



The Reflector

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"With All Purity"

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"Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity." (1 Timothy 5:1-2 NKJV)

The above sentence, written by Paul to his young friend and fellow preacher, Timothy, gives simple but powerful guidelines sorely needed by preachers today in their dealings with others. If those who preach had always kept these instructions in mind it would have saved the church a lot of unnecessary pain.

Preachers, to be faithful to their duty to "reprove, rebuke and exhort," (2 Tim. 4:2) must deal with people of all ages – both men and women. It can be no doubt that while doing this that we would be more effective by treating older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters. But, the purpose of this article is not to elaborate on ways that one might behave toward each of these classes. My purpose is to focus on the last phrase – "with all purity."

Though the word translated purity (*hagneia*) in this text is a little different from the word, *hagnotes*, a noun meaning "the state of being *hagnos*." *Hagnos* is an adjective translated "chaste" in 2 Cor. 11:2; Tit. 2:5 and 1 Pet. 3:2. Vine says *hagneia* is synonymous with *hagnotes*. (See W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 498).

Of the phrase, "with all purity," Marshall Patton aptly writes, "Preachers, especially young preachers, need to guard themselves carefully against any indiscretion that might reflect on their **purity** or proper conduct. Not one word, look, or action should ever suggest improper feelings on their part. Their character and usefulness depend so much upon their observance

of this precept. Paul, by this timely admonition to young Timothy, shows knowledge of human nature and the danger of temptation so often present in such work." (*Truth Commentaries, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Marshall Patton*. Published by Guardian of Truth Foundation, 2001)

The life of any Christian should be a life of moral and spiritual purity. It is part of the "wisdom that is from above." (Jas. 3:17). But, preachers in being examples to the believer should lead an exemplary life of purity (1 Tim. 4:12). It is hard enough to get people to listen to the gospel, especially those parts that they may need yet to be convinced about, without preachers giving them an excuse to turn a deaf ear because some preacher they know is unable to control his passions and keep himself pure. Not only does such a preacher turn people off who need to hear the gospel message, he gives the church where he labors a black eye in the community that takes a lot of time and effort by brethren to overcome – if they ever do.

Yes, I know that preachers are not perfect, nor does anyone have a right to expect them to be. And, yes, I know that there are likely many who do things "just as bad." Still, few sins damage the good influence of a preacher or the church with which he is affiliated more than one who is known for his "womanizing."

Young brother, whether or not you preach, deal with older women as mothers and younger women as sisters – but especially so if you preach. Your influence and effectiveness as a gospel preacher is at stake. Yea, your soul is at stake.

There was a time when we thought that such warning should be almost exclusively directed to younger preachers. However, we are hearing more and more of older preachers with "woman problems."

Whether young or old it should not be tolerated by brethren. Such a one should not be “allowed to resign,” his work as preacher for the congregation and slip out without publicly confessing his sin that is publically known.

Some sins even after they are corrected and are forgiven have lingering temporal consequences that are not removed by forgiveness. A sin that all but destroys one’s reputation in the community and brethren’s confidence in him, while it can be forgiven in a moment, it takes time for him to rebuild his reputation and the confidence that folks have in him. For this reason, it is a mistake for a church to immediately put a man back into the pulpit after his womanizing episode – even though he is forgiven and even if he does send the brethren on a “guilt trip” for being “unforgiving.”

Later in this chapter, Paul give Timothy instructions about rebuking elders who sin, he cautions him “that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.” This principle can be equally applied with our dealing with that which we have discussing. It is easy for us to play “hush hush” if the guilty one is in our particular “brotherhood clique,” but virtually shout it from the housetop if he happens not to be.

It is sad when a brother falls into impure conduct, We need to do all that we can to “restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering (ourselves) lest (we)

also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). We need to receive him back with love and open arms when he corrects the matter. A Christian can do no less. If he is sincere and desires to do the right thing, he will understand that he now needs to bring forth fruits meet for repentance and “prove himself” so that he can rebuild his reputation and influence so that brethren can once again support him in his preaching with confidence.

