

The Reflector

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PAINLESS POINTLESS PROFITLESS PREACHING

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

The doctor, looking at the routine test results, announces to the patient, "Hey, man, give me five. Have I got good news for you? Your blood pressure is super. Your pulse rate is fantastic. And, man, what a fabulous gall bladder. It is beautiful to behold. You are in marvelous shape."

Now, the patient really feels good about himself. In fact, it confirmed what he had thought all along - there was nothing wrong with him. He only went in to satisfy his wife. She is one of those health nuts that thinks one should have a periodic checkup even when he is feeling good about himself.

Then the doctor says, "Now sit down, I want to tell some really good news about our treatment plan for folks like you -- you will love it and hardly feel a pain -- I tell you it is sensational."

"Treatment for what, Doc?", the patient asks, "you just said I was in great shape".

"Well, you are, or at least we believe you need to think you are (haven't you ever heard of Positive Mental Attitude), but

everyone needs a treatment plan", replies the doctor.

"How much is this going to cost me, Doc?"

"You don't need to concern yourself about the cost now, I will explain that to you a bit at a time while you are recovering from the initial surgery."

"From initial -- what?"

"Initial surgery for that nice tumor that I think you may have - isn't that super! Can you say 'super'?"

"To tell you the truth, Doc, 'swell' is about the best I can do until I find out what will happen if I don't have surgery. What will likely happen?"

"Now, there you go. Do I detect that you are beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable about yourself? I was afraid of that. We can't have that!"

"But, Doc, why didn't you tell me to start with that I had a tumor and needed an operation"?

"What kind of doctor do you think I am? I am of the new school that tells patients how well they are, rather than that old negative school that tells folks how sick they are. How can I claim to be a 'good news' doctor if I keep telling folks the 'bad news' about their health and what all it is going to take for them to get well?"

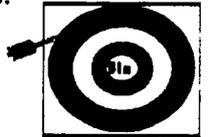
"Doc, I think news about the surgery and its cost would have been 'good news' to me had you honestly told me first, with convincing evidence, the 'bad news'

about my illness."

The above fictional doctor's approach parallels a growing approach to preaching among us. One who sees no flaw in the doctor's approach will likely see no flaw in this new style of preaching.

The idea that you can save sinners without first convicting them of sin is both unscriptural and illogical. The first order of business of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles was to "convict the world of sin" (John 16:8). As they went forth preaching under the direct guidance of the Spirit they first convicted men and women of their sins; then they gave them the good news about how to be saved from sin.

Notice the order in Acts 2. Peter first convicted them of their sin by plainly pointing out, with ample evidence, that the One they had rejected and crucified was the Christ of prophecy. He concluded "that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now, that made them rather uncomfortable about themselves. It even cut them to the heart. They asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (v. 37). They were now ready for the good news. There was a way out of their sinful condition. (v.38). They gladly did what they were told to do. (v. 41).



Of course, they were not made to feel bad about themselves and left hanging. They were given good news of the way out of their sinful and lost state. They would not have been ready for the good news until they no longer felt good about having crucified Jesus. As long as they felt that they were innocent of wrong doing they would have felt no need for the gospel. They would have not considered it good news.

Once men and women are faced with the guilt and consequences of their sins. When they understand that they are lost and hell bound. Then the news of the gospel plan of salvation indeed becomes great news. It is good news even when they understand that discipleship involves effort, hardships and sacrifices.

No, we are not saying that every sermon or every article or every class lesson must be to convict one of sin. There are other purposes in preaching and teaching. But, there is entirely too much emphasis in today's preaching upon trying to make people feel good about themselves rather than convicting them of sin. Too much psychology and not enough gospel in lessons directed to those in and out of the church. A preacher friend recently told me about hearing a young visiting preacher preach an entire sermon on "the grace of God" without even mentioning the plan of salvation. A few years ago, I stopped at a place on Sunday night and heard a sermon on "the new birth" without baptism being mentioned -- much less showing that people needed it and urging them to do it. There seems to be less and less emphasis upon what we must leave behind and what is involved in being saved from sin and condemnation.

The world hasn't changed so much since the first century that it does not need convicting of sin. The church has not

changed so much that there are no brethren that need convicting of sin. The word of God has not changed so much that it is not still designed to make us see what manner of men we are -- prompting us to do something about it. (cf. Jas. 1:25).

