



March 4, 2007 (Vol. 7)

## The Negative Side of All Positive Preaching (Edited)

In many places, "sermons" amount to a verse read at the beginning of the lesson, followed by 20 minutes of after dinner stories, and one verse at the invitation. Such a "lesson" may not contain any error, but brethren, is that enough? What is right about a lesson like this? John said "If anyone comes to you and does NOT BRING this doctrine..." (2 John 1:10). John did not say, "If they don't preach error", rather he said "if they fail to preach the truth!" There can be a difference in preaching what is true and preaching THE TRUTH. So many sermons offered today may contain only true things, but it also lacks anything that a denominational person would disagree with. Some churches have asked preachers to work with them who held unscriptural positions, only to be told, "But I won't preach it!" It is not enough that he does not preach error, he must preach truth. All of it. No one can preach all the truth in a meeting certainly, but over a course of time one must. Paul said he did not fail to teach all that was needed to the Ephesian church, Acts 20:20, nor did he fail to declare the whole counsel of God, vs 27.

There is a grave danger facing the church of our Lord today, more subtle than that of false teaching. After all, when one clearly teaches false doctrine, we can expose it and mark it for what it is. But, with the Positive Mental Attitude (PMA) type of preaching and writing of today, it is more difficult to identify the error. I say it is dangerous, for it slouches toward error, rather than openly promoting it or denouncing it. It tolerates and sets up a church for error by not being prepared to deal with error. It allows for churches to slowly drift (Hebrews 2:1). It creates an atmosphere in which error cannot be fought.

With the AIDS virus, one generally will not die of the disease itself. **It suppresses the immune system, so the body cannot fight other diseases that come along.** The body no longer is **able** to fight, because the ability to recognize and fight an invading host has been compromised. How much more dangerous is compromise in preaching to the body of Christ, which has taken away the ability to recognize in advance and fight error? Brother Irvin Lee said in Things Which Make For Peace, "Only error will thrive under the wet blanket of 'no controversy allowed.'"

Much of what we are hearing in pulpits today sound more like Dale Carnegie (Secular motivational speaker and author of How To Win friends And Influence People) instructors than gospel preaching. Robert Shuller has extolled the virtues of positive preaching for decades as well. In Dennis Voskuil's book, Mountains Into Goldmines, the author explains Shuller's theology saying he "Tells people exactly what they want to hear in the manner which pleases them most. He doesn't insult people by telling them

they are sinners" (pg 68). He teaches that the church must create a "non-controversial image" to grow. "The possibility preacher must therefore be a positive preacher--inoffensive, uplifting, and affirming," (pg. 43). Shuller believes Jesus was the greatest possibility thinker of the ages, "Positive and nonjudgmental. Jesus never called any person a sinner!" Jesus would never preach, "You are sinners, Repent and be baptized" (pg. 104). The truth, however, is more accurately found in Alexander Campbell's observation that "Jesus drew His sword at the Jordan and threw away it's scabbard."

A part of the problem lies with the idol of reputation. The preacher finds his ego stroked and his wallet lined as he preaches what the crowds want to hear and is complimented as to "how sweet it is." And since he is not a "trouble maker" then he is deemed safe and sanitary for gospel meetings. Yes, Proverbs does teach us that we should seek to have a good name (Proverbs 22:1); but if we want a reputation on the world's terms and not God's, then it is false reputation.

It is not all the preachers fault, members and elders share in the blame. There is a cause and effect situation here, supply and demand. Sometimes elders want to fill the pews, pack the building and of course, pay for the building. And whenever there are itching ears to be found, there will be ticklers readily available (2 Tim. 4:3). Consider Balaam "the mercenary prophet." If there had been business cards then, his would surely have said "Balaam, prophet for hire." Notice how Peter describes him in 2 Peter 2:15, "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor who loved the wages of unrighteousness." Peter did not say Balaam loved unrighteousness, but rather the wages of it. He who serves God for wages will serve the devil for higher bid!

