. Peter commanded the penitent believers in Jerusalem:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

Would you not rather preach what the apostles did than to imitate what some human organization has authorized? You know the sinner's prayer cannot be found in the scriptures. So will you please give it up and preach the gospel plan of salvation? Are we not obligated to speak as the oracles of God?

But if a church wants to promote the sinner's prayer, why should that be of any concern to me or to other gospel preachers? Why not just preach the gospel and leave others alone? God's plan for saving the world is the only plan that has God's approval. That was Paul's reason for writing:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8).

I do not want anyone—including those who promote the sinner's prayer—to be lost. So I have a sacred obligation to show the error of that teaching and all other false doctrines. How can I enjoy God's approval if I do not point the errors that lead to condemnation?

But do not preachers and theologians have the right to preach and practice whatever they choose? They have the political and moral right to do so, but do they have a

scriptural right? I have no intention of using any kind of pressure or force—except the force of truth—to stop false teachers. But God being my helper, I intend to preach the truth and expose error so long as the Lord allows me to live and to preach. Do you remember these words from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak (2 Cor. 4:13).

Faith in God and in His word demands that we speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Only the truth can make us free (John 8:32).

Our conclusion from a biblical viewpoint cannot be disputed. No one who wants to help others come to the knowledge of the truth and live by that knowledge can be so blind as to ask, "Why do you not preach the gospel and leave others alone?" It simply is not possible to do that. If Jesus and His apostles could not preach the gospel and leave others along, how do we think we can? They are our models for preaching. So, dear friends, will you preach the gospel without fear or favor?

Chapter 29

"Johnny-One-Note" Preachers

Have you ever meditated on the size of the Bible—a veritable library with sixty-six books? In the words of one anonymous writer: The Bible,

...contains...the mind of God, the state of man, the doom of sinners. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true and its decisions immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword and the Christian's charter. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our good its design and the glory of God its end. It should fill our memories, rule our hearts and guide our feet. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory and a river of pleasure. It is given in life, will be open at the judgment and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labor and condemns all who trifle with its holy contents (George DeHoff, **Why We Believe The Bible**, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1944, p. 107).

With such an enormous variety of topics, people, nations, situations and problems in the Bible, can you explain why some preachers dwell on one topic and seem never to stray from it? Is it because they are too lazy to study to learn all God has to say on every subject—not just the subjects of special interest to the preacher? Some charismatic preachers even boast of not studying. They pretend to speak

only as the Spirit of God moves them. I remember hearing of a preacher who claimed to be supernaturally guided in his preaching. A gospel preacher handed him a Bible that was open at Romans 16. He asked the charismatic preacher to read the names of men and women listed in that chapter. He could not pronounce the names. Please understand that I am not making fun of the preacher, but should not a preacher who claims to have supernatural guidance be able to read the Bible intelligently? Charles Taze Russell, a prominent leader in one religious cult, boasted of his knowledge of the Greek language. In a court of law he was given a Greek New Testament and asked to read it. He could not read one word. He was then asked to read the Greek alphabet. He could not do that either. A Spirit-guided preacher should be able to read the Spirit-provided word.

Occasionally, I listen to a radio preacher on Sunday mornings. He devotes the major portion of his preaching to one theme: the new birth. There are at least two problems with that kind of preaching. He neglects dozens and dozens of subjects that are vital to Christian living. For example, he never discusses the political corruption that is undermining our nation's moral values. He almost never talks about the family, about the sexual promiscuity that is destroying millions of our young people, about rampant racism both in churches and in the nation as a whole or about bioethical issues, such as, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, genetic engineering, cloning and such like. Does he not read books and magazines or watch television to know the problems our nation faces? Or does he have any interest in any of that?

The other problem with that preacher's discussion of the new birth is that he has perverted what the scriptures teach on that topic. He wants his hearers to believe that all they have to do to enjoy the new birth is to pray the sinner's prayer. He continually emphasizes the necessity of the new birth—which is absolutely essential to our becoming children of God—but he neglects to explain how the new birth takes

and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost
(Acts 2:38).

Does that sound to you as if we have nothing to do to become Christians?

The Jewish council provided the apostle Paul—a Christian convert from Judaism—an opportunity to defend his actions in becoming a Christian. Paul told of his meeting the Lord on the Damascus road. When Paul learned that it was Jesus whom he had met, he asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” Jesus Christ answered,

Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do (Acts 22:8-10).

And what had the Lord appointed for Paul to do? Among other things, he had to be baptized. Ananias said to Paul,

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).

That is the message I have to preach to be faithful to God. It is also the message all must obey to have their sins remitted and be added to the church of the living God. If you have not obeyed the gospel, will you please do it this very day?

He reasoned in the Jewish "synagogue every sabbath and persuaded both the Jews and Greeks." His message at Corinth was the same he had preached in Thessalonica. He "testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." Luke does not give us an outline of what Paul preached at Corinth, but we know what the results of his preaching were. He angered many of the Jews. They even made an insurrection against Paul and his companions. But,

Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

Is it possible to preach the truth of the gospel and not teach about faith in Christ and obedience to His will? If you have read the book of Acts without Calvinistic glasses on, you know what the answer to my question is. In every case of conversion, there must be faith in God and in His Son Jesus Christ.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6).

It ought to be obvious from reading the book of Acts and the epistles that faith alone cannot please God. If alien sinners are saved by faith alone, why does every book in the New Testament—except 2 John—use some form of the word "do?" Two examples from Acts of the Apostles should demonstrate how absolutely essential doing the will of God is. The believing Jews on Pentecost asked the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)? If Peter had been a Calvinist, he would have responded, "There is nothing you can do. Jesus Christ has already done it all." Instead, Peter by divine inspiration answered,

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,

in passing that Luther had some difficulties with James, Jude, Hebrews and Revelation. But Luther believed the word of God was identified with the Bible. He believed the teaching of the Bible was inerrant.

There is much more in Dr. Godsey's book that demands examination and refutation, but for the remainder of our time, let us return briefly to our text. Paul expressed gratitude to God that the Thessalonians had received his message as the word of God—not the word of men. What did Paul preach at Thessalonica? We do not know all he preached, but we do have some information about his preaching. Luke tells us that he went into the Jewish synagogue on three separate sabbaths and reasoned out of the scriptures. He explained to the Jews and gave evidence that Christ had to suffer and be raised again from the dead. He concluded his speech by saying, "...this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:2-3).

When we preach the word of God—as Paul did everywhere he went—we must preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). We must continually preach what the scriptures teach about Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter told a Jewish audience in Jerusalem: Christ,

...is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:11-12).

We must teach—because our Savior taught—that He is "the way, the truth, and the life"—that no man comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). We must also teach that all spiritual blessings are in the church of the living God. Those blessings include election, adoption, forgiveness, redemption, inheritance, reconciliation and salvation.

What did Paul teach about the plan of salvation? I have time to give you just one example. On one of his missionary journeys, he visited the wicked city of Corinth.

Did Paul believe he was providing the Galatians with some final answers when he wrote:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Are we children of God by faith in Christ Jesus? Must we be baptized to put on Christ? Are we all of equal value in Christ? If these are not final answers, how can we oppose unbelief, failure to obey the Lord and discrimination? Dr. Godsey may not accept these verses as final answers, but Paul did and all who wear the name of Christ must do so.

Dr. Godsey argues: "The simple identification of the Word of God with the Bible is a grave mistake" (p. 50). I wonder why neither Jesus nor Paul ever took such an unreasonable and indefensible position. I also wonder why the great scholars through the centuries until the development modern theological agnosticism had not discovered that identifying the word of God with the Bible was a grave mistake. Although I vigorously disagree with some of the teachings of Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Wesley, all of these men accepted the Bible and the Bible only as the word of God. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, a prominent Luther scholar, edited the book, **God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture** (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974). In this outstanding volume, there are articles by some of the leading evangelical scholars in the world: John M. Frame, John Gerstner, James I. Packer and R. C. Sproul. These distinguished scholars show that the reformers almost without exception accepted the Bible as God's written revelation. It does need to be mentioned

ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

And what did Paul mean when he wrote:

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep (1 Thess. 4:15).

In 1996, Dr. R. Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, wrote one of the most disturbing and most unscholarly books I have read in my long preaching life. His book has the title, **When We Talk About God...Let's Be Honest** (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc.). The book is basically a diatribe against all conservative religious views. It is significant, in my judgment, that his Baptist brethren vigorously repudiated his book and refused to carry it in their bookstores. There is much in Dr. Godsey's book I would like to discuss with you, such as, his explicit denial that Jesus is God (p. 128), his contention that each of us is God incarnate (p. 131), his condemnation of the Bible's teaching that Jesus is our only Savior (p. 133) and his belief in universal redemption (p. 202). But for our lesson today, I shall concentrate on what he says about the inspiration of the Bible.

In his chapter on "Reliable Sources," Dr. Godsey denies that anyone has "final answers" (p. 47). Does it bother you when the president of a denominational school or a professor in one of the schools elevates his ignorance about the teaching of God's book? Did Jesus ever leave the impression that no one had "final answers?" He quoted scripture to settle disputes with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He castigated His enemies by asking, "Have you not read?" He outlined His mission by appealing to the Old Testament (Luke 4:17-19). If the scriptures were not final answers for Jesus Christ, why did he appeal to them as if they were?

account of creation. The book of Luke gives strong evidence that Jesus endorsed the entire Old Testament. Please listen to what our Lord said to His apostles:

These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me (Luke 24:44).

Those three expressions—the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms—cover the entire Old Testament—from Genesis one to Malachi four. Christ did not question the inspiration or the integrity of one Old Testament book—not even one. He knew they all came from the very mind of God. He agreed totally with the words of Peter: "...holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

Dr. Furnish asserts that it "is important to recognize that Paul was not conscious of contributing to scripture" (p. 15). Has Dr. Furnish been able to enter into the very mind of the apostle Paul? How did he learn that Paul "was not conscious of contributing to scripture?" He certainly did not learn it from reading Paul's epistles. I challenge you to listen to three passages from Paul's letters and then on the basis of these passages decide whether Paul was "conscious of contributing to scripture." Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

Our text for today can hardly be misunderstood, unless one wishes to misunderstand.

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which

What was the Lord's view of scripture? Since He is the Son of God, surely He knew if the Bible is the written deposit of God's truth. Had you ever noticed that not one time did Jesus Christ ever deny the truth of any scripture in the Old Testament? He never said, "I know Moses wrote about divine creation, about a universal flood and about the fall of man, but these are mere traditions. He did not have access to reliable records; so although he was honest, he was simply mistaken." He criticized the Pharisees for making the commandments of God of no effect by their traditions (Matt. 15:6). He accused the Sadducees of erring because they did not know the scriptures nor the power of God (Matt. 22:29). But our Lord never denied the truth of God's book—never. On one occasion, He instructed His disciples:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe,
that observe and do; but do not ye after their
works: for they say, and do not (Matt. 23:2-3).

Would our Lord have made that comment had the scribes and Pharisees been perverting the word of God?

The simple truth is: Jesus specifically endorsed some of the most controversial stories in the Old Testament. For example, so-called "higher critics" have questioned the inspiration of Deuteronomy. Yet when Jesus Christ faced the devil's temptations, He used three Old Testament passages to respond to the temptations. All three of those passages came from the book of Deuteronomy. When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about marriage, divorce and remarriage, He asked them,

Have ye not read, that he which made them at
the beginning made them male and female, And
said, For this cause shall a man leave father and
mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they
twain shall be one flesh (Matt. 19:4-5).

These verses confirm that Jesus fully accepted the Genesis

Furnish learn that Peter was complaining about Paul's letters being hard to understand? There is nothing in the context that gives that impression. Peter does not seem to be complaining. He calls Paul "our beloved brother" and says he was writing according to the wisdom given to him (2 Peter 3:16). How can professors or preachers be honest when they twist the scriptures as Dr. Furnish does?

Please listen to this excerpt from Dr. Furnish's book.

Some people believe, or at least read the Bible as though they believed, that scripture is the written deposit of God's truth, mediated through inspired writers in centuries past, but valid in both general and specific ways for all times and all places. This may be called the sacred-cow view of the Bible (p. 14).

Is the Bible the written deposit of God's truth? Did the Bible writers believe they were delivering the very word of Almighty God? You know they did. Have you ever noticed how many of the Old Testament prophets begin their messages by saying, "The word of the Lord came unto me," or "Thus says the Lord"? God even promised He would put His words in the mouths of the prophets (Deut. 18:18). Isaiah challenged the Israelites: "Hear the word of the Lord" (Isa. 1:10). The prophet Jeremiah was no less emphatic about the origin of his message.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place (Jer. 7:1-3).

Are you willing to call these men liars or deceivers or scoundrels? They were all of these if they were not speaking the word of the Lord. An honest man does not claim to speak for God when he knows he is not speaking for God.

If salvation were by faith alone, why does Paul require obedience? The word of God absolutely demands obedience—both to become and to remain Christians. The apostle John emphasized the same truth.

If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him (1 John 2:29).

If we fail to do righteousness, are we still born of Him?

The number of books denying the inspiration of the scriptures has multiplied by the dozens in the past one hundred years. We expect such denials from atheists, agnostics, secular humanists and other unbelievers. But it is distressing when prominent religious leaders, including some who claim to be evangelicals, attack the Bible's trustworthiness. I could give you dozens and dozens of examples, but I shall concentrate on two in our study today—one a professor of ethics at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and the other the president of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia.

In 1979 Dr. Victor Paul Furnish of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University wrote a little book on **The Moral Teaching of Paul** (Nashville: Abingdon). It is literally filled with vicious attacks against the Bible. The examples I shall give you are just a few of the many in the book. Dr. Furnish asserted:

The second-century author of II Peter...complains of the Pauline letters that 'there are some things hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction' (p. 11).

There are two inexcusable blunders in this one sentence. The author of 2 Peter was not written by a second-century author. If it were, we have a false document since the author of the epistle claims to be the apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:1). Do we have a fraudulent letter in the word of God? If we do have a spurious letter, why not cut it out of the Bible with a penknife, like Jehoikim did (Jer. 36:23)? And how did Dr.

one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

The same apostle told the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

James adds:

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21).

The word "able" in Acts 20:32 and in James 1:21 is the same word translated "power" in Romans 1:16.

Can you now understand from these readings why Paul ceased not to give thanks that the Thessalonians had received the word of God so enthusiastically? He knew there was no other way for them to be saved from their alien sins and be added to the Lord's church. The word and the word alone tells us what God demands that we do to become Christians. Paul does not mention in 1 Thessalonians what people must do to become Christians, but he does in his second letter to the Thessalonians. Please listen carefully to these words:

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

to preach the gospel—not only in their home province—but in other places as well (1 Thess. 1:6-8). Paul's preaching at Thessalonica had not been of deceit or of uncleanness or of guile. At no time did he use flattering words to gain their approval. He was not mean-spirited, but was gentle among them as a nurse cherishes her children. Not only had he preached without compromise; he behaved himself holily, justly and blamelessly among them. He wanted the Thessalonians to walk worthy of God who had called them into His kingdom and glory. But what was Paul's message to the Thessalonians? Please listen carefully to his own words.

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

The Thessalonians were deeply grateful to God for sending the soul-saving word to them. Paul also thanked God without ceasing for the vigorous reception of the word that he preached to the Thessalonians. He tells us why he was so thankful. "Because, when you received the word of God, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God." Was the message Paul preached at Thessalonica truly the word of God or was that just Paul's opinion? If you listen to many modernistic theologians, you may not believe the Bible is the word of God. Most liberals believe the Bible has much good advice for modern men, but they do not accept it as the inerrant word of God. Before I show how some liberals disregard and disdain the Bible, let us examine briefly what the word of God does for those who hear it.

Paul's great letter to the Romans contrasts the power of the gospel to the weakness of the law of Moses. The theme of Romans is expressed in these familiar words:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every

the head of John the Baptist? Had he been trying to build up her self-esteem? Hundreds of thousands of the early Christians were murdered because they were unwilling to compromise the gospel message. Polycarp, and elder of the Lord's church in ancient Smyrna, sacrificed his life for the cause of Christ. The Roman soldiers burned him at the stake because he would not confess Caesar as lord.

The preacher's message is of vital importance. If he preaches error, he will lead his hearers to eternal damnation. Jesus warned His hearers:

Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:13-14).

If the preacher's message is not of eternal significance, why did Jesus tell some Jews who believed on Him: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? Paul admonished the young preacher Timothy:

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:16).

