

“TAKE HEED TO THE MINISTRY....”

By Dub McClish

Introduction

Paul wrote the exhortation contained in the title above to Archippus, a member of the Colossian Congregation. *Ministry* is from a cognate of the Greek word from which translators gave us *deacon*. It simply means a servant or minister, which term the New Testament never without qualification applies specifically to preachers. Paul included him in the greeting of his letter to Philemon, calling him his “fellow-soldier.” Thus the service Archippus rendered the church in Colossae appears to have been preaching the Gospel. With this in mind, let us study the subject of preaching and preachers.

Preachers Must *Preach* the Gospel

To the Corinthians Paul wrote: “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). *Woe* is the usual term the prophets used to announce God’s judgment on nations, cities, and individuals. The Lord frequently employed this term in crying out against sin and error among the Jewish leaders, using it seven times in Matthew 23 alone (KJV). Paul recognized that he was under the threat of God’s judgment if he failed in his responsibility to preach the Gospel.

The word *preach* in 1 Corinthians 9:16 is from a Greek word that means to “bring or announce good news.... mostly specif. of the divine message of salvation, the Messianic proclamation, the gospel...proclaim, preach” (*Arndt and Gingrich*). In its various forms, this term is found fifty-five times in the Greek New Testament. Jesus commanded: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). *Preach* in this passage is from a different Greek word which, in its various forms, is found sixty-one times in the New Testament. It means, in part “to proclaim after the manner of a herald; always with a suggestion of formality, gravity, and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed” (*Thayer’s*).

One cannot read the history of God’s preachers in the New Testament without being impressed with how authoritatively they preached the Gospel—beginning at Pentecost. They did not offer it as one-among-several, equally good messages. They had not heard of politically correct religious pluralism. They boldly proclaimed—in the face of severe persecution—that salvation was in the name of Christ alone (4:12). The apostles instructed “second generation” preachers to preach in the same manner. Paul commanded Timothy to “preach the word” so as to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort” his auditors (2 Tim. 4:2). He ordered Titus to “speak and exhort and reprove with all authority” (Tit. 2:15).

The Change Agents in the church have chosen worship as a major target. They have especially sought to undermine and weaken preaching, if not eliminate it altogether. They know that they must get rid of forceful and faithful Gospel preaching if they are to force the church into their denominational mold. Precept precedes practice, and practice follows doctrine. To change the practice, they must first silence the messenger or alter or replace the message. The outcry that I began to hear as a young preacher in the 1960s against “negative” and “dogmatic” preaching was the seedbed of this effort. It was an attempt to remove the authority status that true Gospel preaching has occupied from New Testament times and that was rooted in the Old Testament prophets. The Change Agents have succeeded to a remarkable and alarming degree.

The attack on authoritative Gospel preaching is clearly demonstrated in such things as:

1. Eliminating an invitation that includes the plan of salvation
2. Moving the preacher from the pulpit down to auditorium floor level
3. Preachers dressing in casual, everyday (sometimes sloppy) attire
4. Replacing preaching with consensus panel discussions
5. Cutting the sermon time to no longer than fifteen minutes
6. Replacing the Sunday evening worship assembly (and its preaching) with small group meetings in homes
7. Replacing preaching with subjective “testimonials”
8. Ridiculing book, chapter, and verse (liberals call it “concordance”) preaching
9. Debunking “doctrinal” preaching in favor of preaching only on “grace” “love,” “peace” (as they define them, of course), and “social” issues
10. Substituting dramatic skits for preaching

Another way the Change Agents have dumbed down the Biblical concept of Gospel preaching is by slyly introducing the word *sharing* in reference to it. We do not read in God’s Word of preachers who “**shared**” the Gospel **with** their hearers, but of those who “**preached**” the Gospel **to** their hearers. As noted earlier, Christ commanded us to **preach** the Gospel and Paul commanded us to **preach** the Word. *Preach* is an authoritative word that implies an authoritative message, which may be the reason the Holy Spirit employed it.