Young preacher, as you read these lines realize that the best way to avoid such problems is to use extreme caution in your association with others – especially females. It is a good idea, and has proven to be effective over the years, to not “counsel” a woman “one on one,” but to always have a trusted third party present to witness what is said and done. This writer has stopped his wife from household chores many times to go with him to call on a sister. By having that third party you not only have a witness in case some wagging tongues let their imaginations run wild and accuse you of impropriety. Also, by having a third party present you protect yourself. The conversation is not as likely to drift into “pillow talk” between you and the person you are “counseling” – both of you would be less likely to go there if someone you both trusted were present. It often takes years to build an impeccable reputation and a wide influence for good, but it can be destroyed by one moment of indiscretion.

“Keep thyself pure.” (1 Tim. 5:22)

Wringing Our Hands And Failing To Lift Up Our Eyes

Dennis Reed

The cause of the Lord is greatly suffering in our day because of brethren who are determined to follow their own will rather than God’s Will. This is not new information to most of us who have seen it happening all around us for most of our lives, but yet we are still shocked with the brash and cold resentment that some seem to demonstrate toward God’s commandments. We see brethren fleeing from churches where the Truth is being preached with all boldness and where error is vividly and openly exposed without respect of persons. These departing brethren don’t want to hear the Truth, and most will probably migrate to churches where soft

preaching is in vogue, where error can run rampant, and where toleration of sinful practices will be openly welcomed. Churches which are taking a firm stand for the Truth are growing smaller in number, and it is most obvious that prejudicial criticism and ridicule is being readily used to discourage brethren from having anything to do with those brethren who are opposing the innovations and error being adopted by so many among us. Some preachers who have stood firmly for the Truth in years past are yielding to the pressure, closing their Bibles, and apparently saying that “it just doesn’t matter”, and then generally proceeding to do “whatever

it takes” to “please” the brethren. Is it possible that they want their “job” and their “prestige in the brotherhood” to remain safe, and that they are willing to compromise and seal their lips to achieve those selfish purposes? Many of us are truly appalled at this sordid and ugly mess of unbelief, lack of self respect, and spirit of compromise!

So, shall we just continually wring our hands and constantly bemoan the loss of so many to this digression, or shall we determine to press on in our efforts to reach those in the world who are without God and who have never known the Truth? Shall we lift up our eyes unto the fields which are white unto harvest?(John 4: 35) (Matthew 9:37-38) Yes, indeed, we must tell the lost of the world that the Lord’s church does exist today just as it was established and existed in the New Testament. And we must ALSO tell those whom we are teaching that most of our brethren in churches of Christ are not holding to the “old paths”, and that these churches are literally filled with error, false teaching, and the toleration of unscriptural and sinful practices.

Yes, we are well aware that this is a tremendous obstacle to overcome, just as it is an obstacle to overcome when we teach the lost that they must come out of denominational error and take a firm stand to obey and uphold the Truth. To some brethren, this obstacle may seem too great and thus cause them to shrink back from the noble task of preaching the Word. When we convince ourselves that we cannot save others, then we may well have also convinced ourselves that we cannot save ourselves. When we let digressive brethren drag us down and make us fearful of speaking the Truth with all boldness, then there is nothing left for us but the wringing of the hands and the constant groaning about how terrible the situation is. We can resign ourselves to that useless state of discouragement or we can believe and practice the inspired words spoken by the apostle Paul, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:35-39.

Brethren, we do truly hurt for those brethren who have closed their eyes, ears, and hearts to the Truth. We deeply hurt for those whose willful lack of knowledge and complacency has permitted them to be deceived. We hurt for those who are so enamored with “men” that they will follow them blindly down the road of digression. We hurt for those who have seared their conscience and who are determined to bring the world into the church. We hurt for our own families and loved ones who act almost violently toward us when we would expose the unscriptural practices and false teaching which they have so readily accepted and are now advocating. If they believed that we were

A new generation has been reared on “pabulum preaching”, they have been fully indoctrinated with the concept that no “false teachers” exist, and they are fully convinced that we are permitted to fellowship moral and doctrinal error! A great many of this generation are so “long gone” that they have absolutely no concept and understanding of the Lord’s church as we have known it during our life time.

