

God's Commission to Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:4-10

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Introduction

Few Old Testament characters equal and none surpass the prophet Jeremiah's devotion to Jehovah God (McClish, 41-60). His refusal to compromise the message God commissioned him to preach to Jerusalem's stiff-necked apostates in the face of brutal and terrifying persecution is worthy of the grandest admiration and emulation. However, the need for a Jeremiah to prophesy to Judah begins well before his time.

Almost fifteen centuries before the birth of our Lord, Jehovah warned Israel through Moses in the following unvarnished terms:

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.... Jehovah will bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, that shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young, and shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy ground, until thou be destroyed; that also shall not leave thee grain, new wine, or oil, the increase of thy cattle, or the young of thy flock, until they have caused thee to perish. And they shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fortified walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land; and they shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which Jehovah thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, whom Jehovah thy God hath given thee, in the siege and in the distress wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee (Deu. 28:15, 49-53 [ASV used throughout unless otherwise indicated]).

Move now some nine centuries later. The once united nation of God's elect people had been divided. Israel, Judah's sister nation to the north, had already paid her terrible price for rejecting Jehovah, having been destroyed by Assyria a century before. Although she witnessed the national suicide Israel committed through her corruption, Judah seemed to have learned nothing from that tragedy. God would make one last desperate attempt to effect repentance in Judah to avert having to pour out His wrath on His beloved people. If they would not renounce her evils upon this appeal, His forbearance would be exhausted. The instrument through whom He would appeal to them would be a prophet—the stubborn, adamant-willed, unshushable, unbreakable Jeremiah.

Ironically, Jeremiah, the priest of Anathoth, received his call of God in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (cir. 627 B.C.), the most righteous of all the kings of Judah, including

David himself (2 Kin. 23:25). In his reformatory zeal, this young king had already made great progress in destroying idolatry in both Judah and Israel by the time God commissioned Jeremiah for his work (2 Chr. 34:3–7). To the casual observer, it might have appeared that the reforms of Josiah had utterly reformed God’s people. Where, then, was the need for Jeremiah’s clarion voice to cry out against idolatry and apostasy? Had not Josiah driven it from their borders? Yes, perhaps from the borders of their land, but God knew that it had not been driven from their hearts.

The wickedness that consumed the people had a long history and involved every stratum of Hebrew society. Reaching back for several generations to the early judges not long after Joshua, it prevailed in kings, princes, and priests, and filtered all the way down to the lowliest citizen. Only a few righteous kings were exceptions in Judah. There were exceptions among the kings of Israel. Nations do not escape such long-standing thought and behavioral patterns easily or quickly, if at all. Not merely the hands, but more basically, the hearts of Judah had to be converted. Josiah’s restoration effort was well underway by the time of Jeremiah’s call. Josiah exorcised Judah and the remnant of Israel of all the outward trappings of idolatry. It would be Jeremiah’s task to eliminate it from the hearts of the people, for without this accomplishment, the former would be very short-lived, which history reveals was the case.

To learn the essence of God’s definition of faithful preachers and preaching we need to return repeatedly to the prophets as our models. No better model among them exists than Jeremiah, both in that which God commissioned him to do and in the way he responded to it. In God’s commission to him one can see both the significance of the work to which God called him and the great responsibility which God placed upon him. When one reads Jeremiah’s two books, one is struck with the degree to which he comprehended both of these elements of his work. Perhaps it is not too much to say that no mere man ever surpassed his faithfulness in discharging his assigned task and none ever did so under greater duress, opposition, and suffering. We discover the key to the incomparable work and life of Jeremiah in God’s charge to him and his response to it.

Exegesis of The Text

God Appoints Jeremiah – Verses 4–5

Now the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations.

Jeremiah makes it clear from the beginning that he will not be speaking independently from henceforth. The “word of Jehovah” would hereafter direct and instruct him concerning his words and his works. Note now the elements of God’s employment of Jeremiah:

The When of It

In his foreknowledge, God “knew” Jeremiah before he was formed in his mother’s womb. Before Jeremiah came forth in birth God had “sanctified” him. We do not pretend to understand all the mysteries of the deep subject of God’s foreknowledge. However, the Bible unmistakably teaches that God foresees the future, not just in general, but even as it pertains to individuals. What God said to Jeremiah about knowing and selecting him, the Bible also says of David (Psa. 139:13–16), Isaiah (Isa. 49:1, 5), John the Baptizer (Luke 1:15), and Paul (Gal. 1:15).

