

Plain Preaching

It is the solemn duty of every gospel preacher to proclaim the message of Christ "plainly." When our lessons are shrouded in ambiguity they do little or nothing for the people. As the old saying goes, "you must put the salve where the sore is." To do less is to fail in our duty toward God and man.

The teachings of our Lord were both "positive" and "negative." If I proclaim His message "plainly," then my lessons will be the same. Timothy, the evangelist, was admonished: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince (reprove -KJV), rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 2:4). It may come as a shock to some that two-thirds of this instruction about teaching is in the negative. As an evangelist, I must "tell it like it is," whether the people like it or not.

When error is exposed there are always three groups of people who get very upset.

1) Those who are involved in unscriptural beliefs and practices. Naturally, they don't want their deeds exposed.

2) Those who claim they don't go along with the unscriptural practices of others, but they are in sympathy with the advocates of the error. Regardless of how carefully an evangelist goes about exposing error, regardless of how much love and kindness he uses, it is never "handled right" in the eyes of those who sympathize with the evil doer. They are like the Jews who, even after Jesus told them "plainly," were not happy with the answer.

3) There are some who get upset about error being exposed because they honestly think Jesus never did that. Obviously, such people have not read the life, works, and teachings of Christ. Of course, it could be that they have read it, but just don't want to believe it.

- by ***W.R. Jones***

The Days of Our Years

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorry; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalms 90:10) "What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." (James 4:14)

These quotations from the Old Testament and the New bring sharply into focus the brevity of human life. No man can read such words with any degree of comprehension without realizing how swift and how certain is the approach of death for every one of us. All our earthly hopes and ambitions, our plans, dreams, and fondest expectations will finally come to rest beneath a little mound of dirt over which the green grass will grow for centuries after we have returned to the elements. How futile and how silly to think we can build anything that will endure on this earth!

In view of the brevity of life, and the certainty of judgment, what manner of persons ought we to be? "Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God..." are the words used by Peter to impress our responsibility.

God's plan for redemption of the soul is simple. By the sacrifice of Christ, He has made it possible for me to escape the awful punishment which is the due recompense for my sin. Believing in Christ, I turn in penitence from sin, and am buried through baptism "unto the remission of" all sins. This brings me into covenant relationship with God, makes me a citizen in His kingdom. It then is my task to live each day in the consciousness of that relationship, to "walk worthily of the calling" wherewith I have been called.

Business ventures, family troubles, political upheavals, personal problems - how trivial! There is one problem, and only one, before every one of us: to live a life that is pleasing to God. Whether that life is lived in riches or in poverty, in political freedom or in chains and imprisonment, in domestic felicity or in misery and loneliness, is quite unimportant. Whether one receives the adulation and praises of men or their contempt and animosity matters little. If one walks with the Lord, in the full assurance of His favor, neither the flattery of friends nor the hatred of foes will count for much. The days of our years are so few, so filled with duties and labors, that we should waste little time in thinking whether our actions are pleasing to men or not. Do they please God?

That is the one and only question to be considered. If yes, then with confidence we can press on; if no, then we should tremble in terror until the situation is changed.

"What is your life?" Consider it: let God's will rule your heart, and His word direct your ways.

- by **Fanning Yater Tant**

Self-Control

The Bible clearly teaches that Christians are to exercise temperance or self-control (2 Peter 1:6) if we are to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10).

There are those who profess to being Christians that do not exercise self-control and as a result they lose their temper; they use speech not fitting for a Christian to use or engage in actions unbecoming to one wearing the name of Christ.

How can we develop self-control? Paul gives us the answer in 2 Corinthians 10:5; "...*bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" When our every thought is controlled by the desire to be obedient to Christ in all things we will be able to exercise the self-control expected of followers of Christ.

- by **James Hahn**

Burning Bridges

The expression 'burning bridges' obviously originated in the literal act of destroying structures used to cross over rivers and other barriers. By destroying them it prevented anyone, friend or foe, from traversing the obstacle. No one could come over to you but, likewise, you could not go to them. It was a permanent and final action.

Today we most commonly use the phrase figuratively to denote the termination of relationships and associations. Not only have these connections been broken, but also the means to restore them has been removed. There is no going back.

Sadly, this often happens among brethren in the body of Christ. A harsh word spoken, a hateful act taken, a simple disagreement mishandled – and suddenly a full fledged 'bridge fire' ensues. Long friendships and close bonds are broken. Where once there was a valuable spiritual kinship, now there is deep alienation. And, what's worse, the way back is gone. The 'bridge' has been 'burned'.

The Lord's instructions actually give us the methodology to avoid these relational disasters. If I am the offending party, I am to go to the one I have wronged and make amends (Matt. 5:23,24). If I am the one who has been wronged, I am to address the one who has caused the fault (Matt. 18:15ff). If both parties in the dispute are committed to this divine plan, 'bridges' need never come down.

The unfortunate reality is that brethren too often allow simple, resolvable issues to become massive problems. Sometimes the conflicts grow so large and complex that even 'the wisdom of Solomon' can not solve them. Knowing that this potential for 'burned bridges' and permanent separation exists, we should be extremely careful in the maintenance of our precious relationships. "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." (1 Peter 3:8 ESV)

- by **Greg Gwin**