

## A SERMON OUTLINE

(Editor's Note: I have had several requests for the outline of this sermon which I have preached at several places during the past year. So, for what it might be worth to you - here it is )

### THE WICKEDNESS OF THE WICKED SHALL BE UPON HIMSELF

Ezek. 18:20 (NKJV)

#### Introduction:

1. Two important lessons taught in Ezek. 18.
  - a. Each responsible for his PERSONAL spiritual condition. (v. 20)
  - b. Each responsible for his PRESENT spiritual condition. (vv. 21-24)
    - (1) Past sins are not remembered for the penitent.
    - (2) Past righteousness is not remembered for the apostate.
2. Ancient Israel had a serious problem with internal sin.
  - a. Encouraged by a false proverb (vv. 1-3).
  - b. Blamed their sins on their fathers (v. 19) and even God (vv. 25, 29).
  - c. Had to learn to put responsibility where it belonged - on the individual himself (v. 3-20).
    - (1) As long as they could be allowed to blame others they would never repent.
    - (2) As long as we do not hold folks responsible for sin today they will not repent.
3. Ancient Israel's case has many parallels in history and today.

- a Calvinism takes responsibility away from the individual and places in on heredity.
- b. Liberal behavioral experts take responsibility from criminals and places in on society, parents or background in general.

4. Modern approaches to crime is paralleled, all too often, in the church's approach to internal sin. Anything to take the heat off the individual and not make him feel responsible for his misdeeds!

#### DISCUSSION:

- I The DECRIMINALIZATION Approach.
  - A. It reduces crime by legalizing it.
    - 1 If a crime gets too hard to control - decriminalize it!
    2. If a sin becomes too prevalent in the church - either find ways to justify it or at least put in the "grey area"!
  - B It shifts responsibility away from the individual and makes it the law's fault. (cf. Rom. 7: 7-12).
- II. The DISTRIBUTIVE Guilt Approach.
  - A It assumes that personal guilt can and often must be shared - it cannot be
    - 1 A crime is committed - investigate the victim, police, society and then maybe the criminal.
    2. A brother becomes unfaithful and ungodly - investi-

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# AN "IDENTITY CRISIS"?

\* \* \* I once sat through a business meeting that devoted the majority of the time discussing the wording for a proposed new sign to identify the church at that place.

It should read 'The Church of Christ meets here'", suggested one.

"No", objected another, "'the' would suggest that this is the only congregation in existence."

"Why not simply put Church of Christ?", asked a brother.

"No", says another, "that suggests that the building is the church".

"Maybe we should word it. 'A church of Christ meets here', that would suggest this is one of many congregations", suggests another.

All the while, I was wondering why not for the sake of accuracy just word it: "Some of a church of Christ meets here some of the time" - for there are always some members absent from the meetings.

\* \* \* A young man recently said to me that he wishes that we could just drop the name "Church of Christ" from our signs, stationery, etc. and use some other terms to identify us. He was so disgusted with all the various practices that are being practiced by some "churches of Christ". He did not want to be identified with them.

\* \* \* It has been suggested that we should not advertise ourselves as "church of Christ" because it suggests that "other churches" are not "of Christ", thus making us a narrow sect. It is often suggested that we should be reaching out to extend fellowship to "Christians" in "other churches", so we should eliminate anything that would characterize us as narrow.

\* \* \* Often we are scolded by some well-intentioned brethren for putting identifying adjectives on brethren in order to distinguish them from other brethren. "Why not just be content to call them, 'brethren', rather than 'conservative brethren' or 'liberal brethren'?", we are asked.

Maybe all of this says that we are

going through some kind of identity crisis. I don't know. But I do know that there is a gap between the real and the ideal with Christians. It would be great if we could hang up a sign and have everyone understand all that the sign says or implies. It would be great if saying, "I am a member of the church of Christ", would clearly be understood by all to mean the same thing in every community. It would be wonderful if all churches were indeed "of Christ" and all who wear the name "Christian" were indeed one - making it unnecessary to narrow the field in any way. It would be great if we could just say "brethren" without ever using any other descriptive or qualifying term at all. But, my closing my eyes and wishing it so, will not make it so.

Pollyannaism is not Christianity. Christians live in a real world, coping with things as they are, trying to keep themselves unspotted from it, trying to convert its people away from it to the Christ - dealing with things as they are, not as they want them to be.

As long as there are people who think of themselves as Christians but pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-10), that is how long we are going to have these identity problems. Signs are going to be subject to misunderstanding. Various brethren are going to be confused with one another. Descriptive adjectives will be unavoidable. A recognition must exist that all who claim to be "of Christ" or "of God" may not be so. We must do all we can to correctly identify those who are indeed "of Christ" in a world filled with perversions of the gospel of Christ (cf. 1 John 4:1). We must cope with perversion and misunderstanding and not put our heads above the clouds and walk around acting and talking like the real was in fact the ideal.

Before one gets so carried away with the idea that it is sinful to put labels on brethren, he might do well to consider Paul's language. He spoke of "FALSE brethren" (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal.

2:5) and "FAITHFUL brethren" (Col. 1:1). If we are not careful we will make up our own rules of love, courtesy and fairness and bind them upon ourselves and brethren - rules that are violated in the very Scriptures that we claim to be following. Incidentally, do you think "false" would have been a label that those false brethren would have used to identify themselves?

