

StraitWay



May 2003

Volume 5 Issue 5

Overseeing The Flock Part Five (Preaching That Demands Change)

Elders are to demand the word be preached. Paul told Timothy to “preach the word” (2nd Tim. 4:2). The word demands change in one’s life. It demands change to become more like Christ, and to live a righteous and godly life. Truth is, if a congregation can sit in the pew week after week and never feel a need to change anything in their life, they are not hearing the gospel preached. The gospel of Christ is demanding.

In these times, many will not endure sound doctrine (2nd Tim. 4:3). They do not want to feel the prick of the sword as it exposes their sin and demands change in their life. They want change, but not according to the gospel. They want to change the church to be more like the world. It is sad to say Carlton Pearson, a Pentecostal preacher, may be right when he said, “There’s an eagerness to worship a God of love. In the next 10 years, the gospel of inclusion (universal salvation) will be the most popular thing preached on the planet.”

In his book, “Piloting The Strait”, Dave Miller talked about how the cultural change in the last 30 years is affecting the church. He said, “The church has not eluded the clutches of this social circumstance. The influence of these cultural currents is being strongly felt. In fact, hurricane force winds of change are pounding down upon the body of Christ. The instigators insist that change is absolutely essential if the church is to remain “relevant” to society and “appealing” to human culture (Introduction page 11). He is talking about change that is destructive. He is talking about change that moves the church closer to being like the world.

As we see many denominations move to a more relaxed atmosphere in their worship we can see it also affecting many in the Lord’s church. Many are beginning to dress more casual, and casual dress leads to casual worship. Many want more “stories” and less scripture in the sermons preached. Entertainment is the order of the day instead of book, chapter and verse. We can already see the “gospel of inclusion” being embraced by many that don’t want to expose sin, but just show more love. We must never forget that we can teach a social gospel and be liberal without a kitchen, gym or bus.

It appears some are afraid to be different. It seems they have forgotten the words of Peter, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1st Peter 2:9).

Elders must demand preaching that will urge us to “...examine ourselves whether we be in the faith.” (2nd Cor. 13:5). We must ask ourselves if we have truly been converted from the world, especially if we are one that wants only to feel comfortable after every sermon we hear.

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Preacher Training Personal Work

In this series we are breaking down the work of training preachers into segments for consideration and our hope is that some seed for thought might be encouraged in each area.

The Aspect of Personal Work

Since the church growth “bust” that crossed denominational and church lines in the seventies, personal work has acquired a reputation for itself that is truly ‘underwhelming.’ Brethren lack interest in it, classes on it come and go, and even some preachers have almost given up on it. The reasons for this, I believe, are twofold. First, it is “personal.” It is one on one and requires a teacher to spend time with and actually get to know his/her student. Secondly, it is “work.” It takes time, preparation, and requires one to be patient and open for questioning. It is sad that this skill has fallen out of favor with so many, because as I think back over a quick 28 years of gospel preaching it is not necessarily the “easy” responses during gospel meetings and persuasive sermons that I remember. My richest memories are stuck on those whose homes I was in night after night. To struggle with Satan over those souls and win... to see their family grow and change over the years as a result of decisions made at the kitchen table... those victories are victories indeed and the relationships formed are lifetime relationships. Young preachers do not need to shy away from this aspect of their work, they need to develop it in all its fullness.

How shall this be done? It starts with an attitude like Jesus had. If one does not truly care about people, whatever situation of life they are found in, then he is in the wrong business. Go get a job at the factory where the wage and benefits are better. If one does care, then opportunities abound and sometimes we just need some practice to start seeing them.

The young preacher in training needs to “shadow” the local preacher (or elder) for several months just to watch and learn. He needs to learn the difference between confidence and arrogance, between friendliness and pushiness, between warm interest and nosiness. Often a young man just needs to develop the conversational skills to find out where a person is spiritually. He needs to learn some ways to swing a conversation around to speak of spiritual needs.

He also needs to have some organized material that he is prepared and ready to teach. Asking for a class is one thing, but what happens when the serious prospect says, “sure, I’ll study”? I put together some basic fill-in-the blank lessons years ago using the requests of an interested student as a subject guide. Those lessons have been updated and developed over the years, but have served me (and many others) faithfully for hundreds and hundreds of home studies, both to lead people to faith and to confirm them in the gospel. You can do the same.