Communications experts in the secular world recognize the implications of the “sharing” approach in public speaking. *The Regan Report*, a newsletter for communications executives, observed several years ago that speakers who dote on “sharing” when they make a speech do not really do so at all: “They are being manipulatively humble and phonily democratic. They

pretend that we have come for dialogue, but instead they speak and we listen with the foolish pretense that we are **communicating with each other**" (emph. DM).

In recent years, "sharing" has become one of the "darling" words of liberals in the church (whom some mistake for Gospel preachers), and with good reason. *Sharers* fits them far better than *preachers*. They do not even like to be **called** "preachers" because this word connotes authority, which they despise. Just as they have rejected Scriptural boundaries for their own doctrine and practice, they shrink from emphasizing said authority to others. When they step into the pulpit, rather than preaching a Gospel sermon with some food for the soul, they must "share" an experience, a poem, a joke, a lesson, or some stories (maybe even a Scripture occasionally!) in a pitiful little "talk." Hundreds of congregations are languishing in Biblical beriberi and spiritual scurvy because they are hearing little or no Gospel preaching from such men. Brethren are being "shared" to death spiritually by these fellows week after week.

However, liberals are not the only ones who have adopted the "sharing" terminology. I frequently hear it in prayers and sermons from faithful brethren. Certainly, one errs in concluding that everyone who employs the "sharing" terminology is therefore a liberal. Faithful brethren who do so, however, have been influenced by and are playing right into the hands of liberals without realizing it. They are unconscious of either its origin or implications relating to public speaking in general and to preaching. I challenge such brethren to break the habit of "sharing" in the pulpit or even in teaching a Bible class. It simply does not belong in a Biblical vocabulary relating to the authoritative communication of the Gospel.

The world and the church need far more than sickening-sweet "sharing" of religious platitudes and pop-psychology. They need far more than a group of sissified, sanctimonious "reeds shaken with the wind" masquerading as Gospel preachers, who care more about social and entertainment activities than they do for the Word of God and never-dying souls. The world and the church need to hear **preaching** by Gospel **preachers**. If one wishes to call me by some term he thinks will insult me, he will have to choose some term besides *preacher*. Paul said, "Woe is unto me, if I **preach** not the gospel." The saying is quaint, but true: "God had but one Son, and He was a Gospel preacher."

Preachers Must Preach *Only* the Gospel

Paul could preach no other message and please God, nor can any man. Those who preach a perverted or changed Gospel have the damnation of God resting upon them (Gal. 1:7–9). It matters not if one is the companion of world rulers, has written fifty and sold forty million books, and preaches for a church with five thousand members. It matters not if one is president

of a “Christian” university or is a tenured religion faculty professor with a half-dozen PhDs. It is of no consequence if one has a TV audience of millions, or can draw thousands to his metropolitan crusades. Nor does it matter if he mounts a pulpit in a building that still has “Church of Christ” on its marquee. **If he preaches anything different from the Holy Spirit-revealed Gospel, he is “anathema.”** The tragedy of the loss of the souls of such false prophets is compounded by the loss of all of those who follow them (Mat. 15:14).

We must preach **only** the Gospel, because it alone is the “power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16) and the sole means by which one is begotten of God (1 Cor. 4:15; Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23). God therefore demands absolute purity in the Gospel message. In spite of this, preachers in religious bodies unauthorized by Heaven waste their own time and damn the souls of their hearers with discourses containing gross religious perversions.

It is sad beyond expression that it is little better in many of “our” pulpits. Some seem far more enamored with various wild speculations of infidel theologians and silly theories of modernistic skeptics than with the Bible. Many leaders are caught up in the “grow-at-any-cost” fads they have learned from the “community churches” and other denominational mega-churches with their “super-star,” “exciting” pastors. Members, Biblically ignorant, worldly, and materialistic in their thinking are willing to pay top dollar for such men. Never mind the shallowness or outright error (in case they happened to recognize it) of the message, as long as the messenger is “dynamic” and can keep them awake with his funny stories for a few minutes on Sunday morning. This sorry situation is based on sheer emotionalism in both the preacher and the hearers.

