

November 1990

# The Reflector

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## **GOSPEL MEETING**

**December 2-7, 1990**

**Speaker:**

**Donnie Rader**

**Sunday Morning 10:45**

**Nights 7:30**

**Fultondale Church of Christ  
2005 Elkwood Drive**

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# THE PREACHING OF JOHN

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John the Baptist, who broke the four hundred years of silence left by the prophets, was a true servant of God. His work lasted only two years (H. I. Hester, **The Heart Of The New Testament**, p. 122), but has enjoyed a lasting impact upon many generations. John worked largely in the wilderness of southern Judea and in the Jordan valley - possibly even beyond Jordan, in Perea (John 3:26). His task was to prepare the way for the Lord.

Though his years of labor were short, his preaching has inspired many, including this writer. It helps me for I see a contrast in the kind of work that John did and what is done by some today.

## What We See And Hear Today

Don't misunderstand. What I say here is not to indict all or even most preachers or listeners. We have a good number of men who preach like John and churches that demand that from their pulpits. However, that is not true in all places. I am not talking about the preaching that is done in denominational pulpits or even among what we think of as our "liberal" brethren. I am concerned about some of the preaching I hear from "conservative" men.

I'm bothered by **preachers** whose messages are weak and say practically nothing. We hear sermons that demand nothing from the hearers. Some preach so that they impress you with themselves rather than God and his word. Something is wrong when preachers are vague or silent rather than speaking out. We have men among us who skirt the issue on a number of questions, lest someone clearly see where they stand. We hear

too much preaching that says nothing about the church, hell or worldliness. It is not often that we hear a man make direct application to those to whom he speaks.

There are **listeners** that like what I have just described and would request the same. Some would tell us that the kind of preaching that John did won't work today. After all, "You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar." A few stand ready to call the preacher a "legalist" or a "Pharisee" if he takes a stand on an issue. This writer has been criticized (though I take it as a compliment) because some felt like I was preaching to them.

Let's consider John's work in contrast.

## A Warning About Extremes

As with most anything, we have a tendency to go from one extreme to another. While we have those who are soft and whose message is vague and says very little, we also have those who are all negative. Some have the concept that every sermon must deal with sin and error. If it does not, the preacher must be a little soft. Such preaching leaves the people "beat down" and discouraged if they never hear words of exhortation and encouragement (2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 10:24; Heb. 6:9; Heb. 3:13). It has been said that if the preacher is not stepping on your toes every Sunday, he is not doing his job. Friend, I don't believe it. Are there not subjects that must be preached that will not be stepping on toes? Shall we not preach on the nature of God, evidence of the resurrection or the qualifications of elders?

The truth is that those with this extreme thinking and practice are just as responsible for breeding the "all positive" atmosphere among us as anyone else. How?, you ask. By an imbalance and overkill. People who listen to a rebuke or reproof every Sunday quickly tire of that and begin looking for something more "positive."

The key will be in maintaining a **balance**. If the whole counsel of God is preached, that will not be hard (Acts 20:27).

## John's Work As A Preacher

1. **John rebuked.** "Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7). John was not haughty or arrogant. He was just blunt. His rebuke was clear. It left no doubt. Does that sound to you like John was trying to catch more flies with honey than he was with vinegar?

John was dealing with the Pharisees and Sadducees who were deceitful and wicked. They needed a stern rebuke. I do not think that we are to conclude that every word that John uttered was one of rebuke or reproof. However, when it was needed, John did it. Yes, there is a time to be very careful, to use tack and kid gloves. And yet, there is also a time to rebuke them sharply (Tit. 1:13). Preaching that imitates John's will reprove and rebuke as well as exhort (2 Tim. 4:2). The fact that there are people in the world in sin and in error as well as some of our brethren who participate in the same, demands preaching that will rebuke.

2. **John was firm.** He was not a reed shaken first one way and then another by the opinions of men (Luke 7:24). John did not wait to see which way the wind would blow before he would stand. He was firm, even if he stood alone. There were times he did. John gave no uncertain sounds. His message was clear. His audience never wondered where he stood. I look around at some of my own brethren

today and I wonder "Where do you stand?", "What are you saying?" It is a shame that after you hear a man preach several times you might have to ask "Where do you stand on moral issues, doctrinal things and the work of the New Testament church?"

**3. John did not impress men with himself or his appearance.** He was not clothed in soft raiment as someone of royal decent (Luke 7:25), but with a cheap and coarse cloth made of camel's hair (Matt. 3:14), girted with a rough band of leather. John didn't have that "preacher look." Rather, he was crude and rough in his appearance. John did not derive his influence from the impression made by his personal appearance. Some preachers just have a commanding appearance, but not John. He impressed people with the word of God that was given to him (Luke 3:2).

**4. John's message was a plea for repentance which demanded a change.** His message of repentance (Luke 3:3,7) called for a change of mind and cessation of sin. It required a complete change of thoughts and lives.

Something indeed is wrong with our preaching when week after week and night after night (in gospel meetings) sinners hear a "sermon" and never hear a call to change their lives, to leave denominationalism or to quit sin. Rather, they are left comfortable in sin. John did not do that! He called for a change from his hearers. Yes, that made them uncomfortable. Yes, that would offend some. Yes, it may not catch many flies. But, I'll tell you what it didn't do. It didn't leave people comfortable in sin. I'm afraid that the kind of preaching done by some today leaves people comfortable in spite of their sin. John didn't do that.

**5. John preached about the kingdom.** In preparing people for the Lord, he preached about the kingdom (Matt. 3:2). Philip did the same in Samaria. He preached Christ (Acts 8:5), which included a message about the kingdom (v. 12). You can't truly preach about the Lord without

preaching about the kingdom, the church. Too many sermons are preached where nothing is said about the church of our Lord. I don't know what is preached all across the country, but I wonder if we are preaching about the kingdom as we ought. I know for a fact that I haven't heard an abundance of preaching about the church. What has happened to those sermons on the nature of the church, terms of membership, its essentiality, its organization, its work and its worship? And we wonder why there are not more conversions than there are.

