

THE REFLECTOR

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"Preach The Word!"

EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." 2 Tim 4:2-4.

Paul's words have never been more needed that it is today, even among some "conservative" brethren. The preaching that seems to be coming more popular among us has some disturbing qualities about it. I believe we must address the problem -- now.

The problem runs deeper than just a difference in personalities and styles. Preachers' personalities and speaking styles are going to differ greatly, even as they speak the truth in love. Some brethren just naturally show more energy, enthusiasm, and exhilaration than others in everything they do. Others exhibit a more reserved, quite and laid

back personality. I am glad. It adds a little spice to things. I would hate for every preacher to look, sound and act exactly alike. Each is quite effective in his own way. So, one should not be held in suspect simply because his personality or style might differ from what appeals to our personal taste. However, I am talking about things that go beyond personality and style. They have to do with neglecting essential elements in preaching.

You may ask, "Why address a problem about preaching in a paper that is not sent primarily to preachers?" The answer is really quite simple. The wrong kind of prophesying was popular in Jeremiah's day because "My people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:31). The wrong kind of preaching in the church is not likely to

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND A

Gospel Meeting

LYNN HEADRICK, speaker

May 10-15, 1987

7:30 Nightly

Fultondale Church Of Christ
2005 Elkwood Drive
Fultondale, Alabama

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.

be corrected by preachers alone. Brethren (God's people), in general, will have to quit enduring and supporting the wrong kind of preaching.

The problem, as I see it, is not that "false doctrine" has invaded our pulpits. It is the lack of *real Bible teaching* in the preaching. Oh, I know that a few verses are thrown in at points along the way between the jokes, anecdotes, and verbal love notes -- enough for it to pass for gospel preaching. It is not at all uncommon to hear sermons so filled with promotional, overemotional and motivational hype that there is little room for real teaching from the Sacred Text; and a noted absence of anything negative like reproof and rebuke. Such preaching will open the door for false doctrine down the road.

Paul warned Timothy what would happen if he neglected the charge to preach the word in the way outlined in the text. First, brethren would cease to endure sound doctrine. They would lose an appetite for it, though not yet turned to false doctrine. In time "they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." Then, the problem would be false doctrine. The problem would have had its roots in Timothy's failure to keep Paul's charge to "preach the word".

How did Paul tell Timothy to preach the word?

1) "*Reprove (KJV) Convince (NKJV)*" "2. to find fault with, correct; a. by word; to reprehend severely, chide, admonish, reprove: Jude 22 L T Tr txt.; 1 Tim. v. 20; 2 Tim. iv. 2; (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, J. H. Thayer. p. 203.) "To convict, rebuke, reprove". (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Nelson Edition, p. 527)

2) "*Rebuke*" "4. to tax with fault, rate, chide, rebuke, reprove, censure severely 2 Tim. iv. 2" (*ibid.*, p. 245)

3) "*Exhort*" "to admonish, exhort, to

urge' one to pursue some course of conduct (always prospective, looking to the future, in contrast to the meaning of comfort, which is retrospective, having to do with trial experienced).... (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Nelson Edition, p. 217).

4) "*Longsuffering*" "2. patience, forbearance, long-suffering, slowness in avenging wrongs" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, J. H. Thayer. p. 387.)

5) "*Teaching*" or "*Doctrine*". Thayer says that it used in the active since in verse 2, meaning the act of teaching. While, in verse 3, it used passively, meaning that which is taught.

6) "*Sound*" "'to be healthy, sound in health' (Eng. 'hygiene', etc.) ... " (Vines)

Churches do not have to hear false doctrine begin the slippery downward path to apostasy. They can be fed a diet of preaching that contains little or no *real teaching*. Every sermon may be true, as far as they go, even lifting one's spirit, and still not be sound (healthy). If they are void of reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with longsuffering and (Scripture) teaching they can do little *lasting good*.

No doubt, the craze for "positive-thinking" and "motivational" programs in the business world, with their apparent success, has spilled over into the church. Some preachers have caught the bug. Some brethren do not try to conceal the fact that they seek those kind for meeting and local work. I am afraid they are taking their cue from the men trained on an avenue called Madison rather than from the man converted on "a street called Straight" (cf. Acts 9:11).

We all know that brethren, young and old, need to be motivated to more enthusiasm. In fact, many need a more positive outlook on life and toward the Lord's work. They also need something to get enthusiastic and be positive about -- a good knowledge of God's word. They can only receive that through preaching that puts more emphasis on *sound sober teaching* than it does on *motivational and/or emotional manipulation*.

Frankly, I have heard preaching that almost caused me to wonder when the game was going to start because the cheer leader was already in place. One could feel right "at home on the range"

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"... Behold Now Is The Accepted Time ..."

