

The Way Paul Preached

Soon after Paul had established the cause of Christ in Galatia, Judaising teachers appeared and began their work of destruction. They insisted that Gentiles must be circumcised, must come to Christ via a Jewish route of law; and in their effort to overcome the truth Paul had taught they questioned his apostleship. Paul defended his apostleship to establish the divine source of his message. We here note only the variety and nature of his appeal -- the way Paul preached.

There was absolutely no toleration of "another gospel," even if an angel should preach it (1:8-9). Nor could its principles be compromised, even by another apostle (2:11-14). But strong, hard preaching and emotional appeals were not incompatible. He compared his early work with them to a woman in birth pains, suffering much to bring them to Christ. Now, "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (4:19). He reminded them of their appreciation for his early effort, saying, "If it had been possible ye would have plucked out your eyes, and have given them to me" (4:15). That is a heart wringer!

He could become upset with them: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you" (3:1); but it is concern for their spiritual well-being that disturbed him. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years" (as religious ceremonies); so he says, "I am afraid of you" (4:11) and "I stand in doubt of you" (4:20). This was the concern of genuine love.

But for those who brazenly contradicted the principles of the gospel Paul had some strong words. He said they were proselyting for the sake of numbers, and their own glory (6:12-f). They "desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh." Perhaps his sharpest criticism is the irony of Gal. 5:12, "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." They preach a little cutting; I wish they were completely cut off.

Here is love, warning, concern, exasperation, tender appeal, fear and trembling, harshness, prayer, blood and thunder. Here is a genuine soldier of the cross; a man of flesh whose heart's desire was to serve the Christ; an example for us all.

- by Robert Turner

Positive Isn't Always

The other day I heard someone pray that another person would receive positive medical test results. However, when we are looking for cancer we don't want a positive result - that would mean we have cancer. You see, sometimes positive isn't good.

The Zig Ziglar, Dale Carnegie, and Norman Vincent Peale crowd (and their modern day contemporaries) has yet to grasp this reality. We hear about "positive preaching" and "positive mental attitude," as if perception can trump reality. Pleas for balanced preaching are generally nothing more than a cry to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.

What is positive and what is negative? Positive is supposed to build people up while negative tears them down. Perpetually 'happy' preaching, however, works a most evil result upon its audience.

People who need to hear rebuke (not want to hear, but need to hear) never do. Would Peter's Pentecost audience have been cut to the heart if he had blasted them with happy talk instead of telling them, "You are the men" (to paraphrase with help from another negativist, the prophet Nathan).

Positive preaching refrains from rocking the boat, which is, of course, perceived to be the greatest risk to church growth. A sinking boat, however, does not always rock before its plunges. Could it be that all this positive preaching is like the band playing on the deck of the Titanic?

- by J.S. Smith

An Important Key in Solving Marriage Problems

There have been times when I have been called in to 'referee' a marital dispute only to realize after hours of discussion that the real solution to the marriage problems was contained in The Golden Rule. If husbands and wives would really absorb what Jesus said and apply it to their situations, many problems would vanish immediately. Is there any husband so bold as to deny

that he often acts selfishly, thinking only of his own wants and needs, with little attention to those of his wife? Can any wife deny that a similar blindness on her part is more than a little to blame in many disputes? If each of the marriage partners would 'wear the shoes' of their mates, they would see the need of 'doing unto others as we would have them do unto us' (as it is commonly paraphrased). No marriage counselor on earth could give better advice than to press home the meaning of these words to feuding husbands and wives.

- by Tom Roberts

The Grace of God

There seems to be a lot of confusion in the Lord's body concerning the grace of God. We believe that a lot of error has been taught on the subject. It was reported that a preacher made the following statement: "We are not saved by the right stance on any doctrinal issue; but rather by the grace of God." Do you get it? He is saying that it doesn't matter what you believe (or practice) on any Biblical subject - God's grace covers all. We deny it!

We've often said that grace is the unmerited (unearned) love and favor of God. That seems to be a fair and accurate definition. Now let's be sure we understand it. Consider this example: I make the following offers to two individuals:

- #1: Wash my car, and I'll pay you \$5.
- #2: Come to my house - I'll give you \$5.

Is there any difference here? Of course there is. If you don't think so, just ask the first guy. He has to work to earn his \$5. But fella #2 receives a gift. #1 is a case of pay for meritorious work. #2 illustrates a gift given on the basis of meeting a condition ("come to my house"). #2 does nothing to deserve his \$5 - it is a gift - but he must meet the condition to receive it.

Salvation is the product of God's grace. There is nothing you can do to earn it (Eph. 2:8,9). However, there are conditions you must meet in order to receive it (Rom. 10:9,10; Acts 2:38). So then, YES, you must be right in matters of doctrine in order to be saved. These doctrinal matters are God's conditions in order to receive His gift. But, it is still a gift - not earned - it is by God's grace.

- by Greg Gwin