If our preaching makes one still in his sins feel good about himself then we have done him an injustice. It is likewise an injustice to make one think that salvation and discipleship are without cost. But once one understands the gravity of his sinful condition and the rewards of salvation -- he will eagerly accept the cost of obeying the Lord. The gospel, with all its conditions, tribulations and blessings will indeed be good news to him, because he has fully understood the bad news of his condemnation.

It time we quit trying to spare the sinner the pain of honestly facing the reality of his condemnation; so that we might introduce him to the glorious relief in the gospel of Christ. It is time that we quit trying to make disciples of Christ without the painful decisions having to be made. Repentance is not painless. It is prompted by godly sorrow. (2 Cor. 7:9,10).

When one obeys the gospel there are sinful pleasures that must be sacrificed. There are often beloved hindering relationships that must be severed. When preachers preach and people understand the whole picture the Lord will be pleased and souls will be saved. When one understands the profitableness of godliness for the life that now is and that which is to come (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8) -- he will gladly count the cost worth it all. But one can hardly understand and appreciate the profitableness of godliness until he understands the unprofitableness of ungodliness.

Maybe we need to be more concerned that our preaching be profitable than painless.

PULPIT MINISTERS

Paul Brock



In the N.T. the word "minister" simply meant to serve. With reference to proclaiming the word it was ministering the word of God. Paul was thankful to the Lord for "putting me into the ministry." (1 Tim. 1:12). He was a minister of the New Testament. (2 Cor. 3:6) Timothy was told, "Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry" (2 Cor. 4:5). Note the number of times the Apostle Paul refers to himself or himself and others as ministers of, or in the gospel. (Acts 26:16; Rom. 15:16; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23,25; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; Col. 1:7; 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; passim). The word minister also refers to a service in other areas, but to preach the word is to minister or to serve in proclaiming the word. Paul never claimed to be *the* minister, or a minister. I have ready once or twice in some papers or bulletins of pulpit ministers. I suppose that means the only place they preach was in a pulpit. I have also read of "youth ministers" and "ministers of education", etc., etc. I have no objection to anyone being referred to as a minister, but very much do I object to one being *the* minister whether pulpit or some other kind. On the other hand, if standing in the pulpit (an elevated platform) would make me a pulpit minister, to this practice I confess. I also confess to preaching in *front* of the pulpit. The same reasoning makes me a *courthouse lawn* minister, a *living room* minister, a *kitchen* minister, a *dining room* minister and a *restaurant table* minister. It would make me a *motel* minister and an *airport*

RELIEVING THE PRESSURE

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance of their own desires." -- 2 Tim. 4:3 (NASV).

When one's standard of conduct begins to bind his conduct, something must give. He may alter his conduct to fit the standard, but too often he alters the standard to fit the conduct. Like those of the text, he seeks teachers who will make the standard fit his practice. Thus, he finds temporary relief from the pressure.

Once I watched the wife cut out a dress. Being the prudent man that I am ("prudent" does sound better than "cowardly"), I silently watched as she used the same size pattern as before -- but just allowed a little around the edges. I guess this seemed to be the easier way out. I thought how typical this is of many brethren. They get their lives out of step with the pattern (the Bible), but seem to still want to use the pattern -- so they just allow a little here and there.

People often get themselves involved in situations and then go looking for some teacher who will tell them that they are alright. This happens so often in the matter of divorce and remarriage. They get into it and then call every preacher in the country hoping one will justify them in it. This is true of many other problems of life.

Churches get involved in questionable, to say the least, activities -- then hunt teachers who will try to make enough allowances with the Biblical language so that the brethren can feel comfortable in their error. As the digressing grows other allowances have to be made until someone talk about "where there is no pattern" -- as if we may not always need the Pattern for the church and her practices.

We must confine our practice to the doctrine of Christ -- with no allowances. "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God". (2 John 9).

(EDITOR'S NOTE: We wrote this little piece over 20 years ago. We thought we would run it again. Brethren, in every generation, need to be warned against stretching the pattern).

minister along with *open-air* and *brush-arbor* minister. This preacher has baptized in creeks, ponds, rivers, hospital-therapy tubs, large bath tubs, swimming pools, motel Jacuzzi, plywood with plastic insert baptisteries and "REAL BAPTISTERIES"; AND OF ALL PLACES, SET RIGHT BEHIND THE "pulpit."

Call me what you will. My name is PAUL and I will go on preaching and baptizing wherever opportunity can be made.

FRIENDSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"Fellowship" and "friendship" are not synonyms. We have a hard time understanding this. We find it hard to deny the "right hand of fellowship" to friends, regardless of the their spiritual

condition. A few find it hard to work in true partnership (fellowship) with any other than close friends. When a brother says he can not fellowship a brother, then too many of us automatically assume that he is no longer friendly toward that brother. Such need not be so.