**6. John warned of the wrath to come.** When John saw people in sin, duty required that he warn of God's eternal wrath (Luke 3:7). He announced that God's axe was laid at the root (Luke 3:9). God was ready to cut them off! He then spelled out the end of God's wrath which would be to burn "with fire unquenchable" (v. 17). John said that because he cared. He warned lest they suffer. Do you think John delighted in that? I think not. But, duty required it.

Sound preaching warns sinners that the axe is laid at the root, and if you don't change you will loose your soul in the fires of hell. That may be the vinegar that doesn't catch flies, but it is the gospel that converts souls.

**7. John made direct application to the people.** John didn't huddle the Pharisees and Sadducees together and talk about the Essenes and the Scribes or vice-versa. He directed his point to those to whom he spoke. He called them a generation of vipers (Luke 3:7). "It was bitterly, it was uncourtly, but oh, it was truly said" (James Hastings, ed., *The Greater Men And Women Of Tho Bible*, p. 67)! He did the same with Herod and Herodias (Mark 6). To say "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:14) is about as direct as one can be. John never left the people wondering who he was talking about. There are times a preacher needs to tell the listeners, "I'm talking about this church." "I'm talking to you" or "There are some in this congregation that are guilty of this sin."

**8. John's stand cost him his life.** It took courage to tell a king that he was not lawfully married. But, John did it. John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway." John had that courage. He saddled up. It irritated Herodias so much that she had him killed. John could have said, "God's law is not clear on this marriage thing" or "It's really a matter of individual interpretation" or "I couldn't have married her, but I wouldn't say that it is wrong for you." If he had, he would have saved his life. But, not John. He took his stand and paid his price.

### It Got Results

The strong and straightforward preaching of John didn't run everyone off as we may fear today. It caused the people to ask, "What shall we do then?" (Luke 3:10). Upon hearing, they were baptized (v. 21). He had converts. It worked! Now, tell me again - what's the saying? "You can catch more flies with honey that you can with vinegar." It worked! Do you want to tell me what the kind of preaching that John did is not for our day and time? It worked! Do you want to tell me that you have a better way of getting the job done? It worked! Say what you like. But, the preaching that gets results first of all demands results.  
—By Donnie Rader in *Searching the Scriptures*, June 1990.



## Tests Of Character

The real character of a person does not always appear on the surface, nor is it determined necessarily by what one professes himself to be. Sometimes what one appears to be, or professes to be, and what he actually is may be very different. Time and circumstances often serve to remove the veneer and reveal the real character beneath it. Various instances related in the scriptures serve to illustrate this principle.

A parable of Jesus concerning two sons is related in Matthew 21:28-32. The chief priests and elders had questioned Jesus concerning His authority. Jesus had answered by asking them a question, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" They would not answer, knowing that whatever answer they gave would involve them in further difficulty in their efforts to oppose Jesus, and they said, "We cannot tell." Jesus then told them of a certain man having two sons, both of whom he requested, "Go work today in my vineyard." The first said, "I will not," but later repented and went. The second said, "I go sir," and went not. When Jesus asked as to which did the will of the father the chief priests and elders could not profess inability to answer, as they had just done with His question concerning the baptism of John, but had to answer, "The first." Jesus' application was a stinging rebuke of these men, for He revealed that the publicans and harlots, whom they looked down upon, were actually superior to them. The publicans and harlots had, previous to John, been like the first son, who said, "I will not." The chief priest and elders had made great professions of respect and obedience, like the second son saying, "I go." But when the preaching of John put them both to the test it was the priests and who "repented not," making no change in their conduct. The publicans and harlots "believed him," gave up their evil practices, confessed sins and were baptized. (Cf. Luke 7:29,30).

Also, Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:19 challenges our attention: "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be manifest among you." The word "heresies," as in the King James Translation, can refer to both doctrinal and non-doctrinal divisions. The Revised Standard Version renders the word, "factions"; J. B. Phillips' translation, "cliques"; and the New English Bible, "dissensions." As regrettable as they are to us, factions, cliques, dissensions, divisions which come to the church serve God's purpose in testing, making manifest, those who are really faithful. The fidelity of those who claim to serve Him is tested in faith and doctrine as well as the love of the world, lusts of the flesh, and pleasures of life. And how often has it been observable that some who profess great soundness in the faith, devotion to the scriptures, and fidelity to Christ have then espoused error, accepted innovations, and joined in unauthorized practices in order to follow some favorite preacher and/or be with the crowd! And how often has it been the case that some who have looked with disdain on the worldly, ungodly members who are careless in both practice and teaching, will then align themselves in cliques with such members to the hindrance of the Lord's work and disturbance of the peace of His people, in order to promote the self-willed, carnal ambitions which they mutually share with those worldly ones! They fail the testing, manifest weakness of character, and belie their professions of great soundness and faithfulness.

While all of us need to learn the lesson that we are to avoid placing too much confidence in untried, untested men, we need also learn the lesson that we must not place too much confidence in ourselves. Self-righteousness and self-conceit can lead us to self-deception and self-destruction. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12).—By Paul C. Keller in **PAUSE-PONDER-PROFIT**

## Schedule of Services

### Sundays:

Bible Classes . . . . 9:45 a.m.

Worship . . . . . 10:45 a.m.

Worship . . . . . 6:00 p.m.

### Wednesdays:

Bible Class . . . . . 10:00 a.m.

Bible Classes . . . 7:30 p.m.

Fultondale Church of Christ  
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