

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“That’s Not A Problem Here”

By Heath Rogers

A number of years ago I was reprimanded for preaching a rather straightforward sermon on the sin of homosexuality. The language of the sermon had upset a couple in the church, as they did not want their young children exposed to this subject. When I discussed this matter with two older men of the congregation (one had served as an elder before, and the other would later be appointed as an elder), I was shocked when they advised me not to preach on the subject again. Their reasoning: *“It is not a problem here.”*

“Don’t talk about that. It isn’t a problem here.” When do we use this kind of logic? Generally speaking, we usually do just the opposite. Elementary schools do not wait until there is a fire to start having fire drills. They have such drills on a routine basis so teachers and students will be prepared for such an emergency. We are familiar with the phrase “Preventive Medicine.” As a child, my dentist had a sign in his office that read, *“You don’t have to floss all of your teeth, just the ones you want to keep.”* We do not wait until our children get a few cavities before we buy them a toothbrush and insist they brush their teeth. As a general rule, we know it is foolish to wait until something becomes a problem to address it. The same principle holds true for the pulpit.

In First Timothy chapter four, Paul says the Spirit has expressly said that in latter times some will depart from the faith. He goes on to describe the nature of this departure: giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies, forbidding to marry, and commanding abstinence from foods. After identifying this apostasy, Paul says, ***“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ...”*** (v. 6). Timothy was not to wait until this was a problem where he was preaching. He was to forewarn the brethren so the church there would not depart from the faith.

In his second letter, Paul charged Timothy to ***“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*** Why? ***“Because the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...”*** (2 Tim. 4:2-3). Timothy was not to wait until this time came to address the problem of apostasy. The way for him to prevent a future departure was with the present instruction of sound doctrine.

There are a number of things every local church will likely have to address at some time, and wisdom demands that these subjects be covered before they become problems. Issues such as divorce and remarriage, the work of the church, the role of women in the church, instrumental music, church discipline, etc. Why does a church need to address these subjects prior to them becoming problems?

Prevention. One way to prevent problems is by addressing the issues beforehand. It pays to earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3), and to forewarn a congregation of dangers lurking on the horizon. If your strategy is to wait until something becomes a problem to address it, then you are inviting problems into the local church.

Defeats Emotionalism. We all know that it is better to address problems when we are thinking clearly. If we wait until there is a fire to talk about escape procedures, no one will be of a mind to listen and follow instructions. However, if procedures are discussed and exercised beforehand, they will be followed in a real emergency. Church discipline and divorce and remarriage are very emotional issues. If we study these subjects in a calm setting, we can arrive at the truth and understand what ought to be done in such situations. However, if we wait until it is a real problem involving members of the church that we love and care about (perhaps even family members), then the plain teaching of Scripture can be misinterpreted or set aside in favor of our emotions.

Paul declared the whole counsel of God while he was in Ephesus (Acts 20:27). In doing so, he set the pattern for preachers and elders to follow today (Phil. 3:17). Let's not wait until a particular sin becomes a problem before we deal with it. Both the word of God, as well as common sense, instruct us to declare the whole counsel of God. ■

In The Midst Of A Crooked And Perverse Generation

By Bill Hall

“Do all things without murmurings and questions; that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:14, 15).

The Philippian Christians had to serve God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. They were neither the first nor the last to find themselves under such circumstances. In fact, every person who ever served God did so "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation," and so must we.

Surely no one would question the perverseness of the generation in which we live. We are surrounded by indecency. Moral filth lines the shelves of the neighborhood store and video shop. Drug scandals rock the sports and entertainment worlds. Christians working in factories are exposed to bad language, filthy stories, and rumors of immorality among their fellow employees. Our children attend schools that are filled with wickedness. We are not overstating the case—this is the world as it really is, a crooked and perverse generation indeed.

We face two possible choices as Christians: (1) try to clean up the society in which we live, so that we and our children can serve God without the pressures and evil influences that presently exist. We would not discourage reasonable effort on the part of individual Christians along these lines, but success in any such efforts will be on a small scale. It matters not how hard we work at it, by and large, the world will still be a corrupt world when we die: evil will still exist on TV and in the movies; pornography will still be a problem; corruption will still exist in government; and schools will still have their ungodly influences. Our purpose as Christians is to call people out of darkness through the gospel and into light. We can do that, but efforts to eradicate darkness will for the most part be futile. Fortunately, we have another choice: (2) make up our minds to serve God faithfully in whatever environment we find ourselves. This is the only viable choice for the Christian.

It can be done. Consider Noah's generation when ***“every imagination of the thoughts of (man's) heart was only evil continually”*** (Gen. 6:5); or Lot's generation when ten righteous souls could not be found in all of Sodom; or Elijah's generation when wicked Ahab served as king in the wicked nation of Israel; or Daniel's generation when as a young man he found himself in a foreign land facing pressures to eat the king's meats and drink his wines (Dan. 1:8); or the apostles' generation when Rome ruled the world and the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees dominated the religious scene. What were these men doing in such crooked and perverse circumstances? They were serving God! That's what they were doing! The point is this: if these could serve God in the midst of the crooked and perverse circumstances in which they found themselves, and if the Philippians could shine ***“as lights in the world”*** in the midst of their crooked and perverse generation, so can we. Our eternal destiny is not determined by the environment in which we live, but by our own determination to be what we ought to be in whatever environment we find ourselves. We must lay aside our excuses, both for ourselves and our children, and make up our minds to say with Joshua, ***“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”*** (Josh. 24:15). This we shall do, and with God's help we shall overcome. ■

“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:6-8 KJV).

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

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