

Perilous Times, the Preacher, and the War against Liberalism

In Second Timothy three, the apostle Paul warns the younger preacher that “perilous times will come.” He then proceeds to describe some of the sad things that characterize men in these last days. Having painted the bleak but undeniably accurate picture, Paul admonishes Timothy to continue in the things he has learned, and reminds him that the inspired Word of God will perfect the man of God through its doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. The answer to the perilous behaviors of men is to preach the Word! (2 Tim. 4:2-4). Paul never deceived Timothy into thinking the task would be an easy one. In chapter two, Paul wrote: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (vv. 3, 4).

The apostle Peter points out that in the days of Israel and the Old Testament prophets, there were also false prophets among the people, and then assures his readers that, “there shall be false teachers among you” (2 Pet. 1:20-2:2). The remedy against false teachers is to warn the brethren (Acts 20:28-31), and to shut the mouths of those who espouse error (Tit. 1:10, 11). False teaching and teachers are such serious matters that the apostle John instructs that neither God speed nor an invitation into one’s house may be extended to them (2 John 9-11).

Today, congregations are being bombarded with liberalism in matters of doctrine and morals, but where are godly elders and where are preachers administering the Words of the New Testament to shut the mouths of gainsayers? Where is the denial of opportunities for false teachers to speak in our congregations? Where are all the faithful soldier preachers? Too often they have been replaced by hirelings who are more concerned with guarding their paychecks than they are the souls of their charges. They don’t run from the wolf; they don’t have to, because they can either ignore his presence or invite him right on in. Where are the warnings like those Paul issued at Ephesus? From some pulpits they are never forthcoming. While the issues mount in the congregation; while error in teaching, improper practices in worship, and sin increases in the individual lives of members, the preacher is speaking only those things that offend no one and can be accepted by all!

Preacher, when liberalism in any form comes into the congregation where you preach, and you refuse to address the issues, you are opening the door for change agents to transform the church into a progressive, mainstream, fence-straddling body that stands for nothing and falls for everything. When new people come into the congregation, where are the elders and the preacher who should right from the very start make it plain that the congregation they serve will resist every attempt to sway them from the truth of God to the modern idea that man can not only write his own ticket to heaven, but also plot his own path to get there? Where are the voices crying out from the pulpit assuring newcomers that “this congregation stands and will continue to stand in the traditions handed down by the apostles” (2 Thess. 2:15), even though men claim they are only human in their origins?

Brother preacher, you do not have to be unkind, but you cannot be a milksop and please the Lord, either. You say you want to be accommodating to people; well we all do. But compromise and symbolically sewing one’s lips together when error appears is not accommodation; it is treason. It is a sad reality that some are willing to take a stand against instrumental music, expanded roles for women, unscriptural divorce and remarriage, the modern agnostic attitudes toward the plan of salvation and identifying marks of the church, and all the other liberal ideas that are being peddled off on brethren, so long as those are issues in the next county, state or territory. When they show up in the home congregation the boldness of the pulpit turns to

cowardice and perfidy. Souls are placed in danger, the congregation is threatened, but the preacher abandons the sermons that are needed, overlooks the warnings that must be forthcoming, and commences to deliver speeches that as the old saying goes, "can be heard at any church in town."

These are perilous times; liberalism is overtaking a large number of the congregations of the churches of Christ. Departures, much like a worm working its way through an apple is casting out the good meat and replacing it with rottenness. Preachers, before the trouble hits the congregation where you preach, and it will, if it hasn't already, preach the Word, warn the brethren, and serve as a good soldier of Christ. Ground the brethren in the truth of God's Word, so when the evil day comes they will be able to stand (Eph. 6:11-13). By all means stop this incessant generalized preaching about sin is bad and so is error and start being specific. Do that to save yourselves and them that hear you (1 Tim. 4:16). Otherwise, you will have failed in your duty as a watchman, thereby causing them to be lost, and your own hands soiled with their blood (Ezek. 3:17, 18). Don't allow the judgment day to be a perilous time for you.

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