

Practice What You Preach

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The Holy Spirit placed as much emphasis upon practicing the truth as in preaching it. Paul said, "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" (Rom. 2:21,22).

We are concerned about why our preaching is not more productive in terms of men and women obeying the gospel. We seek about to find new ways and methods of getting people interested in our preaching, but not much works. Why? It just may be that far too many preachers and elders are not practicing what they preach.

"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of the fingers" (Matthew 23:1-4).

Jesus said these things to point out the contemptible practice of the scribes and Pharisees, and to emphasize the need for doing what we teach others to do. James said it is not enough to be hearers of the word, we must be doers. The above passages from the word of God point out that we must practice what we teach and refuse to do what we teach is forbidden by God.

Doctrine is absolutely worthless if not practiced. What one has learned, however good and true it may be, does not benefit him at all unless applied. The scribes and Pharisees were condemned by the Lord for saying and not doing. In the New Testament we have the right book, or we have no guide at all in spiritual things. The apostle Paul makes it plain that no other doctrine can be preached. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8,9).

We must practice what we learn from the gospel if we are to be blessed by God. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:22-25). Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

We preach that one must know the will of God to be saved. While we preach this, many members of the church make only a token effort to learn what the Bible teaches. Programs are used to try to "pressure" members to be "daily readers," but usually to no avail. Until we can

get the same attitude toward the Bible that most have toward the "funny" paper or the sports page, we will continue with the same problems of not much knowledge of the Bible among members. We preach that the following passage is to be obeyed. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). But many avoid the opportunities to learn in Bible classes and in studying for themselves what the truth really is on a given subject. Unless we begin to practice what we teach in this matter, we will never be able to teach others the truth. We will never know it ourselves.

We preach that the gospel is the power of God to save. We quote Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:22,23).

While we preach that the gospel is the power of God to save the sinner, we do very little to preach it. One may be close in his association with one who has never heard the gospel of Christ, and while he preaches the truth above, he never once tries to use this power upon his friend. I wonder if such can really be convinced that he will be saved when he does not do the will of his Father in preaching the truth to those around him.

We preach loud and long that scriptural baptism makes one a new creature in Christ (Romans 6:3-6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 2:14; 3:1,2). But how do most of us practice this? Many who have been baptized into Christ continue to live the same old sinful life that characterized them before they were obedient to the gospel. If they preach that one is a new creature, and that he ought not to continue in sin, why not practice this teaching and try to live in the "newness" of life that we preach? Why not seek the things above and not the things upon earth? Why not practice the good works, "which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

I will assure you of this one thing: we will never make headway in preaching the gospel to those who are lost until we begin to practice what we preach. This is a major cause for the decline in congregational membership, and so few baptized now as compared to fifty years ago.

Failure to practice what one preaches does not apply only to preachers, elders, deacons, teachers and their families; it applies to every Christian alike. We must do what the doctrine says if we expect to go to heaven when we die, and if we expect others to go with us.