



"Woe Is Me If I Do Not Preach The Gospel"

"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" -- 1 Corinthians 9:16 (NKJV).

A story made the rounds in my home community when I was a youngster. Times were getting pretty hard during the great depression and a certain fellow in the community was reported to have said, "If things get much worse, I may have to take up preaching - and I am not a bit too good to do it."

Just Another Way to Make a Living?

That man's idea of preaching may not be too far removed from some today - even among those who have "taken up preaching". The attitude seems to be that it is a way to make a living or a way to supplant income until something better comes along. Think I am over stating the case? Then take note of preachers who preach only until they can qualify themselves educationally or vocationally for higher paying secular positions - then decide all of a sudden that they can "serve the Lord better" that way. I do not intend this as a blanket indictment of all brethren who may have turned from "full-time" preaching to secular work. Many brethren have no choice if they are to "provide for their own". Others have circumstances where such is the wise and noble thing to do for the good of family and/or the Lord's Cause in that area. But, we still think we see evidence that some look upon preaching as just another way to make a living -- a job or profession in the secular sense of the terms.

Professionalism

Frankly, many of us who preach do little to dispel that concept. We often take on a professional posture or act like hired executives of the church. We often expect "professional courtesy" in the community and from brethren. We often leave the impression that our aim is to "move on up" in our field by constantly looking around for a "better position". If we are successful enough in getting this church on the move, then we may attract the attention of brethren elsewhere who will make us an attractive offer to do the same

job for them. When younger men who aspire to preach see this, no wonder they think of preaching as good job alternative.

When we talk and think in terms of measuring the amount of work by the amount of pay received or vice versa we have the wrong concept of preaching -- we become mere **"professionals"** or **"hirelings"** whether we like to call it that or not. I have heard preachers say that they "give the brethren their money's worth" and after that they feel that their time is their own to do as they please -- sell insurance, golf, or whatever. I am not against a preacher selling insurance, if he needs to in order to provide for his family; nor playing golf for recreation - what time do we tee off? What I am talking about is that secular concept -- so much preach for so much pay -- I hear too much about from some preachers and those who support them financially.

"Necessity is laid upon me"

I realize that Paul's necessity to preach was laid upon him in a unique way by his special call to the apostleship, but he also felt compelled to preach because of the great need and his ability to do it. He preached the gospel when supported by brethren (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:16), when supported by the works of his own hands. (1 Cor. 4:12). He was totally committed to preaching - wherever and whenever opportunity was present - with or without the brethren's support. He had to preach! That is the kind of preachers we need today.

We support young men during the summer months to preach. If we detect that they are merely looking for a "summer job", then that ends our consideration of them for support. If they have demonstrated that they intend to preach - no matter what - then we consider them for support.

"Hiring" and "Firing" Preachers

The preacher - congregation relationship is different from the employee - employer relationship in the secular world. A preacher is not the church's hired hand or even a hired executive. At best, the terms **"hire"** and **"fire"** are accommodative terms often used of the

preacher - church relationship. The "hiring" should be nothing more than an agreement to have fellowship with a preacher in his work and "firing" is nothing more than a decision on the part of the church to cease that fellowship. A church cannot "fire" a man from preaching. They can only cease to support him and decide whether or not he will preach as a part of that congregation's work. Preachers are servants of the Lord with whom churches have fellowship (Phil. 1:5; 4:10-17). When preachers begin thinking of themselves as and brethren think of them as hired to the church - they will cease to do the Lord's bidding and become servants of men (brethren) rather than Christ (Gal. 1:10). While he may, in a sense, make himself "a servant to all" - he must ever understand that he is "free from all men" (1 Cor. 9:19). His work must not be affected by the amount of support he receives nor the source of that support. The only way that it should affect the amount of preaching he does is that "wages" from brethren frees time and energy that would be otherwise used in making a living to be used in preaching. His duties will be the same whether supported by brethren or not - he is to preach the gospel to all, in or out of Christ, to the extent of his ability and opportunity. The only thing that changes by being financially supported by the church is an increase in time and opportunity and possible increase in ability by having more time to study and reflect upon the Scriptures. The church in supporting him will have the fruits of his labor abound to its account. (Phil. 4:17).