Personal work starts wherever you are. When we learn to love people and be comfortable wherever we are, it becomes easier to talk to them, seeking out the spiritual prospect. It begins in the hospital where we run into a relative or friend of the person in the bed. It begins on public transportation where seats are crowded, things get dropped, and people need assistance from time to time. It begins in the laundromat, at the gym, in line at the grocery store, the daycare, or calling on a client. It begins when a visitor's card is filled out on the Lord's day, when a new person moves into the neighborhood, or when a co-worker is ill or having some kind of family problem.

Basically it takes three things to be successful at personal work and a young preacher needs to be led toward all three. It takes preparation (working with someone and developing some lessons that one is confident in). It takes personality (learning how to be warm and friendly without giving the ‘salesman’ image). And it takes patience (both in setting up studies and in seeing them through to the conclusion).

Paul, as one of Christ's chosen witnesses, taught publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20) and so should the Lord's bondservant today. Likewise, the Lord is going to do his part in every single study of this kind that takes place whether the prospect obeys the gospel at that time or not. Isaiah 55:11 indicates that the word of the Lord does not go out without accomplishing what the Lord desires. For God-pleasing, gospel-teaching, memory-building, satisfying work... try personal work!

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Passing The Sword

In this article, we will continue to notice what Paul is telling Timothy. We will begin this study with 1 Timothy 3

Chapter Three

Paul begins this chapter by telling Timothy what the qualifications of elders in a congregation of God's people should be. Since others in this publication are and will be teaching about the qualifications of elders and deacons, I will not say much about the qualifications, per se. But only to say, that every Christian, that desires to please God, must have the majority of those qualifications in their own individual lives.

Timothy, as well as Titus, (Titus 1:5) are to be involved in the appointment of elders. Possibly this would entail the assurance of the possessing of all the qualifications. It would also entail the teaching of the requirements of elders even beyond the qualifications. The candidates as well as the congregation from whence they are chosen should be taught and they should understand what the requirements of elders are.

As we go on in the chapter beyond the qualifications of elders and deacons, vs. 14,15, seem to be a parenthetical expression showing the purpose of the Letter. In vs. 16, we see the preservation of the pure gospel and the One who revealed it. There are six clauses in this verse that depict the true godliness of Christ:

1. First, we find Christ being manifested in the flesh. He took upon Himself the form of man and became God with us. He suffered and died as a sacrifice for our sins. The body that God provided for Him while He was here upon this earth, Heb. 10:5, was put to death upon the cross.
2. Second, He was raised and thereby vindicated as truly the Son of God that He had claimed to be while upon the earth, Rom. 1:4.
3. Angels (or messengers, possibly the apostles) saw Him after His resurrection. They went into the world as they had been told and preached the Word of God.
4. Paul said that the Gospel, God's power to save, Rom. 1:16,17, had not only been preached to the Jews but also the Gentiles.
5. This message was proclaimed throughout the whole world during Paul's lifetime. Col. 1:6,23.
6. He ascended back into heaven and was seated upon His throne at His Father's right hand. Acts 1:9; Col. 3:1-4.

This particular passage (vs. 16) depicts Christ from His carnation to His glorification.

Chapter Four

This chapter starts out with discussing the forthcoming evils of which Timothy was to be aware. False teachers and false doctrines will arise. There would be several false doctrines that would be put forth deceiving the people of God.

The way that Timothy could counteract these false teachers and doctrines would be for him to continually and repetitively speak the truth and live accordingly. In order for him to be able to do this, he must give himself over to study, reading, and learning. He must love the gospel, live it, teach it and refuse to be drawn into any error. No teacher or preacher can improve upon this system today regardless of all the secular assistance he might have at his disposal. Truth instilled in minds prevents apostasy. The function then, of preachers and teachers, is the exposition of the Word of God. To this end he is to present himself as an humble servant of Almighty God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth.

A Voice From The Past The Well-Spring of Love

I Corinthians 13 is the love chapter of the Bible. The importance of love (charity, KJV) is the subject of **13:1-3**. Then in vs **4-8**, are listed several things which love does and does not do. Each of us would profit rereading **I Corinthians 13:4-8**. Rather than reading "charity" or "love" substitute "I." "I" suffer long and am kind; "I" envy not... etc.

Have you ever wondered how we can do the things that love does? Consider **I Timothy 1:5** where Paul said, "*Now the end (purpose,GM) of the commandment is charity (love, GM) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned...*" What did Paul say? The purpose of the law of God is to produce love. That this love can only be produced where there are three things -- a pure heart, a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith. Consider each one.

First, the pure heart. "*Blessed are the pure in heart...*" (**Matthew 5:8**). "*...Love one another with a pure heart fervently.*" (**I Peter 1:22**). To see how important this quality is, take a man with a pure heart and inject him with a good dose of "envy." Can an envious person love his neighbor? Take the same heart and pollute it with hate, strife, slander, false doctrine, or fornication. Would you want to meet a person that had those things in his heart? Surely not.