Whatever is involved in God’s election of certain individuals to serve Him in special ways, such predestination does not interfere with the exercise of their own free will, nor does it determine their eternal destiny (Mat. 11:28–30; John 3:16; Rev. 22:7; etc.) Despite Paul’s selection “from his mother’s womb,” he persecuted the Lord by persecuting His church in the early part of his life. Had he never turned from this rebellion against God, he would have been lost eternally despite God’s selection of him. Jeremiah could have utterly rebelled against God’s call, although God desired him to be His spokesman to Judah and to other nations. It was not force beyond his ability to resist, but humility and reverence toward God, that caused Jeremiah to respond to His commission.

The What of It

God first told Jeremiah he “knew” him before he was formed. This term is likely intended to convey to Jeremiah that God had chosen, selected, or approved him for the task to which he was being called. God also told Jeremiah He had “sanctified” him before he was born. This means God had dedicated Jeremiah or set him apart for the holy commission He was now announcing. Furthermore, God had “appointed” Jeremiah to be His spokesman to the nations. The prophetic work of Jeremiah was not assumed by self-appointment. Indeed, we shall shortly see that he shrank from it in his feeling of inadequacy (v. 6). He had a mandate from God, and this must have given strength and courage to the prophet when he had to stand alone as he executed his Divine commission.

Jeremiah Responds to God – Verse 6

Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, I know not how to speak; for I am a child.

Understandably, Jeremiah initially appears to be overwhelmed with the task God has laid upon him. He seems to be both alarmed and amazed that God would call such a one as himself for the staggering task of being His mouthpiece, not only to Judah, but to the nations. He protests that he does not have the necessary communication skills. I understand him to mean that he does not have the training or native capacity to stand before princes and multitudes and speak with the fluency God's message deserves. Moses' great reserve and similar excuse when God called him from the burning bush at Sinai immediately comes to mind (Exo. 3:10–4:12).

The reason Jeremiah gives for his inability to speak well is that he is but "a child." This, some suppose, means that he is still a very young man. His long prophetic career (over forty years) would certainly harmonize with his beginning at a young age. However, he may mean that, compared to the task and the abilities he knew the work would require, he saw himself as no more qualified than a child.

God Answers Jeremiah – Verses 7–8

But Jehovah said unto me, Say not, I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith Jehovah.

God Refuses Jeremiah's Excuse

When God told Jeremiah what to do, no excuse was acceptable to avoid the task. What if he were but young and inexperienced? Was this or any other imagined handicap a problem to the Creator of man and His universe? Yet, God does not severely rebuke the fledgling prophet. Perhaps this indicates that God understood that Jeremiah's excuse did not arise from faithlessness, but from meekness, modesty, and understandable fear. What if he were but a "child"? God would still send him to whoever needed to hear him and with whatever message He would give him. He would not have to be concerned about the words, for God would supply them.

A century before Jeremiah, Isaiah described the digression of the leaders of God's people and its terrible consequences: "For they that lead this people cause them to err; and they that are

led of them are destroyed" (Isa 9:16). The attitude of the people in general was one of defiance that would not tolerate God's faithful message and messengers:

For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of Jehovah; that say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits, get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us (Isa. 30:9-11).

In his explanation of why Jerusalem and Judah had to be destroyed, the inspired writer of 2 Chronicles described their determination to walk in their own obstinate ways despite God's long-suffering attempts to alert them to their peril:

Moreover, all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy (2 Chr. 36:14-16).

It was because of this very human proclivity that God sent Jeremiah to Judah, as the last in a long line of prophets, in a final attempt to rescue her from national suicide. The religious leaders of God's people contemporary with Jeremiah were corrupt, and the people rejoiced in their corruption: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5:31).

God Reassures Jeremiah

God's promise to deliver Jeremiah implies that he would meet severe opposition. Part of Jeremiah's reluctance may have sprung from his contemplation of the awful treatment to which he would likely be subjected if he preached what Judah and the nations needed to hear. He had every reason to be fearful for his life, even before God gave him his specific message. God encouraged him by telling him not to fear, for He would be with him and deliver him. Jeremiah must have relied upon God's promised protection often as he faced cruel and shameful treatment repeatedly because of his message. God gave an almost identical message of assurance to Paul about six and one-half centuries later when he faced difficult and discouraging circumstances in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10) and again in Jerusalem (23:11). God's words of encouragement were His way of removing every excuse from Jeremiah's mind. It was not for Jeremiah to question his qualifications or his ability to stand before great men with a message they would not appreciate; it was his place to obey and let God take care of the details.