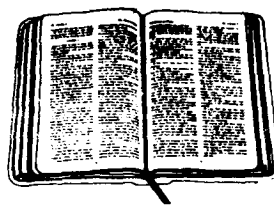
So, young man, if you are looking at preaching as one of many possible career options - you need to do some more thinking. But, if you love the Lord, love souls, and have the ability to preach, look for and take advantage of every opportunity you have to preach. Preach whether you have a "place to preach" or not. Preach whether supported or not. If there are opportunities for you to preach and be supported by brethren then take advantage of it - but do not think of your work as a profession or job in the common secular sense, but as something that you must do with your ability as a servant of the Lord. Then you will have proper reward. - Editor.

OUR NEXT MEETING

JUNE 10 - 15

H. E. PHILLIPS

7:30 EACH NIGHT



Creeping Ecumenicalism

Bitter sectarianism (or acute factionalism) has left its ugly marks on Christianity. The landscape is literally marked by visible results of that demonic spirit. Buildings, housing churches, all claiming to be "Christian", are too obvious to even the casual observer as he drives over the country. Signs on building fronts may say the same thing, but the churches behind these signs may have very little to do with each other. Even among those meeting in the same building, there may be a dispute that is the nucleus for another sect or faction. This disturbs anyone who understands that the Bible teaches that there be "no divisions among you" (1 Cor. 1:10).

Is Ecumenicalism The Answer?

What is the answer to this deplorable problem? The religious thinkers of the world think they have found the answer -- The Ecumenical Movement. They have long since given up on any idea that the various churches (conceived by them to be various factions of the one church) will lay aside their varying, peculiar and distinctive traditions -- so they are willing for each to maintain its peculiar traditions, yet throwing the arms of fellowship around all factions.

The results of this concept are everywhere. Ministerial alliances abound. Joint holiday services are conducted all over the country. One denomination freely supports and encourages the another's activities and programs -- even things that they themselves would not dare practice. One can freely move his membership from one denomination to another, being accepted without any basic changes of conviction or life -- as long as he claims to have "accepted Christ" in some vague way. Preachers from one denomination will openly praise those of another as "ministers of Christ" - "brothering" all without distinction. It makes little difference that each teaches totally different ways of being saved from sin, different ways to worship God and completely different concepts of what the church ought to be. The big thing is to have enough love and goodwill to embrace all "Christians", as being equally right before God - even while observing their separate postures in doctrine and

practice.

As The World Thinks, So The Brethren Think

History shows that as the world thinks, then so think many in the Lord's church. The church has always had to be on guard against the moral (or immoral) trends in the world. It has always had to watch what the church did not conform itself to the structural patterns of the institutions - social and political - of this world. For example, the Catholic church (a result of a series of steps away from the Bible pattern) became almost a carbon copy of the Roman government in organization. The church has to be on guard against the prevailing moods and ideas of the religious world around it.

While I do not believe that any of my brethren would embrace what has come to be called the "Ecumenical Movement", I do believe that I see evidence of a kind of creeping ecumenicalism* among some brethren. About all one has to do to be fully fellowshiped by some brethren is to claim to be a "member of the church of Christ" or an "heir of the restoration movement". About all a congregation has to do to receive the endorsement and encouragement of some brethren is to operate under the name "church of Christ". If one has been "baptized for the remission of sins", then his acceptance into fellowship is almost automatic.

No Questions Asked Fellowship

It is not uncommon for one to be accepted into congregational fellowship without any questions being asked. (The brethren at Jerusalem would not accept Paul until he was vouched for by Barnabas -- Acts 9:26). One may have been nothing but a troublemaker at another congregation. One may openly advocate practices in congregational worship, work, and organization that would destroy the very basis and nature of the congregational functioning and fellowship and brethren will continue, not only to tolerate, but openly support and encourage him -- after all he is a brother. Or one may be in an unscriptural marriage. But, what does that matter? As long as he is "called a brother" (cf 1 Cor. 5:11), he is received with open arms. In fact, it is amazing how tolerant and loving(?) many brethren can be toward such brethren and at the same time be scathing and harsh toward anyone who questions their right to embrace such brethren!

A congregation can openly support and promote just about any of the above things through its leadership and brethren will continue their support of them and their activities with the same fervor that they support congregations that are making every effort to keep themselves free of such influences. All that seems to be important to some folks is that the congregation is called a

church of Christ.

