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Preach the Text

by David Posey

I am very concerned with what I perceive to be an approach to preaching (and listening) which, more and more, seems to place the word of God in the background. I've heard some sermons recently which illustrate the point. In one, I was not required to open a Bible for the first 20 minutes; in another, one verse was referred to, sort of as a launching pad, and then the Bible was closed from that point on. I heard another "sermon" in which the preacher (who had a degree in psychology) first expressed his opinion about certain problems in our relationship with God, then quoted psychological theories to validate his opinion, then threw in a little Bible, presumably to validate the psychology. If these are examples of "preaching the text," I must admit that I'm very worried about the future of preaching!

We need a fresh reminder of the lesson of Nehemiah 8, where Ezra stood in the pulpit (v. 4) and OPENED THE BOOK (v. 5), reading distinctly from it and helped them to understand what the BOOK said (v. 8). If that does not describe our function as "preachers of the word," then I'm at a loss as to what I'm supposed to be doing as a full-time gospel preacher and teacher. Of course, I'm not sure the problem is all in the pulpit. In fact, I'm pretty well convinced it is not. I preached a meeting recently in which the majority of people did not have a Bible in their possession. Since I was attempting to present an exposition of one of the minor prophets, needless to say, I was at a disadvantage.

I cannot pretend to understand why people of God would enter a building, presumably to hear the word of God preached, and not have a Bible with them. What is going through a person's mind? What are they expecting to hear? What do they want to hear? Platitudes? Maxims? Jokes? God said through Amos, many years ago, that there would be a "famine in the land, not of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Such a famine came and the people of Israel suffered the spiritual consequences. There is no such famine now, except when it is self-imposed. In too many places and in the sermons of too many preachers (one is too many), such a famine exists. It extends to the pew and people are beginning to get along quite well without the word of God... after all, if we hear only opinions, we have a choice to accept them or reject them, don't we? "My opinion is surely as good as his, though perhaps not as eloquent."

Perhaps I'm sounding an alarm which is not needed (though I know many others who share my concern). Jeremiah said to beware of those who cry "peace, peace when there is no peace" (4:10). These are just my observations - but if they ring true, in your experience, I'd like to make a couple of short suggestions. To those who occupy the pews each week and listen to preaching, demand (yes, demand) Bible preaching - accept no substitutes. In addition, bring your Bibles, open them up, take notes, listen. Challenge the preacher to present the word of God as the only solution to every problem he presents. We need to be challenged, checked and, sometimes, corrected. And, to my fellow preachers, let's "just preach the text" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Free From All Men

Dan S. Shipley

For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. (2 Cor.9:19) While the apostle Paul recognized a sense of indebtedness to all men, he was never obligated to any man in such a way as to hinder his obligations to the Lord. How all Christians, especially evangelists, need to be free and under bondage in this same sense!

Paul was free from men because he was not preaching for money. Even though he stoutly maintains his right to be supported by the Corinthians, he foregoes that right in the interests of this particular work. When he did receive wages it did not flavor his teaching; he taught the same things in every church (1 Cor. 4:17). Any man whose teaching is tempered by financial considerations places himself under bondage to men — but in the wrong sense. He is no longer free to teach all truth by which souls are gained. Those who will not endure sound doctrine always seem able to secure teachers after their own lusts (2 Tim. 4:3). Whether by tacit or declared agreement, such teachers know what subjects they are not to bear down on. Undoubtedly, wages have enticed many to look at certain Bible truths in a compromising light—or at least to muzzle their convictions. Any evangelist who can endure where sound doctrine cannot is never free from all men — he is really their own hireling, to their detriment and his.

Neither was Paul obligated to men because of his sins. Nobody ever had anything on Paul that could place him in a compromising position. Regrettably, the influence of some is seriously impaired by their unbecoming conduct and bad habits.

Such are not unlike the elderly man lamenting over being called a nasty old snuff-dipper by a female friend. When asked about his reply to such a charge he confessed, Well, I couldn't say much at the time — I happened to have a dip of snuff in my mouth. Likewise many Christians become hamstrung by their own sins. With Paul we should be able to say, Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.

Furthermore, Paul had no respect- of-person obligations to men. He both spoke and applied the whole counsel of God without favoritism, even to rulers and fellow-apostles. Having done this he could rightly claim to be pure from the blood of all men. He reminds Timothy to do nothing by partiality (1 Tim. 5:21). To shield friends and family (or any other sinner) from Bible truth is like hiding life-giving medicine from a sick man. The most urgent need of every sinner is the forgiveness offered through the gospel of Christ. How strange that some Christians would be more concerned about bedside manners than healing the patient; with the favor of men more than their salvation! Such prove themselves to be more the slaves of public opinion than of Christ.

Consequently, we must remain free from all men in order to serve their best interests and gain the more. Our ties with men must never become shackles to hinder their salvation — or to hinder our walking with God.