One of the by-products of the computer age is a new vocabulary. We live in a "user friendly" day and age. And many think churches should be "user friendly" as well. People don't like that old "command line." And preachers are frequently asked to keep up with these user friendly times. An elder once told me, "We need more pep-rallies and less sermonizing. What we need are some feel good sermons." Now, we all like Twinkies once in a while, but a body cannot remain healthy on a steady diet of the sugary sweet stuff.

The denominations have already been there. In Newsweek, May of 1990, there was an article entitled A Child Shall Lead Them. The article discussed the Church Growth Movement--what to look for in a minister. Their "experts" judged a ministers success not in faithfulness to the gospel, but whether they could keep people coming and giving. Are we suffering from a trickle down of this type of performance driven thinking? After all, that's the way secular employers rate their employees and salesmen. Perhaps that is why so much preaching has turned into a performance! By such standards, Noah and Ezekiel would surely be considered as failures, while Absalom would be a success!

Have you noticed it is often the case that a preacher either is supported or not supported financially based upon numbers? So the pay-check is kept dangling in front of him to "perform." Should the preacher feel pressure to perform so as to maintain the membership of those who should not be maintained (1 Cor. 5) and baptize people who may not be ready for baptism in order to keep his job? Wouldn't this be the spirit of Balaam at work? Numbers do not necessarily show the whole picture as to how hard or how faithfully the preacher is doing his job. The same Newsweek article praised the new Mega-church movement. One such church was the Second Baptist Church of Houston which boasts of 17,000

members. The preacher said they have banished hellfire and damnation and that they are more for things, then they are against things.

Some think Christianity is the same as getting-alongness, but Christianity involves controversy. It is a sad state of affairs when preachers are expected to have better manners than their Lord! Billy Sunday was once told "Brother Sunday, you need to lighten up. Your preaching rubs the cat the wrong way." To which Mr. Sunday replied "Then let the cat turn around. The way he is facing now he is going to hell." To be sure, it is better to be called cruel for being kind, than to be cruel while appearing kind. It is not kind to fail to warn! Paul asked "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:10). Sometimes kindness DEMANDS that we do things that would not be considered as kind in other circumstances. To knock a child to the ground would seem unkind, but not if it is to prevent him from being run over.

"PMA" (Positive Mental Attitude) is a relatively new title for what is actually an old problem. The Jews at the time of Isaiah asked for smooth things to be taught (Isaiah 30:10). Years ago the term "soft preaching" was used instead. Frankly, I really don't even like to hear the terms "positive preaching" or "negative preaching" for it infers there can be two different types of preaching that can be pleasing to God. The truth of the matter is, there is only Gospel Preaching and it must contain both positive and negative aspects! The New Testament is replete with examples of both positive and negative being emphasized. Paul said: "Let him that stole, steal no longer, but rather let him labor..." (Ephesians 4:28) and again "Putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth..." (4:25).

A Christian who once owned a battery factory told me "you cannot have a positive flow without negative grounding." When the Law said "Thou shalt NOT commit adultery", was that positive or negative? BOTH, for while forbidding and naming sin, the point is to love your wife, that's positive. So, it is not always enough simply to say what we should do, we also must emphasize what we must not do.

In recent years, there has been a shift in the emphasis of preaching. In a seminar and training opportunity for preachers a few years ago (hosted by several non-institutional preachers) "Maslows hierarchy of needs" was placed on an overhead chart and referred to as what our message should address. These are the so called "felt needs" of the physiological, safety/security, love/affection, self esteem, and self actualization. This is the same approach I was taught among the liberals as the "whole man concept." Supposedly, the gospel appeals to and fulfills man's "self-esteem" and "ego needs." Yet, Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." We are told that the gospel will take care of our "interpersonal relationships." But, fact is, in becoming a Christian one might experience problems within their family they never dreamed of (Matt. 10:21-37)! The problem is that man's biggest needs are the one he often doesn't feel, such as salvation from sin, Romans 1:16.

