

## ***Preach the Text"***

I am very concerned with what I perceive to be an approach to preaching (and listening) which, more and more, seems to place the word of God in the background. I've heard some sermons recently which illustrate the point. In one, I was not required to open a Bible for the first 20 minutes; in another, one verse was referred to, sort of as a launching pad," and then the Bible was closed from that point on. I heard another "sermon" in which the preacher (who had a degree in psychology) first expressed his opinion about certain problems in our relationship with God, then quoted psychological theories to validate his opinion, then threw in a little Bible, presumably to validate the psychology. If these are examples of "preaching the text," I must admit that I'm very worried about the future of preaching!

We need a fresh reminder of the lesson of Nehemiah 8, where Ezra stood in the pulpit (v. 4) and OPENED THE BOOK (v. 5), reading distinctly from it and helped them to understand what the BOOK said (v. 8). If that does not describe our function as "preachers of the word," then I'm at a loss as to what I'm supposed to be doing as a full-time gospel preacher and teacher. Of course, I'm not sure the problem is all in the pulpit. In fact, I'm pretty well convinced it is not. I preached a meeting recently in which the majority of people did not have a Bible in their possession. Since I was attempting to present an exposition of one of the minor prophets, needless to say, I was at a disadvantage.

I cannot pretend to understand why people of God would enter a building, presumably to hear the word of God preached, and not have a Bible with them. What is going through a person's mind? What are they expecting to hear? What do they want to hear? Platitudes? Maxims? Jokes? God said through Amos, many years ago, that there would be a "famine in the land, not of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Such a famine came and the people of Israel suffered the spiritual consequences. There is no such famine now, except when it is self-imposed. In too many places and in the sermons of too many preachers (one is too many), such a famine exists. It extends to the pew and people are beginning to get along quite well without the word of God... after all, if we hear only opinions, we have a choice to accept them or reject them, don't we? "My opinion is surely as good as his, though perhaps not as eloquent."

Perhaps I'm sounding an alarm which is not needed(though I know many others who share my concern). Jeremiah said to beware of those who cry "peace, peace when there is no peace" (4:10). These are just my observations—but if they ring true, in your experience, I'd like to make a couple of short suggestions. To those who occupy the pews each week and listen to preaching, demand (yes, demand) Bible preaching — accept no substitutes. In addition, bring your Bibles, open them up, take notes, listen. Challenge the preacher to present the word of God as the only solution to every problem he presents. We need to be challenged, checked and, sometimes, corrected. And, to my fellow preachers, let's "just preach the text" (2 Tim. 4:2).

- by *David Posey*

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## ***Re-Stating an Abiding Principle***

We have now a plain work - simply the work of the Lord and no other. We have nothing to preach but the gospel, nothing to believe but the truth of God, nothing to do but the will of God, and nothing to hope for only what is promised in the word of God. Our work is not new and untried, but old, well tried, and nothing can stand before us. We have truth and righteousness to maintain - sin and the world to oppose. We can make change only at our peril - no departure without losing all. We started simply to be the people of God, and to give ourselves unreservedly to the Lord. We can not turn away.

- by *Benjamin Franklin* (gospel preacher, 1812-1878)

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## ***Searching for Non-Extremists?***

Awhile back, a 'Christian college' announced the search for a candidate to replace their retiring president. A review committee was appointed to set standards and cull applicants for the job. The college newsletter published their 'candidate profile' describing the kind of man they

desired for the job. Among other things, he needed to be "recognized as a dedicated, active Christian . . . not an extremist."

Unfortunately the sentiments of this presidential search committee are becoming all too prevalent among God's people. We want Christianity that is watered-down and non-offensive, so much so that a Christian could be "recognized" as "dedicated" and "active", yet still not be viewed as an "extremist" by anyone. Sounds incredible, doesn't it?

Brethren, faithful Christians have been viewed as extremists ever since the church began. After all, when a man is willing to lay down his life for a cause, that's extreme! And that is exactly what happened in the first century (Acts 7:57-60), and many times since then, too.

Would the apostle Paul have been a suitable candidate for this college presidency? Apparently not, for he was certainly considered as an extremist. His faith and zeal caused him to be branded by unbelievers as madman (Acts 26:24), and a "pestilent fellow (trouble-maker), and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). Obviously, we need more men like Paul, and fewer of the stripe desired by this college review committee.

Unless we are somehow trying to be 'better' than our Lord, we will have to accept the fact that our lives and our teaching will be offensive to those who are of the world (Matt. 15:12-14). We need to stop trying to please men, and be more determined to please God. "For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1: 10). The Lord is looking for extremists!!!

**- by Greg Gwin**