

PAUL TELLS PASTORS WHAT TO PREACH

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This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance
(1 Tim. 1:15).

The epistles written by Paul to Timothy and Titus were personal, practical, and powerful. The apostle was addressing two of his favorite sons and advising them what to preach to their congregations. Solomon, the king of Israel, did a similar job. He wrote proverbs considered to be pearls of wisdom, but what he said was ruined by deplorable conduct. He gave advice which should have been applied to himself. Paul was completely different. He was a leader of the Christian church, had evangelized the known world, and inscribed the name of Jesus on millions of hearts and minds. At the beginning of his ministry there was only one Christian church. It was situated in the city of Jerusalem. Yet before he went home to heaven, the apostle established churches in every major city in the Roman empire. His fame outshone that of any other disciple, and his inspired letters were destined to be read worldwide.

He understood the problems which would confront young pastors and realized they would make mistakes and become discouraged. Paul had been hurt by Christians who did not exhibit the beauty of the Savior. They tried to undermine his ministry; their criticism was cruel and unrelenting. Yet the apostle never wavered from his duty. The advice offered came from personal experience. His three epistles are called The Pastoral Epistles; they should be studied by every minister. Young preachers begin their work with boundless enthusiasm and plan to save the world overnight. They become discouraged when, after years of service, they believe themselves to be failures. The task of discovering new materials can be frustrating, and preparing for regular church services may be boring. A man who studies for long periods of time may be disappointed when friends neglect to say "Thank You." Many devoted ministers go to church filled with expectations but return to their homes wondering if they wasted their time.

As far as is known, Paul did not possess a degree in

189

psychology, but, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he wrote three textbooks which are now studied in universities. It seems significant that when he considered the tasks ahead of his young proteges, he emphasized certain things. Every word he wrote was wise and necessary, but some details were more vital than others. What Paul was about to express was very important, for without this information his friends might fail in their ministry. He seemed to be saying: "Everything I tell you is important, but "this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance." Three times to Timothy and once to Titus he seemed to be saying: "Whatever you say in your sermons, never leave this out. If you do, you may preach and say nothing."

The Undeserved Grace... Redemption

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (1 Tim. 1:15).

When Paul arrived in the city of Corinth, he was deter-

PAUL TELLS PASTORS WHAT TO PREACH

mined to preach about the death of the Savior. An important lesson had been learned on Mars Hill in Athens, where reasoning only produced arguments. When he left, the apostle believed he had failed in his mission. It probably took two days or more to walk to Corinth, and during the journey he had plenty of time to reflect. When later he wrote to the church that he established, he said:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-2).

The apostle's phenomenal success in Corinth set the pattern for the rest of his ministry. The Hebrews in whose synagogues he preached detested the Gospel, for it was to them a stumbling block. When Paul used the Old Testament to support his claims, the listeners had no effective reply and were

'90

left irritated. The intellectual Greeks despised the Gospel. for they thought redemption through sacrifice was ridiculous. When Jews and Greeks united to oppose the evangelist. progress became extremely difficult. The life of the apostle was threatened and his services interrupted. Yet through all the difficulties he continued to preach about the death of Christ. He remained so convinced about the validity of the message that he expressed extreme disapproval of any other doctrine (see Gal. 1:6-9).

One wonders what Paul would say if he were writing to students in modern seminaries. Men and women are trained to be administrators, counselors, and social workers, but it is doubtful if they are instructed how to knock on doors and explain to strangers the mighty power of the Cross of Christ. Some pastors are more successful in dividing churches than in leading souls to Christ. I attended a banquet in honor of a retiring president of a prestigious Baptist College who said: "If I could have my time over again, I would preach nothing but the old time Gospel of Jesus." I wished that statement had been made at the commencement of his ministry instead of at its end! Paul insisted that Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom he was the chief. When men preach without mentioning the reconciling death of the Savior, it is evident they are in the wrong occupation.

The apostle said his message was conceived in the mind of

God, fulfilled in the death of Jesus, and should be the theme of every message preached. There never was, nor is, nor will be an effective substitute for the Gospel of Christ. If Timothy, Titus, and Paul preached it, so should every clergyman. To try to save the world with any other message is as futile as trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon.

The Unhindered Growth... Rewarding

For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance (1 Tim. 4:8-9).

PAUL TELLS PASTORS WHAT TO PREACH

During the lifetime of Paul there existed many sects and cults which practiced all kinds of exercises to "keep people in shape." The Olympic Games and other sporting events in Rome and throughout the empire were so popular that thousands of athletes could be seen daily throwing javelins, hurling the discus, and running in marathons to prepare for forthcoming events. Perhaps there were Christians who spent more time with their exercises than with their Lord. There was nothing wrong with programs to develop physical strength, unless they prevented spiritual growth. The apostle realized his friends would be required to offer guidance to men and was careful when supplying advice. He did not condemn the activities, but did say: "They profiteth little." Some activities developed muscles, others decreased weight, but they were all meant to improve appearance and impress friends. Paul compared these with godliness which pleased the Lord.