May we reason as follows: If Timothy did not take heed to the doctrine, he would not have been able to save himself and his hearers? All of us preachers must vow before our Father in heaven that we shall preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The apostle Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians' work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:3). He reminded them that his gospel had not come to them in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance (1 Thess. 1:5). The Thessalonians had become imitators of Paul and of the Lord. They became examples unto people in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. They made great effort

Chapter 39

Paul's Message To The Thessalonians

Do you think there was ever a preacher in the whole world that someone did not criticize—either to his face or behind his back—for what he preached and the way he preached it? Noah preached to his generation about an impending flood that would destroy the earth's inhabitants—unless they repented and turned to God for forgiveness. The people of Noah's day must have thought he had lost his mind. No one, except Noah's immediate family, paid any attention to his preaching. The great prophets of the Old Testament kept warning the Israelites that they would be conquered and carried into Babylon—if they did not repent. A priest by the name of Amaziah told Amos that the land was not able to bear his words. Amos had predicted that king Jereboam would die by the sword and Israel would be carried into captivity. "O you seer," Amaziah said to Amos,

...go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court (Amos 7:10-13).

Eventually the Israelites threw the prophet Jeremiah into a cistern because he would not compromise the message God had given him.

If Jesus Christ had preached like Dr. Robert Schuller, the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and similar positive thinkers, would the Jews have so bitterly opposed him? Would he have been crucified for telling people to feel good about themselves? Can you understand why the Jews wanted to kill our Lord when He said to them, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell" (Matt. 23:33)? And why did Herod's wife demand

I cannot overemphasize the importance of the preacher's manner of life. When the preacher commits the grievous sin of adultery, he can repent and be forgiven like king David. But the chance of his ever becoming as influential as he once was is very slim.

A few years ago, it was my privilege and honor to speak to about fifty young men at a forum called "Polishing the Pulpit." One of my topics during that meeting was "The Preacher and His Wife." I cautioned those young men about being too friendly with women other than their wives. The very next morning after my lectures, a young man visited me at the motel where I was staying. He told me that the preacher of his congregation had been fired the night before because he was engaged in an adulterous relationship with a member of that church.

Paul urged his young preacher friend, Timothy, to treat the younger women as sisters, with all purity (1 Tim. 5:2). Also in that very same chapter, Paul commanded Timothy: "Keep yourself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22).

ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

Later in the same chapter, he implores the Ephesians "not to walk as the other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds" (Eph. 4:17).

What a great disappointment it would have been to Paul if the Thessalonians whom he had taught and nurtured had gone back into the world! If they had returned to the weak and beggarly elements of the world, he would have been tempted to think his labor had been in vain. He expressed that thought in the following verse:

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain (1 Thess. 3:5).

If the Thessalonians had actually become unfaithful—a real possibility—would it in anyway have affected their eternal salvation? If not, why was Paul so concerned about their spiritual condition?

Paul taught that God had called the Thessalonians unto His kingdom and glory. The verb "called" is not past tense as the King James Version indicates, but present tense. Present tense in the Greek involves continuous action. God continually calls men and women into His kingdom and glory. In this context Paul does not tell how God calls the Thessalonians and others into His kingdom and glory, but his second letter to the Thessalonians does.

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

obligation to comfort those who are discouraged, those who mourn and those who are hurting, either physically or emotionally. After all, our God is the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3).

Gospel preachers also have the obligation to "charge" their listeners. The word "charge" comes from the same Greek word translated "testify" or "witness." Dr. Hugo McCord renders the Greek "testify." Some versions translate the Greek "implore" or "plead." The three participles I have discussed with you—exhorting, comforting and charging or imploring—do not exhaust the work of the preacher, but they do help us to understand his work. Every preacher who would honor his Lord and edify the church where he preaches must do all of these.

In an earlier section of 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul affirmed that he was gentle among the Thessalonians as a nurse cherishes her children (1 Thess. 2:7). The New American Standard Bible renders that verse: "We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he had exhorted and comforted and charged everyone of them as a father does his children. Both of these verses—seven and eleven—show the great love Paul had for the Thessalonians. He had nurtured and cherished them like a mother and had implored and entreated them like a father.

Paul gives one reason for his constant care for the Thessalonians and for all the churches where he labored:

That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12).

Paul often uses the word "walk" as a synonym of behavior or conduct. Vine says the word "walk" signifies "the whole round of the activities of the individual life, whether of the unregenerate or of the believer." Paul urged the Ephesians:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith

murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain (Phil. 2:12-16).

What a tremendous difference it would make in our world if all Christians would let their lights shine in our world—if they would hold forth the word of life!

Paul's godly life was a powerful influence on the Thessalonian Christians. But he did more than live holily, justly and blamelessly. He wrote,

As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children (1 Thess. 2:11).

Paul used three words to describe his preaching: exhorting, comforting and charging. These three participles provide considerable insight into the work of a preacher. He has the sacred responsibility to exhort his hearers. That word means to urge, to encourage, to entreat and to admonish. It is sometimes translated "comfort." One form of the word is translated "Comforter" in reference to the Holy Spirit (John 16:7) and "advocate" in reference to Christ (1 John 2:1).

The word "comfort" primarily means speaking closely to another person; hence providing consolation, comfort with tenderness (Vine, p. 199). The word is used of the Jews at the home of Mary and Martha after their brother Lazarus died.

And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother (John 11:19).

Paul exhorted the Thessalonians: "Comfort the feeble-minded" (1 Thess. 5:14). The New American Standard Bible renders the same verse: "Encourage the fainthearted." Every preacher, and to some extent, every Christian has the

"unblameably" is a translation of the Greek *amemptos* and means blameless. In using these three words of his behavior—holily, justly and unblameably—Paul was not pretending to be without sin. After all, it was Paul who wrote: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). He knew his weaknesses, but worked diligently and trusted in God so that he would not give in to temptation to sin.

Is there any doubt in your mind that Paul's righteous conduct was a major factor in his success in converting the lost and in establishing churches? There will almost certainly be thousands—perhaps even hundreds of thousands—in heaven because of Paul's holy life and his dedication to the cause of Christ. Is that not the import of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount?

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16).

Do these very familiar words apply to preachers only? Are the leaders in the church the only ones who are supposed to be devout, righteous and blameless? Paul was not addressing the elders and deacons only when he wrote to the Philippians as follows:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without

with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men (2 Cor. 8:18-21).

As you can understand from this brief reading, it is not enough to be honest in the sight of God. We must also be honest in the sight of men, especially when we are handling other people's money.

Paul told the Thessalonians,

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe (1 Thess. 2:10).

You know Paul is not stretching the truth. If Paul had been sexually promiscuous or had been dishonest with money or had used filthy language, his enemies at Thessalonica would have found evidence he was not being honest with his hearers. They would not have let him get by with his hypocrisy. They would have had reason to say to Paul what he told the Romans:

...thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery... (Rom. 2:21-22).

Paul used three adverbs to describe his conduct and that of his companions among the Christians at Thessalonica: holily, justly and unblameably. The word "holily" comes from the Greek word *hosios* and is translated in the New American Standard Bible "devoutly." The New Revised Standard Version uses the word "pure" to translate the Greek. Vine says the word "signifies religiously right, holy, as opposed to what is unrighteous or polluted" (p. 557). The word "justly" comes from the Greek *dikaios* and is rendered "righteously" (Titus 2:12). The term,

what these two Pentecostal preachers did. And may I say in all sincerity, they are not representative of Pentecostal preachers?

In addition to the Jim Bakker's sexual escapades, the federal government found many irregularities in his financial empire. The government indicted him for selling partnerships in various resorts in North Carolina when all of the resorts were already sold out. The federal government would not have brought charges against Jim Bakker for sexual behavior. Sexual immorality lies outside the government's jurisdiction, unless it has connections with other serious crimes, as in the case of Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton was not impeached for his sexual involvement with Monica Lewinsky. He was tried—that is what impeachment means—because he had deliberately lied to a grand jury and to the FBI. He was guilty of perjury and of suborning witnesses.

The apostle Paul had not engaged in sexual immorality. He had not misapplied the money churches had sent to him. Apparently he was sometimes accused of preaching for money, but anyone who knows the life of Paul understands how utterly ridiculous those charges were. There were many times when churches did not give any financial support to Paul, even though God had ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). No one could accuse Paul of misappropriating the money he received. And when he had raised money from the churches in Asia Minor and in Europe to aid the poor saints in Jerusalem, he made sure there was no way anyone could accuse him of misusing the money. Please listen to what Paul wrote about the money that was to be sent to Jerusalem. Paul had more than one person to accompany him as he delivered the money so nobody would think the men who took the money had mishandled it.

And we have sent with him (that is, with Titus) the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel

secular job so he could preach the gospel of God to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians could have no doubt of Paul's love for God and for them.

Not only had Paul worked night and day so that he could preach to the Thessalonians; he also conducted his life in such a way as to point men and women to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He reminded the Thessalonians:

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:10-12).

Will you join with me today in examining the topic, "The Preacher's Manner Of Life?"

If the preacher misbehaves, does that hurt the church more than if other members misbehave? The answer is a very definite YES. The reasons for that answer are very simple. The church and the preacher have placed the preacher in a very prominent position. He is no more important than any other Christian, but he is far more visible than other church members. Many people of the world—including many devout persons—see the preacher as the main representative of the church. That is not a biblical concept, but millions of people hold that view. When the preacher engages in sleazy activities, like Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker, many Americans extrapolate those preachers' conduct to reflect on all who preach and those who claim to be Christians. Many religious organizations suffered financially when it was learned that Jimmy Swaggart had visited prostitutes and was apparently addicted to pornography and Jim Bakker had an encounter—although very brief, he says—with a woman other than his wife, Tammy. It will take a long time for people to forget

asked if he molested other boys, he said there might be "one other person under similar circumstances." Did you know that the Roman Catholic Church in America may have already paid out as much as \$1 billion dollars to compensate for the sexual misconduct of their priests?

The apostle Peter accused some of the false teachers of his day of "having eyes full of adultery" (2 Peter 2:14). The Greek word Pete used was not "adultery," but "adulteress." J. B. Mayor's classic commentary on **The Epistles of Jude and II Peter** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965, a reprint of the 1907 edition) says concerning Peter's observation, "having eyes full of an adulteress." This is,

...a striking expression to describe the man who sees an adulteress in every woman, or in plainer words, who cannot see a woman without lascivious thoughts arising in his heart, such thoughts becoming as it were stereotyped, and betraying themselves in his looks (p. 135).

We expect such behavior from Hollywood types, but not from preachers of the gospel or men who claim to be preachers of the gospel. Is there any doubt in your mind that the sexual misconduct of some preachers and priests stands as a barrier to alien sinners coming to Christ for redemption? I ask my fellow gospel preachers: Do you want your sexual misdeeds to stand in the way of people obeying our Savior?

The apostle Paul established the church in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). He labored with that congregation for a short time, although we cannot say exactly how long. He reminds the Thessalonians of his preaching in their midst. He was gentle among them, even as a nurse cherishes her children. He was willing to impart to them, not the gospel of God only, but his own soul as well because they were dear to him. They knew he had labored night and day so that he could not be chargeable to any of them. He worked at a

knew it was happening among the prophets and priests of his day. Who can fail to understand these words from Jeremiah:

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah (Jer. 23:14).

Even king David—a man after God's own heart and a prophet of God—committed adultery with Bathsheba. King David repented of his grievous sins, but apparently Henry Ward Beecher never did.

In recent weeks, the news media have reported on the misbehavior of several preachers and priests. One preacher in Nashville was arrested for breaking into automobiles and stealing credit cards, cameras and such like. A preacher in Lewisburg, Tennessee, has been charged with raping a child, according to an article in **The Tennessean** (March 14, 2002, p. 2-B). Both in the United States and abroad, Roman Catholic priests have been convicted of sexually abusing children, especially little boys. **The Tennessean** (Friday, February 1, 2002), printed an article about Irish priests who have been molesting children. The entire payment from the Catholic Church for the priests' misconduct may reach a total of \$430 million. Some of the money will go to the state and some to the families of the children who were abused (p. 3-A).

A bishop of the Roman Catholic Church admitted to molesting a teenage boy more than twenty-five years ago. Anthony J. O'Connell, former bishop of Palm Beach, Florida, became the highest ranking official to be involved in the terrible sex scandal rocking the Roman Catholic Church. The young man O'Connell abused said he thought the behavior of the priest seemed wrong. But priests were supposed to know right and wrong. When O'Connell was

greatest preacher since the apostle Paul. He delivered the first three series of lectures on the most famous lectureship on preaching in the United States and perhaps in the world. The lectureship has been held every year at Yale University since 1871. The lectureship was named the Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching. Lyman Beecher was Henry Ward Beecher's father. Henry Ward Beecher carried on an affair with Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of one of Henry Ward Beecher's closest friends. Beecher admitted his sin privately, but would not confess it publicly. Elizabeth Tilton was not the only woman with whom Beecher had been sexually intimate. What an absolute shame that a man of such great ability will be remembered as an adulterer and as a hypocrite!

In 1989 Marie Fortune, a lesbian preacher of the United Church of Christ, wrote a book with the title, **Is Nothing Sacred?** (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers). Marie Fortune tells the sordid story of a preacher she calls, "Dr. Peter Denovan." Through the years he had been sexually involved with as many as forty-five women in the church where he was preaching. Six of the women brought formal charges against the preacher. Those charges included sexual misconduct with counselees and employees, misusing his office as a preacher to abuse women, threats against anyone who reported his behavior and "the use of physical force to engage in sexual intimacy" with members of his church (p. xiii of the Introduction). Marie Fortune accused the leaders of the church where Donovan preached of improperly handling the situation (p. 124). They should have turned him over to law enforcement personnel for prosecution, but they failed the congregation they served and they also failed the Lord they claimed to honor.

If Henry Ward Beecher and Peter Donovan were the only preachers who were guilty of sexual misconduct, we might be able to pass it off as non-typical and strange behavior-not a recurring problem. But the prophet Jeremiah

Chapter 38

The Preacher's Manner Of Life

Some of the greatest and most influential men who ever lived were preachers. Our Lord Himself was a preacher. Modern preachers are fond of saying that God had only one Son and sent Him into the world as a preacher. Christ gave His infallible estimate of John the Baptist, one of the world's greatest preachers. Jesus asked some of His disciples who had gone to hear John the Baptist what they had gone out in the wilderness to see.

A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matt. 11:7-11).

Can you think of a more urgent need in modern times than preachers like John the Baptist, the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul? They might be accused of turning the world upside down, but the world needs turning upside down.

Tragically, many preachers have disgraced the name of the one they are supposed to represent. One of America's best-known and most influential preachers ever was Henry Ward Beecher. Beecher preached for Brooklyn's Plymouth Congregational Church for more than twenty-five years. There were many people who thought Beecher was the

in spreading the gospel.

Paul's purpose was to preach the gospel, regardless of circumstances or hardships. He wrote to the Corinthians about his commitment to preach.

Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14-16).

I close today with a few pertinent observations. There is no greater need in our world than faithful gospel preachers. The moral and spiritual problems we face as a nation are not going away until preachers understand the times and apply God's inspired word to those problems. What tremendous changes could be wrought in our culture if all preachers would teach the Bible's message on marriage, divorce and remarriage! We could turn the world upside down if we had the courage to speak out on the ravages of alcoholic beverages and other destructive drugs. And how can we remain silent on gambling, on pornography, on corruption in business and in government?

I plead with all the preachers in my audience: "Preach the word." I urge all church members to demand that your preacher take a stand on truth—all truth. Only by so doing can we make the difference God demands of us.

work. There will be times you will be called out at night because someone has had a heart attack or has died. You will have to help a marriage that has experienced some great difficulty. Or you will have to go to the church building at midnight to baptize someone into Christ. If any of this would be a burden to you, you should forget about becoming a preacher. For me, preaching has been challenging, fulfilling and enjoyable. Although I have taught school for many years, operated my private businesses and engaged in other kinds of work, none of it has been so satisfying as preaching the gospel. I cannot imagine not preaching.

