

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD”

By Greg Gwin

In Paul’s final meeting with the elders at Ephesus, he challenged them, encouraged them, charged them, and warned them. He expressed his own confidence in their knowledge of God’s truth and was certain that they understood the expectations placed upon them. He said: **“I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:26-27).

All who preach the gospel today should strive to accomplish that same task. Faithful preaching is not simply preaching that is free from error. While that is certainly important, more is necessary. The **“whole counsel of God”** must be proclaimed.

We need more than ‘spiritual pep-talks’ from the pulpit. While it is essential to deal with the positive themes of God’s love, grace, forgiveness, etc., it is also critical that we cover important doctrinal issues that are so often neglected. When brethren are not well grounded in these crucial matters, they are left vulnerable to false teachers **“who will secretly bring in destructive heresies”** (2 Pet. 2:1). Paul warned the Ephesian elders that such false teachers were like **“grievous wolves”** and that they would **“not spare the flock”** (Acts 20:29).

Brethren should demand a balance of preaching that stress indispensable truths of both a positive and negative nature. Let all be encouraged by the affirmative facts of God’s love and blessings. But let them also be strengthened against the assaults of the Devil whose **“servants masquerade as servants of righteousness”** (2 Cor. 11:15, NIV).

After a typical sermon ask yourself: Did the lesson do more than merely entertain? Did I learn something? Was I stirred to greater faith and service? Was my understanding of God’s Word increased? Am I better prepared to live in the face of the great challenges that surround me? Can I say – as the preacher brings lessons from week to week – that **“the whole counsel of God”** has been declared? ■

Soft Pulpits and Dusty Bibles

By Dickey Howard

During the 50s the Lord’s church divided over institutionalism, and there was a clear line drawn between truth and error. Many of God’s people stood for the truth, and continue not to support institutionalism, but one battle does not win the war. **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour”** (1 Pet. 5:8). The devil must be very pleased so many are living in the past, and think the war has been won. Yes, the lines were clearly drawn in the past, but today those lines have become fuzzy and gray, because of soft preaching in some pulpits and dusty Bibles in the home.

The church today is in trouble because it is uninformed. How many know anything about the issues that are dividing the church today? How many even know there is a division taking place in the church? Soft preaching has left the church uninformed and has tickled folk’s ears. When error is clearly taught, it is called false teaching by those who will stand for the truth, and is easy to recognize. Soft preaching is not error, but it does not teach the *whole counsel of God*, and is not as easy for many folks to see. It is dangerous because it allows the church to ease into apostasy. It doesn’t point out sin in the congregation, nor expose error or the names of those teaching it, as did Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:2. Soft preaching is for those with itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3).

Many will say we are not in trouble. Let us look at this honestly. Are we not in trouble when there are those, in the Lord's church, who will condemn a gospel preacher because he exposes error and calls the names of those who teach it. Some may say he doesn't have the right personality, or his sermons are a little too long. No one would dare say he taught any error, in fact everyone would say he taught the truth right down the line.

There are those who would say such a gospel preacher would cause dissension in the congregation where they preach, and also the surrounding congregations. God's word has always caused division, because the word clearly separates truth from error. The truth turned the world upside down in Acts 17:6. "***Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?***" (Gal. 4:16).

Soft preachers are not the only ones to blame for the softness in the church today. Hebrews 13:17 tells elders they will give an account of how they watched for souls. God will not overlook elders who do not have the backbone to stand for the truth, and to see to the feeding of the flock that is among them (Acts 28:28). Be vigilant, which means to be alert or watchful (1 Pet. 5:8). Reactive preaching is like closing the gate after the mule is out. Elders and preachers must be watchful and listen to what is being taught and supported. God's people must be warned of the dangers that face the church.

There are those who want to hear hard or plain gospel preaching like Paul and the other apostles did. It was preaching that exposed error and called the names of those who did it. It was preaching that encouraged the brethren to love God and their brothers and sisters in Christ and to have unity according to the word. It was not unity in diversity by fellowship of any and everything for the sake of peace.

We must remember, no one can go to heaven on the group plan. Each of us will stand before God in judgment and give an account of himself. Matthew 12:37 says, "***For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.***" Let us not let friendship or kinship cause us to say or do things that will cause us to lose our soul in eternity. I long for the day when folks will come to the elders and preachers and say, "*Give us the truth and nothing but the truth.*" God told the Laodiceans that he would spew them from his mouth because they were lukewarm, and we had better check our temperature before it is too late. – ***Guardian of Truth***, December 4, 1997. ■

(Reprinted from ***The East Florence Contender***, Florence, Alabama, September 1997. Dickey Howard is an elder in the East Florence Church of Christ, Box 915, Florence, Alabama 35631-0915)

Preaching Christ and His Church

By Joe R. Price

"1 Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. 2 He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1-2, NKJV).

Jesus gave His apostles power (capacity) and authority (the freedom to act) over demons and diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to work miracles which confirmed the divine nature of their message. The New Testament identifies the kingdom of God as the church of Christ (Matt. 16:18-19; Col. 1:13). Preaching the kingdom of God is central to preaching Christ. When the evangelist Philip preached Christ, he preached "***things concerning the kingdom of God***" (Acts 8:5, 12). We fail to preach Christ if our preaching minimizes His church (His kingdom). There is rich irony in one thinking he can preach Christ to sinners (so they can be saved and added to the church, His kingdom, Acts 2:47) by not preaching the church (the kingdom) to them! Such is the feeble and futile attempt to preach Christ but not His church. We cannot preach Christ (the Anointed One, the King) without preaching His kingdom, His church. Truly, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of the kingdom (Lk. 4:18, 43-44). Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom, and so did His apostles. When early Christians preached Christ, they preached His kingdom (the church). When we preach Christ, we must preach His kingdom, His church. – ***Sword Tips***, April 30, 2018. ■

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

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