Solid, plain, unvarnished preaching of the Gospel is repulsive to this class of weakling pulpiteers and those who pay their keep. They think the congregation will die without a gymnasium; it just cannot have a successful “outreach” program without it! (*Outreach* is another one of those buzz words the liberals stole from the denominations and that many faithful brethren have borrowed from the liberals—and which I would like to “out-throw.”)

We have observed many imaginative gimmicks that sidetracked Gospel preaching in an effort to produce numerical and/or spiritual growth. One fellow out of Abilene made the rounds for several years with his “Gymnastics to the Glory of God” show. (Age may have forced him to change it to “Geriatrics to the Glory of God” by now). Another brother put together an act called “Magic for the Master” over twenty years ago. He and I had a brief discussion about his work on one occasion, during which he handed me one of his calling cards. I later turned the card over and found that he was multi-talented; the backside advertised “Juggling for Jesus.” These silly

sashays into sensationalism fit right in with the clowns who operate their “clown ministries.” Such gadgets run the gamut of tomfoolery and absurdity.

Some congregations (most of them large and liberal) have so loaded themselves with “ministerial staffs” that they have a religious “staff infection.” The Richland Hills “Church of Christ” (a misnamed denomination that was a sound congregation thirty-five years ago) just north of Fort Worth, Texas, boasts twenty-two “ministers” (three of whom are women) on its Website (www.rhchurch.org/index.html). These include such titles as “Senior Minister of the Word,” “Senior Minister of Administration and Finance,” “Praise and Worship Minister,” and “Minister of Recreation.” Not to be out-done, a church bulletin in Atlanta, Georgia, listed a “Minister of Socio-Economic and Political Affairs,” and another congregation had a “Minister of the Parking Lot.”

To some it is not enough to preach **only** the Gospel and let it cause people to obey the Lord, thus letting the church grow as God gives the increase. They must attempt to stimulate “growth” artificially. They err, however, in crediting God for such “growth.” By their own scheming and promotionalism they attract the crowds, and any enterprise—secular or religious—can swell its clientele by such measures. Congregations that boast of great numerical growth by such means have little more of God and His Gospel in them than any other aggressive entertainment or business operation. They simply hide behind a quasi-religious mask. Church growth that is thus artificially stimulated can only produce artificial growth. Whatever it takes to get the crowd there, it will take more of it to keep the crowd coming back. God said that rebellious Israel engaged in practices “which I commanded not, neither came it into my mind” (Jer. 7:31). I believe He would say the same thing about the practices described above. All such innovations go back to one starting point—a failure to preach (and practice) **only** the Gospel.

Preachers Must Preach *All* of the Gospel

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of his preaching: “I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The Lord promised the apostles He would send the Holy Spirit Who would teach them **all** things, bring to their remembrance **all** that He had taught them, and guide them into **all** the Truth (John 14:26; 16:13). God has inspired **all** Scripture to furnish us completely unto **every** good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Only when we have **all** of the Gospel do we have **all** things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). A Gospel “in part” is a defective message; it is bad news rather than good news.

We often hear of the need for “balanced” preaching—a worthy concern as long as *balance* is Scripturally defined. However, some view “balanced” preaching as that which is never “negative,” confrontational, dogmatic, or authoritative, but which predominantly dwells on “grace” and “love” (as they define them), couched in terms of insipid suggestions rather than authoritative obligations. The only way anyone can be sure his preaching is “balanced” is if he preaches “the whole counsel of God.” Ironically, when we thus preach the liberal element accuses of being “unbalanced.”

Our age is cursed not only with those who preach outright error. Many in our pulpits preach the Truth—on the subjects they address. Unfortunately, they just never “get around” to preaching on certain topics and themes. Thus, while they do not blatantly preach error, they preach only a portion of the Truth. To deliberately preach less than the entire Gospel message is but another means of preaching error—and pleasing the devil. Those who preach must aim at preaching the whole message. Listeners must demand the whole message from preachers.

