

Pride of Preachers and Problems

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"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).

"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Gal. 6:3).

"He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" (1 Tim. 6:4).

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

What preacher of minimal experience has not read and preached from these verses? Yet some of them have never learned how to be humble in preaching, and even in personal conversation they can not hide their pride and arrogance. It shows in their countenance and language. Their preaching reflects pomposity that hinders reception of the gospel by the hearers.

I have heard some preachers in general conversation boast and brag about their expertise as a preacher. These could not resist telling how "churches continually call them for counsel and wisdom," and "many friends and brethren" constantly urged them to publish a sermon or series which were "the best they had ever heard." They eagerly tell of their prowess in meeting the strongest and bravest false teachers and how they totally crushed them with their ability and strength.

The spirit of pride is sure to set preachers against one another. Since "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble," those who want to walk with God must also resist pride. Conceit must protect itself against every challenge. A conceited man is self deceived: "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Gal. 6:3). A self deceived preacher is an envious man, and envy is the main root to the problems between preachers. "He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" (1 Tim. 6:4). The fires of hate and alienation begin right here.

If young preachers could learn that they are not powerful in themselves. If they could know that all the education they could get in America will not make them one wit greater in the pulpit, they would be more successful in eliminating pride and envy from their hearts. They would be much more effective as gospel preachers. If they could always remember that the **power** to convert men and women to Christ is in the **gospel** (Rom. 1:16), not in their personalities, articulate speeches or college degrees. They should preach only the gospel, plain and simple! Do not seek to preach anything new in order to build a reputation. If it is new, it is not true; if it is true, it is not new. The revelation of the New Testament began on Pentecost following the ascension of Christ into heaven, nearly two thousand years ago. The truth is at least that old. Young men, do not let your egotism drive you to preach "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-7).

Pride and envy seek a glorious personal reputation. It is the spirit of covetousness that pursues every advantage to promote self and selfish interests. Whatever formula that can achieve these goals will be used by the conceited preacher, young or old.

Reputation is what the public thinks of the character of the person. His **character** is what he really is: what God knows him to be. Since one who is interested largely in his personal reputation for job security, money and power, he will proceed to preach and promote that which will enhance the people's estimation of himself. Of course, the people will look at different standards by which to measure the preacher. Some are impressed by wealth, some by education, some by his promotional ability, some by looks, some by youth, and others by his speaking ability. If the people to whom he preaches want these qualities, he will have the personal reputation he wants if he succumbs to their demands, but it will not be good. In the course of time, and in the final analysis of his reputation, it will not be what God wants.

Look at the reputation of the apostle Paul: he was in prison, nearly always in controversy with the Jews, scribes and Pharisees who challenged him every where he went. Some indicated that his speech was contemptible. They said he was a law breaker and a blasphemer. But what do people now think of him? He has the reputation of a godly man who reached the pinnacle of preaching power. He probably converted more people to Christ in his lifetime and by his writing than any other man. Of course, Peter, James and John rank with him.

There have been great men of God, in my judgment, who now sleep with their fathers, who have fought the battles of faith in years gone by. These men earned the reputation as giants in the faith; "Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26); men of humble spirits, who walked close to God day by day. They are not remembered as wealthy men, great promoters, educated men, pleasers of men, who built great institutions. They are remembered for one thing: they preached Christ and him crucified year after year, sometimes without the abundance of life's comforts; sometimes in extreme adversity. They did not compromise truth for any consideration. They walked humbly before God in righteousness. They have fought a good fight, have finished their course, and have kept the faith. That is their reputation. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). And so did they.

There are great old preachers of the gospel now living who have the same reputation, and if they maintain their course, there is laid up for them that crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give them at that day: and unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

There are many great, dedicated young preachers, whose reputation as Christians and proclaimers of the gospel of Christ is impeccable. They are humble, industrious, kind and honorable workers in the kingdom of Christ. They know and love the truth, and are not afraid nor ashamed to declare it at every opportunity. I love and hold in high esteem every young preacher of the gospel who humbly yet boldly preaches the truth in love. May God increase their number in this day when the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few.

Love, Truth and Peace

Love is absolutely essential to successfully preach the gospel. That is firmly established by the inspired Paul. He said: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3) ASV.

The love spoken of in these verses is described in these inspired words: "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7) ASV.

A preacher who does not possess in his heart this love, cannot successfully preach the gospel of Christ. He must love God with all his heart, love Christ and his word, love the church, love the souls of lost men and women. He must love preaching Christ; his heart must be filled with the burning desire to tell people the greatest story ever told. He must be honest and sincere with himself. One must have "an honest and good heart" to "bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). He must be absolutely honest with himself in all things. He must examine his motives for preaching God's word. He must patiently analyze his attitude toward lost people, the church, sin, money, himself and the book of God. He must search for any jealousy and envy that might reside deep in some corner of his heart, and eliminate it completely. He must be propelled in preaching by love and a desire to please God at all cost.

I would urge every man who does not have this motive for preaching Christ to turn to something else for a livelihood and leave the preaching to men who are motivated by the attitudes and goals we have just discussed.

Preachers and brethren ought to "be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:13). "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15). To be a disciple of Christ, one must continue in his word, and he must know the truth to be free (John 8:31-32). This certainly applies to all preachers.

To the rest I say: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11) ASV. "Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John 3) ASV. "Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied" (Jude 2) ASV.