All Christians are running in the race of life and are hopeful to win a prize. If athletes were willing to sacrifice enticing food, practice endlessly, and refuse to permit interference with their daily routines, such determination should be more necessary for followers of the Savior. God will reward overcomers. Contrasting persevering athletes with inspired saints, Paul reminded his readers that earthly crowns would perish; those given by Christ would endure eternally. Contestants who ruined their chances of victory by eating and drinking would be their own enemies, for sacrifice is the forerunner of success. The believers in Galatia forgot that fact, and the apostle wrote to them, saying: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you? ... Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1-3).

Contestants in the marathon of life should avoid anything which undermines their chances of victory. Paul believed it necessary for Timothy and Titus to emphasize this fact. The birth of a child should cause abounding happiness, but if the baby never learns to walk and talk, joy is replaced by sadness. The apostle explained how he had suffered because of his faith in the Savior of the world. He said to his colleagues: "These things, command and teach."

192

The Unchanging Remaining

It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him . . . He abideth faithful: he cannot lie (2 Tim. 2:11, 13).

A secure anchor is an asset when a ship is being buffeted by a storm, and an irrefutable fact is reassuring when a soul is overwhelmed by adversity. Paul spoke about suffering, disease, and denial because he realized Timothy would encounter them all during his ministry. There would arise many questions which would be difficult to answer, and problems too hard to solve. Nevertheless, God would be faithful and would never deny access to Himself. When faith is lost, nothing remains. Job realized this when in the midst of his difficulties, he exclaimed: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

Paul mentioned very important conditions, all of which were vital to successful Christian living. (1) "For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Tim. 2:11). The apostle explained in his letter to the Romans that spirit-filled believers are identified with Christ in His death, and this was the divine plan for spiritual success. The carnal life-

PAUL TELLS PASTORS WHAT TO PREACH

the "old Adam"-would retaliate, argue, be spiteful and unforgiving, but if this nature were nailed to the Cross, believers would experience an outpouring of resurrection power. Timo-

thy was urged to explain this to his congregation.

(2) "If we suffer we shall also reign with him" (v. 12). Writing to the Ephesians, Paul said Christians are seated with Christ "in heavenly places, far above principalities, and powers and the rulers of darkness." Provision has already been made whereby saints could trample under foot the lusts to which they were formerly enslaved; but believers were reminded this had to be personally appropriated.

(3) "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (v. 12). This statement had broad implications. Cooperation was necessary to bring blessing to believers. If they refrained from doing the will of God, the Lord could not bless them. Jesus promised that all things would be added to the disciples if they sought

193

first the kingdom of God (see Matt. 6:33). Unless that condition were met, no person could receive God's benediction.

(4) "if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (v. 13). Doubts may attack the mind and, if permitted to remain, may destroy faith. Nevertheless, the immutability of the Almighty does not depend upon the changing whims of disappointed people. God will always be what He was. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (see Heb. 13:8). A cloudy day does not mean the sun has ceased to exist. May Agnew Stephens was correct when she wrote:

Have faith in God; the sun will shine;
Though dark the clouds may be today;
His heart hath planned your path and mine,
Have faith in God; have faith always.

The Unique Goal ... Responsibility

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works (Titus 3:8).

It has been conjectured that Titus, Paul's associate, was older than Timothy and more diplomatic. He arbitrated in some of the problems which troubled the church at Corinth. He was a Gentile (Gal. 2:3) who became the first bishop of Crete. He must have been cautious, wise, and understanding, for intervening in church quarrels was never an easy matter. Paul trusted him implicitly.

It would appear from this letter that the apostle did not repeat all that was written to Timothy. Yet there was always need for holiness in the lives of Christians wherever they lived or worked. Titus was an arbitrator in Corinth, a fellow laborer with Paul in Jerusalem, an itinerant preacher on missionary journeys, and a bishop over the diocese of Crete. He reached all types of people, in all kinds of places, and ministered to all ages in all circumstances. His message was essential to every one of his listeners, for they were living epistles,

194

seen and read of all men. He wrote: "These things I will that thou affirm constantly." "Titus, my brother, when you preach.

PAUL TELLS PASTORS WHAT TO PREACH

say something!"

These thoughts were uppermost in the mind of Paul when he wrote this letter to his young friend. Christians should be careful what they present by life and lip, for people watch more intently than they listen. One moment of self-indulgence may ruin a lifetime of preaching. John would have endorsed Paul's message, for he wrote: "He that saith he abideth in Christ ought himself so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). Someone has skillfully handled the letters in the word Christian, Christ-I-A-N. If the last three letters are omitted (I-I; A-am; N-nothing), only Christ remains, and that must always be the standard for holy living and successful service.

195□

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