I have one other word for young preachers and for those contemplating preaching as a life's work. Unless you are willing to spend countless thousands of hours in reading and research, you should not chose preaching as your career. In other words, if you do not like to study, do some other kind of work. I remember many years ago preaching in a gospel meeting in south Georgia. The preacher for that congregation said to me after the meeting was over: "The difference between you and me is that you like to read and study. I like to be out among people." There should be a balance between the two approaches to preaching. We have no choice but to study diligently and to meet meet people, sharing their heartaches and triumphs and working with them under many different circumstances.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know of his love for them. He told them he had labored night and day that he might not be chargeable to them. He was not just talking about the work he did as a preacher. He worked with his hands in secular work that he might continue to preach the gospel. The scriptures teach that churches have an obligation to support the preacher (1 Cor. 9:1-6). But if churches such as Corinth were unwilling to support Paul, he did not cease preaching. He worked with his own hands to support himself and some of the young men who worked with him

without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father (1 Thess. 1:2-3).

Paul charged the Corinthians:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

The Greek word rendered "travail" means difficult or painful labor. The word is used just two more times in the New Testament. Paul recounts some of the hardships he endured for the cause of Christ. He says he endured weariness and painfulness. The word "painfulness" is a translation of the word I am discussing with you. Paul also used the word in this second letter to the Thessalonians:

For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you (2 Thess. 3:7-8).

Paul and other New Testament preachers are great examples of the hard work that ought to characterize the life of every gospel preacher. But do you know one of the most frequent complaints I hear about preachers? They are lazy. In fact, someone very close to me said that the last three preachers his congregation had hired were lazy. Of all the people in the world who ought to be diligent and energetic in their work, it ought to be preachers. We must be examples in our dedication to our responsibilities.

I have a message for all the young preachers in my audience and to those who are thinking about dedicating their lives to preaching. Being a preacher is not a 40-hour a week job. If you think preaching is an easy way to make a living, you have the wrong attitude toward this great

that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:33-35).

When a preacher is willing to work at farming or building or fishing to make a living so he can continue to preach, you know he is sincere in his work. I mention these three occupations because I have known gospel preachers who worked at all these occupations to make a living so they could preach for churches that could not afford a fulltime preacher. Being willing to work at secular work so one can preach the gospel does not make what the preacher says right, but it surely shows how strongly he is committed to what he believes. And there have been thousands and thousands of preachers who made their living at various jobs so they could preach. Paul was an apostle and a faithful gospel preacher who often worked with leather to make a living. The King James Version calls Paul a "tentmaker"—and Paul no doubt made tents—but the tents were made either of leather or of goat's hair (Robertson, **Word Pictures**, volume 3, p. 295). Dr. F. F. Bruce's excellent commentary on **The Book of Acts** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), says that Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul were "leatherworkers" (p. 346). Handling leather and making tents could not have been an easy task, but Paul wanted to help churches grow and accomplish the mission the Lord called them to do, regardless of the sacrifices he had to make.

Paul used two words to describe his efforts in Thessonica—labor and travail. Both words provide considerable insight into the apostle Paul's dedication to the cause of our Lord. The Greek word translated "labor" primarily means a striking or a beating. It involves toil that is wearisome or laborious. The word is used in the following verse:

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering

will preach, he is not planning to make many sacrifices to further the cause of Christ. He does not belong in the same category as Paul.

The reason Paul was so willing to impart both the gospel and his own soul to the Thessalonians is explained in this very simple statement: "You were dear to us." The word "dear" comes from the same Greek word translated "love." Dr. Hugo McCord renders the Greek: "you became very precious to us." If the people to whom we preach are not precious to us, we ought to be selling used cars—not attempting to preach the gospel. Paul explained his devotion to the Corinthians:

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile (2 Cor. 12:14-16).

Paul's great love for the Thessalonians shines through in these words:

For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God (1 Thess. 2:9).

We do not know all the details of Paul's work at Thessalonica, but the Thessalonians knew. Did he do manual labor in addition to preaching the gospel? We know he did on several occasions. In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, Paul said,

I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how

unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

There is a tragic and unbiblical notion that edifying members of the body of Christ is not preaching the gospel. The people who have been promoting that idea reason somewhat as follows: Since the gospel is good news, the members of the church have already heard it or they would not be members of the church. So it is not news any more. There is a very serious problem with that kind of reasoning. It simply does not make sense. Paul told the Roman Christians:

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also (Rom. 1:14-15).

The gospel is not just the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It encompasses all that men must know to become Christians and to remain faithful Christians. If I preach against gambling, against pornography, against homosexuality and against other sins—and I do and must—I am still preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul not only was willing to preach the gospel to the Thessalonians; he was also willing to impart his own soul. That expression means that Paul was eager to do whatever it took to make the church at Thessalonica as strong as it could be. He was willing to make whatever sacrifices were necessary that he might preach to them and help them to grow. If that meant preaching without support—as it often did in the early church—he was willing to do that. I have one question for the preachers in my audience: Are you and I as committed to the work we do with local churches? When a preacher demands an exorbitant salary before he

Milligan's scholarly work, **The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), gives an example of the Greek word translated "affectionately desirous" from writings that were contemporaneous with the New Testament. That ancient writing tells of parents who were sorrowing for their son and "greatly desiring" him (p. 447). The expression was a term of endearment. It showed the great love Paul had for his brothers and sisters at Thessalonica. It also shows he was continuously seeking their welfare.

Paul's desire to help the Thessalonians to grow meant that he was willing to have imparted to them, not the gospel of God only, but his own soul, because they were so dear to him. He had done the initial preaching at Thessalonica, according to Acts 17:1-9. But that was only a start in the Thessalonians' walk of faith. They had to keep on growing in faith, in knowledge and in service to their fellowmen. Paul prayed that Christ would dwell by faith in the hearts of the Ephesians, that they might "be rooted and grounded in love" and that they might be,

...able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God (Eph. 3:17-19).

If the Thessalonians had not heard and obeyed the gospel, they could not have been saved from their alien sins. But nobody can please God simply by believing and being baptized into Christ. We must keep on growing in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). The author of Hebrews told his readers:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is

Tragically, there are people in most religious groups who think the preacher is being harsh when he preaches the truth—especially on controversial issues—regardless of the love he demonstrates for his hearers. I knew a preacher who resigned just before he was fired. He was courageous to preach what that church needed. The elders of a church in Florida had taken a stand against dancing. The preacher fully agreed with the church's position. The preacher learned that the daughter of one of the elders was a dance instructor, but the elders had done nothing about the woman's conduct. He mentioned the fact in a sermon. He knew the elders would not stand behind him. So when he had finished the sermon, he resigned.

Will you please answer this question? Do you believe the leaders in the church you attend would stand by the preaching of Elijah or of John the Baptist or of Jesus Christ or of the apostles? What would happen if your preacher were to say,

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:7-9).

Even if what he said was the absolute truth, do you honestly believe he would last another week or another day? When some of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the baptism of John, he said to them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7)? Were Jesus Christ and John the Baptist being both bold and gentle? Are you willing to accuse our Lord and God's special emissary, John the Baptist, of having the wrong attitude in their preaching?

Like Paul, both Jesus Christ and John were "affectionately desirous" of their listeners. That expression means to long for someone's welfare. Moulton and

proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." The word rendered "cherish" means to nourish with tender, loving care. Vine says the word,

...primarily means to heat, to soften with heat; then, to keep warm, as of birds covering their young with their feathers (Vine, p. 176).

Paul used the word of husbands and of Christ:

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church (Eph. 5:28-29).

A preacher who is not gentle in his presentation of the gospel and in his work among fellow Christians and non-Christians ought to be doing some other kind of work. Incidentally, some manuscripts have the Greek **nepioi** (babies or little children) instead of the word **epioi** (gentle). Charles Williams renders the Greek text: "Instead we were little children among you; we were like a mother nursing her children."

Paul expands on his being gentle among the Thessalonians:

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us (1 Thess. 2:8).

If every preacher in the world had the attitude Paul expressed in this verse, more people would be attracted to the church of the living God. Paul was gentle as a nurse cherishing her children, but he was also forceful and uncompromising in his declaration of the truth. Gentleness apart from the truth will not save anyone. The truth preached in an ugly spirit will drive men away from the Lord.

around the Lord's table. He even said that some of them were weak and sickly because of their misconduct at the Lord's supper. They were eating and drinking damnation to their own souls because they were not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:27-34). Yet 1 Corinthians 13 is unquestionably the greatest treatise on love ever written. Even secular humanists and other unbelievers sing the praises of Paul's great chapter on love. Corliss Lamont's little booklet, **A Humanist Funeral Service** (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1977), recommends the reading of 1 Corinthians at a funeral of a humanist (pp. 17-18). He does exclude verses 9-12 because humanists do not believe that miracles ever occurred.

Preachers must be gentle in preaching to their audience, but that does not mean being soft on sin and error, as I have demonstrated from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount and from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. A careful reading of Paul's Galatian correspondence will convince anyone of Paul's love for the Galatians. But it would not be easy to find stronger language than Paul used in this powerful letter. Paul asked them,

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you (Gal. 3:1)?

The word "foolish" indicates that the Galatians were without understanding. In the New English Bible, the word is translated "stupid." Could a preacher still be gentle and use that kind of language? If it took that kind of language to awaken the Galatians to the dangers they faced, Paul was being a good friend to them by telling them exactly what they needed. Paul knew they were in danger of falling away from grace unless they changed (Gal. 5:1-4).

Paul compared his gentleness among the Thessalonians to a nurse who cherishes her children. The New American Standard Bible translates verse seven as follows: "But we

favor. Paul does not use the word "bold" in the following words of admonition to Timothy, but there can be no doubt that Paul was urging Timothy to be bold.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Can a preacher be bold and gentle at the same time? He not only can be; he must be, if he wants to imitate his Lord and the apostles. Can you think of a bolder approach to any group than our Lord's condemnation of hypocrisy among the Pharisees (Matt. 23)? But how could words be more gentle than these:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (Matt. 23:37).

The Lord's great invitation shows how gentle Jesus was in His dealings with others.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

There were times when Paul had to use very critical language in his letters to various churches. He accused the Corinthians of gross negligence for failing to withdraw fellowship from a member who was guilty of incest (1 Cor. 5:1-5). He reprimanded them for their division and confusion

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15).

He discussed the two ways that men travel in this life—the strait gate and the narrow way that lead to life and the wide gate and broad way that lead to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). Does the Lord's preaching sound all that positive? Will you study with me today the topic, "The Preacher's Manner of Preaching?" Our lesson will be based on 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9. Please listen to those three verses:

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

Paul informed the Thessalonians:

...we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention (1 Thess. 2:2).

Is there not a conflict between boldness and gentleness? W. E. Vine suggests that the word "boldness" means "the absence of fear in speaking boldly; hence, confidence, cheerful courage" (p. 130). Paul's boldness at Thessalonica also involved "much contention." "Much contention" connotes conflict and struggle. It indicates the great effort and energy with which Paul preached the gospel at Thessalonica and everywhere else. He told Timothy: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Both the words "fought" and "fight" are from the same Greek word translated "much contention."

Boldness means declaring the gospel without fear or

Chapter 37

The Preacher's Manner Of Preaching

There is great confusion in the religious world regarding what a man ought to preach, how he ought to preach it or even if he ought to preach at all. Certain topics are off limits for many churches and preachers. Some churches forbid a preacher to discuss marriage, divorce and remarriage. The leaders in those churches do not want their members who have been divorced and remarried a half dozen times or more to be embarrassed by the preacher's sermons. Other churches discourage a preacher discussing current moral evils, such as, abortion, gambling, alcoholic beverages and corruption in business. The leaders in one congregation instructed one of my former students not to preach on church discipline. He preached on the topic anyway and they fired him. And heaven help the preacher who opposes denominationalism and the other so-called "great religions" such as, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism! The motto of those churches seems to be, "Live and let live. Do not rock the boat. Above all things, do not judge other people's religious or moral views."

How should a preacher approach every topic he discusses from the pulpit? Should he always devote his sermons to the positive elements of Christianity or is it permissible to be slightly negative? I read in one newspaper article that we preachers should not be negative. We must preach positive sermons just like Jesus did. Do you think some people have ever read the sermons Jesus preached, especially His great Sermon on the Mount? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifically condemned the worship of those who were trying to impress others with their devotion to God (Matt. 6:1-8). He urged His followers to,

what the Bible says about church attendance. If church members fail to give as they have been prospered, the preacher must teach what the Bible says about giving. Many preachers teach very important lessons, but fail to preach what the particular church must have to grow and to be faithful to God. Those preachers are being negligent in their responsibilities.

Every preacher should be concerned with the audience's reaction to the gospel message. However, that concern should be kept within proper limits. We should want those who hear to respond favorably to the message, but we must not water down the gospel just to make it more palatable to our hearers. Kindness, love and concern must be evident in every message, but our ultimate goal in preaching is to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31). We must pray that God will use us to bring lost souls into the Lord's kingdom and to build them up in the most holy faith.

they refused to do so. But Paul kept right on preaching. I wonder how many of us would preach if the churches cut off our financial support.

The work of preaching in our day has lost some of the luster it enjoyed in the early days of our nation's existence. There probably are many reasons why that is so. One of the main reasons relates to the materialistic nature of our culture. Millions of Americans see no reason for preaching. They may even think that preacher ought to get a real job. If we are seeking glory of men, we more than likely will not find it. Paul was working to have God's approval, as is clearly seen in this verse.

Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ (1 Thess. 2:6).

Those preachers who are searching for worldly glory are in the wrong work. If the preacher's main motive is worldly glory, he should join the entertainment business or become a professional athlete. On the other hand, if his reason for preaching is to receive glory from God, he will strive to preach exactly what God demands. And how do we know what God demands? We can study the sermons of Jesus Christ, of the apostles and we can devote ourselves to the letters that talk about preaching, such as, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. Nothing and nobody in this world should deter us from preaching what we know is right.

Paul loved the Thessalonians and all others to whom he preached, but he did not permit his love for them to interfere with his obligation to preach what they needed. The truth is: If we love people, we are going to preach portions of scripture that will help them to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. For example, if a church is filled with people who do not attend all the services of the church, a preacher has an obligation to teach them

common among the Greek orators, but Paul would not engage in such conduct. We can learn from the Lord Himself that commendation is often in order. For example, he said to the Ephesians:

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars (Rev. 2:2).

Those compliments were in order. But notice what he said to them in verse 4: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Neither Jesus nor His apostles practiced flattering their listeners. They praised when praise was deserved, but they reproved when their listeners deserved reproof. When Paul learned of the confusion around the Lord's table at Corinth, he asked the Corinthians, "Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not" (1 Cor. 11:22).

Paul was open and honest about his motives in preaching at Thessalonica and elsewhere. He denied that he was using his office as an apostle and as a gospel preacher as a cloak of covetousness. He called God to witness his statement (1 Thess. 2:5). Anyone who has studied the life of Paul knows he did not preach for money. There were times when he was actually hungry (Phil. 4:12). If Paul embraced the so-called "health and wealth gospel," he had a strange way of showing it. The Corinthians had sinned in not supporting Paul's work in spreading the gospel. He told the Corinthians of his love for them.

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you (2 Cor. 12:15-17)?

The Corinthians had an obligation to support Paul, but

Paul believed he could be lost if he were unfaithful to God.

Paul's epistle to the Galatians is very disturbing. He discovered among the Galatians those teachers who were returning to some of the doctrines and practices of the Old Testament. His warnings to the Galatians could not have been stronger. They resented what Paul preached to them and counted him their enemy. He asked them: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth" (Gal. 4:16)? Paul loved the Galatians, but he could not compromise the truth just to please them or anyone else. He directed this question to them:

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? If I were trying to please men, I would not be the servant of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:10, NASB).

Does it hurt to alter the truth just a little so that more people would come to Christ? Changing the gospel will condemn the preacher and his hearers. Telling alien sinners just to pray for forgiveness of sins is a very serious matter. It radically alters the divine plan of salvation. The Bible demands that we believe and obey the truth.

The reason both preachers and their listeners must strive to be faithful to the word is explained by the expression: God tries our hearts. The word "tries" is the same Greek word translated "allowed" in the King James Version and "approved" in the New American Standard Bible. It means that God examines or tries our conduct with a view of either approving or disapproving. We certainly want to so conduct ourselves that we will have God's approval. Do you not want to hear Him say in the final judgment: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joys of thy Lord?" Can you not see that Paul's main motivation in preaching was to please the One who called him into His service?

Paul denied that at any time he had used flattering words, as the Thessalonians surely knew. The Greek reads: "words of flattery." Such words of flattery were quite

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

Does God have a plan other than the one the Corinthians obeyed? Since I have been entrusted with the gospel, am I not in grave danger if I preach another gospel?