The pressure to preach a partial Gospel has a triple thrust:

First, some in the church will not tolerate all of the Gospel. These want to—without rebuke—parade in public almost nude, drink their beer, commit suicide by consuming tobacco, visit the bars and dance halls when they please, and continue in their God-forbidden marriages. Others cannot bear to hear strong preaching that exposes religious error and lays down dogmatic Truth. To some, the worst thing a preacher can do is to mention by name a man, in or out of the church, who is a false teacher. These brethren would rather let their Baptist friends go to Hell believing Baptist doctrine than to hear their preacher identify the Baptist Church as a human order with no Biblical right to exist. One such brother or sister invented that sage advice decades ago: “Just preach the Gospel, and let everyone alone.”

Another group in most local churches may be morally upright, but various ones among them are as stingy as Ebenezer Scrooge, forsake the assembly at will, or they have tongues that can curl a porcupine’s quills. These folk applaud preaching on baptism, the church, or the Lord’s Supper. They can become very testy, however, when the preaching reflects the “whole counsel of God” sufficiently to address their transgressions.

In earlier generations, such folk would either “shape up or ship out,” but now they often stay and try to oust the preacher and/or the elders who dared make them feel guilty. “We’ll take our money and go elsewhere if you don’t tone that preacher down. After all, he’s just a hired hand.” It has become common for congregations to keep the sinners and ask the faithful preacher to leave, rather than vice versa.

Second, as earlier noted, preachers in ever-growing numbers are unwilling to preach all of the Gospel anymore. Many are content to ignore the morass of worldly behavior and liberal and denominational thinking characteristic of many in their respective congregations. Some of them have openly embraced the liberal lies, while others have just become pulpit puppets, determined to make whatever compromises necessary to keep their jobs. We should not confuse Gospel preachers with such “semi-gospel sharers.” These sanctimonious spiritual sissies profess to be too “loving” and “kind” to get down in the trenches and wage war against the doctrinal and moral errors that have captivated brethren by the thousands. They are more likely to excuse, defend, and embrace false teachers, rather than name and expose them. In doing so, they place themselves above the Lord, the apostles, and all of God’s prophets of both the Old and New Testaments.

Paul’s powerful prophecy that fits our time so well, rebuked both preacher and hearer who could not tolerate all of the Gospel:

Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2–4).

Third, some congregations and schools are so far gone that they intentionally recruit liberals to fill their pulpits, professorships, and lectureship rosters. To such erstwhile brethren, the cardinal sin is for the preacher to offend the most sensitive or liberal soul. (Of course, they care not if the Lord and other lovers of all the Truth are offended by their corrupted message.) Such folk would not knowingly let a plainspoken Gospel preacher within five miles of their bailiwicks. Yet they openly embrace, support, and even honor false teachers and factionists who long ago proved themselves to be Trojan horses in Jesus’ kingdom. Elders and preachers in such congregations would never question any member’s marital situation nor think of withdrawing from the most blatant sinner. The only one whom they might threaten with disfellowship would be some “troublemaker” who insisted on hearing the whole Gospel from pulpit and classroom.

One will not pursue his determination to preach all of the Gospel very long without being tested. He will likely even be tempted sometimes by the rich, by the powerful, by friends, or even by family, not to preach it fully—but he must not yield. To be **Gospel** preachers we must remain committed to preaching not merely some, much, or even most of the Gospel, but **all** of it. We labor under the woe of God if we do anything less.

Preachers Must Preach the Gospel *in the Right Way*

There are right and wrong motives, spirits, and manners that may characterize preaching. Paul wrote of such:

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one do it of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel; but the other proclaim Christ of faction, not sincerely... (Phi. 1:15–17).

Every man who decides he wants to preach should carefully examine his motives for this decision, and he should continue to examine his motives as he preaches. All who preach should strive at all times to preach in both manner and spirit that comport with those of the inspired men. What exemplary elements can we glean from the way in which these men preached?