Let each be sure that he is identified by the Lord as one of His, do his best to identify others who are so identified in order to have fellowship with them. Let us recognize that there is an identity problem (and has been from the very beginning) and do our best in every case to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:14). The older I get and the closer I get to facing my Lord in judgment the more interested I am in identifying (or "labeling", if you like) myself and others in harmony with what the Scriptures teach and less and less how others might want to be identified. It does my heart good when I can in good conscience call brethren "faithful" or "sound". I wish I could so label all brethren. It hurts inside to have to label them something that indicates otherwise - but that is the way things are, not as I wish they were. But identifying brethren for what they are is a practice as old as the New Testament and practiced by no less person than the Apostle Paul, who wrote: "The things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - these do..." (Phil. 4:9). If such lessens my esteem among some brethren, then I am sorry - but it is the only course that I can take and live with my conscience in view of apostolic teaching and examples in such matters.

At the same time, I realize that there are other good brethren who may not share my assessment of some brethren's faithfulness or lack of it and would not use the same "labels" as I would. They may not have all or the same information that I have or they may in all honesty not view the information in the same light as I do. I must try to be patient with such brethren and not mislabel them (nor impune their motives or faithfulness) simply because they may

not agree with my judgment in the matter. But, I still must speak and act consistent with the way that I see the matter and warn my brethren of any whom I believe to be a threat to the peace and purity of God's people. I must "call them as I see them", based on my study of the Word of God, regardless to what any one else does. If one can take the facts in one hand and the Bible in the other hand and show where I have mis-called or mislabeled something or someone - I must repent of it and correct the matter. But, to make no effort to discern between good and evil (or good men and evil men), even among brethren, and so identify them would be shirking the responsibility God has placed upon me as a Christian and teacher of the gospel of His dear Son. (Heb. 5:12-14).

Brethren, let's use the discerning power that God gave us to make righteous judgments (John 7:24; 1 Cor. 5:3,12,13) and have the courage to stand by and make known our convictions. Now if that identifies me as a "crank", or "extremist", or "dogmatic", or "a brotherhood watchdog" in your eyes and you honestly feel that I should be so labeled then you are welcome to it. Of course, I don't have to accept your judgment any more than you have to accept mine - but we both need to make an honest effort base our judgment upon the facts at hand and what the scriptures teach.

We need to love and treat one another as brethren always. We need to use terms to identify brethren with whom we might have differences that are not prejudicial nor inflammatory in design nor effect. But, when we perceive that brethren are misbehaving to the extent that they threaten the truth of the gospel then because of the love we have for the truth, the church and all brethren - we must identify them for what they are and warn them and those upon whom they are having or are apt to have influence (Gal. 2:4-5,11-21) - desiring all the while that they change or that our unfavorable judgment of them has been wrong.

Let's think about it.- Editor

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gate the church elders  
etc.

3. A man takes up with his  
secretary - investigate  
his wife, home, etc.

4. A student terrorizes the  
school - investigate  
school, teachers board  
etc.

B. It assumes that all mistakes  
and imperfections are of  
equal import (cf. Mt. 7:3 4;  
23: 23-24).

1. Hence any mistake of soc-  
iety police or victim  
disqualifies them to judge.

2. Hence, any mistake by  
brethren disqualifies them  
to rebuke and discipline.

3. Hence, any imperfection of  
parents disqualifies them  
to discipline children.

C. It prevents ALL parties from  
facing their responsibility  
- it gives all an out:

1. It prevents repentance by  
allowing the guilty to  
transfer their guilt to  
others.

2. It prevents rebuke and  
discipline by making those  
responsible for such feel  
that since they are not  
perfect that they have no  
right to point to others  
even those who badly need  
rebuke and discipline.

III. The DEPRIVATION Approach.

A. It assumes bad behavior caus-  
ed by being deprived, not de-  
praved.

1. Thieves steal because they  
are deprived of things by  
their society.

2. Murderers kill because of  
their rage at being un-

loved.

3 Brethren apostatize be-  
cause they have been neg-  
lected by brethren.

B It assumes that simply sup-  
plying the thing deprived  
will change the behavior -  
rather than our firmly in-  
sisting that the offender  
face his REAL problem an  
evil heart and changing it.

1 So many in society cry  
for more social programs  
as the answer to the  
crime problem

2 So many brethren cry that  
if we will just show more  
concern, more love, more  
attention rather than  
censure or discipline that  
rebels in the church will  
come around.

IV. The DISEASE Approach.

A No criminals or sinners just  
sick folks - who can hold a  
sick person responsible for  
his illness?

B So, they need our sympathy  
and treatment rather than  
punishment and discipline.

CONCLUSION:

1. There has been only one Perfect  
Man and one perfect law.

a. Hence, all need self-exami-  
nation, self-improvement -  
often.

b. But imperfect men must apply  
the perfect law and not allow  
sinners to pass the buck to  
them or anyone else (cf. 2  
Cor. 7:2) - the guilty must be  
made to feel the full respons-  
ibility for his actions or he  
will not really repent.

2. There are times to show REAL  
love and concern by refusing to  
take responsibility for a sinners  
action or letting him shift  
attention away from himself on to  
to someone else - even those try-  
ing to correct him.

3. The wickedness of the wicked  
shall be upon HIMSELF!