God Equips Jeremiah – Verse 9

Then Jehovah put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and Jehovah said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth:

God had already told Jeremiah that he was to speak whatever He would command him to speak (v. 7). Now He endows Jeremiah with the very words which he is to proclaim.

Jeremiah's first reaction to God's commission was, "I know not how to speak" (v. 6). When Moses offered a similar excuse, God gave him his brother Aaron as his spokesman (Exo. 3:14-16). To help Jeremiah, God said, "Behold I have put my words in thy mouth." A century before Jeremiah, God spoke to Isaiah in almost identical terms: "And I have put my words in thy mouth..." (Isa. 51:16). God would later do the same with Jeremiah's younger contemporary, Ezekiel. God set a scroll before him which contained the message he was to speak (Eze. 2:8-10). God then commanded the prophet of the Exile to eat the scroll and to "...go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them" (Ezek. 3:1-4).

In Jeremiah we see an instance of that to which the Hebrews writer referred: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners" (Heb. 1:1). Peter declared the same truth: "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). The Old Testament prophets of God did not speak their own message, but the words God gave them. Thus, when they spoke, God was speaking to the people. By this means, God also gave us the Old Testament in written form.

God Enables Jeremiah – Verse 10

[S]ee, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

Jeremiah's Authority

While God sent Jeremiah primarily to Judah and Jerusalem and he did almost all his prophetic work there, his prophecies would relate to other kingdoms and nations as well. In fact, he delivered God's message of doom to at least ten other nations (Jer. 43- 51). God said He had set Jeremiah over nations and kingdoms, but this humble priest of Anathoth would not rule by the power of crown, throne, or sword. Rather, he would be "over" the nations to which he would address his prophecies by the power of the Word of God. He would have advance

knowledge of their respective fates and futures. This knowledge would be a form of great power and authority, which even the kings of those nations did not possess.

Jeremiah's Authority Implemented

In executing his commission and exercising his authority, his initial work would be that of demolition. This is expressed in four terms: "to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow." We are not to understand this to be literal or physical destruction, although God was well-pleased with just such behavior in the righteous King Josiah relative to idolatry and all of its evil trappings (2 Kin. 22-23; 2 Chr. 34-35). The demolition to be wrought by Jeremiah was to be through his delivering the message of God's judgment against all wickedness. It would be a bold exposure of the evil and thoroughly corrupt practices of rebellious Jews and Gentiles as well. The Word God gave Jeremiah was like fire, and "...like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces" (Jer. 23:29). Jeremiah was to do his best to level the bastions and strongholds of idolatry, immorality, and every form of apostasy by speaking the words God had placed in his mouth.

However, his work of destruction was not an end in itself. It was rather preparatory work for the next stage of his assignment—to build and to plant. However, before virtue can take root, evil must be rooted out. The land on which one would plant crops or build a house has to be cleared of trees, stumps, rocks, and other undesirable items before the works of planting or building can be accomplished. The rebuke of wickedness in the absence of repentance was to be followed by the promise of mercy and blessing if the people turned back to God.

Application of The Text

Verses 4-5

God, not some man, called and commissioned Jeremiah and sent him forth with His message to the people. The various men (such as Jeremiah) whom God commissioned spoke and wrote words that could not have come from men. They often foretold events in detail that could be known only by One who can see the future as easily and as certainly as if it were the past. There is no explanation for this ability apart from God. The Bible was written by men to whom God gave His message. Therefore, it is "...not...the word of men, but...in truth, the word of God..." (1 The. 2:13).

God no longer miraculously calls or commissions men to serve Him, notwithstanding the claims of some. However, He does call us through His Word to serve according to our

abilities (Mat. 25:14–30; 1 Cor. 4:1–2; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:5–10; 1 Pet. 1:17; et al.). We have the same responsibility and accountability to use our God-given and personally cultivated abilities (in harmony with God’s restrictions) as did those who were called in a miraculous way.

The least observant reader cannot miss the implications of God’s statements about Jeremiah before he was formed and born in relation to the unspeakable tragedy of abortion. Perhaps the favorite ploy of the pro-death advocates is to confuse the issue by arguing that one cannot know when life begins in the gestation period. They adamantly argue that it does not begin until sometime after conception. Thereby they attempt to rationalize their bloody work and escape responsibility for their campaign of infanticide. For the Bible-believer, there can be neither question nor equivocation. It is clear from His statements to Jeremiah that in the mind of God Jeremiah existed in his mother’s womb from the time of conception—before his body began to take its form!

