

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

DANGEROUS PREACHING

By Sewell Hall

A man who accepts the task of preaching the gospel accepts a dreadful responsibility. ***“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment”*** (Jas. 3:1). Application of these words may not be limited to what we commonly term local preachers, but they apply in a special way to such men. The longer a man remains with a church, doing such work, the more responsible he becomes for the convictions and faithfulness of the members.

Brother, why do you preach? Is it a profession for you, simply a way of making a living? Is it a career that you wish to enhance by building up a large congregation? Is it an opportunity to exercise your artistic talents by producing a masterpiece of words each week? Is it the pride of having people praise your preaching for years without tiring of it? Preaching for these reasons may build reputations or even larger congregations but it will not produce godly, well-informed, and indoctrinated Christians. Preaching that is God approved is not for the advancement of the preacher but for the salvation and edification of the hearers.

Note three examples of dangerous preaching.

Preaching What is False

The Old Testament is filled with warnings. Remember the ***“man of God”*** who died because he believed a false prophet’s lie (1 Kings 13). Jesus warned, ***“Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”*** (Matt. 7:15). Peter echoed these words, predicting, ***“... there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ...”*** (2 Pet. 2:1).

The danger of false teaching is recognized by most of us. But teaching does not have to be false to be dangerous. We have seen how the media can distort the news by reporting only selected facts. Those facts may be true but if they do not give the whole picture, false impressions are left. A mother may not feed her child poison, but if she does not give it the balanced diet it needs she may contribute to its sickness or even death.

We may be pleased when someone says, ***“You have made me eager to obey God in everything.”*** Such words are encouraging, but we should not suppose that our job is done when this is said. Jeremiah’s countrymen said, ***“Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God”*** (Jer. 42:6). But when Jeremiah told them what God wanted them to do, they totally rejected it and called him a liar. It is our job, as it was Jeremiah’s, to show our hearers what God says they should do and not do. We need to be teaching what is wrong with profanity, dancing, drinking, immodesty, and other worldliness; as well as with the social gospel, instrumental music, Calvinism, denominationalism, institutionalism, and other doctrinal errors.

Preachers, how long has it been since you have preached on these important subjects? Elders, how long has it been since the flock for which you are responsible have been taught on such subjects as these? We may think that the congregation knows about these things, but how do they know? Even if the older members know, what about young people who did not hear the old sermons of thirty years ago? It is a failure to continue preaching on such things that leaves a church open to worldliness and unscriptural innovations.

My brother, Bill, has observed that churches vary in their feeling about sound doctrinal preaching. The first church does not want sound teaching and will avoid preachers they fear might produce it. The second church

will accept sound teaching and appreciate it, but they do not demand it. The third church not only accepts sound teaching but will accept nothing short of it. However, those churches that will accept it but do not get it for a period of ten years will cease to want it.

Preaching that is Limited to Attacks on Worldliness and Error

It can kill a church. Recently, someone reported to me their periodic visits to a very small congregation of older Christians, and observed that every time they visited, the preacher was warning about some kind of apostasy that really does not threaten those faithful veterans. All Christians, young and old, need encouragement. The gospel is good news; the promises it makes and the hope it gives should be often stressed.

The same passage (2 Tim. 4:2) that calls upon evangelists to convince and rebuke also instructs them to exhort. Exhortation involves appeal, entreaty, encouragement, consolation and comfort (Vines). ***“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all”*** (1 Thess. 5:14).

On the Other Hand ...

Great preaching has always come from the heart of one who was passionate about the needs of his hearers and confident that God’s word is the solution to their needs. One of the temptations involved in preaching to the same congregation each Sunday is the feeling that one must come up with something that is either new, or a novel presentation of what is old. The needs of the hearers may be forgotten. One may use scripture — even limit himself to expository preaching — yet not deal with the current needs of his audience.

Jeremiah rebuked the sins of his generation and warned them of future consequences until he was tempted to keep silent. ***“But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones. And I was weary of holding it back, and I could not”*** (Jer. 20:9). *“Someone has said that there are three kinds of preachers. The first has to say something — he is a paid talker who has to fill a certain amount of time each week. The second has something to say, and that is a whole lot better. But best of all is the third — the man who has something to say and has to say it. That is the kind of preacher Jeremiah was”* (L.A. Mott in Thinking Through Jeremiah).

Each of us who preach should ask, “What is the burning fire in my bones that I cannot hold back?” If we do not have such a burning fire, or if it is something other than ***“what is good for edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers”*** (Eph. 4:29), then we had best quit preaching. ■



Why Preach?

1. TO DECLARE GOOD NEWS (Rom.10:15)
2. TO EDIFY THE HEARER (1 Thess. 5:11)
3. TO INFORM THE LISTENER (Matt. 28:19, 20)
4. TO PRESENT THE TRUTH (Jn. 8:32)
5. TO PRODUCE FAITH (Rom. 10:17)
6. TO CONDEMN ERROR (Jas. 5:19, 20)
7. TO REBUKE THE ERRING (2 Tim. 4:2)
8. TO RESTORE THE ERRING (Jas. 5:16)
9. TO SHOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN (Rom. 6:23)
10. TO ENCOURAGE CHRISTIAN LIVING (2 Pet. 1:5-11)
11. TO COMFORT THOSE IN SORROW (Rom. 12:15)
12. TO SAVE SOULS (Mk. 16:15, 16)

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Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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