At no time in his life did Paul preach to please men, even though, like all faithful preachers, he hoped and prayed that men would accept the truth he was preaching. If Paul had preached to please men, he would not have condemned the church at Corinth for failing to withdraw from an incestuous brother. Nor would he have rebuked another apostle for acting the hypocrite (Gal. 2:11-14). One of the reasons many churches are filled with adulterers, drunks and liars is because the preacher does not want to step on anyone's toes. He does not want to be disliked. He certainly does not want to be fired. But would preachers not rather be fired from their pulpits than to be cast into the fire of eternal hell? But maybe they do not believe in eternal hell. Besides, if a man has been saved, nothing he does could cause him to be lost, at least according to Calvinism. The apostle Paul could not have believed that doctrine. He told the Corinthians:

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27).

Dr. A. T. Robertson, one of America's most distinguished Greek scholars, in his outstanding set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), commented on this verse as follows:

It is a humbling thought for us all to see this wholesome fear instead of smug complacency in this greatest of all heralds of Christ (volume 4, p. 140).

their hearers. When they promise their listeners that they will be healthy and wealthy if they contribute to the preacher's television ministry, they are guilty of using guile as a snare to get more money.

Paul was grateful to God that he and his fellow workers "were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel." He then added: "...even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4). The word "allowed" involves being tried and then approved for the work of preaching the gospel. The word means to be tried or examined with a view of either approving or disapproving. God proved Paul and his companions and then approved them for the great task of preaching the word. The New American Standard Version translates this verse:

But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who examines our hearts.

Is there any greater honor or more serious responsibility than to be entrusted with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ? It is a great honor to speak for God, as the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament did. But what if one misleads his hearers by preaching soul-condemning doctrine? Would it not be better for him to have a millstone hung about his neck and be cast into the sea? But you and I both know that what you hear on radio and on television cannot all be the truth. If one preacher gives one plan of salvation and some other preacher gives another, they cannot both be true. They both may be false, but they both cannot be true. It would be a violation of the law of non-contradiction.

The gospel and the gospel alone is God's plan for saving man. The gospel provides the one plan of salvation that will save the whole world. You cannot miss the plan that God has provided—if you read and believe the great book of Acts. In Corinth, Paul preached that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:5).

they might lose some of their power. And, tragically, there have always been preachers who lusted after women or men. A man recently admitted on television that he did not think it was wrong when his priest molested him. His reasoning as a child seems to have been: "If a priest did it, it must be all right. It seemed wrong, but after all, the priest surely knew what was right and wrong." How unspeakably evil for a priest or a preacher to take sexual advantage of anyone, especially a child!

Paul's preaching at Thessalonica was not of uncleanness. We do not know—because the text does not tell us—what kind of uncleanness Paul had in mind. The Greek word translated "uncleanness" appears in several different contexts. In His criticism of hypocrisy among the Pharisees, our Lord compared the Pharisees to,

...whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness (Matt. 23:27).

In that verse, Jesus Christ was speaking of physical uncleanness. Paul used the word in the following verse:

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints (Eph. 5:3).

Is Paul inferring that false teaching and uncleanness may have some connection?

The word "guile" is closely related to "deceit," although they come from different Greek words. The word "guile" is a translation of the Greek *dolos*, a word that was used of bait to catch a fish. When a fisherman casts a lure into the water to catch a fish, he is doing his best to deceive the fish into believing something edible is being thrown into the water. Do you remember what Jesus Christ said about Nathanael? "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47). Preachers sin against God and against their hearers when they are not completely honest with

Christ promised the apostles:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever (John 14:16).

In the following verse the word is rendered "advocate" and is applied to Christ.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

Paul's preaching or exhortation at Thessalonica was not of deceit or of uncleanness or of guile. The word "deceit" is a translation of the Greek **planes** and comes into English in our word "planet." The word literally means wandering from the right path. In the King James Version the word is translated "error" and "delusion," as well as deceit. The verb form is often rendered "go astray." Jesus used the verb form in His discussion with the Sadducees. In the following verse it is translated "do err." "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). Often New Testament writers warn against being deceived. For example, Paul warned the Corinthians: "Be not deceived: evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Why would preachers or teachers wish to deceive anyone? I have given you three reasons: greed, lust for power and sexual fulfillment. That many people through the ages have preached for money no knowledgeable person can deny. When a nationally known evangelist admits privately that he does not discuss certain topics because he would lose support if he did, you know he is probably preaching for money—maybe not so much for himself personally—but for his organization. Other preachers like to have power over the lives of their followers. If they preach the truth on certain topics—especially on controversial issues—

The word does not involve being mean or unkind or rude. Preachers must not compromise the truth of the gospel, but they cannot preach the gospel of Christ in the spirit of the devil.

Paul and Silas preached unto the Thessalonians "the gospel of God with much contention." The Greek word **agon** (translated "contention" in this passage) comes into English in our word "agony." It is usually translated either "conflict" or "fight" or "race." Dr. Hugo McCord renders the Greek "anguish." Charles Williams translates the term "terrific strain." Paul was speaking of the opposition he and his companions had experienced at Thessalonica. They were accused of turning the world upside down and of preaching another king, one Jesus (Acts 17:6-7). And they were urged to leave town, as if they were thieves or insurrectionists. It took great courage and faith for them to keep on preaching in the face of such persecution.

Paul affirms that his and Silas' "...exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile" (1 Thess. 2:3). The word "exhortation" literally means to call to one's side for comfort and encouragement. The verb form of the word appears 108 times in the New Testament. It is often translated "beseech." Paul uses the word in this well-known passage from the book of Romans.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (Rom. 12:1).

The common noun form appears twenty-nine times in the New Testament. The most common translation of the noun is either "exhortation" or "comfort." Paul urged Timothy, his son in the gospel: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). One noun form of the word is applied both to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ. The apostles were sorrowing because Jesus Christ told them He would leave them and return to the Father.

Thessalonians of his visit to their city. "For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain" (1 Thess. 2:1). The book of Acts provides a record of Paul and Silas' initial preaching at Thessalonica. Luke does not tell us how many people obeyed the gospel, but he does say:

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few (Acts 17:4).

Some of the ones who were persuaded of the truth of the gospel were members of the Jewish synagogue. The Jews and the Greeks who believed and obeyed the gospel were the charter members of the church at Thessalonica. From the report in Acts 17, it is obvious that the work of Paul and Silas was not in vain. Even if one precious soul comes to Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, our work is not in vain.

Both Paul and Silas had suffered for the cause of Christ—not only in Thessalonica—but also in Philippi and in other places. Paul says that he and Silas were shamefully treated at Philippi, as the Thessalonians knew. I have already referred to their treatment at Philippi (Acts 16:16ff). But the persecution they experienced did not deter them from preaching as the opportunity arose. Paul tells us that he and Silas "were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention" (1 Thess. 2:2). The Greek word translated "bold" means to speak openly, plainly or freely. It involves not being afraid of the pressures the enemies of Christianity bring to bear on preachers. The same word is used in reference to Paul's preaching at Ephesus.

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8).

a preacher were. Please listen carefully as I read those verses:

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

On his second missionary journey, Paul took Silas with him. They visited the city of Philippi and then went on to Thessalonica. At Philippi, the two faithful gospel preachers were imprisoned for preaching Christ and for casting out a spirit of divination from a young woman whose masters were using her for making money (Acts 16:16). The Lord sent an earthquake that opened the doors of the prison where Paul and Silas were locked in stocks. Through divine intervention, they were freed from their imprisonment. They taught the Philippian jailer the gospel and baptized him into Christ (Acts 16:33). The rulers in Philippi sent to the prison and instructed the jailer to let Paul and Silas go. Paul told the jailer that he and Silas had been beaten contrary to Roman law. He told the jailer to tell the magistrates to come in person and let them go from Philippi. The magistrates were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. The magistrates apologized for their behavior and asked Paul and Silas to leave Philippi. They left the prison and went to the house of Lydia (Acts 16:34-40).

In the passage I read to you, Paul reminded the

God and His inspired apostles continually condemned sin. Jesus commanded the woman taken in adultery: "Go your way, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Paul amassed a number of Old Testament passages dealing with sin, such as,

There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God (Rom. 3:10-11).

He concludes his discussion of sin by affirming: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The verb "have sinned" is past tense. The expression "come short," is present tense and means "continues to come short." Does Dr. Schuller know about these passages? If he knows about them—and you know he does—how does he excuse himself for not preaching them? Does it bother him that he is not preaching the whole counsel of God? Does he know how serious it will be to stand before God in the judgment having neglected to teach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? It is only the truth that sets men free (John 8:32).

I am reluctant to mention one motivation that the apostle Peter discusses—sexual exploitation of church members and others. The Roman Catholic Church has experienced a rash of priests who have sexually molested boys. Many Protestant preachers have been involved in sex with the members of the churches where they work. The apostle Peter mentions some false teachers who had "eyes full of adultery" (2 Peter 2:14). The word "adultery" should be translated "adulteress." It is the same Greek word rendered "adulteress" in James 4:4. Why no standard version translates the Greek "adulteress," I cannot explain. But there are preachers whose motivation is to see how many women they can seduce. They may not have begun their work with that thought in mind, but that is the way they currently live.

For the remainder of our study today, let us examine 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6 to learn what Paul's motivations as

Chapter 36

The Preacher's Motivation

Are the television preachers—Kenneth Copeland, Gloria Copeland, Paul Crouch, Rod Parsley, Marilyn Hickey and Benny Hinn—representative of the hundreds of thousands of other preachers in the United States? Have you ever wondered what motivates the television preachers and other preachers? Does love of money explain the behavior of some preachers? Greed was a major factor in the lives of some of the preachers in Bible times. The apostle Peter accused the false teachers of being covetous and using feigned (or forged) words to make merchandise of their hearers (2 Peter 2:3). In the same chapter he wrote:

Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:14-15).

I am not accusing any of the television preachers of being motivated by money. I do not know what motivates them. I am merely asking you to think about what should motivate all preachers.

Are some of the television preachers motivated by a desire to be popular? When a preacher deliberately avoids preaching the whole counsel of God, is it possible his main purpose in preaching is to get people to like him and support his ministry? For example, Dr. Robert Schuller says he does not believe in mentioning sin in his sermons. He thinks his listeners already have a negative self-concept; so it would add to their burdens if he mentioned sin. Yet the Son of

baptism. Baptism is always administered to penitent believers. No babies were ever involved in baptism because they had not committed any sins and did not need to be baptized. On the day of Pentecost, those who were baptized were those who believed on the Lord and repented of their sins. Peter charged the Jews on Pentecost:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

As you can see from this reading, penitent believers were baptized "for the remission of sins." That is the truth about one of the purposes of baptism. Baptism washes away our sins (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism also places us in the church of the living God—the kingdom of heaven.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Let me close our discussion of sound doctrine about baptism by reading these words from the Galatian letter:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

If sound doctrine were not vital, why would our Lord say, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:11-12).

The apostle Peter warned Christians about suffering as evildoers. He then added:

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Peter 4:16).

Am I telling you that Philip preached these truths about the name of Christ? I am not saying that because I do not know exactly what he said. But I do know he taught sound doctrine about the name of Christ. If "doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense," why bother to preach about the name of Christ? Would it not be just as legitimate to preach the name of Buddha or Krishna or Joseph Smith, Jr. or any other religious leader? What is so special about the name of Christ if "doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense?" My friends, without intending any ill will toward anyone, it is in order to say that denying the importance of doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense.

Philip preached baptism to the Samaritans. How do we know that? When he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Christ, the Samaritans were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12). Should it surprise anyone that Philip's sermon had to include baptism? Our Lord Himself had submitted to baptism at the hands of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:13-17). In addition, when he was ready to depart this earth to return to His Father, He commanded His disciples:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (Matt. 28:19-20).

Briefly, let me summarize sound doctrine relating to

kingdoms is still standing, the God of heaven will set up His kingdom and it shall stand forever.

As every student of scripture knows, it was during the days of the Roman empire—the last of the four kingdoms mentioned by Daniel—that Jesus Christ came into the world to build His church or to establish His kingdom. If Jesus came to build His kingdom, that kingdom is surely in existence today since Daniel said it would stand forever. And that is precisely what we find in the New Testament. Paul informed the Colossian Christians: God,

...delivered (or rescued) us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:13).

My friends, according to Bible doctrine, we are not looking for the kingdom; we already have it. It is the church of the living God. The apostle John informs us that he was “in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9).

When Philip preached to the Samaritans about the kingdom, did he say what I have read to you today? We have no way of knowing what he said, but we know he preached the kingdom of God. If “doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense,” are we not free to say about the kingdom of God whatever we feel like saying? If doctrinal soundness is not of any great significance, Philip’s preaching about the kingdom of God was wasted time. But nobody can reach that conclusion if he believes and loves the word of God. It borders on blasphemy to argue that “doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense.”

Philip presented some teaching or doctrine on the name of Christ. We have no way of knowing exactly what he said, but we do know what the Bible says about the name of Christ. Peter said to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem:

This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there

When Stephen was martyred by unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem, there arose a great persecution which drove the early Christians throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:4-5).

Have you ever wondered what doctrine Philip preached in Samaria? If you have, wonder no more. We have the inspired record of his preaching.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

After listening to these verses, you should be in a position to answer this question: Does preaching Christ include preaching doctrines relating to the kingdom of God, the name of Christ and baptism? My friends, you know it does.

The Old Testament prophets had continually predicted the coming of the kingdom of God. I have time to mention just one. By divine inspiration, the prophet Daniel was able to look down through the centuries and tell of the coming of the Lord's kingdom. He saw four kingdoms: The Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Alexandrian and the Roman. He then said,

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44).

The expression, "these kings" refers to the kings reigning over the four kingdoms which Daniel mentioned. He said, in effect, while the great image representing the four

Let us go a step further. Is the resurrection of Jesus Christ a sound doctrine? Could there be any Christianity without it? Please listen carefully to Paul.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Incidentally, the death of Christ is a fact; His death for our sins is a doctrine. Christ's resurrection is also a fact; His resurrection according to the scriptures for our justification is a doctrine.

If a preacher fails to preach the doctrine of the resurrection, is he preaching sound doctrine? It does not matter what else he preaches, if he does not preach the resurrection of Christ. He can encourage men and women to be holy, to do the works which God has before ordained that they should walk in them, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world, but if he does not preach the resurrection of Christ, he is not preaching the whole counsel of God. Is that really what 1 Corinthians 15 and other biblical passages teach? Will you please read that great chapter and decide for yourself?

Conceivably, some modernistic theologians might concede that these are essential biblical doctrines. But what about the necessity of obeying the gospel to be saved? Is that kind of doctrine acceptable to the world of liberal religion and even to some evangelical theologians? The conversion of the Samaritans should give us some good information in answering these questions. Will you please turn to Acts 8 and study briefly with me?

theological nonsense." (p. 17). I have already shown how utterly unscriptural and ridiculous such an approach to the word of God is. But let us be a little more specific. One of the great doctrines I preach—and one which thousands of others preach—is that Jesus Christ became a man and lived among men. Is that sound doctrine? I shall read a few passages to allow you to make up your mind on that topic.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh... (1 Tim. 3:16).

You have probably heard a great amount of talk in recent years about the antichrist. Do you want to know how the apostle John identifies him?

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world (1 John 4:3).

May I ask you again: Is Christ's incarnation "sound doctrine?" If it is—and there can be no question at all about it—then we must preach that doctrine. How could anyone call preaching the incarnation of Christ "arrogant theological nonsense?" If our Lord's becoming flesh is not sound doctrine, we ought to cease preaching it. If that doctrine is not true, the foundation of New Testament Christianity will collapse. Can you not understand how absolutely vital preaching sound doctrine is and always has been? I would be ashamed to assert that "doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense."

being "contrary to sound doctrine?" My friends, they are contrary to the teaching of scripture and therefore contrary to sound doctrine. Would we not all be better off if we stuck to biblical categories?

When the Bible speaks extensively of family matters, would you classify that teaching as "doctrinal?" We have Paul's example for doing exactly that.

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience (Titus 2:1-2).

In Titus 2:1-8 Paul addresses every classification of humanity. He writes to the older men (Titus 2:2), to the old women (Titus 2:3-5), to the younger women (Titus 2:4-5) and to the younger men (Titus 2:6-8). Paul affirms that our personal behavior, including family living, constitutes "sound doctrine." Does Dr. Godsey believe that striving to maintain good families, as well as being holy personally, constitutes "arrogant theological nonsense?" I am appalled at Dr. Godsey's twisting of the scriptures to harmonize with his modernistic views. Are men not being arrogant when they use the scriptures in such a fashion?

