

Too Deeply

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“If you can’t say nuthin’ nice, don’t say nuthin’ atall.” (the precocious rabbit Thumper in Disney’s *Bambi*) Many Christian leaders today act as if this philosophy came from the Bible. Whether they actually state their philosophy so baldly or just practice some variation of this theme, the “pastor” or traveling huckster simply dares not offend his audience too deeply. Oh, certainly, he can lay on the guilt trips about more tithes and offerings and more faithful “church” attendance and more involvement in the various “ministries” of the “church” – these are expected of him and his audience has long ago learned to tune out, tolerate and ignore that routine. But if he delves too deeply, say, into Paul’s list of “the works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21) or explores too carefully into John’s differences between the children of God and the children of the devil (1 Jn. 3:10) – and these are but two examples – he will watch his congregation (and his own income!) quickly dwindle. No, he dares not offend his audience too deeply. And this flaw is inherent, built into, the system of churchianity and perpetuated in all its variations.

Paul certainly did not subscribe to this foolishness. Certainly, as Paul wrote, “a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, humble” – but we must not lose sight of the goal of this gentleness, patience and humility – “correcting those who are in opposition [to the Lord’s servant], if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (2 Tim. 2:24-26) Correction, repentance, truth, liberty for those in opposition – these are the goals of the genuine servant of the Lord, not grasping or holding onto a secure position over a congregation so as to enjoy its attending financial rewards. It must also be noted that correction, repentance, truth and genuine spiritual liberty are *not* the usual goals of most passively-listening audiences today.

Paul wrote to Timothy (in the so-called “pastoral” or leadership epistles – see 1 Tim. 3:15), “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” (2 Tim. 4:2) Paul’s instruction is to speak the message concerning “the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God” (Thayer), whether it is a season of popular acceptance and approval or a season of hostility, ridicule, oppression and persecution. Convince, rebuke, exhort – not soft-peddle the truth so as to tickle and scratch ears and draw followers after oneself.

And indeed Paul goes from this very instruction directly into one of his most clear prophetic warnings of the end time apostasy: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Tim. 4:3-4) A cause – and result – of watering down the truth so as to please one’s listeners is departure from the faith! No longer does the preacher act as a servant of the Lord seeking to bring about correction, repentance, knowledge of the truth and liberty from the schemes and oppressions of the devil. The apostasy has progressed so far in our day that tolerance of all kinds of sin and carnality is the standard creed, the need for repentance is ridiculed, the very existence of truth is doubted and the liberty that attends worshiping God in spirit and truth is never attained to. (Jn. 4:24, 8:32, etc.) Anyone who dares to preach such things in purity and power will not have many listeners for very long. Yet, to the extent that any

speaker gives in to the pressure of pleasing his or her listeners rather than pleasing God (1 Ths. 2:4), to that extent the gospel is corrupted.

This philosophy of having to avoid offending one's listeners is a strategy of the demonic designed to limit (especially but not limited to) the effectiveness of the prophetic – not speaking here of those who make a public speaking “ministry” out of it but rather of those who are truly graced and gifted by God to speak forth what is on His heart for the particular time and season, however imperfectly or incompletely they manifest the gift and calling of a New Testament prophet. The prophetic gifting and calling is a legitimate one but is one that is easily exaggerated, misused or abused. On the flip side, any apparent flaw in a prophet is used to dismiss his or her entire message and, in this regard, prophets, especially young and untrained ones (as most prophets are who have come of age in a “church” setting), are often the worst enemy of their gifting and calling. Thus if a prophet is too rough, too uncouth, too blunt, too courageous, too specific in his naming of popular sins, if his words reach too deeply in the lives of those who hear him, then, of course, he must be a false prophet and he or she is no longer welcome in the “church” where they began. Few prophets survive this treatment without becoming bitter – some even reject God because of it. The few prophets who refuse to succumb to either the pressure from the “church” system to conform or to the bitterness and frustration of the “church's” rejection must continue to speak when and how the Lord leads them – no matter what any listener's reaction might be. As Paul said above, the prophet especially must be ready to speak the word in season and out of season!