Vine makes an interesting observation on the difference between a *fellow* (GK: HETAIROS) and a *friend* (GK: PHILOS). He says, "This (HETAIROS - EOB), as expressing comradeship, is to be distinguished from No. 1 (PHILOS - EOB), which is a term of endearment." Thus, one can maintain friendship (endearment) with one with whom he cannot maintain fellowship (comradeship or partnership); or else a Christian could have no friends outside of Christ. Even one's joining with the local church in withdrawing fellowship from a brother does not mean that he is withdrawing his friendship (2 Thess. 3:15); though the circumstances calls for not keeping company with him. (1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Thess. 3:14). Neither friendship or fellowship need be the basis for the other.

There are people with whom I maintain a relationship of endearment (by friendship, kinship, etc.) to whom I cannot extend fellowship -- either in the sense of congregational fellowship, or becoming partners with them in moral and spiritual efforts (such as ministerial alliances), or extending "the right hand of fellowship", or some any other gesture that would signal a general endorsement of them in their work.

I have close friends and dear relatives who are not Christians after the New Testament order. I love them dearly and they me. Either would come to the other's aid in a moment in time of need. Yet, we are not fellows in the Lord's work. I cannot not partake of their sins nor encourage them in their spiritual work. I cannot afford to make any gesture that could be taken by

them, or others, that there are no vital differences between us in spiritual matters. Even if one of these close friends or relatives, even a parent, brother or sister in the flesh, comes into this community to *spread his doctrine* then I must not receive him into my house nor bid him godspeed to avoid being a partaker of his evil (2 John 9-11). I could not announce his spiritual activities. If he came to the services I would not call on him for prayer. Would that mean that I no longer felt close to him as a friend or relative? Of course not!

Sometimes those who, because of various relationships and associations with us, have greatly endeared themselves to us. Its awfully easy to gear our degree of fellowship with them to our degree of friendship with them. They can virtually "get away with murder" in matters vital to the kingdom of God and we still treat them as pillars in the church. Their actions not only causes their faithfulness to the Lord to be suspect, but the openness of their actions places the Lord's cause in a bad light before all. If the same positions and/or practices were embraced by those not so friendly with us we would have long ago quit bidding them godspeed.

If a good friend gets into a situation that we cannot in good conscience endorse or encourage, it need not destroy our feeling of friendship toward him because we cannot conscientiously do anything we feel would encourage him in his situation. In fact, good friends do not want the other's endorsement or encouragement against the conscience. Nor should scriptural disciplinary action be taken as an act of animosity.

No, friendship and fellowship are not parallel lines

PERVERTED BIBLE

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) - A new book has apparently met the needs of thousands of readers whose idea of Bible study is to skim through the Scriptures, stopping only at the juicy parts.

"The X-Rated Bible" published by the American Atheist Press sold out its first printing of 5,000 copies.

The paperback was issued with an announcement that it included every "lewd, licentious, and vile" sexual story in the Bible.

Those atheists think they are clever, but they are self-deceived. I deny that they have included the **WHOLE** story regarding the sexual sins of the Bible. First, the Bible does not present sexual sin in a pornographic way. It deals with it in the most solemn and serious tones. It tells the facts with no lascivious pictures. Second, it shows the consequences that come in this life (read David's penitential Psalm 51) and are sure to come in eternity (Gal. 5:19-21). These atheists don't want to hear **THE REST OF THE STORY**.

Men only attempt to rewrite the Bible when they don't like the way it reads. When men refuse to have God in their knowledge He gives them up to a reprobate mind and allows them to go from bad to worse morally and spiritually. The Bible says so and these atheists are living proof that the Bible is right about that (Rom. 1:26-28f). I bet they didn't include that verse in their (per)version of the Bible.

-- Dick Blackford

IT'S A FUNNY THING BUT TRUE

It's a funny thing but true,
The folks you don't like, don't like you.

I don't know why this should be so

But just the same I always know,
That when I'm sour, friends are few,

When I'm friendly, folks are, too.
I sometimes get up in the morn,

Awishin' I was never born,
And then my family wishes, too,
That I had gone some other place,

But then I change my little tune,
And sing and smile,

And then the folks around me
sing and smile.

I guess 'twas catching all the while.

It's a funny thing but true,
The folks you like, they sure like you!

Author Unknown

OUR NEXT MEETING
August 12,13,14
Alan Hargett

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