Dr. Charles Williams translates Titus 2:1 as follows: "You must continue telling people what is proper for wholesome teaching." The wholesome teaching, as I have already indicated, includes instructions to older men to live righteously before God and before their fellowmen. It includes encouraging older women to teach the younger women how to love their husbands, how to love their children, to be keepers at home and to conduct themselves in a righteous manner. Liberal theologians may not think of these concepts as constituting sound doctrine, but inspired spokesmen for God did.

Let me return to Dr. Godsey's statement about sound doctrine. "Believing," he said, "should never be equated with doctrinal soundness. Doctrinal soundness is arrogant

Was that Paul's reason for reminding the Ephesians elders of the kind of preaching he had done in their midst?

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ...Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:20-21, 26-27).

Was Paul committed to preaching only sound doctrine? Did he think and believe that maintaining doctrinal soundness was arrogant theological nonsense, as Dr. Godsey so blatantly insists?

Tragically and inexplicably, many modernistic scholars equate doctrine with what the church is, how to become a member of the church, the Lord's supper, and similar controversial issues. There is absolutely no excuse for that kind of thinking. Are these doctrinal statements? Obviously they are, but there are hundreds of other topics which also fall into that category. In fact, every word of scripture is Bible doctrine. The Old Testament doctrine does not directly apply to us, but it was God's revelation of His will to the Jews and has great meaning for all who love the scriptures. We have confused a great number of people making a gulf between doctrinal and practical matters. There is no scriptural warrant for so doing.

What Paul and other New Testament writers had in mind when they used the word "doctrine" is not always what modernistic theologians have in mind when they speak of doctrine. Would you classify the following as doctrinal concerns or practical matters: fornication, homosexuality, menstealing, lying, perjury, the killing of parents? Paul mentioned these grievous sins and then added: "...if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:10). Why would Paul think of these activities as

temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience
(Titus 2:1-2).

If you believe the scriptures, how can you avoid seeing the absolute necessity of believing and preaching sound doctrine? How could anyone ever be so foolish to say, "Doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense?" Was Paul guilty of believing and promoting "arrogant nonsense" when he demanded that Timothy and Titus preach only "sound doctrine?" Obviously, Dr. Godsey, president of Mercer University at Macon, Georgia, rejects the inerrancy of scripture and places himself above God's inspired spokesmen. Besides, Dr. Godsey continually stresses doctrine-false doctrine-but doctrine nevertheless throughout his book. Since doctrine is teaching, a book always teaches doctrine-either good or bad. In Dr. Godsey's case, it is bad, soul-condemning doctrine. Tragically, Dr. Godsey does not consent to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 6:3), but to the doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). You may consider those harsh words, but when a man denies the doctrines of scripture and substitutes his own, he has turned away his ears from the truth, and has turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:4). Does he intend to pursue and to promote the doctrines of demons? I am sure he does not, but he does anyway, regardless of his intention.

The Greek word translated "sound" is **hugiaino** from which we get our word "hygiene." The Greek word means healthy. The word is rendered in the King James Version as follows: "whole" (Luke 5:31), "safe and sound" (Luke 15:27), "wholesome" (1 Tim. 6:3) and "be in health" (3 John 2). The most common rendering of the Greek is "sound." Were the Bible writers, especially Paul, arguing that there is a kind of teaching which produces health? If I preach like Jesus and His apostles preached, will my preaching engender health among God's people? On the other hand, if I do not preach sound doctrine, do I not open the door for all kinds of heresy to tear the kingdom of God apart?

Paul encouraged both Timothy and Titus to preach sound doctrine. Paul warned Timothy about remaining separate from the sins of the world.

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:9-10).

The Greek is rendered "wholesome works" in the following passage, but the Greek is the same expression which is translated "sound doctrine."

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness (1 Tim. 6:3).

Paul exhorted Timothy:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears (2 Tim. 4:2-3).

Elders of the Lord's church must be men of sterling character and skilled teachers;

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:9).

Finally, Paul commanded Titus:

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave,

about some point of biblical doctrine, but who had never obeyed the gospel and submitted their lives to the word of Almighty God. Many of these people would object to my description of their beliefs and behaviors, but that was the impression they left by what they taught and the way they conducted their lives. Doctrine is vital to one's becoming and remaining a Christian, but we must live the doctrine we teach or it really amounts to very little. Jesus said to His disciples following the footwashing episode: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). Our Lord also said,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Our English word "doctrine" is a translation of the Greek **didaskalia** which means teaching. Doctrine or teaching can be false or it can be true. Paul warns of the danger of following false doctrine:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (1 Tim. 4:1).

In the same chapter, Paul writes of good doctrine.

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained...Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:6, 13, 16).

How could anyone criticize Bible doctrine when Paul assures us that the word of God is profitable for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16)?

Chapter 35

Sound Doctrine

The religious world manifests two extreme attitudes toward sound doctrine. Liberal theologians strongly criticize almost any emphasis on doctrine. They seem to think of doctrine as being relatively unimportant and even oppressive. If a man does good works—feeds the hungry, visits the fatherless and widows in their affliction, comforts men and women in prison—he cannot be judged on the basis of doctrine. Dr. R. Kirby Godsey's book, **When We Talk About God...Let's Be Honest** (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1996), denigrates doctrine. Please listen to these examples:

Jesus enables us to break out of the catacombs of doctrine and trust God's presence in our lives (p. ix of the Preface).

Whenever we try to build doctrinal empires that admit or reject people on the basis of agreement or consent, we are simply wrong. Believing should never be equated with doctrinal soundness. Doctrinal soundness is arrogant nonsense (p. 17).

There are many other examples from Dr. Godsey's book, but these should be sufficient to show how little respect some theologians have for doctrine.

The opposite extreme says, in effect, that doctrine is all important. If you believe and teach the truth of God's word, nothing else really matters. Among people who take this unscriptural and unreasonable position, evangelizing the world, being compassionate toward the less fortunate and being light and salt seem to matter little or not at all. I have known men and women who argue all day long

some people are so intolerant they do not want those who believe and teach ideas they do not like to have the freedom to do it? Would it not be more honorable to refute in public discussion the errors he thinks I am preaching?

truth" (Gal. 4:16)? It is a sad commentary on sinful humanity that preaching the truth does make some enemies, but all serious Bible students know it does.

I wonder if my denominational critic has bothered to examine the churches in America that are growing. The liberal churches—those who oppose no one except those who stand for something—are the churches that are dying. Over the past thirty years, most of the liberal denominations have lost millions of members. Some of the most liberal denominations have lost a third of their membership. Why should anyone want to be a member of a church that stands for little and condemns almost nothing? Many of the Pentecostal churches preach grievous error. They are growing because they stand for something—the wrong something, in many cases—but for something. All I am pleading for is standing for absolute truth just as Jesus Christ and His apostles did. If that drives people away—and it unquestionably does sometimes—we are not held accountable since that is the way the Lord wants us to preach.

I would prefer not to have to oppose religious error and immoral conduct. I would love to talk most of the time about the love of God as manifest through Jesus Christ. I would love to spend all of my preaching time telling men and women how to become and remain faithful Christians. But I must adapt my preaching to the needs of the day. And remember that John said: "...many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Can I ignore these false prophets—men and women who pervert the scriptures and confuse those who are striving to learn what God wants them to know? I cannot and sleep at night.

The most unusual statement my denominational critic made was this: He said he was going to call the radio station on which he heard our program and buy our time so that we could not preach on that station anymore. If he has tried to do that, he has failed. Does it bother you that

wolves...Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:15, 20).

If Jesus Christ is my example in preaching, should I not expose and oppose false teachers—whether among churches of Christ or elsewhere?

Do you suppose the preaching of Jesus always appealed to the devoutly religious leaders in Palestine? If I remember correctly, the religious authorities in first century Judea crucified the greatest preacher who ever lived. They did not put Him to death because He was tolerant of the views of the majority. They killed Him because He was preaching the truth—truth they did not want to hear and were willing to murder to stop. Did Jesus drive away some people because He criticized many of the false positions of the religious leaders of His day? He did not drive away those who wanted to know the will of Almighty God, but many of the Jews were offended at what He taught. Did their being offended keep Him from preaching the truth? You know it did not; neither should we allow it to stop us.

Paul's letter to the Galatians is one of the harshest letters in the New Testament. He asked:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh (Gal. 3:1-3)?

The Greek word translated "foolish" in verses one and three means stupid or without sense. Does that kind of preaching win friends and influence people? Do you suppose Paul drove away some of the Galatians by his harsh criticisms of the behavior of his fellow-Christians? Paul knew his preaching offended some of the Galatians. He asked them: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the

If we fail to do them, have we not already fallen? Can a Calvinist preacher sleep at night when he has ignored or denied the thrust of these verse? If he does sleep at night, is it because of or in spite of what he has preached?

As a fallible human being, I am sure I have failed to preach what was needed at the time it was needed and in the way it was needed. But my aim—if I know my own heart—is to imitate the apostle Paul in his preaching at Ephesus. In his farewell addresses to the elders at Ephesus, Paul said,

Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house... Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:18-20, 26-27).

Do you suppose Paul could sleep at night after declaring the whole counsel of God? Could he have slept or should he have been able to sleep if he had failed to declare the whole counsel of God?

My denominational critic says that my criticizing other Christians drives people away. Let us suppose, just for the sake of argument, that he is correct. What does that prove? Does that mean I am not to oppose the false teachings of the religious liberals or Calvinist theologians or cultic groups. If I fail to condemn false doctrine, I am not following the Lord Jesus Christ or His faithful apostles. In His great Sermon on the Mount, our Lord warned:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening

but because that is precisely what the scriptures teach. How could a preacher sleep when he denies these great truths of the Bible? When a preacher like Max Lucado tells men all they have to do is call God "Father," how can he sleep at night? And how can Calvinist preachers sleep when they teach salvation grace alone through faith alone? Have they ever investigated the passages that demand that we do the will of God? Jesus asked His own disciples: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (Luke 6:46)? After Peter had listed the Christian graces—virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love—he said:

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:8-11).

Preaching these great truths does not interfere with my sleep. But how does a preacher sleep when he knows these verses and yet continues to preach salvation by grace alone through faith alone? When Peter urges his readers to give diligence to add the Christian graces, was that a mere suggestion or is it an absolute requirement? If a Christian does not add these graces, he is barren and unfruitful. Can a Christian go to heaven if he has been barren and unfruitful? Peter demands:

...give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Peter 1:10).

not matter how honest John Shelby Spong is; he is promoting soul-condemning error. As much as I despise the error Spong preaches, I have no ill will toward the man. I do not attack John Shelby Spong; I attack the error he promotes in his books and on television. Have you noticed how the media give so much publicity to radicals like John Shelby Spong?

The preacher who wrote criticizing me for attacking certain people expressed wonder that I could sleep at night. I will admit publicly that I have had more trouble sleeping since October 12, 2002, than at any other time in my long life. The reason is very simple: My gracious and loving wife departed this life and went to be with her Lord. I am still grieving over my loss. During the day, I am able to handle her departure with greater ease because I can keep busy reading, writing and recording, but even then it has been extremely difficult. But I have an especially hard time at night when I try to sleep. I never knew the heartaches that accompany the loss of a wife of fifty-three years. People tell me it will get easier, but it has not done so yet.

But the preaching I have done for almost sixty years has not kept me awake, except when I should have done better in the pulpit than I did. I have grieved privately when I had not spent enough time preparing for a lesson and did not deliver the lesson with the love and compassion I should have. But the gospel I preach and the error I refute do not keep me awake at night. With God's gracious help, I work seven days a week trying to learn what I ought to know and to apply the truth of God's word to my life and to the lives of those who hear me—whether in the pulpit where I am privileged to speak or on the radio.

When I stand in the pulpit or sit in my recording studio and preach that men and women must believe in Christ, repent of their alien sins, confess the name of Christ before men and be baptized for the remission of their sins, I know I am on solid ground—not because that is what churches of Christ have preached since the day of Pentecost—

4:10). There were probably people in Paul's day who accused the apostle of attacking certain people. There are some people in our day—including preachers—who make such foolish accusations against those who work to keep the church free from error and immorality. But Paul was not attacking Demas. Is there any doubt in your mind that Paul would have been the first to welcome Demas back into the fold, had Demas repented of the error he was practicing?

The apostle John—whom many of us like to call “the apostle of love”—reserved some of his harshest language for a man named Diotrephes. Diotrephes was one of those church leaders who wanted to be Lord of the flock. As one of my college professors loved to say: “He was going to rule the roost or run off all the chickens.” John wrote unto the church; but Diotrephes, who loved to have the preeminence among them, did not receive John and his companions. Please listen to what John writes:

Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9-10).

John exhorted his readers:

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God (3 John 11).

Was John attacking Diotrephes or was he attacking his behavior? There is one thing we can know for sure: John had no intention of allowing Diotrephes to get by with his evil conduct. Even if some may have considered John's writing unchristian and inappropriate, he had no choice if he intended to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance. We cannot allow false teachers like John Shelby Spong to go unanswered. When a man denies virtually all the fundamentals of the faith, we must respond to him. It does

on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

This is some of the harshest language in Paul's writings. Hymenaeus and Alexander had shipwrecked the faith. Paul delivered them to Satan. Was Paul attacking the men or was he attacking their behavior? If it were not honorable to mention the names of false teachers and moral reprobates, would the Holy Spirit have endorsed what Paul did?

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul urged his dear, young friend and fellow worker: "shun profane and vain babblings." Paul predicted that they would increase unto more ungodliness.

And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17-18).

These two men's names will live in infamy so long as the world continues, but Paul was not attacking them personally; he was warning of dangers confronting the church and refuting the errors of the two false teachers. Paul's approach was not only legitimate; it was absolutely necessary to prevent the church's departure from the faith and overthrowing the faith of some.

Paul also mentions Alexander the coppersmith. He said Alexander had done him much harm, but he does not specify the nature of the harm. He does leave Alexander's ultimate fate to God Almighty (2 Tim. 4:14). In this same chapter, Paul mentions a man by the name of Demas. At one time Demas had been Paul's faithful fellow worker (Col. 4:14). But tragically, Demas forsook Paul, having loved this present world, and departed into Thessalonica (2 Tim.

then Christianity has no foundation. The apostle Peter wrote of having been present at the Lord's transfiguration. He affirmed:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Peter 1:16).

Did the transfiguration actually happen? Were the apostles Peter, James and John eyewitnesses? Did they hear the voice from God that said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17)? If these are all facts, then facts are what faith is all about. If they are not facts, Christianity is a great hoax.

But in refuting Joey Fann's errors, I am not attacking Joey Fann. He may be one of the most gracious men in the great state of Alabama. He may be as honest as any human being who lives, but that does not prevent him from teaching error-soul-condemning error. Should I have contacted him first before refuting his false teaching on an international radio program? Contacting Joey Fann would have done nothing to change the error he has promoted in using *The Andy Griffith Show* during Bible classes among churches of Christ or to refute the errors in his book. My concern should be to reprove, to rebuke and to exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2). Obviously, Joey Fann has the prerogative to teach whatever he chooses. I have the sacred obligation to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). That means I cannot ignore error-whether in the denominational world or among churches of Christ.

How did Paul handle religious error and immorality among the Christians in the first century? Sometimes he called names and sometimes he did not. Paul's letters to Timothy should serve as models for preachers in every generation. Paul exhorted Timothy:

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before

Chapter 34

Attacking Others

I dearly love to have people write or call the International Gospel Hour. It makes me know our program is being heard. I remember a poem I taught in high school many years ago: "What if they gave and war and nobody came?" What if we pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for the privilege of speaking on outstanding radio stations across the nation and nobody is listening? But when you write or call, we know someone is listening, even if you do not agree with what is being taught. So when I received a call from a denominational preacher who apparently was outraged at what I was preaching, I was grateful that he took the time and spent the money to call. His particular objection related to my criticism of the Promise Keepers. He has a right to object and I have a right to speak my mind. Are we not bountifully blessed that we live in a country that grants us freedom of religion and freedom of speech?

