

StraitWay



August 1999

The Preacher's Attitude Toward "Preach the word..." (2)

In this series we are taking a glimpse at First and Second Timothy and Titus, reminding ourselves of some of the responsibilities of gospel preachers.

(1) The faithful preacher must not "...entangle himself with the affairs of this life..." because as a soldier he is a warrior that pleases "...him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (II Tim. 2:4). It is not wrong for a preacher to earn his living in secular work. Paul did this on some occasions. But, his mind is not to be filled with worldly things which crowd out the spiritual. Fully supported preachers need to give full time to their work. Brother, you are not fully supported so you can get out and earn more money on the side. (2) He endures all things for the elect's sake, that they may be saved (II Tim. 2:10). Therefore, he does not complain about how he is treated. (3) Put them in remembrance and charge them not to strive about words (II Tim. 2:14). The need for constant reminder of those things we already know is great. Would it not be wonderful if we did not strive about words, but kept our doctrinal speech pure and clean? (4) He studies (gives diligence) to be approved before God (II Tim. 2:15). As you listen to sermons, ask yourself, Is this man trying to be approved of God or of men? (5) He is to rightly divide (handle aright) the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15). Every preacher has to watch his teaching to make sure that more and more he is closer and closer to what the text actually says. (6) He must "...shun profane and vain babblings..." (II Tim. 2:16). Certain talk must be avoided if we are to be spiritually minded and pleasing to God. Speculations of men are vain. (7) He must be a vessel unto honor meet for the master's use (II Tim. 2:21). If a church cannot see a preacher live what he preaches, his influence will not be for good. He will not be effective as a proclaimer of Divine Truth. All men sin, and that includes preachers. Churches must give preachers time to grow, but there must be an evident effort on the part of the preacher to live right and set a good example. There have been too many (and one would be too many) preachers who preached one thing and lived another. Brother, if you do not intend to live right, your first need is to repent. Then you may need to consider another line of work. I understand that in the medical field, there is a saying that goes like this, "First, do no harm...." It is well for us preachers to keep that in mind. One fast way to do harm is to let our mind be filled with the corruption of the world. Remember Paul's admonition to Timothy, "Keep thyself pure..." (I Tim. 5:22). Also, remember the words of Solomon, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). A worldly minded preacher will not develop a spiritually minded church.

Brother, what do people see? Do they see a deeply spiritual person whose life evidences a pure mind set on things above and not on things on the earth? Ask, What am I passing on to the next generation?

How well are we doing the work of an evangelist? Are we making full proof of our ministry? Or, are we hirelings? Study carefully.

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Word Studies

Sober-minded

One who serves as an overseer in the local church must be "sober" or "sober-minded." (1 Timothy 3:2.) We often use the word "sober" in contrast to a mental state produced by imbibing alcohol, but the Greek word "sophron," along with several words derived from it, refers to a proper mental state in general. The word itself is derived from two Greek words meaning "to save" and "the mind." It means "of sound mind," that one's mind is of such a state that he is in control of his actions and words. The Roman governor Festus, upon hearing Paul affirm the resurrection of Christ, cried, "You are beside yourself...mad!" Paul replied that he was speaking "words of truth and soberness." (Acts 26:24, 25). "Sober-minded" is the opposite of "mad."

Paul left Titus the evangelist in a tough spot--the island of Crete, where the natives had a well-deserved reputation as "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." (Titus 1:12, 13). This indicates a culture which promoted an unsound state of mind. This produced defiled minds and consciences. (1:15). Titus's task was to overcome this cultural perversion, leading the Cretan believers to the right way of thinking. Paul charged that he "speak the things that are proper for sound doctrine." (2:1). Let us note the role of soberness in that charge, as the apostle expounds upon sound doctrine in Titus 2:1-15.

The older men must be taught to be sober (vs. 2). The elders whom Titus appointed in every city would come from among these men (1:5-8), but all of the older men must set the tone of sound thinking among the saints.