Second, the good conscience. The conscience, a function of the heart, approves of that which one thinks is right and disapproves of that which one thinks is wrong. The Lord wants us to have a good conscience at all times (**I Timothy 1:19**). When the heart is instructed by the word of God and we keep a good conscience we will always do that which is right toward all men. But, how would you like to have someone do something to you that violated his own sense of right and wrong? Let us ask self, do we ever do something toward another which violates our sense of right and wrong? If so, did we love that person?

Third, faith unfeigned. "Unfeigned" is without hypocrisy. An unfeigned faith says, what does God say for me to do? That is what I will do! Take the golden rule for example. Do I always do to others as I would want them to do to me. Just think, if all practice the golden rule, there would be no stealing, lying, murdering, backbiting, slander, excuse making, etc.

The Holy Spirit knew what it would take for one to love another--a pure heart, good conscience, and an unfeigned faith. Only when we have those three things are we truly prepared to love.

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (**John 13:34,35**).

Glenn Melton - Northside News-November 20, 1994

Some Things God Has Joined Together

1. **Faith and hearing the truth.** Rom 10:17 "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"
2. **Faith and works.** Gal 5:6 "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*" "*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*" (James 2:26)
3. **Baptism and salvation.** "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*" (Mark 16:16)
4. **Salvation and church membership.** "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...*" (1 Cor. 12:13). The one body is the church. (Eph. 1:22,23). "*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*" (Acts 2:47)
5. **Faith and eternal salvation.** "*...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" (Rev. 2:10).

"What...God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6).

Glenn Melton - Northside News-June 01, 1997

“Home” Needs A “Real” Man

With this article we begin a study of the individual components of the home in regard to their particular roles and responsibilities. Certainly we will not be able to cover these in any great depth, but hopefully we will be able to share some thoughts that will be beneficial to you.

One of the greatest problems with homes today is that many do not have a man in them at all and in those who do have, the man is not a “real” man. Both Ezek. 22:30 and Jer. 5:1 talk about looking for a man among God’s people and not being able to find one. Were there only females among God’s people at this time? Certainly not, there were plenty of males, but God was looking for a “real” man.

Remember, in the beginning, God made them male and female (Gen. 1:27). So, there is a difference in physical makeup, but it takes more than just the physical makeup to be a man like God wants. In Gen. 3:16 God specifically said to Eve, “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” God gave to man the role of leadership or headship, and men, in general, in our society have “thrown in the towel” in regard to this God given role.

There were men in the Bible who had everything physically, but they were weak in character. Samson was stronger than any man, but he gave his strength away to the allurements of a woman (Jud. 14,15 and 16). King Saul was taller in stature than any man and began his reign in humility, yet pride became his downfall (1Sam. 15:11-23). Absalom was a very handsome man, but greed and conceit caused him to lead an insurrection against God’s chosen leader, David, his own father. Contrary to the concepts of modern society, physical appearance and the possession of material things are not what make a man a “real” man.

In 1Kings 2:2 as David was soon to die, he admonished his son Solomon to “shew thyself a man.” Many men in the Bible showed they were “real” men. Joseph was tempted sexually like no other, yet resisted, which caused him to be unjustly accused and put in prison (Gen.39). Daniel, as a young man, was tempted to defile himself with the king’s food, but resisted (Dan. 1). Moses was tempted with affluence (treasures of Egypt), yet he refused and suffered with God’s people (Ex. 2; Heb. 11:24-27). What made these men different? Masculinity is not determined only by physical appearance, but is the result of properly managing oneself, that is, being in control of one’s emotions and desires rather than allowing them to control him (1Pet 2:11). As you continue reading in 1Kings 2:3 David tells Solomon keeping God’s will is showing himself a man”. So, to be “real” men we must submit ourselves to God’s law; conform ourselves to His will in all things.

The “playboy” attitude says a man’s body is a toy, a plaything to be exposed and exploited with selfish greed. Yet, even those who recognize that such an attitude is not right, see the body as simply a means to an end. They push themselves to the limit and use all kinds of chemical substances in their efforts to push their mind and body to perform in an effort to have more material things and neglect their leadership responsibilities in the family. Yes, man must work to provide for his family (1Tim 5:8), but this must be balanced with his other responsibilities and the “real” man has the understanding necessary to balance all his responsibilities as well as the strength of character, tempered with love to see that he meets all of them. One responsibility cannot be neglected in order to fulfill another.