My caller appeared to be troubled because, he said, I was attacking people. But I do not attack people; I attack positions. For example, recently I refuted some errors from a little book with the title, **The Way Back to Mayberry: Lessons from a Simpler Time** (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), by Joey Fann of Huntsville, Alabama. Among the grievous errors in Joey's book is the following: "Facts are not what faith is all about" (p. 43). I showed from the scriptures just how serious that theological position is. From the opening chapters of the Bible to the end of Revelation, there are thousands and thousands of facts-facts that serve as the very foundation of New Testament Christianity. What did Paul have in mind when he wrote of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? They are either facts or they are not. If they are not facts,

salvation neither Jesus nor the apostles taught, does he not fall under the condemnation the Holy Spirit spelled out in this passage from 2 John? Can a man pervert the gospel of Christ and not bring the curses of God on his head?

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

done publicly does not fall in the same category as personal injuries. For example, when Max Lucado teaches that all one has to do to be saved is just call God "Father," that is not a personal injury against me. It is a clear violation of the teaching of the great book of Acts. I cannot—I must not, and, with God's help, I will not—allow such teaching to go unchallenged and unrefuted. I am not attacking Max Lucado; nor have I ever done so. But I would be unfaithful to my God and to my conscience if I did not respond to such perversions of scripture. Even if you think I am wrong, do you not understand why I must respond to what I believe is contrary to the word of Almighty God?

Besides, Max Lucado did not contact me when he decided to speak at the Promise Keepers meetings; nor did he talk with me about telling people all they have to do is call God "Father." If he had consulted reputable scholars among churches of Christ, he might have avoided making such a blunder. But he apparently has greater respect for denominationalism than for the word of God. He has compromised on many biblical concepts and will apparently fellowship anyone. When a man who calls himself a gospel preacher speaks at a Promise Keepers meeting, it is obvious he does not draw the line where the Lord has drawn it. Must we not respect and abide by what the Holy Spirit has revealed through the apostle John?

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

I am aware that John specifically had in mind those who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (2 John 1:7). But if a preacher or anyone else teaches a plan of

know their views do not rest on solid biblical ground. For example, I cannot comprehend how anyone can preach the doctrine of once in grace, always in grace. I can understand why very few Calvinists will attempt to defend that doctrine. But is that honest? Is that the way men who claim to represent Christ ought to think and act?

The denominational preacher asked me why I did not contact members of the church of Christ who had written books critical of the church before I oppose what they teach. Tragically, he has a solid misconception of what Jesus taught in Matthew 18. Please listen to what our Lord said to His disciples.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Matt. 18:15-17).

It ought to be obvious even to a casual reader that Jesus was speaking of personal injury—not the teaching of false doctrine. If, for example, my brother in Christ spreads a rumor about me, I am to follow the Lord's prescription for righting the wrong. I must first go to the brother in private and seek to urge him to make things right between us. If he fails to do that, I should take one or two others with me to help in restoring the right relationship. If he fails to respond under these circumstances, I must take what started as a personal injury to the church. If he will not listen to the church, the church has a sacred obligation to disfellowship him. How many personal differences could be settled if every Christian would follow the Lord's plan for resolving conflicts between brothers and sisters in Christ!

But publicly refuting the false teaching a brother has

you. Paul carried on a debate for three months in the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus. It almost certainly was not a formal debate, as is often the case in modern times, but it was a discourse, a dispute, an argument in a philosophical sense—not a knock down, drag out argument. It was a debate between civilized people who happened to disagree over fundamental issues. Was Paul unchristian in debating with the Jews at Ephesus?

From a Jewish standpoint, the debate did not go well. So,

...when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he (Paul) departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9-10).

It would be fascinating to know the topics Paul and others debated in the school of Tyrannus. It is interesting that the debate lasted for two years. Now notice what is said: "So that all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." If an honorable debate—not a dogfight—in our time were to continue for two years, it is certain that many would hear the truth of the gospel and would become Christians. As it is, very few people are willing to test their convictions by having a debate.

Why do preachers in modern times object to debating and refuse to debate? Some, like the preacher who called me, probably believe it is unchristian, although that position is difficult to understand in view of the behavior of Jesus and of the apostle Paul. Others may not feel prepared to debate and are unwilling to take the time to prepare. If that is the case with some preachers, they ought to be ashamed. Still others may not be strongly convinced of their theological positions. They may be afraid they would have to give up some of their views if they debate them. They may even

the Controversialist (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1970, originally published by the Tyndale Press). Please listen to Dr. Stott:

The title **Christ the Controversialist** is intended to indicate not that Jesus Christ was a controversial figure, but that He engaged in controversy. Many of His public discourses were debates with the contemporary Palestinian leaders in religion. They did not agree with Him, and He did not agree with them (p. 7).

Dr. Stott argues that professing Christians should not ignore or conceal their differences; they should debate them (p. 22).

If you carefully study the book of Acts—particularly that part that records the missionary work of Paul—you will discover that he regularly debated with those with whom he disagreed. In many cases, Paul debated members of his own nation—the Jews. I shall give you some examples in a moment, but first we must examine the Greek word **dialogomai**, usually translated “dispute,” “reason” or “preach.” The word appears thirteen times in the New Testament and is used primarily of Paul’s activities. **Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (New York: American Book Company, 1886) defines the Greek to mean: “to converse, to discourse with one, argue, discuss” (p. 139). **W. E. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1940) says the word most frequently means to reason or to dispute with (volume 1, pp. 316-317).

Now let us examine one passage where Luke uses the word two times to describe what Paul did at Ephesus.

And he (that is, Paul) went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8).

The word “disputing” is the word I am discussing with

The books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews strongly condemn Christians' adopting any of the practices of the Jewish covenant. The theme of Romans teaches conclusively that we are saved by the gospel—not by the law of Moses.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein (that is, in the gospel of Christ) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

Paul told the Galatians:

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

The author of Hebrews lays great stress on the change in the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites to that of Melchizedek. He concludes: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). The New Testament forbids Christians to practice any of the precepts and ordinances of the old law, including the Ten Commandments. So how can any preacher attempt to justify from the book of Psalms or from any Old Testament book the use of instruments of music in the worship of the New Testament church? We are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14-15).

The denominational preacher criticized me for suggesting people debate their differences about religious matters. He apparently thinks debating is unchristian. Have you ever wondered how a man can debate all day that it is wrong to debate? Has that preacher ever studied Christ's relationship to the Pharisees and to the Sadducees? Jesus Christ carried on a running discussion or debate with the Pharisees. Dr. John R. W. Stott, one of England's most influential Evangelical theologians and one of my favorite authors, wrote a powerful little book with the title, **Christ**

oppose instrumental music. I wonder if he knows that the founder of his church condemned the use of instrumental music in worship. Adam Clarke, a distinguished Methodist scholar, wrote a commentary on every book of the Bible—a commentary I have used for more than fifty-eight years (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.). Clarke calls mechanical music in worship “an abuse of music.” He then writes concerning John Wesley, the founder of Methodism and other holiness groups:

The late venerable and most imminent divine, the Rev. John Wesley, who was a lover of music and an elegant poet, when asked of his opinion of instruments of music being introduced in the chapels of the Methodists said, in his terse and powerful manner, “I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen” (volume 4, p. 684).

The preacher who called the Gospel Hour and then called my home sought to justify the use of instruments of music in worship by appealing to the Psalms. Does he not know that the Psalms endorsed and regulated worship under the Jewish covenant? I wonder if he would apply all of the Psalms to the worship of the New Testament church. One of the Psalms reads:

I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows, Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats (Psa. 66:13-15).

If churches use instrumental music in their services because they were used in the Old Testament, why do they not also offer sacrifices, observe the sabbath, keep the Passover and other Old Testament ordinances? The book of Psalms totally endorsed the old covenant.

Three times in these verses, James uses the word "doer." Does he really mean that one has to be a doer of the word? If he hears and does not do, he deceives himself. And was it not James who wrote: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17)?

Did you know that every New Testament book except 2 John uses some form of the Greek word **poieo** usually translated "do?" Even if you disagree with what these inspired writers teach, how can you fellowship those who teach the opposite of salvation by grace alone through faith alone? Is the doctrine so unimportant to you that you are willing to compromise your belief on the flimsy basis of seeking to have unity—a baseless, useless, destructive unity? Or do you believe we ought to seek to homogenize all religious organizations—uniting only on what is common to all groups, if indeed there are any common teachings or practices?

One speaker at a recent college lectureship foolishly stated: "We are all one big happy family." What he was seeking to do was to break down the walls that separate religious groups. If he knew what various denominations teach, he ought to have known better than to make such an ungrounded and unbiblical observation. The differences between churches of Christ and Mormonism, for example, are absolutely irreconcilable. If the different religious groups agree to meet in common worship, it is because someone has scuttled his convictions—if he ever had any. Can you not understand why no faithful gospel preacher—I repeat "no faithful gospel preacher"—or church of Christ can be involved with the Promise Keepers? Denominational churches that want to be a part of the Promise Keepers are free to do so, but faithful churches of Christ cannot forsake the gospel of Jesus Christ without bringing the curses of God on their heads (Gal. 1:8-9).

The preacher whose criticisms of the Gospel Hour I am reviewing does not understand why churches of Christ

practice. I have difficulty understanding how anyone with biblical convictions could participate in the worship services of the Promise Keepers. There are usually representatives from many different denominations and from various parachurch groups at the meetings of the Promise Keepers. How can someone who believes the Pope to be the vicar of Christ on earth, that the Roman Catholic Church is the true New Testament church and the doctrine of purgatory fellowship those who vigorously deny those positions? I am not discussing the scripturalness of these views. I am simply inquiring about the basis of fellowship when there are so many major conflicts. Does not the word "fellowship" mean having something in common? What do we have in common with those who deny all we hold dear?

Many American denominations teach salvation by grace alone through faith alone. John Calvin, John Wesley, Martin Luther and other church founders taught that doctrine. Churches of Christ teach—as do some other religious groups—that we must do the will of God to be saved. I shall not take the time to list a great number of scriptures that cannot be harmonized with the Calvinistic doctrines of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, but I must read a few verses which absolutely require the doing of God's will.

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:21-25).

Chapter 33

A Denominational Preacher's Criticisms

Preaching on the International Gospel Hour not only has furnished me wonderful opportunities to speak to thousands of people each week, but it has been the most challenging and fulfilling work of my long life. I receive wonderful encouragement from people all across the United States and from parts of Mexico and Canada. I know there are thousands of people praying that I will always be faithful and loving in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. These people will never know in this life how much their prayers and support have meant to me and to our elders who oversee this great work. I am grateful to God for these gracious and generous people.

But just in case you may be tempted to think that all letters and telephone calls have been supportive, let me hasten to assure you that there have been some other kinds. For example, one denominational preacher called several weeks ago to express outrage because of some ideas I have emphasized in my sermons. Before I respond to the preacher's criticisms, I want you to understand several points. I have absolutely no objections to anyone's criticizing my sermons—whether from the pulpit or on radio. I do not claim perfection. I welcome your comments, even though I have every right to disagree with them. I have no intention of being hypercritical of whatever anyone says about my sermons. I shall respond in whatever manner I believe is in order, but never sarcastically or unkindly. Should we not be able to discuss our differences without questioning each other's integrity?

The preacher objected to my criticisms of the Promise Keepers. He has every right to endorse the Promise Keepers. I have every right to disagree with what they teach and

importance of facts for our faith? But just because we have an abundance of facts to sustain our faith does not mean we have sight. The fact is: Jesus Christ returned to the Father to prepare a place for His obedient followers. We can have assurance that heaven exists and that faithful servants of the Lord will go there. We can have that assurance because Jesus Christ came down from the Father to live among men. But nobody in this world has seen heaven. "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). But faith that is not founded on fact is not biblical faith. So I appeal to you today to build your house on solid rock—the great facts of the gospel. You can know for sure that these facts will stand the test of time. Will you not this very day obey the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

fundamental to our faith in Christ?

Paul used these facts in discussing what one must do to become a Christian. He asked the Romans:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:3-6).

Just as Christ died, we die to sin. Just as He was buried in Joseph's new tomb, we are buried with our Lord in baptism. Just as He rose from the grave to a new existence, we are raised from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life.

Did Paul actually mean to use the facts of Christ's life as a model for our obedience to the gospel? If you have any doubt whatsoever, please listen to the apostle.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18).

The doctrine or teaching was the truth about Christ's death, burial and resurrection. The form of doctrine involves our death to sin, our burial with the Lord in baptism and being raised to walk in a new life.

How can any serious Bible student dispute the absolute

of Jesus Christ. He asked the Jews,

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

Would Stephen have agreed with Joey Fann that "facts are not what faith is all about?" Stephen listed dozens of facts that serve as the basis for our faith in God's dealings with the Old Testament saints. It ought to be evident from Acts 7 and hundreds of other passages—both in the Old Testament and in the New—that there is no faith if there are no facts. Without facts we may have opinions, speculations, imaginations and wishes—but no faith.

Paul's great chapter on the resurrection contains facts that form a solid foundation for our faith in eternal life. Will you please give attention to these well-known truths about Christ?

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve (1 Cor. 15:1-5).

It does not take a Ph.D. in math or in logic to count the facts Paul outlined in these verses. Christ died, was buried, rose the third day and was seen. How important are these facts to New Testament Christianity? Could we still have Christianity if Christ had not died, been buried, risen from the dead and been seen by many witnesses? Are these facts

Abraham in southern Mesopotamia. He reminds the Jews of God's command to Abraham to leave his home country and his family and travel to the land God would show him. He traces Abraham's travels from Ur of the Chaldees through Haran into Canaan. God gave Abraham no inheritance, but promised him the land for his seed, even when he had no child. God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs. The twelve patriarchs sold their brother Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him. And God

...delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house (Acts 7:10).

When there was a dearth in the land, God used Joseph to save both Egypt and Israel. While the Israelites were in Egypt, God prospered them until they became a great nation. Tragically, there arose a king in Egypt who did not know Joseph. The new king oppressed the children of Israel and cast out their young children to the end that they might not live. Moses was born in the midst of Egyptian slavery, but was brought up in the house of Pharaoh.

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel (Acts 7:22-23).

There is much more in Acts 7 I would like to discuss with you, but time does not permit it. Stephen concluded his review of the history of the Israelite nation by accusing the Jews of his day of being stiffnecked and uncircumcised of heart and ears and of always resisting the Holy Spirit. Stephen's purpose in reciting so many historical facts was to show that all history had been leading up to the coming

used in leading up to the coming of Christ and the salvation he provides for all men?

Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel (Acts 13:14-24).

Paul could have saved himself and his listeners a considerable amount of time if he had known that "facts are not what faith is all about." But no one can read Paul's preaching and writing and not understand just how absolutely vital facts are to the scheme of human redemption. Over and over, this great man of God appeals to facts from the Old Testament and from events in the life of Christ. I shall return to Paul's preaching and writing in a few minutes, but I invite you to think about the sermon Stephen preached in response to false accusations that he was guilty of blasphemy and stirring up the people (Acts 6:11-12).

Stephen begins his sermon with God's appearance to

Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her (Matt. 22:23-28).

The Sadducees just knew they had Jesus between a rock and a hard place. Please take note of our Lord's answer.

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:29-32).

Jesus accused the Sadducees of not knowing the scriptures. But if facts are not what faith is all about, what possible difference could ignorance of the scriptures make? For many years, liberal theologians denied the existence of men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and even Moses. Jesus gave explicit endorsement to the historicity of these men. Besides, God claimed to be the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob many years after these men had died. If these men were not still alive when God spoke to Moses, then God was the God of the dead. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all other men and women will be raised in that great day. Jesus established that truth based on the facts of Old Testament history.

The apostles and other New Testament spokesmen for God also appealed to facts to build a foundation for faith. In his sermon on the sabbath in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul stood to preach the gospel of Christ. Will you please pay close attention to the facts from the Old Testament Paul

of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25).

The book of Jonah opens with these words:

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me (Jonah 1:1-2).

If Jonah were not a historical person, why would Jesus speak of him as if he were? If Jonah were merely a mythological person, would not our Lord's use of him and of his experiences weaken or destroy the point Jesus wanted the Pharisees to understand?

On another occasion, the Pharisees came to Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause" (Matt. 19:3)? As was often His practice, He appealed to the Old Testament to answer their question. He asked,

Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh (Matt. 19:4-5)?

Please think for a moment of the great facts Jesus mentioned in this well-known passage. He specifically taught that the world had a beginning. God created human beings—both male and female. They did not evolve. He arranged for marriage between the first two people—Adam and Eve. His permanent will was that the man must leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. In the marriage relationship, the man and the woman become one flesh. Would Joey Fann accept these facts as the basis of our faith in God's pattern for the home?

The Sadducees rejected the final resurrection of the dead. They asked Jesus about the practice known as "Levirate marriage."