We must preach out of love

Any lesser **motive** would have soon failed the Lord and the apostles, given the trials and perils their preaching provoked. The love that moved them was two-fold, and rightly ordered. Most of all they loved God, followed closely by their love for men (Mat. 22:37–39). Paul reminds us that, even if one could preach fluently in the languages of men and angels and could prophesy powerfully, without love his preaching amounts to so much noise (1 Cor. 13:1–2).

One should also preach in a loving **manner**, as Paul urged: “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). If love is one’s motivation to preach, it is likely that his manner of preaching will reflect it. Love will not allow one to intentionally and unnecessarily offend others just for the sake of offending them. However, the same love will not allow him to withhold the Truth men need for fear of offending some of them. The Old Testament prophets, the Lord, and the apostles often offended those who heard them preach. To preach lovingly does not necessarily imply softness or sweetness, however. The inspired men often spoke in terms that were neither. *Love* must never be used as an excuse for compromising the Gospel or ignoring sin and error. Contrariwise, Biblical love demands—rather than prevents—the proclamation of the Truth in a straightforward, uncompromising manner. If we bowed to the demands for “loving” preaching as some define it, no sinner would ever learn his need of a Savior, much less what to do about it.

Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel out of love.

We must preach with simplicity

The Gospel is basically a very simple message. Admittedly, it is deep and complex in some of its subjects and parts, but men tend to complicate its simplest features. Paul was brilliant and could be eloquent, but when he addressed the erudite philosophers in Athens, his message was a model of simple, direct terms (Acts 17:23–31). He could have addressed the citizens of Corinth with “excellency of speech or of wisdom,” but instead made the crucified

Christ his theme (1 Cor. 2:1–2). He later wrote these brethren who were fussing over the gift of tongues that he would rather speak five words that they could understand than ten thousand words they could not understand (14:19). Both Peter and Jude warn that a trademark of false teachers is their “great swelling words” (2 Peter. 2:18; Jude 16). Paul identified “smooth and fair speech” with apostates (Rom. 16:18).

The Truth did not sweep like a prairie fire across the frontier of our fledgling nation in the first half of the nineteenth century on the shoulders of theologians with PhDs. True, such intellectual giants as Alexander Campbell, J.W. McGarvey, Moses E. Lard, and others contributed much. For the most part, however, the restored church grew so rapidly mostly from the preaching of men with little formal education, but who possessed a great zeal and love for the God, Christ, and the Gospel.

It may come as a shock to many that the King James Version was the Bible of those who heralded the great plea for restoration. From its general acceptance in 1644 until 1885, **it was the only English Bible in circulation**. Those who clamor for “modern-speech” Bible versions whine that the KJV is “too difficult” for moderns to understand. Poppycock! Such is a confession on their own ignorance and/or intellectual laziness. Were those older generations more literate than recent ones? There will likely be millions in Heaven who learned and obeyed the Truth from that “impossible-to-understand” version.

Unarguably, the modern versions use simpler words. In fact, some modern versions have “simplified” much of the Truth right off its pages. I would much rather explain to my grandchildren the meaning of *wot not*, *to wit*, *Holy Ghost*, *I trow*, and other expressions in the KJV text than to attempt to explain why such terms as *sinful nature*, *Saturday night* (observance of the Lord’s supper), *faith alone* (as sufficient for salvation), and other such fatal errors are in a book with *Holy Bible* on its cover. The dirty little secret of the **real** driving force behind the incessant publication of new versions is not inability to comprehend the KJV or ASV; it is profits from their sales. I oppose the extremists who demand the use of the KJV alone. However, those are also extremists who would cast it on history’s ash heap as a relic which modern man has outgrown.

Many theologians are as bad about using “theologese” as lawyers are about using “legalese” when they speak and write. It seems that some men cannot get advanced degrees without having common sense “educated” right out of them. When one throws such terms as *eschatological*, *ecclesiological*, and *soteriological* around, he sacrifices simplicity for his own pomposity. When a man feels compelled to **gratuitously** sprinkle his sermons with Hebrew and

Greek terms, I strongly suspect that he is trying to **impress** a few naïve brethren more than he is to **instruct** the whole assembly.

