



March 1986

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 3

"IF ANYONE SEES YOU"

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idols temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?"

-- 1 Corinthians 8:10.

It may be a sign that I am getting old, but I can remember when Christians were deeply concerned about their influence for good. Preachers urged and many brethren heeded caution to avoid even one's "innocent" actions being misinterpreted. It was pointed out that what people see us do usually carries more weight for good or evil than what they hear us say or teach. Older preachers urged younger preachers to avoid actions that had a high risk of being misinterpreted by the brethren and the community - even though the action might be lawful within itself. I still believe that such caution is wise. However, it seems to me that more and more the predominant attitude is becoming: "If the thing can be defended as lawful, then I have a right to do it. I intend to exercise that right and if some misinterpret it, then that's their problem. I do not intend to be hindered from doing what I know to be right by what someone else will later think about it." I do not know what the time must about, but I think I can see the attitude prevailing in the church today.

There is a danger in this attitude. It is a danger that we are taking a step back from the principles of the gospel and are moving toward a more worldly view of life.

conceded some points: 1. The eater was right in his view of idolatry and things offered to idols (v. 4-6). 2. The eater had the "liberty" or lawful right to eat. (v. 9; 10:23). 3. The eater was within his rights in the idols temple. What they personally believed, taught and practiced on the subject of idolatry was not called in question. It was where they would lend their influence. It was how it would likely be perceived by others. Paul then uses his own freedoms for illustration. He even gave up his right to a livelihood from his preaching at times and places where it would likely be misinterpreted. (9:12,18-23). To him there was more to consider that his being able to successfully defend his right - which he ably did in chapter 9:3-14. He also had to consider the effect that the exercising of his right would have on his influence on behalf of the gospel. Oh yes, he could take money from brethren with no pains of conscience. He did under circumstances that would not hinder the gospel. But, if there was a high risk that his taking it would be misinterpreted then he held it back without taking it. He was not afraid to lay up the subject of idolatry for discussion. He thought of that they did

Evangelizing The Church

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"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." - 2 Tim. 4:5.

Evangelism is not just to the lost in the world at large. It is also directed to the church.

Timothy was an evangelist. Paul, in his letters to Timothy, told him to instruct the brethren - those who had been saved. (1 Tim. 4:5). He was to prepare faithful brethren to teach others. (2 Tim. 2:2). He was to rebuke sinning brethren. (1 Tim. 5:20). He was to warn brethren of dangers before they sinned. (1 Tim. 3:3).

In doing the work of an evangelist, Timothy was to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Any one professing to do the work of an evangelist needs to study carefully this context, so that he can fulfil his ministry.

His Equipment

"I charge you therefore ... preach the word!" "Therefore" refers back to chapter 3. Since the "man of God" is "complete, thoroughly equipped" for his work, he needs to get on with it. His equipment is "all Scripture given by inspiration of God". His work involves doctrine (teaching), reproving, correcting and instruction (training or discipline) in righteousness. (v. 16). The Scriptures equip him for this work.

His Work

Convince. (Greek: ELENCHO). "To convict, confute, refute..." (Vine's Dictionary). It is same word translated "tell ... fault" in Matt. 18:15 in the King James Version.

Rebuke. (Greek: EPITIMAO). "To tax with fault, rate, chide, rebuke, reprove, censure severely ... 2 Tim. 4:2" (Thayer).

Exhort. (Greek: PARAKALEO). "to admonish, exhort" (Vine). It carried the idea of comforting, beseeching, encouraging, etc.

All three are to be combined with long-suffering and teaching.

How about that! Two negatives out of three! Maybe our friends who seem to be

deeply worried about our preaching and writing being too negative will allow us to be at least two-thirds negative.

His Purpose

In this context the purpose for preaching the word is preventative maintenance. Verse 2 tells what to do: "Preach the word"; when to do it: "In season and out of season"; and how to do it: "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."

Verses 3-4 tell why do it: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...". Brethren need to be taught while they will endure sound doctrine. Before they "turn their ears away from the truth". The best time to teach a congregation about false doctrine is before it is bothered with it. If one waits until their ears have been scratched by ear scratching teachers, it will likely be too late to have any real effect.

Yes, the work of an evangelist involves carrying the gospel to a lost and dying world. However, a big part of his work involves equipping (cf. Eph. 4:11-12) and stabilizing the brethren so that they can be a powerful force in evangelizing the world by their teaching and influence.

An evangelist needs to understand his work and spend a lot of time studying (2 Tim. 2:15) his equipment. He also needs to keep abreast of what is being taught among brethren so that he can use the equipment to reprove (convince), rebuke, and exhort. Brethren in general need to understand the work of an evangelist to fulfill their responsibility as to kind of teaching they endure and support.

Let us evangelize the world, but let us also evangelize the church. It needs it.

Visit With Us Soon

not have to exercise their right to eat meat offered to idols when there was a likelihood that it would hinder their influence for good because it would likely be misinterpreted by others - especially weak brethren.