If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

face of the waters. If the ideas presented in these verses are not facts, our faith rests on a very flimsy foundation—on myths and legends. Incidentally, that is the charge evolutionists have made against the Bible, at least, since Charles Darwin's publication of **The Origin of Species**.

Since Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh and our supreme example, the way He interpreted His Bible—the Old Testament scriptures—ought to be definitive for our use of the Old Testament and the New. Did He ever leave the impression that "facts are not what faith is all about?" Our Lord often criticized the Pharisees for their misinterpretation and misapplication of the Old Testament, but not one time did He ever question the truthfulness of any incident or statement in His Bible. It ought to be revealing to every Bible believer that Jesus often explicitly endorsed the very people, places and events that liberal scholars and theologians have doubted or denied. For example, some of the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Master, we would see a sign from thee." Jesus knew the hearts of those who were asking for a sign. He said to them,

An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here (Matt. 12:39-41).

Is there any reason to doubt the Old Testament's teaching about Jonah and his preaching at Nineveh? The Old Testament says concerning Jereboam:

He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son

If Joey Fann's views were correct, why would the apostle Paul write, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2)? The Greek word translated "sincere" is **logikos** from which we get our word logical. The word means reasonable or rational—not unreasonable or irrational.

Joey Fann further states: "Facts are not what faith is all about" (p. 43). I do not mean to be facetious, but I must ask: Is that a fact? How any person who has studied the Bible at all could make such a statement defies imagination. Even children who sing little songs about Jonah or about the wise man who built his house on a rock or about Daniel in the Lion's den surely understand that these stories are factual—that the people and events are real. But if children do not fully understand, conservative scholars know that the battle for the Bible centers on the facts of scripture, such as, the existence of the Hittites, the miracles of Jesus Christ, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and other people and events. I invite you to study with me the theme, "Facts and Faith."

From Genesis 1:1—the first verse of the Bible to Revelation 22:21—the last verse of the Bible—there are literally thousands and thousands of facts in the word of God. Moses, the great lawgiver, revealed wonderful facts about the creation.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:1-2).

Did you take note of the powerful facts in these two verses? The earth did not come into existence by itself; it was created. The creation of the earth and the heaven took place "in the beginning" God is the One who created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form and void. Darkness was upon the face of the deep. God's Spirit moved upon the

Chapter 32

Facts And Faith

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, a distinguished Lutheran scholar, has written a number of outstanding books on Christian evidences, on the meaning of history and on moral issues. His book on abortion, **Slaughter of the Innocents** (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Boos, 1981), is an excellent discussion of some of the issues surrounding this abominable practice. In 1978, Dr. Montgomery wrote an outstanding book with the title, **Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc.). The thrust of Dr. Montgomery's book is very simple and plain: If faith is not founded on fact, it is not really faith. It may be a wish, but if there are no facts to sustain it, it is not faith. The Bible makes that ruth too plain for anyone to doubt.

Joey Fann of Huntsville, Alabama—one of the two men who introduced the *Andy Griffith Show* as a teaching tool in Bible classes among churches of Christ—has written a little book with the title, **The Way Back to Mayberry: Lessons From a Simpler Time** (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). Joey Fann asserts: "Faith is not something we conclude from a logical process, because faith is inherently illogical" (p. 43). I wonder if Joey Fann knows that atheists, agnostics and other unbelievers have been making that observation about Christianity for almost 2,000 years. A faith that is illogical is not the faith of New Testament Christianity. A cursory reading of Christ's discussions with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and of the book of Romans should be adequate to refute the idea that faith is irrational. Contrary to Joey Fann's assertion, faith based on the Bible is inherently logical. It appeals to the mind and the will—and not just to the emotions—of man.

Lord's supper. Paul quoted our Lord's words from Matthew 26:26-28 and then added:

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come (1 Cor. 11:26).

Does that not sound like a pattern?

I wonder why Paul did not say to the Corinthians: "I know what Jesus said about eating the Lord's supper, but there is really no pattern or example involved. We are far removed from Jerusalem and should be free to eat in the way that seems appropriate for the people of Greece." The truth is: When the Corinthians violated the divine pattern, they were severely criticized. Paul asked them concerning their perversions of the Lord's supper: "...shall I praise you in this? I praise you not" (1 Cor. 11:22). Was Paul such a traditionalist that he thought the Corinthians had to observe the Lord's supper as the Lord Himself had directed? Or maybe this is just a molehill that churches of Christ have defended. And what about singing, praying, preaching and giving? Are these also molehills?

to learn that we cannot serve two masters. It is not possible to love God and money at the same time (Matt. 6:25). And that, dear friends, is a pattern we must not forget.

The church at Jerusalem was composed of both Hellenistic (or Grecian) Jews and Hebraistic Jews. The Grecian Jews had adopted the Greek culture surrounding them. The Hebraistic Jews had not done so. You may remember that Paul referred to himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). That means that Paul had not accommodated himself to the Greek way of life. The Hellenistic Jews accused their brothers of discriminating against the widows of the Hellenistic Jews. Rubel and Randy ask, "Do we follow the church's racial exclusiveness and the resulting lack of evangelistic activity" (p. 6)? In the first place, the sin of the Hebraistic Jews was not "racial exclusiveness." Both groups—Hellenistic Jews and Hebraistic Jews—were all Jews. Their behavior apparently did constitute discrimination, but it was not racial discrimination. Besides, the apostles remedied the situation by appointing seven men from among the Grecian Jews to see that the commodities were fairly distributed. That is the pattern—not the discrimination that existed (Acts 6:1-8).

I have time to discuss just one example of a divine pattern for the church in every generation. On the night before Judas Iscariot betrayed the Son of God,

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:26-28).

Unfortunately, some of the Corinthian Christians were perverting the purpose for which the Lord instituted the Lord's supper. By divine inspiration, Paul commanded the Corinthians to follow the Lord's pattern for partaking the

The United States of America is not specifically mentioned in these verses; nor is any other modern nation. Do the phrases, "all the world" and "every creature" imply that modern nations are included in the Lord's Great Commission? If they do not imply that, what is our authority for doing mission work—both at home and abroad? The verses imply that the gospel must be preached to all nations until the Lord returns. They also imply that believing and being baptized are God's commands concerning salvation. We have every reason to infer those truths from this and similar passages.

Faithful gospel preachers have also stressed following divinely approved examples or patterns. Incidentally, in most cases, the words "example" and "pattern" are derived from the Greek *tupos* from which we get our word "type." It is tremendously troubling when some left-leaning preachers deny that a pattern for the church exists. For example, Rubel Shelly and Randall Harris' book, **The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church** (West Monroe: Howard Publishing Co., 1992), argues that the scriptures do not provide a historical prototype. According to these men, the church has always been flawed. "It is not a fixed, static institution. It has no once-for-all form." They illogically and inexcusably ask if the Jerusalem church is a pattern for the church of our day. They ask if we should emulate Ananias and Sapphira (p. 6).

A freshman Bible major might be excused for making such a blunder, but mature preachers and theologians may not be. Do you remember what the Lord did with Ananias and Sapphira? If the Lord had passed over their sins of deception and greed, we might be confused concerning their behavior. The Lord struck them dead for their sinful attitude and behavior. They do serve as examples for our generation. Their deaths apprise us of the fact that we may deceive our brothers and sisters, but we cannot deceive the Lord. From the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, we ought

of the dead, but of the living. Jesus understood and explained that implication of the scriptures to the Sadducees (Matt. 22:29-32). The simple truth is: What the scriptures imply is binding on us. But what man may infer from the scriptures could be in error. If the inferences we draw are not implied in the scriptures, then we go beyond the sacred page.

Many modern teachers ridicule the practice of inferring any position from the Bible. But we have no choice about inferring that certain teachings are binding on us. For example, I have to infer that the word of God applies to our generation, including me. I have been reading the scriptures for more than sixty-five years. I have yet to find my name anywhere in them; nor have I found your name either. Does that mean the word of God does not apply to my fellow human beings and to me? What inference can you make from the following verses? In his discussion with the Greek philosophers in Athens, Paul said very plainly:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

May I infer that the expression, "all men everywhere," applies to every generation since Paul preached his great sermon at Athens? God will "judge the world in righteousness." He "hath given assurance unto all men." Do these expressions imply that all men—including you and me—are bound by this command?

Jesus Christ commanded His apostles:

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

until the day of Pentecost. From Pentecost onward, the apostles and other Christians lived by the precepts of the new covenant. Anyone who tried to bind the Mosaic covenant was guilty of preaching another gospel (Gal. 1:8-9). He had fallen away from grace (Gal. 5:1-4). If we refuse to hear Jesus Christ, we shall not escape eternal damnation (Heb. 2:1-3; 12:24-26).

· But there is more to our interpretation of the sacred text than knowing the differences between the old covenant and the new. We must seek to explain those direct statements that apply to our work and worship. For example, Christians are commanded to sing praises to God Almighty (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). I do not know any group that identifies itself as "Christian" which would dispute that conclusion. There are many other direct statements—both statements of fact and direct commands—we must understand and observe. Time does not allow any further discussion of them in this brief study.

Interpreting the scriptures requires us to recognize the implications of certain passages in the Bible. Sometimes we use the word "infer" when it is more correct to use the word "imply." "Implication" involves what the Lord intended by what He has revealed. "Inference" is the conclusion we draw from the sacred text. We must use our minds to discover what God has implied in any given passage. Christ's discussion with the Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead is an excellent example of what a biblical text implies. The Sadducees questioned our Lord's teaching about the resurrection of the dead. Jesus accused them of being ignorant of the scriptures. Was He saying that the Sadducees had not read the Old Testament? Or was he implying that they did not know the scriptures because of their failure to make the right application? Exodus 3:6 explicitly states that God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The implication is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not dead. God is not the God

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

The Old Testament tells us about the endurance of Job, about the faith and faithfulness of Abraham, about the moral purity of Joseph and about the courage of Elijah. The book of Hebrews provides many powerful examples of faith. In fact, our knowledge of God's dealings with man would be seriously deficient without the great truths and examples of the Old Testament.

But we live under the new covenant. The author of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah's predictions about the coming of the new covenant and then says:

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).

Paul contrasts the letter (the law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments) with the spirit (the gospel of Christ). He concludes: God,

...hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death (that is, the Old Testament), written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit (that is, the new covenant) be rather glorious?... For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious (2 Cor. 3:6-8, 11).

But did not Jesus and His apostles keep the sabbath, burn incense and offer animal sacrifices? Jesus lived under the law of Moses. The apostles also lived under that law

If you have ever had any doubt about that fact, please listen to what Moses told the Israelites.

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day (Deut. 5:1-3).

Did you notice how many times Moses used the word "us" in this passage? The apostle John stressed the same truth when he wrote: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

God's commands for the Jews to keep the sabbath day holy, to offer animal sacrifices and to observe various feasts and festivals applied to the Jews only. Except from a historical viewpoint, those commands have no bearing on our relationship to God. We live under the new covenant. The author of Hebrews explains:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

The same author wrote:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect (Heb. 10:1).

Does this truth imply that nothing in the Old Testament has any meaning for Christians? There are very few people in the religious world who would defend that position. We know what Paul wrote to the Romans.

College (now Freed-Hardeman University), I had the privilege of studying hermeneutics. Our textbook had the simple title, **Hermeneutics** (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, n.d.) and was written by professor D. R. Dungan. Dungan defines "sacred hermeneutics" as the "science of interpreting the scriptures" (p. 1). We use the word to mean explaining the meaning of scripture. While the word "interpretation" is not used in the following passage, there is no question about the goals of the Jewish teachers.

...the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (Neh. 8:7-8).

Is not giving the sense what preachers and other teachers are supposed to do for their listeners? Is that not the meaning of the word "interpretation?"

What hermeneutical systems have faithful gospel preachers used in their teaching the word of God? Basically, there are three categories of biblical teachings: direct statements, implications and examples. This is the approach to interpreting scripture that Tim Woodroof calls a "molehill." If this approach to interpreting the Bible is a molehill, most conservative preachers and scholars—and not just among churches of Christ—are guilty of employing and defending molehills. For the remainder of our time, I shall define and illustrate each of these categories: direct statements, implications and examples.

There are preachers in all religious groups who maintain that only commands are binding, but they often have difficulty deciding which commands are binding. Of course, those preachers have no reason or authority for that view. We must begin by distinguishing between the commands of the old covenant and those of the new. The Old Testament (or covenant) was given to the Jews only.

And what in Tim Woodroof's view are some of the molehills that gospel preachers have defended? Tim Woodroof provides the following list:

Clerical titles. Worship styles. Organizational structures. Peculiar hermeneutical systems. Women's role. No choirs. No instruments. Ugly architecture. Anti-hand clapping and raising. Slippery slopes. Shape notes (p. 120).

I shall dwell in today's lesson on what Tim Woodroof calls "peculiar hermeneutical systems" that churches of Christ have generally used.

Before I discuss with you what Tim Woodroof calls "peculiar hermeneutical systems," I must first define the term "hermeneutics." The word is derived from the Greek **hermeneia** and is always translated "interpretation" in the King James Version of the Bible. The verb form, **hermeneuo**, is rendered "being interpreted" (John 1:38) or "by interpretation" (Heb. 7:2). One other Greek word should be mentioned in passing. The Greek **diermeneuo** appears in the following verses:

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying...Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret...Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge (1 Cor. 14:5, 13, 29).

In all of these verses, the word probably should be rendered "translate" rather than "interpret." The one giving the meaning of the tongue was not interpreting in the sense we use the word "interpret"; he was simply translating the words from one language into those of another. When I tell you, for example, that the Greek word **koinonia** means "fellowship," I am not interpreting; I am translating.

During my junior college years at Freed-Hardeman

Chapter 31

Defending Molehills

Since I began preaching in 1943, I have always taken seriously Peter's admonitions to the early Christians,

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

The Greek word **apologia** (rendered "answer" in the King James Version) means defense. In fact, the word is so translated in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace (Phil. 1:7).

He later says in the same chapter: "I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17). The word "defense" means that Christians have an obligation to explain why we believe what we believe. Paul used the word to tell the members of the Jewish council why he had left Judaism and become a follower of Jesus Christ. "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you" (Acts 22:1).

Since that has been one of my main concerns for more than a half-century of preaching and college teaching, you can readily understand how distressed and hurt I was when I read Tim Woodroof's book, **The Church That Flies: A New Call to Restoration in the Churches of Christ** (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2000). Tim Woodroof accuses gospel preachers—and that includes his grandfather, Claude Woodroof, thousands of other faithful preachers and me—of having entrenched themselves in "defense of molehills."

wash away thy sins..." (Acts 22:16). How did Saul who later became the apostle Paul understand what he had done to become a Christian? Will you please listen with an open heart?

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:3-6).

Do you honestly believe preaching can be Christ-centered and not emphasize these Bible truths?

Jesus told some Jews:

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:24).

You can see from these and many other New Testament passages that Christianity is a system of faith. We must have faith in God, in His Son, in His word and in His church.

But faith alone is a dead faith. Our faith in God must lead us to obey His commandments. One of His commandments requires us to change our minds and our lives. That commandment is called repentance. Peter commanded the Jews on Solomon's porch:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

It is unfortunate that the King James translators rendered the Greek "be converted." The Greek is in the active voice—not in the passive voice. Peter commanded: "Repent and turn." Repentance is absolutely essential for conversion to Christ. Preaching that fails to stress repentance is not Christ-centered.

Sinners must confess Christ before men if they want Christ to confess them to God Almighty (Matt. 10:32-33). We must confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus and believe in our hearts that God has raised Jesus from the dead.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10).

If men do not believe in Christ and do not confess Him before men, they have not obeyed the gospel (Rom. 10:16).

The book of Acts has three accounts of Saul's conversion—Acts 9, 22 and 26. Ananias, a faithful gospel preacher, commanded Saul: "...arise, and be baptized, and

have yet to find any teaching that even faintly resembles what he was advocating. In fact, I found the very opposite. Had the preacher ever read what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount?

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

Can you find the so-called "sinner's prayer" in these words? Should not preachers pay close attention to the little word "does?" We must do the will of our Father who is in heaven. That means more than just calling God Father. If calling God Father is all one has to do to be saved, then the members of cultic groups and of the Eastern religions will be saved. Many of them call God Father.

I have given you examples of conversion. All of those conversions were taken from God's inspired book of conversions. But just in case some may not have completely understood what God demands of alien sinners, let us review what the word of God teaches on that topic. Did you notice that in all the cases of conversion I mentioned there was always the preaching of the word—always? Peter preached to the Jews on Pentecost. Philip preached to the Samaritans and to the Ethiopian eunuch. Paul preached to the Corinthians. There should be no surprise in that fact. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6).

thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 5:22-6:4).