A mark of maturity is self-mastery or self-discipline (1Cor 9:24-27). The undisciplined horse is of no value to the farmer; the undisciplined athlete never reaches the top; the undisciplined Christian is under the control of Satan Rom. 12:1,2; Gal. 5:19,20. The crying need today in the church, families, and countries is for MEN, REAL MEN. Men who have the courage of their convictions and the strength of character to act like men. We need men who take their role of leadership and provider seriously. Until men are willing to accept the responsibilities God has given to them and act like men; not only will the church suffer, but homes, businesses and our country will also, because the home will not be what God designed it to be and as the home (family) goes, so goes the church and the country.

The Delicate Balance

Gospel preachers must move with a spirit of confidence tempered with humility. How can this delicate balance be maintained? There is little doubt some will be uncomfortable with the preacher who moves with conviction in matters relating to truth. Who has not heard the element in pop culture that loudly advocates *open-mindedness* and *tolerance*? It is said that those who insist on one standard of right and wrong are *close-minded*. In religious matters, members of the Lord's church have been long accused of being *narrow* by teaching about **the** plan of salvation; **the** church; and **the** way God expects to be worshiped. According to some, "truth" is no longer *something that is the case; the real state of affairs; reality; or actuality*, but whatever a person "feels." In other words, truth is different from one person to the next. Is the thinking that dominates our pop culture making inroads among brethren?

When taking a strong stand, some are quick to question a preacher's humility. Is he being "high and mighty" or just moving with conviction? Remember, God has spoken. In religious matters, he has expressed to us *the real state of affairs*. We have the responsibility to listen to Him speak through the pages of His word and teach *the whole purpose of God*. (Acts 20:27) This will involve instruction publicly and privately on some things that listeners may not wish to hear. In self defense a brother may be quick to charge the preacher with a lack of humility, among other things. In some cases, the brother could have a point...or he could not. But one must not be confused into thinking that definiteness of conviction and lack of humility are synonymous. Because of this confusion some preachers have been tempted to *tread lightly* so as not to offend anyone. Some have become afraid to take a stand on anything! This is an unacceptable extreme.

Think of Paul's preaching for a moment. In no way would one be able to say Paul was timid in his preaching or writing. His life was filled with confidence and determination to do what God expected him to do. ***I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*** (Phil. 4:13) Think also of his writing where he says, ***I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*** (2 Tim. 1:12) His confidence is clearly seen in his teaching. Place yourself in a predominately Greek society saturated with paganism while reading these words: *neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.* There is no need for clarification here. It cannot be misunderstood. No doubt some would say this teaching is *narrow-minded* – then and now! Paul nowhere apologizes for his teaching. Why? He says it had been *freely given to us by God, which things we also speak....combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.* (1 Cor. 2:12-13) We have his writing, as well as the writing of others. It is from God. So, **let us move with conviction in our teaching!**

Yet, we must work to fill our lives with humility! *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; look out...also for the interests of others.* (Phil. 2:3-4) Paul also said, *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment,...*(Rom. 12:3) Preach the truth! Preach the truth in love! (Eph. 4:15) Preach the truth with humility and guard against haughtiness. We are cautioned about this in Gal. 6:1 - *restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.* The thought that *we* could be the next person *someone else* has to exhort to do better is most humbling and should keep the preacher away from an arrogant spirit. But, we have a tendency to forget all are human and susceptible to lapses in judgment. Others mean well but are sincerely wrong. While truth may be so easy for us to see, it can be shrouded from others because of pride, selfishness, or a lack of teaching.

When the truth is communicated in love, tact, and in simplicity those with a love for Jesus will respond accordingly. While some may perceive confidence and clarity as arrogance, God's kind of preacher will work daily on maintaining this delicate balance – giving all the glory to God!

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Preaching The Gospel In Foreign Fields

The viewpoint of one who goes to preach to another nation and remains there for months or years will not necessarily be the same as one who spends 5-6 weeks a year there. It may be that the latter's view is not really balanced. It is much like a preacher who works with a congregation full time versus he who comes for a week's meeting! The latter cannot possibly have the perspective the former has. The adage "a new broom sweeps clean" must be qualified "Yes, but the old broom knows where the dirt is". Are there no benefits from a week's meeting? Certain so. A visiting preacher may be able to accomplish some things that the resident preacher could not do. And, there is benefit from preachers working in foreign lands even for a brief period of time. I have said all that to say this: I cannot give the perspective of one who has spent years in the Philippines for I have not. My observations may be recognized as coming from one who has spent limited time each year there for the past eleven years.