We should never oppose true scholarship or the thirst for more knowledge. Preachers must continue to study and learn as long as they have the mental capacity to do so. However, the notion that one must have a PhD degree from a theological seminary or divinity school to be a Bible scholar is sheer folly. In fact, a large percentage of brethren who have gone to such schools have come back fuller of doubts, skepticism, and denominational drivel than of the Bible. They have been a major source of the *Change-Agent* movement in the schools and congregations over the past generation—a veritable curse to the church of the Lord.

The Lord revealed the very words of Scripture through the Holy Spirit to inspired men (1 Cor. 2:10, 13). One does not love the Truth very much who is uncomfortable with its terminology. We will not stray from the Book as long as we hold dear the time- and battle-tested, Bible-based slogans that admonish us to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent and to call Bible things by Bible names. Paul's warning is ever current: "I fear lest by any means your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). **Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel in simplicity.**

We must preach with boldness

Luke used *boldness* or some form of it eight times in Acts to describe preaching. Paul used it eleven times in his letters in reference to his own behavior or that which he urged on others. Boldness is the opposite of cowardice, reticence, timidity, or undue reserve. It is not mere loudness, but it will cause one to speak up and speak out with the Truth and to stand one's ground in the face of opposition, threat, or danger. To be bold is to risk offending others in order to save them and to risk reprisal and ridicule, both from brethren and from those in the world. Paul described his boldness when he wrote: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ..." (Rom. 1:16).

When a few brethren in about 1960 became convinced that our fathers in the faith had been too bold with the Gospel, that was the very time that the solid and dramatic growth of our congregations began to slow. If we ever regain the growth pattern of yesteryear on any solid and widespread basis it will not be, as some seem to think, by borrowing the silly gimmicks and errors of false teachers. We will not regain it by mouthing ambiguous platitudes, polite little speeches, or quasi-religious pop-psychology pep talks. We will not regain it by delivering insipid sermonettes that could be delivered in any denominational pulpit without causing a ripple. We will not regain it by so speaking and acting toward denominational errors as if we have no

problems with them or that we agree with them. We will not regain it by trying to appear to worldlings that we have little objections to their fornication, drinking, gambling, dishonesty, selfishness, and general denial of God in their utter secularism.

The only kind of growth that pleases the Lord and that is true and lasting will come from Paul's inspired formula: "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). Both Paul and Apollos preached the Gospel boldly and uncompromisingly and allowed God's powerful Word to do its work in good and honest hearts. **Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel boldly.**

We must preach with humility

When God commissioned Jeremiah to be His prophet, he responded: "Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, I know not how to speak; for I am a child" (Jer. 1:6). Some have been critical of Jeremiah's attitude, but rather than criticizing him for his reticence, I believe we should praise him for his humility and modesty. Perhaps he was not so much trying to avoid doing what God commanded as he was wondering aloud how, feeling his own limitations, he could ever accomplish it. Hardly any character trait so beautifully adorns the personality as humility, and especially is this admirable in preachers.

Because our Lord, the greatest preacher of all, was "meek and lowly in heart" (Mat. 11:29), He washed the disciples' feet (John 13:14) and urged His followers figuratively to follow His example (v. 15). Surely, preachers are not exempt from His beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 5:3). Nor are preachers immune to the world's siren call rooted in "the vain glory of life" (1 John 2:15–16). When Paul preached in Ephesus, he did so in "lowliness of mind" (Acts 20:19). His warning to all certainly includes those who preach: "Doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself" (Phi. 2:3). In spite of such warnings and exhortations, as mentioned earlier, there were still some self-centered, ego-maniac preachers in the first century who preached out of envy and strive (1:15). Unfortunately, they are not extinct.

Pride is a temptation of special severity to preachers because people frequently look to us for answers to their questions, seek our counsel, and publicly praise us. If we do not take care, we can begin to believe all of those nice things people may write or say about us. (Of course, wives, elders, and certain self-appointed critics usually help keep us down to earth!) Few things are more disgusting to right-thinking people than a preacher who touts his own ability, education, influence, or importance. Solomon's advice in Proverbs 27:2 is especially

valuable for all who preach: “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.”