RICHARD BOONE

The Apostle Paul here, in 2 Cor. 6:2, quotes from Isaiah 49:8, where reference is made to the "Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One". Paul's use of the prophecy is to impress upon the Corinthian Christians the urgency with which they should respond to God's gift of grace to all men everywhere -- SALVATION. This response should be made as soon as possible by anyone who is willing to humbly obey what God tells him/her to do. However, let's look at this phrase from another viewpoint, that of conditions that exist in today's frenzy of a religious world. I have had, over the past month, three separate conversations with three different individuals concerning the "haywire" condition of modern-day denominations. These people see what is happening with the denominations all around us and reject it as being of no use to finding "true Christianity". Even though I cannot accept what each may consider his/her brand of "Christianity", I am impressed with the fact that these individuals see through the facade of this effort to allow each to "join the church of his choice", when in reality, it is a bitter fight to see who can be the most populous, popular, or BOTH. I also have in my possession a bi-weekly religious periodical (*Guardian of Truth*, out of Bowling Green, KY, 2/19/87 issue) in which is an article entitled "An Expression of Concern". In this article many preachers from the liberal element of the church of Christ are deeply concerned over the influx of "liberalism" into even the liberal side of the church. By "liberalism" they mean, taken from quotes in the article, *"there is a drifting from the Bible-centered, definitive, distinctive doctrine that once characterized our preaching ... there is a concerted effort on the part of some of our brethren to restructure the organization, worship, and work of the church along sectarian lines, thus tending to denominationalize the New Testament body of Christ ... the typical emphasis of the denominational world on recreation, entertainment, and solving the social ills of society has been incorporated into the thinking and programs*

of many congregations, supplanting the God-given work of meeting the desperate spiritual needs of those both within and without the body of Christ." From their own definition, it sounds as though these preachers are trying to convert one from any local denomination to being simply a New Testament Christian. These problems are from WITHIN THE ELEMENT FOR WHICH THESE PREACH -- NOT FROM DENOMINATIONS. This should alert us to at least two things which we shall discuss.

First of all, we need to be constantly on the lookout for any innovation which could come from among "conservative" brethren. "That will never happen to conservative churches!!", you say? Yes, it COULD happen, for I would venture to say that many of these brethren did not see this "liberalism" coming 40 years ago when these innovations began to "sneak in the back door". The CAUSE of these problems today is the fact that, once you let one innovation in, it is nothing but an open-ended invitation for all others to come in -- "we have this innovation, why not this one also?"-- the flood-gate is open.

Secondly, it should also make us stop and consider the desperation and peril these preachers are in. Within the last 18 months or so, an editor of the main liberal periodical was fired for he did not go along with some of the further innovations of these brethren. He stood opposed to the fruit of the innovations that he and others marketed 40 years ago and lost his editorial role. Mr. Former Editor, if you sow the seed, you must also reap the harvest! Just like this former editor, these preachers are having to deal with the fruits of the innovations of 40 years ago. What was only a snowflake then has suddenly (?) SNOWBALLED into something which they never thought they'd have to deal with. They did not look to the logical end of that which they started.

I've given the preceding examples of both the denominations and "liberalism" the main thrust of this article. Many individuals in both situations will not go as far as to accept any and everything

that many will accept. It is therefore incumbent upon those of us who strive for simple New Testament Christianity to be ready to offer the simple, untainted gospel to those who are diligently and honestly searching for way out of these pitfalls. As I read in another article recently, "there are people searching for and wanting Jesus." You and I can stand ready to offer that to them -- SIMPLE, NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY. We can also be ready to teach those who are back-peddling from and rejecting liberalism the same truth. Now is the time to prepare ourselves and fellow-Christians to fight these battles and win souls to Christ. The time to do this is now, so to be ready to "give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). Faithful brethren, "...BEHOLD, NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME. "

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because "seldom [was] heard a discouraging word". It was obviously designed primarily to generate enthusiasm among brethren. It worked! Most of the audience took home a barrel full of enthusiasm and less than a thimble full of "book, chapter and verse" teaching. How can this condition exist? Again, "My people love to have it so."

One of these "motivational" and "positive-thinking" dynamos may come into a congregation and stir his idea of enthusiasm and positive thinking to a fever pitch. After he leaves, or maybe even before, the mature, taught and thinking brethren in the congregation have a real a problem on their hands. They have to deal with untaught people on fire with zeal, generated the motiva-

tor's ability, and charisma, rather than by having calmly and soberly considered good solid Bible teaching. There is a great deal of difference between zeal without knowledge and zeal generated by knowledge (cf. Rom. 10:1) Paul's life before and after becoming a Christian is a good illustration. Knowledge is generated by teaching, not by promotional and emotional hype. Brethren, if we do not get hold of this problem we are in for some real trouble in the future.

We had better start to look for more preachers who will stand before audiences and reprove (convict) and rebuke ("find fault with"; "correct") as well as exhort with kindness, earnestness and sobriety. Preachers who will *major in teaching* as they preach THE WORD. It is a pity that men who quote or read the Scriptures throughout their sermons, giving "sense to the reading", with appropriate application to our spiritual needs, are considered dull by many brethren (both young and older) today regardless of how many positive elements their preaching might have. There are many such preachers among us. Thank God for them. And thank God than some of them are being used extensively by many churches. But, not nearly enough.

May the Lord grant us more men who will follow the pattern for preaching the word given to us by Paul. May there be more mature leadership in the church with the good judgment to seek out such preachers to use and support. It will take some courage because it goes against the popular trend of today. It will take courage because it will mean not catering to the wants and demands of the untaught, shallow and spiritually immature element in the church who make the most noise because they are not studying.

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