Often "the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" Luke 16:8. Often, I hear our national leaders cautioning against "sending the wrong signals". This is usually used in the context of the struggle of the super powers for influence in the world. They are not only concerned with the rightness or wrongness of a given action by our government, but they want to be careful that the action does not send the wrong signal either to our allies or adversaries. They want adversary and ally alike to clearly understand where we stand. They understand full well that once action is taken and misinterpreted that all the explanations for taking the action will not likely undo the damage. They do not want the adversary to take the action as a sign that they are not as committed to their cause as their words might indicate. This would be dangerous because it might embolden him to further his advances in the world, thinking the other side no longer feels strong enough about his convictions to stand and fight for them. It is also dangerous in that it might cause an ally to reassess his allegiance or maybe withdraw his support because he feels that he can no longer be certain of what would happen when the chips were down. In short, wise statesmen know that it is just as important, if not more so, to send the right signal to all by our actions as it is by our words. They value the friendship and support of allies too much to take unnecessary steps that have a high possibility of being misinterpreted. Likewise, they fear the consequences of an uncertain sound to adversaries.

If brethren could be this wise in our struggle to assure that the "truth of the gospel" is not taught away by some teachers or compromised away by some brethren - the Lord's cause would be far better off. One may teach the truth on the purity of the Lord's church in its work and worship. He might go so far as to say that those who do

such things have departed from the truth. He would never surrender his convictions in his own teaching and practice in these matters. Personally, he would never compromise his convictions for the sake profit, peace nor popularity. Yet, by his deeds (sometimes even his words) lends his good name to further the influence of those who do the very things that he personally abhors and says so.

J. W. McGarvey was an influential preacher during the instrumental music controversy that was a factor in dividing the church in the later 1800's and early 1900's. He believed instrumental music was sinful. He taught that it was sinful. He refused to sing with the instrument. The Lord only knows what a difference it would have made in the number of brethren and churches that might have been saved from apostasy had he been more careful about what brethren saw him do. Here are the words of J. P. Sewell about him:

"Professor McGarvey may speak out against the use of instrumental music in the worship, as he does, and say things against it that those who refuse to use it would hardly say; but what do the people who want the instrumental music care about this thing so long as he gives his influence almost entirely (except in his home congregation) to those who use it? Brother McGarvey believes that instrumental music is wrong, and so teaches; still gives his name and influence to a paper that advocates its use and associates with churches that use it. So, while he believes and teaches that the thing is wrong, there is not a church in the land that uses it that will not today point to Brother McGarvey as 'one of the strong men on our side.' His influence goes with his fellowship, not with his faith and teaching." (all emphasis mine -EOB)

-- Gospel Advocate, December 1902.

My brethren, the fight to assure that the

truth of the gospel on the sinfulness of church support of human institutions and other centralized arrangements is not over. There are some brethren who have gone so far that they have very little in common with churches that oppose institutionalism and related matters. There are others whose actual practice may differ very little from our own - but their attitude toward authority differs greatly. There are still others who openly express their willingness to reach an accommodation with those who practice such things so that neither party would have to give up any thing they believe or practice and they together would support and encourage all brethren regardless to what those brethren believe, teach or practice concerning the work and organization of the church.

It is not those who have progressed to far - out liberalism that pose a real danger to us. The contrast between them and sound brethren is so great that one would not likely be mistaken for the other - even by those weak in knowledge. It is the latter two that pose the real threat. Since the differences are not as obvious to all, especially to weaker brethren, there is a far greater danger that what they see us do regarding those brethren -- even though the action itself would be innocent -- would be misinterpreted for approval of them in spite of their erroneous stance. What they see us do is likely to have a greater impact for truth or error than anything we might say to the contrary.

My brethren, let's be careful where we throw our influence. "A good name is better than precious ointment" (Prov. 7:1). It sometimes takes years to build that good precious name as being synonymous with one who loves, teaches, practices and defends the truth. It is something one should treasure as he would precious (expensive) ointment. One wants to live and behave so that his name will continue to mean what it

should mean. He also wants to be careful that he does not willingly allow his name to be used to enhance the influence of those whose own names suggest error and/or compromise. He would do anything in the world that is right to get those in error to renounce their error and accept truth. Or to get those who compromise (like Peter in Galatians 2) to walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel.

I realize that assessing the potential danger of an action that would be perfectly innocent and lawful were it not for the circumstances depends a great deal upon one's subjective judgment viewed from his own vantage point. For this reason, I do not get all out of sorts with one whom I believe to be personally standing for the truth, if he does not share my assessment of the danger and acts differently from the way that I feel I could or he should. There is always the danger that I could be seeing a potential danger that is not really there and be overly reacting. So, I try to be as charitable as possible to one who may not share my view of the potential seriousness of his action that I am questioning.

Yet, I still feel maybe none of us are as concerned about how our actions "will be taken" by others we should be. There are even times that brethren, who hold to error(s) detrimental to the Lord's cause and/or whose compromising stance in such things is a matter of public record, do things that I could commend and would like to encourage. I would have no problem in supporting them in this work - were it not for the danger that my support of their good work would be interpreted as tacit approval of their error for which they are noted. I need to be as concerned about what brethren see me do toward those in error as I am about what brethren hear me say about those in error.

 * The Reflector is published monthly by
 * members of Christ meeting at 2005 Elkwood
 * Avenue in Fullbrook, AL 35066. Edited and
 * printed by Bradwell Dr. USPO #06-149
 * 31000g Warren, 2011 Drakefield Drive
 * * * * *

 * U.S. Postage Paid * Fullbrook, AL 35066 *