The older women were to "train the young women..." (2:4) This word "train" ("teach" or "admonish") is translated from a verb form of "sophron." The task of these older women was to give the younger the proper frame of mind through training. This implies an ongoing process of directing and correcting their young counterparts. Among the traits which they were to cultivate was that of being "discreet." (2:5). This is yet another appearance of "sophron," and a similar use is found in 1 Timothy 2:9, also directed toward women: "...that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety..." Proper dress is a matter of sound judgment. In Mark 5:15 a man who had been demon-possessed and unable to control himself was seen to be "clothed and in his right mind ('sophron')." When he had control of himself and was "sober," he put on clothes! There is something unbalanced in the thinking of those, male or female, who dress themselves inadequately. They do not see the merits of moral purity as opposed to sensuality. Sobriety is lacking.

Titus was also to "exhort the young men to be sober-minded" (2:6), with himself being the pattern of good works for them. The contrast between the "integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech" of Titus (2:7, 8) with the generally low character of the Cretans (1:12) should have given the young saints a good perspective of the inherent superiority of sober thinking. Let all preachers of the gospel take this admonition to be an example seriously, for that same contrast between sobriety and unbalanced thinking must be observed by the young men who are forming patterns of thinking and behavior that may last a lifetime.

Paul told Titus that God's grace teaches us that "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." (2:11, 12). Living soberly includes "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts." When believers live worldly lives, participating in the ungodliness seen among Satan's servants, they have taken leave of their senses and ignored the limitless blessings of an eternity with God when compared to this brief present age.

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First Principles

Salvation Is By God's Grace

This space in last month's paper was given to the discussion of a few reasons why one should be a Christian. Being a Christian, as one understands it from the New Testament, is the same as coming into a saved relationship in Christ Jesus. While there are a number of things by which the New Testament says we are saved, our focus here is upon grace and its relation to our salvation. Grace may be understood as goodwill, friendly disposition, or favor of one toward another. When used of God toward man, it means favor undeserved. The observant reader will see in such passages as Rom. 5:1-2,6-8; Eph. 2:4-5 and Tit. 3:3-7 that man certainly did not deserve the great favor shown him by God in the sending of His Son as the propitiatory price for man's sin. Through God's gracious provision in Christ, vile and sinful mankind may be delivered from that against which the wrath of God is directed (cf. Rom. 1:18; Col. 3:6).

THE EXPANSE OF GRACE. Paul tells us that God's grace and the gift by that grace is *abundant* (Rom. 5:15,17). Whiteside comments, "...Paul assures us that the blessings through Christ abound much more than the curse through the trespass of Adam; they include deliverance from our own sins" as well as "the evils resulting from Adam's sin." When Paul who "was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent man" referred to his own forgiveness, the Lord's grace became "exceedingly abundant" (I Tim. 1:14). The Ephesians were assured that the forgiveness of sins, the redemption wrought through His blood, was "according to the *riches of His grace* which He has *made to abound* toward us..." and "that in the ages to come He might show the *exceeding riches* of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:7-8; 2:7). A hymn we sing speaks of "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt...Grace that will pardon and cleanse."

THE GIFTS OF GRACE. Jesus and His death for everyone is a gift of grace (Rom. 5:15; I Cor. 1:4; Heb. 2:9). And what a great gift is the gospel which Paul calls "the gospel of the grace of God" and "the word of His grace" (Acts 20:24,32). The gospel is the good news which unfolds the scheme of redemption in Christ (Eph. 1:7-11; 3:1-12).