We should all do all within our power (in keeping with Christian principles) to oppose this incredible barbarism. We should especially take care to use the power of the ballot box to turn those in favor of this indescribable catastrophe out of office and replace them with representatives who will work to ban it. The voices of the more than 40 million innocent and defenseless offspring of U.S. citizens who have been butchered since *Roe v. Wade* was enacted in 1973, though silenced by the heartless abortionists’ vacuum machines, scream at us to rise in their defense. If there were no other evidence to advertise the malignancy of the religion of evolution, the fact that, among other malignant effects, it has brought a once civilized and generally God-fearing nation to the point of mercilessly slaying its own young almost altogether out of sheer convenience should be sufficient!

Verse 6

Some have criticized Jeremiah for his reluctance. Rather than censuring him for his hesitation, ought we not to praise him for his humility and modesty? He was not so much trying to avoid doing what God commanded, as he was wondering aloud how, knowing his own limitations, he would ever be able to accomplish it.

There is hardly any character trait that so becomes the personality as humility. This is especially so in preachers. Paul tells us that there were self-centered, ego-maniac preachers in the first century (Phi. 1:15) and unfortunately, they have not become extinct. Pride is a temptation of special severity to preachers because people often rely upon them for answers to their questions, seek their counsel, and publicly praise them. If he does not take care, a preacher can

begin to believe all those nice things people may write or say about him. (Of course, there seem always to be those whose mission in life is to keep him “in his place.”)

Few things are more disgusting to right-thinking people than to see a preacher who is puffed up with his own ability, education, influence, or importance. I am convinced that pride is what has led some to abandon the Truth and adopt the liberal slop of theological pluralism. I am also convinced that some have adopted and continue to propagate strange, quirky heresies to feed a bloated ego that craves extra attention. Some 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. These self-proclaimed “scholars” are for the most part the leaders in the determined effort to cast the church of our Lord in the denominational mold. In their pride they cannot stand for their denominational academic fellows to accuse them of being “narrow” in their concepts of the inspiration of the Bible, fellowship, the conditions of pardon, the identity of the church, worship, and like subjects.

However, one does not have to be a doctrinal fruitcake, a theological liberal, or someone educated beyond his intelligence (and/or his convictions) to fall prey to pride. Those who are sticklers for sound doctrine can also succumb to this deadly sin. It seems that some preachers are not content to let “cream rise to the top.” Some allow perverse ambition and jealousy to drive them as they openly seek position and prominence that have come to others only through decades of faithful and difficult work. Such behavior is akin to that of a twelve-year old fledgling song leader who tries to lead “The New Song” or of a new convert wanting to begin immediately a study of Revelation before he has dried off from the baptistery. Solomon’s advice is valuable for all, but especially for all who preach: “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; A stranger, and not thine own lips” (Pro. 27:2).

A few years ago, a preacher I know reportedly 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 lectureship director for more than two decades, several men over the years approached me, recommending themselves and offering their services as speakers or writers. I habitually thanked them politely and did not invite them. I have never felt comfortable asking congregations to invite me to preach in Gospel meetings. I have always thought that if they want me to come, they will call me.

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 suit of clothes ever looked better on a Gospel preacher than the suit of humility! Let us cultivate the beautiful and commendable trait Paul enjoined: "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" (Rom. 12:3).

An unknown poet wrote:

How ready is the man to go,
Whom God hath never sent!
How timorous, diffident, and slow,
God's chosen instrument!

Verses 7-8

The essence of God's commission to His uninspired preachers of the Gospel is found in His words to Jeremiah: "For to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak" (Jer. 1:7). God's spokesmen must go wherever and to whomever He sends us. Since the Savior did His redemptive work and ascended to His heavenly throne, He has sent His devotees to make disciples of all the nations and to take the saving Gospel into all the world and to the whole creation (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15). This commission will not cease as long as the world stands (Mat. 28:20). We must never flag in our zeal to go with the Gospel.

The prophet of God (whether inspired or uninspired) will speak only and all that God commands (authorizes) him to speak. If he does not, he is not God's spokesman, whatever he may claim. Men have never been content very long to speak the message of God even as the people have not been willing to hear it.

We see much of the same condition among the people of God now that existed in Jeremiah's time. God's spiritual Israel is cursed with its prophets who prophesy falsely. What began as a whisper over forty years ago from certain radical voices who began labeling the

Lord's people as merely another denomination has now grown into a great shout from men of vast influence. These liberal, fellowship-everyone (except those who are set for the defense of the Gospel), denominationally minded men can be found all over the world. Some of them occupy seats on the boards, fill offices in the administration, and stand behind lecterns in the classrooms of our schools. They have already poisoned a couple of generations of young people entrusted to them by ignorant, overly trusting, and sometimes naive parents. They occupy editorial chairs and staffs of such papers as *Restoration Quarterly*, *New Wineskins*, and *The Christian Chronicle*.