True, there must be balanced preaching. We do not want someone with a morbid fascination for controversy filling our pulpits with a sadistic gleam in their eyes. BUT, what the Bible calls balance is (1) Reprove (2) Rebuke (3) Exhort (2Timothy 4:1). That sounds exactly two-thirds "negative" to me. Jeremiah, in his call to the prophetic office was instructed to "root out and to pull down. To destroy and to throw down. To build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). Notice that he had to tear down before he could build up! Farmers know that fields must be cleared of stumps and rocks before they can plant!

More "positive" preaching has generally been promoted when controversy arises. Preachers who called for a "sane and patient approach" to dealing with the instrument, the society, premillennialism, institutionalism, etc., ended up in error for the most part, when the divisions came. Papers also

experimented with this kind of approach. And when apostasies came, they were swept away in the error (ie. The Christian Standard, Christian Leader, etc.). One then has to wonder about the future of preachers & writers who present similar attitudes today.

Ahab said concerning the bold prophet Micaiah, "There is still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." (1Kings 22:8). Yet, the "negative" message preached by Micaiah was the only one that could save. The 400 prophets speaking "positive" things to the king were not saying what was needed. Ahab had a problem handling truth in preaching. Just before this he had even accused Elijah of being a trouble maker (18:17) when Ahab was actually the one creating the problem. Thus, some see the preachers and churches that still hold to the whole counsel of God as "creating" the problem. But it is really those who contend for a more "positive" gospel. Brethren, churches must demand preachers who will preach the whole counsel, and preachers must demand churches respect the whole counsel. Some preachers may be fired as a result of standing for the whole counsel. And some preachers may need to be fired in order for a church to be able to receive the whole counsel of God.

Remember the song we frequently sing: "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross. Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss."

brotherly, Wayne Goforth

## **PEOPLE TO REMEMBER & PRAY FOR**

**Othena Kinnard** (Cookeville Hosp. Room 404), **Jo Miller** (Life Care), **Wesley Geer**, **Ethan Rece**, **Mag Bumbalough**, **Thelma Cunningham**, **Mary Cox**, **Monie Petty**, **Dave Poteet**, **Joshua & Misty Poteet**, **Rose Taylor**, **Dorris Williams**, **Robert & Betty England**, **Johanna Fletcher**, **Ed Williams**, **Joe Smith**, **Lydia Poe**, **Mike Tenpenny**, **Thelma Klein**, **DeLeesa Price** (expecting) and **Alisa Fletcher** (expecting), **Kenley Streeval**. Also, **Reba Jones** (Dorris Williams' niece), **Jackie Tindle** (cancer, relative of the Sims), **John Ross Key** (Mary Cox's son), **Marci Miller** (Alisa Fletcher's mother), **Ocia Bell Jones** (Doris William's mother), **Ruth Williams** (Betty England's niece), **Pauline Hickey**, **Nanny Witaker**, **Dylan Roberts** (grandson of Marilyn's friend); **Kitty Mahan** (Kathy Tenpenny's mother), **Dwayne Williams** (Dorris William's son), **Jeff England** (Robert & Betty's son), **Paul Grissom**, **Carl Williams** (Ed's brother), **Clair Gentry** (Doris' sister-in-law), **Danny & Michelle Cunningham** (Lydia Poe's brother & his wife).

## **THINGS TO REMEMBER**

- **Home Bible Study** - Sat., March 3, 17, 31
- **Workday** - Sat, March 10th @ 10 am.
- **Business Meeting** - Sun. March 25.
- **Ladies Class** - 2nd & Last Sunday Each Month.
- **GM** - R. McPherson, Oct.14-19, 2007.
- **GM** - Brian Yeager, April 13-18, 2008.
- **GM** - Lanny Smith, Oct.12-17, 2008.