SALVATION BY GRACE. This is a fact plainly declared in many passages. Peter spoke of his confidence that "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" both Jew and Gentile would be "saved in the same manner" (Acts 11:15). Paul said to the Romans that we "are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). And to the Ephesians he wrote, "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Now consider this. Looking back to Romans 3:24-25, note that the justification by grace is accomplished through the redemption that is in Christ, our propitiation, and that redemption is through faith and in His blood. Similarly, in the Ephesian passage salvation, the gift of God, is by grace through faith. Contrary to the understanding of many, salvation is the gift, not the faith that appropriates the benefits of grace. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). One is called into grace, which call is through the gospel (Gal. 1:6; 2 Thes. 2:13-14). Hearing the gospel, "the word of His grace", converts in New Testament days responded obediently to the apostolic message to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." (Acts 2:38). Their message was as Jesus had instructed when giving them the charge to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:15-16). Those whose faith so responds are then said to stand in grace (Rom. 5:2; I Pet. 5:12). Friend, we plead with you to accept the salvation which God's grace provides.

Personal Work

When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we will give an account of the life we have lived (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). It doesn't matter how much work someone else has done (or is doing) to teach people to obey the gospel. What are you doing to save lost souls? How many souls have you taught to obey the gospel? Remember we are going to be judged by what we do.

Cancer is a dreadful disease and kills many people each year. If you had a book that told how to cure the disease, would you tell your friends and neighbors (if they had cancer) about it? Why, you know you would. You would be aggressive about telling everyone you knew with the disease. But, what about the disease (sin) of the soul, are you as interested in telling others about it? We have the cure for the soul and the people around us are lost and dying. Why are we not telling them how to save their soul? Any disease of the body is only temporary for the short time we are here on earth. But the disease (sin) of the soul is much worse. It will effect one's eternal destiny.

The church as a body has work to do. Yet, the action of the church as a group does not rule out the duty of individual Christians to act in the matter of evangelism. There are some duties we have, not just because we are part of a group, but because of our personal relationship to God. Any attempt to shift upon a collectivity a duty that is private is displeasing to God. Jas. 4:17

There are people all around us that are lost. Most of them have never one time in their lives even heard the true gospel and have no concept of what it takes to go to heaven. They are alien sinners. An alien is the opposite of citizen. Many aliens do not know that they are aliens. Many are religious, many are members of denominations and are deceived into thinking they are saved when they are lost, not having heard and obeyed the pure gospel of Christ. Brethren, can you not see why we need to be aggressive with the gospel of Christ? If we don't tell these people the truth, who is going to do it? These will be lost forever unless we can bring them to repentance.

The gospel is God's remedy for man's sin. Someone says, I don't know how to start teaching the lost. Write down the following passages and show them to those you are trying to teach. These show why one must obey the gospel to be saved.

Rom. 1:16,17. God's power to save.

1 Cor. 15:1-4. Saved by the gospel.

Acts 11:14. Words to save Cornelius.

John 15:3. Cleansed by words of Christ.

Luke 8:11. Word of God is seed of kingdom.

2 Tim. 1:10. Life and immortality brought to light through the gospel.

2 Thess. 1:7-9. Those who know not God and obey not the gospel shall be punished with everlasting punishment.

Dear brother or sister will you start teaching the lost, not tomorrow, but today?

EVIDENCE FRUIT AS EVIDENCE

There is some value in being able to counter the pseudo-scientific attacks upon the Genesis record of creation. This helps us be stronger in our faith and thereby to teach others. However, we may become expert (I am not) in this field and lose our souls. Jesus has something to say about fruit bearing. Saints need to recognize and produce fruit pleasing to the Lord. Our faith must be "*—in the power of God.*"

Jesus said, in Matthew 7:17 that "*every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*" By the Lord's own words we recognize two types of fruit or produce. One is good. It is good in every respect. It not only looks good but is in fact nutritious. On the other hand there is an evil fruit. A literal rending of "evil" is "rotten." Nothing is more distasteful than rotten fruit!

In the early stages one must take care concerning the produce or fruit of the harvest. A variety of plants may grow in the same environment. This well known fact is the basis of the parable of the tares in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. The seed sown is all important. Different seeds produce different plants. In the parable both the wheat and tares flourished. In the harvest the tares were separated and burned.