Sound doctrine – the word, the true message of God – is especially unwelcome in this day of apostasy as it too intrudes too deeply upon our right to be our own masters. Sound doctrine is the commands of Christ Jesus who, as we follow His Spirit, leads us to *fulfill* the precepts of God's moral laws, not as forms and letters obeyed in outward expressions but as the essence of our life filled with love for God and others and motivated by a drive to do God's will and not the will of self. (Rom. 13:10, Gal. 6:2, Heb. 10:7, etc.) The law was given to show us what evil and sin are. (Rom. 7:7, etc.) The man who refuses to look into the holy, just and good commandments (Rom. 7:12) because he believes himself to be “under grace,” neglects and refuses to discover just how sinful his life truly is – and this one has misused the very reason God's grace (power) was given to men. Paul wrote, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age... [Christ] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless [unrighteous, self-approved, sinful] deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” (Tit. 2:11-12, 14) One of the main points of God's plan of redemption for mankind is that we receive His power (grace) so that we may experientially partake of His divine nature, overcome our sin nature and escape its corruptions! (2 Pet. 1:4) The apostasy uses “grace” as its excuse for sin and lawlessness (doing what is right in one's own eyes – Jdgs. 21:25) even as its participants defiantly proclaim themselves to be “the righteousness of God” all while self – and not Christ – is their true king. (see 2 Cor. 5:21)

Directly after Paul describes this primary aspect of Christ's sacrifice, he tells Titus, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority.” (Tit. 2:15) “These things” are “the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1) and Paul gets very specific about the *requirements* that are upon those in Christ. Among this list, we find that admonishing and exhortation are a true part of sound doctrine. (Tit. 2:4, 6, 9, also see Tit. 1:9, 1 Tim. 5:20) Paul recognizes the depth and depravity in the people around Titus (Tit. 1:12-13), a description that truly applies to any and all who give themselves over to self-gratification in any of its forms (Tit.

1:15), gives his detailed list of sound doctrine and then concludes, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” (Tit. 3:8) Paul clearly intended that Titus should offend most deeply the fleshly sensibilities of those whom he was in contact with – the offense of the cross of Christ. (Gal. 5:11, 1 Pet. 2:8)

“We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block [to their pride and self-righteous attainments under the law] and to the Greeks [the western mind] foolishness [because man’s intellect is not elevated to the throne of one’s life], but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the [experienced] power of God and the [intimate, directing] wisdom of God.” (1 Cor. 1:23-24)

That man can do nothing to save himself but must instead draw all things from God *is* the offensive message of the cross of Christ. There simply has been no place left for our flesh to boast. (1 Cor. 1:29)

The apostasy driven as it is by the deceptions of the demonic (1 Tim. 4:1, etc.) distorts the gospel at every turn. It corrupts the definition of what it means to be saved (see 1 Pet. 1:23, Jn. 3:3, 5) and then prohibits the very works that prove that one is truly saved (Jas. 2:26), calling any good works “a return to law” or “self-effort.” Almost completely eradicated is the idea that we must crucify and put to death our flesh and its members and lusts. (Col. 3:5, Gal. 5:24, etc.) Modern churchianity has all but eliminated the true role and meaning of the cross of Christ and has, quite simply, concocted a different “gospel.” (Gal. 1:8-9) And even where a fairly accurate representation of the gospel might be presented (since the “church” paradigm differs so radically from the kingdom perspective this is virtually impossible in its own right), the “church” structure and paradigm effectively drown out and silence the voice of truth.

“Repent and believe” (Mk. 1:15) is still God’s solution for all that is wrong with mankind. Turn from your own wickedness, your own resources and believe that *He* is all that is required for life and godliness. From this belief, draw upon His grace (power) to turn from and overcome all the temptations of the flesh, the world and the demonic. This *is* the grace of God that leads to eternal life. All else is merely some man’s attempt to soothe the itching ears of his listeners so as to achieve some purpose or agenda of his own. Do not be deceived.