Another matter must also be factored in. There are some who go to foreign lands who preach much as Paul did: they must make contacts and lay a foundation. Others who go to help after the word has been planted and disciples have already been established, cannot appreciate the difficulties and disadvantages the first worker faced. Jesus told his disciples "I sent you to reap that whereon ye have not labored: others have labored and ye are entered into their labor" (Jhn. 4:38). The church in Corinth presents the classic example. Paul planted and Apollos watered. Often the successful growth in a congregation is not limited to him who reaped the harvest, but is due in large measure to him who sowed the seed. Every one should be conscious of the efforts of others and the reaper should not boast himself over him who planted; nor should he who planted be jealous of him who reaped. It is after all, God who gives the increase. What success we may have seen in the Philippines must be attributed in large to others who preceded those who have gone in these past 10-12 years as well as to native brethren who in turn introduced the gospel to their own people. I cannot write from the vantage point of a pioneer on the ground, introducing an entirely new message to those who heard me, I must write as one who came after the seed had already been sown and many already were believers. Yes, we have preached to many who never had heard the gospel before, but there has never been an occasion (which I can recall) in which all who heard were unbelievers unlike those who came 50-75 years before, preaching to people a gospel they had never before heard.

I did not spin a world globe and put my finger upon a spot and say "I will preach the gospel here" and the "here" turned out to be the Philippines. Nor did I contemplate the many places where the gospel was being preached, weigh all matters and decide that the Philippines merited my attention above all. Nor did I, as Paul, see a man in a night vision saying, "Come over the Philippines and help us", although I believe Providence did figure in my going there. It was none of these things. I became involved in the Philippines accidentally. I had written (but ceased) a monthly news column in the Preceptor magazine and an old issue of that paper somehow fell into the hands of a young Filipino preacher, who saw my name as a contact and wrote me. He requested material and that I "contact Kenneth Marrs". I supplied his requested material but made no effort to contact bro. Marrs. Although bro. Marr's name was familiar to me, I did not know him, nor he me. I thought the matter closed and forgot about it. But another letter from the same brother was insistent. "Please contact bro. Marrs" he wrote. And so I did, seeking to fulfill his request. Bro. Marr's response was instant and direct. "Come go the Philippines with me". He had spent about a month there earlier that year (1992) and was planing another trip in early 1993, three or four months away. To say the least, I was taken aback. I had never entertained an idea of making such a trip. In earlier years I planned to spend 2-3 years in Australia, working with Jim Everett and Robert Harkrider but that trip was aborted. I had no intentions of going to the Philippines. But, in the cause of events, I did go and my world was changed. The following articles will chronicle some lessons I have learned which hopefully might benefit others who may purpose to preach the Word in Foreign Lands.

Next: Preparing to go.

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Grounding Our Children

“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” 2Timothy 1:5

Are your children grounded in the faith? Paul recognized the faith of young Timothy began with his grandmother and mother. How often do you study the Bible with your children? We spend time in Bible classes with our local brethren, study with other adults, and research for our own understanding. We participate and contribute to bulletins, discussion list and other means to spread the Gospel. We need to spend time teaching our children so that they will be prepared for the time when we are no longer with them. Fathers are given specific instruction by Paul to raise their children in the Lord. *“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4*

Our children are a heritage from the Lord. **Psalm 127:3** God will not judge us only on those we convert and teach outside our family, He will hold us accountable for teaching our children also. When we neglect the opportunity to teach our children while they are under our care, we fail both God and our children. Not only should they see the example we show by our lives, they need us to talk with them about the Holy Word.

One thing that is easy to develop into a routine is nightly Bible study. Certainly we can see that such study is better than the entertainment offered by the world each evening. If you start now you will find it something that you and your children expect and look forward to by this time next year. Just spending 15 minutes reading from the Bible is a good way to start. There will probably be questions that arise as you read. You might write them down and spend one night each week answering them. If you start when your children are just old enough to listen, by the time they are ready to participate they will have a good general background of Bible stories. Children who grow up hearing the Scripture read every evening before bedtime will be closer to God and their parents. They will know that you care about God and His Word. They will know that you are ready and willing to discuss Scripture with them. They will be more likely to ask you questions and seek answers for themselves.

All too often, parents leave the teaching to the church. This is not acceptable. God will hold you responsible for your neglect. Timothy did not develop his faith from the teaching he received from the local group. His faith was developed through the teaching and example of his mother.

We need to make sure our children are grounded in the faith. If we do not they will be tossed about by the doctrines of men and likely lose their soul. Do you want to stand before God and explain why you had time to teach many outside your family, but could not find time to teach the children He entrusted to your care?

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