If these Christ-centered truths had been preached more forcefully and faithfully through the years, there would be less trouble in the homes of America. I urge the preachers in my audience to preach what the Bible teaches on the home.

Not long ago, I heard a radio preacher say, "All you have to do is call God Father. That is all. Just call God Father." I wonder if that preacher has any idea about the meaning of Christ-centered preaching? Where in the world of God did he discover his view of salvation? I have been preaching the gospel as long as that preacher has lived. I

Would Christ-centered preaching be the same as preaching Christ crucified? Would it be the same as preaching the whole counsel of God? If you want to know what preaching Christ crucified means, study Paul's writings—all of his writings. But study also the epistles of Peter, James, John and Jude. Is there even the slightest possibility that these men were not preaching Christ crucified in every one of their writings? The four gospels, the book of Acts, the epistles and the book of Revelation are all Christ-centered. They are all devoted to Christ crucified. If they are not, we have been deceived about Christ-centered preaching.

For many years I have done a great amount of preaching and teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage. I have conducted dozens and dozens of workshops on the family. If I preach what the Bible says about the family, can I consider the sermons on the home Christ-centered? Am I preaching Christ crucified when I talk about marriage, human sexuality, parenthood, and related topics? Please remember Paul's statement:

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

Paul preached on the family. He must have considered preaching on the family preaching Christ crucified or he would not have discussed those topics. One example will have to suffice.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides considerable information about husbands and wives, parents and children.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every

Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). Please remember that Paul's sermon was devoted to the topic: "Jesus was the Christ." Was that Christ-centered preaching? You know it was. So what was the response to Paul's Christ-centered preaching?

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

Could any truth be simpler than what I have read to you from the book of Acts? There is nothing complicated about the conversions I have reviewed with you. So will you think on these conversions and render obedience to the gospel as did the people on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch and the Corinthians?

While we are thinking about the conversion of the Corinthians, it should help us understand more about Christ-centered preaching to read a few passages from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul knew that preaching a crucified Savior would not find ready acceptance among the Jews or the Greeks. He wrote:

For the preaching (literally, the word) of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

Did Jewish and Greek opposition prevent Paul's preaching Christ crucified?

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

In the very next chapter, Paul declared:

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

who served as treasurer under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. As the Ethiopian official rode along in his chariot, he was reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch responded: "How can I except some man shall guide me?" Philip joined the eunuch in the chariot. The place in Isaiah from which the eunuch was reading was as follows:

...he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken (Isa. 53:7-8).

The eunuch asked Philip about the meaning of Isaiah 53:7-8. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). Do you have any reason to doubt that Philip's preaching was Christ-centered? So what happens when preaching is Christ-centered? The eunuch asked Philip: "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized" (Acts 8:36)? And where did the eunuch learn about baptism? Was that subject included in preaching Jesus? Where else would the eunuch have learned about baptism? The eunuch commanded the chariot to stand still and Philip and the eunuch went down into the water; and Philip baptized the eunuch (Acts 8:37-38).

Paul visited the synagogue at Corinth. He "...reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks" (Acts 18:4). What was the message Paul preached at Corinth? He "...testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:5). The Jewish reception of the gospel was not exactly overwhelming. In fact, the Jews "opposed themselves and blasphemed." Paul was troubled by their reaction and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the

know it was Christ-centered. What were the results of Philip's Christ-centered preaching? Will you please remove any prejudice from your mind and listen to what Luke says about Philip's preaching?

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

Would Christ-centered preaching necessarily include the kingdom of God, the name of Christ and baptism? Please let the scriptures speak for themselves.

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 4:17).

Peter told some Jews in the city of Jerusalem:

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Jesus commissioned His disciples to,

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

Do you understand now why Christ-centered preaching in Samaria involved the kingdom of God, the name of Christ and baptism? Has God's plan for saving man been altered since the close of the New Testament? If the plan of salvation has been changed, by what authority has it been changed?

After Philip the evangelist had preached to the Samaritans, an angel of the Lord instructed him to go,

...toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert (Acts 8:26).

Philip made contact with a man from Ethiopia—a eunuch

do. If Christ-centered preaching were rooted in the doctrine of faith only, Peter should have informed the Jews of that fact. He should have told them what one Chattanooga, Tennessee preacher said he told a young man. "It is too late for you to do anything. Christ has already done it all." One radio preacher argued that there are "no rules for the righteous." He says there are no commandments, works, rules or regulations for the salvation of the soul and no kind of words is involved in the salvation of the sinner or in the life of the Christian (**East Main Informer**, May 22, 2001, Tupelo, MS).

If what these preachers teach were true, the apostle Peter did not understand God's plan for saving man. When the Jews asked what they had to do to be saved, Peter commanded them—not suggested to them—but commanded them:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

Am I telling you that Christ-centered preaching must include baptism for the remission of sins? That is what an inspired apostle taught. Do you honestly believe modern preachers—or ancient preachers either, for that matter—can improve on apostolic preaching? Do you not find it profoundly disturbing when preachers decide they know more about salvation than God's inspired spokesmen?

Acts 8 records the conversion of the Samaritans and of the Ethiopian eunuch. After the martyrdom of Stephen, the Christians at Jerusalem "...were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). The good news was that those who "...were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:4-5). The inspired writer does not give us a full report of Philip's preaching, but we

kept in the grave. Peter quoted a prophecy from David that God's Holy One would not see corruption. Peter further explained:

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:29-36).

Peter's powerful sermon convinced the Jews that they had crucified their own Messiah for whom they had been waiting for centuries.

Now when they (the Jews) heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do (Acts 2:37)?

If the Calvinists were right, the question the Jews raised was out of order. If they already believed—and you know they did, or they would not have asked what to do—there was nothing more they had to do. Calvinists teach that salvation comes at the point of faith. The Jews believed the preaching of Peter, but they asked what else they had to

Chapter 30

Christ-Centered Preaching

Should not the goal of every gospel preacher (or of every man who calls himself a gospel preacher) be to preach like Christ and the apostles? How many of the preachers on television know or even seem to care how Christ and His apostles preached? If you have watched most television evangelists, you know how far some of these men have strayed from the biblical ideal of preaching. Some of them almost never quote any scripture. A few of them quote scripture and then misapply it. The number of television preachers who even attempt to analyze biblical passages is very small indeed. I have sat for hours listening to the preachers on Trinity Broadcasting Network and not hear one scripture discussed in depth. They almost never examine the meaning of words in their contexts. Can any of this be called "Christ-centered preaching?" What excuse do men have for doing any other kind of preaching?

Would you have a problem admitting that Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was Christ-centered? Peter emphasized that Jesus of Nazareth was,

...a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

The miracles, wonders and signs were God's way of telling the Jews on Pentecost that Jesus was God's chosen messenger from heaven. The one God had sent into the world to save the world had been "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." The Jews supported by the Romans had crucified Jesus on a Roman cross. But it was not possible that the Son of God could be

Many years ago I entered the wonderful temple of God's revelation. I entered the portico of Genesis and walked down through the Old Testament art gallery where the pictures of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Joshua; Samuel and David and Daniel hung on the wall. I entered the music room of the Psalms where the Spirit swept the keyboard of nature and brought forth the dirge-like wail of the weeping prophet, Jeremiah; to the grand impassioned strains of Isaiah until it seemed that every reed and harp in God's organ of nature responded to the tuneful touch of David, the sweet singer of Israel. I entered the chapel of Ecclesiastes where the voice of the preacher was heard and passed into the conservatory of Sharon where the lily of the valley's sweet scented spices filled and perfumed my life. I entered the business room of the Proverbs and passed into the observatory room of the prophets where I saw many telescopes of various sizes, some pointing to far-off events but all concentrated upon the bright and morning star which was soon to rise over the moonlit hills of Judea for our salvation. I entered the audience room of the King of kings and caught a vision from the standpoint of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; I entered the Acts of the Apostles where the Holy Spirit was doing His office work in the forming of the church; I passed into the correspondence room where sat Paul, Peter, James, Jude and John penning their glittering Peaks. I got a vision of the King seated upon His throne in all His glory, and I cried: "All hail the power of Jesus' name, Let angels prostrate fall, Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all" (DeHoff, pp. 104-105).

What a great honor it is to be able to preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

known humanist publishing house. Steve set himself up as an expert on the Bible, religion and morality. He lists several hundred books in the bibliographies of his two books, but only four or five of those books would be considered conservative. Steve makes an enormous number of blunders for the simple reason that his reading was too narrow. Had he consulted the works of Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, the world's greatest linguist of all time, Dr. Edward Young, an outstanding Hebrew scholar, Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, Dr. Norman Geisler and hundreds of other conservative scholars, he would not have come away from his writing looking so foolish and biased. Preachers cannot afford to make the same mistakes Steve Allen made.

It is also advisable to know your community well enough so you can address the problems it faces. Many of us preach the truth and only the truth, but we do not preach the truth our communities need. For example, our city—like many cities in the United States—has had a fight over the legalization of alcoholic beverages. I have often wondered what most of the preachers in our city were saying preceding the vote on this very serious problem. Maybe they were speaking out against racism. We surely ought to teach what the Bible says on that topic. Maybe the preachers were teaching on the family. All of us know how very vital that subject is. But were they telling their listeners what alcoholic beverages do to families and to our country? If we preach on legitimate subjects but do not address those concerns that are touching the lives of our people at this very moment, we are not preaching the whole counsel of God. Many preachers teach the truth, but they neglect to address the immediate needs of the congregation and of the community.

I close our lesson today with another anonymous writing. This excerpt encourages all of us—and not just preachers—to examine the entire word of God—from Genesis to Revelation. Please listen carefully to these challenging words.

was not speaking of preachers only when he wrote: "Let the word of God dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16), but should not Paul's advice drive every preacher to his study regularly? There is no excuse for a preacher's failure to study.

If preachers are going to serve their hearers, they must also be informed on what is occurring in our world. That means we must read, read and read some more. Preachers should read widely—not just theological works—but books on dozens of topics, such as law, biology, ethics, politics, anthropology and education. How are we going to know what our hearers are facing if we do not read books pertaining to their lives? If you are a "Johnny one-note" and want to expand your horizons, you must start by being an avid reader.

I have preachers to tell me that they do not have time to do extensive reading. If that is the case—and I am convinced that it is with many preachers—then different arrangements must be made with the elders of the church. It is absolutely inexcusable for a preacher not to know what the world thinks about abortion, homosexuality, gambling, alcoholic beverages, the criminal justice system, the death penalty, corruption in government and in business, the religious movements in our country, cloning, physician-assisted suicide, affirmative action, secular humanism, the New Age movement and radical feminism. It is my considered judgment that preachers should read the books that oppose these evils, but also the ones that uphold them. In other words, to be well informed, we must know what the enemies of truth are saying as well as what its friends are teaching. Incidentally, many writers—both conservative and radical—make the mistake of not reading anything that differs from their views. I have time to give you just one example—and that not from a preacher. Steve Allen, the famous American entertainer, was a secular humanist, although I guarantee he is not one now. He wrote two books on the topic, the Bible, religion and morality. Both books were published by Prometheus Books, America's best

have a friend who holds dozens and dozens of workshops on evolution every year. For the past twenty-five or more years, I have conducted at least one hundred workshops on marriage and the family. I taught marriage and family courses at Freed-Hardeman University for fourteen years. I am tempted to speak often on topics relating to the family. But I realize that a congregation must have information on many other areas. So I strive to do exactly what Paul said he had done. He told the Ephesian elders:

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ...Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:20-21, 26-27).

Is there a preacher on earth who would not like to say the same when he stands before God to give an account of his preaching? But will we be able to do that if we have failed to preach the whole counsel of God?

So if a man does not want to be a "Johnny one-note" preacher, what should he do? What I am about to say to you may not fit every situation in the world, but I am convinced that most of it will help preachers in our country to be more effective in their work for the Lord. Preachers who desire to please God must keep their hearers informed, warned and built up in the most holy faith. And what is included in those responsibilities? Obviously, preachers must be committed students of the word of God. How can we preach what we do not know? I knew a preacher in Alabama who studied his Bible four hours everyday. Would it surprise you that his sermons were saturated with scripture? I have heard him quote as many as 150 verses of scripture in one sermon. One verse would be an abundance of scripture for some modern preachers. Paul

devoted almost entirely to the rapture, the great tribulation, the so-called "signs of the times," what will happen to Israel at the end of the age, the part Russia will play in the battle of Armageddon and such like. What is especially disturbing about these sermons is that the preachers have no idea about the time of the Lord's return and about the other topics they so glibly discuss. Can they not learn from the mistakes of false prophets of the past? One man wrote a book with the title, **Eighty-Eight Reasons Why The Rapture Will Occur in '88**. Another false teacher wrote a book entitled, **101 Reasons Why The Rapture Will Occur in '88**. All one hundred eighty-nine reasons were wrong, inexcusably wrong. Furthermore, anyone who sets a date for the Lord's return will always be embarrassed, if he can be embarrassed. And how utterly foolish for preachers to keep saying, "This is the terminal generation." Only God in heaven knows the time of the end. He has chosen not to tell anyone.

Some of the preachers on Trinity Broadcasting Network have a different note, but still just one note—how to get rich by giving to the Lord's work. Prosperity, according to some of these preachers, is a sign of the Lord's favor. A preacher friend of mine wrote in a letter, "Some of these preachers say, 'Send your money to God, but send it to my personal address.'" Even if these men were preaching the truth about giving to the cause of Christ—and they most assuredly are not—do they not know any other subjects? The impression these preachers give to outsiders is that churches are just interested in your money. In many cases, the preacher gets richer, the contributors get poorer and religion suffers from the very people who ought to be its friends.

All preachers with whom I am acquainted have their special interests. Many preachers have spent a great number of years studying some particular topic, such as, the family, the Greek language, archaeology, creation, moral issues and the miracles of the Bible. Those preachers often conduct special meetings or seminars on their areas of expertise. I

cannot be missed, unless people have already decided not to accept the Holy Spirit's words. Peter said,

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin. (Acts 2:38).

These verses demand that I ask you some questions. When Peter commanded the Jews to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, was he telling them how to be born again or from above? If he were telling them how to be born again, what else did they have to do to comply with Christ's command to Nicodemus? If water in John 3:5 means the water of the physical birth, how do you explain what occurred in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch? Philip, the preacher, and the eunuch, the alien sinner, went down into the water, and Philip baptized the eunuch (Acts 8:38). But does water really play a part in the new birth? My friends, you know it does, if the Bible means what it says.

Preachers, whatever their denominational affiliation, who preach only one theme—regardless of how vital the theme is—are guilty of failing to preach the whole counsel of God. Do you remember a song that was popular several years ago? I have forgotten who wrote it or who recorded it, but it had the title, "Johnny One Note." That title describes some of the preachers of our generation. They know one note and vigorously avoid learning any more. Do they not know that their hearers are going to starve spiritually, unless they hear other preachers and teachers? Individual Christians must have a balanced spiritual diet if they are going to grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The new birth must be preached faithfully, regularly and enthusiastically, but people will starve to death spiritually if that is all they hear.

Some of the television evangelists I sometimes watch also seem to be "Johnny one-note" preachers. Have you ever noticed how many of the preachers on TBN seem to know only one topic: dispensationalism? Their sermons are

place. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Even though Nicodemus was a very wise man and held a responsible position among the Jews, he did not understand what Jesus was teaching. So Jesus made the new birth so plain that anyone can understand it.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

The preacher I hear sometimes affirmed that the water was the water of the physical birth. That is the exact opposite of what Jesus told Nicodemus. It would have been foolish for Christ to command Nicodemus to be born of the water surrounding the physical birth. He had already been born physically. Jesus would have confused the ruler of the Jews and others who read this great chapter. The new birth or more precisely, the birth from above, can be understood only as we read the book of Acts to ascertain how the apostles understood it. The book of Acts is a divine commentary on what one must do to be saved or to enjoy the new birth.

You, no doubt, have read the sermon the inspired apostle Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. I shall not take the time today to review the main points of that great sermon, but I do want to read the climax to the sermon.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Peter's powerful sermon convinced the Jews that they had crucified their own Messiah. They were cut to the heart and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Has it ever dawned on you that Peter did not say, "Except you be born of the water and the Spirit, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God?" What did Peter tell the penitent Jews? The simple answer