These religious seditionists serve as elders and occupy the pulpits of some of the largest congregations. In fact, there are few congregations with two hundred or more members that do not have this kind of elders and preachers. (It is doubtful that any of these congregations can be turned back from their apostasy.) They are the planners of, and speakers on the largest annual gatherings of brethren such as the misnamed Tulsa International Soul-Winning Workshop, Winterfest, and most of the university lectureships. Some of these same men have produced a veritable flood of books over the past ten years, all promoting approximately the same cultic mantra:

1. We are under grace and therefore not under law
2. To preach obedience to God constitutes legalism
3. To claim to be the exclusive people of God is Pharisaical and sectarian
4. We should consider the church of Christ to be only one among the thousands of denominations
5. We should likewise therefore freely extend fellowship to them as sister entities in the real "church of Christ at large"

One of the greatest tragedies that those of us who have made overseas preaching trips have observed is that these unscrupulous servants of Satan have not hesitated to export their heresies to faraway places with strange-sounding names. Their effects can be seen in Jamaica, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Russia, Europe, and likely everywhere the Gospel has gone.

While there have always been some who were not content with speaking what the Lord commanded, such men could not have come to places of prominence and power in the church but for two factors.

First, at the initial signs of such foolishness, God's people in general did not rise up in righteous indignation but sat idly by and allowed this tragedy to happen. This apathy has been partly due to widespread ignorance of God's Word. As it was with Israel, so it has been with God's spiritual Israel of our day: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." (Hos. 4:6). Many have not recognized even the most grievous errors because they knew so little of the Truth with which to contrast it. (If one knows not the Truth, he is hardly able to detect error!) This apathy has also sprung from the almost hypnotic influence of the godless humanistic philosophies that brethren have absorbed, urging tolerance toward almost every doctrine and/or practice, whether in morals or religion. Brethren have lost the power and the will to make judgments and to criticize, expose, oppose, and/or refute based on correct judgments. Some can hardly bring themselves to label anything as "sin" or "error." Even now, when God's faithful ones raise the cry of alarm, such cannot be moved. As Jeremiah asked his people concerning the tragedy that had befallen old Jerusalem, we ask our brethren who are even yet nonchalant and unconcerned about the siege of the liberals against the new Jerusalem, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" (Lam. 1:12). Of course, some in the pews have been more than merely apathetic toward liberal teaching and practice; they have recognized, embraced, and encouraged it. They have delighted in having someone twist the Scriptures to justify their worldly and immoral lives and their desire to see the church flow into the polluted stream of denominationalism.

Second, the very men God has charged to spiritually feed, oversee, and protect each flock, respectively — its shepherds, pastors, elders — have failed on a grand scale. Both as an elder and as a local preacher I worked intimately with elders for almost forty years. I appreciate the fact that no group of men on earth has a weightier responsibility than do these men who must account to the Judge of all men for the souls under their care (Heb. 13:17). When preachers, professors, and publications began spouting an ever-increasing flow of liberalism several years ago, these men, more than any others, were in a position to put a stop to it. Some were equal to the task, and every faithful saint admires them. But unfortunately, many were not.

Instead of protecting the flock from the ravaging wolves, they have opened the door and protected the wolves while they fed on the flock. They have provided platforms for the promotion of error and bread for the tables of propagators of apostasy. In some cases, elders were and are eager promoters of liberalism. In other cases, elders have been so ignorant they

did not recognize it in their very midst until the church had been stolen from them. In yet other cases, elders recognized the error, but were too spineless to deal with it in the face of threats from congregational bullies. The result has been the same, regardless of the reason – hundreds of churches have been so corrupted that there is no hope for them.

Elders could still isolate and stamp out much of the liberalism that has reached overwhelming proportions in the church. I suggest the following beginning points:

1. Get rid of their liberal preachers and other “staff” members and replace them with men who know and love the Truth and who will teach and preach what the Lord commands without compromise. Then hold up their hands as they do so.
2. Get rid of all the Bible class material that teaches error. (Much of it sold by our brethren is warmed-over denominational material, carelessly edited [if edited at all], with new covers slapped on it. Sweet, 20th Century Christian, and Gospel Advocate have been doing this for years.)
3. Gather up all the modern speech versions of the Bible from the classrooms and pews and throw them away. Replace them with KJV, ASV, or NKJV and allow only these versions to be used in preaching, teaching, and public reading.
4. Warn the church about liberal periodicals and subscribe to sound periodicals for each family. Also warn the church about liberal authors and books and encourage them to buy books written by men and women who are sound in the faith.
5. Warn the church about “Christian” universities that are set on apostasy and discourage members from sending their children or their money to them. Write the presidents and boards of these schools telling them you will continue to issue such warnings until they repent.
6. Invite only men whom you know to be sound in the faith to preach in Gospel meetings and to speak on lecture programs.
7. Assign the preacher some sermons that will inform the church of brotherhood controversies and errors. Have him expose the false doctrines and apostasies that are destroying churches on every hand, naming those who are promoting error so that the church may be alert to and aware of such matters.

The suggestions listed above will sound almost as radical to liberal elders and preachers as Jeremiah’s message did to the ungodly priests and false prophets of Judah. Alas, I will not hold my breath until elderships begin following this advice (any more than Jeremiah did till Judah repented). Admittedly, to do such would result in a furor in any congregation that has been sliding down the slimy slope of error for some time. Those who have for so long rejoiced over the comfort they have been made to feel in their liberalism and error would register

extreme displeasure. No doubt, it would cause church splits all over the land, but they would be divisions that not only would please the Lord, but that He demanded (Luke 12:51–53).

Those in today's very permissive and irrational climate who dare to speak what God commands are not going to win any popularity contests, even as Jeremiah did not. They are going to be mistreated by the very ones who should be upholding their hands and encouraging them, even as Jeremiah was. However, even when sin and error have temporarily triumphed, true servants of God will not compromise the message of God to avoid persecution, even as Jeremiah did not.

Verse 9

While God spoke to His people in previous ages by the voices of His prophets, "...when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son" (Ga. 4:4). God sent the Eternal Word in the person of Jesus of Nazareth as His last messenger to mankind: God "...hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son" (Heb. 1:2). As with Jeremiah, Jesus' message was not His own, but that which the Father sent Him to declare: "For I spake not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49; cf. 7:16; 8:26; 14:24). Christ chose, endowed, and sent out His apostles to declare His Gospel to all mankind (Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:47–49; John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:12–15; Acts 1:4–8; 2:1–4). Thus, when they spoke and wrote, it was by Christ's authority (John 13:20) and by Heaven's mandate (Mat. 18:18). It is by this means that "**all** scripture [NT as well as OT (1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:15–16)] is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16; *emph. DM*). The Holy Scriptures are not the words of men, but the Word of God!

The measure of the message God gave Jeremiah was not in mere broad thoughts or themes: God put His **words** in the prophet's mouth. This passage powerfully sets forth verbal inspiration. The New Testament echoes this Truth loudly: Among other things the Lord promised His apostles was that when they were arrested, they would not have to be "...anxious how or what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (Mat. 10:19–20). Paul claimed, "We speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:13). I am not moved (except to indignation!) by the calumny of the critics, skeptics, modernists, and liberals who say that the doctrine of verbal inspiration constitutes "mechanical dictation" by which the inspired men are rendered mere "stenographers." Let them call it what they may, the Bible teaches that God gave to the inspired men the very **words** He wanted them to speak and write. This is the only way the Scriptures can

claim plenary (full, complete in every part) inspiration, which they do (Psa. 119:160; 139:17; John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; et al.). The only way men can fully and faithfully receive and deliver the message of God is to do it in His own words.

Every saint needs to be aware that for quite some time there have been some among us who have snuggled up to the most sneering and blasphemous modernists in their open rejection of the Bible doctrine of verbal inspiration. I cite the following examples, among others:

1. **Harold Hazelip**, long-time Dean of Harding Graduate School of Religion and Retired President of David Lipscomb University made the following assessment of the Bible in a Herald of Truth television sermon back in the 1970s:
“We are assuming that it [the Bible] is the inspired word of God, though this certainly is also an area in which we should be open to whatever facts are pertinent. Any observer of religion is aware that our problem is a legitimate one” (7).
2. **John T. Willis**, teacher in the religion department of Abilene Christian University, affirms that “...the Bible **contains** the word of God, but not ordinarily or absolutely as it is ordinarily read” (“Men Spoke...,” 807). He further opines: “There is **no way to prove or disprove this claim** [i.e., inspiration] absolutely, although arguments have been advanced on both sides of the issue [emph. DM]” (*World and Literature*, 11).
3. According to **Rubel Shelly** Luke wrote his Gospel account from information he gathered after interviews with the Lord’s associates and visits to various historical sites, from Mark’s book, from an imaginary document called “Q,” from preaching he heard, and from “scraps” (“Church in the Nineties”). Modernistic critics of the Bible have long taught just such infidelity. Did you know that the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5–7) is also a compilation of “scraps”? (Cates, 28).
4. **Carroll D. Osburn**, retired professor of the religion faculty of Abilene Christian University, ridicules the idea of verbal, plenary inspiration as “naive” and calls it “fundamentalism.” He seems amused that any would advance the view that Truth in the Bible extends to scientific, historical, and geographical teachings as well as those on morals and religion. Amazingly, he then has the audacity to deceptively label himself a “conservative” despite his denial of the Scriptures’ claims for themselves. He debunks the idea that one can really understand the Bible by studying the KJV (58, 62–62). Osburn believes the origin of Jude’s letter lies shrouded in obscurity, but that it relies heavily upon several books of the “Jewish apocalyptic” in the Apocrypha (94, 107–113).
5. The late **Dowell Flatt** was Chairman of the Bible department when our son, Andy, was a Bible major at Freed-Hardeman University (1985–1989). He had to argue the case for the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20 in one of Dowell’s classes, for Dowell argued that it was not authentic. It has become public knowledge since from some of Flatt’s former students that he was teaching the old modernistic and mythical “Q” documentary hypothesis. Winford Claiborne (one of Dowell’s fellow-teachers in the Bible department for several years) stated to me in a phone conversation on November 4, 2002, that “there is no doubt that” Dowell taught this heresy. Furthermore, I have a copy of the class notes Flatt distributed to his

students that verify this fact. So, we had a Bible Department Chairman who taught a heresy concerning the source of at least three of the Gospel accounts and denied the authenticity of a major section of one of those accounts. We also had an administration that tolerated the Chairman of its Bible Department who taught these grievous errors. Flatt suffered a complete emotional breakdown at one point and was forced to take an extended leave of absence. Earl Edwards was appointed in his place. When Flatt was recovered, Edwards rehired him as a teacher, and when word of Flatt's errors began to be circulated in 2002, Edwards forcefully defended Flatt, denying that he held or taught such doctrines.

Such men should be ashamed to pretend to be teachers of the Word of God, while not even believing the Bible is the Word of God in the sense that it claims to be.

It is amazing almost beyond comprehension that many men go on portraying themselves as "Gospel preachers" when they no longer (1) accept God's Word as being from Him, (2) will preach it and it alone to lost men, and (3) believe there is only one body, one faith, and one baptism. When men who profess to preach and teach the Bible as God's Very Word lose their faith, they should either repent or quit. Simple honesty demands that they quit destroying faith while supposedly engaging in the work of building it up. Rubel Shelly, one of the most serious offenders in this respect since 1983, wrote (in his rational early years) a powerful article titled, "Oh, for an Honest False Teacher." His comments in this article on the false teachers who left the church (per 1 John 2:19) are words he has long needed to apply to himself. He wrote so truly, as follows:

Can anything good be said about such apostates as these? Yes! They were honest.... Surely we can have more respect for a man who is honest and open about his convictions (or lack of them) than for a man who no longer believes the basic doctrines of the gospel but seeks to stay within the body of believers as a subversive. Such a person is not only a heretic Christian, he is a dishonest man.... Let them [college professors, preachers, Bible class teachers, et al.] be honest enough to break with us openly and quit their unmanly treason (382-84).

How this man (and those like him who have lost their faith) can look at himself in the mirror every morning and live with himself after writing the statement above is more than I can understand. I recommend that he change his name to **Rebel** Shelly, for this is what he has been in relation to sound doctrine for many years.

Jeremiah stands as a model for Gospel preachers, in that he was content to preach only the words which God gave him, and he did so faithfully despite the almost universal rejection of his message and terrible opposition and persecution. Each generation has the obligation to

receive only the Word of God, to obey it, and to pass it and it alone on to the next generation so it can do the same thing all over again, until the Lord comes (2 Tim. 2:2).

Verse 10

God's empowerment of Jeremiah is instructive concerning the nature of the preaching He wants His preachers to do. For several years now we have been hearing outcries from some brethren against "negative preaching." By this they mean preaching that opposes, exposes, rebukes, reproves, condemns, judges, or corrects. (It is somewhat humorous that they see no inconsistency in their own negative preaching against "negative preaching.") I suppose that if they had their way no preacher would ever stoop so low as to identify any specific sin or error. To them it is next to blasphemy to dare call the name of a false teacher and expose his false doctrine. One thing is certain—were Jeremiah to be resurrected, they would not tolerate him in their pulpits more than once.

