

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Sins Of Preachers

By Hugh Fulford

“Therefore, seeing we also are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares (besets, KJV; ASV) us, and let us run with patience the race that that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

The story is told of three preachers traveling together to a Christian university Bible lectureship. One of them brought up the passage above and said, *“You know, we all have a besetting sin—even we who preach. I think it would be good if each of us would confess our besetting sin so we can help each other overcome that sin. I’ll start. My besetting sin is that I like to drink a little. O, nothing heavy, just a little social drink every now and then when I am away from the brethren.”* The second one said, *“Well, I like to gamble a little. Nothing big, just a little petty gambling for the thrill of it, and the chance to perhaps pick up a little extra money.”* They traveled on for a while, with the third preacher saying nothing. Finally, the others said, *“Come on brother Bill, fess up. We know you have a besetting sin just like the rest of us. Tell us what it is.”* Bill said, *“Well, yes, I do have a besetting sin. I love to gossip from time to time, and I can hardly wait to get back home!!”*

Yes, preachers are human. They face the same temptations as everyone else. But because of their unique place of influence and often being the “face” of the church in the community, their sins can be especially harmful to the cause of Christ. Here are some sins of preachers that I have witnessed over the years.

Envy and Jealousy – These two attitudes are closely related. *“The distinction lies in this, that envy desires to deprive another of what he has, jealousy desires to have the same or the same sort of thing for itself” (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. II, p. 37).* Unfortunately, preachers can sometimes be quite envious and jealous of each other. The size of the congregation, the salary, the number of meetings and lectureships in which one is invited to speak, the number of responses to one’s preaching, the articles one writes and the publications in which they appear can become objects of jealousy. Both envy and jealousy are sinful attitudes roundly condemned in scripture. Do we think that when we preachers **“judge those who do such things, and do the same, that [we] will escape the judgment of God”** (Rom. 2:3)? The late Ira North used to say (and it perhaps was not original with him), *“There is no competition between lighthouses.”* Let all of us who preach the life-changing gospel lay aside all envy and jealousy and genuinely rejoice when others are more successful in the work of the kingdom than are we!

Grudge-Holding – Some preachers (and Bible professors!) are quick to take offense at anything that might be viewed as a criticism of them (whether it actually was or not), some action they have taken, or some theological position they hold. They are ultra-sensitive and seem to feel that they are somehow above criticism. When such criticism comes, the critic is no longer in the good graces of the one who received the criticism. A grudge is held and the critic is “black-listed.” None of us enjoys being criticized, but criticism can be productive if given and received in the right spirit. But under no circumstances is it ever right to hold a grudge against another. **“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest you be condemned”** (Jas. 5:9, KJV). Liberty Mutual, the insurance company, doesn’t hold grudges, and neither should Christians, especially preachers!

Egotism – Some preachers are plagued with a huge ego and this one character flaw perhaps lies at the heart of many of the other sins of which preachers are especially guilty. I am not a trained psychologist, but I have been around preachers nearly all of my life and am one myself, and I know egotism when I see it—in myself as well as in others. Get a few preachers together and see who can “outdo” the others in telling how many degrees “I” have and where “I” got them, what “I” have done, where “I” have preached, how many meetings “I”

have held, what “big name” lectureships “I” have spoken on, how many sermons “I” have preached, how many people “I” have baptized, etc., etc. I think preachers have more “I” problems than any other group of people I know, but I am sure it plagues all professions. It is hard for some folks to play “second fiddle.” I know preachers (and they are otherwise fine men) who simply cannot sit for very long and listen to someone else tell of his accomplishments without feeling compelled to tell what they have done! And be assured, it’s never less than what the other fellow has done, it is always more and better! How good it would be if all preachers could train themselves to sit quietly and listen to and rejoice in the successes and good fortune of other preachers without feeling the necessity of saying something about themselves! Whatever became of the injunction: **“but in lowliness of mind let each esteem another better than himself”** (Phil. 2:3)? Or, does that not apply to the bearers of the “Good News”?

Love Of the Praise of Men – Closely akin to the preceding is the unwholesome love of some preachers for the praise of men. While thoughtful recognition and honor are appropriate, to desire and seek **“the praise of men”** (John 12:43) is debasing for the true man of God. Some of Jesus’ strongest words were reserved for the Jewish leaders of His day. **“But all their works they do to be seen of men. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the market places, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’”** (Matt. 23:5-7). Jesus warned, **“Woe to you when all men speak well of you”** (Luke 6:26). The wide praise of men may say more about a preacher and his faithfulness to God’s word than it does about the actual honor of the preacher! Yet, some preachers are flagrantly guilty of this sin. In this they fall far short of the Old Testament prophets of God and the New Testament apostles and preachers of Christ.

Sexual Immorality – Many an effective preacher has been forced to leave the ministry because of sexual improprieties: fornication, adultery, homosexuality, pedophilia, pornography addiction, and the like. They have destroyed their own family, the families of others, brought shame and reproach on the church in their community, shame and reproach on themselves, shame and reproach on the name of Christ, and destroyed what could have been an otherwise long and faithful ministry in the kingdom of God. Preachers are just as human as anyone else in this regard, but we must guard against those situations that tempt one to engage in sexual misconduct (cf. Matt. 5:27-28; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:15; Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 4:12). One of the evidences of the fruit of the Spirit and one of the Christian graces is self-control (Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:5-7). Preachers need to practice that! **“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself”** (Rom. 2:21)?

Compromise To Hold One’s Job – In a culture where the mores and morals are constantly changing the temptation can be strong to “trim” the message of the gospel to fit the fluctuating standards of society. In an age when doctrine is belittled and propositional truth is scorned, the temptation can be irresistible to not proclaim **“the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:26-27). God does not change (Mal. 3:6). His word does not change (Matt. 24:35). The truth of the gospel does not change (Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Man’s response to the gospel, the acceptable way to worship the Lord, the nature of the church, and the way we are to live as Christians do not change (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jude 3). Woe to that preacher who caves in to the culture around him and fails to speak the truth of God – ALL the truth of God – in love (Eph. 4:15)! But it has happened and it continues to happen. Names can be named! And remember: one does not have to preach false doctrine in order to be disloyal to Christ and the gospel. One can simply fail to preach all the truth in its fullness. What our hearers do not know can condemn them as quickly as false doctrine and false practice.

The lesson in all of this? Preachers are human. They are no better or holier than any other Christian. They, too, have feet of clay and must, like all other children of God, **“be even more diligent to make their calling and election sure”** (2 Pet. 1:10). ■

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews” (Gal.2:11-14 KJV)?

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

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