I am convinced that pride has led some to abandon the Truth and adopt the liberal slop of theological pluralism. I am also convinced that some, though not generally liberal in doctrine, have adopted and continue to propagate strange, quirky heresies in order to feed bloated egos that crave extra attention. As described above, some among us who have attained advanced degrees (many of whom are on the faculties of our schools) look down their “ivory tower” noses at the “unscholarly” fellows who have no more sense than to study and preach the Bible. Such self-proclaimed “scholars” are for the most part the leaders in the determined effort to reform the church of our Lord to conform to denominational patterns. In their pride they cannot stand for their denominational academic peers to accuse them of being “narrow” in their concepts of fellowship, the conditions of pardon, worship, and like subjects.

However, one does not have to be a doctrinal fruitcake, a theological liberal, or someone educated beyond his intelligence to fall prey to pride. Those who are sticklers for the Truth can also succumb to this deadly sin. It seems that some preachers are not content to let “cream rise to the top.” Some, often in their youth, allow ambition to drive them as they openly seek position and prominence that have come to others only after decades of faithful and difficult work.

A few years ago a preacher I know asked some fellow preachers how one went about “getting an invitation to speak on one of those lectureships,” for he would surely like to be on one. As a director of lectureships spanning more than two decades, I had various men at times to recommend themselves and offer their services as participants. I always thanked them politely—and did not invite them. Such brethren remind me of a twelve-year old fledgling song leader who tries to lead “The New Song” or of a dripping-wet new convert wanting to begin an immediate study of the book of Revelation.

Though they may not have a string of degrees after their names or be the greatest orators, those men who preach God’s Truth in humility and at great sacrifice because they would rather die than compromise it are nonetheless great in the eyes of God: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mat. 23:12). Jeremiah was just such a man. The proud man asks, when charged with great responsibility, “I thought you would never call.” The humble servant, as Jeremiah, asks, “How can one of such mean ability possibly be equal to the task?” No clothing ever looked better on a Gospel preacher than the suit of humility! Let us cultivate the beautiful and commendable trait advocated in Romans 12:3:

For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.

Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel in humility.

We must preach with urgency

When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he reminded them that while among them he had “ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). Later, when Timothy was in that same city, Paul instructed: “Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). Jude describes the urgency of our saving the lost as “snatching them out of the fire” (v. 23). Conversion accounts in Acts indicate immediate obedient responses of sinners to the Gospel (i.e., “there were added unto them in that same day,” “what does hinder me to be baptized?” “the same hour of the night,” et al.), implying the urgency their teachers conveyed to them.

We need to preach so as to provoke decisions in those who hear—decisions to make whatever changes or take whatever steps necessary—privately or publicly—to comply with the Word of God. Those who preach, but who have no sense of urgency about their work may need to consider some other kind of work. We dare not mitigate the Gospel’s power by leaving our hearers with the impression that it is a “ho-hum,” “take-it-or-leave-it,” inconsequential message. We preach not merely a life-or-death-message, but a Heaven-or-Hell message. **Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel with urgency.**

Conclusion

Those of us who preach must **preach** the Gospel, **only** the Gospel, **all** of the Gospel, and in the **way** the Gospel dictates. Furthermore, those who occupy the pews (especially elders) must demand no less of those who preach. Woe is unto us if we fail to do so. God’s order to Jonah is still His order to all who open their mouths in His name: “preach...the preaching that I bid thee” (Jon. 3:2). All who dare to preach are under the obligation Micaiah iterated when summoned by the wicked Ahab: “As Jehovah liveth, what Jehovah saith unto me, that will I speak” (1 Kin. 22:14). We dare not soften, sweeten, or shave it to appeal to the vanities and vices of men. To do so will fail to save the sinner and damn the preacher who dares do it.

[Note: I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared as a combination of an “Editorial Perspective” and an “Editor’s Clippings” column in the June 2005 issue of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time. This MS is a shorter and slightly different version of my MS titled, “What Is Appropriate Preaching.”]