In the context of our first passage we hear the defense, in Matthew 7:22, of those the Lord rejects, "*—have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*" Twice, in verses 16 and 20 Jesus has made the point that fruits identify the false teacher and those who follow them. Their fruit, not appearance, manner or deportment, identifies them. They claimed what they had done was "*—in thy name.*" Still, like Simon of Acts 8:22 their hearts were not right with God. They "*worked iniquity.*" Literally they acted outside of or without law! Jesus, knowing all things, reveals them as they are inwardly, "*—ravening wolves.*" They called Jesus "*Lord, Lord.*" Jesus does not question their zeal or fervor which are marks of sincerity, he rather identifies the basis of their actions. They were without law, consequently; their fruits were evil. Fruits can be identified.

Christ's ambassador, the apostle Paul, wrote in Galatians 5:22 that "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,* ²³*Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*" Here is fruit that is within law. There is no law prohibiting it. Like the false teacher they have said "Lord, Lord." The difference is that they loved and obeyed the Lord. Love for God is inseparable from obedience. Consider Exodus 20:6. Moses wrote that God shows "*—mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*" Reading of 2 Peter 1:5-10 is helpful in examining our fruits. Our faith or belief in God derived from the scriptures is shown in virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity or love. This list does not put love last. Indeed the order is not of particular significance for all of these descriptions of character and behavior are a consequence of faith. Love for God and his word results in an active, saving faith.

Luke writes, in Acts 2:41-47 that saints were identified as being different. They lived lives of praise. They had greater concerns for one another than their concerns for financial security. Their lives of praise caused them to have "*favor with all the people.*" Leaving Jerusalem "*they went everywhere preaching the word.*" Our religious friends are taken aback because we insist upon a strict accounting according to the scriptures. They think we put love at a lower level. Disciples must be at once "*set for the defence of the gospel,*" and demonstrate patience and brotherly kindness. It is not an either or option. Re-read brother Melton's article in the January issue dealing with the imbalance of concern for good feelings as opposed to faithful gospel preaching.

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Issues Among Brethren WAS JESUS GOD ?

It is strange, but some among us are contending that while on earth Jesus was nothing more than a man. Is such an idea supported by the teaching of the Bible? Let us see.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Lord would give a sign in which “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” Isa.7:14. Hundreds of years later this prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. As Matthew wrote of the birth of our Lord, he stated, “ Now, all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us,” Mt.1:22-23. From this title “Immanuel” we understand that in Christ the Person of God is with us, among us.

While Jesus was on earth, often He did or said those things which others understood could be the work of God only. On one occasion Jesus said to the man sick of palsy, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee,” Mk.2:5. The reaction of the scribes was, “Why does this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?” Mk.2:7. After Jesus had healed an infirm man on the sabbath and claimed God as His Father, “the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God,” Jn.5:18. They understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. At a later time Jesus stated, “I and my Father are one,” Jn.10:30. The Jews understood what Jesus was saying and took up stones to stone Him. When Jesus questioned their actions, the Jews answered, “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou being a man, makest thyself God,” Jn.10:33. On those three occasions, and others as well, Jesus purposely conducted Himself so as to impress others with the truth that, indeed, He is God. Did our Lord act to deceive on those occasions? Did He claim to be God when He was not? Those today who deny that Jesus was God while on the earth join forces with the unbelieving Jews who nailed our Lord to the cross.