Let be understood that I am not talking against receiving with open arms weak brethren or brethren who may hold positions with which I might disagree in the application of Bible principles to one's individual faith and practice. I am not even talking about receiving brethren who may privately hold some views that I consider dangerous - as long as he is doing just that, holding them. I am not talking about marking and avoiding all brethren who might disagree with me on some matters that do not threaten the fundamentals of the faith or some matters that do not threaten the purity of the congregation as a whole. I am not talking about "taking a stand" on every personal and/or local dispute that might arise between brethren -- often situations that you couldn't get to the bottom of if your life depended on it and the brethren involved in such disputes ought not to expect brethren elsewhere to have the same perspective of the matter as they do.

I am talking about the trend to receive into congregational fellowship without question or restriction brethren who openly and flagrantly teach and/or practice things that threatens to "leaven the whole lump" (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6) - often the very kind of people that the Scriptures specifically forbids our fellowshiping. I am talking about the tendency to continue business as usual with brethren (individuals and congregations) while they continually and openly teach and encourage positions that would corrupt the congregational worship, congregational work and congregational organization -- things that are shared, for better or worse, by all members. I am talking about receiving and/or encouraging them, not because their guilt cannot be determined, but when their positions and practices are openly and widely known and often even freely admitted by those who continue to support them. Yet, for some reason or the other brethren still feel should continue to embrace them in the name of keeping the "unity of the Spirit". I kind of doubt that that is the kind of unity that Jesus prayed for or that he commanded through his apostles. It seems to me to be the embryo of ecumenicalism - creeping or otherwise. - Editor.

* During my high school days, I took a course called American Government, in which the term "**creeping socialism**" came up quite often. It was a term that was being kicked around in those days to describe what conservative politicians saw as small but significant steps toward socialism in this country. I have adapted that term for purposes of this article. By "**creeping ecumenicalism**", I refer to small but significant steps among brethren away from drawing any lines against any who may be called (however loosely) brethren.

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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SUNDAY

Bible Classes.....9:45 A. M.
Worship.....10:45 A. M.
Worship..... 6:00 P. M.

WEDNESDAY:

Bible Class.....10:00 A. M.
Bible Classes..... 7:30 P. M.

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The Indwelling of The Spirit

Few people would question the fact that the Holy Spirit in some way dwells within the Christian. Paul wrote to the saints in Corinth: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...?" (1 Cor. 6:19) He further wrote, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his". (Rom. 8:9) There is considerable disagreement, however, as to **how** the Spirit dwells within a Christian. It is not our aim in this short article to deal with that issue, but we do want to suggest three facts that must be remembered as one studies the question.

(1) The age of miracles is past. The only people in the gospel age who ever performed miracles were those who either received the

baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-46) or received spiritual gifts through the laying on of the apostles' hands. (Acts 8:5-23; 19:1-7) No one receives either of these today. The purpose of the miracles was to reveal and confirm truth. (1 Cor. 2:7-13; Mark 16:19,20) Since all truth has been revealed (John 16:13) there is no further need for miracles. One's conclusion, therefore, concerning the indwelling of the Spirit must be compatible with this fact.

(2) The Christ is led by the Spirit through the scriptures, the word of God. (Psa. 119:105; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Eph. 3:3,4) He does not have some inner voice, separate from the scriptures, that somehow guides him into infallible conclusions in relation to truth and right. Nor is there anything in the scriptures that suggests that God's providence somehow works through the indwelling of the Spirit. Consequently, one make a serious mistake if he interprets his feelings or subjective thinking as some kind of message provided by the indwelling Spirit.

(3) Statements concerning the indwelling of the Spirit were not placed in the scriptures as problems to be wrestled with. They were place there for one's assurance and consolation. A Christian sustains a very close relationship with deity - so close that it can be said that he dwells in deity and deity dwells in him. In persecution, trials, temptations, and death his recognition of this close relationship sustains him and helps him to become triumphant in Christ. The apostles never felt the need to explain how this indwelling takes place. Pentecostalism and other misconceptions of the Holy Spirit force the Christian of this generation to be concerned with this problem. If, however, statements concerning the indwelling of the Spirit become primarily a problem to be wrestled with; if his obsession with the "how" of the Spirit's indwelling blinds him to the "fact" of that indwelling, he makes a serious mistake and may fail to find the joy and consolation that should be gained through the Lord's promise.

Difference will continue to exist, but a constant remembrance of these three facts should protect any of us from dangerous conclusions in relation to this question.

- Bill Hall

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