In emphasizing the need for and place of the negative element in preaching, we do not want to lose sight of the need for "positive preaching." Jeremiah was to do this kind of preaching, also. To be fair, there are some who do not seem comfortable with anything but a strong "negative" sermon every time. (This is an extreme as erroneous as the former, but it seems that the criticism of negative preaching is far more prevalent than its opposite.) We not only need to hear sin and error exposed. We also need to hear preaching from the Word of God that encourages, enlightens, and edifies our hearts and spirits. This is the "building" and "planting" Jeremiah was to do and that preachers today still must do. If one preaches only a negative message all the time, his preaching is single-dimensioned and incomplete. However, the trend among preachers in the Lord's church over the past several years has favored a "positive only" approach. With this approach has come a corresponding rate of apostasy due to liberalism.

It was surely not accidental that God used four "negative" terms, but only two "positive" terms to describe the preaching Jeremiah was to do. It is surely not a mere coincidence that Paul used the same ratio of "negative" and "positive" terms to describe the kind of preaching Gospel preachers are to do: "Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). Is God trying to tell preachers that they need to spend twice as much time uprooting evil as planting Truth, or that exposing sin and error is twice as important as imparting the Gospel, or something besides these? Perhaps we will never know for sure. However, what we can most certainly learn is that

the namby-pamby, soft-soap, toothless preaching that some brethren want exclusively does not represent God's standard.

Where did anyone ever come up with the ideas of "negative" and "positive" preaching in the first place? It certainly was not from the Bible. When we hear a man preach, it should never cross our minds to judge the lesson as "negative" or "positive." Only one question deserves any consideration at all—is it Biblical, Scriptural? If so, why should anyone care whether it fits someone's subjective definitions of *negative* or *positive*? As a matter of fact, any sermon that expounds the Truth on any subject will be both "negative" **and** "positive." In the process of setting forth what the Bible teaches, there is implicit condemnation and exposure of teachings of men that contradict the Biblical message. Likewise, when it is necessary to devote a sermon to exposing some given sin or error, there is the positive effect of making us stronger in the Truth and helping prevent us from falling into some error or sin.

The sad fact is that the church in the twenty-first century contains a large and growing number of congregations that do not want and will not long tolerate a preacher who preaches what the Bible plainly says on a host of subjects and who takes longer than twenty minutes to do so. By their own foolish and carnal requirements, they would not knowingly let Jeremiah (to say nothing of John the Baptizer, Paul, Stephen, or even the Lord Himself) within ten miles of their pulpits. The super-sweet, ooey-gooey, touchy-feely, pasted-smile, storytelling, stage-prancing, after-dinner-speaker type "preachers" are much in demand nowadays. They are being supported, rewarded, and promoted by congregations that languish in Biblical beriberi and spiritual scurvy. Like Laodicea of old, they are so blind and ignorant they are incapable of seeing their woeful condition (Rev. 3:17-18). At the same time, good men who love the Lord and His Truth more than life and who, as Jeremiah did, will preach it regardless of the cost or persecution, are encountering more and more difficulty in finding congregations that desire or will long endure their services.

Conclusion

Let us summarize and re-emphasize some major points: God is "pro-life" concerning infants in the womb—and we had better be. Jeremiah's reticence to respond to God's commission is an attractive sign of humility. The arrogant seek to push themselves into places of prominence. Humble folk attempt to do God's bidding, all the while thinking themselves unworthy. God's preachers must go where He sends and speak only and all of what He bids them speak. Those who do otherwise are not God's preachers, regardless of how many academic degrees, how much popularity, how prestigious a position, or how handsome a salary

they may possess or command. God's preachers must not fear what men will do unto them. If they do, they will not long be God's preachers (Gal. 1:10).

We must serve God faithfully and trust Him to deliver us from evil men. Jehovah has put His words in our "mouths" by giving us His completed revelation, and we dare preach nothing more or less than this. God sends His preachers to upbraid evil and error wherever it is found, whether in university presidents, elders, deacons, the families of elders or deacons, our own families, those who are financially or politically powerful in the church, or those immoral segments of society who might threaten us with bodily harm for rebuking them. God also sends His preachers to sow the kingdom's seed so that new growth and strengthening of old growth may occur.

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[**Note:** I wrote this MS on assignment for and I delivered it at the 33rd Annual Bellview Lectures, June 7-11, 2008, hosted by Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, FL. The MS was also published in the book of the lectures, *Preaching from the Major Prophets* (ed. Michael Hatcher, Bellview Church of Christ).]

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