Numerous inspired statements of the New Testament refer to Jesus as “God.” Consider Acts 20:28 where we read about “the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.” Every true student of the Bible knows this is a reference to Christ and the inspired writer speaks of Him as “God.” The Hebrew writer, while showing the superiority of Jesus over the angels, wrote that God the Father said to the Son, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,” Heb.1:8. Again, Jesus is spoken of as “God.” We read, in Tit. 2:13, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” In this verse Paul refers to Jesus as “God.” Col. 2:9 tells us, “ For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” To refute the false ideas of the Gnostics of his day Paul wrote this statement about Jesus. While He was in the flesh, He had the fulness of the Godhead which He possessed in His pre-fleshly state. Everything, without a single exception, which goes to make up the Godhead, all that is included in the term “Godhead,” dwelt in the Lord’s fleshly body when He lived upon this earth. To deny that Jesus was God in the flesh, God-Man, is to reject the inspired words of the New Testament.

Let us all concur with Paul, “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory,” 1 Tim.3:16. Thomas, the apostle, once confessed to Jesus, “My lord and my God,” Jn.20:28. Let us follow his example and be faithful servants of the Lord until that day when “ at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” Phil.2:10-11.

How A Church May Use Its Money (2)

The church is to be evangelistic. Consider what Paul wrote the young gospel preacher, Timothy: “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). In I Thess. 1:8, Paul wrote, “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.” The church has evangelistic responsibilities. How may a church use its money in evangelism?

Preachers have the right to be supported. “Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?...Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (I Cor. 9:6-14).

In the NT, churches sent money directly to the preacher. “Now ye Philippians know also...no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity...I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you...” (Phil. 4:15-18). “I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself” (II Cor. 11:8,9).

In addition to direct support of gospel preachers, the gospel can be taught through the printed page: newspapers, books, tracts, bulletins, and journals. Radio and TV time may be purchased for the purpose of preaching the gospel in those mediums. Church buildings expedite the work of evangelism. As pointed out last time, equipment is often purchased by churches to aid in such efforts.

Now we turn our attention to unscriptural ways of using the treasury of the church. For one church to send money to another church to preach the gospel is not authorized in the NT. In the NT, churches sent directly to the preacher. Elders oversee all affairs of the church (I Pet. 5:1-3). Elders are not given authority to receive money from another church unless they have more needy saints than they can care for.

Churches are not authorized to send money (support) to missionary societies. A missionary society is a separate organization and stands independently of churches, yet is dependent on them for support. In the 1800's The American Christian Missionary Society was formed. That and mechanical instruments of music in worship provided the wedge which caused division among God's people. The result was the churches of Christ and the First Christian Church.

Churches are not authorized to provide social and recreational facilities to promote the gospel. Paul said the “...weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds...” (II Cor. 10:4). Further, Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). If people do not want the gospel, ice cream and cake are not going to make them spiritually minded. “For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein” (Heb. 13:9). Paul told the Corinthians to eat at home (I Cor. 11:22,34) rather than corrupting the worship of the church.

Monetary contributions to hospitals, colleges, and female evangelists or personal workers are not pleasing to God and the church that engages in such is guilty of adding to the word of God (Rev. 22:18,19) and going beyond the doctrine of Christ (II John 9-11).

Let the church be the church. In so doing it can spend its resources according to that which pleases God. Study carefully.

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DEBATES CONCERNING THE DEITY OF CHRIST ON EARTH

Propositions

David D. Bonner will affirm the first two nights: "RESOLVED: The scriptures teach that Jesus, while on earth in the flesh, had and used both human and divine attributes." Jeff Asher denies.

Jeff Asher will affirm the last two nights: "RESOLVED: The Scriptures teach that Jesus, while on earth in the flesh, had both human and divine attributes but never used any of His divine attributes." David D. Bonner denies.

Time: August 2, 3, 5, 6, 1999 (M, T, T, F) 7:30 PM

Place: Crockett Middle School, 4720 Floyd Street, Amarillo, Texas
(Crocket Middle School is three blocks south of Olsen Park church building)

Time: The debate will be repeated August 23, 24, 26, 27, 1999 (M,T,T,F) 7:30 PM

Place: Fourth & Goesbeck Church of Christ, 401 E. Groesbeck, Lufkin, Texas

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