The “church” has been forced to open itself to any and all who will come through its doors because it no longer causes its people to personally *go* into all the world to preach Christ’s gospel of the kingdom and to make disciples who obey His commands. (see Mt. 28:19-20 - and note well the few exceptional missionaries who do!) This only creates confusion as this mixed multitude that consists of genuinely born again saints (1 Cor. 1:2, etc.), some non-believers, some pseudo-believers and some mis-believers is called “the church.” The original Greek word – *ekklesia* [1577] – refers *only* to those who have been called out of the darkness of this world and transferred (by their new birth from above) into the kingdom of light and given the responsibility to attend to the affairs and issues of Christ’s kingdom of light and truth. (Col. 1:13, 1 Tim. 3:15) There is nothing particularly wrong with the people of Christ being among the people of the world – indeed, there is no other way to be salt and light in a dying world! (see Mt. 5:13-14) – but those who remain sinful while calling themselves “a brother in Christ” are not to be included in our gatherings (1 Cor. 5:11, 2 Tim. 3:5, etc.) and these certainly are not spiritually able or qualified to be “ministers” or leaders! Yet the “church,” the apostasy, seeks to include everyone so as to purportedly “save” more people but it only succeeds in confirming the condemnation of all who participate. Confusion, misdirection and causing people to perish is *not* the work of God! (1 Cor. 14:33, 2 Pet. 3:9)

To speak these truths to a passive, paying audience simply cuts too deeply and most will flee to the franchise down the street where the professional clergy and staff panders to more comforting (fleshly) ways and ideas. It will always be easier to build a “church” building and draw in followers according to one’s charisma and eloquence and administrative abilities than it is to preach the offensive gospel of Christ that *requires* all to deny themselves, take up the instrument of their own execution (the cross) and follow after Christ wherever He leads. (Lk. 9:23, etc.) It is this in this light that we see how suspect are the multitudes of “pastors,” traveling talking head “apostles,” “prophets,” “evangelists,” etc. and their worldwide “ministries.” Wherever a Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9) has the preeminence, a different spirit (2 Cor. 11:4) rules over the assembly and few, if any, are likely to be trained to be sons of God who follow only the Spirit of God. (Rom. 8:14) The “church” will continue to produce tares (sons of the devil – Mt. 13:38, 1 Jn. 3:10) while the genuine ekklesia (people) will travel through and endure whatever wilderness is required to follow the Lamb of God wherever He leads. (Jn. 10:27, Rev. 14:4) No wounding inflicted by truth will be so great as to separate the genuine follower of Christ from his or her Master, Lord and King. No price or cost will be too great to diligently attend to the requirements of the great salvation that has been so freely and completely bestowed upon us. Those who are too deeply offended will return to “church” (or invent their own sect of it, even calling it “ekklesia” or “the kingdom of God”), comforted by strong delusion (2 Ths. 2:11) that the way in which they go is indeed “the right and only way” because that is what their own eyes tell them. But the end of this way will be eternal death and destruction. (Prov. 14:12)

“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10) and He “did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Mt. 9:13) But today’s “Christians” don’t think of themselves as lost. They have all the “light” they need to live a “Christian” life that is right and good in their own eyes – and they have piled up their favorite teachers to re-affirm all these “truths” for them. Today’s “Christians” don’t want to be saved – they want to be bettered. Self-improvement, better self-image, pleasing of self’s ideas, issues and agendas – these are far more popular (and lucrative!) as a means of drawing followers (especially ones with money!) after a particular teacher or teaching than is the narrow way of the cross that alone leads to eternal life. Today’s “Christians” are not really sinners who need to repent – oh, maybe they’ve committed a few sins which God is happy to forgive them of, but seeing themselves as a fatally flawed enemy of God (Rom. 8:7) is completely unthinkable and certainly not taught from the ear-scratching pulpiteers. Today’s “Christians” simply require a different “gospel” because the original one cuts far too deeply into the self’s image as a good, intelligent and wise member of a good circle of fellow human beings. Truth is far too cutting to be an acceptable doctrine in the “church” today.

Let he who has ears hear.

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