in error,

wouldn’t you think that they would do everything in their power to teach us the Truth and turn us from our dangerous path? No, don’t expect that to happen, because even if they believe that we are teaching and upholding error, their basic false doctrine called “unity in diversity” says that those who teach and practice soul destroying error are worthy of acceptance and fellowship! Those who have truly adopted this falsehood are not worried about anyone being lost, and the ultimate end of that doctrine will be to justify all the errors present in denominationalism as well. So, when they react adversely to those of us who openly oppose their digression, it seems to be ONLY because they just don’t like the idea of us telling them that THEY are in error! Their attitude is that “if you will just leave us alone and let us believe and teach what we want to”, then we will gladly reciprocate to receive you and uphold you under the same conditions! Now brethren,

if you are willing to swallow and go along with that attitude, then I am truly at a loss as to how I could ever overcome such willful and absolute disregard for the Word of God.

But what can be accomplished by our “sitting idly by” and wringing our hands over these conditions? Brethren, many of these folks are “long gone” and they won’t be coming back! They are “long gone” and they don’t want to hear a single word from us that would be intended to help bring them back! We have been in this present “unity in diversity” digression for nearly twenty years now. A new generation has been reared on “pabulum preaching”, they have been fully indoctrinated with the concept that no “false teachers” exist, and they are fully convinced that we are permitted to fellowship moral and doctrinal error! A great many of this generation are so “long gone” that they have absolutely no concept and understanding of the Lord’s church as we have known it during our life time. Their mission is to CHANGE the church to suit their desires and whims as to what THEY WANT THE CHURCH TO BE. This is just exactly the same attitude which some of us experienced more than fifty years ago with the institutional digression. We lost the majority of our brethren to the errors of that time and most of those churches are now really nothing more than a human denomination. Yet we have never ceased to seize upon any opportunity we have to retrieve them from this error, and we shall never neglect any opportunity which we might have in the future to bring those back who are overcome with the “unity in diversity” error. But the time has come for us to gird up our loins and lift up our eyes to the fields white unto harvest. We must determine to find men and women who are willing to open their hearts and listen to the Truth. We must replace those who “went out from us” with those who want to be saved and become faithful and sound servants in the Lord’s Kingdom. We must “seek and save the lost”! This may well include brethren who have become lost by embracing error, and that is our great hope, and it must continually be a reaching out to those who are not Christians and who can be persuaded to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus Christ.

What are we presently doing to reach those in the world who are in this lost condition? How many are we speaking to about becoming Christians? Are we making efforts to teach Bible classes in the homes of unbelievers or to invite them into our own homes to

study the Bible? Are we deceived into believing that we can reach the lost without “going” to them with the gospel? Do we think that we can just sit in our church buildings and the lost will look for us long enough until they find us? Brethren, how naive have we become? When we are occupied with wringing our hands and being filled with disappointment in our brethren who are leaving the Truth, why aren’t we also totally appalled at the lack of interest and concern about lifting up our eyes to the fields that are white unto harvest? For over fifty years I have had to tell those being taught that I have brethren who don’t love and respect the Truth. I have had to tell them that there are numerous churches of Christ that are not sound in faith and practice. I have had to leave family, dear friends, and many others of my own brethren behind because they will not abide in the doctrine of Christ. Why should it be any different today? We must be totally “up front” with those we teach, and let them know that many of our own brethren have become just as disinterested in following the Scriptures as the people are in the denominational world around us. Brethren, we need to do everything in our power to expose the error of “unity in diversity” and diligently seek to retrieve those who are deceived by it, and we also need to do everything in our power to be taking the Word of God to the world around us which is filled with people who are lost without God and without hope. If our own brethren are determined to shut us and the Truth out of their lives, then we must lift up our eyes and find those who will gladly let both us and the Truth come into their lives!

Now if our digressive brethren feel that we are going to “leave them alone in their error”, they are seriously mistaken! With every departure from the Truth, they will be boldly reminded that they have gone beyond the doctrine of Christ, II John 9-11. They are going to be constantly reminded that they are the ones who are not speaking as the “oracles of God”, I Peter 4:11. But they are also going to be put on notice that we can “shake the dust off our feet” and press on with our time and effort to save those who do have hearts which are open to the Truth. With humility and soberness, we shall seek to take on this tremendous task, with God as our helper and His Word as our guide! “I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:13.