

PREACHERS AND PREACHING

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In about 1968 I heard the late R. N Hogan preach a sermon in which he quipped “The brethren are hearing so much sweet talk preaching nowadays, its a wonder they all don have spiritual sugar diabetes.” If he thought preachers were getting softer in their preaching back then, he should hear what passes for “Gospel preaching” in many pulpits today. I do not know who wrote the following (which I filed long ago), but it is hand-in-glove with the Hogan statement above:

The modern preacher takes a few tablets of the doctrine of Christ, dissolves them in a gallon or two of sentimental rose water, puts a little of the solution in an atomizer, and sprays the congregation to the tune of “sweet spirited” Christianity and the fragrance of a benevolent life if, by evaporation, the solution becomes too strong he always has an abundance of pink tea handy to revive the faintlings who may have been overcome by too strong a dose. The men-pleasers preach that one must believe (to a degree), repent (in a measure), and obey (somewhat), or be condemned (to a certain extent).

A lament of many Truth-loving saints is that they have not heard the plan of salvation mentioned from the pulpit where they are members in months, or even years. There are many congregations in which the invitation to sinners is rarely, if ever, offered anymore. In some cases where it is still offered, it is so indistinct and general as to be practically meaningless. But; when a man spends only twelve or fifteen minutes delivering a “sermon” that could pass for after-dinner entertainment at the local Kiwanis Club, there is little to which he can invite people. Some jokester has called such efforts “skyscraper” sermons—one story on top of another, but unfortunately containing very little, if any, Scripture.

Many preachers nowadays seem to aim at making everybody present feel righteous, convincing them of how much God depends on them. The worst thing one can do, they think, is to arouse any guilt feelings. There is little in such preaching to cause a sinner to repent, confess his faith, and be baptized in order to be saved. He will not even learn he is lost, much less how to be saved, from such prostituted pulpits.

It is certainly appropriate to encourage the brethren and to give them reassurance for the daily struggle. However, when the Gospel is fully and faithfully preached it will remind us of how much we need and depend on God. It is not without reason that the written Word is depicted in Scripture as a sharp sword (**Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12**). The Gospel (and only the Gospel) is still the power (the only power) of God unto salvation (**Romans 1:16**). When men lose sight of this stubborn fact and retreat from it, they have surrendered to the devious devices of the devil. These same men almost always gravitate toward ecumenical alliances with various denominations—and why should they not? In the first place, they conceive of the Lord’s church as merely another denomination, in the second place, in their view the denominations are part of the church.

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Henry Devere wrote the following advice to preachers in 1915. Although some of its terms identify it with a bygone era, it is no less timely now than when he wrote it. He obviously knew something about the Scriptural concept of Gospel preachers and preaching. May we all carefully read and consider what he wrote:

Let us, dear brethren, keep the old Gospel plow moving. Let us plow deep and wide. Do not cut and cover. Plow every inch of the ground, and the church will have fewer unconverted men and women in it.

Do not try to add men and women to the church, God will do this if the material is right. I fear there are many in the church (so to speak) God did not place there. Let us be careful how we build. Let us look more to quality than to quantity. Do not beg people. If once you begin this way, when you have ceased begging, they will go pouting.

Do not try to pull them in; if you do, when you quit pulling, they will backslide. Do not try to fiddle people into the church; if you do, when you quit fiddling, they will fiddle out.

Just preach the Gospel plainly to people and keep right on preaching the Gospel. Fill the honest heart full of Truth, and such will obey. Dishonest-hearted people the devil will keep, and God cannot reach them. Preach the Gospel, and be happy with it. Never quit.

It sounds as though Mr. Devere could see right down to our time. Without doubt, he aptly described what we have seen going on in the church for several years now. The words of Paul still stand: "PREACH THE WORD; BE URGENT IN SEASON, OUT OF SEASON; REPROVE, REBUKE, EXHORT, WITH ALL LONGSUFFERING AND TEACHING" (**2 Timothy 4:2**).